

The Scran Academy

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At Scran Academy, we support young people to overcome poverty-related barriers through accessing the experiences, support and skills required to change their lives. We offer transformational youth work programmes that empower young people to lead our real-life catering social enterprises.

From March-to-September 2020, alongside seven other partner charities, we produced, packaged and delivered 120,000 meals to over 3,500 vulnerable people and families across Edinburgh. This report details how we maintained positive relationships with Scran Academy young people and the challenges they faced within the context of one of the city's largest Pandemic response programmes.

Maintaining Positive Relationships

Essential Youth Work during COVID-19



Introduction

This report outlines the effects of COVID-19 on the youth work and young people of Scran Academy. This report provides an insight into how our provision shifted to ensure we maintained safe spaces and positive adult contact for young people during the lockdown period.

Our main findings include:

- **Youth Work has been more critical than ever for young people facing challenges**
- **Existing youth provision could not continue, and most services ceased**
- **Young people faced increased and often unrecognised issues related to covid19 including domestic violence, homelessness, bullying and mental health issues**
- **Online, telephone and wider digital services can work for a limited time if managed and set up correctly, however online presented new barriers such as getting online or feeling comfortable with appearing on camera**
- **Digital work alone became tough to effectively support those young people with very chaotic life circumstances due to engagement beginning to drop**
- **Youth Work support worked best during covid19 along with more fundamental support for families – including food, technology and financial aid**

- **Face to face support was increasingly demanded by young people, such as park meets or one to one beach walks and cycling**
- **Volunteering and being part of Scran’s keyworker projects offered focus and purpose to many young people**
- **Young people have been extremely resilient and adapted well, and despite lockdown, many still managed to respond to support and continue to excel in wider life**

YouthLink Scotland’s report on ‘Safeguarding checklist for digital youth work’ has helped to ensure the right measures have taken place to provide a safe environment for the young people involved in Scran Academy. By following these guidelines alongside government advice, Scran Academy identified the appropriate online platform(s) to ensure a safe online environment for our young people that they would actually actively use and engage with.

“Digital youth work should still take the same approach to youth work in a physical setting. It is about taking what you do offline and moving it into an online context, this might mean doing things differently, but fundamentally, it is still youth work.” (YouthLink Scotland, 2020)

Scran Academy exclusively works with young people who have been referred due to the challenges they face within mainstream education and/or the life barriers they face to effectively transition beyond the classroom into the workplace and wider life. Scran Academy is a social enterprise, working in a community setting, taking a youth work approach to offering alternative educational program for young people who struggle to engage with formal education. Scran Academy use hospitality and enterprise to provide young people with skills, knowledge, social skills and qualifications needed to thrive. Young people are able to express themselves in a safe, welcoming environment, and develop their confidence and self-esteem. Young people are then able to apply their new skills and knowledge to transition into a sustainable positive destination.

'Thanks for helping, I feel much better about going back to school' – 15-year-old young person

Digital Youth Work – Critical but challenging

Due to the current pandemic, Scran Academy has had to adapt to the way in which it delivers its program to young people. This has meant that during lockdown all face to face contact stopped and online engagement became the 'norm'.

We have been able to provide online support for young people through various social media and apps, which helps to keep everyone involved connected. Scran has also provided young people with technology to ensure that everyone is able to participate in online activities and receive ongoing support.

Each online source has been assessed with safeguarding checklists provided by YouthLink Scotland. This has enabled our team to guarantee a safe environment, where informal education and ongoing support can take place, and our aims can be achieved.

'I was feeling really happy yesterday knowing that I would see you today' – 16-year-old young person.

When working with young people between the age of 14 – 18 it is key to know where they go online. Many young people use technology in their day-to-day lives and connect with each other through different apps and social media platforms. Using a platform that young people are already familiar with has aided group engagement as Scran Academy has found group engagement to be as important as one-to-one support.

Through Facebook Messenger, we provided a safe space where only the youth worker and the young people could be on the call/video call at any one time. Only the youth worker had the authority to add other people to the call if necessary. This was to ensure the safety of young people and professionals, and the ability to see each other

in one to one and group sessions has given a sense of ‘normality’ to the unusual circumstances.

It can be difficult for young people to engage with professionals for many reasons in informal settings. Young people can find it difficult to interact with other young people and professionals, often because they have a lack in social skills or have low confidence/self-esteem. Some young people also have difficulties in their individual and/or home lives, which negatively impacts their behaviour and engagement with others. Young people feel more confident online because this is a place that they can become and portray the best version of themselves. The ability to choose if, when and how engagement occurs, empowers some young people to feel more confident, which makes positive engagement more likely.

Facebook Messenger remains a popular platform for communication among young people. All young people involved already had the app and a group chat was easy to set up on our work phones.

- Ground rules were established in partnership with young people and they were made aware of their rights and responsibilities when using this technology. This follows our commitment to include young people in all decision making that directly impacts them, providing a sense of inclusion and influence over choices being made.

The youth worker and young people agreed set times and days of group and individual chats by phone and video chat and what the nature of the call would be.

- Young people were encouraged to support each other, using the Scran digital spaces, outside of sessions, therefore, providing a safe space for peer support whilst being monitored by the youth work team.
- One-to-one sessions provided opportunities for young people to discuss issues outside the group setting and focus on individual development and goal setting.
- One-to-one sessions also provided opportunities for relationship building with parents/careers and wider families, providing opportunities to celebrate the

achievements and progress of their young people. Throughout lockdown, workers have seen the positive impact of parental/career engagement on the outcomes of young people.

‘That was well fun. It’s good to see everyone’ – 17-year-old young person

Lockdown, Phase 1 eSupport

Throughout phase 1 lockdown, the team had no physical contact with young people and all work was done digitally. Food and financial support was provided to young people and other care packages were sent out from local organisations as required. Scran Academy, thanks to partnership with People Know How, also issued every young person with a laptop/tablet so homework and online contact could occur. Many family members were made redundant during lockdown, and this support helped young people and their families to meet basic needs around food and toiletries.

We built a program around confidence and self-esteem building in a group setting, focusing on mental health, wellbeing and informal education.

Activities included:

- **Reading and Writing** - Stop the Bus, Pictionary, Hangman
- **Problem Solving** - Scavenger hunts and Clue solving
- **Physical Exercise** - Online Mini Work Outs and Dancing
- **Leisure Activities** - Make-up and Hair Tutorials, Online Ludo, Birthday Celebrations
- **Employability Skills** – Scran Academy COVID Response Volunteer Opportunities

Lockdown, Phase 2 - Phased physical support

Throughout phase 1, it became clear that some of our young people were leaving their houses very infrequently, causing a negative impact on their health and wellbeing. Others ignored guidance around social distancing, through either ignorance or due to conflicting and contradictory advice provided. Simultaneously, we saw online engagement decline as the novelty of the platform wore off and the limits of digital space were reached.

With the move into phase 2, **we were able to reduce the online activity as we could in very controlled situations meet young people face to face.** This was risk-assessed and done in an outdoor public area where social distancing took place and appropriate PPE was provided. The key aims and outcomes of this work, were around introducing more exercise into daily routines, relationship building through informal conversation, and COVID safety education.

Youth leadership and volunteering became critical too. As Scran Academy were leading one of the largest meal support programmes, our quarantined and risk assessed premises enable young people to alone or in pairs support at the frontline. Empowering young people to feel part of the 'solution' to covid19 and enable their active citizenship had a transformational impact on some of their mindsets. They felt like they were achieving and contributing, in a safe way. Dedicated transport and PPE was provided.

Lockdown - Phase 3 & 4

As we begin phase 3, we are planning for young people to physically return to Scran Academy gradually. Physical one to one support will continue, however, online group activities will now take place face to face, as much as possible. We aim to provide safe spaces for young people to participate in informal learning, in a structured and secure way. We will take the opportunity to positively frame lockdown as a learning experience for young people, engaging in reflective practices to identify and apply learning.

The Scran Academy staff team understand the challenges of physical meetings with young people at this time, however the major risks of not enabling young people to access positive and caring adult relationships cannot be unrecognised.

'It makes me feel proud to be a part of Scran' – 14-year-old young person

Challenges & Achievements

COVID-19 has caused major disruption to the delivery of the Scran Academy program and it could no longer continue with its original model. The pandemic has impacted everyone that Scran works with in various ways and we have done our up most to make the experience easier for young people through our digital youth work program. Scran have worked hard to not only provide ongoing support for young people but to provide a much-needed service to help combat the impact of COVID-19 amongst Edinburgh's most vulnerable citizens.

Through regular risk assessment, Scran Academy has followed government recommendations and has produced a tailored program that encourages positive outcomes for young people during COVID-19. This program focused on confidence and self-esteem building alongside providing opportunities for peer support and empowerment. There was a high level of engagement throughout and the informal feedback collected details some of the impact of this program.

It is important to recognise the impact of continuing relational support on young people through lockdown. Due to the informal and flexible nature of youth work, we have been able to deliver provision where many institutions have not. Some of our young people have gone through significant and life-changing events, such as moving to new areas, being socially isolated, losing jobs, facing relational breakdown, and being made homeless and having nowhere to live. For these young people, regular contact with a youth worker has helped them to cope. Some have gained employment or accessed further education and training opportunities as a direct result of the youth work intervention. Finally, young people have made the most of volunteering opportunities within the Scran Academy COVID meals program, giving back to their

communities and developing social relationships with peers and adults from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Young people are the heart of Scran. Their eagerness to engage, despite often unstable, complex and traumatic home lives, during a global pandemic it is inspiring and has shown what strong and incredible people they are.

Contact:

To discuss this report or any further information contact

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