

Chapter 6

Different working contexts

This chapter looks at the diversity of roles that youth workers can take in social inclusion projects. Taking into account the challenges, risks and factors, the chapter offers a description of youth work contexts in the short term and the long term.

Youth workers can take on a great diversity of roles. People working with young people with fewer opportunities may also be operating within a range of different working contexts. Such contexts can range from long-term commitments to short-term involvement. At either end there are advantages and disadvantages, but they can complement one another. As youth workers trying to work inclusively we need to be aware of where we are situated and what the consequences of the style of work we choose will be.

Short-term interventions	Long-term commitments
Often aimed at specific young people whose problems or situations have come to the notice of the relevant authorities Undertaken by social sector professionals (social workers, school councillors or mentors, probation officers, etc.) Commonly the result of a crisis in a young person's life When the crisis is resolved support may end abruptly A young person may have little choice over the intervention Although often necessary and important, interventions and those associated with them can cause young people to be hostile or suspicious	Often community based and locally run and staffed (youth clubs, long-running community initiatives or schemes, local volunteers or professionals who have lived and worked in the area for many years, etc.) Usually non-professional or voluntary in nature Open to all young people but sometimes targeting young people with fewer opportunities Non-compulsory, freedom of choice for young people involved Strong likelihood of being "owned" by the young people who participate Offers opportunities and support to young people over the long term Are often built on strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect between staff and young people

Building successful working relationships at the grassroots level is never easy and care must always be taken to ensure that such co-operation is mutually beneficial for all parties and has the interests of the young people concerned at heart (see previous sections in Chapter 5: "Young people and their context").