

corrymeela 

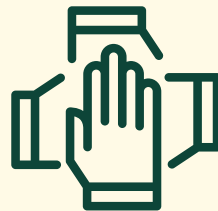
Shared Education in Youth Work





In Brief

This resource seeks to:
**inspire and guide youth
groups to build sustainable
shared education
partnerships, empowering
children, young people, &
youth workers to create a
shared future.**



**Written by the Corrymeela Community
& funded by the Education Authority**

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Introduction



This resource has been created to support the development of shared education practice within the youth sector.

Shared education is a model for long-term, sustainable partnership and relationship building between youth groups from different communities.

Participation in shared education activities can be a hugely rewarding experience for both young people and youth workers. The building of flexible and resilient partnerships at an institutional level embeds the means for encounter between young people. In addition, these partnerships can offer collaborative opportunities for youth workers to strengthen practice, trade expertise, and plan together.

The shared education model is designed to facilitate long-term partnerships within which shorter-term activities or funded projects can rest. Time is needed to cultivate relationships of trust and openness. Institutional collaboration is placed at the centre of the shared education model, allowing short-term activities to contribute to longer-term strategising.

We hope this resource sparks connection and conversation, and provides ideas and activities that can be reshaped across different settings.

We have attempted to account for the diversity of work that occurs within local youth services when developing this resource. We have suggested a range of activities and hope that many will be useful for your context.

Future opportunities to embed shared education in youth services, such as the SEUPB Peace Plus Shared Learning Together project, will have their specific programme requirements and objectives (SEUPB, 2021). This resource will explore the shared education model, provide guidance on partnership working, and outline potential activities for shared groups.

As partnerships engage with shared education, they will uncover unique ways to embed the model. This resource is designed to provide guidance for the sector ahead of future development and innovation.

Whether you are a full-time, part-time, or voluntary youth worker, and whether you are setting up a youth work partnership for the first time or deepening existing partnership engagement, we encourage you to use this resource in whichever ways are most relevant to your context.

Core Principles



Before exploring policy, practicalities, and activities, we would like to state the core principles that have shaped the development of this resource.



Centrality of relationships

Our attitudes and beliefs are shaped by our relationships with those around us. Relational experiences can lead to greater individual and interpersonal understanding for young people.



Difference as productive

Engagement with different perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds can be illuminating and beneficial for young people. Encounters between youth groups with differing social, cultural and religious backgrounds can open discussion on how we interact with different perspectives in the rest of society.



Power of partnerships

Partnership brings a range of practical benefits, from sharing expertise and resources to expanding the reach of opportunities for young people. We believe that creative sparks fly when passionate practitioners have space to work together. Through partnership, ideas and opportunities emerge which would not have been possible in an organisation working independently.



Long-term planning

Shared education aims to embed ongoing work over long periods of time. This extended timeframe allows youth workers to plan effectively & deepen their collaborative relationships. Sustainable relationships between institutions allow for purposeful relationships of trust to be built between young people.

Core Principles



Young people as peace-builders

A recent United Nations Security Council Resolution (2015: UNSC 2250) recognised that ‘young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security’. The views and actions of young people should be a transformative force in post-conflict societies. Young people can bring unique contributions to the building of durable peace, and practitioners should seek to engage them in this process through shared education partnerships.

Brian Caskey: Shared Education in Youth Work





Shared Education:

An Overview

Shared education is a model of partnership that offers children and young people long-term opportunities to build relationships across traditional divides. In this way, the goals of the shared education model are similar to those of many cross-community educational programmes.

For decades, the youth sector has been providing children and young people with invaluable experiences of encounter through a multitude of programmes. Shared education is not intended to supersede or replace other initiatives. Instead, shared education is best defined as the embedding of partnership between youth groups within which a variety of projects can take place.

The relationship between youth groups is the foundation of this model. We know that youth groups naturally establish and develop local partnerships. The shared education model can be used to maximise the potential of these existing partnerships, and create further opportunities for all those involved

Shared Education: Background



Shared education is a model that seeks to practically address division and separation within the education system. Its development has been influenced by the work of educators, often youth workers, in bringing young people who would not normally meet into contact with one another.

Since the 1970s, contact-based initiatives have been a central part of the programmatic responses to a separated education system. Throughout the conflict in Northern Ireland, youth workers engaged with young people and took steps to bring groups from different backgrounds together. Youth workers envisaged that, through contact programmes young people would reframe negative beliefs and build constructive relationships. In a period of limited encounter between communities, these opportunities for young people were significant, and the methods developed during that period continue to influence peacebuilding practice.

Shared education centres the relationship and connection between educational bodies. The model holds that if youth clubs engage in long-term collaborative relationships, trust between institutions, youth workers, and young people builds over time. Gallagher (2016, p. 6) writes that emerging research has pointed to ‘collaboration as a means for promoting reconciliation at a systemic level without requiring a radical restructuring’.

To date, shared education programmes have largely taken place in schools. This focus, which has been reflected in the allocation of funding, has contributed to a sense that the shared education model is for the formal education sector only. Further, use of the language of shared education is rare within the youth sector. And yet, youth workers are in a strong position to make use of the model. Experience of previous programmes, participatory practice and conversational modes of learning are useful tools for youth workers involved in shared education programmes. The Department of Education (2022, p. 69) acknowledges that ‘the youth sector... offers great potential for further expansion and development of shared education’.

At present, there are significant opportunities to shape shared education practice within the youth sector. The model’s flexibility will allow youth workers to be at the forefront of defining, developing, and embedding shared education. Harnessing the energy and expertise of young people will contribute to the impact of shared education across the sector.

Shared Education: Background



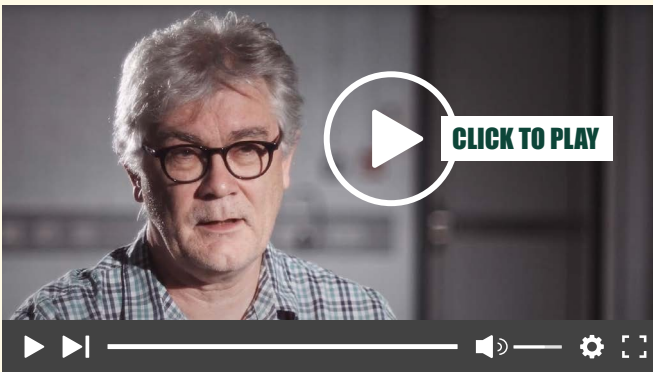
Young people's support for shared education has been evidenced by a recent Young Life and Times Survey (2022, p. 4), which reports that 61% of respondents had a favourable or very favourable view about shared education.

Shared education was designed to offer contact experiences for young people over a long-term, sustainable period. Participation of students in schools-based shared education programmes has been associated with improved trust between groups and reduced bias within groups (Hughes et al, 2010).

Gallagher (2016, pp. 10-11) further identifies five core elements that emerged from early schools' experience with shared education:

- 1) Partnerships needed to be based on bottom-up, locally tailored solutions to address local circumstances, challenges and opportunities
- 2) Partnerships were unlikely to be successful unless educators are empowered and encouraged to be creative and imaginative
- 3) Regular and sustained contact was vital for long-term success
- 4) There was value within shared education's combining economic, education and social goals
- 5) Partnerships and connections between individuals were crucial to cultural change and sustainability

Professor Tony Gallagher: Shared Education in Youth Work





Shared Education:

The Shared Education Act

The Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 defines “shared education” as the education together of:

- a) those of **different religious belief**, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and
- b) those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not.

which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers, with a “relevant providers” meaning a person providing:

- a) education at a grant-aided school, or
- b) services of any kind (**including youth services**) which provide education benefit to children or young persons.



It is important to note from the outset the specific shared education requirements which are set out in the Act.

Firstly, shared education means the education together of groups from either different religious backgrounds or different socio-economic backgrounds.

If a partnership is established on the basis of differing religious beliefs, it must include ‘reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic young persons’. The demographics of a youth club, including the number of young people from other religious backgrounds who attend, can be considered when determining what these ‘reasonable numbers’ may be.

Secondly, it is important to make explicit that shared education requires the ‘**working together and co-operation of two or more**’ youth clubs. An individual youth club working with a significant internal diversity of religious belief or socio-economic background would not be classed as shared education. In the formal education sector, integrated schools have engaged in partnership activities with other types of school to participate in shared education. Diverse youth groups can similarly benefit from sharing experiences, expertise, and resources with another youth group.



Shared Education:

The Shared Education Act

The Shared Education Act (2016) sets out the aims of shared education as follows:

- a) to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons;
- b) to promote the efficient and effective use of resources;
- c) to promote equality of opportunity;
- d) to promote good relations;
- e) and to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

The Department of Education's (2011) Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy seeks to improve relations between communities by equipping young people recognise and respect difference.

This aligns with the 'good relations' aspect of Shared Education. One of the aims of CRED, to bring young people from different backgrounds together to build relationships, is also supported by shared education provision.

Professor Joanne Hughes: Shared Education in Youth Work



Sharing Works



The Shared Education Act (2016) is supported by Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education (DENI, 2015). The policy sets out the background, rationale and vision for shared education in schools, early years settings and ‘statutory and voluntary youth work settings’.

The vision for this policy is:

Vibrant, self-improving Shared Education partnerships delivering educational benefits to learners, encouraging the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.



Sharing Works sets out the case for shared education in three parts: **the social case, the education case & the economic case.**



The social case:

‘Improving societal well-being by promoting a culture of mutual understanding through significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction between children & young people from different community backgrounds and between early years, schools and youth work settings and their communities’ (DENI, 2015).



The education case:

‘Improving access for learners...and facilitating the sharing of ideas and good practice between education providers’.

As well as enabling ‘children & young people to develop a greater sense of their own identity and a capacity to articulate their views and opinions with a better understanding and confidence’ (DENI, 2015).



The economic case:

‘Making more effective and efficient use of limited resources to improve value for money’. (DENI, 2015) ideas and opportunities emerge which would not have been possible in an organisation working independently.

Sharing Works: The social case



Shared education can make an important contribution to addressing the legacies of conflict in Northern Ireland, including the segregation which continues to exist in housing and education. It is therefore worthwhile to briefly explore the local impacts of conflict and division.

Conflict and context

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 sought to establish lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Over the past century, individuals have mainly identified with one of two communities: Protestant, unionist, and loyalist or Catholic, nationalist and republican. This division was reinforced by decades of conflict, which entrenched an atmosphere of fear and distrust across the region.

Since youth work is inherently relational and social, its development in Northern Ireland has been shaped by the enduring division and conflict within society. As young people in Northern Ireland engage with the surrounding structures and their place within them, conversations about politics and the legacy of conflict are likely to be relevant. Local youth services have shown flexibility and adaptability when engaging young people in discussions about the complex interaction of identity, history and politics.

Youth work has been shaped by the history of intercommunal division and conflict, political instability, and violence in the region. At the same time, many structures and relationships within Northern Ireland

have been shaped by the work of the youth sector.

Young people and the legacy of conflict

Recent generations of young people 'have grown up with an expectation of peace rather than conflict' (Schubotz, 2017, p. 1). The priorities of this generation have understandably been shaped by the relative peace of the post-Agreement period, and, as members of a 'post-conflict generation', young people can feel that the decades of violence have had a limited impact on their own lives. However, young people experience the legacies of the conflict via segregated structures, sectarian attitudes, and political dysfunction. 75% of young people surveyed in NI Young Life and Times (ARK, 2022) thought that 'religion will always make a difference to the way people feel about each other in Northern Ireland'.

The legacies of the conflict are often compounded in areas of economic deprivation. Opportunities for young people to meet others from different backgrounds remain limited by continued separation in housing and education. The task of building a shared future is ongoing, even in our post-Agreement context.

Sharing Works: The social case



Relevance

Peacebuilding programmes within youth work will openly grapple with the tension between focusing on the past and focusing on the future. Many young people identify themes such as mental health provision, environmentalism, respect for human rights, and economic opportunity as being important to their generation.

Conversations which are overly focused on a conflicted past may leave young people feeling disempowered. Within shared education programmes, how the legacy of conflict is considered is an open question. Each group of young people may have a different answer.

As Smith & Magill (2009: p. 7) write:

It is also clear that young people do not want the past to be ignored, nor do they want to dwell on negative aspects of the past. Instead, they want to understand what happened and why, and how to create a more positive future.

Where shared education partnerships seek to engage young people with conversations about peacebuilding, they should seek to help young people 'have a balanced pivot between the past, the present and in shaping the future' (McMullan, 2021, p. 15). Youth workers can use examples from the news, social media or international contexts to allow young people to engage with peacebuilding in its current form.

Crossing boundaries

The influence of sectarian structures can impact how young people move through their world. As an example, geographical boundaries are often based on the perceived identity of local areas. Roche (2008) refers to the idea of 'Bounded Contentment' in which young people feel safe and comfortable in 'their own' areas, but may limit their movement to avoid places in which they feel they would be unsafe or in the minority. Shared education activities which connect young people from different communities can act to challenge the impact of these boundaries. Shared education partnerships can open opportunities for young people in a distinctly local context.

The above geographical limitations, based on fear or avoidance, can also be replicated within interpersonal relationships or dialogue. Avoidance of contentious topics within certain public or mixed settings can be seen as a learned behaviour designed to keep the peace.

Parents and schools remain the two most significant influences on young people's understanding of the past (Bell et al, 2010, p. 7). Youth work can provide a space for discussion and dialogue on areas of contention or disagreement. Shared education can provide a framework for long-term relationships that explore identity and politics in a relevant and shared setting.

Sharing Works: The education case



The education case for shared education highlights the potential benefits of partnership working for young people and youth workers. Young people given the opportunity to learn together will enhance their soft skills and sense of self. Similarly, partnerships can offer youth workers space to collaboratively develop their skills and share practice and resources.

For young people

The youth sector has continually provided young people with experiences of learning and growth. Youth work encourages the personal development of young people, giving them the tools 'to act as social beings in the social world' (Young, 1999: p. 1).

When two youth groups come together, young people can benefit educationally. Young people can learn to interact with different people and perspectives, explore what it means to be part of a group, develop collaborative working skills and become more comfortable and self-confident.

Relational learning is the domain of youth practice across the world. In a group environment, young people test their own beliefs and learn to engage with the opinions of others. Exposure to a range of identities, views and backgrounds gives young people space to explore their interdependence and constructively respond to conflict.

'Personal and social development is concerned with the young person gaining knowledge, understanding and awareness of him/herself as an individual and as an active participant in relationships with others (DENI, 2003: p. 12).

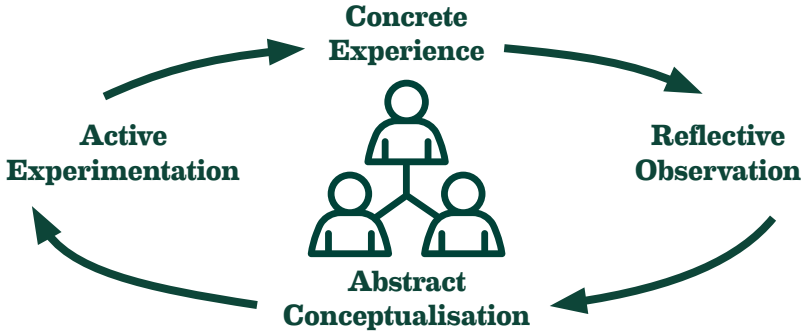
Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice

There are educational benefits to bringing youth groups out of their setting and into an environment that may be unfamiliar. As discussed previously, this facilitates the crossing of community boundaries and opens new areas to young people. Research on the schools-based PEAVE IV shared education programmes 'reported that 92% of teachers and practitioners agreed children have a greater sense of the wider community' after participating in shared programmes. (SEUPB, 2021a).

Sharing Works: The education case



A cycle of experiential learning developed by David Kolb is a useful model for exploring the impact of experience on young people. Kolb (1984, p. 38) writes that ‘learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’.



Concrete Experience:

Either a new experience or a reinterpretation of an existing experience informed by new ideas

Reflective Observation:

Reflection on the experience and comparison with existing understanding – learners are encouraged to ask questions and discuss their experience

Abstract Conceptualisation:

Reflection leading to the emergence of a new idea or adaptation of previous understanding – these are the lessons learned from the experience

Active Experimentation:

Young people test their new idea on the world around them, returning to the beginning of the cycle

According to Kolb’s model, learning is an ongoing, cyclic process. Educators or youth workers encourage young people to take charge of their own learning. There are key stages within which learners may need support. Educators should encourage self-reflection and discussion by asking questions that allow young people to articulate their views throughout the learning process. During shared education programmes, young people should be offered this space of reflection after specific contact-based activities. Youth workers can act as a central guide throughout the process of learning.

Sharing Works: The education case



For youth workers

Relationships built between youth clubs can lead to educational benefits beyond those gained through directed interaction between young people. Youth clubs can work together to make best use of their current facilities, equipment, or programming to reach more young people. One youth club could share its sports pitch with its partner. Another youth club offering specific qualifications and courses could make this available to young people from across the partnership. Diverse educational opportunities for young people can also help to address the tail of educational underachievement experienced by some within the education system.

Within programme activities, youth workers can share responsibility and exchange practical ideas or tools for their work. Networks built on trust can share key information relevant to the sector. Working with new young people may offer new opportunities to extend or refine youth workers' practice. Further, youth workers based in the same local area can consider how their contexts are similar and collaboratively respond to the needs of their locality.

Within the schools-based PEACE IV Shared Education project over 90% of teachers surveyed identified these key benefits:

- improved professional teaching skills and knowledge (94%)
- increased access to curriculum resources (93%)
- enhanced teaching and learning in your pre-school or school (95%)
- opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice (96%)

(SEUPB, 2021a: p. 7)

The needs of individual local areas are nuanced and unique. As educators engage across organisations, they can gain a holistic understanding of their context. As advocates for young people, youth workers in partnership can speak together with a stronger voice. Engagement with stakeholders, whether in central organisations or local communities, can be more powerful if youth workers speak collectively.



Sharing Works: The economic case

Sharing resources

In recent decades, the voluntary sector has often been encouraged to work collaboratively and in partnership to increase efficiency and public value.

Policy makers across the United Kingdom and Ireland have focused on the objective of making money go further. The Northern Irish context of segregation has a unique relationship to partnership.

Within Northern Ireland, services are largely separated and, at times, replicated within different communities. The same replication is seen in the education sector, with funding implications for educational providers, although the majority of this cost is incurred within the formal education sector (Deloitte, 2007, pp. 56-63). Within shared education, locally based youth groups are valued as individual institutions. At the same time, they are also encouraged to work collaboratively with other local youth groups (Hughes and Loader, 2021).

Taking a broad view, shared provision for young people, which aims to build relationships across division and provide educational opportunities, could have economic impacts beyond the educational sector. Young people involved in shared, civic discussion on the future of their society may be more likely to stay in Northern Ireland in the future, providing long-term benefit for society as a whole.

A recent study by Pivotal (2021) exploring young people's motivation for leaving Northern Ireland, reported that:

'many students felt that the heavily segregated nature of education created limited contact with young people from different religious/political backgrounds and contributed to a desire to study elsewhere to gain a more varied experience of society'

Collaborative networks and partnerships take time and resources to embed. Funding should be available to support this process and associated projects. In the longer term, partnerships planning together to provide shared provision in a local area can make more effective use of their resources. Specific courses or activities can be offered to young people across the partnership. Especially relevant may be accredited courses such as OCNs, which may be of interest to a smaller group of older participants. Catering for diverse or niche interests may become easier within a creative partnership. The ability to offer young people varied activities taking place at either youth club could be a significant benefit once shared education partnerships have been embedded.

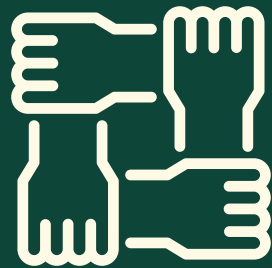
Established partnerships can apply for funding that would not be available to individual youth clubs. Funding for partnership working will likely be available through Peace+. Other reconciliation funds, with small grants or project funds, will also become available to partnerships.



Preparing for partnership

Before embarking on partnership working with another youth club, it is vital to consider several key questions.

These questions are relevant for youth groups with a history of collaboration and those with more limited experience. Those seeking to reconnect with partner youth groups should also consider these themes in light of any changes in priorities, values or personnel.



Preparing for partnership



Pre-partnership Questions



Values and organisational culture:

What are the stated values of your organisation?

How closely does your work reflect the values of the organisation?

How are decisions made in your organisation?



Location and demography:

Where are you based & where would you look for potential partners?

What is the demographic background of your youth group & what demographic background would be beneficial for partnership working?

How do young people travel to your youth club?



Objectives:

Why is your youth club involved, or seeking to become involved, with a shared education partnership?

What potential benefits are you seeking for young people and youth workers?

What would constitute a successful partnership for you organisation?



Resources:

What resources do you have that will support the partnership?

Do you need extra funding to support the partnership?

What resources or facilities do you have that you could offer your partner youth club?

What resources or facilities would you value in a partner organisation?

Preparing for partnership

Key themes



Culture

The culture of an organisation is formed by values, beliefs, and tacit ways of working. These ways of working can emerge over time, influenced by a variety of factors.

Differences across organisational cultures can be significant and, at times, can lead to misunderstanding. Shared education is designed to encourage individual educational bodies to retain their distinct cultures while working together. Open discussion between partner organisations can clarify underlying assumptions and expectations.

Communication

Effective communication is essential for the success of a partnership, and is it important to consider how this will be achieved.

Consider the ways in which you might share information and plan together. Emails, phones, video calls and in-person meetings are all options and can be used for different purposes. Too much communication may have an impact on the workload of the individuals involved. Too little communication can limit the sharing of information leading to confusion on partnership activities and objectives.

Partnership Agreements

Practitioners recognise the importance of newly created groups of young people forming an agreement which can set expectations and clarify goals. When difficulties arise, this agreement can be a useful reference document.

Contracting between youth workers and youth organisations is equally important. These co-working agreements are important as ‘an initial contract or set of ground rules in order to clarify what you each expect from each other and how you will work together’ (Harrison, 2016). Through this process, groups and individuals can clarify and commit to their respective roles, responsibilities, and review processes.

Leadership

Working in partnership requires buy-in across organisations, and resistance to change is not uncommon. Decision making cannot always be a collective process. In this instance, those in leadership positions should communicate the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the partnership within their own organisation.

Partnership Practicalities

Agreement on values and outcomes within a partnership is of limited importance if youth clubs find it practically difficult to engage in shared activities. The variety within the youth sector is one of its many assets but means that the nature and content of provision vary across different organisations, contexts, and locations.

Partnerships between similarly run youth groups have greater potential for success due to simple practicalities. Many youth groups, especially in the uniformed and faith sectors, are run by volunteers and open for a select time for each age group. The provision offered within these groups will be necessarily distinct from drop-in youth centres run by full-time staff.

Young people:

How many young people attend each youth club?

What is the age profile of attendees?

What is the community background of these young people?

Youth workers:

How many youth workers are there at each youth club?

Are these workers staff or volunteers?

How much time do they have to plan, deliver and review programmes?

Operations:

What are the opening days and hours of each youth club?

What spaces are available for shared, larger group activities?

What ongoing projects, courses or goals is each youth club committed to?

Geography:

Where is each youth club located?

How much distance is between the youth clubs?

How do young people travel to each youth club?

As discussed previously, shared education focuses on the relationship between youth groups, allowing them to pursue activities that are contextually relevant. Youth groups, where possible, can look for opportunities to include their ongoing programming in shared formats. Uniformed groups, with specific organisational activities, can look for opportunities to align these across shared activities.

Partnership Ideas for getting started



Below are some suggestions you may like to consider when establishing a shared education partnership. These suggestions highlight the connection between a partnership ahead of any programmatic activities.

Talk about your partnership

As you deliver your regular youth club activities, check in with your partner club and tell your young people what they are doing. Talking about 'our partner club' outside of contact activities can contribute to connection throughout the year.

Audit your partnership

Take stock of current activities and commitments within the partnership. Keep an eye out for activities that could be delivered in a partnership context. Shared education works best when it is adapted to each partnership's context.

Seek support

Speak to other organisations in your area. Local schools may be involved in partnership projects and willing to offer support. Central youth organisations may have useful partnership resources or be able to connect you with another local club.

Look for opportunities

If there are any special events within your youth club's calendar, such as fun or family days, consider inviting your partner club. Similarly, projects within the local community or charity events can be great partnership opportunities. Look for any activities or projects you are currently working on that could be delivered in a partnership setting.

Stay connected

Shared education allows youth clubs to focus on long-term planning. That means that partnership activities may increase and decrease throughout the year. During quieter periods, it is important that youth clubs continue to feel connected. Sharing details of future plans or exchanging updates between youth clubs can keep young people engaged throughout the year.



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Shared Education in Youth Work

Together is better

corrymeela⁺  ea Education Authority

