

RAG/LAG Stakeholder Engagement Event

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

The Needs of Children and Young
People after Lockdown

Tuesday 22 June 2021

Via Zoom



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of the Stakeholder Participation Event that took place on Tuesday 22 June 2021 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 seventy-four key stakeholders from across the statutory and voluntary youth work sectors to consider 'the needs of children and young people after lockdown.' Participants had the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions through participation in a one of five creative workshops using the mediums of poetry, songwriting, vlogging, creative art and pottery. These workshops provided a new approach to stakeholder events and each workshop not only generated discussions on the chosen theme but produced a piece of artwork at the end.

The impact of lockdown on young people has had both a positive and negative effect on young people. A clear message from key stakeholders was that young people need, over the forthcoming months, to be offered a range of social experiences that are fun and attractive. Having missed out on key life events for example formals, concerts and travelling, young people need to have increased opportunities to build 'new memories' of their teenage years which include the development of existing friendships and/or the opportunity to create new friendships. Young people identified that they require support and guidance to make this happen. This is particularly in areas such as confidence, communication, motivation and working with others. Mental health remains a priority issue for young people and support through the embedding of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework across the service will ensure all young people are supported in this area and have access to relevant services.

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 Needs of Children and Young People after Lockdown' on Tuesday 22 June 2021 online via Zoom. The event was the first of a series of planned events for 2021-22 aimed at engaging key stakeholders at a local level on themes/issues identified by the RAG.
- 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

- 1.2.1 To establish the views and opinions of young people and key stakeholders on the needs of children and young people after lockdown across Northern Ireland.
- 1.2.2 To identify how Youth Services can best respond to the identified needs.

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 interactive and creative workshops, to identify the needs of young people after lockdown.
- 1.3.3 To develop recommendations on how Youth Services could best support children and young people after lockdown.
- 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 plus wider afield.
- 2.1.2 LAG members had the opportunity to input into the overall design and planning of the event when they met remotely in March & May 2021.
- 2.1.3 Members of Youth Voice supported the design and delivery of the evening including introducing speakers & workshops and selecting examples of creative ways to express feelings experienced during lockdown which were featured during the event. Featured pieces included Keeping you Alive by Hussain Manawer; This Too shall Pass by Mike Love; Six Feet Apart by Alec Benjamin.
- 2.1.4 The guest speaker Inez Murray spoke about her motivation and role in establishing the Crisis Café in Newry and offered an inspirational talk on how others can recover and regain confidence and hope in their future.
- 2.1.5 Five creative and performing artists facilitated activities using clay, paint, poetry, song writing and vlogging to demonstrate ways young people can express their thoughts and feelings emerging from lockdown.

2.2 Event Packs

- 2.2.1 To support engagement during the Stakeholder event, each participant was provided with a 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;
 - Just Breathe Journal designed by the Lisburn & Castlereagh Youth Voice
 - EA Youth Service branded note pad with pen
 - Clay and equipment to model it
 - 3 chocolate bars
 - Emotional well-being card pack
 - Be Brave book for teenagers
- 2.2.3 Participants had these delivered by hand to their youth project or posted which allowed for full engagement during the practical workshops.

2.3 Creative Workshops

2.3.1 Participants were divided into breakout rooms to participate in five creative and practical workshops to serve as a starting point to be creative as they journey together out from this crisis.

2.3.2 Discussions were focused on expressing:

- The young people's feelings coming out of lockdown
- Identifying ways that youth services can support them going forward.

2.3.3 The concurrent sessions lasted fifty minutes and were facilitated by a professional artist, supported by a youth worker to record discussions. The facilitators fed back to the whole group and demonstrated the piece of art that was jointly created.

2.4 Online Platform

2.4.1 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.

2.4.2 Zoom was the chosen platform based on it being widely available to participants and its ease of use.

3 ATTENDANCE

3.1 Attendance

- 3.1.1 A total of 74 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 i). There was representation from the Regional Advisory Group, members from the Department of Education, Regional & Local Voluntary Youth Organisations, Gwynedd Youth Service, Bangor, Wales, along with representatives from Schools, local Councils and the PSNI. 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 half of attendees at 50%.

3.2 Attendance Figures

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	35 (includes 4 LAG/Youth Council/ Youth Facilitators)
Local Advisory Members	3 adults
Regional Advisory Members	2 adults
Youth Work Staff, Volunteers	25 (8 EA staff and 17 voluntary sector /other staff)
Other e.g. PSNI, Schools	9

3.3 Satisfaction

- 3.3.1 95% of participants involved in the Stakeholder Event stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the event.

4.1 Analysis of evidence

- 4.1.1 The five creative workshops delivered; songwriting, pottery, creative art, vlogging and poetry provided a different platform style for key stakeholders to discuss the needs of young people after lockdown and explore how Youth Services could best support young people moving forward.
- 4.1.2 Through the different mediums it was clear that participants viewed lockdown in both a positive and negative light. The songwriting workshop paid particular focus on how lockdown impacted both young people and adults in a positive way by allowing them to reflect on the importance of living for 'today' whilst also creating time to focus on 'self' and looking after those that were important to them. Others commented that lockdown also had a negative effect, for example within the pottery workshop participants highlighted that there was also a sense of fear – fear of passing on the virus to loved ones and particularly as people begin to move about their daily lives fear in larger crowds of people.
- 4.1.3 It was recognised that the impact of lockdown on young people was significant particularly in relation to young people missing out on key social opportunities for example school formals, travelling, attending concerts and 'making lasting memories' of the teenage years. Some also reported that it had had an impact on their career development as they could not go on work placements during this time.
- 4.1.4 One of the major needs of young people identified by stakeholders across all of the creative workshops was the need to build friendships again and have space to meet with friends. Young people and adults felt that young people needed to 'be young people again' and have the freedom to physically meet with friends, something they had undoubtedly missed out on over lockdown.
- 4.1.5 Whilst the need to meet with friends was a priority, feedback from the poetry and pottery workshops highlighted that there was also a need for young people to be supported to redevelop their social skills as these had been significantly impacted by lockdown. This included supporting young people to rebuild their confidence to be comfortable with other people as some reported that there was now for some a nervousness when talking in front of a group of people.

- 4.1.6 There was also recognition that young people's mental health was still a major concern and further support for young people is required in this area. Some stakeholders also noted that some family situations had been impacted by COVID e.g. parents being out of work and this also needed to be considered.
- 4.1.7 Key stakeholders across the five creative workshops put forward a range of ideas and suggestions as to how Youth Services could best support young people after lockdown. Linked to the identified needs, key stakeholders reported that Youth Services needed to create opportunities for young people to meet with their peers. These opportunities needed to include spaces where young people could relax without the stressors of school, exams etc.
- 4.1.8 There was also the suggestion that Youth Services should provide a range of activities that would support this type of environment. For example, day trips, beach parties, BBQ's and residentials, activities that would motivate young people to get involved as some reported that for some young people they had simply become stuck in a rut.
- 4.1.9 Activities that promote young people's creativity was also suggested as a positive way of supporting young people after lockdown. For example, the vlogging workshop identified that social media can be a very effective platform to promote positive mental health whilst also creating a space for young people to voice their views and opinions.
- 4.1.10 It was also suggested that Youth Services should provide opportunities for young people to get out of their own areas. Travel has been limited over the past eighteen months due to COVID-19 restrictions. Travelling opportunities provided by Youth Services host a range of benefits for young people, particularly with older young people and can help with supporting young people to reconnect along with broadening their horizons.
- 4.1.11 There was also an emphasis from stakeholders that programmes for teenagers needed to be more flexible. For example, they needed to be open later in the evenings or designated safe spaces for older teenagers created. One suggestion to do this was through more positive use of outdoor spaces.

5.1 Recommendations

- 5.1.1 The impact of lockdown has both positive and negative elements for young people. The positive aspects should be shared and celebrated and support from Youth Services is needed to address some of the negative impacts on young people.
- 5.1.2 Over the next few months, Youth Services should be creating a range of social experiences that are fun and attractive to young people. These experiences will support the creation of fun and lasting memories for young people as they move through adolescence into adulthood.
- 5.1.3 There is a need to also create spaces for young people to build on existing friendships along with creating new friendships. This can be done at either a local or regional level, or by creating opportunities to bring young people from different communities/backgrounds together to increase their contacts with peers from different areas.
- 5.1.4 Through all these experiences young people should have increased opportunities to develop key social skills such as communication, confidence, motivation and working with others.
- 5.1.5 Youth services have a key role to play in the continued support and interventions for young people in the area of positive mental health. The embedding of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework will support this work across all levels of Youth Services.
- 5.1.6 The use of creative methodologies within Youth Services is an important platform from which to support young people on a range of issues.
- 5.1.7 Opportunities for travel should recommence across Youth Services once it is permitted to do so, due to the added value and benefits the travel experience has for young people.
- 5.1.8 Spaces for teenagers within Youth Services need to be kept under review to make sure that it is meeting the needs of older teenagers. Enhanced use of outdoor spaces may support this work.

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.

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

Appendix i Attendance list

Appendix ii Event script

Appendix iii Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x61om5Y4-0o>

Appendix iv Songs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8OVy33V_OI

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxMaHi91RkE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBET-22qits>

<https://youtu.be/BoA8xkiuts0>

Appendix v Photographs

Appendix vi Participant evaluations

