Reversing the Trend is a joint project involving six voluntary youth work organisations, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland's Partnership Drugs Initiative and Evaluation Support Scotland.

Reversing the Trend is about the role the youth sector plays in preventing problem substance use by young people. The purpose was to offer an insight into what outcomes can be achieved by providing preventative approaches from universal help through to more specialist support for young people – and how to evaluate them. We are focused on substance use but we are aware youth work also contributes to other cross-cutting issues facing young people.

In this short summary we include two diagrams which explain the need being addressed and the activities and outcomes from youth organisations. We also highlight some assumptions underlying our work and some messages about evaluation and about our approach.

Go to our on-line guide for more information about:

- How we are defining youth work and prevention
- Where youth work fits with other services
- Formal evidence which backs up our models
- Links to key policy documents
- How youth workers can evaluate these activities and outcomes
- Case studies – with example methods including individual logic models
- More example methods used by the 6 organisations involved (not a comprehensive set, so not a toolkit, but a place to start sharing our methods)

Our on-line guide is designed to support and help managers who develop services, practitioners, policy makers, funders and commissioners. Guidance is given on the areas which might be most relevant to you.

The diagrams overleaf: in brief

The situation tree identifies the issue being addressed (the trunk); the factors affecting risk (the roots, both positive and negative and the general landscape); what may happen to some young people (the branches)

The activities and outcome model shows:

- Steps are taken to engage with young people, particularly those most at risk
- Open access activities are used to build trust and relationships
- This leads to deeper engagement work helping young people to achieve positive outcomes and effectively build protective factors
- Young people can then make positive choices and take less risky behaviours
- Which therefore benefits the community in general and meets ADP and government outcomes around substance use
The Situation

Young people are at risk because of drugs and alcohol

The Roots
Factors affecting risk

- Ability to say no
- Aspirations and belief in the future
- Expectations re use of drugs and alcohol
- Levels of boredom, stress and unhappiness
- Need for acceptance and friends
- Need to express their freedom and grown-upness
- Need for fun, adventure and risk
- Drink and drugs are cheap and easy to access
- Drinking is glamourised by the alcohol industry
- Poverty and disadvantage
- Drinking is normal behaviour
- Getting drunk seen as a rite of passage

The branches what may happen!

- Picked up by the police
- Homelessness
- Teenage pregnancy
- Truancy and absence from school
- Reduced achievement at school
- Impact on community safety and environment
- Falling out with family
- Vulnerable to rape and other sexual abuse
- Unsafe sex
- A & E admissions
- Unsafe or anti social behaviours
- Reduced ability to assess and / or avoid risk
- Reduced aspirations
- Health problems, liver problems
- Repeat use
- Learn to use drugs and alcohol responsibly
- Alcohol and drugs provide fun
- Things to do with friends
- Community of support

The problem does not affect all young people equally, some individuals and some communities are more at risk than others.
Assumptions about the way we work as youth workers

One size does not fit all. Outcomes are very different for each young person and should be led by them. In turn the local community and society benefit, but the prime beneficiary is the young person.

Young people are not the ‘issue’; they are part of the solution. Young people should be involved in assessing needs and designing services and solutions.

We do not want to label young people. We want to focus on ‘assets’ not ‘deficiencies’. We address behavioural problems, using informal educational approaches to help young people to make more positive choices.

Our approach is flexible and responsive, engaging young people in a way, time and manner that is accessible and feels safe to them. Contact is voluntary and workers have to be non-judgemental and consistent in approach.

Although projects sometimes target areas or groups, youth activities such as drop-ins and events are open to all.
Some key messages about evaluation

It can be challenging to evidence the direct impact of preventative and diversionary work on longer term substance misuse outcomes.

Evidence matters to policy makers and funders, who want to understand what services and approaches are effective in preventing longer term problems.

Evaluation is about responding to young people and improving our services as well as proving our value.

We need to put young people's voices at the heart of our evaluation methods, to understand what is important and what changes have happened for them.

Statistics and data sets held by public agencies, are often limited because they may not be localised enough and also need careful interpretation to understand what has changed and why.

The evaluation questions that preventive youth work should answer are:
- Are we engaging and reaching the right young people (those at risk) and in a way that enables them to benefit from our preventive services.
- In the short term are young people prevented from problem substance misuse, achieving positive outcomes and increasing protective factors.
- Are young people reducing risky behaviours and making more positive choices.

There is more detail about what to evaluate and how to evaluate prevention in our online pack.

Some key messages about our approach

Drug and alcohol issues have common roots with other issues (mental, physical and sexual health, anti-social behaviour, not thriving at school). Substance use work should not be put in a silo.

There is a spectrum of preventive action. Voluntary youth work is involved in all stages of the preventive journey. But in Reversing the Trend we focus on activity which is diversionary or about early intervention.

Youth work is not alone in using preventive interventions. We see the importance of partnership with other agencies and enabling young people to make use of other services.

Our unique selling point is our young people focussed, relationship-based approaches, which happen at a key point where young people branch out from families and become independent. Often youth work is the key point of contact for young people who are 'disengaged' from other services. We provide a point of regular positive contact with a supportive adult and a chance to build positive trusting relationships.

Youth work can build protective factors which in turn reduce the risks associated with substance use. We provide things to do, foster supportive adult relationships and peer groups, boost confidence and increase knowledge about the effects of drugs and alcohol.