

YMCA Vision 2030 Case Study

From youth club attendee to accomplished staff member: The story of Layla Riddoch exemplifies the approach of YMCA Tayside to Meaningful Work.



**Pillar 2:
Meaningful
Work**

AT A GLANCE

YMCA: YMCA Tayside
Perth, Scotland
ymcatayside.com

YMCA Alliance: YMCA
Europe



Vision 2030 Pillar:
Meaningful Work

Dates of the project:
2014 - present



*I had a goal. I knew what
I wanted to do.*

Layla Riddoch
YMCA Tayside

THE CHALLENGE

Through the story of one person's experience, the project addresses three main questions:

- How to help young people determine their career path?
- How to support their career goals?
- How to provide leadership pathways for young people to go from YMCA programme participant to volunteer to staff?

Following the story of 19-year-old Layla Riddoch, YMCA Tayside shares the positive impact of long-term youth work and how it encourages young people to learn new skills and pursue their goals.

Layla was 10 when she began attending junior youth clubs at the YMCA. "There were games, and all my friends went along. I didn't know much about the YMCA; it had bouncy castles and was a fun space for young people to meet. One of the youth workers was Matthew, and he seemed like a cool guy to me. I loved what he was doing and knew I wanted what he had. I wanted his job".

THE RESPONSE

Through her early teens, Layla stayed with the YMCA, going from the youth club to the Teen Drop-in. When she was 14-15 years old, Layla changed schools, which was challenging for her. She was bullied, she said, and she "hated" it there and left when she turned 16. "I had a goal. I knew what I wanted to do", Layla said.



As part of the Youth Voice at YMCA Tayside, Layla helps serve community meals such as chili and pasta.

Fun on the job!



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She had tried other jobs, such as hairdressing and restaurant work. Although she didn't enjoy those jobs, they increased her determination to be a youth worker.

"Layla was always somebody who knew what she wanted, so for us as youth workers, it was essentially providing that space for her to learn and grow", said programme manager Alyxs Dellaquaglia, who has known Layla since she was 13. "When she left school, she met me for a chat and asked about her options".

Alyxs suggested Layla begin by volunteering. Alyxs advocated for her with team members so Layla could get sessional hours working with the youth clubs and take on more responsibility. "The staff saw how good she was. When a job came up, I could help her with her application and interview skills".

After a year of learning and training, Layla was offered a Community Learning Job through the YMCA - her first full-time job. Today, she is one of nine youth workers at YMCA Tayside.

Along with leading a youth club at a local church, Layla assists with drop-ins, which are popular with young people. On a winter Wednesday in 2023, about 70 young people attended.

PROJECT DETAILS

When Layla expressed interest in one day becoming a youth worker, YMCA Tayside had the people and programmes in place to guide her.

- Mentors: Alyxs and other youth leaders were there to support Layla and offer suggestions on where to begin. Most importantly, Alyxs said, "I could support her by being a listener".
- Gradual steps: Although she knew the YMCA programmes and staff members, Layla acquired the skills and experience to become a youth worker through volunteering and sessional work.

VOICES



"She's an inspiration to the young people who come to our YMCA. She gives them hope that change is possible and that their dreams can become reality".

- Alyxs Dellaquaglia
programme manager

"Layla has come full circle now, leading the local youth project she once attended as a young person".

- Matthew Dellaquaglia
youth worker

"I love the YMCA and I want to stay here. I want to continue to develop as a youth worker and gain more skills and experience".



- Layla Riddoch
youth worker

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- Training: Layla has completed numerous courses over the years, including training on: Volunteering, Child Protection, Intergenerational 1-to-1 Mentor Training, Introduction to Youth Work, and more.

She also completed a three-day Train the Trainers course, learning how to effectively lead a group.

Between her sessional work and joining the YMCA full time, Layla completed a 12-week Personal Development course. It was exactly what she needed, she said. "I wanted to build my timetable and add more skills and more understanding", she said. "I didn't want to jump straight to employment, as I thought that would be a bit too much for me".

Initially, Layla worried about not going to university, as many of her friends were doing. "I was thinking, am I not going to have the qualifications to match?", she recalled. But thanks to her training and experience, "I now have those qualifications and skills that would transfer, if I ever needed to".

PROJECT OUTCOME

At only 19 years, Layla has become an accomplished youth worker.

- She attended the 20th YMCA World Council in July 2022 in Aarhus, Denmark.
- From there, she flew to Poland, where she joined Alyxs and six YMCA leaders where she worked at a summer camp. For 10 days they worked on conversational English with the campers and more.
- She was invited to join the Youth Panel of The Gannochy Trust. The panel meets four times a year to assess and approve applications of up to GBP 10,000, giving young people experience in the funding and grant process. Read more about the panel [here](#).
- She is part of the YMCA Tayside Youth Voice, a group of ambassadors who listen to and amplify the voices of young people. So far, Youth Voice members have conducted meaningful surveys, discussions and projects focusing on Covid and mental health.



Layla said she is passionate about helping young people, thanks to her own positive experience at the YMCA.

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- At the 2023 YMCA Scotland National General Assembly, Layla won two awards: the John D. Knox Youth Achievement Award, and Young Leader of the Year.

Not only is Layla an accomplished youth worker, but she is also now a mentor to young people.

“Some of the young people in my junior drop-in always want to chat and tell me what has happened at school that day”, she said. “It’s really nice. I can see that relationship building like what I had with my youth worker”.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Have well-trained mentors on staff that young people are comfortable with
2. Have a clear path for young people who are interested in making a career at the YMCA and a strong volunteer development programme
3. Provide diverse training opportunities
4. Connect young people with opportunities outside the YMCA to build skills and form connections
5. Enable young workers to travel or see other YMCAs when possible

WORTH NOTING

YMCA Tayside has long prioritised Meaningful Work and providing young people – in an informal, relaxed setting – the skills needed to find employment.

Its Digital Skills hub provides young people with access to learn 3D printing, coding, graphic design and more.

YMCA Tayside has 10 full-time staff, 3 sessional workers and 62 volunteers.



For an interview with Layla and Alyxs, see the video on the YMCA Tayside YouTube Channel.