YFJC

Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster





5:3

A Model for Effective Rural Youth Work







ea Education Authority

The Development of an Effective Youth Practice Model for Rural Youth Work

The project is based on the Education Authority's most recent Regional Assessment of Need[1] (RAoN) which states that young people living in rural areas are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Northern Ireland. This is due to the increasing performance gap and overall variation of standards varying between those young people living in rural areas and those in urban areas. This project therefore seeks to address these issues and develop a youth practice model that impacts future practice for the benefit of rural youth by reducing social isolation of young people in rural areas.

Research Questions:

1. What barriers are in the way for rural youth accessing a non-formal, inclusive and skills-based environment?
2. What do young people view as enjoyable, desired and necessary youth work?
3. What measures should be developed in order to improve the accessibility of rural youth work and the associated resources/stakeholders?

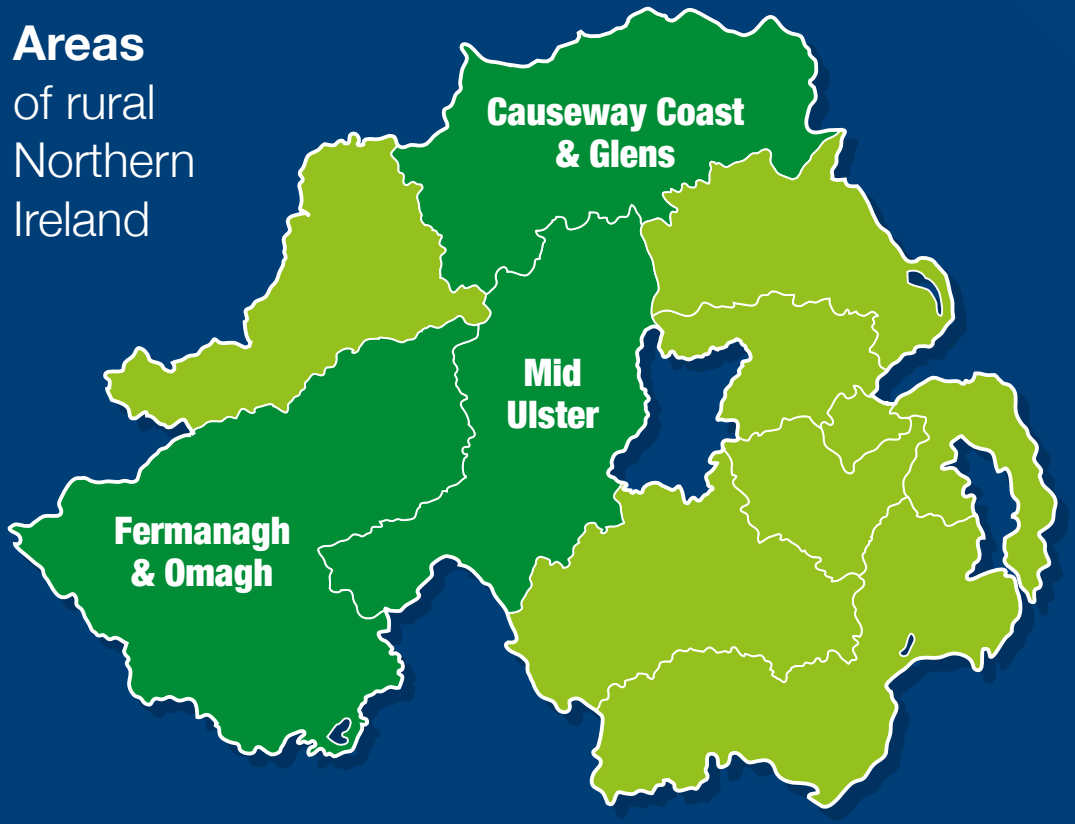
Data Collection:

In accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, this project used vignettes as a child-friendly structure to the focus groups. As the traditional style of focus groups with standardised questions pose the risk of being disengaging to young people, the use of relatable, short scenarios aimed to promote maximum engagement with the participants. The vignettes focused on several issues: transport, Wi-Fi, skills development, accreditations, resources and mental health provisions, in accordance with the Local Development Plans for each area (Appendix 3 of full report).

1. Education Authority Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need (2017-2020) available at **www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Regional%20Assessment%20of%20Need%20-%20%20Feb%202017_0.pdf**

Participant Recruitment

Areas of rural Northern Ireland



Strands of **youth organisations:**

- EA Youth Service
- Uniform
- Stand-alone
- Young Farmers' Clubs
- Youth Councils
- Community Island
- LGBTQ+
- Irish Medium

Young people aged **11-25 years** who were involved in a youth club that is situated in a rural locality

11-15 year: Focusing on the persona; and social developmental needs of adolescents

16-25 years: Focusing on access to leadership/ training opportunities for senior participants

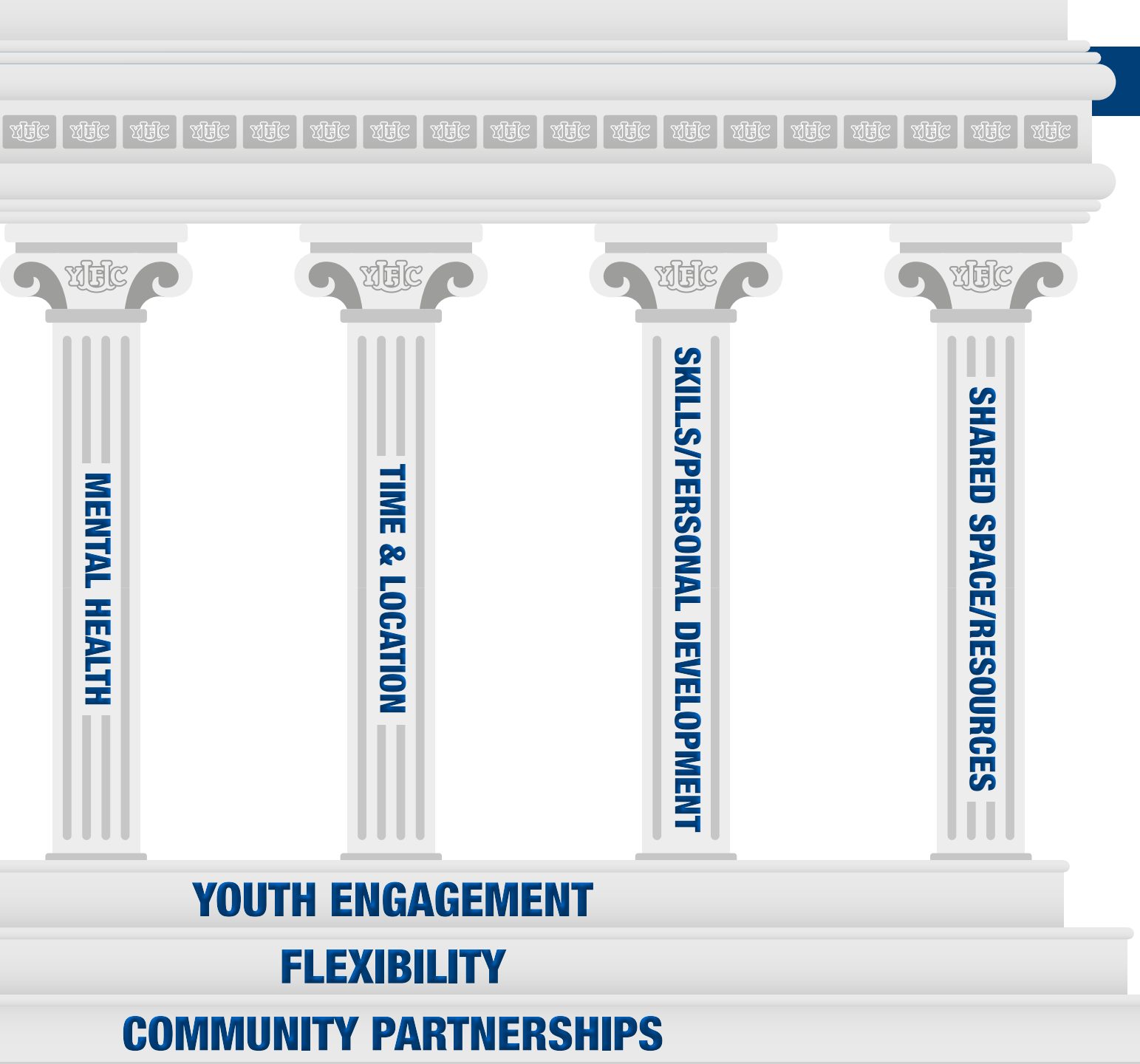


Rural Youth Practice Model: 5 Pillars & 3 Foundations

Key Findings:

The key findings from the qualitative research conducted in this project have driven the model of effective youth practice in rural areas. The effectiveness of rural youth work practice is dependent upon the structural integrity and quality of the five key findings shown below; and therefore our model depicts these five areas as 'pillars'. Additionally, the model incorporates three 'foundations' to rural youth work. The three aspects mentioned below are key to the model because they contribute to the sustainability of rural youth work practice. That is, rural youth work can be effective by upholding the five key pillars of the model, but without ensuring that each pillar is embedded in the three foundations, the rural youth work practice is not sustainable. The model is presented below.




MENTAL HEALTH
TIME & LOCATION
SKILLS/PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
SHARED SPACE/RESOURCES
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
FLEXIBILITY
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Public Transport

The **cost** of public transport is a major barrier to young people using buses as a means of accessing social activities

The **lack of communication** between Translink and young people means that young people do not feel confident in independently navigating transport outside of their home-school transport route. This is because bus timetables at their rural bus stop are often confusing and out-of date.



Mental Health

The most common form of **Tier 1** provision is awarness workshops, which are inefficient and unappealing for young people to attend. The young people said that confidentiality and anonymity were paramount.

There is a significant lack of handover and crossover between **Tier 2** services which meant that many young people must repeat often sensitive and personal stories to practitioners of whom there is little trust built up.



Time/Location

Twilight and weekend provisions appear to be **apparent gaps** of current operational timetables in rural areas. A revision of operational hours should be considerate of location of hub and time to get there.

Young people value the opportunity to be consulted in the **decision making process** of the operational running hours of the youth work in their local area.



Skills/Personal Development

Valued skills are interview advice, self-confidence, 'don't stress' and health and wellbeing.

Young people did feel that these skills and virtues are currently not available in their local youth work. There appears therefore to be a **lack of awareness** from young people on the plethora of capacity building work available in rural areas.



Shared Space/ Resources

The four most important aspects of a shared space are: comfort, colour and brightness, internet access and a diverse space. It is important that the space is **multi-purposeful,** that can operate as a social hub, homework area and area for personal/social development.

Due to the lack of facilities and funding available in rural areas, there should be a **greater effort to form partnerships** between local stakeholders to share resources and space.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Youth Engagement

This project created Young People's Advisory Groups (YPAGs) so that young people were continually consulted with and involved in the decision-making process. Our YPAGs helped to create the agenda of action points for this project. We also used online surveys in order to engage young people with our research and to gain an understanding of their opinions. There were 200 young people that had partaken in the online survey.

Flexibility

Alongside our YPAGs, this project co-developed motion and tools for future practice including:

- Youth-friendly timetable
- Lower bus fares for young people
- Better communication methods between Translink and young people

Community Partnerships

This project has received the agreed recommended actions from Translink:

- Use the feedback and draft timetable template for future timetable developments.
- Run promotional lower fares with greater targeted communication methods – i.e. 50% off yLink with stronger use of social channels.
- Continue to promote and explore new 'youth friendly' media channels to target this audience with informative useful information on yLink and other Translink discounts, such as the Proof of Age Card.
- Promote the journey planner by incorporating messaging into timetables at bus stop level.
- Conduct a trial promotional period for the Journey Planner – suggestion to support this with an online 'how to use' video guide.

Youth Engagement

Our youth-based focus groups said that Tier 1 and Tier 2 support are paramount and should be addressed in this project. The focus group participants said that there should be better access to Tier 1 material that is confidential through leaflets and online forums. Our YPAGs focused on improving Tier 2 support through developing tools for future practice.

Flexibility

Alongside our YPAGs, this project co-developed motion and tools for future practice including:

- Mental health passport: improve communication between services and empowers the voice of young people through nonverbal communication
- Online forum: Recommendations for online mental health support through development of a template
- Hard copy material: co-development of an example template of a mental health leaflet
- Terminology toolbox: recommendations from YPAGS of positive terminology to reduce stigma of mental health

Community Partnerships

This project has received the agreed recommended actions from its stakeholders:

Tier 1 Accessible information: FLARE

- Use the recommendations and feedback on the revised template to steer and guide the redrafting of literature and pamphlets
- Use the suggested terminology toolbox
- Revise current use of QR code leading to online content (such as Facebook page) and making online material more accessible to young people.

Tier 2 Transition between practitioners: Department of Health

NICCY have accepted the recommendations made in this report and have agreed to present the findings to the cross-departmental development of the mental health passport which will be chaired by the Department of Health.

TIME & LOCATION

Youth Engagement

Youth work should be consistently re-aligning itself according to the needs of the young people. The introduction of a twilight and weekend programme should therefore consider its operational running time according to the needs of the catchment youth and their daytime locality. Young people should be consulted with prior to implementing a timetable.

Flexibility

Purpose: Although the findings of the project have suggested that there is a gap for twilight and weekend programmes operating in rural areas, a youth practitioner must practice flexibility and consider the purpose of the programme in general; and most importantly, what are the needs of the young people in that particular rural area.

Time/location: Moreover, rural youth practitioners should seek to adapt and adjust standardised youth practice in order to meet the needs of the young people. This may involve relocating the youth hub or adjusting the operational running time. This model does not advocate a 'one size fits all' measure.

Community Partnerships

Public Transport: For a twilight programme to run effectively and efficiently, rural youth practitioners must consider the location in terms of accessible public transport. Future programmes should therefore consider its location according to accessible public transport. Twilight programmes may only be effective if there is accessible public transport nearby.

Department of Education – There appears to be little coordination between formal education, nonformal education and Translink regarding operational running times of extracurricular activities and evening bus schedules. Ideally, when an afterschool activity finishes, young people should have access to another bus promptly without paying a bus fare. This reduces idyll and unsafe behaviour from young people waiting for buses.

Youth Engagement

The programme structuring and skills development exercises should not be implemented until a substantial number of young people have engaged with the restructuring period. This is a shift in practice; it is not 'outreach' work where the youth worker is reaching out to young people with already formed programmes; but rather young people developing the programme themselves and skills evolving naturally.

Flexibility

Wellbeing: Mental health and wellbeing should be incorporated into every youth programme yet adapted according to the needs and experiences of the young people. Practitioners should be flexible in how this is manifested; through residential camps, trusted relationships and conversations with their youth workers or discernment and resilience-based evenings.

Communication: When the young people were asked what skills development exercises they desire that are currently not available in their area, they did not realise that many desired skills are already available. Perhaps, therefore, there needs to be greater communication between skills-based providers and young people in a 'youth-friendly' channel. A potential gateway of doing so is by creating an online social communications portal; that is, a thoroughly mapped out model of skills providers in a rural area.

Community Partnerships

Internal professional development: Rural youth work should harness and cultivate skills that young people can use for their professional developments within the local area to enhance economic development in the area and a sense of belonging for the young people.

Service provider cooperation: Sustainable rural youth work manifests itself as a cooperative effort between statutory, uniform, non-uniform and independent services to provide a comprehensive, non-duplicated skills sector in rural areas. This means that statutory youth work should not necessarily be the sole provider, as perhaps other youth organisations have more specialised skills and a trusted reputation in the local community. Often, these non-statutory organisations can carry out and deliver specific key themes in specific areas where there is no provision within the Youth Service at current, for example, physical or mental health.

RESOURCES/ SHARED SPACE

Youth Engagement

The findings of this project highlight that young people value the following attributes to a positive youth environment: comfort, Wi-Fi, computer access, refreshments and inclusivity. In every youth context, young people should be consulted within regards to what they perceive as desired resources and amenities.

Flexibility

Environment & Atmosphere: To reiterate what has been previously mentioned, however, youth practitioners should not assume that this is the case for all youth groups and that it is a 'one method fits all' case; therefore, it is essential to be flexible and to listen attentively to the current needs and desires of young people in the surrounding area - particularly those who are perhaps not currently involved in Youth Service.

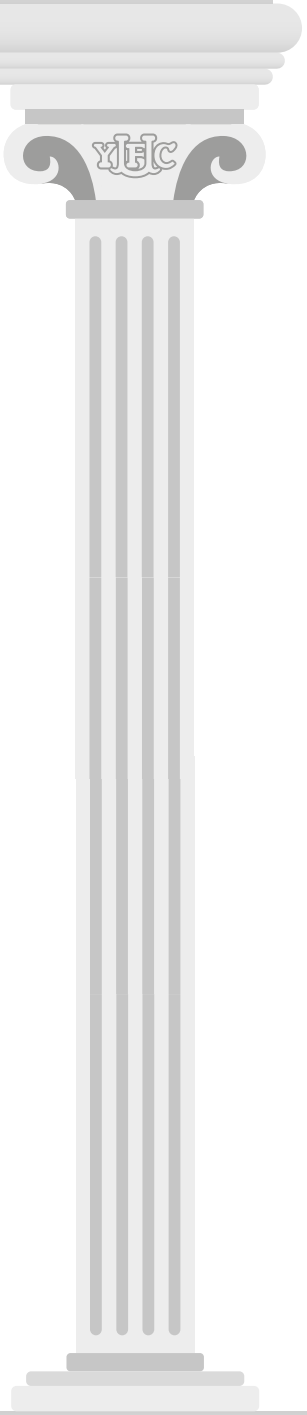
Community Partnerships

Stakeholder Engagement: Likewise, as rural youth work should be community-centred, it is important to include stakeholders in resourcing a youth programme, who often have more expertise than practitioners. For example, parents are an important stakeholder to engage with. This is particularly the case for children and young people with special needs. Likewise, to promote community-interdependence and engagement, external NGOs such as Mencap or Cara Friend should be involved in the decision-making process.

Community Interdependence: With limited budgets and a significantly lower cache of resources compared to youth programmes in urban areas, it is paramount that the future of rural youth work coordinate with local stakeholders to avail of already available resources. Further research should endeavour to conduct a thorough mapping of resources and skills providers for a cascading model. In youth work, facilities and resources can be cascaded down to smaller areas in the form of outreach work. A comprehensive overview should include all strands of youth work including formal education, Youth Service, EA registered groups, stand-alone organisations and those funded by other Departments, such as the Department of Infrastructure, Peace and Communities.

Conclusion

This project has found that effective youth work should consider and incorporate the five key pillars: public transportation, mental health, time/location, skills/personal development and resources/shared space. For some of these aspects (public transport and mental health), however, the quality of the pillar is out of the control of the youth worker; rather, its quality is measured and adapted by key service providers. It is paramount, therefore, for youth services' and policymakers to continually liaise and partner with these stakeholders in order that services will be improved for the betterment of youth practice. Likewise, there are three pillars which quality and effectiveness is not reliant upon major service providers: time/location, skills/personal development and resources/shared skills. It is on the onus of youth practitioners to therefore continually monitor and evaluate these pillars against the three foundations. The following checklist has been devised as a tool for future practice.



Youth practice considerations	YES	NO
Is my youth organisation actively building relationships and partnering with public transportation service providers in order to improve quality and provision for young people in my local area?	○	○
Are young people in my local area supported and empowered to voice their opinions about public transportation operating in their area?	○	○
How are young people's voice heard in my local area regarding available mental health sup port? Is this a meaningful and effective measure?	○	○
Are mental health policymakers aware of the needs of rural young people's mental health?	○	○
Is my youth work operating in a contextually accessible location for young people? Are young people able to access the location using public transport or are there measures in place to transport young people safely?	○	○
Is my youth work operating at a time that meets the needs and desires of the young attendees? Have they been consulted in the operational timetable?	○	○
Is my local area providing the skills and personal development exercises that are needed and desired by my young people?	○	○
Am I liaising with other skills providers in my local area to avoid duplication and support one another's' services?	○	○
Are my young people, their families and stakeholders being consulted with regarding what they believe to be resources and spaces that are needed to carry out effective youth work practice?	○	○
Am I partnering and liaising with local stakeholders in my area to share resources, facilities and space?	○	○

Notes

Notes



Young Farmers'
Clubs of Ulster