

REPORT

RAG/LAG Participation Event Newry, Mourne & Down

The Health & Wellbeing Needs of Children and Young People

Monday 7 October 2019

Patrician Youth Centre, Downpatrick



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The event engaged seventy two key stakeholders from across the statutory and voluntary youth sectors to consider 'the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people'. Participants had the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions through discussions in two workshops to identify the new or emerging issue for young people and how the youth service can best respond to support young people on these issues.

Participants identified that some of the issues prioritised in the 2016 Regional Assessment of Need remained a priority namely, mental health and anxiety however a number of new key issues came to the fore. These included:

- high expectations from teachers and parents
- screen time
- lack of sleep
- body image
- anxiety and burn out

Key recommendations on how the youth service could address these issues were identified including support for young people in the form of additional programmes and more outreach work. Along with these some new areas for consideration included:

- creation of spaces for young people using existing infrastructure, e.g. shopping centres
- emphasis on partnerships to support young people in understanding and celebrating their place in the community.

1.1 Introduction

The Newry, Mourne & Down Local Advisory Group (LAG) facilitated a Stakeholder Engagement Event for the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) on the 'Health & Wellbeing Needs of Children and Young People' on Monday 7th October 2019 in Patrician Youth Centre in Downpatrick. This event was one of a series of events aimed at engaging key stakeholders at a local level on a particular theme/issue identified by the RAG.

Young people from the Newry & Mourne and Down Youth Councils who are members of the local LAG along with young volunteers from Patrician Youth Centre planned and organised the event inviting registered youth groups, partner organisations and members of the public to come along and be part of the discussions.

Aims

- To increase participation of young people and other key stakeholders at a local level to identify key themes and issues in relation to emerging health & wellbeing needs and to outline how 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 identify new or emerging issues for young people
- To develop recommendations on how youth services could best support young people to address these issues
- To produce a report on the event to inform RAG of themes for consideration for the Regional Assessment of Need.

2.1 Methodology

LAG members including young people from the Newry & Mourne and Down Youth Councils and young volunteers from Patrician Youth Centre had the opportunity to input into the overall design and planning of the event when they met in May. The young people took the lead in terms of creating the programme and content of the evening. This included workshops, interactive activities, challenges, and speeches (see appendices).

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

A variety of methodologies were used to capture evidence throughout the participation event:

- Interactive workshops –
 - (i) Well known issues relating to mental and physical health were randomly selected by groups. 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) A second workshop involved a small group discussion on how best the youth service should respond to these issues. Facilitators provided some examples however each group was encouraged to think creatively and put forward any ideas/suggestions which could be considered.
- DVD – A short video was shown illustrating how a jar can appear full but still has room for more. This involved a lecturer using a demonstration with students in his class that when a jar is filled with golf balls and pebbles, sand and liquid can fill the spaces. This was used to stimulate discussion about how we all manage the important things in our lives and to provide advice about keeping things in perspective.
- Digital Mentimeter - Through the use of the Mentimeter online engagement tool, participants were encouraged to state one thing they would personally commit to doing to improve their own health and wellbeing. The tool collated and presented the responses in the form of a word collage (Appendix viii).

- A total of 72 people attended the Stakeholder Engagement Event in Downpatrick from across a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations (appendix iii). These included, Newry, Mourne & Down District Council Community Planning, Newry & Mourne Youth Council, Down Youth Council, Newcastle YMCA, St John Bosco Youth Club Newry, South Armagh Area Project, Youth Initiatives, The Girl Guides, St Marys High School Downpatrick, Community Policing and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.
- There was also representation from RAG members including the EA Head of Local Youth Services, a representative from the Department of Education and a Youth Work Alliance representative.
- 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 51%.

3.1 Attendance Figures

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	29
Local Advisory Members	13 (5 adults and 8 young people)
Regional Advisory Members	3
Youth Work Staff, Volunteers	22 (7 controlled, 15 voluntary)
Other e.g. PSNI, Schools	5

3.2 Satisfaction

100% of participants who returned evaluation forms rated the event very satisfactory or satisfactory.

4.1 Health and wellbeing of children and young people

The participants selected the following key issues for discussion;

- a. Mental and emotional health - anxiety, bullying, peer pressure, self-confidence, exam stress, eating disorders, high expectations, screen time, self-harm and suicide.
- b. Physical health - participants discussed alcohol, drugs, smoking, vaping, sleep, diet and body image.
- c. Other issues that came up were outside of the young people's control such as poverty, career prospects, isolation, lack of services, media influences, prejudice & stereotyping, neglect, adverse childhood experiences and poor relationships between them and those around them.

As expected many of the issues discussed impacted on the physical, mental and emotional health of young people. For example there were clear links between high expectations, media influence, exam stress, sleep disruption, balancing part time work, and burn out. Young people stated they are getting the message that they can be and do everything but feel that parents and teachers expect too much of them.

It was identified by groups that there is a growing awareness of screen time eating away at the time available for rest, recreation, study, and sleep.

It is interesting to note that although self-care was selected the young people didn't know how to do this and asked to be shown what this meant.

The risk taking behaviours that impact on young people's physical health and wellbeing are often due to a lack of confidence and having a low self-image. Respondents felt that pressure from the media to look and behave in a certain way presented unrealistic or false personas as role models.

With young people spending increasing amounts of time using technology for study and pleasure, respondents felt that face to face communication and interpersonal skills were diminishing and online feedback was much more likely to be critical and offensive, which attacked the emotional health of those using it.

Other factors were discussed such as living in rural locations. It was highlighted that this often leaves young people without access to sports facilities or social spaces to meet with friends or employment opportunities to aspire to which affects their mental and physical health.

4.2 The youth service response to these issues

A range of suggestions were put forward as to how the youth service should respond to young people's mental and emotional health issues. There was a demand for opportunities to connect young people to local provision and increase connectedness with other service providers. It was felt that youth services could help to promote a positive view of young people and aid communities to see them as assets rather than problems which would support a stronger sense of belonging, identity and attachment. A wide spectrum of interventions was suggested from one to one work to developmental group work both inside and outside of school. Some had suggested a dedicated youth zone located in shopping centres which is central, neutral, safe and warm.

The youth service has a key role in terms of supporting young people regarding their risk taking behaviour. Having access to late night and weekend opening allows for an alternative use of their time when peers often exert pressure to indulge in alcohol, drugs and vaping. Suggested responses included prevention and educational programmes as well as advice and guidance, or signposting to other services at the later stages. Outreach and detached strategies can help engage with hard to reach young people as well as offering challenging outdoor learning activities that provide natural highs in a safe environment.

For many participants, factors outside of their control had a negative impact on their health and well-being. We are aware that children who are socially disadvantaged are more at risk of poorer health outcomes. Those who live in rurally isolated communities suffer due to lack of access to recreational or leisure services. Partnership working with local councils and schools by the youth service can draw down additional resources to enhance provision. Lack of career prospects and job opportunities can further reduce young people's aspirations. The youth service can and should develop effective links with the business community to provide job skills training and work experience opportunities for young people.

Youth services should continue to broaden their engagement with young people who experience prejudice & stereotyping due to lack of respect for diversity. Newcomer young people are increasingly part of our demographic, and we need to ensure there are opportunities to celebrate cultural differences. Other communities of interest such as LGBT or transitioning young people need to be welcomed into our units or projects both by removing physical barriers but also by addressing attitudes of those who don't understand their needs. Families struggling with conflict, substance misuse, ill health, or trauma are not safe places for some young people. The Youth Service can provide places of sanctuary where children and young people can express their feelings and get the guidance they need to enable them to understand their difficulties but also to positively take steps to improve relationships that matter to them.

It is hard to separate some risk factors because there are clear links and overlapping consequences for many health and well-being issues such as sleep. Young people commented that their physical and emotional health suffered when they could not get enough sleep due to a mix of poor diet, excessive screen time and anxiety over managing their responsibilities and studies. The youth service can assist by ensuring that generalist provision is anchored within every community so that young people have opportunities to have fun and socialise with friends. Targeted support can be used to add to the options available for young people.

5.1 Recommendations

The Newry, Mourne and Down Stakeholder Engagement Event confirms that a number of issues identified in the 2016 Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need remain a priority for young people. Suggestions as to how youth service should respond to these issues however could be explored further e.g. safe spaces for young people to express themselves, increased partnership working, along with the development of more targeted work supporting young people across the service and strengthening work with the business sector.

Support with social media and the online world is essential for young people to remain safe and consideration should be given as to how this medium can be used safely both by the young people and youth services.

Support for young people in relation to drugs, alcohol, vaping and other risk taking behaviour is also important for moving forward. The youth service has a role in providing attractive alternatives such as residential experiences and outdoor learning opportunities for young people along with an educational and supportive role.

Young people need support in terms of helping to form and understand their identity and develop a 'sense of belonging'. Youth services have a key role in helping young people explore their identity in a safe and supportive environment along with creating opportunities to for them to explore and understand difference. This includes working with local communities to promote the positive role young people contribute to their community and intergenerational work to strengthen relationships between young and old.

In terms of preparing young people for transitions into the world of work, support should continue to be provided to help young people deal with the stresses of exams and assessments along with building the necessary skills for their career choices. Youth services should consider establishing twilight sessions to provide spaces for young people to complete homework and coursework, as well as linking them with a wide range of employers to access work experience.

Across all the issues discussed it is worth noting a number of specific responses for youth services being recommended. The creation of ‘chill zones’ for young people was recommended for supporting young people who need space to think and be themselves.

5.2 Future considerations

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 the local Senior Youth Officers in their upcoming 3 year plans.

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

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- ii Group Challenges
- iii Script
- iv Power point presentation
- v Attendance list
- vi Key issues identified by group
- vii Participant evaluations
- viii Mentimeter call to action

