

REPORT

# RAG/LAG Participation Event Ards and North Down

## The Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

*Monday 7 October 2019*

*Ballymagee Youth Centre, Bangor*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of the Stakeholder Participation Event that took place on Monday 7 October 2019 at the Ballymagee Youth Centre in Bangor. The event was part of the Education Authority (EA) Regional Advisory Group (RAG) participative processes and was led by the RAG and Local Advisory Group (LAG) for Ards and North Down.

The event engaged forty-two key stakeholders from across the statutory and voluntary youth sectors to consider 'the health and wellbeing of children and young people'. Participants had the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions through discussions in two workshops, to identify the main causes of many health and wellbeing issues experienced by children and young people and how the youth service could best respond to support young people.

Participants identified that issues affecting the health and wellbeing of young people remain a key priority but the causes of these issues highlighted through the stakeholder event demonstrate that they are complex and multi-faceted. The causes within each of the issues present an opportunity for youth service to consider fully the best responses to supporting young people to address issues relating to physical and mental health. A number of common causes were highlighted including peer pressure, how young people feel about themselves and social media influences.

The key recommendations from this event have also provided information that will be useful for youth services to support young people and address issues. Whilst it was recognised that youth work programmes are an effective methodology along with outreach/detached youth work, training opportunities etc. other suggestions have been put forward that should be considered further including; more opportunities for peer support structures, peer to peer programmes, increased access to services including 'safe spaces' for young people and increased access for young people to gyms/fitness centres through youth service provision.

## 1.1 Introduction

The Ards and North Down LAG facilitated a Stakeholder Engagement Event for the RAG on the 'health and wellbeing of children and young people' on Monday 7 October 2019 in Ballymagee Youth Centre in Bangor. The event was one of a series of events aimed at engaging key stakeholders at a local level on particular themes/issues identified by RAG.

Young people from the LAG planned and organised the event along with Youth Service staff and invitations to attend the event were extended to registered youth groups, partner organisations and members of the public.

### Aims

- To increase participation of young people and other key stakeholders at a local level to explore key themes identified in the Regional Assessment of Need (Health and Wellbeing) and to identify how best these could be addressed by youth services.
- To gather the views and opinions of key stakeholders on the identified theme to help inform the development of key themes for the Regional Assessment of Need and Regional Youth Development Plan 2020-2023.

### Objectives

- To host a local event to increase the participation of young people and key stakeholders.
- To engage key stakeholders in a range of group activities and group discussions, to on the theme of the 'Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People.
- To develop recommendations on how youth services could best support young people to address issues of health and wellbeing.
- To produce a report on the event to inform RAG of themes for consideration for the Regional Assessment of Need.

## 2.1 Methodology

The Stakeholder Engagement Event was led by the Ards and North Down LAG which included young people. LAG members had the opportunity to input into the overall design and planning of the event however the young people represented on LAG took the lead in terms of creating the programme and content for the evening including workshops, interactive activities, speeches, catering and publicity (appendix i).

The young people were supported by youth workers to be co-creators of the programme and to lead on the delivery and facilitation of the event.

Following an introduction and setting the scene input, participants were divided into 4 groups to participate in the main part of the programme which consisted of two workshops.

The 'Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing' (Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give) underpinned the Stakeholder Engagement Event and the evening finished with all participants identifying one key action they would take away from a personal perspective based on the five steps model.

Other methodologies included:

- Interactive Workshops -
  - (i) Well known issues relating to mental and physical health were randomly selected by each group. An interactive/discussion based workshop was then used to confirm these were still key issues for young people. Each group was asked to think behind the issue and consider what the 'root causes' of the issues were from their own personal perspective or organisational perspective.
  - (ii) The second workshop involved a small group discussion on how best the youth service should respond to these issues. Some examples were provided by the facilitators however each group was encouraged to think creatively and put forward any ideas/suggestions which could be considered.

### Attendance

- A total of 42 people attended the Stakeholder Engagement Event in Bangor from across a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations (appendix ii). These included, Ards Estates Project, Ards Rural Project, Bangor Alternatives, Hollywood Youth Centre and Ards and North Down Borough Council
- There was representation from RAG members from the Department of Education, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Strategic Forum and Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster
- EA staff both full time and part time were also in attendance
- Young people from across the statutory, voluntary and community youth work sectors were in attendance which made up the main constituent body of attendees at 60%.

#### 3.1 Attendance Figures

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	17
Local Advisory Members	10 (2 adults and 8 young people)
Regional Advisory Members	3
Youth Work Staff	12 (9 EA staff and 2 voluntary sector staff)
Other e.g. PCSP,	1

#### 3.2 Satisfaction

100% of participants involved in the Stakeholder Event rated the event very satisfactory or satisfactory.

### 4.1 Health and wellbeing of children and young people

The health and wellbeing issues discussed during the stakeholder event were categorised into mental and physical health issues and were examined to ascertain the cause of the issue for children and young people. The issues identified and discussed included; drugs, diet, self-care, relationships, social media, exam stress/school, peer pressure, prejudice, body image and confidence (appendix iii).

The physical health issue responses provided an indication that the causes of physical health issues for young people are numerous and complex. For example in relation to drugs, young people can use drugs as a result of peer pressure, as a means of stress relief or a cheap escape but accessibility is also a key determining factor. One response included 'you don't even need to go to the shops'. Access to drugs can also be influenced by where you live, links with paramilitaries/family members but it was recognised that it is also due to young people being 'curious' and wanting to 'experiment'.

The contributing factors that influence young people's poor diet were examined and it was felt that one of the challenges is that fast food is often seen as 'quick and easy'. Stakeholders discussed that the general 'busyness' of individuals (parents/carers/young people) also impacts on choices, however it was felt that there remains somewhat confusing messages about what is categorised as 'good food' or 'not so good food'. Other causes for poor diet included a lack of skills in cooking along with the recognition that the level of family income can impact the quality of a young person's diet.

Young people not looking after themselves (self-care) is caused by a range of factors including poor mental or physical health issues such as depression, anxiety and loneliness. Participants recognised that young people experience pressure from a range of sources – peers, social media and self which can lead to them not taking appropriate care for themselves.

Young people's relationships were identified as a physical health issue caused by isolation, lack of social skills and a lack of access/engagement in services. It was also felt that young people did not have positive role models and those issues such as

bullying and alcohol/substance misuse also impacted on a young person's ability to develop long term positive relationships with others.

It was recognised that social media has a role to play in affecting the physical health of young people. Stakeholders identified that young people's physical health was impacted by cyber bullying, gambling, sexting and the amount of time young people spend online, particularly on social media. This area not only impacts physical health but also young people's mental health.

Within the mental health issues identified, poor body image was associated to young people lacking in confidence but it also linked to other physical and mental health issues. The impact of social media was emphasised as having a negative influence on young people and their own body image due to the portrayals of the 'perfect body' on social media.

A number of causes were identified in relation to young people's confidence and self-esteem. These included issues with bullying, lack of diversity within communities/social settings, having a poor body image and young people having a lack of self-worth. The influence of social media was also felt to impact this issue very strongly. Interestingly young people's experience of school was also seen as a key factor affecting individual confidence and self-esteem.

Issues relating to school, including exam stress and educational under achievement were discussed to identify what the particular causes were for young people not performing to their full potential. Stakeholders identified that large classes, young people struggling to make new friends and bullying were important causes for young people not achieving. A lack of interest (both by pupils and teachers) was also cited, along with addictions to gaming, alcohol, drugs and a lack of sleep having a negative impact on performance in school.

Peer pressure was identified as a key mental health issue for young people, caused by young people's desire to 'fit in'. Participants felt that some young people don't have a clear understanding of what it means to be a 'real friend'. This area also links to the physical issue of relationships. Several stakeholders felt that other 'pressures' such as those from within the community including paramilitaries was also a 'pressure' (which could also be from peers) that affected the mental health of young people.



Prejudice and stereotyping can also effect young people's mental health. Stakeholders felt that this was caused by the 'people around you'. Isolation and a lack of knowledge can contribute to young people being prejudiced along with messages carried through the media. The religious divide within NI was also cited as a major cause of prejudice and discrimination.

## 4.2 The youth service response to these issues

During the second workshop session, each group discussed and identified how best youth services could respond to the physical and mental health issues/causes identified by young people.

A wide range of examples were presented based on each of the issues discussed however some key youth work methodologies/interventions were common across both mental health and physical health issues. These included: youth work programmes (based on particular issue e.g. drugs/alcohol programmes), detached and outreach work, signposting to other services, accredited and non-accredited training and residential experiences/outdoor learning.

Significantly, peer to peer support or peer education programmes were recommended highly for young people across a number of issues.

It was also felt that the youth service is best placed to provide 'safe spaces' for young people.

A number of responses also suggested that youth services could provide sports sessions and or free/discounted gym passes to address health and wellbeing issues for young people.

### 5.1 Recommendations

The Ards and North Down Stakeholder Engagement Event confirms that a number of health and wellbeing issues identified in the 2016 Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need remain a priority for young people. Young people are still facing challenges with regards to their health and wellbeing and youth services have an important role to play in this area.

The causes of physical and mental health issues are wide-ranging and are often interlinked however within each area discussed, there were some common trends emerging that should be considered by youth services in terms of responding to need.

Peer pressure is recognised as having an impact on both the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people. Supporting young people to cope with peer pressure is essential and youth services have an important role to play in helping young people develop coping strategies when feeling under pressure by their peers. Closely linked to this is relationships and the ability to recognise good relationships and have the skills to form good relationships.

How young people feel about themselves impacts their overall health and wellbeing. The youth service can support young people to think more positively about themselves through the range of experiences and opportunities provided within a non-formal education setting.

Whilst it is recognised that there are a range of external factors that impact on a young person's health and wellbeing e.g family, social media, community, friends, school, and paramilitaries, the youth service can support young people to develop confidence and build resilience to face the day to day challenges within these settings.

Social media is a cross cutting theme linked to a number of physical and mental health issues in young people. Young people recognise the impact that social media can have on their health and wellbeing however the key challenge is how can youth services reduce the impact of these social media messages or counterbalance the messages with positive reinforcement messages to young people?

Peers supporting peers was a key theme across a number of health and wellbeing issues in terms of how youth services could support young people. Youth services should consider how to develop this concept further and train, equip and support young people to support their peers in a number of areas within this theme.

Youth services have an important role to play within the formal education sector. Through school based interventions young people can be supported with issues relating to physical and mental health including forming relationships, making new friends along and building resilience along with raising awareness of the things that can impact performance in schools such as lack of sleep.

Whilst outreach and detached work was cited as being a key methodology for youth services supporting young people it was recognised that youth services provides safe spaces for young people to meet, leading to increased access to services. This is particularly needed in the evenings and at weekends.

There were several recommendations across a number of issues that youth services should have stronger links with leisure centres or provide opportunities for young to access fitness facilities such as local gyms or fitness suites. Providing discounted membership for these facilities for young people was noted as a way to encourage young people to be more active and promote overall health and wellbeing.

Providing residential and international experiences was a common recommendation to support young people's health and wellbeing. Further exploration of why these types of programmes are recommended would be beneficial to establish if it is due to just being away from the normal environment that is attractive and of benefit or the type of programme itself, which benefits overall health and wellbeing.

## 5.2 Future considerations

The findings from this Stakeholder Engagement Event on the theme of health and wellbeing theme should be considered further by the EA Information and Planning team in preparation for the Regional Assessment of Need.

The causes identified under each health and wellbeing theme should be considered further at a regional level to inform regional strategies for dealing with young people's health and wellbeing issues

The LAG should also take account of the recommended youth service responses to identify issues for future area planning purposes and service delivery.

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

- i Stakeholder Event Programme
- ii Attendance list
- iii Issues discussed and responses

