



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE  
FOR EMPLOYMENT  
AND LEARNING**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**Inquiry into Young People not in  
Employment, Education or Training  
(NEETs)**

19 May 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson)  
Mr Peter Weir (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Anna Lo  
Mrs Claire McGill  
Mr Pat Ramsey  
Ms Sue Ramsey

**Witnesses:**

Ms Olwen Lyner ) Northern Ireland Association for the  
Ms Heather Reid ) Care and Resettlement of Offenders  
Mr David Murphy )

Ms Claire Meenahan )  
Ms Anne Schulz ) Include Youth  
Ms Koulla Yiasouma )

**The Chairperson (Mrs D Kelly):**

You are all welcome. Thanks for attending the Committee session to give members a briefing for our inquiry. I invite Olwen to introduce the team.

**Ms Olwen Lyner (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders):**

Thank you. I welcome the Committee to our headquarters.

**The Chairperson:**

This auspicious building.

**Ms Lyner:**

Absolutely. We thank you for the opportunity to give evidence. It is important to mention the fact that the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) and Include Youth have come together for this purpose. Our briefing paper explains the differences and complementarity of our groups. By joining our presentations, we feel that the Committee is getting a double whammy. There has been quite a lot of collaboration between our staff in putting together today's presentation to avoid repeating too much and to make the best use of time. I am aware that time is shorter than we anticipated, but, at this stage, it is hard for us to cut out anything. Therefore, we will keep going.

Quite a lot of other people who we would like members to meet have arrived on the first floor of the building, and we hope that we will have time for that. Witnesses will have the opportunity to introduce themselves, but the team includes Heather Reid from NIACRO and Claire Meenehan from Include Youth, each of whom is supported by a service user. We want everyone to have the opportunity to make their prepared submissions, so I hope that the Committee will bear with us.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you, Olwen. I want to reassure everyone that although the setting appears formal, the microphones are here so that the evidence can be recorded and reported by Hansard and read via the Assembly website. Please do not be put off. Your views are important to us and we are keen to hear them.

**Ms Claire Meenehan (Include Youth):**

I would like to spend the next couple to minutes talking to the Committee about the Give and Take scheme, which is one of Include Youth's largest projects. I want to speak about five things. I want to tell the Committee who we are, what we do, how we do it, why it works and make a few

points for members to consider.

Give and Take is an employability scheme for young people aged 16 to 21 who are not ready to access mainstream training or employment. The young people with whom and for whom we work are deemed to be at high risk of social exclusion. A recent profile of our young people showed that 100% of them are not in education, employment or training, which is a characteristic that never changes. Seventy-five per cent of them had essential skills needs; 74% were young care-leavers; and 49% were early school-leavers. Mental and emotional health problems are among other characteristics of the group with whom we work, which also includes young people who live in unsettled accommodation. All our young people are referred through social services and they can get a place with us only if they cannot access or sustain mainstream provision.

So, what do we do? Our project operates on a regional basis. We have premises in Belfast, Armagh, Derry and Ballymena. More recently, we moved into Omagh and Coleraine. The three components of our scheme are as follows: supported work experiences, training, and personal development and mentoring. Those components are standardised across Northern Ireland, so that every young person on the scheme gets the same quality of service regardless of who they are or where they come from. This is really important to us.

How do we do it? In respect of the first component — supported work placements — we are, ultimately, an employability scheme for those young people. However, the supported work placements are individually tailored to suit the needs and interests of the young people with whom we work, so every young person gets a say in the job or the placement that they want. Every young person has an identified careers officer who actually comes into Give and Take to meet them during the course of the year to ensure that placements suit their needs. It is really important that those careers officers come to us, because the young people feel quite intimidated in going to careers.

The system is three-tiered. We offer work prep, work able, and work well. Work prep is about preparing young people for the world of work, which might have been alien to them. A lot of it concerns attitudinal behaviour in the world of work and improving their social skills. Work prep is more about taster days. Work well comes into play when the young person is in a sustained placement.

The second component of the scheme is training, and all the participants are offered essential skills training. Include Youth previously worked with further education colleges on essential skills training, but after seven years that arrangement no longer worked for us, and Include Youth recruited its own tutors. That training is very resource intensive; however, it pays dividends, and qualifications have soared in the past couple of years. One of the reasons why the previous arrangement did not work was the requirement by the colleges for a 40-hour rule in essential skills training. It means that students must attend for a minimum of 40 hours before they can receive a qualification, and if some of our young people with chaotic lives missed a couple of sessions they could not receive a qualification. Similarly, the four-week rule, which leads a young person who did not attend training for four weeks to be expelled from the course, did not work for some of our students who have to attend hospital or who are homeless. The other issue was that if a young person was on the scheme they could only go up one level in any one year, whereas some of our young people are now jumping two or three levels in a year. The new system works much better.

The third element of the scheme is personal development and mentoring, which I believe is the lynchpin. These young people face a number of barriers to employment, and, if Include Youth did not work with them on those issues and help them to overcome them, they will not be engaged or able to move on to employment, further education or training.

The Give and Take scheme works for these young people for a number of different reasons. All programmes are individually tailored to suit the needs and interests of the young people in question, and we have qualified staff, the majority of whom are youth-work trained and have excellent skills in engaging young people. The scheme also works at a pace with which the young person is comfortable, and it is very outcome-focused, offering seven qualifications in one year so that participants leave the scheme with something concrete. We offer young people driving lessons and the opportunity to do their driving theory test. That has been a huge incentive, and five of our people have passed their driving tests in the past six months.

We stalk young people — *[Laughter.]* — no; we track, monitor and follow young people. We find that some people will go AWOL, and we will call to their houses, phone them or drive out to collect them, because that is what some young people need in order to keep engaged in our programme. We also offer a holistic approach and one-to-one mentoring so that when a young person begins the scheme there is someone who has undertaken a 60-hour training course to help

and support that person to stay engaged during his or her time on the scheme. That has been a huge success.

We recognise that progression is not always linear. It is not about where a young person starts, it is about where they finish. During their time with us, participants may go up and down and require more intensive support at different times. Include Youth also recognises and celebrates achievement, and we are holding our annual certificate presentation on 9 June in Belfast City Hall. Committee members are very welcome to attend that event.

Include Youth would like the Committee to consider the following points. We would love the education maintenance allowance (EMA) to be offered to all young people who are on the Give and Take scheme and to those who are involved in similar projects. We would also really appreciate support with essential skills training, and recognition that the 40-hour and four-week rules do not work for our young people. It would be great if a more flexible approach to learning could be taken and that there is recognition that our young people have career and life aspirations too, and that, with the right support, they can reach their potential. Finally, we would like support in setting up employment and training opportunities with employers specifically targeted at this group of young people.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much for that Claire. Will anyone else be contributing or do you want to take questions from Committee members?

**Ms Heather Reid (Northern Ireland Association for the care and Resettlement of Offenders):**

I am going to speak on behalf of NIACRO.

**The Chairperson:**

Do Committee members wish to hear both presentations and then ask questions?

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Yes. There is a split developing, and I like that. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms Reid:**

There is not such a split. I am here to represent NIACRO's Youth Employability programme, which is the child of our adult programme Jobtrack and is based on the same model of one-to-one intervention and an individual-needs-led approach. We share a great deal of commonality with the Give and Take scheme, and a number of the things Claire mentioned are appropriate to our programme and our young people.

Specifically, the Youth Employability programme is a partnership with the Youth Justice Agency and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

The programme targets young people aged between 15 and 18 who have come through the justice system. There has been an increase in number of serious-risk offenders who are coming on to the programme — prolific young offenders who have gone through the system time again. Those are the very people with whom the formal education and training systems do not want to deal, and therein lies one of the biggest challenges.

The young people are referred under a youth conference order system or as part of a release package from the Juvenile Justice Centre or Hydebank Wood. As Claire said, the types of individuals referred to the programme face significant difficulties and challenges and have had negative experiences in their lives. Many of them have chaotic lifestyles, in which they experience boredom and peer pressure and have a distinct lack of positive role models in their lives.

The make-up of the group is predominantly male. That is not discriminatory; it simply reflects the offender population. Twenty-five per cent of the young people on the programme in the past year are prolific offenders. That requires a much more intensive and supportive approach whereby we do not let the young people go; but if they do leave, we track them and bring them back. We keep our door open, and often they come back to it.

Significantly, 90% of the young people on the programme last year did not complete formal education. They, therefore, came to us with no qualifications at all. More significantly and perhaps more worryingly, 15% of them left formal education at a young age when they were in either aged 10 or 11. Obviously, there is a link between that and engaging in offending behaviour.

We had expected that a significant number of offenders would not show, given the serious nature of their offences and the fact that they were referrals. We thought that it would be good if we could get 50% of them to participate. In fact, only 10% were no shows. The young people wanted to come, because they saw the programme as a positive step, and because they were probably supported to do so as a result of their court cases. If those young people then started to take seriously the need to demonstrate a move away from offending, that was quite significant. The other difference this year is that there has been a 20% increase in the number of young people on the programme who are already 18. That was the result of a change in the sentencing arrangements and the fact that young people were being charged but their court cases were not being heard until after their eighteenth birthday. That is significant in respect of the ability to access mainstream programmes.

Like the Give and Take scheme, our programme has Northern Ireland-wide geographical coverage, except in the north of the Province. That is because of an issue with funding, which we wish to progress in the future. As I said, our model is individual-needs led and is focused on progression into employment and training. Employment is the ultimate goal, but given the chaos in the job market, more and more focus is being placed on training and education.

Our role is more about providing linkage and brokerage than training and qualifications on site. We believe that offenders should be able to go back into the community by linking them into local provision through the Youth Employability programme. Our ultimate goal is to get offenders on to programmes offered by DEL-supported providers. That requires our staff to provide ongoing support and engagement to the providers. Quite often, the relationship between the providers and the offenders breaks down, and we must support and repair it.

Any group work that we do is focused on job search. That is delivered in a group-work setting in conjunction with the Careers Service, and it works very well. The specialist part of the job search activity is about encouraging young people to disclose their convictions. We, as an organisation, do not advocate that people do not disclose such information. We, therefore, develop skills in young people so that they are able to communicate and demonstrate to employers and training providers that they have moved on. Through our specialist advocacy service, we provide employers, training providers and DEL's Careers Service with training and support on legislation relating to the rehabilitation of offenders to ensure that the appropriate



advice and guidance is given. We see this as being fundamental to working with our target group.

There have been several positive outcomes in the past year. Fifty-five per cent of those who left the programme moved to positive destinations, as we call them. That is quite significant, given their backgrounds and profiles. Thirty-three per cent moved into Training for Success, 16% moved directly into employment, and 6% went back into education.

We support the education maintenance allowance. We have noticed, particularly in rural communities, that delays in the payment of EMA significantly impact on a young person's ability to attend. Having worked hard to get them to go to college or into training, their payments may not come through for five months. Often, their families are in poverty, so delays exacerbate the situation, setting the young person up to fail.

We share the concerns about essential skills delivery. However, specific to our work, we have identified a gap, or inconsistency, in Training for Success. Young people who come through the care system can get on to the programme up to the age of 22. However, that provision does not apply to young people who come through the justice system, and it impacts particularly on young people who, perhaps at the age of 16, go into Hydebank or the Youth Justice Centre and do not come out until they are over 18. Consequently, they miss the window of opportunity. That discrepancy could and should be addressed.

Finally, I ask for the Committee's support in encouraging, in particular, DEL to ensure that people who provide careers advice or guidance for young people from a justice background are trained in legislation, because poor advice is very damaging and can, unnecessarily, take young people down a path to failure.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you, Heather. Do the young people wish to add anything?

**Ms Anne Schulz:**

My name is Anne Schulz, and I have just turned 19. I want to tell you a bit about me and why I was referred to the Give and Take scheme. Before going into care, I did really well in school and was a grade-A student. Even though things were difficult for me at home, I managed to keep my

grades up. When I was brought into care, things got worse and, as a result, I never got my GCSEs. I then moved into foster care, where I felt part of a family again. To this day, I am part of that family. I attended Bangor tech twice, and, on both occasions, I got EMA. Again, I was a good student, and my confidence and grades went back up.

On reaching my eighteenth birthday, I had to move out of my foster home, despite me and my foster family wanting me to stay. I moved to Larne. It was my first time living alone, which was a big worry to me because I had to cook my own meals, clean the house and pay bills. I was no longer able to stay at tech, because I could not travel from Larne to Bangor every day, so, again, I did not get my qualifications. I had other worries as well. The fact that I was living on my own meant that I had no routine, and I was no longer getting EMA or foster care money. Consequently, because I could not afford to keep it anymore, I had to sell my motorbike. I tried to go to tech in Larne, but the courses on offer there were just not for me. Therefore, I just sat in the house. Living in Larne, I felt very isolated because I was away from my foster family. None of that helped my mental health issues. Shortly after moving out of my foster home, I suffered panic attacks and was diagnosed with depression.

When I heard about the Give and Take scheme, I thought that I would give it a go, and my social worker referred me to it. I think that Give and Take is different to most techs, because it is more flexible and enjoyable. I am now back doing classes, and I aim to achieve up to seven qualifications, including essential skills. Last week, we did our first aid training, and we are working towards our Duke of Ed'. I also have a mentor, who meets me every week. She supports me and helps me with anything that I need. I am also getting driving lessons, which will open up many career opportunities to me. In addition, we do work prep, which enables you to experience different jobs and see what you would like to do.

Our essential skills class is small and the tutors are really good, so you get more one-on-one time and more work done. If you miss more than four classes, you do not get kicked out, because the staff know about your needs and circumstances. A member of staff will phone you in the morning to make sure that you are up and that you are going to class. If you cannot make it to class, a member of staff will collect you and take you there. Staff also encourage students to do well.

I hope to go to university. I am really interested in cooking and animals, and I have an idea

that I would love to open a food business that caters for people and animals. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Some restaurants cook animals. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:**

There used to be a show on television — I am not sure whether Kenny Everett was on it — that featured a cat in a microwave.

**Ms Schulz:**

I attend the Give and Take programme. Although money is very tight, I still travel from Larne to Belfast to attend my classes. I see a counsellor to overcome my mental health issues. Most people who take part in the Give and Take programme have had similar experiences to me. I can speak for most people who take part in the programme when I say that normal tech does not meet our needs; it does not work for us. If the Give and Take programme did not exist, I would be sitting at home playing my Xbox all day. That is just the way that it is.

Give and Take is about giving young people support to deal with their lives and their childhoods. It also helps young people to plan their futures. Thank you for listening.

**The Chairperson:**

You are a good advocate for the young people who you represent. You are going to be a role model for how people can turn their lives around in the face of adversity. Well done. David, are you going to make a contribution?

**Mr David Murphy:**

I was referred to NIACRO through a youth conference order. I came here with no qualifications; no GCSEs; nothing. Over the past year that I have been here, I have been through three training schemes and now have enough qualifications and experience to get a job.

Since I have been here, I have been supported really well, and I have overcome fears and challenges. I am applying for a lot of jobs, and getting turned down; but I get back up and apply for more jobs.

**The Chairperson:**

Unfortunately, with the economic recession, you are not on your own in that respect. I know that many people are applying for jobs. I was talking to someone recently who had applied for 80 jobs. You are either overqualified, underqualified or there are just too many people in the workplace.

**Ms Reid:**

And the good news is —

**Mr D Murphy:**

I start a job on Monday.

**The Chairperson:**

Happy days. There will be a celebration when you get your first pay packet. What age are you?

**Mr D Murphy:**

I am 19.

**The Chairperson:**

Well done to you and to the teams that have supported you and Anne.

**Mr Weir:**

Thank you for your contributions and for outlining the valuable work that you do. How many young people do you deal with each year?

**Ms Meenehan:**

The Give and Take scheme is very intense; every young person who takes part gets two workers and a mentor. We work with 140 young people a year on a regional basis.

**Ms Reid:**

Youth Employability worked with 188 young people last year.

**Mr Weir:**

What is the average length of time involved? Is it a lot less than a year, or does it extend beyond a year?

**Ms Meenehan:**

In the Give and Take scheme, the young people are with us for a year, so we try to get them as far on as we can in that time. There can be circumstances in which a young person is not ready to progress. In such circumstances, there is a three-month exit strategy, and if a young person is not ready to move on we can be flexible and continue to work with him or her. However, such an arrangement has to be very structured.

**Ms Reid:**

For Youth Employability, the average time is six months. However, that could increase to two years. Young people have progressed to our adult programme, so the time depends on the level of support required.

**Mr Weir:**

I want to ask about the referral aspect. Heather, you said that your referrals come from the youth justice system, which means that you can be fairly certain of the numbers. Claire, you said that the participants in your scheme are referred to you by social services.

Is the potential number of referrals an issue for you? Obviously, due to staffing levels, the number of staff you have is limited. Could social services refer more people to you if you had more staff? I am not saying that there should be a waiting list, but they may have to prioritise because of the limitations.

**Ms Meenehan:**

That is true. We work with all the trust areas, and each trust area holds 12 places. More recently, the Northern Board and the Western Board extended that to 20 places. Every trust will have a gatekeeper, who prioritises the referrals that we get so that we have the most appropriate referrals. However, there is quite a substantial waiting list in every trust area. If there were inappropriate referrals or if, for some reason, it was not working out, that referral would close, and another person would take that place.

**Mr Weir:**

Claire, you said that there was a relationship with FE colleges but that it did not entirely gel because of the more rigid structures involved. Heather, you said that you want ensure that, from the DEL perspective, careers advice is improved. Focusing on the Department's role, what direct links do you have with the Department and what support does it give you? Apart from what has been mentioned, do you have any recommendations for action that the Department could take? Although this inquiry will cover many aspects of NEETs, our focus is principally on the Department and how it can improve its role with regard to your work.

**Ms Meenehan:**

We had a relationship with the colleges for seven years, and each year it became more problematic. The young people were being set up to fail again. We were putting them into classes and, because of the structures, they failed and felt like failures yet again. We were then able to secure money to redeploy resources and employ essential-skills tutors. At one stage, DEL was thinking about piloting a scheme within the Give and Take scheme. However, although it was a recommendation, it never came about. I still think that it would be good if the Department could pilot smaller classes and train tutors who could engage our young people. Quite often towards the end, the Department was sending tutors who were not skilled in engaging our young people. The tutors found it difficult to work with the young people, and vice versa. However, it is completely different now.

**Ms Reid:**

NIACRO has, on numerous occasions, attempted to engage DEL on the youth employability steering group, even in an advisory capacity, with a view to informing DEL of the issues facing young people, particularly those with convictions. That has not happened. We have not had any engagement at a strategic level. We have positive relationships with careers officers and careers management, but that is because we do a practical piece of work. Although DEL says that Training for Success targets young offenders, it actually targets those on the scale who are at the lowest risk of offending. Our issue is that the young people who are offending and who need the most intervention are not being incorporated into the DEL programmes. Colleges are quite discriminatory once they know that young people are in the youth justice system, and they do not even want those young people on the premises. That is a huge issue.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

It is reassuring to see so many people here. The purpose of getting out and about is to ensure that the Committee is accountable and is listening to people. David, good luck with your new job: I hope that it works out for you. Anne, I hope that you secure the university place that you ultimately desire.

It would be remiss of us not to commend and acknowledge the significant contribution that Include Youth and NIACRO make to young people. It would also be remiss of me not to acknowledge Tony Martin from Derry, and the personal and organisational contribution that he made to the difficult times in our city's history and the ongoing work that he does.

However, this inquiry is about looking at and evaluating best practice and good value for money, where the outputs are clear and concise. Clearly, there is no doubt that projects such as Include Youth are extremely good. Your figures show that 100% of young people who join the scheme are not involved in anything. I want to tease out issues, not today but on another day when we have a more concise database from you. Your figures show that in 2009-10, for example, 55% went into education. I would like more definitive and qualitative information that the Committee can use in order to go to the next stage. If there is a model of good practice, we want to champion and advocate it, and make sure that it is rolled out.

I take Peter's point: although the Department for Employment and Learning has a fundamental role, we now have the new Department of Justice, which also clearly has a role. We want to see how we can best use our role to bring what influence we can to bear. However, I am keen to know what qualifications were achieved over the past few years by those who came into the programme with no qualifications. Did the programme enable those people, like Anne, to go on to the next stage, although she made the point that she was doing very well at school. However, most people who join the programme are not doing that well, and become marginalised and excluded from society. I would like information about qualifications, whether those young people remained in education, and whether those at low risk became re-offenders. There is clearly no doubt, however, about the value and contribution of the programme.

One of your aspirations is for mainstream training and education programmes tailored to individual needs, which are considered high maintenance. How much more funding do you want to make the programme better? The Committee needs that sort of detailed information when

looking at inquiry recommendations to ensure that those issues are followed through.

**The Chairperson:**

It would be useful if you could provide those figures. If, when you go away, you think about something that you should have mentioned, you can submit it the Committee Clerk, and it will be considered.

**Mrs McGill:**

You are welcome, and I wish David and Anne well for the future. Congratulations, David, on getting that job. Do you start on Monday?

**Mr D Murphy:**

Yes, hopefully. *[Laughter.]*

**Mrs McGill:**

What is the job?

**Mr D Murphy:**

It is at the HCL call centre in Belfast.

**Mrs McGill:**

Very good. Well done, David. Anne, you are heading for university, and I wish you well on that. It was interesting that FE colleges are, in your view, by and large failing. Did they fail you, Anne?

**Ms Schulz:**

Yes.

**Mrs McGill:**

If it is the case that the bodies and organisations charged with doing something and providing for all young people, from 16 years of age upwards, are not doing so, that really is a massive concern. You all clearly articulated the issues, including lack of flexibility. Another issue of concern is that the tutors lack the very skills that are required. There is something fundamentally wrong, and we must find some way to address that. How that is done is, of course, another issue.



Heather referred to the situation in rural areas. I represent West Tyrone, which is very much a rural area, and having to travel has always been a concern. A lot of people do not understand that added burden. It is not easy.

I raised that issue on behalf of a constituent a couple of years ago. By the time one gets a result, one has given up on doing any course. It is much easier to get some kind of job, for however many hours, and get a few pounds at the end of the week. There is no encouragement being shown, and we need to address that. I wish you well; you are a credit.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

I apologise for being late; I was at a meeting in Dundonald this morning and got lost. *[Laughter.]* Maybe I should do one of those schemes.

**The Chairperson:**

She was lost and is found. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms S Ramsey:**

The presentation was great; I have seen the briefing note. I have a couple of specific questions, and I would like to ask Anne a few questions. The Committee was keen to carry out this inquiry and we are keen to have positive outcomes at the end of it. There is no point in doing all this work if we do not try and instigate change throughout the Executive and not just in DEL.

Your briefing states that 75% of young people on the Give and Take scheme had essential skills needs. Does that mean that people did not attend school, left school, or did they get lost in the schools system? Is it a combination of people who just decided not to attend school, or were they sent to the back of the class, which sometimes happens as we know?

**Ms Meenehan:**

It is a combination. There is a mixture of early school-leavers and school refusers, but there are also young people who attended school and were just left at the back of the class.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Can we get some of those figures? We would like to get information on whether the kids were

out of school. Pat is right; we need a lot of information so that we can point out where things went wrong in the schools system.

**Ms Meenehan:**

Yes, absolutely. We have those figures with us.

A lot of our young people seem to have got lost in the system somewhere. Legally, young people have to remain at school until the age of 16, but we are working with a group of young people for whom that is just not the reality. They left school at quite a young age. A common theme is that many of them have had really negative school experiences. Even going back into the classroom is a big deal for them. As far as they are concerned, it is a case of: I am not as far on as other people my age. For them, addressing and overcoming that problem is difficult.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

During a presentation to the Committee last week, the issue of when the education welfare officers (EWO) service kicks in was raised. Is it after six months, a year, or 18 months? By then, the damage has been done. We are looking into that.

What is crucial, I think, is that a consistent approach to young people is taken, whether they are in care or in the criminal justice system. We would like more information on that. Young people in a care setting can be involved in Training for Success up to the age of 22, which is not the case for those coming through the juvenile justice system. We need balance. I come from a constituency that suffers from juvenile justice issues. We need balance, and we need to realise that some people are in the juvenile justice system through no fault of their own. Society needs to take responsibility for that.

Why is the Department not keen on being part of the youth employability forum?

**Ms Reid:**

If I knew, I would tell you.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Has the decision been made at senior level, or did the Department just say that it was not attending?

**Ms Reid:**

The Department just did not engage at all. I suggest that the Department is trying to have a consistent approach to all of the projects, or perhaps the focus on offending is not as high as we would like it to be.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Anne, why did you have to move out when you were 18 years old?

**Ms Schulz:**

I had to move because there were no funds for young people over the age of 18 to stay with their foster families. I had no choice.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Does that only apply to foster families? The state has a duty of care —

**Ms Koulla Yiasouma (Include Youth):**

Anne got caught in the middle of a transition period. There is now some provision to allow children to stay with foster carers if they are in education. Anne seems to have got caught just before those arrangements came into place.

**The Chairperson:**

Does that only apply if they are in education?

**Ms Schulz:**

I was in education.

**Ms Yiasouma:**

It is really difficult, because it is only just bedding in. It is symptomatic of the lack of foster carers. It is apposite that we bring this up during foster care fortnight.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Again, I think that having more specific information would be useful to the Committee. The other point is —

**The Chairperson:**

Sorry for interrupting. Koulla was going to wind up the evidence session for the witnesses. It is better to formally bring her to the Committee table.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

I am conscious that I do not know details and that we are in a public forum, but why, Anne, did you find it easier to travel to Belfast from Larne than to Bangor?

**Ms Shulz:**

I had been living in Newtownards, which is quite close to Bangor and I had my own transport. My EMA paid for a motorbike. Sometimes I got the bus and sometimes I used my motorbike, depending on the weather. When I moved to Larne, because I am still a learner driver, the distance was just too far. I was in the last few weeks of my course when I had to quit because I could not make it from Larne to Bangor.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Right, no problem, thank you. Good luck in your job and in anything that you do. I think that you will achieve whatever you want to, and you can cook all the animals that you want.  
*[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:**

I have just been reminded by the Deputy Chairperson that it was Hale and Pace who were on television that day, not Kenny Everett.

**Ms Lo:**

I thank the witnesses for their presentations. I spent years in the voluntary sector and I am very aware of your good work. Every time I hear you, I am further impressed. Thank you very much for helping young people who have been so disadvantaged from a young age. I am happy to hear from the two young people, who are examples of your good work. Good luck to both of you.

I want to follow up on Claire's point that she worked with FE colleges for seven years and that it did not work out. Heather also made the point that when FE colleges found out that people had a background of offending, they did not want know. Surely, the Department needs to do

something about that. We cannot let that go on. Teachers should be aware of people's backgrounds and that it is not a case of one size fits all. If teachers do not have the relevant awareness training, it must be given to them, rather than just asking young people to turn up at 9.00 am on the dot and leave at 12 noon and without anyone caring what happens to them outside that time. That is something that the Committee should pick up on. Trying to talk to FE colleges for seven years, and trying to educate them on a voluntary basis, is long enough. If they are still not doing this, we must ask why.

**The Chairperson:**

We can do that, yes.

**Ms Lo:**

Thank you very much.

**The Chairperson:**

I am conscious that a number of young people are waiting to meet us downstairs. I do not want to curtail the debate, which has been very interesting thus far. I am certainly interested in the fact that under the social services foster-care regime that we have, people can remain in foster care after 18 only if they are in education. I have a 23-year-old and a 20-year-old still living with me. I cannot get rid of them. *[Laughter.]*

Therefore, it is not necessarily the norm that once a young person is 18 he or she is out of the family. There should be more of a reflection of what society is like these days.

**Ms Yiasouma:**

I am the director of Include Youth, and I will try to briefly sum up some of the points that have been made, because young people from NIACRO and Include Youth are waiting downstairs for a more informal discussion.

I also extend an invitation to the Committee to visit our organisation locally. In Derry, NIACRO and Include Youth are just around the corner from each other. In Armagh, our offices covering the southern area are next door to each other. The Committee is also very welcome to visit us in Omagh, north Down, Belfast and Coleraine. I am sure that I speak for NIACRO as well. As an aside, we are delighted to provide our evidence in partnership with NIACRO.

Include Youth is the son or daughter of NIACRO. We were spawned from it, and, 30 years on, the relationship remains strong, which is great.

We will also be providing a full response to the inquiry that will specifically include the statistics and information members asked for. Without panicking our policy co-ordinator, that response should be available within the next week or so.

We talked a lot about the failures of DEL and the institutions that it runs and sponsors. However, we need to be clear that the young people who NIACRO and Include Youth work for have been failed by a number of processes before the age of 16, not least by education. We talked about what is happening concerning essential skills in FE, and that is symptomatic and reflective of what happens in mainstream education. The system cannot deal with children who, through no fault of their own, live in very difficult and traumatic circumstances. Therefore, those children are ignored, excluded or encouraged not to attend. That is how those children find themselves in what we call NEET. We must consider whether mainstream DEL services are able to offer young people the specialist and intensive support that they need or whether that process needs to involve NIACRO, Include Youth and the other organisations that the Committee has heard from throughout its inquiry.

If the Committee decides that pre-vocational accredited schemes are necessary, such as the Youth Employability or Give and Take schemes, we argue that certain components must be in place. We have no objection to being subject to an accreditation process that would mean that we could support these young people. However, within that, we would like to see educational maintenance allowances for young people. The Committee brought a motion on that issue to the Assembly, and its progress will be crucial.

The other thing happening in DEL is the scoping study on NEETs. The term covers 16- to 24-year-olds, and we have talked about the challenges for young people within that huge group. We need information to know exactly which young people we are talking about, their backgrounds and their needs. Some young people are NEET for a very short time and others, similar to those who you heard from today, are likely to be NEET for quite a while.

Pat mentioned resourcing. Resourcing, my goodness, will continue to be a huge issue for organisations such as ours. The Youth Employability programme is funded on a shoestring

budget and the Give and Take scheme has been well funded for the last two years. That said; I lie awake at night wondering what will happen going forward. We have managed to develop a scheme that we think meets the needs of young people. However, I worry that, come March 2011, if not before, that funding will go, just as we have begun to get a scheme that works. Therefore, within accreditation, we are asking that resources be given.

We talked about essential skills. I hope that the Committee has heard that we need a process that takes a flexible approach to young people and meets their needs where other programmes have not done so, from the minute that they enter education, rather than the moment they enter post-primary education.

I leave the Committee with the fact that the recession has seen a dramatic increase in the NEET population across these islands. However, regardless of the economic environment, without our specialist support, the young people who NIACRO and Include Youth work for will probably always be NEET. They are not young people who are not unemployed or unengaged because the opportunities are not there for them; they are unemployed and unengaged because they have not been given the opportunity to develop the capacities and skills to be able to engage with the employment, education and training environments. We argue very strongly that schemes such as ours, and the others that you have heard from, are currently necessary to help young people make up for the systems that have failed them for a very long time.

Without further ado, I invite the Committee to come to the first floor and meet the punters, who can probably explain the situation far more eloquently than me.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much, Koulla. I certainly hear what you are saying. However, there is also a responsibility to support families, perhaps even at an earlier stage. It is not just about the system. In some cases, children have been failed in life even before that.

**Ms S Ramsey:**

Can we ask the Assembly Research Service to provide us with a costing for different sections of NEET versus what it would cost for the system to be right? It would be useful to have that comparison.

**The Committee Clerk:**

Yes, we can ask for that. It would show the cost of prevention rather than cure.

**The Chairperson:**

That finishes the session. Thank you for attending and for sharing your stories with us. In particular, I wish Anne and David all the best in their future careers. I thank them for coming, and I look forward to working closely with NIACRO and Include Youth in the coming months as we face financial constraints and difficult decisions. Your presentation will be included in the inquiry report, and, as I said earlier, if you have any further information that you wish to share, please contact us.