

Journeying Together

**Growing youth work and
youth workers in local
communities**

Edited by

Alan Rogers and Mark K. Smith



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Dedicated to

Fred Arthur Rank Packard – Rank Foundation Trustee 1986–2009, Chairman
2000–2009

The Honourable Mrs S. M. Cowen ('Toddy') – Rank Foundation Trustee
1972–2000

and

Sue Bennett – Key worker/*Investing in Success* Initiative (2003–2006)

Jane Caley – *Youth or Adult?* Worker (1987–92) and Manager

David Clements – Manager *Youth or Adult?* Initiative (1992–97 and
1999–2004)

Carl John – *Youth or Adult?* Worker (1992–97) and Manager

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Foreword

*Charlie Harris, Director of Youth Projects,
The Rank Foundation*

How do you begin a Foreword to a book that documents a significant part of your life's work and commitment? The roots of the *Youth or Adult?* Initiative – and the routes that led to its inception – go back six decades, not just (!) the 22 years it has been operational.

Youth or Adult? – which has now grown to become the Rank Youth Workers' Apprentice Programme (YAP) – is the longest and largest running initiative of its sort in the UK. For 22 years it has supported grass roots developmental youth and community work, alongside the professional training and qualification of its leaders.

The philosophy that underpins *Youth or Adult?* goes back to the Stone Age of my own education – certain role models, certain teachers and their educational approach. It goes back to my learning at the 'Central School of Screech and Trauma'. The brilliance of its take on education was founded on a sense of 'community' – and the understanding that creativity is a powerful tool and change is not a threat.

From 'Central' I went on a journey, through community development, play and youth work. Along the way I recognised the pragmatic value of investing for the long-term.

Education and experience liberate. Education should focus on potential. It explores the power of alternatives to the mire of despondency and shows a path through the wilderness. The investment is the essential catalyst, initiating an essential fusion and releasing a gigantic energy source.

In the mid 1980s, the right dynamic people were in the right place at the right time. The Rank Foundation and The Joseph Rank Trust were willing and keen to invest in leadership for the future. It was the beginning of a close partnership between the two bodies, the fruits of which are sampled within these pages. The investment would be nominally for five years but, for community and young people, it was actually investing for a lifetime – as qualification and professional commitment don't disappear like steam.

From the Welsh Valleys to the highlands of Scotland there are community leaders I would trust with the care of my grandchildren. That is *my* definition of 'qualification'. So, let the Journey continue, let's reach out for the myriad of bright stars and beyond.

Introduction

Charlie Harris, Alan Rogers and Mark K Smith

This is a unique collection of writings on work with young people. The 10 Chapters have grown from almost 25 years of work with a consistent youth work philosophy. They combine to set out a vision for effective work with young people in communities, which will be relevant to anyone working, or training to work, with young people.

Our aim in compiling this collection is to offer an accessible and authoritative account of an effective approach to growing work within communities. Quotes telling the stories of practicing youth workers and their managers are linked to established theories of practising organisational and community development.

The book

Journeying Together both articulates and evidences the nature and success of the approach to work with young people that the Rank Foundation's *Youth or Adult?* programme has supported throughout its existence. Collectively, the Chapters identify models of youth and community work practice, personal and professional development – and of funding practice. They combine to give a vision of community development, based on current practice.

The three sections . . .

Growing youth work in local communities: An analysis of the nature of informal education; the importance of youth work rooted within communities and the challenges this brings.

Growing youth workers in local communities: It takes special people to be informal educators with young people. Growing the skills, confidence and experience to be an effective youth worker is the central challenge for workers and their managers.

Journeying together: A commitment to a genuine partnership, involving the funders, the training agency and local organisations is at the root of the success

of Rank's *Youth or Adult?* programme. All parties contribute to the growth of the workers-in-training at the centre of the process. And all partners grow through their collaboration.

The ten chapters . . .

The writers are practitioners – workers, managers, trainers and funders – who are actively involved in growing innovative work in local communities. Most of the writers have come (or are coming) through the *Youth or Adult?* process of growing their skills as workers in communities.

There is no standard approach to the chapters – all grow from personal experience, reflecting a philosophy that encourages and facilitates locally defined problems and solutions.

The research for the publication included interviews and workshops with workers and managers of current and past projects from across the Rank Network. Quotations from this process are included throughout the publication and are indicated by italicisation in the text.

The conclusion

In the conclusion, Alan Rogers and Mark Smith examine some of the wider implications of this unique strand of work with young people. The focus is on the challenges faced by local agencies, policy-makers and funders.

An approach to youth work . . .

During the lifetime of The Rank Foundation's *Youth or Adult?* programme, many government initiatives have come and gone. For more than two decades, however, *Youth or Adult?* has had the same, simple idea at its core – and the same values underpinning its practice at all levels.

In essence, *Youth or Adult?* offers individuals the opportunity to work within their community, while receiving professional training as informal educators. The goal is to grow workers and organisations that are able to make a sustained and sustainable impact on their communities. After over two decades there is plenty of evidence of personal, professional, organisational and community development to illustrate the success of this approach.

Since its inception, the programme has grown – and complementary initiatives have been built around it. The intertwining of structured training with 'real' work experience is distinctive and is built on a vital partnership between the Foundation and The YMCA George Williams College. But the goal

of the programme is not the whole story. What makes it distinctive is how the underlying values have guided practice at all levels.

The Rank Foundation's vision of youth work is clear. Youth work:

- Trusts young people – based on a fundamental belief that there is good in all.
- Facilitates relationships that allow young people to grow and flourish.
- Creates space for the chance to reflect, learn and grow.
- Enables opportunities to join together to organise and take part in groups and activities.

These ideas are expanded in the DVD and booklet '*Journeying together*' [available online at www.rankyouthwork.org].

. . . and youth work funding

The Foundation has aimed to grow a way of working in partnership that is consistent with its ideas about good youth work practice.

As funders of youth work, this means:

- Listening to the plans of workers and agencies, rather than defining their targets.
- Regular personal contact with trainees and their managers.
- Regular opportunities for contact and learning with and from others involved in the programme.
- The growth of a network of funded individuals and projects, providing mutual support.

In summary, funders, trainers, agencies and individuals are 'journeying together' and learning together about how to support and grow skilled and experienced workers in communities.

Using this approach, local solutions are devised through dialogue. Workers and organisations initiate projects and programmes that meet local circumstances, rather than being obliged to use strategies imposed by a distant funder. This way of working means that both change and diversity are desirable and sought, rather than problematic.

Since 1987 just over 200 agencies have hosted a Rank Charities' funded *Youth or Adult?* project. Tens of thousands of young people have benefited from the Initiative – and through support from the other funding strands that have grown around it. Within *Youth or Adult?* alone, around 135 workers have qualified as professional workers, another 40 are currently undergoing training

to degree level. Through the Rank Foundation's wider funding programme a further 90 workers have achieved recognised qualifications and 950 volunteer leaders have been grown. What is more, it has created a body of innovatory, local work with young people. Alongside this, there has been significant development, both in the size and shape of the organisations involved and the depth and range of work they are undertaking.

The 'journeying together' approach has contrasted increasingly with mainstream approaches to funding, especially with government funding strategies, which have increasingly sought to define targets and outcomes for local agencies to achieve. It has, to some degree, 'swum against the tide'. However, as the evidence of these pages shows, there has never been a time when the lessons from this journey have been more widely relevant.