

Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning

The Foyer Federation's Response

26 October 2012

Foyer Federation background

The Foyer Federation was set up in the early 1990s to develop a different way of working with young people who were both unemployed and in housing need. Through transformational programmes that fill gaps in community services and inspiring policy and decision makers to make a more effective investment in young people, we help turn young people's experiences of disadvantage into solutions that support their transition into adult independence. Working through a network of over 120 local Foyers, young people with a range of challenging backgrounds benefit from an integrated housing, learning and personal development approach. At the heart of everything we do is a belief that young people will only achieve their full potential when there is a fair exchange between their responsibilities to contribute and engage and society's obligation to tailor services to their needs. For Foyers, this often means picking up the threads of a young person's education, developing their skills for independence and encouraging greater resilience, and often includes rebuilding relationships.

Evidence from across our network shows that the needs of young people are becoming ever more complex; crime and anti-social behaviour, poor health and well-being, low educational achievement, fears of worklessness and declining social mobility are as much a concern for young people now as street homelessness was in the 1990s. The challenge this poses for vulnerable young people is made even more acute by the present recession and, we believe, this demands a broader range of interventions to provide fairer access to the skills, resources, and opportunities that all young people are entitled to. It also requires a fundamental shift in policies and institutions to recognise the different stages of social development that cut across traditional markers of age and identity.

Through our current approach Open Talent, we are encouraging, challenging and inspiring our members to find new ways to unlock the potential of the young people they work with. Open Talent challenges the deficit based nature of services for young people. We know that the 'something for something' deal that lies at the heart of the Foyer offer played a significant part in ensuring that very few Foyer residents became

involved in last summer's disturbances. They told us that they felt they had a personal 'stake' that they had something to lose.

Summary

The Foyer Federation welcomes the opportunity to share its learning on how Foyers, as localised as youth services have played a critical role in the provision of informal learning. Through a holistic framework based on the principle of conditionality, the Foyer offer ensures:

- a stable and secure community in which young people can support one another and achieve independence
- assistance with finding appropriate employment, training or education
- training in basic skills and independent living skills
- assistance with finding permanent accommodation and providing floating support when the young adult has left the Foyer

Young people in Foyers tend, when they enter the Foyer, to be distant from the labour market. Recent benchmarking data gathered through the Foyer Status Mark process suggests that only 11% of young people are in work when they enter the Foyer. Foyers' learning programmes tend, therefore, to situate themselves at the 'employability' end of the vocational spectrum: that is to say; they focus on developing the skills, attitudes, behaviours and resources necessary to enter the workplace. Again, recent benchmarking data suggests that this approach meets with some success with young people being 20% more likely to be in work when they leave the Foyer than when they enter (31% of young people are employed on leaving the Foyer).

Foyers through tailored support provision indirectly create training and learning environments, and as Foyers are responsive to local needs there is a variance in the level of support provided. For example, some Foyers do not offer accredited internal training but provide budgeting, job search, IT training on site, and refer to local providers within the area. Others deliver specific training projects, focussing on key areas such as: life and living; numeracy and literacy; art; group and social skills; and employment. This type of informal learning also includes outdoor education, health awareness and anti-drug working.

Key points to assure quality assurance in vocational teaching and learning are as follows:

- The service supports an integrated community of young people at different ages and stages of transition
- The service supports the sharing and understanding of learning journeys among young people

- The service supports the Learning Revolution's nine benefits¹ of informal learning as a means to measure service outcomes:
 - o Building communities of active, confident, enthusiastic, critical, creative people, who also help others to learn
 - o Promoting empowerment, civic participation and engagement
 - o Contributing to mental and physical well being
 - o Enabling individuals and groups to prepare for and respond to change
 - o Supporting choice and diversity
 - o Encouraging and supporting activities organised by people themselves
 - o Promoting access to information and signposting sources of impartial advice and guidance
 - o Supporting social contact and independent living for older people and people with learning difficulties or disabilities
 - o Stimulating all aspects of people's lives, promoting intergenerational learning and improving employment prospects

Evidence

Homeless Sector Pilot

The Foyer Federation was a key partner in the Homeless Sector Pilot, a national project managed by the Learning Skills Council that developed and delivered a 'learning and skills' offer that met the needs of the homelessness sector. The programme had three aims: to investigate the issues around homelessness and access to education and training; to identify the costs of delivery in non-traditional settings; and to deliver appropriate training. The pilot demonstrated positive impact as young adults who would not have engaged in mainstream education succeeded to gain formal qualifications; the evaluation identified that 51% had attained Level 2, 6% attained Level 3 and the remainder attained a mixture of other qualifications. Our involvement ensured that the qualification, the 'Learning Power Award' that was developed, was also fit for purpose for delivery in Foyers. 20 Foyers after the completion of the programme continued to use the Award as the conduit for their learning and skills offer. In a number of cases the Learning Power Award has been delivered to young people in custody, or who have recently left custody, as part of a 'custody to community' support programme co-ordinated by the Foyer.

MyNav

In 2009 the Foyer Federation piloted the informal learning programme MyNav, demonstrating how digital technology can open up new learning opportunities and thus also be used as a tool for information and guidance. MyNav adheres to the principles of a coherent information and guidance service delivery based on the following reasons:

¹ Core principles of informal adult learning (IAL), BIS, Source:

http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_learners/informal_adult_learning/core_principles

- It is recognised and trusted, using the enhanced MyNav brand identify and promises
- Foyer staff have the enhanced skills and knowledge to support the navigation process
- It can be used as the locus for a range of different services personalised to an individual's navigation map through their transition
- It can target local priorities
- It helps to support and capture the diversity of needs experienced by young people through a navigation matrix
- It encourages the young person to make informed decisions based on their own feelings and perceptions as well as learning from others
- It emphasises the navigation of both current and future needs
- It engages with young people in a friendly way, using a brand identify that is appealing and owned by young people
- It focuses on the concept of lifelong learning by using access to and control of learning opportunities to progress the navigation process
- It improves awareness of the Foyer's information and advice and guidance service by changing perceptions of the traditional housing support process

Youth Labour's Lost

The Foyer Federation recently commissioned Demos to report on youth employment, *Youth Labour's Lost*, calling for a new educational offer to overcome young people's disadvantage in the labour market. This would be a combination of core skills in English and maths alongside the specific and transferrable skills; having the basic core, employability, and technical skills will enable flexibility and in turn will not restrict the young person to one specific job type. Access to careers advice prior GCSE level will ensure added value as young people are in a better position to make better informed choices on their future pathways.

The report identified a number of factors contributing to young people's disadvantage in the labour market. Similarly the report identified the key factors are centered around: the changing industrial profile - with the UK labour market adapting to the demands of globalization and technology; young people leave the educational system with few skills and very little practical experience; gender disparities - the report highlighted young men having few qualifications in comparison to young women along with the choices of which sector young people choose to enter, for example, more young women are "*six times more likely to go into human health and social work than men*"; regional differences - evidence suggests the level of benefit claimant is increasingly higher in the north of England; increase in the number of older people in the economy can potentially impact the level of opportunities available for young people; and young people's tendency to change jobs and sectors. In carrying out the research, a number of UK employers were interviewed with regards to the perceptions of older and younger workers and whether it is appropriate that training programmes are tailored to age brackets. The findings varied, as some felt young people are more

confident in using technology and therefore able to pick things up at a faster pace, whilst older people are better equipped with communicating skills when delivering a customer service role. Overall it was felt that a mixture of older and younger employers would complement the outcomes of any business as *“older workers share their life skills as well, acting as unofficial mentor to the younger members of the team”*, B&Q HR Director.

Employer Network Rail highlighted the importance in the investment of young people: *“I think it’s fair to say that sometimes low level of literacy and numeracy we get presented with [by young people] surprises us. If you are trying to persuade an employer to take you into a role we expect people to have invested in themselves - eg to have checked for spelling errors in CVs.....sometimes the basic disciplines are lacking - for example, punctuality, reliability and physical presentation. We believe these need more emphasis at school. We don’t expect young people to be engineers when they join us but we look for evidence they have good listening skills, problem-solving and communication skills. We want to see basic competency in spelling and grammar because they are going into a safety-critical environment where it really matters”*, Network Rail, Head of Resourcing.

The Foyer Federation agrees with the aforementioned evidence that suggests a young person’s disadvantage in the labour market is consequent to a number of factors, although we believe much of the explanation also lies in resilience. Resilience is fundamental in that it will determine a young person’s success in entering the labour market and sustaining their employability. We commissioned a review into understanding resilience and the report, *Feeling Good*, concluded the following factors are significant in building and maintaining resilience: safety and security; life skills and independence; respect; acceptance and equality; advice and information; positiveness, learning opportunities; flexibility; possibilities of new experiences; everyday support; training/employment/volunteering opportunities; integrating with the community; accommodation; opportunities; and structured planning.

We would emphasize the importance in ensuring young people are not only equipped with the right assets such as the soft skills that are sought by employers but also have an opportunity through the educational offer to build their resilience.

Working Assets

The Foyer Federation has developed an employability programme, Working Assets that has been designed to help ensure young people are equipped to enter the labour market. Working Assets sets out to shape sustainable routes into future employability as the approach looks at improving outcomes associated with work readiness by equipping young people and their supporting services with a positive-based framework. Working Assets has three phases: engage, build and recognize, all of which enable the young person to identify their own skills, resources and opportunities, which in turn help build their own asset base. Through the framework, Working Assets will engage young people and the local community in an inspirational activity that used as a means

to build skills and resources within both the young person and the services supporting them. The programme challenges negative approaches to disadvantage through a positive emphasis on developing ability and potential, and recognises the achievements of young people and identifying future opportunities. As one young person highlighted: *“I knew I needed a job, I wanted to work, but people kept pressurizing me into jobs that I wasn’t interested in. I learnt new skills through being involved in this project and I can take them into a job”*, Nicola, Peterborough Foyer resident.

Conclusion

There is an abundance of evidence that supports invaluable role of learning delivered by the voluntary sector through informal learning. Reporting on the positive impact of informal learning, a staff member stated: *“Informal learning can help to ensure a smooth transition into resettlement, so this concept proves complementary to support and resettlement processes. Informal learning can build skills and positive learning activities”*.

However it is also important to emphasise that progression in its truest sense involves looking at a person’s asset base; this includes the soft skills under personal development as well being able to engage within the community. The development of skills, resources and opportunities is the means by which young people can ‘make change happen’ through their navigation process.

Additionally, the age and funding disparity should also be addressed as evidence from our network highlights the concerns around the inequality of pre and post 19 year olds.

APPENDIX

Where Are We Now? A Picture of Informal Learning in the Foyer Network

In December 2009 we asked the Foyer network to review their informal learning provision. We asked about the content, scope and range of provision, and the outcomes and impact that it offers to young people. We asked them how young people are involved in defining what is available to them, and how they are offered space to reflect on their learning journeys. We also asked about any barriers to informal learning faced by the young people they work with. The below will examine the network’s responses to the survey, and will discuss their significance in the current public and social policy context.

Content of Programmes

In response to the survey question on the content of Foyers’ informal learning programmes, we received a bewildering array of responses as to the kinds of activities that Foyers do. Broadly, activities can be catalogued as falling into four categories to do with Employment and Skills, Physical and Mental Health, Lifeskills and Creativity. Among the most popular were sessions on cookery, healthy eating and nutrition, employment and job search, financial capability (budgeting, debt management, etc), and sport and physical health. Also popular were self-esteem and emotional well-being sessions, basic skills, arts, crafts and photography, drugs and alcohol awareness and sexual health. See the diagram below for a fuller list of activities, in order of frequency under each theme

Employment and Skills	Physical and Mental Health
Communication Literacy and Numeracy Job Search, CV Writing, Interview skills Financial Capability, Budgeting IT Coaching and Peer Mentoring Enterprise Hair and Beauty Construction	Cookery, Healthy Eating, Nutrition Sports and Physical Activities Self-esteem, Assertiveness Well-being, Enabling Change Anger Management Domestic Abuse, Bullying Awareness Sexuality Food Hygiene Cycling and Cycle Maintenance
Lifeskills	Creativity
Sexual Health Drugs and alcohol awareness Maintaining a tenancy Move-on/resettlement Citizenship Induction DIY and gardening Health and Safety, First Aid, Fire Safety, Road Safety	Arts and Crafts, Photography Media and film production Music and DJ-ing Dance and Drama Discussion Groups Book Groups Residents’ Newsletter

The content of informal learning programmes in Foyers usually strikes a balance between activities that are designed to engage residents, those that are designed to teach useful skills, and those that promote re-entry into training and employment. Clearly, it is possible to achieve all three within one activity, and perhaps the same activity will have different outcomes for the residents taking part. A cookery session could, for example, be offering one resident the opportunity to learn about healthy eating, another the opportunity for some numeracy work, a third the opportunity to develop team working skills, and a fourth the chance to develop their leadership potential. It is in this ability to achieve several objectives in the same activity where the real value of informal

learning lies, and why it is so important to provide individual space for reflection around these activities, so that the value of the learning for each individual can be made apparent.

Outcomes and Impact for Learners

When asked to comment on the range of outcomes that informal learning could give rise to for learners, Foyers again offered a wide variety of outcomes that can be grouped under three themes: knowledge and skills; behaviour; and identity. Under knowledge and skills are all the outcomes that relate specifically to developing expertise in a given area, whether that area is to do with employment, learning, personal development or ‘lifeskills’. The behaviour theme relates to specific behaviour changes that happen as a result of the informal learning, such as reduced substance misuse or less risky sexual behaviour. The third theme, ‘identity’, is perhaps the hardest to define. Grouped under this theme are the outcomes often described as ‘soft’, to do with increased self-confidence, self-esteem and feelings of well-being, but also those to do with a sense of ownership over their living environment, an increased ability to set and meet challenging personal goals, a willingness to extend oneself. In short, they are to do with who a person is rather than what they know or how they behave.

An important outcome mentioned by Foyers is that through informal learning programme young people whose lives are highly chaotic can have structure, stability and routine introduced into their lives. This is a key step towards re-engagement with the mainstream.

The table below details, in order of frequency, the outcomes relating to informal learning returned by Foyers.

Knowledge and Skills	Behaviour	Identity
Increased employability	Increased stability/structure/routine	Higher self-confidence
Progression into learning and work	Enhanced ability to sustain healthy relationships	Higher self-esteem
Increased IT skills	Reduced substance misuse	Increased personal well-being
Ability to work in a team, listen, negotiate	Less risky sexual behaviour	Greater independence
Increased ability to stay safe	Better ability to make a positive contribution	Increased ability to be healthy
Increased economic well-being	Enhanced social skills	Sense of achievement
Understanding equality and diversity		Willingness to stretch/challenge oneself
		Better ability to ‘navigate’ options
		More ‘enquiring mind’
		Sense of ownership over living space

When asked to outline the longer term impact of their informal programme on learners, Foyers’ responses overwhelmingly focused on two themes: firstly, that informal learning promotes entry into formal learning and work; and secondly, that informal learning promotes the development of social skills, involvement, and a sense of purpose. It is clear from the responses that informal learning plays a crucial role in combating the feelings of isolation, low emotional well-being, and low self-confidence that are key barriers to making the transition to independent adulthood.

A further key impact from the perspective of Foyers was the fact that informal learning programmes reduce the number of repeat tenancies by ensuring that learners have gained the skills and resources that they need to live independently in the community. Many Foyers referred to the 'transferability' of the skills learned through informal learning - that is to say, that informal learning promotes the development of skills that learners can use in their everyday lives.

This factor - that programmes are relevant to learners' lives - is crucial to the success of informal learning in Foyers. It is perhaps an obvious point to make, but how do you ensure that the programme you are developing is relevant? One way is to involve learners in the development of programmes themselves, and the next part of the survey asked Foyers about how they do this.

Involving Young People

Opportunities for Foyer residents to have an input into the way in which their informal learning programmes are delivered are offered in a variety of ways. The most popular is to involve residents as tutors, facilitators, fundraisers and mentors on the programmes themselves. There are other procedural ways of obtaining residents' feedback and ideas as to how to shape their informal learning offer, and these form the next three most popular responses: through consultation with the resident representative, through resident/house meetings and focus groups, and through questionnaires and evaluation forms. The fifth most popular response was through one-to-one support planning, keyworking and coaching sessions - this included the initial assessment, induction and formative assessment processes.

Other responses included offering modular programmes, where learners can select the modules most appropriate to their needs, through liaison with external providers of support and information, advice and guidance to residents, to simply having project staff remain open to suggestions from residents on an informal and ad hoc basis.

A number of Foyers stressed the importance of maintaining a flexible programme if young people are to be involved. The results of feedback and evaluation must be acted upon quickly, and learners must see the immediate impact of suggestions they have made.

Meeting Needs

We asked Foyers to state how they ensured that their informal learning 'offer' met the needs of their residents. The overwhelming majority responded that this is done through an analysis of the needs which emerge as a result of initial assessment and support planning with residents. Every young person, when they enter a Foyer, will undergo some form of initial assessment that looks at their current skills, resources and the opportunities they have taken advantage of thus far. The results of the initial assessment will form the basis of the ongoing support plan with each resident. This support plan is then reviewed, most often on a quarterly basis. By collating the information from these support plans about the needs that residents are presenting an informal learning programme can be drawn up which is tailored directly to those needs.

A number of Foyers also reported other mechanisms through which they determine their informal learning offer. Some collect formal feedback from residents through a (usually annual) questionnaire, others collect more informal feedback through residents meetings. A smaller number of Foyers reported that they consult with professionals from both within and outside the Foyer on what needs they consider residents to have. Finally, a handful of Foyers link their informal learning programme explicitly to Local Area Agreement priorities.

Space for Reflection

The support planning process also has an important role to play in offering time and space to reflect on the impact of an individual's informal learning journey. Residents are coached by their keyworker to reflect on what they have learned, both in practical terms (I can cook, I can clean, etc) but also in terms of their own personal development (I know I can work in a team, I know I can

ask for help when I need it, etc). All Foyers responding to the survey identified this as the primary source of space and time for reflection. In their responses, Foyers highlighted the importance of the role of the keyworker as a coach, mentor, or trusted adult who can support the resident in identifying the key elements of their learning journey.

Around half of Foyers responded that they use specific tools to 'capture' the impact of informal learning, and of these tools the most frequently used was the Outcomes Star.² And around half of Foyers include a formal exit assessment at the end of an informal learning programme that specifically attempts to provide an opportunity for the resident/learner to reflect on the journey they have made through the programme. Other ways in which space for reflection is offered include:

- An awards ceremony, where learners are presented with a certificate detailing their achievements;
- Social networking sites ('Facebook' groups etc)
- A display board in the training suite, where learners are encouraged to write messages that reflect their views on the journey they have made;
- Learning journals and 'life story' drawings
- Learners writing their own case studies

Those Foyers whose informal learning programmes are subject to external inspection highlighted the role of the inspection regime in ensuring that space for reflection on the impact of informal learning programmes is offered to residents/learners, and that this is properly documented and reported.

Barriers and Incentives

The barriers identified by Foyers in respect of their informal learning programmes fall broadly into two categories: those to do with the personal difficulties learners face, and those faced by the organisation. Of these, the first is the most frequently reported and clearly the most significant. The difficulties faced by individual learners in engaging with informal learning are as follows, in order of frequency of reporting:

- Poor experience of mainstream school
- Low self-esteem, fear of feeling a 'failure'
- Chaotic lifestyle
- Peer pressure to disengage
- Substance misuse
- Undiagnosed learning difficulties

It is significant that many of these barriers relate directly to the impacts that informal learning programmes are trying to have on the lives of young people.

In terms of organisational barriers, the most frequently reported relate to financial pressures and pressures relating to staff resources. As we have seen, many of the activities that form part of Foyers' informal learning programmes are low-cost interventions that therefore do not require large investment. But they do require staff to be on hand to co-ordinate, supervise and in many cases lead activities. This is coupled with the fact that a number of Foyers reported that it can be difficult to recruit staff that are able to work at evening and weekends, when demand for informal learning activities is at its highest.

Another related organisational barrier reported by Foyers is their ability to meet demand when activities are offered. Occasionally certain activities prove so popular that the Foyer cannot meet demand from the residents. This can, depending on the nature of the activity, be overcome

² www.outcomesstar.org.uk. Produced by Triangle Consulting, copyright Triangle Consulting 2009.

through offering repeat sessions but if there is a significant cost associated with the activity then this is not always possible.

It is interesting to note that one or two Foyers made the point that with some adjustment to entitlement, and to the programmes offered, the informal learning programmes offered by Foyers could become eligible for EMA status, enabling learners to claim a payment for attendance and completion of an informal learning programme. One Foyer which was involved in an Activity Agreement pilot mentioned the beneficial impact this had on recruitment, attendance and completion of its programme.

This brings us on to the question of incentives. Foyers were asked to state what, if any, incentives were offered to learners in return for enrolment, attendance and completion of their programmes. The most frequent response was that in-house certificates are offered, followed by the response that vouchers for local supermarkets are offered for completion of certain programme modules. Thirdly, many Foyers reported that they offer hot food at their informal learning sessions as an incentive for residents to attend. Other incentives that are offered are:

- A day trip, cinema trip or meal out on completion of an informal learning programme
- Access to certain in-house facilities, such as games machines (Wii, Playstation, etc)
- Recognition through notice boards and Foyer newsletter

One important incentive mentioned by around 10% of the Foyers who responded was that the outcomes attained by participating and achieving on an informal learning programme are an important part of 'moving through' the Foyer process, Young people who participate in informal learning are noticeably more likely to progress quickly into independent accommodation, which is the primary goal of most Foyer residents. Some Foyers have a formal process for this - a points scale is in operation in the Foyer for the allocation of move-on accommodation, and for some it is simply an informal outcome of the process.

Conclusion

Informal learning has a key role to play in the Foyer process. It can be used to develop the 'asset base' of skills, resources and opportunities that every young person needs in order to make the transition to independent adulthood. It can do this by developing essential skills such as the ability to cook, clean, and maintain a tenancy. It also supports progression into mainstream learning and work.

There has been significant development in public and social policy relating to young people in recent years. The findings of this survey are significant in this context. They demonstrate how informal learning can be used to identify, engage, involve and progress those young people whose experience of education has thus far been poor and is frequently a primary cause of their disengagement. The role of informal learning in developing those skills and resources which those young people outside the mainstream have not had the opportunity to develop is also demonstrated. Many of the young people who have engaged with informal learning programmes in Foyers are those often described as 'NEET', and this survey shows how informal learning can have a role in helping them make a journey back into formal learning and work. In addition, around 10% young people in Foyers are care leavers, around 18% have had contact with the criminal justice system, and around 2% are lone parents, meaning that the informal learning journeys that these young people take can have an impact on the Public Service Agreement targets, and Local Area National Indicators relating specifically to these groups. Indeed, a number of Foyers use current policy frameworks, such as Every Child Matters or their Local Area Agreement, to define and articulate their informal learning offer.

It is hoped that this survey will be of use to providers looking to develop or review an already existing learning programme, and also to commissioners who are looking to understand more about what contribution informal learning can make in their own commissioning environment. We hope

that it is also of interest to a more general audience who just want to find out more about the journeys that young people undertake when they engage in an informal learning programme.