

RAG/ LAG Stakeholder Engagement Event: The Inclusion of Young Parents

Wednesday 24 February 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a consultation led by the Senior youth Officers for Belfast and supported by North Belfast, East Belfast and South and West Belfast Local Advisory Groups (LAG) for key stakeholders, including young people, on the topic of the Inclusion of Young Parents in Youth Services. The event which was hosted virtually via Zoom engaged with over 88 key stakeholders and addressed some of the key challenges for young parents in relation to their inclusion in youth services. It also provided the opportunity to make recommendations about how Youth Service can support young parents.

The stakeholders who participated in the event and those who completed a survey prior to the event highlighted many issues that they feel impacted on their ability to access appropriate services. Several of the issues noted were in relation to lack of information and advice in relation to available youth provision, lack of awareness on what youth service could offer young parents.

Others clearly indicated the difficulties with childcare, particularly in the evening when most youth provision was on offer. Lack of transport further impacted on access to services.

Key recommendations on how Youth Service could address young parent's inclusion in youth services barriers to learning include day time sessions to reflect the caring responsibilities of young parents, flexibility (around the sessions, and maybe on attendance, given that the young people also have dependants). Mental health was rated highest priority from survey. It was recommended that this should be built into programmes delivered. Programmes around finance and benefits were highlighted as being a practical support that youth service could offer. Additionally young people requested enhanced awareness of other partner organisations who can offer a local service to include support with childcare.

1.1 Aim of the Event

- 1.1.1 Increased participation of children and young people and other Youth Service Stakeholders on key themes
- 1.1.2 The purpose of the event is to establish the views and opinions of young people and key stakeholders on the needs of young parents and the barriers that impact them accessing Youth Services.
- 1.1.3 To discuss the issues identified by young people and other stakeholders and outline how these can be addressed by Youth Services
- 1.1.4 Engagement on the development of the key themes for the Regional Assessment of Need and the Regional Youth Development Plan 2020-2023

1.2 Why the theme 'Inclusion of Young Parents?'

- 1.2.1 Whilst the majority of young people in Northern Ireland have access to youth services, young parents have been identified as a group who have many barriers which impact on their ability to access this service.
- 1.2.2 Youth Work is can play an important role by supporting young parents to access services, increase opportunities and reduce feelings of isolation from peers.
- 1.2.3 Priorities for Youth, DE's policy document placed a greater emphasis on the needs of young people to increase their life chances in areas such as future employment and training opportunities.

2.1 Survey

2.1.1 A survey was circulated to youth groups regionally. This was targeted at young parents and sought to gain information about the following:

- Issues facing young parents
- Sources of support available
- Sources of support accessed
- Engagement in Youth Services and barriers impacting this
- Programmes of support that Youth Service could offer

2.2 Activities

2.2.1 The session was facilitated via Zoom. It was very youth led with 2 young parents hosting the event.

2.2.2 Feedback from the survey was presented to all participants.

2.2.3 Videos from young parent's highlighted issues facing them, support available and barriers to accessing support.

2.2.4 Breakout rooms provided participants with the opportunity to explore the issues further and make recommendations for Youth service to take forward for consideration with Local and Regional Advisory Groups.

3**ATTENDANCE****3.1 Attendance Figures**

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	64
Local Advisory Members	4
Regional Advisory Members	2
Youth Work Staff	18

3.1.1 Invitations for the event were circulated to Regional and Local Advisory Group members and all core funded youth groups in the Belfast area. Further invitations were issued to young people engaged in schools based youth work programmes. A total of 88 people attended.

3.1.2 Representation from Youth Work Alliance, DE and PlayBoard was welcomed and all representatives participated throughout the session.

4.1 Which issues relating to young parents can be addressed by Youth Service?

The 76 responses in the survey prioritised mental health, money and finance, and employment as the top 3 issues having most impact on the lives of young parents. Further discussion within the workshops highlighted:

1. The need to promote self-care of young parents with a focus on mental health and the experience of Covid-19, within a range of programmes delivered by Youth Services.
2. The programme offered by Youth Services could be more visible and resourced with links to support services for young parents.
3. Programmes for young parents should reflect pregnancy through to birth with life skills training taking priority.
4. More opportunities for young fathers to engage with services.

Participants in workshops did highlight that young parents prefer to engage on a range of programmes offered to all members of youth service.

4.2 What can Youth Service put in place to support the needs of young parents?

From the survey 75% of respondents stated they had used or are currently using Youth Services. In terms of support available in their area or previously used they stated: Sure Start, Youth Services and Benefit Office as the top 3 most relevant supports. These topics were developed further in the workshops with the following points raised:

1. Accessibility was important with daytime opening to offer a degree of flexibility, as situations change rapidly with dependants.
2. Support is preferred with transport and the possibility of childcare during the time of any programme offered.
3. Socialisation is important and can come in the form of mixed groups to reduce isolation.
4. It was felt that promoting services for young fathers, one to one mentoring and multiagency services in the one location was key to encourage engagement.
5. Development of skills through training and accredited courses, to eventually assist with employability.

4.3 Who should the youth service be working with to enable them to support the needs of young people?

The survey highlighted that respondents would prioritise supports in parenting skills and childcare, budgeting skills and specific skills-based programmes. The workshops developed the supports further in the following key areas:

1. The voice of young parents is critical and needs to be heard by agencies providing services. Youth Service could promote a thematic voice for young parents which would be cross community in nature, linking the voices to the agencies that matter.
2. Youth Services can act as a hub with links that signpost to Sure Start, Mental Health Services, Family support hubs and childcare services.

It was highlighted that while rural communities have access to similar services, proximity is a real issue and partnerships tend to suffer as a result.

5 OUTCOMES

5.1 Recommendations

- Early interventions on the following topics were recommended:
 - The realities of teenage parenthood
 - Understanding healthy relationships
 - Sexual health programmes
 - Preparation for birth and beyond
 - Parenting skills and childcare
 - Housing advice
 - Benefits and financial support
- Day time session should be offered to reflect the caring responsibilities of young parents.
- There should be flexibility shown for young parents (around the sessions, and maybe on attendance, given that the young people also have dependants).
- Support for positive mental health was rated highest priority from the survey. This should be built into all young parents' programmes delivered.
- Young parents should be supported with programmes around finance and benefits.
- Young parents should be provided with information to raise awareness of other partner organisations who can offer a local service.
- Childcare facilities should be offered to allow young parents for respite and re-engagement with youth service.
- Opportunities and supports for young fathers that they can also bring their children too i.e. football clubs.
- Better promotion of youth services, highlighting relevant services and programmes on offer.

List of evidence sources available on request:

1. Programme Invite
2. Agenda
3. Presentations
4. Notes from workshop groups
5. Attendance Record
6. Evaluation Feedback

