

Foreword

More than 60 per cent of the population of the Commonwealth is aged under 30, and young people's unique needs and capabilities, and the importance of their role in national development, have been the central premise of the Commonwealth Youth Programme for over four decades. This is also enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, which recognises 'the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures'.

Youth workers have an essential, but often under-recognised and under-resourced, role in engaging and supporting young people to be these positive and productive citizens who contribute to national peace and prosperity.

With *Youth Work in the Commonwealth: A Growth Profession*, we establish a foundation for discussion, dialogue and policy initiatives to ensure that young people receive the best professional youth work services from practitioners. It sets out key concepts and approaches in professionalising youth work, and assesses the extent of recognition of the profession in 35 member states in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Americas, Europe and the Pacific.

This study is encouraging in its demonstration of significant steps taken in the recognition of the profession in some member states. However, in some contexts, advances in policy statements are often still to be translated to practice, and, in others, existing good practice could be amplified and replicated through distinct policies.

The Commonwealth has been committed to strengthening the professionalism of youth work since the 1970s through the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development Work. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) also helped establish the foundations of professional youth work by committing to support governments on the education and training of youth workers, facilitating the recognition of youth work by Public Service Commissions and through policy, partnering with youth worker associations in maintaining the ethical and quality standards of the profession, and enabling consultation between professional associations and governments in the shaping of youth work policy. In the recent past, the Diploma has been upgraded to a bachelor's degree by the University of the West Indies in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning. This intellectual property is being made universally available through an online Degree Consortium that aligns with the spirit of sharing and learning that is central to the Commonwealth's vision. Numerous other initiatives to professionalise

the sector, including support to strengthen both policy and practice, have been advanced by the Commonwealth.

We have also had the pleasure of working closely with the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations (CAYWA) in making this publication a reality. This close collaboration has been an encouraging sign of the collective strength of the emerging global entity that is CAYWA, and their shared interest in obtaining recognition for the profession of youth work across the Commonwealth. We applaud their commitment and pledge to continue to work towards the aspirations set by this work, with them.

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Message from the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations (CAYWA)

CAYWA welcomes the comprehensive and critical analysis of youth work in 35 Commonwealth member states undertaken by the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It is a powerful story about the challenges and opportunities for youth work and youth development across the Commonwealth ahead of the 14th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, 2017.

The baseline is set to benefit professional youth work across the Commonwealth, and tells a broader story about the benefits of youth work to young people and communities. The report provides rich evidence of advancements in the recognition of youth work, and of good practice, and calls for gathering comprehensive evidence of the benefits of building the profession and its relationship to building the personal agency of, and social connectedness in, young people, and youth work's broader benefits to building peaceful, productive and cohesive societies.

The report has a distinct focus on professionalisation of youth work that CAYWA applauds. Currently, CAYWA has 17 member organisations and a connection to a global network of 40 Youth Work Associations. We, as part of the National Youth Workers' Associations forming CAYWA have the pleasure to have contributed to the baseline report that will provide the necessary support for this movement to grow across the Commonwealth.

CAYWA, though in its infancy, has an active membership base that are looking for opportunities to strengthen the ability to learn from each other. CAYWA have adopted the Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice, which will provide guidance to establishing national associations. It is the ownership of a code of ethical practice that promotes a profession as having distinct boundaries in its practice and makes clear the underpinning principles and values. In the case of CAYWA that would be its commitment to the human rights of young people and young people being a youth worker's primary consideration.

It would be remiss of CAYWA members not to mention that the report also highlights the work that is still to be established. The need for Youth Policies in a number of countries, the importance of Youth Ministries, the promotion of youth work in legislation and/or a Youth Work Act in recognition of what youth work can achieve in relation to young people, is clearly highlighted. The report goes further to highlight which countries do not have a distinct budget line that focuses on young people and youth work as well as youth work training and education.

One of the more serious concerns that is raised in the report is the number of countries that have no vetting of youth workers, either paid or unpaid. Young people and children's safety is paramount, and ensuring that youth work provides safety for young people is the clear responsibility of Governments. Systems that check the criminal history and suitability of people that work with young people are an essential component of the youth work landscape that ensures integrity and community credibility.

Finally, CAYWA looks forward to continuing engagement with the Commonwealth so that we, together, progress many of the recommendations that aim to build the capacity of youth work in the Commonwealth. CAYWA wholeheartedly supports the premise that building the capacity of youth work will be an important 'game changer' in building greater equity and social justice outcomes for young people.