

A report on

Swansea YMCA

**YMCA Swansea
1 The Kingsway
Swansea
SA1 5JQ**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh

Context of provision

YMCA Swansea is an independent charity that has been active in the area since 1857. Since 1913 it has been based in their purpose-built community facility in Swansea.

YMCA Swansea offers youth and community work provision for children and young people aged 5-25.

It is part of a Global Federation made up of YMCA provision from across the world and in particular a part of a National YMCA Strategy across England and Wales.

However, it is an independent charity and it's responsible for its own fundraising, direction and management. It receives funding from public and other sources including from Welsh Government through the Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Grant (SVYWO), Swansea Council through various funding streams, the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership: Regional Integration Funds (RIF), NHS Wales, Arts Council for Wales, Children in Need, The National Lottery, the Waterloo Foundation and the Benefact Trust.

A significant percentage of the organisation's income is based on it delivering outcomes for various projects.

YMCA Swansea's work is supported by a board of trustees. The senior management team includes a chief executive officer, youth and community manager and finance/human resources manager who manages a team of co-ordinators, youth workers and administrative staff.

At the time of the inspection there were 23 members of staff (full-time equivalent of 16.5). YMCA Swansea supports employed youth workers with fully funded access to training including the Agored Cymru Level 3 Certificate in Youth Work Practice. YMCA Swansea is also an Agored Cymru approved centre which enables it to train and develop its own staff as well as offer accredited courses to other organisations in areas in which they have expertise such as LGBTQ+.

Overview

YMCA Swansea's ethos and actions exemplify the YMCA vision that 'everyone should have a fair chance to discover who they are and what they can become'.

Leaders and trustees make effective use of diverse funding streams to deliver a clear and focussed youth work offer. Self-evaluation and improvement planning are strong. Leaders identifying their key priorities well and plan effectively to ensure the sustainability of their service.

Leaders recognise that they excel in certain specialist areas with their youth work delivery and have built on these strengths to develop a trusted reputation in the Swansea area with other agencies, the police and local authorities.

The Swansea Young Carers Service, commissioned by Swansea Council and further supported by West Glamorgan Partnership and others, addresses the practical and emotional needs of young carers, aged 8 to 18 effectively.

The LGBTQ+ Youth Support Service provides a supportive safe space for young LGBTQ+ people aged 11-25.

The Y-Hub Service concentrates on community, outreach and street work to protect young people most at risk. It offers drop-in sessions five days a week as well as an open access youth club on Friday evenings.

Y-Talent or the Music and Arts Service was recently incorporated into the Y-Hub service and offers valuable opportunities for young people to develop skills, confidence and if they wish, accreditation.

Youth workers in these contexts establish very strong and nurturing relationships with young people placing the needs of young people first. They are enthusiastic and passionate in their commitment to assisting young people to develop their confidence, self-esteem and pursue their goals, regardless of their circumstances.

YMCA Swansea provides valuable support and guidance for some of the most vulnerable young people in the area.

Young people improve their educational attributes and prospects. They learn to collaborate constructively with others and learn to be inclusive and respectful when interacting with others. Many participate in a wide range of activities that assist and benefit their personal growth. They are empowered to articulate their ideas and become more socially and politically aware and consequently they become a positive force for change.

As a result, many young people accessing the provision, from across the Swansea and neighbouring local authorities, successfully acquire the knowledge, resilience and confidence that assists them in transforming their lives and fulfilling their individual potential.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the service continue to improve:

- R1. Develop a proactive offer to promote and facilitate services for young people whose language of choice is Welsh

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?

Young people are firmly at the centre of activities provided by YMCA Swansea. The overriding ethos of the service is to support and challenge young people to grow and to achieve to their full potential regardless of their circumstances. As they are genuinely consulted with, and often co-construct the services they receive, young people drive changes in provision effectively. This improves their own confidence and personal growth and shapes services for other young people. Young people also grow in maturity by influencing and designing training for professionals who deliver and manage services for young people.

Educative

Young people in schools across Swansea, gain knowledge and understanding of issues, such as those faced by young LGBTQ+ people and young carers, through personal and social education (PSE) sessions and lunchtime clubs led by youth workers. In these clubs and one-to-one sessions, they improve their well-being, come to understand their own identities and learn to cope with challenging situations.

By visiting the Senedd and meeting local authority officers, young people who attend the young carers project learn about political and administrative structures. They understand how policy is made that results in services that affect them. They improve their communication skills and make decisions about the priorities for young carers.

Young people in open access sessions learn to be tolerant of others' needs, share ideas and gain skills in planning events. For example, they learn budgeting skills, and the cost of transport and other resources.

A few young people have opportunities to take part in senior member training which leads to accreditation. Although gaining qualifications is not an initial focus for many young people who attend the provision, through their interactions with youth workers they gain the tools to benefit from courses should they wish to. For example, a few have gained food hygiene and music qualifications and gain the confidence to access training that is relevant to their personal situations, such as epilepsy awareness and first-aid training. Others gain digital skills, which they use to promote their work to others.

Overall, many young people develop the skills and attitudes to progress in their formal or informal learning and to grow as individuals.

Expressive

In music sessions, young people build their confidence and ability to communicate with others, whilst gaining valuable music skills. They develop their self-esteem and confidence and express their feelings through interaction with the youth worker. Young people express themselves by playing instruments, writing, recording and performing music in group sessions across Swansea in partnership with the Arts Council for Wales in venues such as the Millennium Centre in Cardiff.

Young LGBTQ+ people express themselves through taking part in Pride events, making their own logos for T-shirts or other artistic projects. Young people involved in the Hot Chicks performing arts project learn stagecraft and become more aware about the exploitation of young people. As a result, they enable many more young people and adults to understand and relate to these issues.

Overall, young people who experience low mental health or anxiety, learn to express their feelings and their fears in the safe places and through the engaging projects they attend.

Spotlight: Addressing exploitation through the performing arts

YMCA Y-Hub have collaborated with a professional theatre company and an artist to deliver a project on exploitation. The theatre company have been delivering a play called 'Hot Chicks' which is a story set in Swansea based on young people being exploited. The company worked with a focus group of young people from Y-Hub which led to changes to the script and the music.

Alongside this work, YMCA Swansea, the theatre company and an artist have been working with young people on exploitation. This has involved creative sessions, such as decorating face masks, where young people could express how they are feeling through the medium of art. Exploitation workshops run alongside the arts, with young people contributing to all aspects of the project. The project is open to any young person attending Y-Hub.

Participative

Young people participate with enthusiasm in activities. Those from underrepresented groups such as young LGBTQ+ people and young carers take part in a wide variety of activities which increase their understanding of themselves and of other young people. Young people in the LGBTQ+ and Young Carers forum develop their leadership skills and articulate their ideas well. They carry out interviews for membership of their forums and clearly and fairly evaluate why they have selected new members. Young LGBTQ+ people also engage constructively with the police to raise awareness of hate crime.

Inclusive

Young people are welcoming, friendly and respectful of others. They understand one another's needs and accept differences. They are courteous and understanding when discussing topics and activities and are careful not to offend the sensibilities of others. They gain a very good knowledge of gender awareness, the needs of other young people and are comfortable to discuss difficult issues such as family situations and dynamics.

Many young people come to understand and respect other cultures and traditions and how they relate to the communities in the local area. A few also develop their use of the Welsh language during school-based activities. Young people share their newly gained knowledge and attitudes with family members and friends during intergenerational events. This enables siblings and other family members to understand more about the issues that the young people are exploring and what they are achieving.

Empowering

Young people gain in confidence through attending youth projects. They become confident in their own roles and identities and undertake practical tasks. For example, they gain the self-reliance to use public transport to attend provision in Swansea. Many young people take part in activities that genuinely empower them and in turn, they empower others. Young people have influenced political and administrative decisions, structures and policies that underpin services they receive. For example, by contributing to developing assessment criteria to identify the needs of young carers and by developing training packages for social workers and the police, young people increase the awareness of the issues that they and others in society face.

What young people can expect from youth work provision

Youth workers establish very strong and nurturing relationships with young people that underpin the organisation's ethos of putting their needs first in a young person-centred approach. They are passionate advocates for young people and are committed to assisting them to develop and realise the YMCA's vision that *'everyone should have a fair chance to discover who they are and what they can become'*.

Youth workers assess individuals' needs well and are aspirational for the young people working with them. They evaluate their progress effectively, for example in weekly reflective sessions for the youth workers. Youth workers co-operate together well to ensure young people's personal development through the different provision provided. As a result, they grow in confidence and become increasingly active members of their groups and society in general.

Youth work sessions are well-planned, and resources are used effectively to enrich the interactions with young people, for example in music and cookery sessions.

Youth workers utilise technology appropriately, through holding online sessions for young carers who are unable to attend in-person provision due to their responsibilities, for example in online baking sessions with doorstep delivery of supplies before the session. Without such provision these young people would not be able to benefit as much from the valuable assistance and support offered to them.

Youth workers co-operate effectively with schools to hold sessions in schools including PSE lessons. These lessons are also available in Welsh for Welsh-medium schools.

The *Swansea Young Carers Service*, commissioned by Swansea Council, addresses the practical and emotional needs of young carers, aged 8 to 18 effectively. Staff arrange transport to activities, provide respite breaks, and guide young carers in self-advocacy. Members of the young carers' forum are encouraged skilfully to take on responsibilities and shape the provision through representing the forum at national young carers events.

Through the Young Carers Card initiative, now solely managed by YMCA Swansea, young people gain recognition and support within schools, pharmacies, and GP surgeries, helping them manage their responsibilities more effectively. Young people explain eloquently how the card helps them balance their caring responsibilities with school life, reducing stress and reinforcing their right to recognition and flexible support.

Spotlight: Young Carers Card Scheme

The Young Carers Card Scheme run by YMCA Swansea provides young carers (under 18) in Swansea with an ID card that discreetly acknowledges their caring role. After an initial launch nationally by Welsh Government, YMCA Swansea took the initiative to preserve the scheme locally. Working closely with the West Glamorgan Partnership Board, they ensure that logos are visible in GP surgeries and pharmacies, so that young carers can collect prescriptions for family members. Staff also liaise proactively with schools to recognise the card. By presenting the card, young people can make schools, health services, and the community aware of their extra responsibilities, often helping them access understanding, flexibility, and support. In addition, Swansea City Football club offers free entry to home games to card holders providing opportunities to these young people that they would usually not have. YMCA Swansea manages applications, issues the cards, and connects young carers with relevant services and resources to support their well-being and empower them in their caring role.

The *LGBTQ+ Youth Support Service* has developed over time from a youth club to a full service that provides a supportive safe space for young LGBTQ+ people aged 11-25. It caters successfully for the diverse needs of young people through provision such as the GoodVibes youth club, drop-in sessions, individual support and outreach work. Youth workers in the GoodVibes group have taken proactive steps to assist members who are selective mutes through arranging Makaton workshops and sign language sessions. Staff members use Makaton and sign language to make sure that these young people feel included and valued and to assist them to become full members of the group.

The service successfully empowers young people to help shape future provision and attitudes. For example, young people recently met with the Cabinet Secretary for Education at the Senedd to inform Welsh Government's new LGBTQ+ action plan.

The Y-Hub Service evolved due to concerns that, following periods of isolation during the pandemic, young people were at an increased risk of harm and exploitation. The service concentrates on community, outreach and street work to protect young people most at risk. It offers a five day a week drop-in session as well as an open access youth club on Friday evenings. It operates efficiently as a one- stop shop for all young people to access.

Very recently, the *Y-Talent or Music and Arts Service's* grant funding came to an end, and it was incorporated into the Y-Hub service. Through creative use of multiple arts funding streams, the service has, over the years, offered the opportunity for young people to develop skills, confidence and if they wish, accreditation.

Spotlight: Y-Talent Music and Arts Service

Over many years, YMCA Swansea's Y-Talent project has offered free workshops in lyric writing, composition, and digital music production. Specialist youth workers invest significant time helping young people gain confidence before they even begin creating music, which is especially transformative for those who have faced considerable barriers or anxiety. The impact of this nurturing environment can be life changing. For example, staff secured the opportunity for young people to visit and record music at the iconic Rockfield Studios, where renowned bands have produced chart-topping albums. In addition, some participants have performed on the public stage at the Millennium Centre in Cardiff and in the YMCA theatre. Through these memorable experiences, young people learn technical and creative skills and develop resilience, self-esteem, and clearer ambitions for the future.

Overall, YMCA Swansea provides valuable support and guidance for some of the most vulnerable young people in the area. Youth workers share their expertise in these fields beneficially with organisations across other sectors including police forces and local authorities. For example, they hold very effective training sessions on transgender awareness that highlights how to use language appropriately and improves the understanding of delegates regarding issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Youth workers work well with young people who have experienced peer-on-peer abuse or have experienced hate crime to encourage them to contribute valuably to the development of anti-racism initiatives.

Youth workers promote healthy lifestyles effectively, and deal with issues such as substance misuse and online safety with young people at risk of exploitation.

As a result, many young people, from across the Swansea and neighbouring local authorities acquire knowledge and resilience that assist them in transforming their lives and fulfilling their individual potential.

Leading and improving

Leaders embrace the rich history of the YMCA in Swansea, maintaining the morals and values from which it was first established. There is a strong sense of strategic vision which is delivered diligently by staff and is shared and skilfully guided by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and trustees. This clear sense of strategic leadership identifies and supports the youth work provision required and offered to young people. The youth work manager is pivotal in driving the vision of the organisation forward effectively with dedication and passion.

Young people have meaningful opportunities to shape the service, from planning provision and activities to meeting with trustees to help shape the strategic direction of the YMCA. Young people also have meaningful opportunities to voice their opinions outside of their locality including talking with the Cabinet Secretary at the Senedd to contribute towards the LGBTQ+ action plan, including being involved with a research project with Bristol University. The research project involved young people taking part in a transgender and non-binary youth forum which will report to the UK government on how young people are represented within UK Laws, specifically within family law.

The CEO, trustees, and the youth work manager make appropriate use of funding streams to deliver a clear and focussed youth work offer. Leaders plan effectively to ensure the sustainability of their service by identifying their key priorities. Leaders recognised validly that they excelled in certain specialist areas with their youth work delivery and built on these strengths.

There is appropriate provision to support young people's development of Welsh, including PSE support in lessons provided in Welsh for Welsh-medium schools. However, leaders recognise the need to further develop a proactive offer for young people whose language of choice is Welsh.

YMCA Swansea is embedded as a key partner with a range of organisations and co-operates effectively with them to minimise duplication and maximise the service offer for young people. This positioning with partners has come from years of building their reputation which has resulted in YMCA Swansea becoming a trusted organisation. The strong links forged with partners is highly collaborative, for example, the joint working with Evolve to map youth work opportunities for young people across Swansea through the Swansea Youth Work Providers Network. This work strives to ensure that young people have access to services regardless of their circumstances or needs.

Evaluation and planning are a strength, both at a strategic and operational level. Projects are robustly evaluated, and regular feedback is captured from young people as part of this process. There is a clear link between project evaluation reports and improvement planning. YMCA Swansea have developed a comprehensive management information system that helps them collect and collate meaningful data that informs their evaluations and future improvement planning well.

Spotlight: Self-evaluation and improvement planning

Staff use a variety of methods to capture and evaluate data to inform practice. Pivotal to this is the use of their management information system. Through this, leaders capture and collate key information ranging from young people's information, details and reflection of every provision session, distance travelled, and feedback from young people through surveys. The data from the system enables leaders to put effective evaluative reports together. The ability to track and monitor individual young people through the service ensures that staff can amend individual support or provision to best suit the needs of young people.

YMCA Swansea have a thorough induction process for staff, including for key areas such as safeguarding. Staff are able to participate in a good range of worthwhile professional learning opportunities. YMCA Swansea make good use of being an Agored Cymru approved centre, allowing them to train and develop their own staff. They also provide training to other organisations in key areas such as LGBTQ+ and Young Carers, contributing to the development of the wider workforce in Swansea and beyond.

There are appropriate supervision processes in place to support staff with performance management, identifying training needs, and to support their wellbeing. Staff participate consistently in group reflective practice sessions. These sessions are used to share good practice, support well-being, provide professional learning opportunities, and are solution-focused on individual young people. These sessions are part of the service's overall evaluation processes, and the learning outcomes have led to positive changes, for example with the development of a new code of conduct for young people to deal with behaviour that challenges.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff make good use of safeguarding software to log and monitor issues and are clear about safeguarding procedures, such as when to raise and report concerns. As a result, the provision effectively provides an environment in which young people feel safe and relaxed.

YMCA Swansea has played a pivotal role in a multi-agency contextual safeguarding project (Contextual, Missing, Exploited, and Trafficked- CMET). Within this group YMCA Swansea is recognised for their expertise on working with young people with protected characteristics and have trained partners, including the police on LGBTQ+ matters which has influenced CMET's approach to these issues.

Overall, due to the clarity of leaders' vision, robust evaluation processes, and strong emphasis on young peoples' voices, YMCA Swansea is a highly collaborative, reflective and forward-looking organisation. Through well-targeted professional learning, proactive use of data, and an embedded safeguarding culture, the service continues to evolve and improve to meet the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the young people and staff questionnaires and consider the views of young people, staff, and partners where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal youth officer/chief executive, board of trustees, senior and middle managers, individual youth work staff, and volunteers to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet young people to discuss their provision, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of youth work sessions, including youth clubs, and school-based activities across the provision, where appropriate
- observe and speak to young people during provision sessions
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on the participation and outcomes of young people, staff meeting records, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of young people, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most young people...*' or '*very few young people...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).

© Crown Copyright 2025: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 05/06/2025