

STORIES OF EQUALITY

EQUALITY 17

As part of the Equality 17 National Campaign, Youth Work Ireland asked young people across the country to tell us their 'stories of equality'. We wanted to know how young people experience being young and equal growing up in Ireland today, and what their opinions and views of equality issues are.

From this campaign we collected storyboards, images, videos, interviews and personal narratives about all aspects of young people's lives. These stories of equality raise awareness of young people's equality challenges and experiences, and highlight how youth services in Ireland support young people in achieving equality.

This booklet contains a sample of just some of the many 'stories of equality' we've heard this year. There are lots more stories of equality on our website and social media platforms.

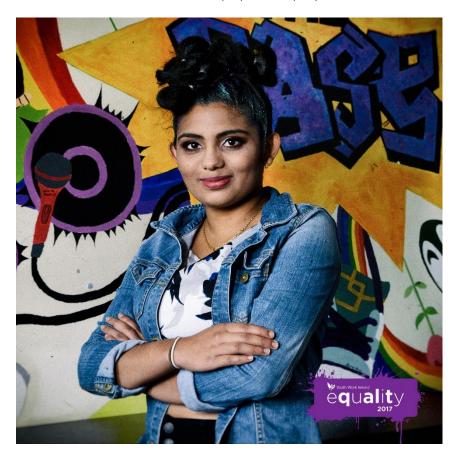
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ALOISA

YOUTH WORK IRELAND NORTH CONNAUGHT

Hello, I am 14 years old, I have lived in Ireland for 5 years. I am from Goa India. I now live in Co. Leitrim. I am in 3rd year in Drumshanbo Vocational School. I have made all my best friends through my youth café. I feel involved in my community through my youth café and also feel that my opinions and views are heard.

I believe everyone should be given the same opportunities. People should see beyond colour, race and sex. It doesn't matter where you are from or where you live we should all be treated the same. But I don't feel people are being given the same opportunities. I feel that people are judged on colour before anyone gets the chance to know them. I feel that people feel it is ok to be hurtful towards other people more openly now.



TO ME, EQUALITY
MEANS THAT
PEOPLE OF ANY
RACE, COLOUR,
SEX SHOULD ALL
BE TREATED THE
SAME AND WE
ARE ALL HUMAN.

I have experienced some prejudices here since I arrived. People sometimes assume that I can't speak English because of my skin colour, when I can speak English and Irish. And I have sometimes seen and heard people picking on people from new communities.

I do think that young people in Ireland are becoming more tolerant of diversity than their parents' generation, but I feel with things like Brexit and racial tensions in America that young people are not afraid to openly abuse people on the street or on social media anymore. I think in one way with the Gay Marriage Referendum it has progressed. But some young people still need to realise that their words/comments on the internet hurt and can last a long time.

CHLOE

LIMERICK YOUTH SERVICE

My name is Chloe Daley, I am 17 years old. I discovered youth work thanks to Naomi who brought me to Limerick Youth Service back in 2013. In 2015, I got involved in a group called Express Yourself whose slogan was "Be Youthself", regarding pride. This paved the way for me to join the club. We have been to Dublin several times with Youth Work Ireland during Pride.



Being part of youth work has helped me a lot with my mental health. I was getting severely bullied in secondary school. Youth work encouraged me to go to my doctor to get medication for my anxiety and my depression. It helps me to process what happened during these years and deal with my problems.

YOUTH WORK ALSO TAUGHT ME TO FOLLOW MY PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS IN LIFE. I WANT TO STUDY FASHION AND NOT CHOOSE THE PATHS THAT SOMEBODY ELSE WANTED ME TO.

To me Ireland is still very traditional and not necessarily progressive, and younger generations still have a long way to go in their tolerance. When I was bullied at school, I was surprised by how mean my classmates were and how strongly they rejected differences despite their diverse nationalities. I think that minorities should be more united. Many of my bullies were ironically part of minorities themselves. I am inspired by the Mandela quote "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion", to me hate is learned behaviour. This issue needs to be tackled through education from a young age.

DANIEL

IRISH WHEELCHAIR ASSOCIATION

Hello, I'm Daniel. I partly agree with the fact that young people are more tolerant than younger generations. We are relatively open to minorities such as disabled people or members of the LGBTQ community, though we could be more tolerant. We have gone far with, for example the marriage equality referendum, but we should go further.

A friend of mine has a campaign called "A day in my wheels" to get the Minister with Responsibility for Disability in a wheelchair for a day to



show him what it is like. I had an appointment for a fitting of my manual chair a few years ago. It made sure my hips were all the way back in the chair. Eventually I was advised to get an X-ray to check if my hips were correctly recovered. I went through years of indescribable pain and was scared it might happen again. I was struck by the medical vocabulary that was used by the staff at that time and felt like it needed to be modernised for the communication to be more efficient. The medical staff needs to take the patients into consideration and address the situation directly to them.

I DO NOT HAVE A DISABILITY; MY ABILITIES ARE JUST DIFFERENT

Even in society, alienation of disabled people is still a major problem. For example, if I'm going shopping, people's stares are very uncomfortable. Young people tend to stare at me often, which I perfectly understand. However, the parents' reactions bother me when they treat me differently. I would like people to normalise disabilities. I always say that time is the greatest gift you can ever receive; it is what you do with it that counts. I was born three months early, and my brain was damaged. Doctors predicted that I would not have been able to write or talk. But my dad always believed in me and now I can do all of that. This shows that you should give people a chance.

EVEN THOUGH OTHER MINORITIES' ADVANCES HAVE BEEN GREAT, I FEEL LIKE DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE SAME AMOUNT OF ATTENTION AND HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND.

Legally the government has done more to progress other minorities such as the LGBTQ community than us. We have to specify the problems while grouping them together. Some of our issues are quite similar, we can learn from each other. It should be an open discussion. I have had to fight since the day I was born. It is incredible how little attention there is to people in wheelchairs. People making the decisions do not understand minorities point of view.

DEBORAH

YOUTH WORK IRELAND MIDLANDS

Say I meet someone for the first time and they say where do you live and I said Athlone and they say that's cool. But if meet someone from an older generation then they're more likely to answer that with 'ok, but where are you really from?' I'm from Ireland, it doesn't matter where my parents are from. And they still have a hard time getting it, I was born here, same as they were, I've lived here my entire life, same as they have. They just can't see that the Ireland they live in now, is not the same as they Ireland they lived in 50 years ago, where people of different



skin colours are born in Ireland every single day.

I think it's how we grew up and the society we live in, when we grew up watching different TV shows there was a decent amount of representation, different skin colours, ethnicities and all that. Back then everything was white, and that was it. Media and entertainment has played a huge role in creating visibility and normalising minorities. There are some double standards. You'll see a certain kind of minority that its trendy to be tolerant of, like gay people. Sometimes I get irritated by the trope of the sassy black woman, that's not all we have to offer, I feel like in media that is a trope and they're stuck in there on purpose. Sometimes that means people meet me and they say 'oh you're very loud, Deborah, you talk with your hands a lot, you know you remind me of Oprah', that's just really annoying, I don't look like Oprah, I wish they'd say I looked like Beyoncé!

The biggest barriers to true equality are people's pride and wanting to not accept that these preconceived notions that they have might be wrong. You can be raised in a certain way and told that these group of people are bad news, stay away from them, they're all robbers, thieves and liars. You can be told that your entire life so much so you really believe it. And then when you're confronted with the reality that that's not actually the truth it hurts you to think, oh wow, all these years I've been wrong. They don't want to accept that fact that they were told something different and they believe it, but they were wrong and they've passed it on to other people and they've passed it on to their children. And they can get defensive.

I think we need to teach people to learn how to be wrong. I'm not excluded from this, I could be in an exam and I'm totally sure I have the right answer to a question, and then I get the result and it turns out its wrong, it really stings.

I think that up until a certain age we learn so much from our parents and guardians but after a certain age it kind of shifts, and they start to learn a lot from us. I come home from school or youth work every day and talk to my mum about a Trans girl I just met or someone from a different race I had never met before. I feel like I'm educating her.

FINN

YOUTH WORK IRELAND CAVAN MONAGHAN

Hello, my name is Finn, I'm 18 years old. I believe that most young people are more tolerant of minorities than their parents' generations. In my situation, I feel like people are globally accepting of the LGBT+ community, but not so much of the Trans side.

As a Bi and Trans person, I have gotten more hate from people within the community than from straight people. Society can either be accepting or rejecting of the LGBT+ community and does not specifically have biphobia. But gays and lesbians seem less open-minded and would for example say, "You're just trying to fit in with straight people", "that's not a thing", "you just want attention" or "you're just gay and you don't want to admit it". And these types of remarks even comes from people my age within my community.



THERE IS A WIDESPREAD
STEREOTYPE OF A GAY MAN
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THAN SOME OF US.

However, now people are more aware of the different types of sexualities through Youth Cafés and so on, which makes them more comfortable with us. Young people seem to know more about minorities than our parents' generation. Our generation is more questioning about religion and more accepting of things. Even young religious people dissociate more easily their religion from hate. In Ireland, young people are less controlled by the Catholic Church than our parents which has allowed us to open our minds to people that are different.

To me equality means that even if you are different you should be entitled to live your life as beneficially as everybody else. Now Ireland still is not the best place for equality, even though it still is better than many other countries. The next biggest challenge for our country is to lower the age at which the gender recognition is applicable.

MATTHEW

CANAL COMMUNITIES REGIONAL YOUTH SERVICE

Hi, I'm Matthew. I started at the Youth project when I was ten. I had friends in the club and it seemed fun. We were playing games, sport, cooking and so on.

The theme for this year's project is equality. To me it means that everyone should be treated equally despite their differences. I have experienced light inequality before, being made fun of by my



friends. An example of inequality is the gender pay gap, it does not seem fair that women are paid less for the same work. I have noticed moment in my life being treated differently than men. Girls are shamed when they receive a lot of interest from boys, whereas boys are praised for the same thing. Regarding many subjects my parents were taught differently than I was.

I FEEL LIKE MY GENERATION IS MORE OPEN TO EQUALITY. WHEN MY DAD WAS YOUNG, THERE WAS NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE OF COLOUR IN IRELAND, BUT AS THERE ARE MORE NOW, HE GOT USED TO DIVERSITY. I THINK PEOPLE ARE NICER NOW, THERE IS A CHANGE IN SOCIETY.

On the internet, people are more aware about sensitive topics and jokes, and try to avoid hurtful comments. In case someone say something against minorities, other people are outspoken and will defend them and say, 'hey you can't get away with saying things like that online'. I think that's progress.

NAOMI LIMERICK YOUTH SERVICE

Hi, I'm Naomi, I am part of Limerick Youth Service. I got involved in youth clubs when I was eleven years old, eight years ago. When I was in sixth class, a club came to my school to promote its actions and I was interested in joining. Back then, it consisted of organised activities every Friday night for two hours, at 5pm after school. When I was thirteen, I decided to leave the club as I entered a grumpy phase and was not interested in the activities anymore.



At fourteen, I was going through my

alternative phase and I found a club in which I saw there were a lot of people like me. It was a normal club without organised activities. It was open on Fridays from 4 to 9 and on Saturdays from 3 to 8. I was free to go there and meet with my friends. I was quite active, having a good time, and Youth workers started to notice me. They told me they had a Youth Committee and offered me an interview to join it. Unfortunately, I initially got rejected, though they liked my personality. Therefore, they put me on a different project which was all about improving the reputation of Limerick with many street paintings. I did a very good job at it so I got the privilege to participate in a Youth exchange in Italy. This finally allowed me to enter the Youth Committee. Ever since I have been involved in many projects, such as UNICEF goals.

Youth work is second nature to me at this stage. I took part in education projects concerning bullying, cyber-bullying, self-harm and sexual education. I work as a peer educator, meaning that I help myself but mostly have the skills to help others. Young members might indeed feel more comfortable sharing their problems and questions to other Youth Committee members. We know how to approach it. What drives me in this position is that it makes me happy. For instance, we did a workshop about politics: we were asked our opinions which we later linked to political parties without being biased. This made me want to study Politics and Sociology at university. I am now about to start my second year to do a major in Politics.

Growing up through the youth services has influenced me in so many ways. My cultural awareness has been enhanced, I am for example doing an exchange in South Africa. I am modelling my degree around what I have learned at the youth services. To the people who might be interested in doing Youth work, I would say that there is a rich diversity of things you can do through the program, from being an activist to painting a wall.

Youth Work Ireland did research highlighting the fact that young Irish people feel overwhelmingly more tolerant than their parents' generations, with which I agree. In our parents' generations there seems to be much more racism. Sometimes I tend to forget the hate. My Catholic school was 10% Muslim and I feel like we were accommodating.

JACK

YOUTH WORK IRELAND CAVAN MONAGHAN

For me, equality is when us as young people are seen as equal to the adults in our society. We have an opinion and a voice just as much as the adults do and we'd like to be listened to.

I do feel that young people in Ireland today are more tolerant as we are more willing to learn and are more open to new opportunities whereas years ago young people were seen

and not heard but that has changed dramatically.



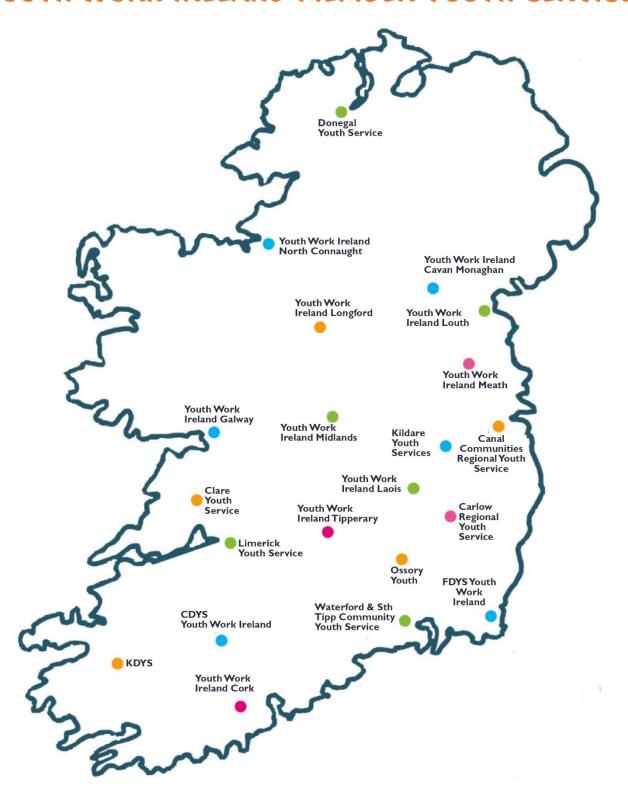
The detached programme contributes to equality as it reaches out to the harder to reach young people on the streets, the detached workers treat all young people the same, they don't know who they are approaching when they first meet a young person but they still stop and talk and get to know the young person.

GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION IS A BIG PROBLEM IN IRELAND, IN PARTICULAR WHERE I LIVE WHICH IS A RURAL TOWN IN CO CAVAN AND MANY OTHER SMALLER TOWNS IN CAVAN RURAL ISOLATION IS A BIG PROBLEM.

The detached programme allows us to talk, allows us to open up a bit about what we want or feel the area needs in order for us as young people to feel valued. This does make us feel equal as when we are listened to and the things we look for are put in place we really feel listened to.

Detached in Ballyjamesduff has helped me to build relationships with the youth workers and get involved in youth cafes, programmes and committees that I would not have been involved in ever before.

YOUTH WORK IRELAND MEMBER YOUTH SERVICES



Canal Communities RYS
Carlow Regional Youth Service
CDYS Youth Work Ireland
Clare Youth Service
Donegal Youth Service

FDYS Youth Work Ireland
KDYS
Kildare Youth Services
Limerick Youth Service
Ossory Youth

Waterford & Sth Tipperary CYS
Youth Work Ireland Cork
Youth Work Ireland Galway
Youth Work Ireland Laois
Youth Work Ireland Longford

Youth Work Ireland Louth
Youth Work Ireland Meath
Youth Work Ireland Midlands
Youth Work Ireland Monaghan

Youth Work Ireland North
Connaught
Youth Work Ireland Tipperary







