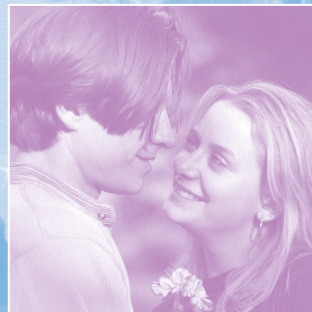


## More About Caledonia Youth

Today Caledonia Youth operates branches in Edinburgh (head office and serving Lothian), Falkirk (serving Forth Valley) and Aberdeen (serving Grampian), with outreach work taking us to many other parts of Scotland.

For more information about our work and briefings on a wide range of issues contact

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## A MANIFESTO

FOR THE RELATIONSHIPS AND  
SEXUAL WELLBEING OF  
OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS



## LOOKING AT THE BIGGER PICTURE

At Caledonia Youth we have offered a comprehensive relationships and sexual health service in Scotland for young people under 25, particularly teenagers, for fast approaching 40 years, covering specialist clinical, counselling, education and training provision.

During this period and particularly in recent years, the charity has played a major role in helping to shape policy. Our Chief Executive, Hawys Kilday, was called upon to provide input to Respect & Responsibility, the Scottish Executive's national sexual health and relationships strategy published in January 2005. Today, Hawys continues to sit on the national sexual health advisory group.

The Scottish Parliament and Executive have demonstrated their commitment to the poor sexual health of the nation through the publication of Respect & Responsibility. Yet we find the emphasis it has placed on frontline clinical services has meant that, in practice, any money tied to the Strategy has been allocated to Genitourinary medicine (GUM) and clinical family planning services.

Although there is a real need for clinical services, the wider issue remains much more than providing free condoms, contraceptive advice and the improvement of testing services. Much more emphasis has to be placed on relationships, feelings, negotiation skills and self esteem, with a focus on preventative measures delivered through a variety of education, training and counselling methods.

Neither should poor sexual health be viewed in isolation. This is a problem inextricably linked with attitudes to personal relationships, coupled with many other societal issues that exist today. We need to recognise and deal with the causes, such as the influence of drug and alcohol misuse, coercion, bullying and violence.

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Our own experiences over the years have constantly shown us that clinical provision alone does not impact on the continuing high rates of poor sexual health. There has been a particularly high demand for our specialist education and counselling services.

Due to limited resources, we have concentrated our efforts more recently on developing and delivering innovative practices for

vulnerable, priority groups who are most at risk of relationship issues and sexual ill health. These are young people with behavioural and emotional problems, learning difficulties, special needs, young offenders, those excluded from school, in care or those from areas of socio-economic deprivation and high rates of teenage pregnancy. For many reasons they find it difficult or even impossible to access mainstream, statutory services provided by local authorities and regional health boards.

We believe however, that all young people should be given the opportunity to take advantage of the tried and tested services that exist today. In order to achieve this, we require equitable access to improved, expanded relationship and sexual health services that are nationally funded - in particular education and counselling services across Scotland.

## TAKING A HOLISTIC APPROACH

In order to make a difference and tackle head on the very fact that sexual health in Scotland is undeniably poor, service providers must also work together to offer consistent services that take a holistic approach. This will help maximise our combined impact and ensure we make a real difference to the communities we serve.

We all clearly recognise that sexual health in Scotland is a problem that needs to be addressed now in order to reverse concerning trends that rank the country as having the highest rates of unplanned teenage pregnancies in Western Europe and a high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Caledonia Youth continually seeks to raise public awareness of these issues through a variety of means, including work with partner organisations, our own stakeholders, the media and, now, through the publication of this manifesto.

We set out policy aims in this manifesto, which we believe can help towards building a safer, happier, healthier society.



## A VISION FOR A BETTER START IN LIFE

Our vision is realistic and we believe wholly achievable. It is about trying to give our future generations the best possible start in adult life. So with prevention foremost in our minds, we put to you...

### Everyone has the right to...

- make informed, responsible choices about their personal and sexual relationships, so that the expression of both their sexuality and feelings are positive experiences.
- enjoy positive sexual relationships free of coercion, discrimination and violence.
- access a choice of free, confidential and non-judgemental relationship and sexual health education, counselling and clinical services, regardless of where they live.

### Everyone has the right to make informed, responsible choices about their personal and sexual relationships, so that the expression of both their sexuality and feelings are positive experiences.

Everyone is entitled to receive adequate and appropriate education, allowing them to become more emotionally intelligent by giving them the skills that will enable them to engage in mutually respectful, happy and healthy relationships.

More extensive sexual health education is needed to help communicate all the facts, as sexual myths show no sign of abating particularly amongst our teenage population. There are still far too many young people not getting access to education early enough. With prevention foremost in our minds, advice is needed before they become sexually active, so that they are far better prepared to make informed decisions, avoid taking risks and are aware of the option to put off having sex until a later age.

From our own experiences at Caledonia Youth, we constantly find that bespoke, age-appropriate relationship and sexual health education provides a platform that lets us engage more with young people. Building up a rapport allows them to open up much more, with discussions that help them realise their potential in terms of personal relationships, understanding their sexuality, social integration, gender roles and opportunities in adult life, while developing responsibility for their own behaviour.

As a fundamental element of prevention, we believe such progressive

education is central to achieving a society that is more positive and more responsible for its actions.

Much more resource needs to be channelled into education to help make a difference.

### Everyone has the right to enjoy positive sexual relationships free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

One of our roles as a service provider is to try and eradicate irresponsible sexual and social behaviour, avoiding coercion and feelings of regret or disrespect. In doing so, it is essential to embrace social and moral issues, as well as deal with emotional and attitudinal problems.

We achieve this through our education and counselling sessions, where we spend a great deal of time listening to the concerns of young people and talking about the full spectrum of issues including coercion and bullying, alcohol and drugs, relationship issues and negotiation skills. Counselling processes help encourage mutually respectful relationships by considering personal circumstances and exploring the options that are available to help people reach a decision that feels appropriate to them.

Yet we know there is a significant shortage of counselling services especially for young people throughout Scotland. Our own are in great demand. Similarly, the uptake of our education sessions clearly highlights the need for an expanded service provision.

While better testing methods could account for the apparent increase in Chlamydia as more people come forward for examination, concurrent rises in other STIs point more towards complacency and an increase in risk taking sexual behaviour often affected by the influence of drugs and alcohol consumption. Coercion and unprotected sex are major issues that we find ourselves facing with young people every day.

Our is a society continually bombarded by sexual imagery and one in which young people face confusing, mixed messages about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Both physical and behavioural influences are seen on television in everything from soaps to soft drink commercials and the music industry often flaunts sexual imagery to help achieve the next big hit single. To compound the problem, many also find themselves succumbing to peer pressure, often fuelled by such persuasive powers.



A fundamental problem is that sexual relationships are often seen as taboo and tend to be dealt with poorly by society today. Far too often the debate dwells on the extreme, with negative sexual behaviour the focus for much media commentary. Unfortunately, it just serves to reinforce the social stigma surrounding sex and sensationalises sexual health issues, often demonising young people and service providers at the same time.

We find that adopting a holistic model of relationship and sexual health education helps young people make more positive and informed lifestyle choices, improving self esteem and, most importantly, steering them away from a pathway that all too often can lead to chaotic, destructive behaviour.

**Everyone has the right to access a choice of free, confidential and non-judgemental relationship and sexual health education, counselling and clinical services, regardless of where they live.**

In order to make a major impact on the long term sexual health of the nation, we need to ensure that good education, counselling and clinical services are accessible, whether in an urban or rural environment.

To facilitate this process at Caledonia Youth, we have always attempted to provide a holistic model across three tiers of service – clinical, counselling and education – allowing people easy access to a range of services depending on their needs. Our holistic model focuses on areas covering self-esteem and assertiveness, with particular emphasis on emotions, relationships and negotiation skills, alongside biological aspects such as STIs, testing, pregnancy and the need for contraception.

Working within such a structure, staff can often identify an issue that requires additional support from a colleague. This may be clinical staff recognising the need for a referral to a counsellor or education worker, or through an education session, the need for clinical input, such as an STI test.

Our own services, which are respectful, confidential and non-judgemental, are also tailored to ensure that they are sympathetic to geographical and demographic circumstances.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Thankfully the poor sexual health of the nation is by no means unavoidable. Our European counterparts have achieved great success in changing behaviours thanks to education programmes introduced at an early age and backed by comprehensive, widely available clinical and counselling services. Why should we be any different?

We believe that if policy makers are truly serious about improving the sexual health of the nation, then these areas require their urgent attention. We need their commitment to help us achieve a society free from the image of having one of the poorest sexual health records in Europe.

Our own experiences show us that, when given all the facts, young people are much more likely to wait until they are older before starting a sexual relationship or act responsibly when they do. Surely this is something to which we all aspire?

Let us all strive to achieve a more positive outcome for the relationships and sexual wellbeing of our young people here in Scotland. Together we can really make a difference.

