

Children & Young People's Services Directorate

Summary Feedback on Stakeholder Participation: The Health & Wellbeing Needs of Children and Young People

Friday 6th December 2019

RAG Group Meeting
Ballykeel Youth Centre



Event details

- **Monday 7 October 2019 – Newry, Mourne and Down event - Patrician Youth Centre, Downpatrick**
- 72 people in attendance – 37 young people and 35 adults
- Key Stakeholders included a representative from the Department of Education, YMCA Ireland, Youth Work Alliance, Newry, Mourne & Down District Council Community Planning, Youth Initiatives, The Girl Guides, St Marys High School Downpatrick, Community Policing and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

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



Event details

Monday 7 October 2019 – Ards and North Down event – Ballymagee Youth Centre, Bangor

- 42 people in attendance - 25 young people and 17 adults
- Key stakeholders included a Department of Education representative, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Strategic Forum, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster, Bangor Alternatives and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

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



Key Findings – Newry, Mourne and Down

Participants discussed the following key issues regarding the health and wellbeing of young people:

- In terms of mental and emotional health they raised anxiety, bullying, peer pressure, self-confidence, exam stress, eating disorders, high expectations, screen time, self-harm and suicide.
- Regarding physical health participants discussed alcohol, drugs, smoking, vaping, sleep, diet and body image.
- As expected many of the issues discussed impacted on all three, 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.
- 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.
- It was highlighted that living in rural locations, often leaves young people without access to sports facilities or social spaces to meet friends or employment opportunities to aspire to, which affects their mental and physical health.



Key Findings – Ards & North Down

- The issues identified and discussed included; drugs, diet, self-care, relationships, social media, exam stress/school, peer pressure, prejudice, body image and confidence
- 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.
- 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.
- Peer pressure was identified as a key mental health issue for young people that is caused by young people's desire to 'fit in'.
- 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.



Recommendations – Newry, Mourne and Down

- Support with social media and the online world is essential for young people to remain safe.
- 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.
- There needs to be continued support for young people in relation to drugs, alcohol, vaping and other risk taking behaviour. Youth services have a role in providing attractive alternatives such as residential experiences and outdoor learning opportunities for young people along with an educational and supportive role.
- 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.
- The creation of 'chill zones' for young people was recommended for supporting young people who need space to think and be themselves.



Recommendations – Ards & North Down

- 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.
- Peer support was a key theme across a number of health and wellbeing issues. Youth services should continue to deliver and develop this approach.
- Outreach and detached work was cited as being a key methodology for youth services supporting young people to feel safe and it was clear that Youth Centres provide safe spaces for young people to meet. 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.
- School based interventions can provide support 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.

