



**University of
Sunderland**

Bowler, Rick and Razak, Amina (2021) The TryLife TV Co-Production Experience: Evaluation of Try Life TV April 2021. Project Report. University of Sunderland, Sunderland, UK.

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/13739/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Trylife



The Trylife TV Co-production Experience:

EVALUATION OF TRYLIFE TV

April 2021 - Dr Amina Razak and Dr Rick Bowler



CONTENTS

Introduction	3
1 Trylife TV: some context	4
2 Methodology	8
3 Trylife TV and the Trylife co-production experience	9
4 Enhancing Trylife TV for the future	22
5 Conclusion	31
6 Recommendations	33
Bibliography	35

Authors: Dr Amina Razak and Dr Rick Bowler



**University of
Sunderland**

CASS
Centre for Applied Social Sciences

Trylife



INTRODUCTION

Trylife

The University of Sunderland were commissioned by Trylife TV to conduct an evaluation into their co-production model. This involved researching the Trylife TV model, the development and co-production of films, Trylife TV's aims, objectives and ethics, the team structure, and their future plans. A key feature of the evaluation was to identify areas of enhancement for the Trylife TV model. The evaluation was conducted between April 2020 - March 2021.



Initial plans for the evaluation included a study of the development and immediate impressions from young people of episode 6, a film commissioned by the North East and North Cumbria Child and Health Wellbeing Network (CHWN) on perinatal mental health. We had identified a secondary school and two youth work settings in Sunderland. This would have enabled the evaluation team to gather some baseline data on how young people, their teachers and youth workers, react to and engage with the issues raised in the film. The pandemic paused the production of the film for a whole year and this aspect of the evaluation was unable to happen. Nonetheless, there are elements of episode 6 film development which took place while the evaluation was underway and our findings have been included in this report.

The report is structured in six main sections. The **first section** offers some insight into the history, development and co-production model of Trylife; the **second section** sets out the methodology and details the evaluation process, the **third section** explores the experiences and benefits of the Trylife model, the **fourth section** addresses areas of enhancement and the **fifth section** offers some concluding remarks with the **final section** offering some recommendations for Trylife TV.



1. TRYLIFE TV: Some context

The concept of Trylife TV was born in 2008 when one of the Executives, Paul Irwin, left his job as a youth worker and began to experiment with interactive storytelling to help young people to understand the consequences of their decision making. In 2011 Trylife TV was created as a film production company with Paul Irwin and Nicky Kaur as the Executives.



Technological advancements have changed the way young people use and interact with the digital world and the use of digital space is a key part of everyday life for young people across the UK. Digital spaces are used by young people

for communications, socialising, education and entertainment (JETS 2020). Almost three quarters of 12 – 15 year olds are on social media including on Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram with Whatsapp, TikTok and Twitch also gaining popularity (OFCOM 2019) and research has found 95% of 16-24 year olds own a smartphone (OFCOM 2018). Consequently agencies working with young people have understood the need to engage with and make use of digital media in their work (Harvey 2016). Recently the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this need and the concept of engaging and reaching young people online is now seen as critical, impactful and powerful tool (OFCOM 2019, JETS 2020) which can complement current approaches especially in rural and sparsely populated areas with the potential to engage the hard to reach. The digital approach enhances and allows the ability to use informal learning to help engage and develop young people. Youth Work Support (2020) have recognised

Trylife TV as a digital resource for youth workers to help support young people especially during the pandemic. However, the pandemic has also highlighted the digital divide and links to poverty and digital exclusion (Holmes and Burgess 2020).

Trylife TV have developed an expertise in creating digital interactive films designed to encourage young people to engage in a process of reflection about the different implications and outcomes of choices and decisions made. Trylife TV films replicate the social, cultural, gendered and health realities young people face using an innovative method which evolved from the old choice-based adventure books. The method encapsulates interactive decision making to enable young people to create their own storylines through branching narrative¹ while exploring actions and consequences in a safe medium. At key points in the narrative, young viewers are encouraged to make decisions for the main character, the results of which have an effect on the outcome of the drama. Viewers can replay the film again and again altering decisions to understand different outcomes. This process aims for viewers to interact, learn and develop critical thinking and reasoning.

To date Trylife TV have produced five episodes with the sixth one being produced as we write. The challenging issues Trylife TV have been commissioned to explore using branching narrative, focus upon key areas of public health concern with the development of the storylines co-produced with stakeholders and young people and led by statistical data in the region in which the film is being produced. Health promotion interventions have the potential to be more impactful when knowledge from multiple stakeholders enables co-produced interventions to address health and well-being issues among the target group (Vallentin-Holbech 2020).

¹A branching narrative is a method of development in storytelling. The viewer begins with a central idea and as the story unfolds different options emerge and these lead to choices. This process continues until the viewer decides they have taken enough options and choices for the story being told.

The 1st episode explored the issues of informed consent and sexual relationships. The 2nd episode explored the issues of gender, gang culture and drugs. The 3rd episode explored the complications of home / family life and the impact on wellbeing, peer relationships and education. The 4th episode explored the socio-economic impact of poverty in young people's lives. The 5th episode explored the issues of grooming, gendered violence and sexual exploitation. The current episode which has been commissioned by CHWN is focused upon perinatal mental health and teenage pregnancy and has been co-produced with young people from across the 12 Clinical Commissioning Group areas across the North East and North Cumbria.



The Trylife TV co-production model has evolved and progressed into a clearly defined process which engages stakeholders and young people at critical moments and ensures young people's agency becomes embedded in the interactive story lines for each public health film. The Trylife TV Executives often describe their co-production approach as based on a youth work method (de St Croix, 2016) and also a digitised youth work approach. This is where young people's voice is brought to the fore and their lived experience foregrounded. This model has attracted a great deal of interest from public health professionals. Our discussions with informed public health professionals throughout our evaluation has reinforced this view and TryLife TV have clearly engaged the interests of well respected public health 'experts'.

The Executives whilst acknowledging the benefits they themselves received from youth work and the depth of experience gained by one executive from working in youth work settings as a locally qualified youth worker, are not themselves, JNC qualified².

In recognition of these factors and the complex reality of co-production with young people, the Executives approached the University of Sunderland Community and Youth Work Studies Team for advice about partnerships, students and working with the University.

The aim of Trylife TV films is to help young people develop reflective and critical thinking to better understand their decisions, the contexts in which they make them and the consequences for them of the choices they make. The Executives intentional use of regional slang and dialect ensures that each film appears authentic and speaks to young people. The youth work approach that Trylife TV has adopted focuses on how 'youth workers aim to help young people explore their identity, their experiences, and the logic of their decision-making' (Bowler, 2013: 151). It is also founded in the principles of participation and the empowered agency of young people (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). This use of a youth work approach in creating digital media is a relatively new and emerging area of work (Pawluczuk et al, 2019).

²JNC Qualified Youth Work in England is a national award, conferred by the Education Training Standards Sub Committee (ETS) of the National Youth Agency (NYA) upon graduating from accredited courses across the Country. The University of Sunderland runs the only undergraduate and postgraduate JNC qualifying youth work course in the NorthEast Region of England.



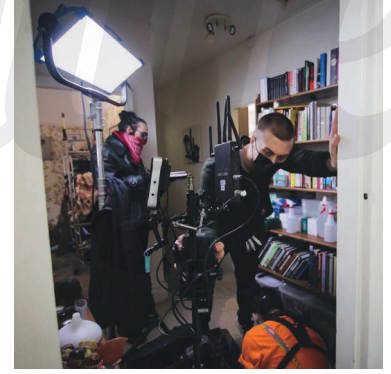
Co-production as a method of engaging with and attentively listening to young people has been central to youth work practice for many years, for example, France, 2000, Clark et al, 2001. It has now become an important focus in academic and public health research, for example, Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016; Clark and Laing, 2018; Vallentin-Hollbech, 2020.

The co-production toolkit developed by Anne Rathbone et al, (2018:5) identifies co-production as 'working together to produce a product, service or activity'. Ramey et al (2017:43-44) in their review of youth - adult partnerships identified a number of promising practices and our evaluation identified that Trylife TV Executives have integrated some of these into their youth work approach utilising an adult initiated but shared decision making approach to the co-production of their films. Gornall (2018) identifies the importance of co-production approaches to be clear about its engagement with young people but defining co-production is complex cutting across dimensions of participation, interactivity, inclusion and time (Pawluczuk, 2019). As Campbell and Vanderhaven (2016: 59) identify 'If co-production is going to be supported effectively, at the very least this

interstitial activity needs to be recognised and valued [...]'. The co-production model that Trylife employs is grounded in the notion of building young people's capabilities and skills while also empowering them to become agents of change (Clark and Laing 2018). The model has the potential to increase young people's self-efficacy and enables them to take ownership and co-develop a product designed to improve the health of young people (Vallentin-Holbech 2020).

The Trylife TV co-production model follows several stages of film development. The initial stage involves a series of workshops with key stakeholders such as youth services, drug and alcohol teams, youth offending services, sexual health teams and the police to discuss the themes that should be part of the film. The themes are data led and help decide who the potential characters may be and what they are experiencing. The workshops ensure the messaging is correct from a professional perspective, including the potential consequences of decisions, what professional interventions may occur in a particular journey, and critical points at which to include awareness raising of support. The second stage involves Trylife taking the framework developed in stage one to young people in youth groups and/or school settings to understand lived experiences of the themes to be explored in the film. Over the course of the production of five films the Trylife TV Executives quoted to the research team that 1,545 young people had taken part in these development workshops.

Knowledge obtained from the workshops is used to develop the key characters, the script and the branching narrative. Once developed a rehearsal workshop with young people and professionals is conducted to ensure the script reflects young people's experiences and that the messaging is correct.



The co-production model continues with young people offered the opportunity to audition for roles in the cast or to take up roles behind the scenes in the production process. Trylife TV hosts a number of universities, college and school placements including from Leeds Beckett University, University of Northumbria and the University of Sunderland. Trylife TV's model is unique in the social value it offers through co-producing a film with young people from start to finish "You can see the young people taking ownership because they were involved in that storytelling aspect of it, something that they did added to that, doing something that they can be really proud of" (Nicky). Young people's involvement has the added benefit of film promotion through young people's social networks thereby increasing the reach of the Trylife films and 'maximising learning opportunities' (Bartindale et al 2016: 1414).

Trylife TV have been able to produce high quality interactive films despite having critically limited budgets as they draw on early career production teams and by utilising local raw talent (Bartindale et al 2016). Although Trylife TV's model is premised on directly involving young people in creating educational resources to ensure that the message resonates with their age group, the research by Bartindale et al (2016) and our own evaluation identifies that the co-production model, on limited budgets, has been at personal cost to the Trylife TV Executive team. As Bartindale et al (2016: 1412) identify:

“ Producing interactive media is often more complex than creating traditional linear films, resulting in increased pressure for production teams. ”



The inclusion of young people in the workshops and the co-production engaged with in the making of the films was described by the young adults we interviewed, as empowering. This inclusion in 'shared spaces for reflection, training and social interaction' (Bartindale et.al, 2016: 1421) has added critical benefits of enhancing employability, equipping and building young people's skills, creativity, knowledge, confidence and career aspirations in media making as well as soft skills such as communication and teamwork.

Trylife TV is a brand that now has a worldwide following with over 7.2m followers on Facebook, 144 thousand followers on Instagram and over 4000 followers on Twitter. Their interactive digital website had on average 33 visitors a day during 2020 and 14 visitors per day during 2019; the rise in viewers during 2020 may be linked to the pandemic and young people seeking out support. Trylife TV's innovative approach has been recognised and showcased at the British Medical Association national conference, Faculty for Public Health national conference, Oxford Health Science Network conference and also the largest Public Health conference in the USA (Keyfund 2015). Trylife TV's second episode premiered at the British Film Institute (Wright 2014) and in 2017 Trylife TV was recognised as a leading entrepreneur and won the People's Choice Award in the Pitch@Palace competition (Pitch@Palace, 2017) and presented a Tedx Talk about digitising youth work (Tedx Newcastle, 2019). Trylife TV won the North East Youth Work award for Innovative Practice 2013 (Youth Focus NE, 2013) and the People Driven Digital Health and Wellbeing award for the Most Innovative use of Existing Digital Technology Applied to Health/ Social Care 2015 (NHS Confederation 2015).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research took a multi-method approach and consisted of a survey distributed to those who had worked on previous Trylife TV episodes, online interviews with young people and staff who had worked on Trylife episodes, attendance at and observation of three (two of which were online) Trylife TV episode 6 workshops, an online focus group with episode 6 placement students, and online interviews with professionals who have either an intricate understanding of the Trylife TV model, or have worked with Trylife TV or have commissioned Trylife TV films.

Online interviews and regular conversations with the Trylife TV Executive team were also undertaken. All participants gave informed consent to take part in the research. All participants understood that their involvement was confidential, and any data used would be anonymised. The research was approved by the University of Sunderland ethics committee.

A survey to young people and staff who had worked on Episodes 1-5 was distributed via Trylife TV networks. Reminders prompting completion were also distributed via Trylife TV networks. A total of only 36 responses were achieved but as the evaluation was conducted over the pandemic, we considered that this may have had an adverse effect on the engagement and survey completion. Survey responses provide an insight into the experiences of young people and staff who have worked with Trylife TV and areas they believe are in need of enhancement. 18 responses were received from male respondents, 16 from female respondents and 1 non-binary person. Respondents were of diverse backgrounds including 15 from a BAME background, 20 from white respondents and one person preferred not to disclose their ethnicity. The respondents were a combination of young cast members, paid actors, staff and some had been involved in Trylife TV projects as part of work experience or placement.

8 respondents had been involved in more than one Trylife TV film project. Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to take part in a more detailed conversation about their experiences of working with Trylife and 6 interviews were completed with young people and actors. A further 7 interviews were conducted with those who had been involved with Trylife either in a professional capacity or as part of the staff team or as commissioners.

Thematic analysis was undertaken on the interviews which emerged from the data itself. The themes were reviewed and then re-assembled into meta-themes. The data was reviewed again to ensure that the themes adequately represented the data.

Smith and McKinlay (2009) in their work on creative labour, identify the difficulties in evaluating the creative process that is not exclusively a marketable product. TrylifeTV Executives are clear that the films they make, 'their product' is more than a monetised marketable outcome. The Executives engage in a complex, co-production process underpinned by a commitment to achieve positive outcomes for the young people at the heart of their concern. Furthermore Ord (2007; 2016) explores the dilemma for youth work as an informed and informal education practice. In this critique of the processes and product of the youth work curriculum, Ord's (2007; 2016) ideas are meaningful to core elements of the Trylife TV offer, for example; the process of relationship building, active participation, collaborative learning and voluntary engagement is in tension with the production of outcomes pre-set by funder requirements. With this in mind, the evaluation team engaged Trylife TV in the same participative process that they undertook with the young people involved in the production of the interactive films. We did this in order to enable a thorough evaluation of the process in making the product.

3. TRYLIFE TV AND THE TRYLIFE CO-PRODUCTION EXPERIENCE

Trylife TV films aim to educate and inform young people on key health issues that may impact upon their lives.

The data revealed an overwhelming recognition and acclaim for Trylife TV as an innovative interactive tool that can enable the autonomy of young people to explore life choices through testing out the consequences of their decisions and the potential impacts of these in a safe medium. Participants also viewed interactive films as helping young people consider and understand possible mental health and wellbeing issues that may affect their lives and those around them.

In reading the data sections of the report, note that 'young cast member' refers to young inexperienced cast recruited either through workshops, schools or youth groups; 'actors' refers to professional actors; 'placement students' refers to university students and 'work experience' refers to those who identified their involvement as such.

a. Trylife TV: Engagement and education tool

Trylife TV interactive films provide young people with access to what the Executives identify as 'educational resources', that unpick common issues young people may experience. Young people in our research highlighted interactive films as a more engaging educational tool which can help young people to connect to and decipher experiences, emotions and issues that they may be experiencing. Given the increase of social media platforms and videos as frequently accessed for entertainment and learning they perceived Trylife TV films as a current medium which can capture the attention of young people for them to explore social and health issues.

Accessing online resources was noted as especially important in the current pandemic where young people may be experiencing loneliness and isolation:

“ The Trylife episodes give such great insight into the issues which the young people of today have to contend with. In these times of rising mental health issues they enable people to be able to connect with the stories [. . .] In a time of more and more social and emotional isolation, it is so important for people to be able to connect to feel less alone and for people to see the issues young people can face. ”

placement student

“ [. . .] They are, can potentially continue to be extremely resourceful for young people to explore their thoughts and emotions about things they may not completely understand. ”

work experience

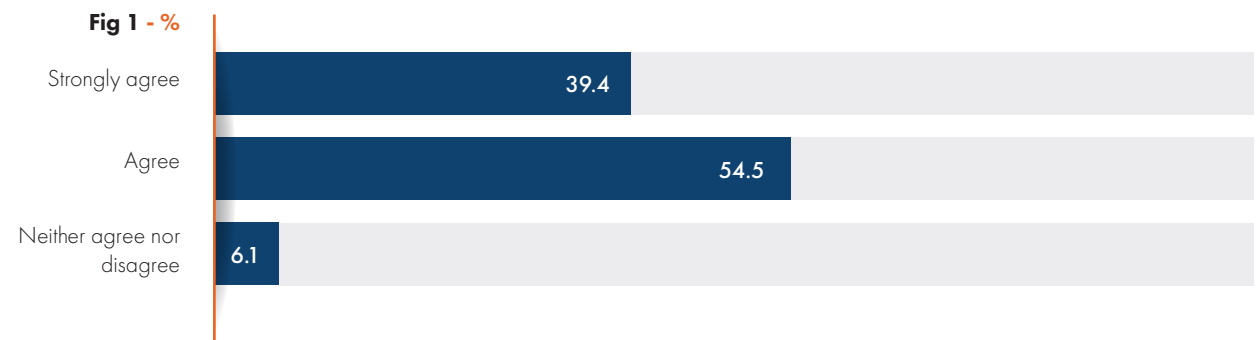
“ [. . .] can really make viewers feel like they're living the stories. I also love how Trylife challenges the viewers and tackles important issues that can really educate people. ”

work experience

“ [. . .] the subjects are things that people don't want to talk about like the grooming one [. . .] the way the story is told is really powerful and is relatable to young girls. ”

cast member

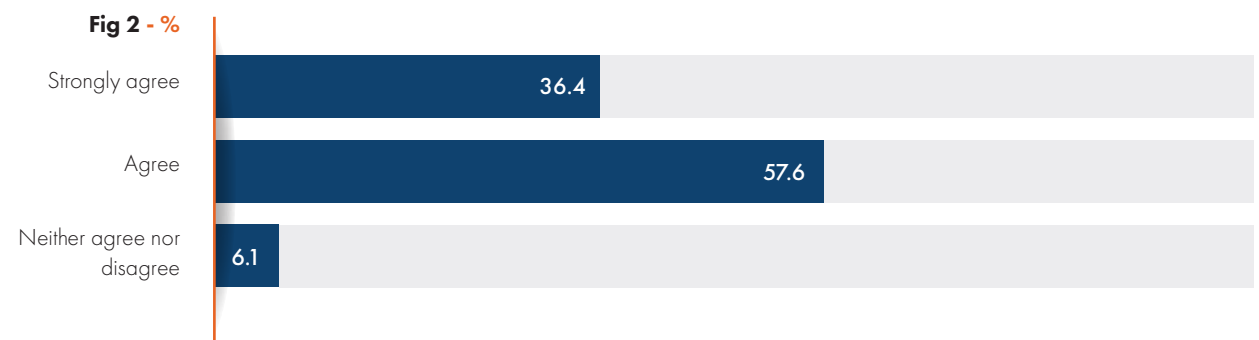
Trylife TV also aims to support the development of critical thinking and decision-making skills for the viewers of films. This is a complex set of tasks that are core to the Executives creative labour. It makes their media production focus more of an interactive and constructivist learning process where young people are overtly encouraged to engage in viewing lived realities and difficult choices, than more covert 'edutainment' or 'techartainment' products (Okan, 2003). While we are unable to comment on the impact of Trylife TV films on viewers behaviour our research evaluation suggests that the Trylife TV film co-production experience plays a role in helping young people develop this behavioural shift with 93.9% of survey respondents stating that it helped them develop critical thinking (fig 1):



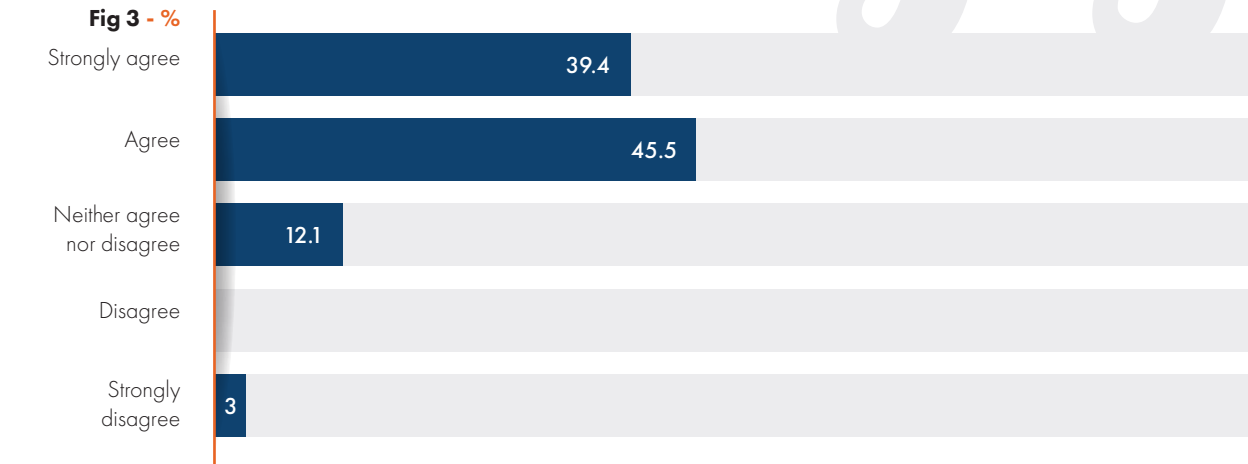
Similarly 94% of survey respondents also stated the Trylife TV experience helped them develop decision making skills (fig 2). Discussions with interview participants unpicked how young people utilise this skill:

“ If I was to make a decision, any decision I would like the online Trylife works, play it out in my mind, what would be the consequences of my actions so I would always try to think ahead myself prepared or anything or as much as for what might happen, prepared as much as I can [. . .] I wasn't doing that before, I would just be diving in head first figure it out along the way whatever happens happens kind of attitude [. . .] more thought out, carefully planned and prepared, more considerate. **”**

young cast member



Survey data suggests the Trylife TV production experience raises awareness of where to seek support. 84.9% considered their awareness improved of where to find support on the issues raised in the film (fig 3).



45.8% of survey respondents also noted their involvement in the Trylife TV production experience helped to increase their awareness of the issues explored in the TrylifeTV films. Discussions with interview participants also illustrated this:

“ Young women are being groomed to be drug mules and passed around the other men it’s absolutely horrid I wasn’t aware of any of that [. . .] when I was younger I knew people that sold drugs but I never knew the darker side of it. ”

placement student

“ Being in Trylife I could see how easy it is to actually groom somebody, how charming they can be [. . .] and that opened my eyes at quite how people are easily led and how people can do that. ”

actor

Our evaluation research finds a valuable aspect of Trylife TV films is the possibility to also educate and inform parents and professionals on social and health issues thus enabling them to develop an understanding about the experiences of young people and the dilemmas they may face in their lives.

The films are potential tools for parents and guardians to identify signs where intervention and support may be required:

“ It is useful for parents that I think decisions are tough for young person anyway but when you grow up you kinda forget how difficult it is to navigate your teenage years [. . .] making people conscious of signs to look out for. ”

placement student

“ I think there’s a barrier between the young people and the parents and they put on this facade you can see it in your own child because you know them but they try to hide things from you, Trylife flags signs that you can look for. ”

young cast member

“ It’s not just a tool for young people, its for parents, grandparents for anyone to notice signs in kids or even adults when you think about suicide, it’s constant reminder to check up on people and yourself.”

young cast member

“ I remember when we did episode 3 we had parents saying ‘I didn’t know this is going on with young people, this has educated me massively.’”

Nicky

Trylife TV films are a useful resource for young people to access, however it seems that supported learning may increase its influence and reach. Commissioners and young people identified the benefit of schools, youth workers and teachers in engaging young people in viewing Trylife TV films. Workshops supporting and exploring the films with young people may be more effective in exploring and dissecting key messages:

“ I would like to see it used in schools, like it to be a product of choice and young people go and use Trylife products themselves outside of school.”

young cast member

“ Teachers, I think is an important group that we need to engage to help bring the young people to engage with it.”

commissioner

“ [...] taking the workshops into schools and using the films as a tool [...]down to the funding and a by-product of this is a bigger team, have people employed on a full-time basis working on this but ultimately it comes all down to the money and funding [...] Would be more ground responsiveness because no matter how many people watch the episodes or how many things we do on Facebook it’s still not as effective as face-to-face human contact.”

placement student

“ They need to take it into schools and think about using polls to get young people to vote on their phones which decision to take, it could be really fun and engaging.”

placement student



Trylife TV has currently only worked on youth issues but the ability of the interactive model to educate and aid informed decision making on health issues for other ages groups is considered to have significant value:

“ If you’re going to have a heart bypass we will give you a pamphlet on that, it is to non-individualised and you need time to think, the thing I particularly like about Trylife because you are trying life [. . .] it allows decision-making to be much more communal than pamphlet reading, an old woman or old fellow can sit down with their son or daughter run it a few times and reach a conclusion in slow time and consideration that is very personal [. . .] I can’t see a better way for people to make complex decisions [. . .] there are people who like to read and there are people who don’t want to think about decisions [. . .] so not everybody will want to use Trylife, but if I want someone to make an informed decision then it is spades better than a pamphlet. ”

professional

b. The Trylife Family

There is much respect and admiration for the Trylife TV Executives and their Trylife ethos; this was evident in both survey and interview responses from young people, staff and also professionals:

“ Paul and Nicky are ace people, they really care about communities and they have great intentions, a lot of people by now would be thinking right how can I monetize this how can I just sell it? ”

staff member

“ This is a company run by smart, genuinely kind people whose desire to better the world around them is sincere. ”

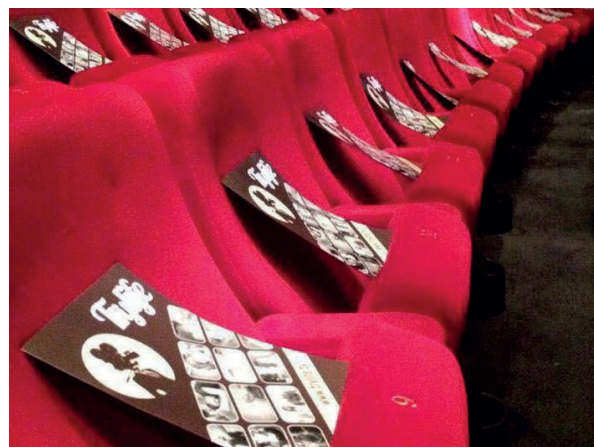
staff member

“ Think really differently, good at developing local talent. ”

professional

“ Two of the most nicest people I have met in my life, radiate positivity and that they do really want to help people I have huge respect for them, they are well-intentioned. ”

young cast member



A frequent descriptor used by people involved in our research in talking to us about Trylife TV and the Executives was the 'Trylife family'. Young people described Trylife TV as a nurturing learning environment with the Executives a continuous source of support and guidance for some young people, offering ongoing mentoring and advice on future work opportunities, employment with Trylife projects to help them continue to develop and grow their skills, knowledge and CVs and sometimes even contributing financial support:

“ They grew to be like family to me, so we’re always keeping in contact with each other. ”

young cast member

“ We started as work colleagues and now we’re family. ”

young cast member

“ I love Paul and Nicky to bits they are now actually my friends, they are like family to me now. ”

professional

“ They have been kind of mentoring me and I would pop up on sets I was able to see and observe [. . .] ”

young cast member

“ Good keeping in contact with them and a couple of times I’ve got some editing jobs through them [. . .] also the experience and advice that they give me as well it’s really useful, for someone who’s just trying to start out in the industry. ”

placement student

“ They kind of became my parents, they’re the parents that I always wanted [. . .] I don’t know where I would have been [. . .] I went on to work in TV [. . .] they have made the biggest difference in my life and I am forever thankful. ”

young cast member

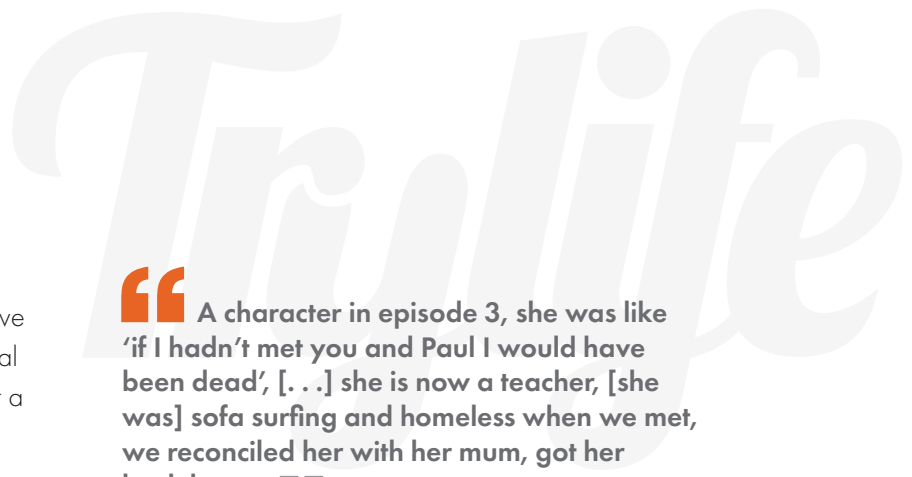
Similar sentiments were echoed by people involved in the production of episode 6:

“ It has been one of the best things I have ever done, I have met some amazing people whom I’m going to stay in touch with. ”

young cast member

“ Never enough words to describe how incredible this experience has been [. . .] from literally not being able to leave my house for a year to leaving this production with some wonderfully talented new friends. ”

young cast member



Young people from episode 6 identified the positive impact of their Trylife TV involvement on their mental health and wellbeing after being in lockdowns for a year:

“ After a year of not being able to do anything or be creative it has been fantastic. ”

young cast member

“ I think everyone is coming from different backgrounds, everyone has dealt differently with lockdown, for me being here and having a positive impact not just those who are going to be watching it but here on set, I feel really connected to come here and help tell a really important story. ”

young cast member

The 'Trylife family', the youth work skills, and the emphatic approach of the Trylife TV Executives has been critical in supporting young people through their real-life experiences including violence and homelessness:

“ She was fleeing honour based violence, she was sofa surfing and was meant to be living with a foster family, social worker didn't make sure that she had money, Paul spent the first few days of filming making sure she was ok and holding her social worker to account. ”

Nicky

“ A character in episode 3, she was like 'if I hadn't met you and Paul I would have been dead', [. . .] she is now a teacher, [she was] sofa surfing and homeless when we met, we reconciled her with her mum, got her back home. ”

Nicky

“ I was crying and I told her [Nicky] that I was in and out of care and I was having problems with my family [. . .] and they actually messaged my social worker and stood up for us and told them they weren't doing a good job. ”

young cast member

The work ethic of the Executives and their personable approach has forged long lasting relationships with young people, staff and professionals: “we don't parachute in and we don't parachute out our lines of communication and our doors are always open” (Nicky). This informal approach of the Executives it seems has been critical in the personal development for new and inexperienced cast and production members. This idea of creating a work environment 'which enables critical information sharing, collaboration, interest driven learning and self-expression' is also supported by research into the social impact of digital youth work (Pawluczuk et al 2019:61). The Executives have maintained contact with many of the young people who have worked with them and are aware of the positive career destinations of many, noting some who have continued onto careers in media making.

c. The Trylife TV training academy

Trylife TV is a socially inclusive enterprise committed to the development of young people and enabling access to a wide range of learning opportunities. Trylife TV's model offers situated learning whereby young people learn through doing: "I kind of had the opportunity to do loads of different things all on set which was good for me as I got to try different bits, oh I like that, oh I don't like that" (placement student). The learning opportunities are varied and include developing young people's knowledge and skills in film production, script writing, storytelling, acting, editing, reflexivity, digital and IT skills, marketing and research. Some of these skills are consciously designed and emerge from and are developed through the critical but informal dialogue around social issues that affect young people's lives. This is what the Trylife TV Executives call their youth work method. The Trylife TV Executives quoted to us that 249 young people had taken part in the Trylife production process over the course of producing five films. Feedback from professionals noted the economic and social value that Trylife offer in supporting and developing the skills of young people and helping to increase self-efficacy:

“ Think the impact they have on young people is fantastic given the economic downturn and lack of opportunities for young people, they skill them up and it's a platform for young people to move into media-making careers. ”

professional

Our research data reveals that the majority of young people found the Trylife TV experience invaluable for self-development. Feedback about the significant benefits of mentoring was evident but similar to the findings of Bartindale et al (2016) given the difficulties of managing a time intensive high pressurised project, mentoring is limited but greatly valued by young people. More experienced team members often informally absorb this role themselves to support and mentor new incoming young team members. Some see this as an opportunity to 'give back' to Trylife while also supporting and nurturing young people who are in the same position they once were in some years ago:

“ This time around when I'm going I'll be behind the camera doing make-up and prosthetics and looking after the cast what Nicky did for me, I will be doing for someone else. ”

young cast member

However, it was noted by some that mentors should be assigned routinely to help support and grow new talent and reduce pressure on the Executives:

“ [. . .] supervise them have someone experienced with them in those key roles, shadow an experienced person. ”

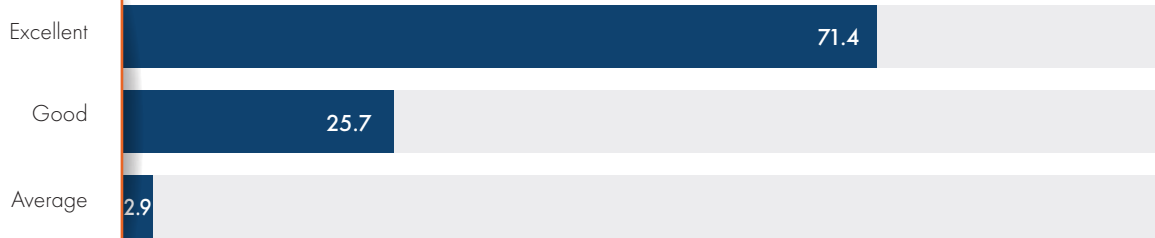
staff

“ She utilised me as a resource, I offered all the actors my contact details because they are now part of my Trylife family that I was brought into many years ago [. . .] links back to their delegating mentors [would be] beneficial instead of going straight to the Executives [Trylife Team]. ”

staff

Our research evaluation found positive findings around the overall experience of working with Trylife, the value of co-production and situated learning in developing the knowledge and skills of young people. 71.4% of survey respondents rated their Trylife TV film production experience as 'excellent' and a further 25.7% rated it as 'good' (fig 4).

Fig 4 - %



87.9% of survey respondents stated that the Trylife experience helped them increase confidence in themselves in approaching and working in new environments (fig 5). Interview discussions also evidenced this:

“ The reception that I received from the production team and everyone involved, more confident to go out and talk to people. ”

young cast member

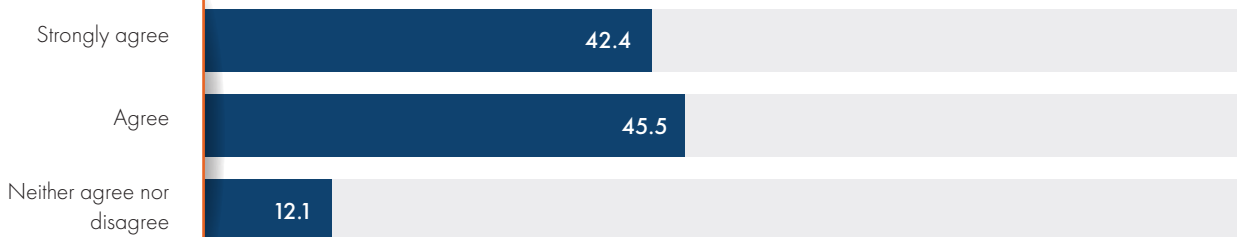
“ It [Trylife experience] made me mentally more stronger and independent, it raised my confidence to try new things. ”

young cast member

“ Trylife I think taught me to be more self-reliant, first by empowering me to grow and allowing me the space to trust myself, and then by cutting that cord and forcing me to find my own path. ”

young cast member

Fig 5 - %



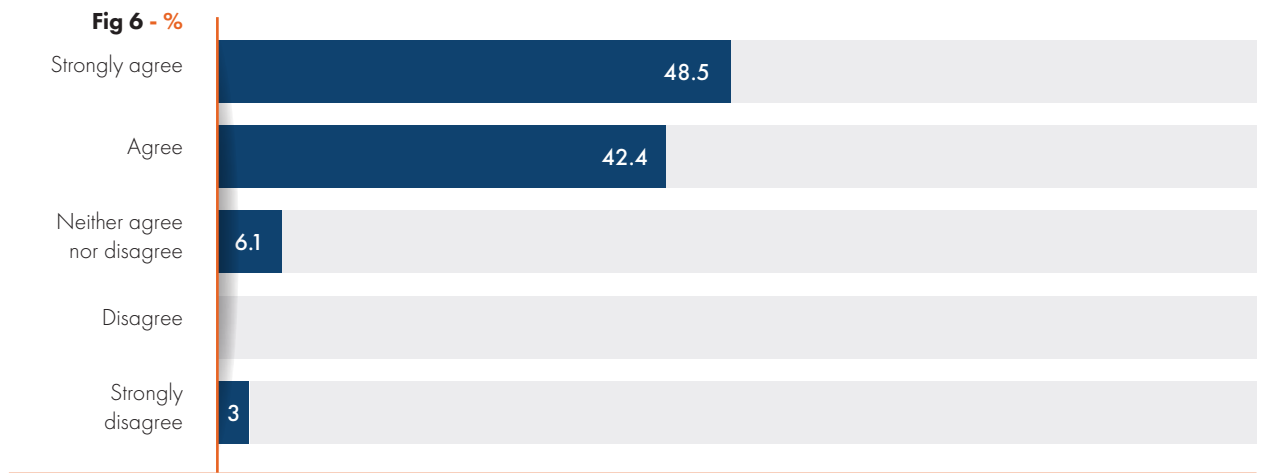
90.9% felt that the Trylife experience had helped them gain skills and knowledge for a career related to media and film making (fig 6). In interviews some noted the benefits of situated learning and that it offers an experience that cannot be taught in a classroom:

“ The concept being on a set itself it’s something that I didn’t learn at uni, relying on each other to do stuff, working long hours [. . .] the people skills and the general working environment suppose you don’t really get that in uni. ”

placement student

“ I learnt about life behind the camera, it was a very great experience and I learned so much about myself and my abilities. ”

placement student



90.9% felt that the Trylife experience had helped them develop additional other workplace skills (fig 7):

“ TryLife have taught me so much about the general working environment within Film/TV. They have helped me to build and progress my skills and opened me up to lots of other opportunities. ”

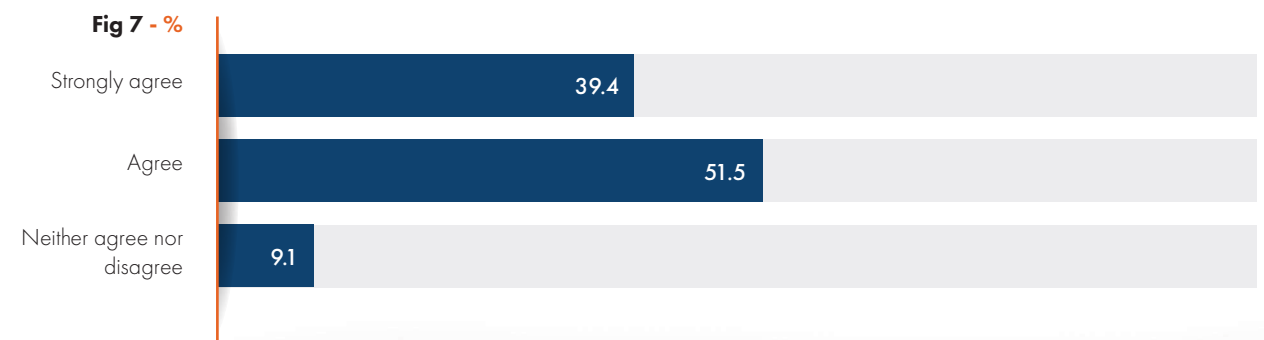
work experience

“ Staying calm in challenging situations and overcoming hurdles that could occur on the way. ”

placement student

“ I have learnt to stay calm and lead by example. To be understanding and listen to others. ”

staff





54.5% survey respondents told us that they were in a career related to media making with 29.4% of these attributing this directly to their experience of working with Trylife:

“ Filming was by far the best experiences of my life, someone on the fringes to be given that kind of experience, it was a paid role it was incredible to experience and work with [. . .] it was kind of a feather in my cap [. . .] definitely contributed to my wider career not in a big way but it was an extra thing. ”

young cast member



The Trylife TV Executives spoke in detail with the evaluation team about their passion for making a difference to the lifeworlds of young people, who came from similar socio-economically deprived backgrounds to them. Their concern for young people who have often not had opportunities structured into their lives is and has been a central driver for their creative labour. The process is as important to them as the product. One creates and feeds the other. The Trylife TV experience raises the aspirations of young people, it offers them the opportunity to explore and engage in media making and additional experiences that come with this. Young cast members speaking about their experiences of working on episode 6 illustrated Trylife TV’s social consciousness in enabling opportunities for young people:

“ No-one has done anything like this for me before. ”

young cast member



“ I never thought I would be professional acting, I did and I even got paid. ”

young cast member



“ [. . .] giving me the most valuable experience that I could have ever asked for. ”

young cast member



“ We work in really deprived areas [. . .] having these kids being part of something they’re going to get taken into central London we’re going to have a launch they’re going to get dressed up, to see their work on the big screen, a social media following, and suddenly now they are associated with this brand, which they perceive to be really cool, the feedback we have had from young people. ”

Paul



Trylife TV’s vision for the future supported by adequate funding and infrastructure sees the Executives continuing to offer opportunities that young people are very often unable to access; training cohorts of young people and equipping them for the future:

“ Whole new range of cast and crew that have been through the Trylife experience, some up-and-coming directors and producers that have only ever done a school project, the first time that they will have operated on a real set and know how to manage the workload, seeing them a flourish are the best successes for me. ”

Paul



d. The Trylife TV Co-production Model

The production of Trylife TV films involves a complex development structure that works with young people and professionals to develop the storylines. Working with professionals is a critical part of building a script which ensures that journeys depicted are authentic and young people viewing films receive correct messages. The Trylife TV approach also enables the development of professional networks and affords the ability for professionals to understand each other's roles:

“ It's not very often all 30 of those agencies get to sit around together and understand each other's role and position [. . .] bring together agencies that normally wouldn't get together. ”

Paul

The evaluation team attended and observed episode 6 script development workshops conducted by Trylife TV with professionals and noted the valuable aspect of this process in ensuring correct information was collated to help develop the script and characters. The researchers suggest workshops to facilitate script development could in the future be delegated to a youth worker / researcher (on the proviso of adequate funding to expand the Trylife team) to afford the Executives time to concentrate on other aspects of the production process or business development. The research team were not party to any workshops with young people and are therefore unable to directly comment on this part of the process.

Co-production workshops with young people in youth group settings and schools are undertaken to explore the social issues to be depicted in the film. These workshops attempt to ensure the accurate depictions of young people's experiences including language and slang that is authentic to the local area.

“ Does this sound like someone who is from Essex if not then the lines would change this way it gives them ownership and it gives it the truth of it as well. ”

staff

The co-production workshops involve bringing different forms of knowledge together while also empowering young people and educating them through storyline development. The Executive team are skilled in making people feel at ease and it is their youth work skills which engage young people in conversations, enabling reflection on decisions and possible outcomes:

“ Young people talk about drugs and knife crime, sex and getting arrested all of the bad things [about the story line] so I said we can't have all this doom and gloom what is this lass going to do? What is this character going to do? They would be stumped and I would just let them sit there for a little bit, then I'd be like maybe she could start volunteering in the community or in the community centre and that would start a conversation, then they would be like 'oh she could go to college', I saw the value of the work with young people, I realised that what I was actually doing was facilitating sessions about really difficult subject matter but under the guise of making a film but I was still a youth worker. ”

Paul

This co-production approach empowers and engages young people's ownership of story lines and it may amplify the reach of messages and engagement in the film:

“ I like the way that the writing process happens and that is written by him and Paul does get involved to make sure that it is alright and links it all together, it's a learning process for the young people as well as a developmental process [increase of knowledge about issues] that is a really big thing me and they are going to go away and talk about it, they are talking about it a lot which means will get more amplified. ”

commissioner

|||||



4. ENHANCING TRYLIFE TV FOR THE FUTURE

A key feature of the use of regular meetings with Trylife Executives, interviews and the survey, was to understand how the Trylife model could be enhanced. The findings are detailed here in this section 'Enhancing Trylife TV for the future'. This section should not be read as a critique of the Trylife TV model but as suggestions for enhancing and growing Trylife TV for future projects.

The pandemic halted Trylife TV's ability to deliver on episode 6 in 2020, however, this pause afforded the Executives much needed time to reflect on key achievements and potential barriers to progress. During this time one of the Executives gained a place on a two-year fellowship programme funded by The Packard Foundation, called 'A Million Realities'. This award recognised the innovation, devotion and vision of Trylife TV including the potential social impact and leadership skills of the Executive and their potential to create change (The Packard Foundation, 2019). The fellowship programme provided mentorship and space to personally reflect, evaluate and identify areas in need of progression for themselves and Trylife TV for the future:

“ I think what lockdown has done is probably has allowed us the capacity to stop and be proud, I only get little, tiny moments where I appreciate what I have done, and long enough for us to appreciate them [. . .] I have been so caught up in the process that I had, I couldn't see what other people see, with lockdown I can afford that bit of time to slow down a little bit, I think I will come out of it with a much clearer perspective strategic goals and a to-do list. ”

Paul



The Executives have approached this evaluation enthusiastically viewing it as an opportune moment to reflect on the development of Trylife TV, understand the benefits and impact of their model and how it can be further enhanced. The research evaluation has identified areas in need of strengthening and we conclude that many of the issues found are directly linked to infrastructure and funding. Infrastructure is a critical gap to resource the administrative, digital engagement, marketing and business development tasks to equip and aid the Executives to continue the focus on the social, educational and career enhancement, so critical to young people's development and so successful to Trylife's creation of interactive educational films. TrylifeTV Executives have the knowledge, experience and skills to engage young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds but this approach is time consuming and uncosted in the commissioning process. How to square this circle where the most socio-economically disadvantaged are identified and who are most at risk but are often unable to access youth work services, due to cuts in expenditure (YMCA, 2020), is a problem that requires resolution. One option for TrylifeTV and Commissioners is to include full costing for the youth work approach that engages 'hard to reach' young people in a process of co-producing opportunities for changing their lives.

In digesting the sections below we urge readers to consider the links to and need for funding and infrastructure to help develop and enhance the Trylife TV model. Trylife TV requires investment from funders who would be willing to actively support the youth work process that adds value as well as cost to the production of these important interactive educational films.



a. Funding and Commissioning

The commissioners and public health professionals we spoke with were fully supportive of Trylife TV's product, including its inclusive participative approach to working with and developing young people. They identified the value of the work and could readily grasp its value addedness as a young person engaged approach. This value now requires all aspects of the media production process to be properly costed and fully funded. Trylife TV consists of two people which evidently impacts on the commissioning, management, delivery and production of films. It is understandable that there are limits on how, if and when the team can grow as this is funding dependent. However, securing a funding stream to extend the reach of Trylife TV films through strategic promotion and marketing could also enable the model to thrive and develop as illustrated here:

“ Why hasn't Trylife taken off? Why isn't it a global force? The fact that you are in the startup phase a few people that are there are working 23 hour days don't have any time cultivating contacts or taking on anyway, everyone is totally maxed out, anyway to break that you need to get enough money in and make the thing you want well and there is enough money to say hire in 3 more people for Business Development and whatever else get the next three contracts and they can hire another 8 people, it needs a cash injection [...] it is classic start-up stuff. ”

commissioner

“ They could get more funding, they could get more of their work out there, expand, cos I would have appreciated Trylife when I was in my teens and prior to that as well. ”

young cast member

Trylife need to be strategic in attracting and securing funding equal to their worth; adequate funding would ease the pressures on the team and production:

“ It is such a shame that they have such a low budget [...] when you think how much money are ploughed into the Samaritans and different charities they don't seem to have a budget anywhere near, they managed to feed us and things but they could have had more time, they did actually wear themselves out, long days, really long days. ”

actor

It was suggested that Trylife TV would benefit from developing their knowledge and skills on commissioning, writing a cohesive business case and understanding the requirements from a commissioning perspective to better their position in applying for, attracting and securing funding. Developing these skills or expanding the Trylife team to employ these skills is critical to enable them to move beyond the networking model they are currently operating through to help secure projects:

“ We had really good feedback from all the youth workers and the young people, [commissioner asked] you want to come and do one about mental health on male suicide? episode 2 is how we got episode 3, commissioner of episode 4 recommended us to the NHS, the health network, spoke to the commissioner of episode 4. ”

Nicky

“ They have such an amazing product [. . .] Need to think about is nailing down the business process [. . .] a business plan [. . .] nailing that stuff down is sometimes quite challenging. They are a small business who are able to get skilled up [. . .] it is the evidence-based stuff it’s the numbers the process, because it is a new concept as well people take a bit of time to really understand it, if I was them I would be working really hard on a pack that is standard, this is who we are, then that business case writing [. . .] I understand the nightmare of the governance route for most organisations, you struggle to get through the door, it’s just when you come across someone because you know them but you can only come across so many people so that’s why you need a slick kind of process to get it through showing that you have done the research a little bit of the area, so that you at least understand, I know that the production process deals with all of that but getting to being commissioned in a business case you need to be able show all that, you have some knowledge of the area [. . .] it is brilliant and I love it I want everybody to be able to use it just makes perfect sense to me, there is a risk at falling at the first hurdle because it doesn’t always come across as being cohesive[. . .] if you get a developmental one a traditional contracting type they will not look at this, they just won’t do it they will ask have you got a business case template. ”

commissioner

b. Project management

“ We have not been operating at full capacity, having this little break [lockdown] just looking and thinking like that must be a simpler way to do this instead of running ourselves into the ground, doing something amazing but how do you make this work? Trylife wouldn’t have kept going if we hadn’t done what we done, Paul wears like three or four different hats, I wear like three or four different hats [. . .] In an ideal world we would have a full development team. ”

Nicky

The lack of capacity in the Trylife team and the time to reflect on and fully cost all aspects of the complex processes of engaging young people in co-producing interactive educational media products has implications for project management. This complex co-production process filters down into the work environment creating potential ‘stress’ points on set. Examples of this include, as the Trylife Executives told us, raw talent and inexperienced young people failing to attend the Trylife TV set often resulting in what some of the wider team and young people see as chaotic production. Our conversations with the Trylife Executives illuminated to us the fast paced, evolving, reactive nature of filming which may account for the ‘chaos’:

“ Every night Paul would say ‘oh well this went wrong let’s do this tomorrow’, for example ‘we don’t have an actor for tomorrow let’s just do this’, he would approach it like this. ”

staff

“ I would say they need to be more organised with their cast but they have been working like this for a decade and it works for them. ”

young cast member

The Trulife Executives acknowledge and understand that team capacity is an issue that impacts across all strands of Trulife TV but funding is intermittent and sustained funding is the only solution to resolving capacity and skills issues:

“ I would love to bring in producers out of the young people that we have worked with, I would love to have them employed, would love to hand over massive proportions to two young people so they could do it better than what I am, I am spread too thin [. . .] I’m not in a position to guarantee anyones long-term future or anything [. . .] ”

Paul

c. Communication and Engagement

After the production of Episode One ‘Sophie’s Story’ Trulife TV identified a number of areas in which they felt that they had struggled including the need to improve communication, reflection and engagement with the production team. The demands of film production scheduling means that filming of scenes rarely takes place in the same order as the narrative and inexperienced cast and production members can struggle to understand the structure of filming schedules and how their characters’ roles and the decisions made in the narrative affect the different outcomes of each scene that they are asked to play (Bartindale, et al 2016). This overview of the demands of film production means that film sets can be challenging, intimidating and confusing environments for inexperienced actors and production

team members. Our evaluation data identified some cast and production members both experienced and inexperienced felt some of these issues could be resolved with improved communication and engagement. This is particularly important for inexperienced young people to help visualise the film, engage with the process and understand why and when certain aspects need to happen:

“ Communication [an issue] because you have no idea about what is happening what is not happening. ”

staff

“ I remember the Script supervisor was also very stressed and she was getting very [...] stressed she was ‘do you know that this has changed again in the script?’ ”

staff

“ I know a lot of people didn’t see the script before starting the film or throughout the whole filming process really, we got the script for that day but we didn’t get the whole script, it was kind of hard to follow where we are which scene we doing, where that fits in [. . .] that will get people more interested in it and more passionate about it, this is actually a really good script. ”

placement student

Research conducted by Bartindale et al (2016: 1413) worked to assess if technology could help overcome the issues of communication and engagement hence “TryFilm was designed to be accessible to all members of the cast and crew, enabling them to maintain a shared awareness of the state of the production as it progressed”. The TryFilm equipment, developed by Bartindale et al 2016, was beneficial for keeping young people engaged in the film production process and improved their situated learning and awareness of the narrative and production flow. Trylife TV were unable to retain the equipment and moved to developing a process map which is shared on set with the cast and production team and which is always accessible. The evaluation team suggests planning in routine meetings with the production team and cast to help with situational awareness, learning and engagement. Reminders to inexperienced young people of the map, its location and its usefulness to understand the process of filming may be helpful to them. Assigning mentors as suggested earlier could also help ease these tensions, increase situational awareness and improve communication.

Communication was also an issue noted by commissioners. Interview data suggests that the current infrastructure of Trylife TV, can struggle with sharing project updates and providing timely information. Commissioners spoke of their frustration over frequent requests for information which were often not fulfilled. The evaluation team at the University of Sunderland had similar experiences. It was noted by all who identified this frustration, that the difficulties experienced were not disingenuous but were directly linked to team capacity to act on and deliver requests. These gaps in infrastructure are familiar realities for youth work projects outside public investment where many are at the mercy of short term target driven funding streams (de St Croix, 2018; Davies, 2019).

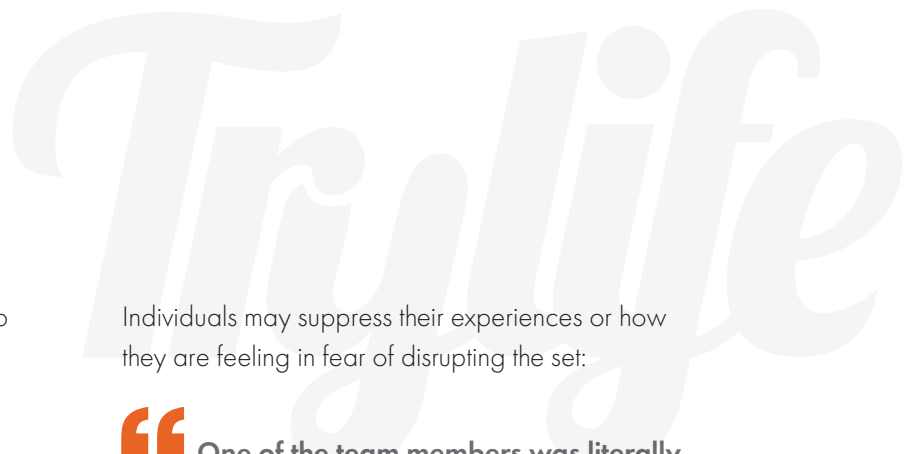
d. Working with inexperienced teams and raw talent

Previous research on Trylife noted the issues working with inexperienced crews and raw talent who do not have the skills and experience to perform in complex film shoots (Bartindale, et al 2016). Sets are opportunities for shared learning and Trylife’s principled approach in allowing young inexperienced people the opportunity to be involved does have implications for project delivery. It was noticeable that in the filming of episode two, youth workers were engaged to work with the young inexperienced crew members (Bartindale et al, 2016: 1414). Building capacity in pre-production workshops is likely to help young people familiarise themselves with tasks on set:

“ When you do get onto the set, like I said no one has got any experience, if they had a couple workshops where it was camera related or whichever area which ever role you’re doing, couple of workshops on that role even just like YouTube videos and stuff which I suppose you could do separately, allow students who have never experienced that role before to have that basic concepts of what they are supposed to be doing, I feel like it would run a bit more smoothly and it will take a bit of stress off Nicky and Paul as well. **”**

placement student





Factoring in more time for project delivery will help to overcome potential barriers and movement in schedule. This will also ease stressful situations on set. Young people may benefit from shadowing an experienced person than taking on the role themselves which may reduce the time taken to execute and deliver a project:

“ You schedule the set amount of time on a location and obviously because we’re all inexperienced it takes a lot longer to set everything up than what do you have scheduled for and then that has a bounce effect keep that location for an extra hour, then that means that we end up going to the next place an hour later and then finishing however later, all the planning and screws it all up [. . .] it gives an opportunity step up and try at that role but it also has its drawbacks that they are inexperienced and stuff will go wrong supervise them have someone experienced with them in those key roles, shadow them, learn from an experienced person. ”

staff



e. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Trylife Executives are attentive to the wellbeing and mental health concerns of young people at the heart of their storylines and their young crew members. Trylife TV have developed a care plan for young people coming on to set to detail any specific needs they have or adjustments they require. The evaluation team suggests routinely asking young people to fill in the care plan even if this is to indicate that they have no needs. We suggest that Trylife TV Executives be vigilant that working on sensitive issues may unearth personal experiences for those on set.

Individuals may suppress their experiences or how they are feeling in fear of disrupting the set:

“ One of the team members was literally screaming because she was so stressed [. . .] stressful for everyone. ”

staff



“ One of the girls that they cast was autistic she had a panic attack. The script advisor had an autistic child so knew how to calm her down [. . .] Learning point for me was how to manage a team and stress, make sure there is someone that team members can go to. ”

staff



“ You know you have lived a while and you have experienced a lot and around people who have been in similar situations, it was quite . . . it was quite near the knuckle for me. I thought it was going to be awful, when it finished it was complete and utter . . . like I have got rid of it, all these years of the grief [. . .] when I was learning the lines it was horrible it was absolutely awful [. . .] I spent a week, I don’t know about you, it’s like a book you’re miserable until you finish reading it, it was like that, for a week when I was learning the lines I was so fed up it really wasn’t nice subject but when I came away I felt great, horrible weight had gone [. . .] They didn’t know I was going through my own nightmare, it was such a happy environment. ”

actor



“ We had 90% of female cast, nearly every single one of them were victims of grooming and some of them didn’t even realise that they had been. ”

Paul

In the instance spoken about above the Trylife Executives detailed to us that filming on episode 4 was delayed for a year after becoming aware of the experiences of young women. Trylife TV are responsive to the needs of young people and the demands of the project; working closely with the local clinical commissioning group they ensured support from Karma Nirvana was in place to continue filming. Trylife TV needs to consider factoring in a mental health and wellbeing advisor in their future funding models and commissioners need to be aware of the importance of this. Trylife TV could also routinely share mental health and wellbeing support services that young people and staff can access.

f. Audience Engagement

Marketing and promotion of Trylife TV is an area that needs investment to increase Trylife TV’s reach, we were frequently told ‘not enough people know about Trylife’ (professional), ‘I didn’t know about Trylife I wish I had known about it when I was younger’ (placement student). Trylife would benefit from recruiting skills in marketing, social media and engagement. Marketing is key to attracting people to the website which could increase engagement: “the marketing and advertisement of their episodes could and should reach a much wider audience given the quality of work. I think that if more focus and resources were put into the marketing side then this would give it a nudge in the right direction” (placement student).

Many research participants noted social media as a resource is not always used to target the right audience nor drive engagement to the Trylife website:

“ The majority of stuff on social media is memes life quotes and all of that, when they have a film going on they do post behind the scenes, I don’t think Facebook is directly pointing to their motto it’s more about getting the viewership. ”

staff

“ I think they need to include more people on there [facebook], there isn’t enough bodies, people or content about the actual episodes and I don’t think there is a clear explanation of what it actually is, it just looks like a meme page, they need more interactive stuff more visual, behind the scenes footage, there’s only a certain number of memes you will read before you press unfollow, if people see what is going on then they will want to get involved and I want to support [. . .] instagram is a huge platform now everyone uses it for everything they could reach and interact with all kinds of audience. ”

young cast member

“ [. . .] messaging, the marketing, if you want to drive people to the website, schools and say this thing is here, that’s where the challenge, it is solvable it is a lot of work. ”

staff

“ How young people engaged with the internet then to now is completely different, you got Snapchat, tiktok, Instagram that’s how they consume content now so if you want to target that age group you need to target in that way, Trylife’s presence on social media platforms doesn’t achieve that, they’re there and have followers, are the majority of their followers within the demographic that they want to target I would hazard to say probably not [. . .] the kind of content that they share is not the kind of content that is going to help people and drive them to the website and engage with it, outside of targeting people through schools, workshops, need to target people to route straight through to the website, they need to do quite a bit of work in understanding what kind of content would engage kids and a coherent social media strategy. ”

staff



OFCOMs (2019) Media Lives study reveals that children remain keen on big-name YouTube ‘stars’, and are also following an increasing number of peer or local influencers. Trylife TV may want to consider how they can work with Youtube influencers to extend the reach of their work.

The website would benefit from some updating and a refresh. It was suggested by some that the Trylife resources could be linked into the films and further supported with video blogs by the actors reflecting on decision making made by the character and where to source support in a particular situation. The evaluation team suggests it may be useful for a thematic structure to the resources section e.g. mental health, abuse etc which will enable the ease of finding local and national resources on issues that the young person may be affected by or worried about.

It seems that Trylife may also need to consider how they update episodes to make them more current. Sophie’s episode (one) was used as an example to discuss how language and humour has evolved. Some young people we spoke to acknowledged Sophie’s episode had been produced some time ago but felt that this may impact on the engagement of young people. A small number of young people suggested using social media and polls to ‘fact check’ the script with young people e.g. would your dad let you go to a party the night before an exam? They suggested this strategy could also be used to drive young people to the films.



Trylife’s Facebook page has over 7.4m followers and the Executives acknowledge that their capacity is limited which impacts on social media content and audience engagement. Given the quality of the films produced and the messages they aim to deliver, the Executives are cognisant to the needs of social media to be on par with and linked to Trylife TV:

“ I really don’t have time for this, the headspace to be dealing with the social media channels, so we started posting stuff on the Facebook page to Instagram and dragged over 130000 people, then I realise that I can move people from one platform to another, but why am I moving them there when I don’t have the capacity and I am just posting memes or whatever, I feel like I am doing them a disservice [. . .] it needs to be as good as the film, the content needs to be like advice but I haven’t got the headspace to think about it, it’s more of a burden than an opportunity. ”

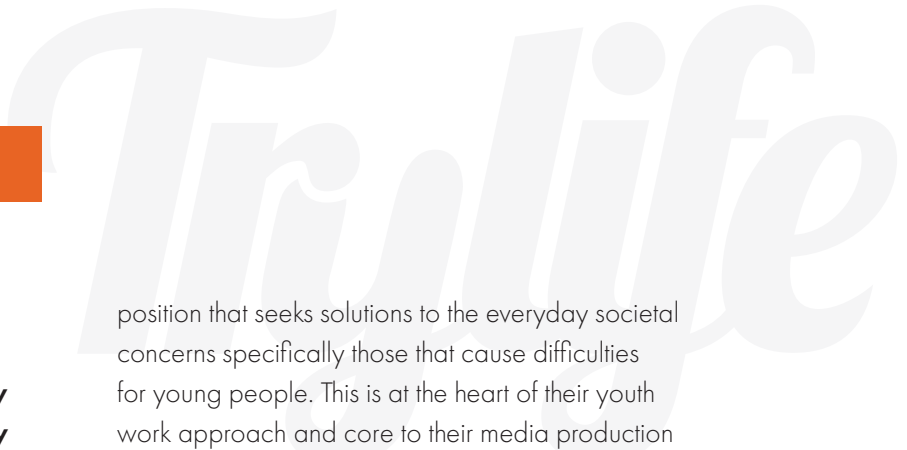
Paul



The pandemic afforded time to reflect on the use of social media and the Trylife Executives recognised early on in the pandemic the impacts on people’s mental health.

They have moved on to use their Facebook page to engage their audience in mental health and wellbeing activities while also providing a platform for new entertainers and start-up businesses. The Trylife TV Executives need to now consider what role this facebook page plays in their model as the vision may have become diluted.

Trylife TV solely operates online and it has been noted that not all young people are ‘digital natives’ with an estimation that there are over 300,000 young people who do not have basic digital skills (The Tech Partnership 2017). This could be a result of personal skills, including poor literacy and numeracy skills; circumstantial barriers, including poverty and poor credit ratings affecting access to technology and internet and systematic factors, including the lack of motivation to access training opportunities (Nominet Trust 2017). The pandemic has further highlighted the digital divide, the links between poverty and digital exclusion (Holmes and Burgess 2020). The evaluation team suggests this barrier may be overcome through partnerships with formal and informal educators to enable access to the Trylife resources and messaging through facilitating learning and workshops.



5. CONCLUSION

The ethical standpoint and passion of the Executives to help create better futures for young people informs the Trylife TV strategy and vision and may partly explain why they have not ‘monetised’ their model:

“ The success story would be more well-informed young people, especially from the really deprived areas like Middlesbrough like Hartlepool, regions of Newcastle and Sunderland, why would I not want to better my own area, like mental health, kids really need this, is alright going to Essex and making money, I really want to help these young people, teenage parents are the parents of the next generation, as a human being I want to do my duty. ”

Nicky



The commitment by the Executives to develop interactive digital resources for young people whose life chances and opportunities have been limited by the contexts of their lives is a testament to their belief in ‘caring equality’ (Crowley, 2006:14). It is this ethical drive and the added value, skills, and knowledge in engaging with young people that the TrylifeTV Executives bring to their digital interactive educational films and the commissioners and public health experts we talked with identified as making Trylife TV such a valued resource. This drive to make caring equality a cornerstone of their business model requires discussion, negotiation and costing in all future bids.

Trylife TV Executives combine creative energy with hard work. This combination is simultaneously commendable but sometimes difficult to keep pace with for partners and people who work with them. Some commissioners, professionals, staff, and young people spoke of these difficulties. The TrylifeTV Executives underpin their work from a

position that seeks solutions to the everyday societal concerns specifically those that cause difficulties for young people. This is at the heart of their youth work approach and core to their media production model. TryLifeTV Executives listen to and learn from young people. As Vallentin-Holbech et al, (2020:1) identify ‘Collaborative knowledge generation and involvement of users is known to improve health promotion intervention development’. We therefore conclude that a more open and early conversation between Trylife TV, funders and commissioners is necessary to develop the framework that brings co-production to the core in developing collaborative knowledge. These conversations should focus on how tendering processes can take account of the gaps and fault lines for supporting the complexity of co-production through genuine partnerships that work together for solutions to the social ills both parties desire to change.

How the real-life tensions can be resolved, between those who identify social and health concerns, those who hold and contract funding, and those who offer creative ground up solutions, such as the TrylifeTV Executives, became apparent in the stories our respondents shared during this evaluation.



These tensions illuminate the difficulties ahead. The co-production and youth work approach lived out and developed by the Trylife TV Executives offers a model for exploring young people led solutions to societal concerns and the evaluation team believe is an excellent starting point for resolving the different points of focus for the different stakeholders who are concerned to find a cooperative partnership approach to health and social problems.

In the absence of externally gathered verifiable data on the impact on young people's behaviour overtime, it is not possible to know if this digital interactive form of public health educational messaging works to change 'risky' behaviour.

The detailed study by the 'If I were Jack' research team (Lohan et al, 2010; 2014; 2018; 2021) exploring a gender conscious digital and interactive approach across geography and time is a major study established to measure impact on young people's behaviour. As a consequence of the relationship developed between the CHWN, Trylife TV and the University of Sunderland (amongst other partners) a successful bid to the National Institute for Health Research Applied Research Collaborations has been obtained. This work is a pilot study using a random controlled trial methodology to test out the impact on young people of youth work and in school led educational discussions using episode 6, the Trylife TV perinatal mental health interactive educational film.

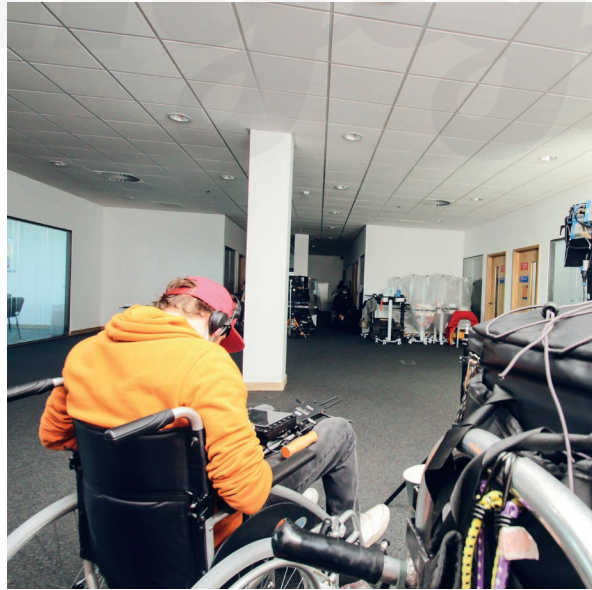


6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In working with the Trylife TV Executives, to understand their creative labour, their co-production processes, their aspirations for making public health educational messaging more relatable to young people, and in the making of their films, the evaluation team have identified several recommendations. The impact and engagement of the Trylife TV films could potentially be enhanced by working in partnership with schools and youth group settings. We suggest as part of the Trylife TV model:

- The Executives consider youth worker led engagement that delivers Trylife learning in schools. Viewing and discussion supported by qualified youth workers will provide supported learning and may help resolve the issue around the need to update language and film content
- The Executives engage and network with The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and UK Local Education Authority Departments (LEA) to promote the Trylife TV films, the co-production model and the potential to deliver engagement in schools and youth settings

The rich data that is currently archived by Trylife TV, if retrievable, offers a source of information that requires dedicated time to compile into a usable form. We suggest employing an administrator to support Trylife TV's capture and documentation of the benefits of their co-production process, the involvement of young people and their offer of employability, mentoring, training and upskilling of young people.



We suggest:

- Mapping out the co-production process to enable commissioners to better understand the complexity of the work undertaken to engage, develop and produce each film. A visual process map will be useful to consider when presenting to prospective commissioners
- Robust data collection on the engagement of young people in training and employability to help evidence the value of the Trylife TV co-production experience
- Robust data collection on the engagement of young people in the Trylife TV co-production process to inform the generation of social return on investment
- Consider including costs for evaluation into every future episode



This evaluation report notes that Trylife TV and its future would benefit from a combination of sustained funding and a strengthening of its infrastructure. This strengthened infrastructure we suggest will improve the co-production process, remove the pressure on the Executives, improve their ability to attract funding, and will potentially increase the reach of their films. We suggest that Trylife TV:

- Consider employing a Company administrator to release time from the Trylife TV Executives to enhance capacity in the management of all aspects of the business
- Consider employing a Digital Engagement Officer to manage the social media platforms and the website content
- Consider employing a Researcher to undertake research with stakeholders, work with the scriptwriter and undertake the evaluation for future episodes
- Consider employing a Business Development Officer to support commissioning new films
- Consider the use of vloggers to help promote the films and direct young people to the website

One of the central elements of the Trylife TV process is its use of a youth work approach to co-production as an essential route to their interactive digital educational film product. The co-production process is integral to the product. To enhance and support the experience of young people in the co-production process we suggest:

- Pre-production workshops to help young people adjust to their role and to understand the production process
- Enhancing partnerships with the youth work sector to further explore using Trylife TV as a learning resource
- Consider formalising the mentoring process to ease the pressure on the Executives
- Consider employing a JNC qualified youth worker and access to mental health and other specialist advisors accessible on each film location

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bartindale, T., Schofield, G., Crivellaro, C and Wright, P., (2016), *TryFilm: Situated Support for Interactive Media Productions*, In P. Bjørn, & J. Konstan (Eds.), *CSCW'16 - Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing*: San Francisco, CA, USA – February 27 - March 02, 2016 (pp. 1412-1422). Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). <https://doi.org/10.1145/2818048.2819929>
- Bowler, R., (2013), *The Risky Business of Challenging Risk: Youth Work and Young People through the Lens of 'Race'*, In Kearney, J and Donovan, C., (Eds.) 2013, *'Constructing Risky Identities in Policy and Practice'* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 9: 149-162
- Campbell, H,J and Vanderhaven, D., (2016), *'Knowledge That Matters: Realising the Potential of Co-Production*, Report, N8 T=Research Partnership, Manchester
- Clark, J.,Dyson, A., Meagher, N., Robson, E and Wootten, M., (2001), *'Young People as Researchers: possibilities, problems and politics'*, Leicester, National Youth Agency, Youth Work Press
- Clark, J, Laing, K, 2018, *Co-production with young people to tackle alcohol misuse, Drugs and Alcohol Today*, vol 18 no.1 pp. 17-27
- Crowley, N., (2006), *'An Ambition for Equality*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press
- Davies, B., (2019), *'Austerity, Youth Policy and the Deconstruction of the Youth Service in England'*, Warwickshire, Palgrave Macmillan
- France, A., (2000), *'Youth Researching Youth: The Triumph and Success Peer Research Project'*, Leicester, National Youth Agency, Youth Work Press
- Gornall, L., (2018), *Co-production: a defence of young people*. *Journal of Radical Community Work*, 3 (1)
- Holmes, H, Burgess, G, 2020, *Coronavirus has highlighted the UK's Digital Divide*, Cambridge Centre for Planning and Housing Research, University of Cambridge, https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Research/Start-Year/2017/building_better_opportunities_new_horizons/digital_divide/presentation_slides/view accessed January 2021
- IYW, (2021), *Institute for Youth Work's Codes of Ethics'* accessed at <https://iyw.org.uk/code-of-ethics/> accessed February 2021
- JETS, 2020, *Digital Youth work – Promotion of Guidelines and Competencies for workers and organisations*, <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Digital-Briefing-Paper.pdf> accessed January 2021
- Key Fund Social Impact Report, 2015, Key Fund Investments, Sheffield <http://thekeyfund.co.uk/wp-content/themes/keyfund2026/downloads/social-impact-report-2015.pdf> accessed December 2020
- Lohan, M., Cruise, S., O'Halloran, P., Alerdice, F and Hyde, A., (2010), *'Adolescent Men's Attitudes in Relation to Pregnancy and Pregnancy Outcomes: A Systematic Review of the Literature From 1980–2009'*, *Journal of Adolescent Health* 47 (2010) 327-345
- Lohan, M., Aveniti, Á., Maguire, L., Clarke, M., Linden, M., & McDaid, L. (2014). Feasibility trial of a film-based educational intervention for increasing boy's and girl's intentions to avoid teenage pregnancy: Study protocol. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 68, 35–45.
- Lohan, M., Aveniti, Á., Clarke, M. et al. (2018), *'Can Teenage Men Be Targeted to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy? A Feasibility Cluster Randomised Controlled Intervention Trial in Schools'*, *Prev Sci* 19, 1079–1090 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-018-0928-z>
- Lohan, M et al, 2021, *'If I Were Jack: The Jack Trial'*, Belfast. Queens University accessed at <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/if-i-were-jack/> accessed February 2021
- Maynard, L and Stuart, K., (2018), *'promoting Young People's Wellbeing through Empowerment and Agency: A Critical Framework for Practice'*, London, Routledge
- NHS Confederation, 2015, *Life-saving app scoops top prize at digital awards*, <https://www.nhsconfed.org/news/2015/07/life-saving-app-scoops-top-prize-at-digital-awards> accessed December 2020
- Nominet Trust, 2017, *Digital Reach: Digital skills for the hardest-to-reach young people* https://socialtechtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Online_NT_Digital_Reach_Prospectus_Final.pdf accessed January 2021
- NYA, (2020), *'Youth Work in England: Policy, Practice and the National Occupational Standards'* accessed at <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/New-Nos.pdf> accessed February 2021
- OFCOM, 2018, *Communications Market Report*, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/117256/CMR-2018-narrative-report.pdf accessed January 2021
- OFCOM, 2019, *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report* https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/190616/children-media-use-attitudes-2019-report.pdf accessed January 2021
- Ord, J., (2007, 2016), *'Youth Work Process, Product and Practice: Creating an authentic curriculum in work with young people'* London, Routledge
- Pawluczuk, A., Webster, G., Smith, C and Hall, H., (2019), *'The Social Impact of Digital Youth Work: What are we looking for?'* *Media and Communication*, 2019, Volume 7, Issue 2, Pages 59-68
- Pitch@Palace, 2017, *Pitch@Palace 7.0 People's Choice Winner*, <https://peopleschoice.pitchatpalace.com/winner/49/trylife> accessed December 2020
- QAA (2019), *'Subject Benchmark Statement: Community and Youth Work'*, accessed at https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-youth-and-community-work.pdf?sfvrsn=5e35c881_4 accessed February 2021
- Ramey, H., Lawford, H and Vachon, W., (2017), *'Youth-Adult Partnerships in Work with Youth: An Overview'*, *Journal of Youth Development*, Vol 12, No.4, Pages 38-60
- Rathbone, A., Pallan-Jhalli, S., Clay, H., Codner, R., Bourne, T., Gregory, S., Turner, F and Morris, E., (2018). *All together now: a toolkit for co-production with young people for use by Wolverhampton service providers, commissioners and schools*. *HeadStart Wolverhampton*, Wolverhampton, UK: City of Wolverhampton Council accessed at <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/all-together-now/> accessed February 2021
- Smith, C and McKinlay, A., (2009), *'Creative Labour: Content, Contract and Control'*, in McKinlay, A and Smith, C., (Eds)(2009), *'Creative Labour: Working in the creative industries'*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 2: 29 - 47
- Tedx Newcastle, 2019, <https://www.tedxnewcastle.com/speakers/paul-irwin/> accessed February 2021
- The Packard Foundation, no date, *A Million Realities*, <https://amilionrealities.com/our-fellows/> accessed February 2021
- Vallentin-Holbech, L., Guldager, J.D., Dietrich, T., Rundle-Thiele, S., Majgaard, G., Lyk, P and Stock, C., (2020)., *'Co-creating a Virtual Alcohol Prevention Simulation with Young People'* *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17, 1097 <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/3/1097/htm#> accessed March 2021
- Wright, J, 2014, *Interactive documentary to support Lewisham's youth*, <https://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2014/10/interactive-documentary-sets-sights-on-improving-young-peoples-life-choices/> accessed February 2021
- YMCA, (2020), *'Out of Service: A Report Examining Local Authority Expenditure on Youth Services in England and Wales'*, January 2020, London, YMCA England and Wales accessed at [Out of Service \(ymca.org.uk\)](https://ymca.org.uk) accessed January 2021
- Youth Focus North East, 2013, *North East Youth Work Awards 2013 Winners*, <https://youthfocusne.org.uk/north-east-youth-work-awards-2013-winners/> accessed December 2020
- Youthwork Support, <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/young-people/> accessed December 2020

Authors: Dr Amina Razak and Dr Rick Bowler



**University of
Sunderland**

