Chapter 5

A Selective History of Youth Work

5.1 Introduction

The paradigms of practice discussed in the previous chapter have deep historical roots informed by pre- and postcolonial contexts, and synergies across State and non-State youth work. This chapter attempts to place this practice in relation to historical events, youth work domains, and their shaping of youth work.

Youth work and youth workers have responded, adapted and changed according to social demands and contexts over time; this has been the most poignant and effective skill set that youth workers have developed, regardless of academic and State interests to define youth workers as 'educators', 'change agents', 'advocates of young people' or any other individual or particular label that has been applied. However, youth workers are playing all and more of these roles. This is what makes youth workers a unique asset to any society and what keeps the practice relevant.

Different eras and contexts have demanded changes in the way youth work has been delivered and perceived. What we know about history indicates that this will continue to be the case. What youth work was or is likely to be will not be all it will become.

This said, there is an underlying consistency in the general understanding of what youth is, or can be. However, as the Commonwealth definition of youth work stresses, it is something more than nonspecific or generalised work with young people.

5.2 Histories

In the context of the Commonwealth, cultural responses to youth work arose alongside postcolonial, usually State-supported practice. Before this, youth work, like most educational and institutional responses and frameworks in colonised environments, was shaped by colonial influences. The professionalisation of youth work across the Commonwealth largely took place with the independence of nation-states and informed by emerging State structures.

However, this process was never 'instant' or based on any particular model. This can be gathered from looking at how youth work developed in Commonwealth contexts after independence. A few examples are provided here to demonstrate this.

5.2.1 Uganda

Up to the 1960s Uganda lacked an explicit, coherent and comprehensive national youth policy. However, national planning for youth development started at that time, with the Ugandan Government establishing a section of Youth within the Ministry of Culture and Community Development. The Government also established three

Youth Organisations: the National Union of Youth Organisation (NUYO), which was supplanted by the Uganda Youth Development Organisation (UYDO) in the 1970s, National Union of Students of Uganda (NUSU) and Youth Farmers Union (YFU).

NUYO targeted out-of-school young people between the ages of 13 and 30, while the Young Farmers Union (YFU) focused on young people in and out of school in the age group of 10–25 years; the National Union of Students of Uganda (NUSU) looked to serve youth in secondary and tertiary institutions.

These programmes were dependent on substantive investment by the Government and NGOs which looked to address the wide range of social and economic needs of young people. They had a rural focus and worked to provide opportunities for the most disadvantaged out-of-school youth.

Like most sectors, youth services/programmes were hard hit during the period of economic chaos and civil conflict in Uganda during the 1980s. Many young people dropped out of school. For some, education lost meaning. An appreciable number of young people joined the armed struggles and came to be commonly known as 'kadogos' (child soldiers).

There was an increase in rural-urban migration by the young. New diseases like the human immune-deficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) appeared, and those most affected were those between 12 and 30. A great number of households came to be headed by young people as adults were overcome by AIDS, or were lost in the armed struggles.

By the 1990s, the Ugandan Government policy transferred responsibility for youth services to local authorities. This meant that new approaches to youth development were needed. At this point the Government initiated a clear and co-ordinated National Youth Policy to address the developmental needs of young people in an all-inclusive way.

In November 1997 a Youth Policy Committee was organised and tasked to present a framework to guide the process of policy formulation between 1997 and 2000.

5.2.2 South Africa

In South Africa, there is no record of professional youth work before 1969. Prior to that youth work was mainly a church-based pursuit. Sponsored training began in the 1970s. It was also at this point that a national training programme for youth leaders within the Methodist Church was initiated.

By and large, churches were on the side of the anti-apartheid struggle and many community-based organisations developed an increased political and black consciousness. The work of Paulo Freire was popular. Young people were to the fore in the anti-apartheid movement. Many were killed during the struggles for freedom and equality. A lot of youth work was funded by international organisations, while the State mainly funded uniformed organisations.

In the late 1980s, the Youth Practitioners Advocacy Group was established to lobby to forward the professionalisation of youth work. In 1996 120 youth workers attended a

conference and produced the 'Hunters Rest Declaration'. This set out a framework for professionalisation that included:

- clear career paths
- a philosophical and education structure for youth work
- desired outcomes
- a code of ethics.

This work ultimately led to the idea of forming a professional association for youth workers and to draft policy documents relating to the development of community-based youth work in the rural areas.

This statement was passed to the Minister of Welfare. Although some of the proposals were not funded, the profession was granted official recognition for the first time.

In 1996, a Youth Commission was established to write South Africa's first youth policy. The consultative process that underwrote this policy was seen as genuine and fully owned.

The Youth Practitioners Advocacy Group became the South African Youth Workers Association (SAYWA) in 1998. It had its own constitution, code of ethics, and standards.[1] It was launched as the first collective voice of professional youth workers (See also Chapter 8).

5.2.3 India

Practices recognisable as youth work have long precedence in India. In the more recent past, in the background of student unrest in the 1960s (replicated in many other parts of the world), the Government looked to develop a programme for an integrated youth service. In 1966, a Planning Commission set up a Working Group tasked with the development of a wide-ranging National Plan for Youth. The Ministry of Education was renamed the Ministry of Education and Youth Services and, in 1969, it called a conference involving youth workers, youth organisations and youth service agencies. The National Youth Board arose out of this process.

Since then, significant progress has been made in the provision of State youth services. The Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) is now the largest network of youth clubs in the world, with 200,073 youth clubs across the country served by 623 district youth co-ordinators and 12,000 national youth corps volunteers managed by 29 State-level zonal directors. In a different but related process of encouraging voluntarism among youth, the National Service Scheme (NSS) works with four million young volunteers through chapters in 350 universities, 16,056 colleges, 42 higher education directorates and 1204 higher secondary schools. The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Developed (RGNIYD) serves as an education and training agency for youth workers and those in related fields.

Box 5.1 illustrates how the RGNIYD has become a State-sponsored leader in youth work education and training:

Box 5.1 The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD)'s Mission for Youth Work – India

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The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, is an Institute of National Importance created through Act of Parliament No. 35/2012 under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India. The RGNIYD was set up in 1993 under the Societies Registration Act, XXVII of 1975.

The RGNIYD functions as a vital resource centre with its multi-faceted functions of offering academic programmes at postgraduate level encompassing various dimensions of youth development, engaging in research on youth development and co-ordinating training programmes for State agencies and the officials of youth organisation, besides the extension and outreach initiatives across the country.

RGNIYD plays a significant role in supporting the professionalisation of youth work. The Institute has reached all parts of the country to train thousands of youth workers since its establishment. It has adopted and promoted varied models of youth work to create a productive youth work workforce in the country through training/capacity-building programmes, seminars, conferences, extension activities and academic programmes. In order to execute the mandate of RGNIYD and priority areas (education, employment, entrepreneurship, health and healthy lifestyle, sports, social values, youth engagement, politics and governance, social inclusion, etc.) of the National Youth Policy (NYP 2014), it reaches the unreached youth workers in the country with the ultimate objective of realising young people's full potential as contributors to themselves and the nation.

The Government of India has been emphasising India's identity as the 'skill capital of the world'. Youth is the potential of our country, and promoting youth entrepreneurship, etc., is further motivating young people to work for nation building. At this juncture, the role of RGNIYD has become vital in adopting and introducing various programmes in youth work.

Since its inception, RGNIYD has focused on building the capacity of youth functionaries through the National Service Scheme (NSS) and the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sanghatan (NYKS). The thrust areas of capacity-building programmes are building the skills and competencies centred on the principles of youth work.

RGNIYD is very clear in its journey towards creating youth work professionals who can be equipped with scientific knowledge and systematic procedures in engaging with young people and dealing with the problems and issues of youth

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in the world in general and India in particular. From the 2016-17 academic years, RGNIYD started offering two programmes exclusively focusing on youth. One is an MA in Social Work with Youth and Community Development specialisation and other is a postgraduate Diploma in Youth Development (PGDYD).

The PGDYD (30 credits) is on offer at five different locations in India. This programme was designed to professionalise youth work, create professionals in youth work and thereby address the problems and issues of youth of this country. It capacitates thousands of learners across the country, which can train and capacitate hundreds of thousands of young people in the country and direct them in a path at right time.

5.2.4 Jamaica

The Garvey Movement of the late 1920s saw Jamaicans working for the development of their communities and their empowerment. This helped to lay the foundation for the nationalist movements of the 1930s. A major feature of the latter was the establishment of the Jamaica Welfare Movement. Under Jamaica Welfare, service groups including community organisations, co-operatives and credit unions took shape.

One major programme under Jamaica Welfare was the Jamaica Youth Clubs Council. The Council was established in 1955 to work with youth groups across the country. It had representatives from the YMCA, YWCA, churches, local government, the civil service, the business sector as well as some co-opted members. In 1973, the restructuring of the Social Development Commission (SDC) resulted in the establishment of a Youth and Community Services Division that was given the responsibilities for all matters related to youth and community organisations. While the SDC and the youth portfolio were shifted from one ministry of government to another, the SDC maintained responsibility for community youth organisations until 2000, when this responsibility was reassigned to the National Centre for Youth Development (NCYD). In 1998, the SDC estimated that there were over 1,600 youth clubs with an average of just under 40 members each. A major feature of the 1980s and 1990s was the increased number of school-based youth organisations and the growing number of youth arms of service clubs.

5.3 The growth of formal state processes and mechanisms

The growth of secular youth work saw ideas related to social justice and themes centred on the empowerment of young people flourish. Following this development, a range of formal training courses, ministries, NGO networks and government advisory bodies began to emerge.

As demonstrated above, in some contexts youth insurgencies and unrest resulted in efforts to engage with young people, not necessarily in youth-centric ways, but as a

form of appeasement, for example in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s (DeVotta, 2004, p. 167). Party politically motivated youth engagement developed throughout the last part of the twentieth century, perhaps most overtly in parts of Asia and Africa, but in more covert/subtle ways in Europe and elsewhere. This kind of motivation, however, cannot be said to be youth work as it looked to empower others, promoting sectional interests, more than seeking to work with young people in order that they empower themselves.

For all this, historically, young people have been the focus of adult philanthropy; attempts to educate, manipulate, indoctrinate, subordinate, control, discipline, reform and liberate. At the same time, young people have been the target of adult concerns about their protection, care and welfare as defined by adults.

Work with young people designed merely to serve the aims of the nation-state, commercial and industrial interests, organised religion, political and military ambitions and secular concerns about everything from the environment to social health cannot be rationalised as youth work, particularly according to the Commonwealth definition. Often, it is downright interference into the personal, group and family life of young people. **Youth work remains, despite every effort to manipulate practice to questionable 'educational' ends or 'betterment', a secular approach that looks to promote human wellbeing by way of forms of association**.

Note

1 At this time, Dr David Maunders from RMIT University in Australia was funded by Australia Aid in partnership with Johannesburg Technicon to establish a course work Masters in Youth Development Work for members of SAYWA.