REPORT

RAG/ LAG Stakeholder Event South & West Belfast Supporting Children and Young People's Learning

Monday 20th May 2019

Saints Youth Centre, Belfast

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a consultation facilitated by South and West Belfast Local Advisory Group (LAG) for key stakeholders including young people on the topic of Supporting Children and Young People's Learning (Tackling Barriers to Learning). The event, hosted in Saints Youth Centre in Belfast, engaged with over 130 key stakeholders and addressed some of the key challenges for young people in relation to their learning. It also provided the opportunity to make recommendations about how Youth Service can support children and young people's learning and address barriers to learning.

The stakeholders who participated in the consultation highlighted many issues that they feel have a negative impact on children and young people's learning. Several of the barriers noted were in relation to learning within the school environment including lack of support from teachers, poor learning environment, exam pressure, no variation in learning styles and too much homework. Others clearly indicated the range of social issues which are impacting on children and young people's ability to learn. These include mental health, social media, family/ friend relationships and drugs and alcohol. Those who attended the event stated that learning through Youth Service caused less stress and pressure, was more fun and did not require formal tests.

Key recommendations on how Youth Service could address young people's barriers to learning include accessible services 7 days per week, greater support and consideration the needs of Irish language speakers, consultations between schools and youth centres to determine how they can best work together and provision of alternative qualifications that are not in the formal curriculum.

1 INTRODUCTION

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 To identify the issues for young people around their learning and discuss how to tackle barriers to learning

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 'Supporting Children and Young People's Learning?'

1.2.1 Whilst the majority of young people in Northern Ireland achieve and succeed at school, other vulnerable young people are at risk of failing to fulfil their potential, either as a result of their social context, an additional educational need or their experiences and attitudes towards school.

1.2.2 Youth Work is designed to complement the formal education system and the Department of Education (DE) recognise that it plays an important role by encouraging learning in a non-formal stetting and by developing young people's personal, social and other key life skills.

1.2.3 Priorities for Youth, DE's policy document placed a greater emphasis on the needs of young people for whom Youth Work can provide a valuable link with formal education to increase their life chances in areas such as future employment and training opportunities.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1   LAG members including young people developed, supported, publicised and engaged with the

event. 8 young people were involved in the organisation and planning of the event. On the

evening they were instrumental giving an overview of the agenda and in facilitating the activity

based sessions.

 There were a variety of methodologies used to capture evidence throughout the

participation event. Outlined below are range of the methods used:

2.1.2   Menti-metre is an online engagement tool throughout which participants use i-pads to

record and collate responses to questions. 10 ipads were given to facilitators who were asked

to record as many different responses from their focus groups. Each focus group comprised

on average 12 people.

2.1.3   Each participant was encouraged to note on a cardboard brick, one thing that prevents them

from learning to the best of their ability. The bricks were then used to build a wall which

participants were then encouraged to help each other to knock the wall down.

2.1.4   A number of team games and challenges were set up and working in small groups,

participants were invited to complete each game as part of a team, seeking support were

required.

2.1.5   A drawing of a youth centre was copied on to several posters which were then attached to

the wall around the venue. Participants were asked to consider how Youth Service could

assist them in addressing the barriers to learning that had been highlighted in the previous

barrier wall exercise and to note their recommendations on the posters. (See Appendix 2 for

full list of recommendations)

2.2   Evaluation

2.2.1   A total of 68% of participants completed an evaluation and satisfaction survey of the event.

3 ATTENDANCE

3.1 Attendance Figures

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	131
Local Advisory Members	8 (4 adults and 4 young people)
Regional Advisory Members	2
Youth Work Staff	11 (7 EA, 4 Voluntary Sector)
Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation	1

3.1.1 Invitations for the event were circulated to Regional and Local Advisory Group members and all core funded youth groups in the South and West Belfast area. Further invitations were issued to young people engaged in schools based youth work programmes. A total of 153 people attended, the majority of whom were young people aged 14-18 years.

3.1.2 Representation from Youth Work Alliance, DE and Start 360 was welcomed and all representatives participated throughout the session.

4   ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

4.1   Barriers to Learning

4.1.1   The responses highlighted a number of issues which relate directly to mental health, as having an impact on how they learn. This is a clear reflection of the results determined through the Regional assessment of Need and on which Regional and Area Youth Development Plan targets are determined.

Issues arising from the school environment itself have been identified as being a barrier to learning. These include exam stress, teachers not giving the students the support and attention they require in order to be successful, teachers focussing on pupils who do well and not helping those who struggle and too much homework. The negative opinion from some of the young people on their formal learning experiences will link closely to their mental health and impact on the successes they achieve within the school environment.

Peer pressure, social media and antisocial behaviour are only some of the examples of the Social Issues which were cited as creating a barrier to learning. These responses would be indicative of the issues raised by young people on a regular basis.

4.2   Menti-Metre Feedback

4.2.1   The Menti-Metre exercise was designed to gauge young people's understanding of learning within the informal sector. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Do you know Youth service delivers qualifications?
- What does informal learning mean to you?
- What role do you think Youth Service has in supporting your learning?
- How does your Youth Centre ensure your opinion matters when it comes to learning and development?

The overwhelming response was that participants were aware that youth service did provide opportunities for young people to complete qualifications. Many respondents were able to list OCN, Duke of Edinburgh Award and Millennium Volunteers as a few that they were aware of.

Furthermore, they understood the term, informal learning, and recorded that it meant a lot to them. The process enables them to develop new friendships, increase their social skills and learn in a more relaxed environment.

Many respondents felt that youth service supports their learning by being supportive, helping when they fail in school, providing opportunities for experiential learning, like international programmes and by helping them to understand better.

They recognised that their youth centres/ projects ensured that their opinion mattered by being inclusive, treating them as adults, asking their opinion, consulting with them and involving them in planning.
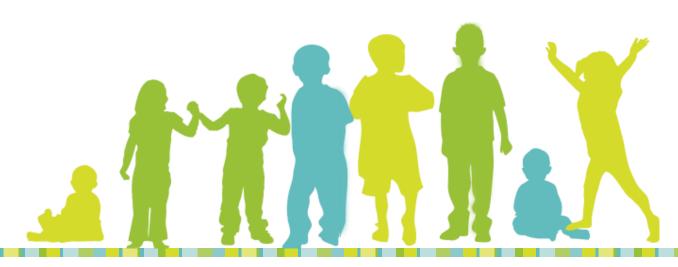
5 OUTCOMES

5.1 Recommendations

5.1.1 Participants listed a range of methods which they felt that Youth Service currently does and could continue to do, or introduce, to help young people address their barriers to learning and reach their full potential in terms of increasing their learning including:

- Additional funding to support educational and international trips.

- Greater consultation between school sand youth service to determine how they can best work together to support Children and Young People's learning.

- Better meaningful conversations, including opportunities to talk more about mental health.

- The provision of more qualifications that are not in the formal curriculum.

- Opportunities for paid work experience in youth centres.

- Several young people highlighted the need for additional and better funded youth services for young people who learn through the medium of Irish.

- Despite extended provision funding being made available to increase services, feedback indicated that there was a need for further youth provision particularly at the weekend.

- It was also highlighted that the youth centre environment can be improved by young people feeling welcomed, listened to, having less rules and by being integrated.

- It was also evident that respondents felt that the youth service can support young people with their formal learning by providing tutoring and support, study space and internet access.

6	Appendices

Appendices (list of evidence sources available on request):

i   Feedback from the barriers to learning activity

ii   Feedback on how the Youth Service can support children and young people's learning

iii   Feedback from evaluation