

# Health and safety welfare for youth workers

Guidance

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## Introduction

All health and safety processes included in this document apply equally to both workers as well as young people. Along with health and safety, welfare is a core part of an employer's duty to workers as well as young people.

Welfare includes provision of suitable and sufficient facilities that are necessary for well-being, such as washing, toilet, rest and changing facilities and somewhere clean to eat and drink during breaks. It also includes other areas that youth work organisations should assess and provisions for those are detailed within The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, including where relevant:

- Ventilation - this takes on additional importance as a result of COVID-19
- Indoor workplace temperature
- Working in hot or cold settings
- Lighting
- Cleanliness and waste materials
- Room dimensions and space
- Workstations and seating
- Maintenance of the workspace, equipment, devices and systems
- Floor surfaces and 'traffic' routes
- Falls or falling objects
- Transparent or translucent doors, gates or walls and windows
- Windows
- Doors and gates
- Escalators and moving walkways
- Sanitary conveniences and washing facilities
- Drinking water
- Changing facilities
- Facilities for rest and to eat meals

Workers with responsibility for health and safety should consider liaising with and/or seeking guidance from HR colleagues with respect to the implementation of welfare provision for all workers.

## Work related stress

In addition to workplace conditions, emotional and mental well-being need to be considered. Stress on youth programmes is another factor which will contribute to the overall welfare of workers. It is natural that workers will from time to time feel stressed whilst delivering youth programmes. Organisations have a duty to assess workers' stress to ensure they are protected from excessive stress at work by pre-emptive planning, as well as providing ongoing assessment and support mechanisms and conducting risk assessments. HSE defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Workers often describe feeling stressed in different ways and such as when they feel they cannot cope with 'pressure' which may be caused by lack of skills, experience, time, resources or support to do the job they are assigned. There are of course many factors that affect individuals in different ways: how organisations approach youth programme planning, staff recruitment, training, worker communication and support can all help to moderate stress.

## Welfare planning

In order to limit the effects of stress, organisations should conduct risk assessments to ensure they have effective recruitment and support processes in place.

Youth work organisations should carefully consider and plan when and how workers take breaks to ensure they get sufficient rest. Residential programmes in particular bring a requirement for workers to manage long periods of supervision and engagement with young people, including early starts and late nights. The impact of this on welfare (particularly regarding lack of sleep) should be carefully considered, with sufficient forward planning conducted. Capacity within teams should be available to ensure workers are able to take breaks and so that their employment is in line with the working time directive law.

Another example which youth work organisations should assess is the potential impact that elements of working with young people may have on workers. In particular, workers may face situations where young people display particularly challenging or confrontational behaviour, or where they are involved in difficult and emotionally stressful incidents or safeguarding situations.

Youth work organisations should conduct a thorough assessment of how they recruit and train workers to ensure they are more likely to be able to manage some of the dynamic elements of working with a diverse group of young people. Key competencies required by workers for handling challenging behaviour and safeguarding concerns or disclosures should be carefully considered and recruited against. Further support would also consider key elements of training required on top of these core competencies to support workers to manage situations effectively and be confident of support structures available to them.

## On-going assessment/mitigations and support

As well as focussing on pre-emptive mitigations such as recruitment, training, and proactive support, youth work organisations should look to include responses to welfare issues on programmes as 'normal business' requirements. This may include specifically considering how support for individuals might be delivered after the fact, such as the need for additional capacity to provide cover or providing access to external counselling or support.

A process for assessing worker stress should be in place and should be monitored and managed during the delivery of programmes. Mental health and stress are often closely related, and organisations should ensure that workers are provided with the right levels of support.

Youth work organisations are encouraged to regularly review their approach to worker supervision & management. Some key things for organisations to consider are:

- Ensuring that welfare is proactively monitored and does not rely on individuals coming forward to raise issues
- Planning a workable system of 'check-ins' with workers (formal / non formal / group / individual) is important throughout dynamic and time-short youth programmes
- Ensuring that all managers are trained and receive specific direction on how to check with individuals regarding their welfare on programmes
- Ensuring the impact of external factors to worker's welfare, as well as those related to their employment, are considered. Youth work programmes can be intense, and workers may spend long periods of time out of contact with family & their everyday lives. Some workers may also be relatively unknown to their employer so building a trusting relationship where workers feel supported and able to raise issues forms an important part of this monitoring process.