

RAG/LAG Stakeholder Engagement Event

Northern Locality

(Derry & Strabane, Causeway Coast & Glens,
Mid & East Antrim, Antrim & Newtownabbey)

The Needs of Children and Young People affected by the Digital Divide

Thursday 30 September 2021

*Derry Youth Office, Strabane Youth Resource Centre, Shantallow Youth Centre,
Limavady Youth Resource Centre, Glengormley Youth Resource Centre,
Ballykeel Youth Resource Centre, Sunlea Youth Centre, Ballycastle Youth Centre,
Carrickfergus YMCA, Larne YMCA, Pilot's Row Youth Centre, Rosemount Youth Centre,
and online via Zoom*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of the Stakeholder Participation Event that took place on Thursday 30th September 2021, the event was presented via Zoom to participants in a range of satellite venues across the locality in order to comply with COVID restrictions, those who couldn't attend a venue were able to participate via Zoom breakout rooms. The event was part of the Education Authority (EA) RAG participative processes and was led by the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) and Local Advisory Groups (LAG) for Derry and Strabane, Causeway Coast and Glens, Mid and East Antrim, and Antrim and Newtownabbey.

The event engaged 116 key stakeholders from across the statutory and voluntary youth sectors to consider 'The Needs of Children and Young People affected by the Digital Divide'.

During the event participants interacted with a live broadcast from Broughshane Youth Centre and keynote presentation by Anja Nielsen from UNICEF UK and used this to help stimulate discussion and develop actions.

Young people and adults agreed that the impact of the Digital Divide creates inequality issues which need addressed urgently and came up with practical recommendations that could be made at youth group level right through to RAG. Key sections were for RAG to set priorities around access to online services and devices to enable young people to participate in statutory education and young people have indicated that based on previous stakeholder engagements they are keen to see tangible outworking of their identified recommendations within an appropriate timeframe. Local Youth Services to act on providing digital bases where young people can supplement their home access, including device banks and access to printers and Wi-Fi, along with virtual links with other youth groups. Youth groups to be proactive in raising awareness of the impact of the Digital Divide on young people's education and social interactions.

1.1 Local Advisory Group

1.1.1 The event was supported by four Local Advisory Groups (Mid & East Antrim, Antrim & Newtownabbey, Causeway Coast and Glens, Derry and Strabane) which are made up of a range of representatives from the statutory, community and voluntary sector, including young people.

1.2 Aims

1.2.1 To engage with young people and other Youth Service stakeholders to identify the Digital Divide in their area.

1.2.2 To discuss and identify actions that will help address the impact of the Digital Divide.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 To host an event across eleven locality hubs as well as online to increase the participation of young people and key stakeholders.

1.3.2 To provide opportunities for RAG members, LAG members and key stakeholders to identify and discuss the Digital Divide and its impact on the needs of young people.

1.3.3 To develop recommendations on how youth services could lessen the impact of the Digital Divide at a local, council area and regional level.

2.1 Methodology

- 2.1.1 The event was hosted and facilitated via Zoom and in 12 hubs who linked to the broadcast via Zoom. This was one more than planned.
- 2.1.2 The broadcast was co-hosted by Jayden Elliott a young person from Larne YMCA, the broadcast set the scene and provided live feedback from the remote discussion groups.
- 2.1.3 The keynote address by Anja Nielsen from UNICEF UK stimulated discussion for the first workshop which aimed to identify how the Digital Divide manifests itself in different areas and the impact it has. The discussion workshop took place in each hub and in virtual breakout rooms. Anja was available to visit each discussion room virtually to assist.
- 2.1.4 Feedback from each workshop group was collated via Microsoft Forms and presented to all groups via the zoom broadcast.
- 2.1.5 The second workshop, using the same breakout format, then looked at possible actions to address the issues identified from the first workshop.
- 2.1.6 Feedback was again collated via Microsoft Forms and presented to all in a plenary session via Zoom.

3.1 Attendance

- 3.1.1 A total of 116 people participated in the event.
- 3.1.2 Participants in attendance included young people and youth workers from Local EA and Voluntary Youth Service, including Ballycastle Youth Centre, Education Authority FLARE Service, Portrush Youth Centre, Sunlea Youth Centre, Shantallow Youth Club, Sunlea Youth Centre, Limavady Youth Resource Centre, Strabane Youth Resource Centre, Glengormley Youth Resource Centre, Pilots Row Youth Centre, Rosemount Youth Centre, Pennyburn Youth Club, Lenamore Youth Centre, Waterside Youth Centre, Causeway Rural Project, Glens Rural Project, St Mary's Youth Club, Carrickfergus YMCA and Larne YMCA.
- 3.1.3 Other key stakeholders included representatives from YEAR project
- 3.1.4 Representation from RAG included Department of Education personnel.

3.2 Attendance Figures

| Attendance Group | Number |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Young People | 86 |
| Local Advisory Members | 6 |
| Regional Advisory Members | 3 |
| Youth Workers/Officers | 21 |

3.3 Satisfaction

- 3.3.1 Over 98% of evaluations stated that the event was very satisfactory or satisfactory.

This is an outline of the feedback from the individual workshops.

4.1 Workshop 1: Identify the Digital Divide in your area regarding, Affordability, Connectivity, Skills and Support, Safe online environment.

1. Affordability

- 4.1.1 Devices are too expensive for most young people to afford themselves, so are reliant on parents which can be a burden especially for larger families.
- 4.1.2 Basic internet is affordable but to get a good connection, especially with multiple devices accessing at the same time requires a more expensive plan.
- 4.1.3 Lack of online access can lead to significant stress especially when it relates to deadlines with schoolwork.
- 4.1.4 Rural areas have added expense in accessing internet due to lack of options.
- 4.1.5 Access to internet should be a right.
- 4.1.6 Mobile data can be expensive.

2. Connectivity

- 4.1.7 Internet access is not fast enough in many areas when multiple devices are connected at the same time.
- 4.1.8 Rural areas experience higher issues with speed and weather can affect some internet connections.
- 4.1.9 Different times of day have higher contention meaning speeds can drop, especially in the evenings.
- 4.1.10 Lack of connectivity can lead to feelings of isolation, especially in rural areas and during lockdowns. This has a negative impact on mental wellbeing.
- 4.1.11 Older devices may not be able to access higher speeds.
- 4.1.12 Mobile data connections can be poor in rural areas.

3. Skills and Support

- 4.1.13 Not all people have the skills to access latest online systems.
- 4.1.14 Most young people feel they have the skills to use latest devices and apps but may not have the devices to do it on.
- 4.1.15 Awareness of privacy and scamming is needed.

4.1.16 Young people may not know how to set up some devices and internet connections so may need support with this. Once set up they feel they have the skills to use the devices.

4.1.17 Issues with uploading to Google Classroom, teachers are unable to help remotely so reliant on parents' support.

4.1.18 ICT technicians not available to pupils for support when at home.

4.1.19 Not all pupils/parents are ICT proficient so struggled with new digital aspect of schooling.

4.1.20 Young people feel sorry for older generation who may be trying to upload documents to government sites.

4. Safe online environment

4.1.21 Many young people would seek support from youth workers, parents, teachers, and police if something happens.

4.1.22 Some feel they wouldn't tell an adult in school about online safety issues as they wouldn't do anything about it.

4.1.23 Young People feel that online safety is not taught enough.

4.1.24 Young people outlined that they don't click on things we don't know and don't use apps we're not sure of.

4.2 Workshop 2: Agree 3 priorities for RAG, Local Youth Service, and your Youth Centre/Project

4.2.1 Groups discussed priorities for the RAG to set for all Youth Services, an action for their Local Area Youth Service to complete in their council area and an action that could be completed by their youth group.

4.2.2 Priorities suggested for the RAG were:

4.2.2.1 Small Grants scheme to enable youth groups to provide devices for young people affected by the digital divide.

4.2.2.2 Wi-Fi in all Youth Centres, same services available in all centres regardless of rural or urban.

4.2.2.3 Explore provision of free/subsidised home internet access to allow young people to access statutory education and meet requirements on submission of schoolwork, along the lines of Free School Meals and Uniform Grants.

- 4.2.2.4 A safe app for young people to chat in a safe environment which is properly monitored.
- 4.2.2.5 Better use of social media to engage with young people.
- 4.2.2.6 Training on Internet Safety.
- 4.2.2.7 All Youth Centres to provide areas for homework and help with homework and submitting it online.
- 4.2.3 Actions suggested for Local Area Youth Service were:
 - 4.2.3.1 Virtual links with other youth centres
 - 4.2.3.2 Ensure young people's voices are heard around affordability and support for families and young people affected by the digital divide.
 - 4.2.3.3 More computers and devices in Youth Centres.
 - 4.2.3.4 Stronger Wi-Fi in youth centres, freely available to all young people.
Computer and Internet bank to allow young people to borrow equipment and access.
 - 4.2.3.5 Youth Service online portal.
 - 4.2.3.6 Source training for young people and parents to develop skills to access internet and be aware of dangers.
 - 4.2.3.7 Area Youth Workers, especially in rural areas to have dongles to allow for Wi-Fi access in remote areas.
 - 4.2.3.8 Use of Cadi to help develop young people through the medium of ICT.
- 4.2.4 Actions suggested for each youth group were:
 - 4.2.4.1 Provide young people with access to printers for schoolwork.
 - 4.2.4.2 Make interactive online safety video.
 - 4.2.4.3 Learn how to use touch screens for games, learning and watching online videos.
 - 4.2.4.4 Allow access to the computer suites in our centres. All young people to be provided with logins and passwords.
 - 4.2.4.5 Digital workstation to allow access to Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom etc to allow young people to complete homework.
 - 4.2.4.6 Wi-Fi to connect Xbox and Playstations
 - 4.2.4.7 Write to local politicians to highlight the digital divide and its impact on young people
 - 4.2.4.8 Join Youth Councils to help further a campaign about the Digital Divide

5.1 Recommendations

- 5.1.1 The following recommendations were identified from this participative event.
- 5.1.2 Priorities should be set by the RAG to include, ensuring young people have access to internet at home to meet school requirements on submission of school work, setting up a small grants scheme to provide devices for young people to complete school work, and report back to stakeholders on their actions.
- 5.1.3 Local Youth Services actions to include, providing strong Wi-Fi within all centres, provide an equipment bank for young people, virtual link with other youth services and all rural youth workers to have a dongle to enable remote internet access.
- 5.1.4 Youth Groups actions to include, campaign to raise awareness of the Digital Divide and its impact on young people (perhaps through Youth Voice), Digital workstation to allow access to Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom etc to allow young people to complete homework.

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 in preparation for the Regional Assessment of Need and will be shared with all local Senior Youth Officers for development of the upcoming three year plans and identified in the annual action plans.
- 5.2.2 The LAG should take account of the recommended youth service responses to identify issues for future area planning purposes and future service delivery.

List of evidence sources available on request

- I. Agenda
- II. Keynote PowerPoint presentation
- III. Notes from workshop groups
- IV. Programme Invite
- V. Attendance Record
- VI. Evaluation Feedback

