

Working Ypod

An NYA case study of places to go for young people produced on behalf of DCSF in support of myplace

Name: **Woking Ypod**

Address: **Woking YMCA, Chobham Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 6JD.**

Lead organisation: **Woking YMCA**

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Summary: **Youth development centre with a focus on partnership and co-location of services.**

Capital costs: **£1 million (to date)**

Revenue costs: **projected costs for 2008-09 of approximately £160,000.**

Staffing: **chief executive and six youth work staff (2 full time and 4 part time) and 20+ volunteers.**

Distinctive features

- Strong partnerships with a range of agencies including the district and county councils, Connexions, the police, local churches and Woking Mosque.
- Young people's involvement built in from the start.
- Focus on income generation and business partnerships.

Background

Woking YMCA had been dormant for 10 years following the sale of its building in 1991, but was still a registered charity with a board of trustees and a bank account with some reserves. A group of young adults aged 18 to 25 who were working as church youth workers identified the need for a safe alcohol and drug free zone for young people in the centre of Woking. Together with young people, they formed the 'ReGen' action group

to campaign for provision, initially seeking to secure shop front premises. They approached local organisations including Woking Borough Council, which was keen on the idea but had concerns that the proposal lacked some strategic thought and business planning. Councillors visited a youth facility in Guildford, Plantation Café, and came back determined to secure similar – or better – facilities for young people in Woking. They asked Guildford YMCA to oversee the project, but it lacked capacity to do so. However, two members of Guildford YMCA board decided to join the board of Woking YMCA to relaunch the organisation to run a new youth centre. The YMCA recruited new trustees, including the chair of the Regen campaign, and started working with YMCA England to develop a vision and plan for the new centre.

The council identified a building in Woking town centre which was leased from Prudential, and which had permission for use for leisure or social purposes. There had been plans to turn it into a nightclub, but these had fallen through and the building was empty. In April 2003, after much consideration, councillors agreed to support the YMCA ReGen project by offering it the building together with £750,000 for its redevelopment. A chief executive was appointed to take this forward, with the aim of creating a world class youth development centre for the 21st century, including developing partnerships to extend the services available to young people. Work began on the project in September 2005, and the centre was opened in June 2006.

The new facility

The building offered an empty shell for redevelopment, with designs drawn up by the council's architects' team. New chief executive Terry Eckersley initially oversaw developments from a portacabin in the yard without any telephone or IT facilities. The centre has been developed in two phases. The first floor, which is up and running, is a dedicated youth centre with drop-in café, IT suite, recording studio, performance hall with space for up to 250 people, three small counselling or quiet rooms, three meeting rooms and office space. There

is full disabled access, and disabled people were consulted during the redevelopment. The design is intended to be flexible, allow a range of different activities to take place, and incorporates some energy-saving features such as automatic lights in the toilets. The second floor, which is not yet redeveloped, is intended to be a multi-sports centre with a five-a-side football pitch and other facilities.

Activities and services

The drop-in café is open four days a week from 4pm till 9pm (now 6pm on Fridays, since a number of other local organisations run youth clubs on Friday evenings). It also offers programmes at the weekend, including a fun dance class, a youth group for 11 to 14 year olds, and a youth church. The centre hosts various specialist projects during the day, including an Entry to Employment (E2E) group run by Nacro; a drop-in session for 16 to 25-year-olds with learning difficulties or disabilities; a 'soccer kids' project; and a young parents' group. A range of sessions take place each week between 4 and 9pm, including dance (with separate sessions for street and Latin dance) band practice and studio sessions, free pool nights, movie nights, and karaoke. Gig nights take place every three weeks, attracting up to 200 young people who then become aware of other services and opportunities offered by Ypod. Most sessions are free, with the exception of Soccer Kids, dance and the gig nights. The YMCA also organises trips out and residentials, including working with Woking Council to organise an annual youth environmental exchange project with its twin towns in Germany and Italy. Staff from Surrey's involved team are also based at the centre, offering young people aged 16 to 25 a range of volunteering opportunities.

Connexions advisers based at the YMCA offer young people information, advice and guidance on a wide range of issues. Young people can also currently access confidential WhY Talk counselling services at the centre. A mentoring project launched in January 2008 offers additional support for young people aged 16 to 19 (25 with special needs) who are not in education, employment or training,

referred by a range of agencies. Mentors work with these young people to get them to a stage when a Connexions personal adviser can help them look at their future. There is also a project for young people aged 12 to 18 who are affected by their own or someone else's drink or drug use. The YMCA runs a Nightstop scheme providing short-term emergency accommodation for young people aged 16 to 25, together with Guildford YMCA. It is working in partnership with Woking Council and a local housing association to develop a housing project for homeless young people.

Young people's involvement

Once work started on the building, the YMCA sent out questionnaires to young people and held sessions at the new centre to find out what facilities and programmes young people wanted. It also set up a partnership with Surrey Youth Development Service, Surrey Youth Offending Team and Connexions to work alongside young people from local schools and youth agencies to gain to the views of a wide range of young people in Woking. It also worked closely with Woking Youth Council. Following these consultations, plans were drawn up and young people invited to comment on them. The YMCA also organised a competition for young people to choose a name for the new centre.

The YMCA has set up a youth council for the Ypod, which young people – including those who might otherwise be disruptive or difficult – are encouraged to join. The YMCA's approach is to encourage young people to take on responsibility and leadership through sharing out and delegating tasks. The youth council meets once a month to discuss what is going on at the Ypod, plan events and activities for its users, and look at how the centre can be improved. Their commitment is rewarded with free food and special events. Young people are also involved in planning and setting up gig nights.

Young people made a presentation to the Board of Trustees at its last AGM, and the Board is currently looking at how to involve young people directly.

Community involvement

Chief executive Terry Eckersley organised a meeting for local people to present the YMCA's vision for the centre once work began in 2005. The YMCA takes part in local festivals, including the Mela run by Woking Mosque, and works closely with a sports project involving around 200 young men, mostly Asian, supported by the Mosque. It also runs community outreach events, such as gig nights in villages. Plans for the second floor include working with partners to reach marginalised young people, and making it available as a base for family and community sports and activities.

Partnerships

The YMCA has strong links with Woking Borough Council, Surrey County Council and Youth Development Service, the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions, Surrey Youth Offending Team, local churches and the mosque, the police, and other youth organisations, including Woking Youth Arts Centre, Nacro, and faith youth groups. It also runs a range of sessions in local schools. Many of these partnerships provide a means to engage the most vulnerable young people, young people not in education, employment or training, looked after young people and ex-offenders. The YMCA also benefits from its business partnerships; there are plans, for instance, for employee volunteers to repaint the centre (with young people being consulted again about the colour scheme).

The planned second floor development will include office space, and various partners have indicated interest in this, while the borough council has paid for architects' drawings.

Its work is aligned to both district and county plans. The three YMCAs in the county play a key role in delivering Surrey's Children and Young People's Plan, while Woking Borough Council sees the YMCA as a key partner in delivering cultural opportunities to young people, and in its community safety strategy.

Governance and management

Woking YMCA is managed by a Board of Trustees, consisting of around 10 people with expertise and experience in finance, schools, business and HR. Woking Council has retained the leasehold for the property which it then leases to Woking YMCA and the YMCA pays for the day-to-day running and upkeep of the centre.

Workforce

In addition to the chief executive, there are two Connexions personal advisers, three youth mentors, and a counselling coordinator. There is a volunteer youth work team of over 20 volunteers who are offered accredited training and treated as an integral part of the staff team, plus other volunteers working in areas such as finance and facilitator. The YMCA encourages a 'grow your own approach', encouraging centre users over 18 to become volunteers and paid staff, and is currently introducing a volunteering programme for under-18s offering a range of roles which do not involve supervising other young people.

Capital funding

Woking Borough Council initially offered £750,000 for the centre redevelopment, but in the end contributed a total of £1 million. The YMCA used some reserves for furniture, and Surrey County Council's Local Committee for Woking also allocated £10,000 to the centre, which was used for furnishings and equipment. The building is leased to Woking YMCA at a peppercorn rent. The YMCA is currently seeking funding to develop the second floor.

Revenue sustainability

The projected revenue costs for 2008-09 are approximately £160,000. Staffing costs of approximately £120,000 p.a. are funded by Surrey Connexions, Surrey LSC and Surrey Youth Development Service. The centre was designed to provide opportunities for income generation through room hire and community

conferences, and the YMCA currently aims to raise around £29,000 a year from room hire, with a further £12,000 a year from events and donations. It operates a corporate sponsorship scheme, with sponsors including a local housing association, Woking's shopping centre, local businesses, and GlaxoSmithKline.

Impact on young people's outcomes

The YMCA identified the aims for the first phase of the centre as to:

- Provide a safe and positive environment for young people;
- Offer young people an alternative to gathering in the streets, pubs, restaurants and clubs of the town centre; and
- Be open to all young people up to the age of 19, regardless of gender, race or faith.

The centre is used by up to 60 young people a night, while gig nights can attract 200 young people. It seeks to provide young people with opportunities for change based on being valued, challenged and taking on leadership roles. It has a clear behaviour and sanctions policy, and has seen significant improvements in some young people's behaviour. 'One young man got a 6-month ban, but was desperate to come back', said youth worker Paul Langtree. 'We worked out a behaviour contract, and his mum was really pleased. It helped him at school as well – he had been close to being excluded, but started to do better.' From September 2008, two YMCA staff will be working with two local schools on a specialist eight week programme, working one day a week with young people close to exclusion to re-engage them with education.

Many of the specialist activities have a focus on skills development and employability. The young parents' group has recently secured funding which will be used to support them in learning skills that they can combine with childcare. The YMCA has also been able to draw on contacts with professional musicians to support young people who are interested in making music or becoming DJs.

What young people say:

- *'The centre's got everything I want, everything that teenagers want.'*
- *'The staff talk to us about what we want to be'*
- *'I've cut down on smoking a lot since I've been coming here. The staff help, they're getting me NHS support.'*
- *'I come here to talk to other people, make music or use the computers.'*
- *'I like the building, it's spacious. It offers a lot more – drama, self harm sessions.'*
- *'If I wasn't here I'd be doing things I shouldn't be doing, climbing on things, smoking.'*
- *'Health sessions help you look at things in a different way. They're better with youth workers [than teachers], they can connect with young people.'*
- *'It's quite cool, I've never seen quality like this.'*
- *'My mum and dad love this place.'*
- *'You can talk to the staff about anything.'*
- *'I used to take drugs, but I don't any more.'*
- *'I saw Ypod, I thought it was a good place, it still is.'*
- *'I used to get into trouble. Now if my mates go out and start to cause trouble I don't go with them, I come back here.'*
- *'It's a good place that helps people behave.'*

Challenges and learning points

- Woking YMCA was fortunate in that support from Woking Council meant that the building and the finances were in place. The quick timescale for redeveloping the building meant that it was vital to network

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and build partnerships right from the beginning. While challenging, this has been key to the YMCA's ability to reach marginalised young people and extend services and opportunities available to them.

- Woking YMCA, like all YMCAs, is committed to making provision for young people of all faiths and none. However Terry Eckersley found that it was commonly seen as just being for young Christian men. He needed to demystify the YMCA and communicate the message that it genuinely was open to all young women and men in the area. Developing relationships and joint

work with the Woking Mosque, as well as local churches, was an important part of this work.

- Securing revenue funding continues to offer a challenge, but the YMCA has worked hard to secure a diverse funding base, including income generation.
- Woking YMCA has sought to ensure that it has developed a professional workforce (paid and volunteer) and robust systems, underpinned by a Christian ethos which encourages young people to build a future through 'dreaming big dreams, taking small steps'.