

# RAG/LAG Stakeholder Engagement Event

Ards & North Down, Lisburn &  
Castlereagh and Newry Mourne & Down

The Inclusion of Children and Young  
People with Disabilities

*Tuesday 20 October 2020*

*Via Zoom*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of the Stakeholder Participation Event that took place on Tuesday 20 October 2020 online via Zoom. The event was part of the Education Authority (EA) RAG participative processes and was directed by the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) and Local Advisory Groups (LAG) for Ards & North Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Newry Mourne & Down.

The event engaged eighty eight key stakeholders from across the statutory and voluntary youth sectors to consider ‘the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities. Participants had the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions through discussions in two workshops; to identify where, how and with whom the EA Youth Service should be working for children & young people with disabilities and how the youth service can take forward steps to support young people with disabilities’ increased participation.

Participants identified that some issues prioritised in the 2020 Regional Assessment of Need remained a priority, namely increased opportunity for participation and making better use of the outdoor learning environment for those with disabilities; however a number of new key issues came to the fore. This included providing “chill zones” for young people who need space to think and day time provision after school with the integration of buddies or siblings as peer leaders

Key recommendations on how the youth service could address these issues were identified, which included, taking forward the Welcoming Youth Strategy and further developing young person friendly online platforms such as Stay Connected along with some new areas for consideration. These included developing ongoing and effective communication with parents to ensure their children have every opportunity to participate, strengthening and broadening the range of partnership working to avoid duplication, as well as sharing best practice and providing mechanisms for young people with disabilities to have a voice and a meaningful stake in designing the services that are tasked with meeting their needs.

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Ards & North Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Newry Mourne & Down Local Advisory Groups (LAGs) facilitated a joint Stakeholder Engagement Event for the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) on the 'Inclusion of Children and Young People with Disabilities' on Tuesday 20 October 2020 online via Zoom. The event was the first of a series of events aimed at engaging key stakeholders at a local level, on themes/issues identified via the RAG and the RYDP.
- 1.1.2 Young people from the Youth Voice and Thematic Voice participative structures, who are members of the local LAGs, planned and organised the event inviting registered youth groups, partner organisations and members of the public to sign up and be part of the discussions.

## 1.2 Aims

- 1.1.3 To identify and address the barriers young people with disabilities experience and how they can feel included in their community.
- 1.1.4 To establish the views and opinions of other stakeholders who work to promote inclusion of young people with disabilities.

## 1.3 Objectives

- 1.3.1 To host a local event to increase the participation of young people and key stakeholders.
- 1.3.2 To engage key stakeholders in a range of group discussions, to identify the barriers to participation for young people with disabilities and ways to overcome these.
- 1.3.3 To develop recommendations on how youth services could best support children and young people with disabilities.
- 1.3.4 To produce a report on the event to inform RAG of themes for consideration for the dynamic Regional Development Plan.

## 2.1 Methodology

- 2.1.1 The Stakeholder Engagement Event was led by the Ards & North Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Newry, Mourne & Down Local Advisory Groups and included young people from across the three areas.
- 2.1.2 LAG members had the opportunity to input into the overall design and planning of the event when they met remotely in September 2020.
- 2.1.3 Youth Voice Groups supported the design and delivery of the evening including chairing workshops (breakout rooms) and producing footage of key note speakers to be featured during the event. (Appendix i).
- 2.1.4 A successful virtual Stakeholder event took place on Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. (Appendix ii)

## 2.2 Event Packs

- 2.2.1 To support engagement during the Stakeholder event, each participant was provided with an Event pack which included items that could be used during the session, along with some useful items for everyday life.
- 2.2.2 Each pack included;
  - EA Youth Service branded face covering
  - EA Youth Service branded hygiene key, to open and close doors safely
  - EA Youth Service branded storage case for hygiene items
  - Individual sanitising wipes
  - EA Youth Service branded lanyard
  - Engagement cards
- 2.2.3 Participants who were unable to receive the packs by post, had materials emailed for printing at home. This allowed for full engagement during the feedback and evaluation elements of the event. (Appendix iii)

## 2.3 Short Video

- 2.3.1 Two young people were supported by youth workers and the CADi Team to create a short video which gave the event participants an insight into the barriers experienced by young people with disabilities and what they saw as the benefits of youth service involvement. This was used as a catalyst for discussion.

## 2.4 Survey Monkey

- 2.4.1 Through the use of an online survey tool, participants were sent a link following the event to allow them to personally reflect on the impact of the event and provide an evaluation. The results were then analysed by the Event Team and are summarised in this report. (Appendix iv)

## 2.5 Discussion Groups

- 2.5.1 Participants were divided into seven breakout rooms to participate in two discussion based workshops.
- 2.5.2 Workshop 1 asked the groups to discuss and answer the following three questions;
- **Where** should the youth service be working to support the needs of children and young people with disabilities?
  - **How** should the youth service be working to support the needs of children and young people with disabilities?
  - **Who** should the youth service be working with to support the needs of children and young people with disabilities?
- 2.5.3 Workshop 2 asked the groups to discuss the next steps for the youth service and how it could better support young people with disabilities.
- 2.5.4 Each session lasted twenty minutes and was facilitated by a young person supported by a youth worker to record and feedback to the whole group.

## 2.6 Online Platform

- 2.6.1 During the initial planning stages, it was felt that the event should operate using an online platform to reduce the COVID risk attached with a large group of participants meeting in a face to face setting. It also allowed the LAG to showcase the tools used by staff to engage young people during lockdown as part of the Stay Connected Service.
- 2.6.2 Zoom was the chosen platform based on it being widely available to participants and its ease of use.
- 2.6.3 The Zoom platform also allowed for both ISL and BSL Interpreters to be engaged to support any participants who required the service.

## 3 ATTENDANCE

### 3.1 Attendance

- 3.1.1 A total of 88 people attended the Ards & North Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Newry Mourne & Down Stakeholder Engagement Event from across a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations (Appendix v). There was representation from the Regional Advisory Group, members from the Department of Education, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations and the Education and Training Inspectorate, along with representatives from Schools, local Councils and Health and Social Care Trusts. EA staff both full time and part time were also in attendance.
- 3.1.2 Young people from across the statutory, voluntary and community youth work sectors were in attendance which made up the main constituent body of attendees at 57%.

### 3.2 Attendance Figures

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	49 (includes 14 LAG/Youth Council/Youth Facilitators)
Local Advisory Members	5 adults
Regional Advisory Members	2
Youth Work Staff, Volunteers	23 (16 EA staff and 7 voluntary sector staff)
Other e.g. PSNI, Schools	13

### 3.3 Satisfaction

- 3.3.1 93.3 % of participants involved in the Stakeholder Event rated the event very satisfactory or satisfactory.

#### 4.1 Analysis of evidence

- 4.1.1 The two breakout sessions provided participants with the opportunity to explore; where youth services should be working to support the needs of children and young people with disabilities, how they should be working with young people with disabilities and who should youth services be working with?
- 4.1.2 Discussions with key stakeholders identified that there is a place within youth services for exclusive targeted provision for young people with disabilities but participants felt that it needs to be complemented by a more integrated approach. This can be achieved by youth centres and youth projects adopting an inclusive ethos and being welcoming places for all young people regardless of ability. Having effective support processes in place such as a bespoke induction for young people is also crucial.
- 4.1.3 This must be supported by buildings that are accessible and have quieter spaces or 'chill zones' for young people who need space to think and be away from the hustle and bustle of a busy centre/project, or need a quieter space before they integrate into mainstream services.
- 4.1.4 It was suggested that youth work programmes delivered during the school day or after school would be beneficial to young people with disabilities, particularly if the programmes could include the integration of buddies or siblings as peer leaders.
- 4.1.5 Online remote engagement was discussed as an essential engagement mechanism for young people who cannot physically attend youth services as it allows young people to remain connected and have social interaction with peers.
- 4.1.6 The outdoor learning environment can also be an extremely positive place, where obstacles to participation for young people with disabilities can be overcome.
- 4.1.7 Participants discussed the link between the non-formal and formal education sector. It was felt that both mainstream and special schools are important links for youth service providers and could offer greater opportunities for awareness raising, recruitment of young people with disabilities and collaborative working.
- 4.1.8 Stakeholders recognised that whilst family support is catered for by a range of partner agencies, ongoing and effective communication with parents about what youth services can offer is also important. Parents may not be aware of youth provision available to young people or how youth services can best meet their child's needs. Having effective communications with parents therefore is vital to ensure everyone has equality of opportunity.



- 4.1.9 It was recognised that youth service staff need to have adequate training for working with young people with disabilities and require support to promote an inclusive environment. Having staff trained to be able to make reasonable adjustments for youth work delivery, along with skills that can promote acceptance and understanding of difference among members is important. This will ensure that young people with disabilities feel welcomed and comfortable that the provision on offer can meet their individual needs.
- 4.1.10 Participants expressed the need for youth services to work closely with a range of funding bodies to ensure provision is 'needs led' and targeted to those young people who can often slip through gaps in provision. This could involve working in partnership with organisations such as charities, community groups and sporting organisations to raise awareness of youth service programmes and ensure the needs of young people with disabilities are being met.
- 4.1.11 Throughout all the discussions there was a consensus that youth services should provide mechanisms for young people with disabilities to have a voice. It was recognised that this was important not only within society as a whole but also within local communities where language around disabilities can be challenged and diversity encouraged and promoted. Youth organisations, both voluntary and statutory have a key role to play in allowing the voice of young people with disabilities to be heard to influence government policy.
- 4.1.12 It was recognised that youth services had an important role to connect with other statutory services to support young people with disabilities and parents who are often isolated. This includes greater connections with Health Trusts, Schools and Further Education Colleges.
- 4.1.13 Stakeholders also felt that youth services should support mechanisms where previous members can be engaged with to help shape the service for the next generation of young people. This would allow youth services to see and measure the long term impacts of the service on children and young people, whilst also providing leadership pathways for young people with disabilities.
- 4.1.14 Finally, greater work with funding bodies is needed to make sure that adequate funding is in place to meet the identified needs of children and young people with disabilities and reduce gaps in provision and services.

## 5.1 Recommendations

- 5.1.1 To encourage and promote inclusivity within youth service provision, youth services should take forward the Welcoming Youth strategy to support organisations to review their environment and physical spaces and make them more welcoming for young people with disabilities. This should include the range of programmes available to young people with disabilities.
- 5.1.2 Youth services should further develop young person friendly platforms (social media/PR materials) to advertise and promote youth services that target and engage young people with disabilities and enhance the use of online platforms as one of the delivery mechanisms for youth service programmes.
- 5.1.3 Youth service providers need to ensure that effective processes to communicate with parents/guardians are in place to raise awareness of youth services opportunities and to ensure the needs of youth service members with disabilities are met.
- 5.1.4 Research should be undertaken to explore more effective partnership working with special schools and how youth workers in mainstream education can provide additional support to young people with disabilities.
- 5.1.5 More training is needed for youth service staff on working with young people with disabilities and promoting inclusive practice. Opportunities to share best practice across the statutory, voluntary and community sector would help develop inclusive youth work.
- 5.1.6 New partnerships across the statutory, voluntary and community sector should be explored along with the development of platforms to ensure young people with disabilities has a voice across all levels of society.
- 5.1.7 Youth services should support mechanisms where previous members can be engaged with to help shape the service for the next generation of young people. This would allow youth services to see and measure the long term impacts of the service on children and young people, whilst also providing leadership pathways for young people with disabilities.

## 5.2 Future considerations

- 5.2.1 The key themes identified through the stakeholder event should be considered further by the EA Information and Planning team and the Regional Advisory Group as they consider how best to respond to emerging needs.
- 5.2.2 The Local Advisory Group and Senior Youth Officers should take account of the recommendations to identify issues for ongoing area planning purposes and service delivery.
- 5.2.3 EA should consider the further development of the Stay Connected online service (available at [www.youthonline.org](http://www.youthonline.org)) to support young people with disabilities to engage in youth services

Index of Appendices: [list of evidence sources available on request]

- i Video input <https://www.facebook.com/111754163598655/videos/378347989960055/>
- ii Stakeholder Event Programme
- iii Engagement cards
- iv Survey monkey evaluation
- vi Attendance list
- vi Event script
- vii Photographs
- viii Participant evaluations

