

Consultation on the Child Poverty Strategy 2014-2017

Response from YMCA England - May 2014

For any enquiries relating to this response please contact:

Mary Hill, Policy and Research Officer: mary.hill@england.ymca.org.uk

Introduction: YMCA England

Working with some of the most disadvantaged groups, our 114 member YMCAs work every day to intensively support over 228, 000 young people and enable them to 'belong, contribute and thrive' in their local communities.

Every year the YMCA helps almost 43, 000 people to engage in education, skills and training to enable them to improve their opportunities in the job market. The YMCA will always seek to support a young person holistically, whether through support programmes for those in our residential accommodation, or by providing access to counselling and training to those who come along to local youth clubs.

YMCAs provide childcare, children's centres, disability programmes, counselling, before-and-after school clubs, holiday clubs and range of support services for children and families in over 530 different communities around the country.

Over 9, 000 children and young people take part in our disability programmes such as holiday clubs and daycare facilities each year; over 18, 000 children and young people take part in our holiday clubs; over 2,000 families are reached through our parenting programmes and there are over 9, 000 children registered to attend our day nurseries, and other childcare provision including crèche facilities.

Summary

The YMCA welcomes the Government's National Child Poverty for 2014-17 and we are of the view that it is sensible to focus on poverty now and in the future, with a particular focus on work, living standards, education and working in partnership with others such as the voluntary sector.

We recommend that the Government works closely with childcare and nursery providers to ensure the smooth operation of the expansion of 15 hours free childcare for a wider group of disadvantaged two year olds and also when implementing the new tax-free childcare scheme.

The YMCA recognises that we are operating in a difficult fiscal climate with budgetary pressures across government, local authorities and in the voluntary sector. In the current environment however, in the wake of cuts to local public services, more pressures are being placed on the voluntary sector to support families in crisis. Previously local authorities may have supported families with lower support needs, but increasingly the

voluntary sector is working with more families who need a range of support and advice services, to support them before they reach a crisis point. The Government needs to acknowledge the increasing role of the voluntary sector in supporting disadvantaged families and young people in crisis.

The previous Child Poverty Strategy had a focus on the importance of place-based approaches to tackling poverty and tailoring policy interventions to the local level. We recommend that there is still a continued focus on achieving change at the local level, as local drivers of poverty will differ markedly, depending on the locality.

The Government needs to better communicate the welfare changes and introduction of Universal Credit to young people and families tailored to their needs, to ensure that these groups understand how they will be affected.

YMCAs have a wealth of experience of delivering childcare, holiday clubs, residential and day camps to develop character and resilience and our response offers examples of the projects and services that we deliver across England. YMCAs often work with and engage the whole community, through services and fundraising opportunities. Many of our services offer ways of mitigating disadvantage now and in the future, through ongoing support, training and advice.

Consultation questions

1. To what extent do you agree that the draft Strategy achieves a good balance between tackling poverty now and tackling the drivers of intergenerational poverty?

The YMCA welcomes the Government's National Child Poverty for 2014-17 and we are of the view that it is a sensible approach to focus on poverty now and in the future. We support the broad aims of the strategy, with a particular focus on work, living standards, education and working in partnership with others such as the voluntary sector.

The YMCA recognises the importance of the voluntary sector and other partners working together to address the drivers and effects of poverty. The Government needs to ensure however, that where local services are facing cuts, or where the voluntary sector are being commissioned to deliver services, that the funding is available to support children and families before they reach crisis point. Early intervention is often key, and tailored support for individual circumstances; YMCAs around the country are concerned that more young people and families are only able to access services once they reach crisis point and have a range of needs. This is becoming increasingly evident as funding for vital early intervention schemes is reduced under local financial pressures, for example cuts and consolidation of children's centres programmes. It is important that all partners work together to tackle the drivers and effects of poverty but this will not happen without investment in local services and funding to deliver one to one and other intensive support with children and families.

The National Strategy should not move away from holding local areas to account through delivering on local child poverty strategies. This was a key part of the

previous National Strategy and we are of the view that the focus should be continued. Local authorities need the funding and flexibility to deliver their local strategies and continued national commitment to supporting place based approaches to tackling poverty with all local agencies, including social services, housing, health and offending services, and the local VCS working together to deliver outcomes.

Tackling child poverty now

Welfare reform: The Government needs to monitor the impacts of welfare reform to ensure that poor families and young people really are better off in work. The Government also needs to ensure that lone parents and young people are benefitting from the JCP flexible support fund to support with travel costs and childcare costs when looking for work; communication to young people and parents needs to improve when supporting them in their work search.

YMCA England recently published a research series, *Feeling the Benefits?*¹, bringing together vulnerable young people's experiences and viewpoints and giving this often unheard and overlooked group a voice on the welfare system. Key findings of our research show that young people feel uninformed about many of the welfare changes, including the sanctions process. Recommendations from our research include:

- The YMCA proposes that Jobcentre Plus advisors spend more time with vulnerable young people when their initial claims are submitted to better understand the barriers they face to finding sustained employment and getting off benefits.
- The YMCA proposes that vulnerable young people are offered more support and advice completing their initial benefit applications and when transferring between benefits.
- The YMCA proposes that improved approaches to communication and information sharing be put in place within the Jobcentre Plus, in particular for dealing with vulnerable young people.
- The YMCA proposes that a duty be placed on Jobcentre Plus to provide people being sanctioned with a clear explanation of the reasons why this is being imposed, both in writing and face-to-face at their next appointment, prior to a prior to removing any benefit payments.
- The YMCA proposes that Jobcentre Plus should reform the sanctions appeals process to make it simpler and more efficient for claimants
- The YMCA proposes that the Government work with relevant service providers to ensure that information regarding the welfare reforms is better communicated to young people.

¹ YMCA England, 2013, *Feeling the Benefits?*, <http://www.ymca.org.uk/policy/research> Accessed 20 May 2014

- The YMCA proposes that vulnerable young people or those without regular access to a computer should have the opportunity to opt-out of the 'digital by default' approach for an agreed period of time while they receive a tailored package of relevant training and support as well as access to a computer.

Childcare: YMCAs across England deliver various forms of childcare, from day nurseries, to playschemes and holiday clubs. For example, Fairthorne Group YMCA run 10 nurseries (including one to open in September 2014) offering 700 childcare places across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Redditch YMCA runs a day nursery with 35 childcare spaces, YMCA Black Country Group have 3 day nurseries in West Bromwich and Wolverhampton, providing care and education for a total of 180 children aged from 6 weeks to 5 years to name but a few.

Our staff have observed that 15 hours per week of funded childcare is not sufficient to enable a parent to transfer into employment. We welcome the additional support that Universal Credit will offer families on low incomes with childcare costs, but are concerned that many families will still not feel the benefits of this for a number of years, as more complex cases will not be transferred over to Universal Credit until the IT systems are fully operational.

YMCAs have also observed that under the current government arrangements it can be difficult for childcare providers to offer flexible childcare, when the hourly government funded rate is usually less than the price that is charged to run a quality, sustainable childcare service. The implication of this is that fees charged to parents often have to be higher in order to sustain the 15 hours of free childcare for three and four year olds and disadvantaged two year olds.

The increasing cost of living and wages not keeping up with increases in essential goods and services, means that childcare costs are a large proportion of family budgets. The Annual Childcare Costs Survey found that over the last five years childcare costs have risen 27 per cent – meaning parents pay £1,214 more in 2014 than they did in 2009 and for a family with two children in full-time childcare, the yearly bill is £11,7003. This makes childcare costs 62 per cent higher than the cost of the average mortgage for a family home.²

Supporting parents with childcare costs and government funding of childcare places can only be implemented in partnership with providers to ensure we support parents with more affordable childcare options, whilst at the same time ensuring a high quality childcare workforce, and to ensure that funded early years places ensure sustainable services – from paying the early years workforce a fair wage to supporting them with training and qualifications. We are keen to see more details on the Government's proposals for tax free childcare to see how this will work in practice for parents and providers.

² Family and Childcare Trust, 2013, The Annual Childcare Costs Survey, <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ac441f45-32fa-468f-b76b-d38579d1af3e> Accessed 20th May 2014.

Breakfast clubs, before and after school clubs: The Government will be investing money in areas with high deprivation to help set up more breakfast clubs. We welcome this move to support working families with their childcare arrangements. YMCAs around England provide before- and after- school clubs for a number of local schools. In some of our clubs children are collected from local schools and taken to a local YMCA centre for activities and snacks until their parents are able to collect them, in other programmes YMCAs are contracted to provide breakfast- and after-school clubs on school sites. The Government needs to work with providers of these services to ensure that roll-out across areas of high deprivation is a sustainable model.

YMCAs often find that the demand in some areas for this provision is low, so a number of schools need to be involved to ensure a sustainable service. Where after school clubs run on a Friday the demand for the service can be very low. We recognise that out of school childcare is vital in ensuring that parents can return to work, and recommend that the Government works with providers to understand the challenges and barriers in delivering this type of provision.

Holiday clubs: A number of YMCAs run holiday clubs across the country. Our YMCAs often undertake local fundraising to enable them to offer bursary funded places for disadvantaged children and young people to attend our summer camps and holiday clubs. Holiday clubs support working parents with a childcare need during the school holidays, but for many disadvantaged families, a holiday club or Daycamp is the child's primary experience and activity of the summer. For some families with disabled children they also provide a family, particularly siblings with a break from their caring role. The Government needs to recognise the importance of childcare during the school holidays for all groups of children and young people. Childcare vouchers only help parents who can afford to pay for their childcare upfront and then claim for a voucher the next month, not all parents can afford to do this. The Government should work with the voluntary and community sector to understand how holiday clubs are delivered and how we can support more disadvantaged children and young people with subsidised and bursary funded places. We provide more detail on our holiday clubs in question 3.

Tackling child poverty for the future – preventing poor children becoming poor adults

Transitions and summer schools: At the YMCA we recognise the importance of transitions in a young person's life. We run a range of summer transition programmes with children and young people. Fairthorne Group YMCA delivers two summer schools to aid transition, one is run from our Fairthorne Manor site near Southampton and another is based on a school site. The second programme will run for the first time in 2014, but the first scheme has run for three years with positive results.

We are concerned that targeted transition programmes to support vulnerable young people to cope with the move to secondary school are not being prioritised locally, as many have seen their funding cut in recent years, due to constraints on local authority budgets.

Early years: The National Child Poverty Strategy for 2014-17 includes a strong focus on education to prevent poor children becoming poor adults and improve their life chances. We are concerned that the strategy has little focus on the importance of early years. Numerous research reports have indicated the importance of early years childcare and services in generating positive outcomes for all children and families³, but particularly for disadvantaged children in the first 2 years of life. We are of the view that the Strategy needs to include more focus on early years and early intervention work with families to ensure they have the support from the earliest years, to prevent crisis points as children grow and become young adults.

2. **Considering the current fiscal climate, what is your view of the actions set out in the draft Strategy?**

Families in crisis: The Government needs to acknowledge the increasing role of the voluntary sector in supporting poor families and families in crisis. YMCAs across the country, delivering services in very different communities, from rural to city centre settings are seeing an increase in families and young people needing support for a range of complex needs, from mental health issues, to basic life skills training, employment support, benefits advice and housing needs. At the same time as increasing levels of client need, local authorities are cutting back their non-essential services, and expect more intensive support to be delivered with reduced funding. The Government needs to ensure that early intervention programmes are a continued priority to prevent families reaching crisis point with a range of complex needs.

Universal Credit: As a key priority in the current fiscal climate, the government needs to ensure the smooth and timely roll-out of Universal Credit in order to improve the work incentives and childcare support for families on low incomes and those who are aiming to transition into work. The sooner that Universal Credit is rolled out, the sooner that many families may be better off in work and benefit from improved support for childcare costs.

3. **At a local level, what works well in tackling child poverty now?**

YMCAs around England deliver a range of projects and services to support disadvantaged groups of children, families and young people as well as mainstream services for all families.

YMCA West and Central Herts: Parenting courses and outreach work

YMCA West and Central Herts serves 8 of the 10 district areas in Hertfordshire, running 6 children's centres, supporting over 3000 parents and 3 nurseries

³ Sir Micheal Marmot, 2010, Fair Society: Healthy Lives, <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report> Accessed 20th May 2014.

supporting over 400 families. The children's centres run a range of parenting courses and outreach work.

Across their children's centres outreach work is available whereby a worker can spend up to 6 visits working intensively with a family. The outreach service provides:

- Support on positive parenting and managing children's behaviour
- Working with parents to manage their well-being and build their confidence.
- Finding local groups for parents to attend
- Financial difficulties/worries
- Support around transition points, ie. birth, settling into pre-school, school
- Support for parents wishing to return to education, employment or training
- Offer ideas for fun activities that children may enjoy.

YMCA North Staffordshire: Counselling services

YMCA North Staffordshire provides a range of services for the local community, including a state of the art sports facility, modern accommodation for singles, couples and families aged 16-25, employment and skills training, life skills provision and relationship services.

YMCA North Staffordshire Relationship Team offers a range of services for children, young people and their families when support is needed due to problems within the family unit.

The First for Families Programme (0 – 5) offers help and support for young families when things become difficult, a family coach visits families in the home and helps with parenting skills, attendance at appointments, registering with schools, playgroups, doctors and other local services.

Rebuilding Families Project (14 – 21) offers help for families where a young person runs the risk of becoming homeless as a result of family conflict. The service is solution focussed and starts by unpicking the problem to gain an understanding of what is really going on.

This team has an expertise built through 10 years of working in the North Staffordshire area with families affected by parental conflict and separation and relationship and parenting issues. Working with both individual family members and the family as a group bringing a firm but effective approach to enable parents to better communicate, resolve their differences without conflict, manage poor behaviour in their children, manage a family separation in as positive a way as possible, learn to parent apart and develop the skills necessary to move forward without the need for support. The team aims to prevent complete relationship breakdown between parents, parent and children, siblings and other extended family members, often assisting with the introduction of new partners and step siblings.

The service works with a family over a period of several weeks to ensure that each individual who undertakes a journey of support with the organisation is offered physical, emotional and spiritual support through engagement with all areas of YMCA North Staffordshire.

Service outcomes include:

- Facilitating discussion and negotiation between parents and children about issues following family breakdown
- Improving communication skills in all family member and improve parenting skills
- Increasing parental awareness about the impact of parental conflict on children
- Helping develop coping strategies for parents and children when family relationships are affected
- Helping parents, young people and children manage poor behaviours
- Helping parents learn to work together and co-parent even when living apart
- Families avoid the use of the family courts
- Children feel listened to and supported
- Parents/Young People and Children benefit from improved mental wellbeing
- Services are also available for young parents and parents-to-be who are also resident at the YMCA. This has led to both 1:1 and group work being undertaken with young residents who are benefiting from advice and support both as expectant parents and new parents.

Key strengths of the service include:

- A range of specialist interventions from within one service
- Access to other YMCA projects (sport, housing, education/training)

Fairthorne Group YMCA: Developing character and resilience

Developing children's character and resilience is a key part of the National Child Poverty Strategy.

Daycamps and Residential Camps

Fairthorne Group YMCA deliver school holiday activities the YMCA Way through Daycamps and Residential Camps. Their unique approach bring their mission and 6 values to life, supporting each child to develop individually. The YMCA Way is underpinned by the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, which explore the influences and actions that affect and support children's development both within and outside of the family. The Fairthorne Group mission is to 'champion and add value to young lives by providing experiences that challenge, enable and develop the individual.' For the last 35 years, the YMCA has continued to offer the best in school holiday care on in their Daycamp and Residential Camps programme, now delivering to over 10,000 children a year in 5 different locations.

Fairthorne Manor Daycamps run every school holiday, offering exciting activities for 4 to 16 year olds. Multi-activity camps include a range of age-appropriate outdoor activities, sports, games and crafts. Theme camps run during selected holidays including: Survival, Water, Equestrian and more.

Fairthorne Group YMCA also offers school activity days. Schools are supported with the risk assessment process for these trips by the local authority Outdoor Education Services, which is not the case for other types of school trip. This is beneficial as schools are more easily able to utilise the activities on offer at the Fairthorne Manor outward bound setting.

Mentoring

Fairthorne Manor has excellent relationships with local schools and deliver a mentoring programme working with 25 students across three schools. The mentoring programme is specifically developed to support emotional wellbeing and resilience. Students receive 1:1 mentoring and this is accompanied with visits to Fairthorne Manor to take part in a range of activities.

Reigate and Redhill YMCA: Disability Services

At the YMCA we recognise that many families living in poverty often have a child or children with multiple complex needs. The Government needs to ensure a focus on this group of families in the national child poverty strategy, and recognise the additional barriers to finding appropriate childcare services for children with disabilities and complex needs, and the additional cost of providing these services, particularly where one to one support is needed.

Reigate and Redhill YMCA responds to the needs of individuals and communities across East Surrey. The YMCA delivers a whole range of services to support children with complex needs and their families. In 2012-12 the 'Yipee Tots' and 'Face2Face' programmes for children under five with complex needs and disabilities have helped 31 families emotionally and socially. Yipee Tots involves stay and play mornings at specially adapted centres for children with disabilities, including specialist toys and a sensory room. The stay and play sessions also give parents a chance to meet, share experiences and know their child is enjoying a safe and caring environment.

At the same centre Face2Face is a volunteer-led group of parent befrienders offering parents emotional and practical support. The group allows parents who have personal experience with children with complex needs and support other parents with younger children with talking through emotions and practical advice on aspects of caring.

For children with complex needs and disabilities aged 5 to 12, the YMCA runs Yipee, a playscheme. The short break scheme currently supports 110 families during the holidays, after school and weekends and provides families with a break from caring. Yipee offers a positive and structure environment for activities, including a specialist

outdoor play area – developed in consultation with children themselves, a sensory room and ball pool area. After school club activities are also inclusive, with one-to-one support on hand for children with complex needs to join in the mainstream activities. The inclusive nature of the after school club, as well as a playscheme, means that siblings in families are able to attend holiday clubs and out of school activities together.

Reigate and Redhill YMCA also runs Yip4Youth, an after school, weekend and school holiday club for 13-16 year olds with disabilities and complex needs. The scheme enabled 96 teenagers to meet up with friends and try new activities in the last year, including outings. Disability play schemes are charged at the same price for parents of children with disabilities as other children, so are affordable for working parents who may otherwise struggle to find childcare and support during the school holidays or after school. Most places on the playscheme are offered at a minimal cost to the family, and bursaries are available as a result of fundraising activities so that some spaces are free. This is particularly important for families with disabled children as they are far more likely to be affected by poverty and struggle to return to employment if there is a lack of quality, affordable and accessible childcare for their child.

4. At a local level, what works well for preventing poor children from becoming poor adults?

Budgeting: YMCAs offer a range of budgeting and money management support for young people around the country. We welcome the Strategy's focus on expansion of credit unions and supporting families with finances. The Government needs to ensure that families and young people are well equipped to manage the changes to their finances and budgeting skills needed with the introduction of Universal Credit and introduction of monthly payment periods. Financial management training is going to be even more critical with the reforms to the welfare system introducing monthly benefit payments, as well as the potential for claimants to receive their housing costs directly.

Our recent report, *Uninformed and Underprepared*⁴, examining how vulnerable young people feel about the introduction of Universal Credit recommended that the Government works with relevant organisations to develop and promote financial education and products targeted at vulnerable young people.

⁴ YMCA England, 2013, *Uninformed and Underprepared*, http://www.ymca.org.uk/component/docman/doc_download/93-uninformed-and-underprepared Accessed 20 May 2014.

Cornwall YMCA: Life Skills Pre-Tenancy Award

Last year, YMCAs provided 10, 299 young people with basic life skills training, a key part of which is financial management training. This training includes; setting up a bank account, budgeting and paying bills.

YMCA Cornwall works to help the communities, families and young people of Cornwall. The YMCA provides a range of services from supported housing and move-on accommodation for young people, a day nursery, youth counselling, youth club and exercise classes. As part of their 'Life Skills' project for young people living in their supported accommodation, they run a Pre-Tenancy Award training scheme. The qualification, endorsed by the Chartered Institute of Housing, is made up of 7 units which cover issues such as personal money management.

5. What more can central government do to help employers, local agencies and the voluntary and community sector work together to end child poverty?

Early intervention: The Government needs to ensure that there is an ongoing commitment to early intervention, making funds available to support children, young people and families before they reach crisis point. In the last year many YMCAs have seen an increase in demand for a wide range of support services and more families and young people are approaching our services with more complex support needs and more clients with a need for counselling services and an increased need for support with a range of mental health needs. We recommend that the Government monitors the impact of cuts to local services, as local voluntary sector services are now supporting families with higher support needs, who may previously have been supported by local authorities.

Local monitoring and support: We recommend that the Government also continues to monitor the impact of local child poverty strategies to ensure that families living in poverty are identified and given a package of tailored support appropriate to their needs that may be delivered by a range of local agencies and partners.

YMCAs highlighted in this response:

- YMCA England www.ymca.org.uk
- Fairthorne Group YMCA <http://www.ymca-fg.org/>
- Reigate and Redhill YMCA www.ymcaredhill.com/
- Black Country Group YMCA <http://www.ymcabc.org.uk/>
- Redditch YMCA, part of Worcestershire YMCA www.ymcaworcester.org.uk



- YMCA West and Central Herts www.ymcacentralherts.org.uk ;
www.ymcawatford.org
 - YMCA North Staffordshire <http://ymcans.org.uk/>
 - YMCA Cornwall www.ymcacornwall.org.uk
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