

IRISH YOUTH WORK CENTRE'S

scene

MAGAZINE

INSIDE

EVIDENCE IN YOUTH WORK

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COMMENTS ON

- † The evidence conversaton
- † Young people's involvement in generating evidence
- † Using evidence in planning and informing practice
- † Research Brief: Study on homelessness



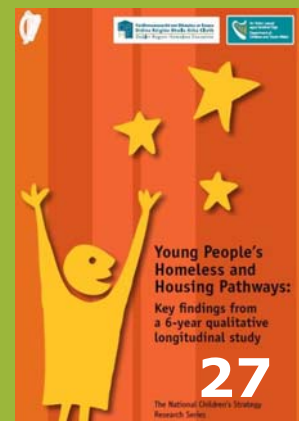
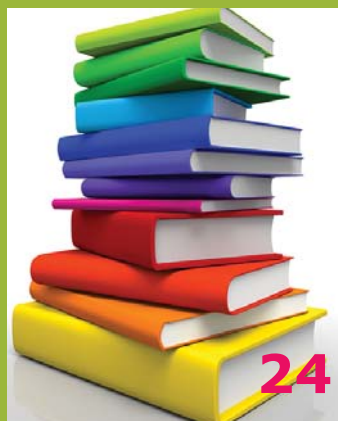
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Scene Magazine Contents

Issue 77: December, 2013

- 3 A Word from our CEO**
Dr. Patrick J. Burke
- 3 Introduction to this Edition**
Matthew Seebach, Irish Youth Work Centre
- 5 Young People's Involvement in Generating Evidence**
Anne O'Donnell, DCYA
- 10 The Evidence Conversation**
Working Group on Evidence in Youth Work
- 12 Elements of a Needs Assessment Framework Development**
Brian McManus, Clare Youth Service
- 14 Evidence Informed Approach in an Integrated Youth Service**
Gareth Gibson, Donegal Youth Service
- 16 The Use of Evidence in Youth Work Practice**
Eleanor O'Sullivan, Youth Work Ireland Cork
- 18 Using Evidence to Inform Practice**
Bernadine Brady, NUI Galway & Mary Lynch, Foróige
- 19 Snapshot of Practice - Bluebell Youth Project**
- 20 Evidence Informed Practice in Rialto Youth Project**
Nicola Mooney and Tina MacVeigh, Rialto Youth Project
- 24 New Library Resources**
IYWC
- 26 Policy Brief**
Michael McLoughlin, Youth Work Ireland
- 27 Research Brief: Youth Homelessness in Dublin**
Paula Mayock, Children's Research Centre



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*A word
from our
CEO*

Towards a brighter future for children and young people in Ireland

Work on the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 0-25 years old, is well underway, and is due to be brought before cabinet in December 2013. The National Advisory Committee on Youth Work (NYWAC) recently had an opportunity to input into the Framework and is now actively engaged in developing the Youth Strategy of 12–25 year olds, which will be one of 3 strategies to underpin the Framework. Both the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People and the National Youth Strategy underpinning it are cross-departmental and have “a whole of government” approach to addressing the needs and concerns of children and young people.

This has clearly to be welcomed. The overarching vision is for, “an Ireland where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard; where they are supported by their families, communities and the State to enjoy a fulfilling childhood and adolescence, and to realise their maximum potential now and in the future”. There is nobody in the youth work sector who could not support this vision. Nor is there, I think, anybody in the sector who could not support the five National Outcomes (1. Active & Health, 2. Achieving Full Potential, 3. Safety & Protected, 4. Economic Security, 5. Connected, Respected and Contributing) for children and young people.

Submissions are currently being prepared by the youth sector, which in addition to making comments on how to meet the needs of young people and recognise the assets which young people bring to communities, are also clearly identifying the specific role which the youth sector can play in relation to realising the vision and ensuring that the five outcomes are achieved. Clearly, the multi-faceted work currently going on in the sector demonstrates that youth work impacts on so many aspects of young peoples’ lives including leisure, personal and social development, education, training, employability, information, physical and mental health etc..

However, it is clear to me that once the National Policy Framework and the associated Youth Strategy is in place the sector will still need its own specific strategy and structure for the delivery of youth support and services in Ireland. This particular strategy is long awaited, it needs to be ambitious and it needs to ensure that every young person in the country regardless of where they live has access to a youth service. A specific Youth Work Strategy would in my view, complete the suite of policy supports and strategies which we need to ensure that together with government we achieve the ambitious vision articulated in the National Policy Framework.

Dr. Patrick J. Burke
CEO, Youth Work Ireland



Evidence in Youth Work

Everybody in the youth work sector knows that evidence of what we do is important. But, what do we *actually* do with evidence? What evidence is important? What about evidence from young people or evidence from our own practice experience? This edition of Scene Magazine will attempt to answer these questions.

Why are we talking about evidence again?

The last edition of Scene Magazine provided a forum for practitioners to share their experience of addressing the challenge of collecting and developing evidence to **prove** the impact of their youth work. The current edition of Scene Magazine provides a number of practitioner stories that help us to think about two other challenges that practitioners face in relation to evidence in youth work. One of these challenges is to ensure that the evidence that we collect and develop is effectively used to **improve** our youth work practice and service provision. The other challenge is that we take a balanced approach to considering, collecting and generating **different kinds of evidence**.

Policy makers and researcher’s discussions of the use of evidence in youth work have emphasised these two challenges over the past several years. At the 2011 DCYA/CES Symposium on Outcomes, Professor Dale Blyth spoke of his vast experience in developing and using evidence in youth work. He stated that youth workers now had to address the tasks of, “understanding, valuing and integrating different forms of knowing” and “shifting from proving difference to improving the ways it makes a difference”.

Likewise Conor Rowley of the DCYA, John Bamber of the CES and consultant Amy Power in their recent article in the Journal of Youth Work said of evidence that “the processes adopted and the data

that it produces *must satisfy practitioners' needs internally*, to confirm and improve practice, and externally to verify and support its future direction for the benefit of the young people it serves (italics added).“

So, in addition to proving what we do has impact, we need to use evidence to improve our work and we need to consider different ways of “knowing” sources of knowledge in youth work. But how do we do that?

The articles in this edition of Scene Magazine document practitioners' experiences of developing and using different types of evidence. We see that evidence can come from large-scale randomised control trial research such as that which has informed the development and implementation of the Foróige Brothers Big Sisters Project and which is discussed in the article provided by Dr Bernadine Brady and Mary Lynch.

Evidence can also come from external assessment as in the small scale community-based research projects. The collaboration between University College Cork and Youth Work Ireland Cork's Community Drugs Outreach is one such example. The learning and application of this research are described by Eleanor O'Sullivan in her article.

Practitioners can also provide evidence from their own experience and practice wisdom. The working group on evidence in youth work asks readers to join them in their work to become involved in surfacing evidence from practitioner learning. Practitioner reflection and learning, it is suggested, is a valuable basis for proving outcomes in youth work, but also worth sharing with others to improve and develop practice.

Evidence can also come from a mix of research, theory, practice wisdom, consultation, monitoring and evaluation and external assessment. Two pieces in this edition describe how needs assessments that employ a mix of evidence sources can provide an evidence base that can inform the kinds of services and projects that are provided in a regional youth service. Brian McManus discusses how Clare Youth Service has moved in recent years to adopting a structured and systematic approach to gathering and using evidence. The place of local, national data as well as young people's data and the particular involvement of practitioner's structured reflection

are discussed. Gareth Gibson of Donegal Youth Service looks in depth at the particular issues of taking an integrated approach to the collection and use of evidence in a regional service delivery context.

While the experience of the Rialto Youth Project are shared in Tina McVeigh and Nichola Mooney's articles about the systematic collection and analyses of evidence through the use of a cloud-based database. The motivations, challenges and first hand practitioner experiences of using this tool to gather and use evidence provide a useful insight into practitioner experience within a rigorously applied approach to gathering and using evidence.

Very importantly, evidence can also come directly from young people and young people can be involved in developing the tools to collect evidence. Almost every example of using evidence provided in this magazine includes collecting evidence from young people through surveys, focus groups or other methods. Anne O'Donnell of the DCYA Participation Unit documents a process in her article of involving young people in developing an evidence generating tool of international stature. Her article demonstrates that young people can be a meaningful part of preparing sophisticated evidence gathering processes. Importantly, these articles largely leave aside the question of how evidence based, or evidence informed practice should be defined in Irish Youth Work. Previous editions of this magazine have begun to explore what this term might mean in Irish youth work. Cormac Doran's review of Dr. Cormac Forkan's book chapter on this subject summarises useful definitions in relation to evidence based practice. Dr. John Bamber of the CES has also articulated a view of what an “evidence informed approach” might look like in Irish youth work. Both of these discussions provide tentative frameworks for evidence based and evidence informed practice respectively.

In all, this edition represents another step towards considering and developing a broader understanding within the sector of what evidence can be used for and where evidence can come from. If you are interested in becoming involved in discussions about the use of evidence in youth work, the members of the Working Group on Evidence in Youth Work have invited practitioners to join them by contacting Mary Robb at CDYSB.

Matthew Seebach, Irish Youth Work Centre

Young People's Involvement in Generating Evidence

Anne O'Donnell, Participation Unit, DCYA

This article describes a journey that proves beyond all doubt the value of involving children and young people in decisions that affect their lives.

Ireland has become the first country to involve children and young people in the development of the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children Survey (2014). This journey was taken by children, young people, policy makers and researchers in the development of a critical national data set, which influences policy and practice in Ireland.

How it all began....

The DCYA has a dedicated Citizen Participation Unit, whose work is undertaken through development of effective structures for children's participation in decision-making; conducting consultations and dialogue with children and young people; and development of evidence-based policy in keeping with national and international best practice. The DCYA Participation Team is comprised of staff from

the DCYA and colleagues from Foróige and Youth Work Ireland who deliver participation services contracted by the DCYA.

The Health Behaviour of School Aged Children (HBSC) Survey is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO). The Survey is run on a 4-year academic cycle with over 43 participating countries and regions. The HBSC is a key data set in gaining new insight into and increasing our understanding of children and young people's health and well being, health behaviours and their social context. The HBSC survey instrument is a standardised questionnaire, but also allows for individual country differences in question areas.

Proposal by DCYA Citizen Participation Unit regarding children's involvement in the HBSC Study

During 2011, the NUIG HBSC Team approached the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit for advice on more comprehensively involving children and young people in the Survey cycle.

The NUIG Team explained that the domains explored in the HBSC Survey and the questions under each domain are developed by academics and policy-makers at national and international level. Children and young people have never been involved in the development of domains or questions for the Survey in any participating country.

The DCYA suggested that it would be interesting to discover the things that children and young people themselves believe are the most important aspects of their health and well-being and examine if these are included in the HBSC Survey. The DCYA proposed that children and



young people should be involved in the development of the HBSC Survey because of its importance as a data source on their lives and behaviour.

It was agreed that in order to ensure the most meaningful participation of children and young people in the Survey, they should be involved from the earliest stages of its development in identifying domains and questions and at all other stages of the Survey process.

The NUIG HBSC Team and the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit formed a partnership under the fledgling DCYA Participation Hub to involve children and young people in the development of the HBSC Ireland (2014) instrument for the four-year cycle. Both Teams agreed to bring their respective expertise to the process. So began the exciting process of being the first country to involve children and young people in development of the HBSC.

Methodology for involving children and young people in identifying domains and questions for the HBSC Survey (2014)

A three-stage process was agreed for involving children and young people in the development of domains and questions for the 2014 Survey (October 2012 to December 2013), as outlined below.

Stage 1: Identification of domains that are important to children and young people.

Stage 2: Development of questions under the domains identified by children and young people.

Stage 3: Testing the Questions

In identifying children aged 8-12, the DCYA partnered with the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) to ensure a good demographic, socio-economic and gender spread.

In identifying young people aged 13-18, organisers of Comhairle na nÓg in the 34 local authority areas of the country were asked to invite interested young people. Both the IPPN and the 34 Comhairle na nÓg responded enthusiastically to involving children and young people in this process.

Stage 1: Identification of domains that are important to children and young people

The DCYA Participation Team and the NUIG HBSC Team developed age-appropriate, innovative participation methods and tools for this process. Workshop design and facilitation was provided by the DCYA Team and the recording and writing-up of data and findings was provided by the NUIG HBSC Team. A blue sky thinking methodology was used, where children and young people were asked to identify the things that are important in their lives.

Blue Skies Workshop with 40 young people aged (12 – 18) – October 2012

The Opening Question put to the young people was: 'What would someone need to know to understand what life is like for young people in Ireland?'

An Open Space Exercise was used to explore this question, during which young people identified topics, grouped them and voted on those of most importance to them.

The domain areas that were prioritised as those of MOST importance were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Mental health | 2. Cyber-bullying |
| 3. Independence | 4. Diversity & Individuality |

The young people discussed and wrote notes and comments on important aspects of these domain areas on customised five-foot square floormats.

It is interesting to note that domains on 'Cyber-bullying', 'Independence' and 'Diversity and Individuality' have not to date been included in the HBSC Survey. A domain area on 'Mental Health (incorporating 'bullying')' has been included in previous HBSC surveys, but the questions do not include aspects of mental health identified by the young people in this workshop.

Blue Skies Workshop with 40 children (aged 8-12) – December 2012

The Opening Question asked to the children was: 'What would an alien from Mars need to know to understand what life is like for children in Ireland?'

An Open Space Exercise was used to explore this question, during which children identified topics, grouped them and voted on those of most importance to them.

The domain areas that were prioritised as those of MOST importance were:

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Having fun | 2. Parents, family and wellbeing |
| 3. Safety | |

The children discussed and wrote notes and comments on important aspects of these domain areas on customised five-foot square floormats.

Domains on 'Having fun' and 'Parents, family and wellbeing' have not to date been included in the HBSC Survey. In addition, questions under the 'Safety' domain in previous HBSC surveys do not include some aspects of safety identified by the children in this workshop.

Stage 2: Development of questions

The next stage of the process involved children and young people developing questions under the domains identified at the blue skies workshops.

Young People's Question Development Workshop – April 2013

The young people worked in four groups on four customised five-foot square floormats. Each floormat had the title of the domain in the centre:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Mental Health | 2. Cyber-bullying |
| 3. Independence | 4. Diversity & Individuality |

The young people used the data (recorded on coloured cards) from the blue skies workshop in each domain area.

They visited the other three floormats, reviewed the work done by other groups, made proposed additions, changes and new categories.

The young people voted on their top three categories under each domain using sticky dot voting, the results of which are outlined below:

Diversity and Individuality:

Sexuality
Stereotypes
Finding yourself

Mental Health:

Solutions
Social media
Causes

Independence:

Stereotypes
Gaining independence
Trust

Bullying:

Causes
Types
Coping

Developing Questions

The next step was to work on developing questions under the top three categories in each of the four domains.

A short presentation was given by the NUIG researchers on the factors that make for good questions. Each group was also provided with a checklist for development of good questions.

They worked on four floormats depicting the domains and categories, discussed their question ideas and agreed two to five questions under each category.

When they had completed their questions, each group visited the other three floormats. They had the opportunity to review the work done, make additions, changes and even add new questions.

All the young people then visited the four floormats and voted on their top three questions under each domain using sticky dots.

The young people then voted on their top three questions under each domain using sticky dots. Below final questions selected by the young people under the four domains - Diversity & Individuality; Independence; Mental Health and Bullying.

Diversity & Individuality

Sexuality:

- What is your attitude towards the LGBT community?
- If you are LGBT, at what age did you become aware of your sexuality?
- Do you feel that every sexuality is accepted in your country?
- Are you comfortable talking about your sexuality? If yes to whom?

Stereotypes:

- Are teenagers judged by the older generation?
- Have you ever been stereotyped? If so how?
- Do you feel comfortable being yourself while with your friends?
- Do you feel accepted as you are?

Finding Yourself:

- Are you free to state your own opinions?
- Are you more confident at home or at school? Why?
- How do people influence your interests?

Independence

Stereotypes:

- Which gender has more freedom?
- Is life hard for LGBT young people in Ireland? Why?
- Do you judge others because they are different?

Gaining Independence

- At what age should young people be allowed to work?
- Should young people be allowed to leave school before the age of 16? Why?
- The voting age is 16. What age do you think it should be? Why?
- Should the legal age to drink be changed?
- At what age should young people be legally allowed to leave home?

Trust:

- If you had a personal problem who would you trust to tell?
- At what age do you think you should be trusted to go out with friends etc.. without parental supervision?
- At what age do you think girls and boys should be trusted to be alone together?
- Do you share your personal problems with parents or guardians?
- Do you think young people should be judged on past mistakes?

Mental Health

Solutions:

- Are you aware of the different mental health services available to you?
- Who do you feel you can talk to ?
- Are you open about your mental health?
- Do you often talk about mental health in class?

- Would you feel comfortable talking to your friends about their mental health?
- Do you know the difference between mental health and mental illness?

Social Media:

- Why do you use social media?
- Does social media influence the way you see yourself as a person?
- Do you think school bullies also cyber-bully?
- What effect does social media have on your mental health?

Causes:

- Does your sexuality effect your mental health?
- Are you self confident?
- What causes low self-esteem for you?
- What is the biggest influence on your mental health?
- Do you feel pressurised to reach expectations / to do well? If so why?

Bullying

Causes:

- Have you ever bullied someone? If so why?
- Have you ever stood up for the person being bullied? If so, what effect did it have on you?
- Have you ever been bullied by a family member? If so, how frequently?
- Does a troubled household cause a person to bully?

Types

- Have you ever been bullied? If so why?
- How has it affected you?
- Do you feel social networking sites are safe?
- Are you aware of the safety features on social networking sites?
- What is the worst type of bullying?

Coping:

- How would you deal with being bullied?
- What services are available if you are being bullied?
- Do you have someone to talk to if you are being bullied? If yes, who?

Children's Question Development Workshop – June 2013

The same methodology was used as outlined above – but the children worked in smaller groups. The children used the data (recorded on coloured cards) from blue skies workshop under the three domains:

1. Having fun
2. Parents, family & wellbeing
3. Safety

The Children's Final questions on their three chosen domains:

Parent's Family & Well Being

Love:

- Does your family try to spend time with you?
- Do you love your family?
- Do you think people with no family deserve to be loved?

Fun:

- Does your family play with you?
- Do you like making new friends?

Family & Friends

- Is having family & friends important to you?
- Do you talk to your family when you are sad?

Fun

Friends:

- Do you feel leftout sometimes by friends?
- Should you have lots of good friends?

Sport:

- What is your favourite sport?
- Do you play with a club?
- Do you play a sport?

Hobbies:

- How often do you indulge in your hobby?
- Do you prefer to play indoors or outdoors?

Safety

Fire Safety:

- Do you know what to do if your clothes caught fire?
- Is it important to have a safety plan in case of fire?

Road Safety

- Do you wear a helmet when cycling?
- Do you wear high vision clothes when going out in the dark?

Caring for others:

- Are you ever left home alone?
- Do you feel safe with other people?
- When someone is hurt would you help them?

Stage 3: Testing the Questions

The final stage of the identification of domains and questions for the HBSC Study, was testing the questions with children and young people who were not involved in their development.

Age appropriate workshops with 13-18 year-old young people and with 8-12 year-old children were developed.

Young People's Testing the Questions Workshop – October 2013

This workshop with young people was intensive as there were a total of 36 questions to be tested under the four domains of 'Mental health'; 'Cyber-bullying'; 'Independence'; and 'Diversity and Individuality'.

Each question was written on an A1 card with spaces for the young people to assign scores and comments under the following question criteria:

- Is the question appropriate?
- Is the question understandable?
- Is the question fair/unbiased?

A further space was provided for each group to select the best response to the question from a list of ten response options.

A moving debate was held before working on the question cards, to help in explaining the concept of 'question criteria'.

The young people worked in 3 groups on 12 questions per group. They discussed each question and cast their individual vote from 1-10 under the each of the three criteria (appropriate, understandable and fair). If they considered it to be a good question with poor wording, the group proposed a re-worded question and voted again.

They then assigned a response option to each question from a list of 10 options provided.

Once finished working on all 12 questions, they moved table and repeated the above process with another set of 12 questions, marking, commenting and proposing changes or agreeing with changes proposed by the previous group.

Next Steps

The Children's (8-12) Testing the Questions Workshop will be conducted in December 2013.

Once analysis of the Testing the Questions Workshops has been completed, the NUIG HBSC Team will consider and review the final questions developed by children and young people against other research criteria for inclusion in the Survey.

New domains and questions developed by children and young people will be included in the HBSC Ireland Survey 2014, marking a milestone in this international instrument.

A methodology for involving children and young people in further phases of the 2014 Survey will be explored by the DCYA and NUIG HBSC Team partners in the coming months.

Evaluation

All stages of the process to date have been evaluated by children, young people, adult facilitators and researchers. In general, the feedback from children and young people has been overwhelmingly positive, with some suggestions about more fun activities and games during the workshop sessions. The adult stakeholders were more critical of some aspects of their own workshop design and methodology and proposed amending some aspects of the methodology to improve the process in the future.

All aspects of the process, including evaluation, will be published in the coming months.

Conclusion

The journey described above represents a radically different approach to development of a national survey than is normally used.

As noted above, 'Having fun' and 'Parents, family and wellbeing' have not to date been included in the HBSC Survey, despite being two of top domains identified by children as important in their lives. It is interesting to note how strongly 'fun' emerges as something of importance to children. It was selected as a category in its own right and as one of the most important aspects of the 'Parents, family and wellbeing' domain.

The young people identified 'Independence' and 'Diversity and Individuality' as priorities in their lives and neither of these domains have to date been included in the HBSC Study. The issue of 'stereotyping' strongly emerges under both domains, which in itself is interesting information about the lives of young people.

The inclusion of new domains and questions in the HBSC Ireland Study in 2014 will provide valuable information on aspects of the lives of children and young people never before explored in the Survey. This information will assist in the development of policies and services that meet the needs of children and young people in aspects of **their** lives that are important to them.

The outcomes from the process confirm the value of involving children and young people as stakeholders in the HBSC Survey and challenges researchers and policy-makers to consider involving children and young people in the development and design of other research into their lives and behaviour.

Presentations on the process of involving children and young people in the development of the HBSC Ireland Study have been made by the NUIG HBSC Team and the DCYA at international meetings and seminars. There is considerable interest across Europe in exploring the Irish process with a view to adapting it for use in other participating countries.

The Health Behaviour of School Aged Children (HBSC), Ireland is funded by the Department of Health and contracted to the National University of Ireland Galway.

Anne O'Donnell is Head of Citizen Participation, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).



To view Anne's presentation on this article at the recent IYWC/CDYSB Symposium on Evidence in Youth Work go to www.iywc.ie

The *Evidence* Conversation

Working Group on Evidence in Youth Work

This short article is an invitation to practitioners and others within the youth work sector to work with us to develop a way of thinking about evidence in a way that reflects the ethos, values and practices underpinning youth work in the Irish context.

This article is brought to you from a working group who came together in response to the recent Evidence Roadshows which supported the National Quality Standards Framework. The group that has met three times to date, is being convened by City of Dublin Youth Service Board, and consists Mary Robb, Caroline Jones - CDYSB, Hilary Tierney - NUI Maynooth, David O'Donovan - UCC and Eoin O'Neill - Waterford & South Tipperary Youth Service. The group will soon to be joined by two youth work practitioners along with John Bamber from CES. The group wants to initiate a conversation across the sector about evidence in order to develop a model of 'practice informed evidence'.

This short article is an invitation to practitioners and others within the youth work sector to work with us to develop a way of thinking about evidence in a way that reflects the ethos, values and practices underpinning youth work in the Irish context. This article was written by Mary Robb, Caroline Jones and Hilary Tierney on behalf of the working group. It also formed the basis of the recent joint symposium on Evidence in Youth Work, hosted by the IYWC and CDYSB which took place in early December.

There is no getting away from the evidence conversation in youth work today. It's everywhere and it's challenging youth work and youth workers to robustly substantiate the value and impact of youth work as a publicly funded intervention in the lives of young people across the country. The truth of it is that youth work has always struggled to effectively communicate the totality of youth work as a complex relational practice, dedicated to the personal and social development of young people, to somewhat disinterested if not downright sceptical audiences beyond the occupation itself (Spence, 2008).

The public awareness of youth work reflects dated perceptions of the traditional voluntary club in the local hall or as a targeted intervention to keep young people off the streets out of trouble or harm's way. Either way, youth

work is both perceived and funded as 'supplementary to other educational and welfare services and its priorities are located in the margins of related provision' (Spence, 2008:5). The structural marginality is further evidenced by the fact that youth work has borne some 40% of the cuts to the DCYA budget since 2008.

It's not surprising therefore that current demands for evidence of youth work's effectiveness are greeted with some trepidation, rather than embraced as an opportunity to show-case and validate youth work as a nuanced multi-faceted 'value-led, dialogical, empowering and educative practice' (Bamber, Rowley and Power 2012) that contributes to young people's personal and social development.

Youth workers, however, do look for evidence as part of their ongoing practice. 'How do I know that this approach, programme or intervention is working?' 'What am I bringing to this situation? Am I helping or hindering the participation and progression of the young people with whom I am working?' 'How do I know that what I am doing is working or not?' Reflective practice is one approach that supports youth workers to explore these and other questions that arise through practice. What we suggest is missing is the ability for the practice wisdom generated through experiences and reflections from and with young people, individual youth workers, youth projects and services, national youth work organisations to be shared and developed in a central place that gives the sector the ability to analyse and develop robust evidence from what is currently a fairly intangible and vague source. Part of the challenge to the sector is to bring the confidence and competence of youth workers to share their current evidence from practice knowing that it will be scrutinised, questioned and challenged and for that to be ok; in fact for that to be welcomed and expected.

Evidence is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as 'one or more reasons for believing that something is or is not true'. Evidence is, therefore, essentially concerned with

the issue of the credibility or trustworthiness of what is offered in support of a belief that something is true. What then is youth work's claim to truth that needs to be evidenced? Despite the profoundly philosophical nature of debates about truth, there is a pragmatic answer to the question or at least to begin to answer the question.

Youth work has an educational purpose, one that is enshrined in the 2001 Youth Work Act and elaborated in the National Youth Work Development Plan (2003-2007). The purpose of youth work as an educational practice is to aid and enhance the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary participation. Youth work's uniqueness is to be found in its intent rather than the fact that youth workers work with young people (Young, 1999). Youth Workers are primarily social educators, not welfare workers, care workers, probation workers, therapists, outdoor instructors, drama teachers, artists, social workers, subject teachers or indeed any of the other professions that work with young people.

Evidence must be related to purpose, in this case the key question should be: what is the evidence that youth work aids and enhances the personal and social development of young people? Can youth work provide credible evidence of fulfilling its purpose, where should we look to for that evidence, how can it be gathered, verified and presented in ways that honours youth work as a value-led, dialogical, empowering and educative practice, where young people's voices are heard and heeded as autonomous citizens in their own right?

The issue is not youth work's or youth workers' unwillingness to be accountable to the young people, communities, funders and wider society for its own professionalism and committed to its stated purpose. Rather it is the lack of a collectively agreed, robustly articulated, defensible and 'fit for purpose' framework for thinking about, talking about, gathering, managing and presenting practice informed evidence that supports youth work's claim to truth.

A recent article (Bamber, Rowley and Power 2012) highlighted the limitations of traditional scientific 'gold standard' approaches to generating evidence in fluid and



complex practice situations. The article suggested a number of useful ways of thinking about evidence including evidence deriving from practice in the form of 'practice wisdom'. Practice wisdom is neither accidental nor automatic; rather it is generated by ongoing critical reflection in, on and about practice.

Our proposal is to examine a model derived from Schön's Reflection on Action (Schön, D. 1983) whereby practitioners will work to develop questions from practice rather than answers to questions. The generation of quality questions based on youth work's agreed purpose will in turn support the development and understanding of youth work as a rich research base from where evidence can be generated, understood, valued and owned by the sector and those who are interested in the value and impact of youth work on young people and society.

If you would like to be included in the ongoing conversation or be part of the work of the group contact Mary Robb at CDYSB. We would also welcome feedback on this article and are more than open to debate our thinking and broaden our approach to this topic.

Contact Mary Robb at
www.cdysb.ie

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Elements of a Needs Assessment Framework Development

Brian McManus Clare Youth Service

Systematically Collecting and Analysing Evidence from Needs Assessment

Apart from being more systematic about collecting this information, we are now much more structured in the way that we analyse, communicate and use this information. The structure of the Hibbert Model requires that you put these pieces of evidence together and make links between them. The different pieces of information are not considered in isolation. You might for instance have evidence from young people who you work with locally; the model requires that you lay this information alongside national statistics to check this to see how the situation of local young people compares with nationally compiled evidence. If there is a spike in relation to this national data, that signals to us that there is a local issue we need to particularly look at in more detail, or we may need to look at the quality of our data from young people or how we have collected it.

Developing an Evidence Base

In Clare Youth Service (CYS) we have always worked to provide a service based on the needs of young people. In previous years we looked at types of information, such as surveys and focus groups with young people, evidence from evaluation and practitioner learning. Previously though, we would have collected information only at the time of the needs analysis and we would have included some information that was of a largely anecdotal basis. That is, we would have had a feeling from working with young people that a certain trend, or need was present and we would have made our plans based in part on that anecdotal evidence.

The difference in the approach we now use is that we are much more structured and systematic in using evidence from needs assessment. We came to be clear about this approach in planning that took place following a workshop on needs assessment with trainer Siobhán McGrory. This structured approach to identifying the evidence for the programmes we provide came about also because we have begun to use evidence based models in general, including theory of change and logic models; these require that you record the needs analysis in a particular way.

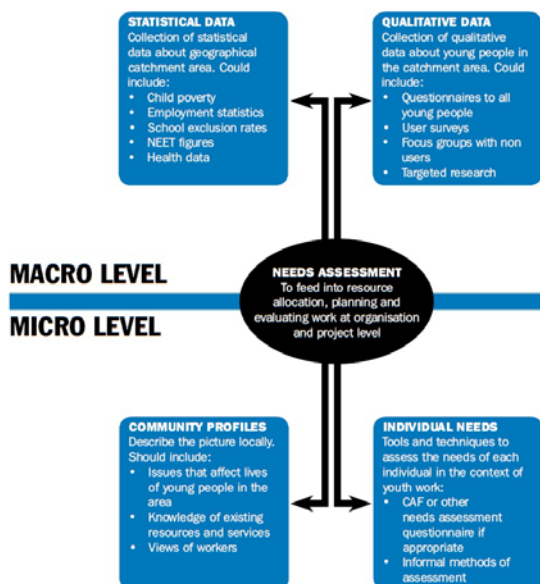
Consequently we have been able to become systematic about recording information and comprehensively organising and analysing that information on an ongoing basis, not just when we are conducting a needs analysis. The particular approach we use now structures, or plots, the evidence we collect using a framework provided by the Hibbert Model (illustration below). This framework helps us to consciously collect and analyse evidence that comes from a different levels and sources. For instance, at the macro level we continuously collect statistics and gather relevant qualitative data from national data sources. While at the micro level we would work on an ongoing basis to develop community profiles in cooperation with local partners and identify the individual needs of young people through surveys, questionnaires and our everyday engagement.

An example might be that we might find that 80% of the young people that we were working with in a particular area are shown to have a regular substance use habit; meanwhile the national average of substance use for young people of that age is 20%. The model assists you to immediately identify this discrepancy as an indication of a particularly acute need for young people in that area. If you find that your locally collected figures are in-line with the national average, than you are going to approach that situation quite differently.

We are still looking in the first instance at the evidence that young people and local networks give us. But the national and regional evidence provides a basis to analyse our local information and to confirm, contextualise and identify trends that we need to look at in more detail. This complementarity of local and national data works in both directions. Sometimes we see local trends before the national evidence is available, sometimes national data make us aware of trends that we should be looking for locally.

For instance, self-harm is an issue that has become more evident in national data trends. At a local level we knew it was coming up more often as an issue, but didn't have any real evidence. So we went back and looked at our service's child protection referrals and found that the basis of these referrals was changing in line with the national trends. This was discussed with the HSE at a project reporting meeting and they confirmed that this was also the case for teenage referrals from other sources as well. So, on the basis of something that was coming to us in a national debate and national evidence we re-examined local evidence to see if this was an issue we needed to address.

We also now look to blend information from across our whole service. Across our projects we work now to general overarching objectives. These objectives are articulated in the CYS Strategic Plan. Our current Strategic Plan and Operational Plans for the various projects were developed alongside each other, so, while not perfect, some



T. Hibbert, 2006 NYA

consideration was given to the overarching outcomes. As a result, we have been able to ask each project to undertake their needs analyses with those overarching outcomes in mind.

At the same time, each project has its own goals in

the staff together to review work on particular areas, as well as to look at resources available and assess the possible interventions or approaches to use in addressing that piece of work. For instance, there is a programme called “Smart Thinking” that one of the Garda Projects used on a trial basis. Once this was used, reviewed and identified as successful the “Smart Thinking programme was adopted by the other projects. The sharing of this learning between staff happens because of the team structure and quarterly full youth work team meetings that include reflective pieces and structured sharing. All of this requires leadership from the management team. The management team ensures that there is a reflective piece provided at each team meeting in which somebody would give an input on a piece of practice they were involved in. The logic models provide a place to hang this learning on – the team structure provides a process to enable sharing.

Challenges of Using this Approach

It has been a challenge within our team to adjust to the new language and the structure of working off a systematic approach to using needs assessment evidence. Everyone on the youth work team has to understand the language, and this is a challenge because we don’t have enough time to bring everybody up to speed and share a deeper understanding of the terms we use. This approach also brings a level of frustration amongst the staff in that not everything they would like to capture and measure will fit nicely on page. There are still some important things that are missing in the evidence gathering and reporting mechanisms and tools we use. Things like empathy and decrease in impulsivity are missing out because they are not easy to record. For instance, how do you record confidence without measuring a young person within an inch of their existence and thereby risk damaging their self-image and ironically their confidence? How can treating a young person as though they were a specimen in an experiment help them?

Opportunities Offered by this Approach to Needs Assessments

A real strength to our approach is that it has allowed us to look across the service and take a uniform approach across the county. We can more easily measure progress on an issue when we are looking at an integrated or county wide approach. Having a model that everyone is working on is very useful for developing a county-wide view. Developing a strong evidence base for the needs we are attempting to address also gives us some measure of what we are achieving. Because we have developed tools to collect evidence in terms of need these can be used also to identify our progress in relation to that need because you have the benchmarking, you know exactly how far you have come, or not as the case may be.

terms of the funders that support them, so different projects are going to pull up different types of information. Garda Projects are going to pull up and analyse local crime statistics, other projects, for example Drugs Education and Prevention, wouldn’t do this kind of detailed work with crime statistics, but they may benefit from access to the crime statistics. The drugs workers, however, do look at The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESSPAD) figures and examine these in relation to local trends. The ESSPAD analysis is not only of use to drugs workers, but also provides the GYDP’s with useful evidence as their crime statistics consistently under-reflect the true level of drug related crime. Each project would be much more in tune with particular types of information and they tend to generate particular types of evidence. What we are now doing is making sure that detailed information is shared across the projects with all workers to give everybody extra background and detail. This formal blending and sharing of hard facts and data is new to us.

Using Evidence from Needs Assessment

Once we have gathered the information, we ask all our staff then to come to a planning meeting and work together to develop logic models that would allow each programme to take into consideration the evidence we have on needs and trends that are relevant to the young people they work with. We look to identify the overarching problems, identify what needs to be changed and use templates, which are very similar to those in the NQSF Resource that is being piloted right now to plot out our work plan for the coming year.

In terms of the actual interventions we choose, the evidence that informs the development of these comes from determining what approaches have been shown to work in our projects. We identify these successful approaches through the ongoing evaluations of projects on a year-to-year basis. These evaluations are shared across projects and we deliberately share this evidence base in order to inform the interventions used by all our workers. To augment these evaluations, we would also conduct reviews of available interventions. For these, we bring all

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Evidence Informed Approach in an Integrated Youth Service

Gareth Gibson, Donegal Youth Service

Context

To set the scene, we in Donegal Youth Service (DYS) are midway through our Strategic Plan 2010 - 2015. In the past, to get our analysis and evidence gathered and create our plan we would use traditional collection methods, i.e. we would look at the context of our work, which would include socio-economic indicators, census data, national trends, as well as the local context for particular projects. We would also look at the needs of the young people served by every project or programme we delivered and considered how we might meet any need emerging needs.

Coupled with being midway through our Strategic Plan we are also in the middle of our first 'Integrated Needs Assessment'. To ensure a measured representation we deliberately went outside of our membership; we deliberately included non-service users and parents of non-service users and interviewed other professionals both statutory and voluntary.

To help develop this new Integrated Needs Assessment we formed an in-house sub-group comprising staff, RD, Board member and young people. In this sub-group we spent a lot of time thinking about what information we need to capture to create a fully comprehensive needs assessment. Considerations included, How do we gather evidence? What kind of evidence is needed? Why do we need evidence?

The Integrated Approach

The approach we came up with has two distinct features: The first feature is that our evidence gathering and use of evidence is more structured, more thorough and more strongly based on systematic collection, recording and analysis of evidence. This approach, we recognise, is one that has become common in the sector.

The other feature, which we will discuss here is that we are consciously taking a county-wide approach to identifying the needs, not just of young people who

engage with our service and would be within the target group for our funders and projects, but to look right across the county at non-service users and other professionals to get a full overview of the needs and strengths of young people. We should point out here that although we have used the term 'Integrated Needs Assessment' we prefer to think of it as an 'Integrated Strengths-Based Assessment'.

The approach we have adopted is in-line with work we have undertaken to develop an internal philosophy of moving towards integrated service provision that directly lines up with our current strategic plan.

Some Features of this Approach Include:

- Developing a core set of themes, or objectives around which we want to develop evidence based findings from the 'Integrated Needs Assessment'. To this end, we want to develop evidence that helps us to assess and plan for meeting the needs and strengths of young people in terms of their Physical Security; Sense of Belonging; Self-esteem/ Confidence; Wellbeing; Health; Family Dynamics; Peer relationships; Education; Substance use and Behaviour (based on the 5 National Outcomes);
- Moving towards an understanding of assessment that includes identifying strengths as well as needs;
- Moving towards a common evidence base that is clearly understood and delivered by Board, staff and volunteers across the county;
- Starting from a commitment within this process to ensure that ultimately every programme, regardless of which body is providing the funding, will pay due regard to the needs/strengths identified within our common evidence base and the common set of objectives we set for the organisation. So in effect, from the very outset, at the project planning stage, everything we aim to do has to pass through the needs assessment sub-group management team. In this way we ensure that it fits snugly into our strategic objectives as per our Strategic Plan and fits with the evidence we collect. In the past every project would have had separate needs identified based on evidence the difference going forward now is that every programme created will have a 'common evidence base'.

The Reasons/Rationale for an Integrated Approach to Gathering and Using Evidence

The approach that we at Donegal Youth Service are taking is really due to a opportunity that has emerged because of the shift of thinking towards an integrated model of youth service provision. We have been pre-empting changes in policy at a national level and the subsequent allocation of funding that might accompany such change, affecting not only Youth Work Ireland but also Youth Work Ireland Member Services across the country. The merging of

funding lines gave an opportunity for an organisation such as ourselves to look at the current model of provision we work to and be clear that with the scarce resources we have that we are providing the best service we can for all the young people in Donegal.

It is important to stress here that this integrated model of gathering evidence means that no single project within the DYS can single out and focus solely on types of information relevant to their type of delivery. Rather, because the evidence gathering is much broader than a single project, it will be interpreted according to the resources available. For example, if physical security comes up as a high priority area in the questionnaires we can examine this further through focus groups and then in the planning stage examine what Donegal Youth Service can do as a whole in relation to young people's physical safety.

Challenges in taking an Integrated Approach to Gathering and Using Evidence

Some of the challenges that we may have to address include a need to continually re-examine our model of practice and the evidence base for our service delivery. This whole process has made us take more notice of our model of practice and the theories that inform our work. The models of practice we work to include the 'Personal Development Model' and the 'Critical Social Education Model'. In particular the NQSF Needs Assessment Tool provided by the QSTRG helped us to realise that this process is an organic evolving process, one that isn't ever finished, but which will require continual review.

Another challenge we face is ensuring that it 'fits' together. Our Integrated Needs Assessment has come along at a time when we were actively working to integrate our projects together and become fully integrated – a lot of that work has begun, but there is still a lot more to be done. We recognise the need to progress with this approach to help the organisation become more rounded and 'fully integrated' in a real, not tokenistic way.

It is sometimes difficult to get out of a 'silo' way of thinking but working collaboratively is the only way to be cost effective and productive in this sector. Joined-up thinking and working in collaboration will only serve to make any organisation stronger and in turn, more competitive for funders and effective in outcomes-based work.

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For more information see www.donegalyouthservice.ie





The use of evidence in youth work practice

by Eleanor O'Sullivan

Implementing evidence-informed and evidence-based practice in youth work is not a new concept in the youth work sector, but it has become increasingly significant in the current economic context. Government departments and funding bodies are focusing ever more explicitly on what youth work is providing in terms of value for money; producing the evidence to support claims that the service is a worthwhile investment and beneficial to the development of our young people is important in maintaining commitment to the sector and its resourcing.

Evidence-based Practice: Youth Work Ireland Cork Community Drugs Outreach Project

Youth Work Ireland Cork (YWIC) has managed a Community Drugs Outreach Project since 2000. In 2010, YWIC sought to examine this project in order to ascertain its impact as a youth work sponsored Drugs Task Force initiative. More specifically, the rationale emerged from discussions held within YWIC which highlighted a number of concerning trends in relation to drugs work, including:

1. The precarious nature of resourcing in the current economic climate.
2. A perception that other agents (particularly state agents) do not fully grasp the nature, context, challenges and successes of the community youth approach to drug use.
3. The growing perception amongst youth and community work organisations that their contributions to this area are undervalued, with the consequential fear that resources would be diverted into other (medical-legal) responses.
4. The growth of an inappropriate 'numerical referral' approach to evaluating the work that views the transference of 'clients' up the tier system as an indication of success.

Our perception was that the drugs work conducted in the Gurranabraher/Churchfield Community Drugs Outreach Project was at a very high standard and worthy of documentation and investigation. The aim of the research, then, was to evaluate whether this project offers learning and examples of best practice in drugs work in disadvantaged localities through the development of a locally oriented praxis congruent with policy and international best practice.

Our chairperson at the time was a lecturer in Social Policy in University College Cork, Pat Leahy, who has extensive youth work practice and research experience. It was therefore logical on economic, academic and practical grounds that the research would be undertaken in the form of an internal evaluation. The advantage of this was his familiarity with the organisation, existing relations of trust with staff, and the optimal use of scarce budgetary resources. Two UCC students, Emma Bennet and Aoife Farrell, were also engaged as researchers as part of their course fieldwork requirements, supervised by the lead investigator. To guard against ethical issues, such as a conflict of interest or an overly subjective analysis, the entire project was overseen by a senior lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, Dr Cathal O'Connell (Leahy, Bennet and Farrell 2011: pp. 6-8). The overall methodological approach can be summarised as 'self-evaluation in consultation with stakeholders...a process whereby individual projects assess and reflect on their performance' (EMCDDA 2001: p9 cited in Leahy, Bennet and Farrell 2011: p16).

The research used a mixed-method approach in data collection including:

1. Semi-structured interviews with selected experts (staff and service users).
2. Informal, anonymous interviews with employees within the youth work and drugs work sectors, aimed at uncovering 'the mood on the ground'.
3. A short empirical 'sub-survey' with random members

of the public in the local area in order to gauge public perceptions of drugs issues.

4. A literature review of relevant texts, including research articles, reports, policy documents, etc., with a focus on international best practice and current debate in the area of youth and drugs praxis.

The outcome of the research was the publication of our report, 'Youthwork as a Response to Drugs Issues in the Community: A Report on the Gurrabraher/ Churchfield Drugs Outreach Project – Profile, Evaluation and Future Development. This report was launched in UCC on the 24th January 2011 by Mr Brian Crowley, MEP. The key findings of the study are:

- A social rather than medical or legal based response to drugs issues offers policy makers and practitioners a genuinely holistic methodology for effective intervention.
- A local rather than universal response rooted in harm reduction allows for cultural, geographical and community factors to dictate the nature of an intervention.
- Effective praxis in this field requires skilled, independent, reflexive, motivated and creative practitioners operating within a supportive agency setting.
- A clear theoretical framework encompassing knowledge of young people, drugs work, human behaviour and communities is a fundamental prerequisite to best practice.
- A high degree of service visibility in the community and easy access to the services is required.
- Community-based projects work effectively with service users who will never enter treatment; they offer drug users an effective alternative to medicalised responses.
- In many cases inappropriate and problem drug use is a consequence of social inequality. interventions that can respond to these social issues in (particularly disadvantaged) communities offer the people who suffer from drugs issues a far more comprehensive range of services than a medicalised response.
- Human contact between the service user and the practitioner in the form of a relationship founded on trust is the key building block of success.
- In terms of cost effectiveness community based projects offer excellent value for money; the overwhelming majority of funding is used in the provision of frontline services.

This research document has been very useful for Youth Work Ireland, Cork in documenting its services.

It provides a rationale for continued funding support and a defence against funding rationalisation, which has been extremely important in the current context of cuts in the

sector. The findings from the research are used in offering evidence to support project proposals and funding applications. The material is also used to explain the theoretical foundations, policies and methodologies underpinning the project to relevant stakeholders and funding bodies.

The research evidences good practice in the project through statistical and qualitative data which is easily understood by our staff and service users and government and funding bodies. There was great learning for the organisation in explicitly identifying the theoretical framework that underpins our practice. This has allowed us to reflect on areas for improvement in future planning and development. The research also influenced the development of YWIC's Strategic Plan in which we commit to developing research-based evidence that will inform our youth work practice and the services the organisation provides and delivers.

This study also identified how the service users and the community viewed the project which was very helpful for going forward. It reinforced to the drugs outreach workers that the interventions and methods being used were of benefit for the service users and the community. It also highlighted the benefit of service users being part of the research process and it enabled the organisation to deliver programmes that are specifically tailored to the expressed needs of the community.

Through commissioning this research, YWIC has a thorough and reliable research document that backs up its claims that youth work has an important role to play in the response to drugs issues in the community; the impact of our services in youth-work sponsored drugs work is clearly and convincingly evidenced in the research.

This research initiative also demonstrates the value of partnership and collaborative work; this holistic approach is clearly evidenced as promoting the interests of the young people, their health, well-being and personal development. Communication and working together are key strengths within the youth sector. As investment in youth services is increasingly precarious, it is vitally important to the survival of our services that we develop methods through which we can 'prove' the impact of youth work and the significance of informal learning for young people in our society. We can use evidence-informed and evidence-based practice to our benefit without losing sight of what community-based youth work is about.

The Research Report 'Youthwork as a Response to Drugs Issues in the Community; A report on the Gurrabraher /Churchfield Drugs Outreach Project can be downloaded from the IYWC website www.iywc.ie

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Using Evidence to Inform Practice

This article written by Bernadine Brady, (UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI Galway) and Mary Lynch, (Foróige), looks at the experience of the Foróige Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme.

Over the past few decades in Ireland, a range of community-based services have been developed to support children, young people and families in addressing challenges and difficulties in their lives. The youth mentoring programme, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) was introduced to Ireland in 2001 by Foróige. The programme was founded in the USA in 1908 and is the oldest and best-known mentoring programme in the world.

Youth mentoring programmes, such as BBBS, aim to create a supportive relationship between an adult volunteer and a young person that lasts for a minimum of one year, during which time the pair meets weekly. The 'match' is monitored by a staff member to ensure its safety and progress. BBBS is based on the idea that a created relationship between an older and younger person will act to prevent future difficulties or be a support to a young person facing adversity in their lives (BBBSI, 2008).

Alongside the growth in programmes, there has been a significant increase in research into mentoring. The results of evaluations provide clear evidence that mentoring programmes can result in benefits for young people, including better emotional and behavioural well-being, academic improvements and reduced risk behaviour (DuBois et al, 2002). But, the research indicates strongly that not every mentoring programme will produce these results. The most effective programmes are those that pay attention to ensuring that every match is as good as it can be and lasts as long as possible, which requires the consistent implementation of specific policies and procedure.

Foróige has consistently used the research evidence in relation to mentoring to inform the development of the BBBS programme in Ireland.

Some of the ways in which this is apparent include the following:

Foróige is affiliated to BBBS International, which sets standards and procedures for best practice. A comprehensive programme manual was developed by Foróige when the programme was initiated, to ensure that best practice was followed consistently by all staff implementing the programme. The manual incorporates the practices acknowledged in the literature as 'best practice', including detailed procedures for mentor screening, matching, match supervision and match closure. The manual is reviewed and updated regularly to incorporate new developments in research or policy.

One of the key factors in ensuring the success of mentoring, is providing enough support to mentors to help them to overcome any problems they may be having. Staff are pro-active in doing this – for example, checking in with mentors, providing activities for matches to attend, providing training and facilitating peer support between mentors.

As a means of ensuring quality, the files relating to BBBS matches are 'audited' periodically to ensure that the programme is implemented according to the manual. This helps to ensure that best practice is maintained on an ongoing basis.

From the outset, the programme management cultivated a strong relationship with international

mentoring researchers, which ensures that they remain 'in the loop' regarding new research findings. Foróige commissioned its own RCT evaluation to gather evidence in relation to the programme's impact on young people in Ireland (Dolan et al, 2011). The evidence from this study has fed in to the ongoing development of policies and procedures in relation to mentoring, both in Ireland and internationally.

There is a risk that having such an 'evidence-based' approach could be experienced as oppressive by staff, who could feel that it didn't leave room for their own skills and ideas. However, our research found that staff were very positive about the approach on the basis that it provides clarity in relation to all aspects of their work, which makes them feel more secure and confident in their ability to implement the programme effectively. While having evidence based practice guidelines is important, the experience and judgement of staff in applying the guidelines effectively is also vitally important. Mentors, young people and parents also expressed satisfaction with the evidence based processes used by the programme (Dolan et al, 2011).

To conclude, the Foróige BBBS programme has been informed by evidence from the outset and continues to use the best available evidence to inform its work with young people, parents and voluntary mentors.

For more information see:
www.foroige.ie/our-work/big-brother-big-sister

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YEAH Education Project

Bluebell Youth Project

The YEAH Project is an education intervention programme that facilitates young people aged 16-21 years of age, who are at risk of using cocaine and opiates, to gain Junior and/or Leaving Certificate qualifications in an out of school setting that is flexible, voluntary and meets their needs. It is a collaborative project between the Canal Communities; Inchicore, Rialto and Bluebell. The project is administered through CDYSB and funded by the Canal Communities Local Drugs Task Force. The project runs from September to June.



"The YEAH Project has huge benefits to those who are often disregarded from learning, who are willing and wanting education, but because of structural inequalities are often left excluded from participating in the education system and left to fall through the gaps. For me the Yeah Project filled that gap and enabled me to succeed in completing my Junior Cert".

Joanne Gelston, Yeah Project Participant

For more information on the YEAH Project, contact Natasha / Evanna on 085 183 7005

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Evidence Informed Practice in Rialto Youth Project

The following article is based on conversations with two youth workers from Rialto Youth Project, Tina MacVeigh and Nicola Mooney

A workers' perspective on adopting evidence based practices through engagement with research and best practices

Tina MacVeigh

What we have tried to do in the last number of years is formalise the information gathering processes around work with young people that would have been informal in the past. Youth workers and homework club staff would have held a lot of information themselves about young people through the relationships that they have built. They would have a good understanding of where young people are at, what their needs and interests are, what kind of supports they would like in terms of developing their own interests and skills. That information always resided with the youth worker and they knew inherently what kind of outcomes they wanted for young people, but it was never actually formally documented anywhere so that they could look back on, not just in terms of trends and the history of work with the young person, but also to see whether outcomes set in relation to young people had been achieved.

We have had to look at the organisation and what we needed to do to make those processes formal, so we could start to gather information, and very specifically gather the types of information and outcomes we want for young people. We can then consistently look back from those outcomes to identify what we need to put in place for young people to achieve these outcomes.

Why we take an evidence informed approach

There are a number of reasons; we are now living and working in a policy environment that is becoming much more evidence based. It is becoming a requirement of funding and of working in the sector to provide this kind of information. More importantly, what we want to do is as much as possible ensure that we are doing everything that we can to achieve outcomes that young people want for themselves and that we want for young people. The reality is as well that we are working in times of much greater need with far fewer resources, so we need to make sure that the resources we have go further- so you want to make sure that what you are doing is known to work. So there is a willingness and openness on our part to changing our practices, looking at the way we work, adopting new systems and new ways of thinking to do that. The Rialto Youth Project tries to be innovative and look “outside the

box” in terms of how we work, reflecting on all aspects of our practice. Sometimes we get it right and sometimes we don’t.

Lastly, in this sector we are all going full speed ahead and have so much work to do. It is a demanding job and a demanding environment to be working in, and is becoming more so because of cuts to funding. Finding the time to reflect on practice, to take a step back and re-examine what you are doing can be difficult. You have to carve that time out, part of this approach is facilitating us to do that. This approach is giving us permission to stop and reflect on what we are doing, to connect to what we call learning networks and to share our experiences and to think of different ways of approaching things. It also helps us to identify if what we are doing is working and changing our practice if we need to and ensure that the resources we have go further.

What is evidence in youth work?

Evidence is essentially information that will assist you in determining whether or not the work you are doing is having an effect. How you gather that information and how you compile it depends on the organisation. In Rialto Youth Project we use a database as well as a number of tools that have allowed us to gather information and to profile young people. The profile includes a range of indicators, from young people’s emotional and psychological well-being, to how they are performing in school, to social skills and how they are getting on with their peers. On a periodic basis the key workers would look at the young people and assess how they are doing across the board and then use that information to profile young people. Based on that profile, young people would be allocated into groups and certain programmes that we would hope would address their needs, while speaking to their interests and aspirations. At the end of those programmes again there is a review process that is conducted that takes a similar approach. All of that information is then fed back into the database. So we use the database as evidence; it gives us the information that we want on how young people have engaged with the various programmes that we have designed for them or in collaboration with them. On that basis it allows us to identify if the outcomes are being achieved, if not it allows us to reflect on why not and perhaps change practice and other ways of engaging with the young person, other programmes that they can go into, other supports or referrals that they might need, and once these changes are made that information is put back into the database.

That's exactly what evidence is - evidence is any information that can support you to reflect better on what you are doing and to ask yourself whether you are actually achieving what you want and if not it helps you to make changes that you need. That information can be derived from a number of places, it can come from shared experiences, from your own direct experience. It can also come from the young people themselves or it can be from questionnaires or surveys that you ask young people and their parents to fill out. The point is that you have to have the processes in place that facilitate the identification and collection and analysis of this evidence. And of course, in addition to these internal processes and self evaluations, external evaluations which will look for evidence that what you are doing is working can also be carried out.

Challenges in taking this approach

The big challenge we faced was in engaging in a new way of working, stopping, taking time out to gather information and to reflect on that information. This required us to really think hard about the criteria we will use to identify the needs of the young people, to identify the outcomes, to measure the successes and failures of our work. These were very challenging questions that people had to answer, because people knew this innately. But, it is one thing to know something and another to live it and challenge it. Another challenge for us was in adopting new technologies and learning how to use a database. That has been a big leap of faith basically it is like going from 0 – 100 miles an hour in two seconds. This has required a huge

organisational change. It requires a real change in how you think and how you act and how you reflect. We are five years into formally using the database and we are not fully there in terms of producing the types of reports and analysis we want. We are continuously working towards it by making changes as we go along to the database and our practice within the project.

Opportunities and learning

We are hoping that there would be an opportunity for other communities and projects to learn from what we have done and to share our experiences and the mistakes we made along the way. We are in the process of manualising the work so that it can be transferred to other communities so that they can adopt a similar approach in their work. Really, for us the big opportunity is to have an even greater impact on young peoples' lives than we have had before. We are here to support them to realise their full potential, with the aim always being that young people self direct their own programmes and ultimately their lives. There is also the opportunity to document and demonstrate the need for the type of work we do to become even more professionalised. There is an opportunity to really model and demonstrate what this work can achieve. Really, this gives the whole sector a chance to document and demonstrate the need for youth work and the potential to have a serious impact on young peoples' lives, as well as the need to continue to expand and professionalise the sector, and more importantly to invest in it.

A worker's perspective on using a database to collect and analyse evidence

Nicola Mooney

We have always recorded our work and over the years we have been trying to improve how we do that. Four or five years ago we began using a database, which we now use to record all of our work with young people. Because of what we now have in the database in terms of evidence, we can say who we targeted, their background, the type of group it is, how young people have progressed and how well they have attended. We also use logic models to say what we want to achieve in that group within a certain amount of time. Logic models are planning tools which emphasise starting with outcomes and working back to the activities you will put in place to achieve those outcomes.

How we use our database

We are logging qualitative and quantitative data. For every session of a programme that we have, we log into the database information such as attendance, we also score each young person on how they participated and we would score them on how they progressed within the session based on a number of criteria. This statistical or quantitative data provides our numbers and figures. The qualitative data we log will give us an idea of how the

young people engaged in the process and how we achieved what we did. In our qualitative data we put in young peoples' issues, how young people were in the session and how we as staff worked together and how we engaged with the young people and any follow up that took place.

How does this differ from previous methods of recording evidence that you have used?

We would have always completed programme record sheets after each session and we would have always completed a review at the end of a programme, in addition to keeping our attendance list. I suppose that the difference is that with the database you are not looking through reams of paper, and it is not held in a folder (as it had in the past) instead you can pull the whole programme up on a screen so straight away you can see the logic model, your attendances and all the data attached to that programme. The big difference in what we can do now is that we can extract information from the system so we can tell over a period of time how an individual young person is progressing, or how effective a programme is. I think in the past I would have said that I went on instinct around whether something was working or not working, rather than on evidence. In the past, I would have had a lot of qualitative data, but not quantitative data. So it was difficult at times to prove that a young person was doing well in that programme. Now, because we are scoring

young people (when they get to a point in their development they score themselves after the sessions), we feel we are going to be able to prove that because of these particular programmes that they have developed their basic and core skills, they have progressed and their participation has improved because their scores will be higher.

We also have individual learning plans for young people which we didn't have before. These are filled out separately and every young person has a key worker who is responsible for their plan. We fill in their personal learning plan looking at their basic skills their core skills and issues. What we would be doing with that plan is looking at how they have progressed in those areas over the time that we have been working with them. What is the same is that much of the evidence is still based on our professional judgement and based on what we know about young people, particularly qualitative data. However, we are youth workers and what else do we have to go on other than our judgment. I really believe that judgment has to be valued as we do know young people well. Any youth worker will tell you that they know what young people are capable of and where they are at, this work can be quite judgement and instinct based and I do understand that. I do wonder how else we can make the decisions we make, without making a judgement and subsequently checking out the judgement in terms of where a young person is at.

Programme summary review

After every session we would sit down and discuss the session and how it went. We would fill out the same headings such as young people issues, staff issues, feelings, follow up, and whether or not we achieved the outcomes we wanted to achieve or not, if we didn't achieve the outcomes we would be able to identify why we didn't. At the end of the programme we write a summary which is just a review of all the sessions in a programme rather than just one night. The summary contains young people's issues, how young people got on throughout the whole programme, staff issues, and the feelings. In the actual summary meeting you would also look at the data trends as well as the qualitative data.

Using evidence from practitioner experience

I really believe in the need for both quantitative data and the qualitative data from worker's experience. This is because I believe we are talking about human nature, we are talking about people, their lives and the complexity of their lives and that can't be gleaned from numbers or statistics alone. Therefore having youth workers getting together and talking about their practice what they did before, what worked and what didn't work, I think will help young people and also support our practice as youth workers as we will be doing less of the stuff that didn't work and more of the stuff that did work, hopefully!

I think it is a lot about being sure of yourself as a practitioner and not being afraid of making mistakes and not being afraid to say what didn't work. I am concerned at the moment that as a sector we are in danger of being pushed to a point where we are afraid to say what didn't work, due to funding difficulties, and as a result of projects being shut down. This doesn't mean I think we should be blasé about the work and not have evidence based work. My concern is that sometimes the evidence is maybe not seen as valuable by funders. It all depends on what type of evidence is asked for. Quantitative, as I said before, is not enough in order to see where a young person is at. Unfortunately young people are also failed all the time by systems around them and they may really struggle or never reach their full potential despite the good work that youth projects engage in nationwide. It can take a long time in working with a young person or a group of young people and supporting them to get to a point where they are becoming active citizens in society, and self directing their own lives.

Tina Mac Veigh is a Community School Coordinator and Nichola Mooney is a Community Youth Worker with Rialto Youth Project

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MASTERS IN YOUTH WORK WITH COMMUNITY ARTS & SPORTS STUDIES



Youth Work with Community Arts and Sports Studies

The Masters in Youth Work, Community Arts and Sports Studies is a new, dynamic and innovative programme which offers professional youth work education for graduates, based on a broad and inclusive approach to working with young people, that embraces traditional youth work and youth participation in sports and the arts.

The programme incorporates a professionally-accredited Postgraduate Diploma in Youth Work, which equips youth work practitioners with the core knowledge, skills and competencies required for working with young people in youth work contexts. The programme, furthermore, offers students the unique opportunity to specialise in community arts and sports studies. Graduates will be equipped with a valuable range of skills, which are highly attractive to employers in the traditional youth work sector, but also in cultural and sporting organisations for whom expanding youth participation is a priority.

Through the delivery of this exciting and diverse curriculum, students will undertake a range of core modules which combine critical theoretical perspectives on youth work and professional youth work practice skills development. Graduates are awarded an accredited qualification in youth work on successful completion of the first year of the programme. In the second year of the programme, students undertake core modules in the Principles and Practice of Community Arts and Sports Studies. Students will also complete a research dissertation on a subject of their choice, guided by their research supervisor. Furthermore, students will choose from a range of diverse and exciting elective modules in applied community arts and sports oriented participatory methods. This allows students flexibility in their choice of specialist pathways and equips them with a range of skills and competencies for working with young people, both in the traditional youth work sector and in a diversity of community-based arts and sports settings.

This programme is an interdisciplinary initiative of three Schools in University College Cork, namely, the School of Applied Social Studies, the School of Education and the School of Music and Theatre. It is taught by a cross-disciplinary team of academics and practitioners, all of whom are active in working with young people, in youth work and in community arts and sports organisations.

Careers and Skill Development

The Masters in Youth Work, Community Arts and Sports Studies, incorporating the Postgraduate Diploma in Youth Work, will address the demand for trained youth workers, will equip youth worker with community arts and sports oriented skills, and will equip community artists and sports trainers with youth work skills. The Masters will prepare students with the skills necessary to design, plan and deliver their own participatory projects in youth and community settings. Graduates will find employment in youth work organisations, in the public sector, in the voluntary/ community sector, in local authorities, and in community arts and sporting organisations where expanding youth participation is a priority.

Further Information

For further information
contact

Eileen Hogan
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(e) e.hogan@ucc.ie
(t) 021-4903443



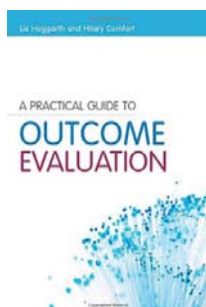
New IYWC Library Resources

These titles represent just some of the new resources in the IYWC library.

A Practical Guide to Outcome Evaluation

by Liz Hoggarth and Hilary Comfort (Eds.), 2010

This versatile 'how to' book guides the reader through the process of evaluating projects in order to improve funding applications and build the case for the project's survival. The guidance in this book will help to set out what the aims and projected outcomes of the project are, how these will be achieved, and how to capture evidence for outcomes. To cater for readers working in different settings, a broad range of case examples are used including youth groups with at-risk young people, a refuge for women who have suffered domestic violence and a road safety education programme. The book also includes a host of practical features designed to provide a deeper understanding of the subject, including activities, reflective tools, and a glossary of key terms.



young people the skills and opportunities to speak up to shape their services, using media and campaigning activities. This toolkit is intended as a practical resource for anyone working with young people aged 11-19 involved in campaigning activities at any level. The resource contains 27 information sheets which are divided into two sections - Planning It and Doing It.

Gen2Gen Volunteer Toolkit

Claire Dever, 2012

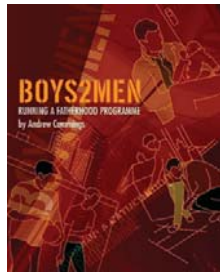
The Gen2Gen Volunteer Toolkit – a specifically designed booklet for volunteers to keep and use following their initial training session – is crammed with hints and tips to help the volunteer through programmes. In four clear sections the toolkit includes: Preparation for volunteering (working across generations); Getting Started (conversation starters and activities to help understand what the older person wants to learn); How-To Guides (on everything from setting up an email address to a glossary of common internet terms); and Your Journey – for the volunteer to record their progress throughout the placement.



BOYS2MEN - Running a Fatherhood Programme

Andrew Cummings, 2004

This guide to working with young men and running a fatherhood programme can help workers to work with young men to develop sexual responsibility; improve their listening skills; cultivate a positive outlook; build confidence and communicate feelings more easily. The resource works through fatherhood issues; opens up broader subjects such as sexuality; sexual health; responsibility; relationships and masculinity. There is an extensive range of activities including fun games; though provoking discussion ideas; entertaining quizzes and useful self evaluation activities.



Is there WiFi in the House?

Alan Rogers, 2013

A comprehensive resource pack and guide for agencies interested in developing a 'Gen2Gen-type' inter-generational IT project. In four clear sections, the guide covers an overview and summary of this kind of project including rationale, challenges and success strategies; Partnership Working; Project Management and Administration; and Project Activity. The Appendix section is packed full of resources including a wealth of tried and tested samples, templates and checklists for everything from recruitment through to evaluation; essential management and administration tasks, planning, safeguarding and technical issues. The project recruited and trained young volunteers for a 12 week placement in a residential home, where they worked with older people, one-to-one and in small groups, showing them some essentials of the Internet. The specific topics they covered would depend on the interests of the older people.



Campaign for Change Toolkit - Hearing Unheard Voices

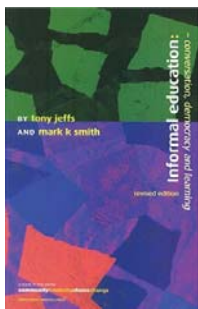
Fiona McGee, 2010

This Campaign for Change toolkit is part of UK Youth's Hearing Unheard Voices Project. Hearing Unheard Voices aims to give disadvantaged



Informal Education: Conversation, Democracy and Learning

Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith, 2005



Informal Education has in recent years attracted a lot of interest amongst educationalists, health and welfare professionals and others. This book seeks to answer the questions - why is this? who does it? and how can it be developed?. The writers explore how informal educators encourage conversation, democracy and learning. They also examine evaluation, working with process, living with values and planning. Each chapter includes a number of questions that help readers to explore their work.

Taking the Lead: Young People and Volunteering

Andrew Cummings, 2007



Taking the Lead is ideal for those working with young people and young volunteers. It offers stimulating ideas for planning, designing and running youth-led volunteering projects and shows how to recognise and accredit young volunteers through the Youth Achievement Awards. Starting with the basics, it gives ideas to kick-start volunteering while highlighting issues to consider when embarking on youth-led projects. It shows good practice through successful case studies, gives tips and ideas for getting started and involving young people in the decision making process.

The Drink Aware Challenges - Questioning Attitudes and Developing Skills Using the Youth Achievement Awards

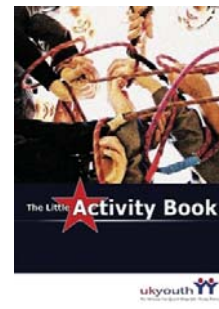
Andrew Cummings, 2009



The aim of the resource is to provide the reader with an invaluable starting point for working with young people to develop their awareness and knowledge of alcohol. This toolkit enables workers to accredit alcohol education work with young people. Included are sample challenges and targets, session plans and evidence sheets as well as signposts and information for the worker. The Drinkaware Challenge Toolkit is an innovative attempt to engage young people with the issues they themselves face and allow them to develop their own knowledge and skills about the safe and sensible use of alcohol.

The Little Activity Book

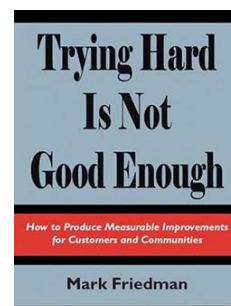
Jasmin Qureshi (Ed.), 2007



This valuable collection of practical group challenges, guides leaders through 22 practical and physical activities and is a must for anyone working with young people. It will increase young people's ability to function within a group and build their sense of well-being. Developed through years of experience at UK Youth's Activity Book enables young people to gain transferrable skills including communication; team work; listening skills; leadership; coordinations and evaluation exercises to enable workers to get the most out of each session.

Trying Hard is Not Good Enough

Mark Friedman, 2005



Results Based Accountability (RBA - also known as Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) can be used to improve the quality of life in communities, cities, counties, states and nations, including everything from the well-being of children to the creation of a sustainable environment. It can help government and private sector agencies improve the performance of their programs and make them more customer-friendly and effective. RBA is a common sense approach that replaces all the complicated jargon-laden methods foisted on us in the past. The methods can be learned and applied quickly. In addition to providing practical methods, the book also makes a contribution to social theory by explaining the contribution relationship between program performance and community quality of life.

Visit the IYWC's new online resource library at www.iywc.ie, this new online database is searchable and contains over 5,000 items relating specifically to youth work.

All our publications are available on loan to IYWC members.

To take out membership please contact gina@iywc.ie

POLICY BRIEF

Youth Work Ireland's policy brief aims to inform and update practitioners about current developments in national policy which may be useful to their work.

Compiled by Michael Mc Loughlin



Job Seekers Allowance Cuts for Under 26s

Budget 2014 contained cuts to Job Seekers Allowance for under 26s, a key breach of one of the two major Programme for Government commitments not to cut core social welfare payments. There has been considerable opposition to the measure from youth groups, charities and opposition parties. It has also been revealed that the logic of prioritising education and training places for the young unemployed is flawed. The measures involve a rate of €100 for all new claimants up to 24 and a rate of €144 for 25 year olds, with some limited exceptions for parents and those who have previously done courses. A number of groups continue to work on this issue and have recently been examining legal avenues.

Erasmus +

Erasmus+ will bring together all the current EU and international schemes for education, training, youth and sport, replacing seven existing programmes with one. This will increase efficiency, make it easier to apply for grants, as well as reducing duplication and fragmentation. It is due to start in 2014. The main aim remains the same – to improve people's skills and ultimately their employability as well as to support the modernisation of education and training systems

Child Detention Centres

Despite the announced closure of Saint Patrick's Institution concerns persist about the detention of young people and child detention centres. The Children Act 2001 introduced a variety of sanctions for young people and set out detention as the last resort consistent with international best practice. Centres are managed by the Irish Youth Justice Service. There are three centres considered suitable for the detention of young people; Oberstown Boys School, Oberstown Girls School and Trinity House School.

Youth Guarantee

The European Youth Guarantee will be rolled out in 2014 but it is still far from clear what this will mean for young people on the ground. The Government is to submit plans to Brussels by the end of the year which will draw down about €63 million in support from the European Social Fund and European Youth Employment Initiative. Youth Work Ireland has made a submission to the Department of Social Protection on the Youth Guarantee. It is widely accepted that the Guarantee will not be as extensive as recommended at EU level.

Youth Unemployment

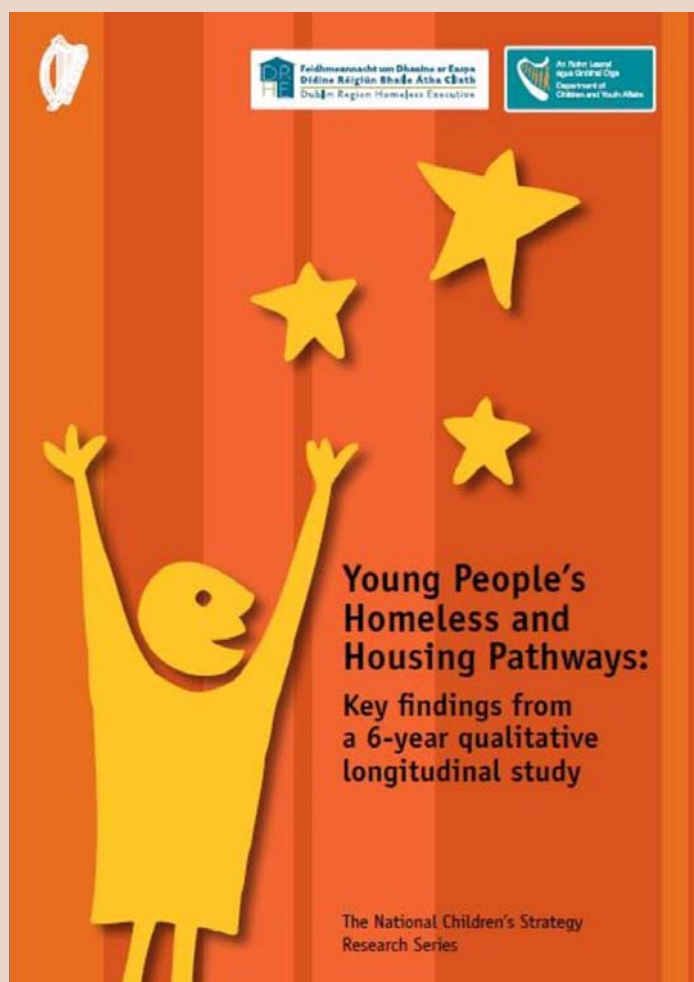
There has been a gradual decrease in youth unemployment as measured by the last few Live Register reports and the Quarterly National Household Survey. Emigration figures however are only published once a year and these show about 30,000 young people leaving the country annually. Similarly young people have not experienced any increase in their numbers at work as measured by the QNHS again suggesting the recovery is not reaching them.

A Guide to Children's EU Rights

The Children's Rights Alliance has launched a booklet on the European Union and Children's Rights. The Booklet was launched at a seminar on the same topic. Speakers at the event included Geoffrey Shannon Child Law Expert, Billy Hawkes Data Protection Commissioner, Natalie McDonnell BL and Hilka Becker Immigrant Council of Ireland and Eilis Barry BL.

**Download the full
Youth Work Ireland
Policy Brief here>>**





Youth Homelessness in Dublin:

Key Findings from a Six-year Qualitative Longitudinal Study

This research tracked 40 young people (aged 14-23 years), all who first experienced homelessness as teenagers, over a six-year period. The young people (23 young men and 17 young women) were first interviewed in 2004 (Phase 1 of the study) and follow-up interviews were conducted in 2005-06 (Phase 2) and again in 2009-10 (Phase 3). The retention rates at Phases 2 and 3 were 75% and 70% of the study participants, respectively.

The early to mid-teenage years emerged as the period of greatest risk for homelessness. Although the reasons for young people becoming homeless were complex, it was possible to identify three broad pathways or routes 'into'

homelessness. These were associated with: 1) a care history; 2) household instability and family conflict and; 3) negative peer associations and 'problem' behaviour.

All of the young people were categorised as homeless or recently homeless at Phase 1 of the study. At Phase 2, 30 were re-interviewed, with 17 having secured greater stability of housing (that is, they had exited homelessness) at that juncture while 13 remaining homeless. At Phase 3 of the study, conducted approximately three years later, 28 young people were successfully tracked and interviewed and the picture remained remarkably similar: 15 had exited or sustained and exit from homelessness while 13 remained homeless. Thus, despite a time lapse of between 3 and 4 years, the broad patterns of movement either out of homelessness or towards more chronic homeless states remained relatively stable over time. These patterns are significant and point to early transitions out of homelessness as generally sustained and sustainable, and, conversely, to the absence of early exit routes as prolonging young people's homelessness and leading them into adult homeless services.

The findings documented in this report are numerous and complex. However, one of the clearest messages arising from the research is the importance of speedy exits from homelessness. Those young people who 'got out' of homelessness early were likely to 'stay out'. This finding signals the need for timely, planned access to housing for young people who experience homelessness. The findings of this research also strongly suggest that young women were far more likely to exit homelessness than their male counterparts. Compared to young men, women exited homelessness at an earlier juncture and they also tended to sustain housing, even if some returned to homelessness temporarily over the course of the study.

Housing options, including returns to the family home, placement in residential or foster care, and moves to transitional or supported housing, were more readily available to young women at an early juncture. In place of stable housing, young men often embarked on an 'institutional circuit' of commuting between under-18s hostels initially and, subsequently, between adult homeless services. Incarceration emerged as a key component of this cyclical pattern of movement through various unstable accommodation types as alternatives to stable housing.

The full report can be downloaded at:
http://www.dcyh.gov.ie/documents/Child_Welfare_Protection/Homelessness_Strategy/YPHomelessHousingPath.pdf

Article written by Paula Mayock,
Children's Research Centre, TCD

www.tcd.ie

Call for Contributions

Scene Magazine's next edition will focus on how youth workers can mainstream development education in their practice.

For our next edition, Scene particularly welcomes contributions from practitioners that document how they work with young people to highlight and address issues around development education. These articles will need to be approximately 900-1100 words in length.

How to propose a contribution to Scene Magazine and Key Dates for Contributors:

By the 30th January 2014 – please submit a 250 word summary of your proposed contribution by this date

By the 30th January - contributors are asked to provide a 250 word summary of the article that they propose to submit. All proposals are valuable to us and the Scene Magazine editorial team will carefully review all proposed contributions. We will work to select contributions that provide Irish Youth Work practitioners with a diversity of views, youth work practice experience and ideas. We apologise in advance if we can't accept all proposals.

Please email your 250 word proposal only to Gina Halpin, ghalpin@youthworkireland.ie with your full name, the youth service you are associated with, the title of the article that you are proposing and the type of article that you are proposing.

Deadline for contributions

If your proposal has been accepted you will need complete a full first draft by the 13th February. You will also need to make yourself available in the fortnight that follows to work closely with the Scene Magazine editorial team to make any required revisions or edits to your article.



Irish Youth Work Centre



Scene Symposia

All editions of Scene Magazine are now accompanied by an informal youth work practitioner's symposium to share and discuss the ideas in the articles with practitioners, volunteers and young people.

We therefore ask contributors to attend this informal sharing and learning event.

Contributors are not required to present, but will be assisted to make a presentation if they wish to. Contributors will be asked to take part in informal conversations with practitioners attending the event.

If you have any questions or suggestions about Scene Magazine and future content of the magazine please contact Matthew Seebach matthew@iywc.ie