

DYRC – Inclusion, Diversity and Equality of Opportunity

Dungannon Youth Resource Centre is a full time funded EA Youth Centre based in the centre of Dungannon. It delivers programmes around mental health, safety and awareness, risk taking behaviour, physical health and sports, good relations which is relevant for the setting, because of the amount of newcomer children and young people in Dungannon. The majority of the membership would be newcomer children and young people, mainly from East Timor and other nationalities including Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, China and Africa.

The Royal School in Dungannon has a boarding unit and the relationship between the school and Dungannon YRC has been very positive and has been a good avenue to support young people who are away from their home in order to study by offering volunteering opportunities and additional support.

Core funding is through the Education Authority. It is a full-time centre, open 6 evenings a week. The core project entails a lot of work with newcomer children and young people, through the needs analysis undertaken with the Education Authority. However, in addition to this there is a specific project which is to develop good relations amongst newcomer young people, health and wellbeing and managing how they live in safety and stability. They have volunteer, drop-in and outreach programmes throughout the week interacting with a range of young people. Before COVID-19, numbers during a Friday evening drop-in could have exceeded 100 participants as a safe place to play sports, meet with their friends and relax after a week of school.

Originally, the young people from East Timor appeared to be extremely polite and well mannered, always thanking you for holding the door open etc. However over a period of time a slight change in some of their mannerisms has been noticed. The Centre has positive relationships with an older group of people from East Timor who recognise that their young people are becoming more 'Irish'. They seem to be adopting local Catholic stereotypes and negative attitudes towards Protestant young people. One example of this was during a cultural session learning about different backgrounds an East Timorese young person claimed they wanted to fight with the Protestants as this was a mindset of their friends and those around them.

An example of a challenge regarding inclusion is of a young female who had recently arrived from Portugal and her English was still understandably quite poor. She was encouraged to attend Dungannon Youth Resource Centre by her school. Other young people in the centre were welcoming but soon got quite fed up with the language barrier and the use of broken English, naturally excluding her from some of their games and conversations. Despite having a large membership of newcomer children and young people, particularly those from East Timor, a Portuguese speaking country, many of them have grown up in the area and therefore English would be their first language. Therefore, language barriers can exist between newcomer children and young people in addition to staff. It is unfair to constantly rely on those young people that can speak both languages to always translate conversations as they have come to the centre or programmes to participate as a young person themselves, not as a translator so you cannot burden them with this task all of the time. Staff persisted with communicating to this young person as best they could but were aware of not becoming the

only person that they felt they could talk to or be beside as they needed opportunities to talk to and befriend their peers.

They have experience working with children and young people from the Travelling Community, some of which are settled in the Dungannon area. On occasions, young people from the Travelling Community would receive verbal abuse and they would take offence and get violent. Staff would attempt to settle them and get them inside the youth centre to safety and build up a rapport and the young people would begin attending programmes much more regularly and then, suddenly they wouldn't attend for a long time despite being settled travellers. Perhaps something has happened within their family or community that requires them to be at home more often or parents are not allowing them out, which could be a cultural dynamic which can be a challenge to their inclusion.

Being aware of the diverse cultures, differences and traditions is important as it can help overcome challenges towards inclusion, diversity and equality of opportunity.

Dungannon YRC staff have stated that 'low level' racism occurs through segregation in the town with services providing for a certain community e.g. coffee shops and barbers. Newcomer young people that would attend Dungannon YRC would share stories of how they have been refused entry into certain bars and nightclubs in the area despite being over 18 years old. They would give examples of how groups of newcomer young people from East Timor were accused of being loud and disruptive and told to leave a local fast food chain despite being a well-mannered group. Staff would question if this would be the case for local indigenous young people. Another example of experiencing 'low level' racism occurred when a group of East Timor young people clapped at the end of a movie in the cinema and were told not to come back. Staff are often informed by newcomer young people of their experiences of racism and exclusion.

Another example of the inclusion and equality of opportunity challenges of newcomer young people is of one member of the youth club who was studying joinery and desperately needed to secure an apprenticeship to advance into the second year of the course. Despite searching and asking around he was rejected and had to repeat the year, in which he did as he was interested and keen in the field of joinery. When the time came round again to secure a placement as an apprentice, he was unable to find anyone willing to accept him which concluded in him dropping out of the course. These are significant challenges to the inclusion, diversity and equality of opportunity of newcomer children and young people. If this precedent was to continue throughout the lives of these young people, they would continue to experience exclusion and inequalities regarding opportunities such as employment.

Another challenge that newcomer children and young people experience that affects their inclusion, diversity and equality of opportunity is the additional responsibilities they have within their family dynamic. Some parents of newcomer children and young people will work shift patterns, late or even nightshifts meaning young people may have to look after their younger siblings by cooking for them, helping them with homework and other household responsibilities. This can affect a young person's ability to access opportunities around them such as youth provision, sports clubs or employment through a part time job due to the demands of attending school and then family responsibilities. Exclusion from social

opportunities such as sports clubs or youth provision can potentially have a negative effect on their personal, social and mental wellbeing.

One way in which Dungannon YRC engages with newcomer children and young people to overcome these challenges is through their sports hall and creating a safe, inclusive space where young people can play sports and participate in healthy living programmes. They have been able to take a group over to Manchester to watch a football match which was an incredible experience, one which those on the trip may never had the opportunity to experience. Despite not being able to join a sports team due to other responsibilities or fear of exclusion, the youth centre provides them with the opportunity to play a range of sports including football and basketball while making new friends. Staff are able to signpost young people towards sports clubs if they believe it is suitable and within their interests. On some occasions newcomer young people can be excluded due to their lack of knowledge or understanding of the area, highlighting the importance of informing them of services and opportunities for newcomer young people to get involved with. Dungannon YRC staff have also advocated on behalf of young people to local sports teams to encourage them to be more aware and welcoming towards newcomer people in the community.

Another way in which the centre engage with newcomer young people who are experiencing challenges regarding inclusion, diversity and equality of opportunity is by providing them with opportunities to volunteer within programmes and schemes throughout the year. This provides young people with opportunities to develop many different skills including teamwork, communication and confidence which they may be unable to develop through a part time job or extra-curricular activities due to other responsibilities. The volunteer programme also helps develop skills in areas such as timekeeping and administration which can be very helpful for young people when writing CVs and application forms.

In some instances, the aspirations of newcomer children and young people can be low and they may view education as a waste of time as they anticipate working in the local factories, perhaps as their parents have done. There is one example of a teacher contacting a staff member of Dungannon YRC to encourage a newcomer young person to sit their maths exam as despite being more than competent to pass the exam, the young person couldn't be bothered to, as they had planned to get a job in a factory once leaving school. The staff member was able to encourage and convince the young person to sit the exam, which they passed, allowing them to continue studying at the school. Although they still might choose to work in a factory at some point, at least they now have another option to continue studying and have more options available to them. This highlights the crucial role of the support from youth workers who have established positive relationships with local and newcomer children and young people to encourage them to make positive, informed decisions.