

Building Communities Consultation

Saturday 20th September 2014

Newry Youth Resource Centre

Groups who participated :

Newry & Mourne Youth Council

Dungannon Youth Council

Armagh Youth Council

Newry CRED Peacebuilders Group

St. John Bosco Youth Club Extended Provision

Funded by

SELB Youth Service

Southern Peace III Partnership via *(Newry and Mourne District Council staff)*

Dungannon Police & Community Safety Partnership

We at the S.E.L.B. Youth Service received notice of the inquiry into Building a United Community during the early period of September 2014.

Part of my role as a Senior Youth Worker is to support the overall development and collective action of S.E.L.B. sponsored Youth Councils in the Newry & Mourne, Armagh and Dungannon Division of the Youth Service.

All the local groups had at some time over the past couple of years spent some time exploring and debating issues of exclusion and inclusion often related to specific areas of prejudice such as Racism, Sectarianism, homophobia, and mental health stigma. Participants in our groups have quite strong feelings around these issues and a good awareness as a result of the workshops and programmes they have attended through the Youth Service.

Despite the short turnaround time, there was unanimous support across the Youth Councils that we try to react as quickly as possible and take the opportunity to have the voice of young people placed within this debate.

The Youth Councils are very much about representing the views of young people and making that voice heard as well as creating opportunities for young people to be actively involved in social action for and within their communities. What better place, than in helping to guide the future development towards the creation of a happier, more stable and healthier environment for the future of Northern Ireland.

The following notes are a collection of the ideas that emerged from a full day's discussion for the assembled groups as listed on the cover. In all thirty two young people gave of their time to attend voluntarily for a Saturday's discussion in the Newry Youth Resource Centre. Within that group were young people from new national backgrounds, GLBT people, representatives of both main-tradition and indeed those who would not claim to represent either. There were people with learning difficulties and people from all levels of education. In common, they were passionate, fifteen to twenty year olds and keen to have a say.

Our thanks to the S.E.L.B. Youth Work Staff for helping facilitate the day; Emma Devlin, Wayne Morris and Liza Hackett, but especially to everyone who turned out to speak passionately about their experiences, to share their learning, and to offer ideas for the consideration of the inquiry.

The day was made possible by the S.E.L.B.'s wonderful new Resource Centre in Newry which was given over for the day, but a special thanks goes to those other agencies who came up with funding at short notice to make it possible, Newry & Mourne staff administering the Southern Partnership Peace III fund and the Dungannon Police and safety Partnership.

All the comments made by individuals are recorded here as they came from the flip charts in each of the various work shop groups. We have attempted to draw together a summary of some main points which relate to the priorities that we asked each group to prepare during the final session of the day.

Building a United Community

One Day Consultation with S.E.L.B. Youth Representatives

Agenda for Saturday 20th September 2014

Within Stormont, a committee for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister has set up an inquiry to advise the Assembly and MLAs as to the best way to support and encourage the development of a truly United Community across Northern Ireland.

The inquiry is seeking submissions from interested groups and individuals that will help with this process.

Given that all forms of prejudice and discrimination have been expressed concerns of our Youth Councils and other representative youth groups, it seems important for us to take this opportunity to share our ideas and thoughts about the future development of a peaceful and inclusive Northern Ireland.

The day has been set out so that we will spend the morning sessions looking at and discussing our understanding, perception and awareness of the situation in Northern Ireland, sharing our experiences, (good and bad), and exploring what we see as the root causes for this intolerance.

Lunch is provided courtesy of Dolce Vita, including vegetarian options.

The afternoon will focus on the way forward, looking at the possible solution, the people and organisations that need to take a lead in this, and even the role we as Youth Representatives can take in delivering a better future.

During the workshops, participants will be asked to ensure all thoughts and ideas are fully recorded and priorities for each group selected and highlighted. A final report will be typed from the notes of the day to be submitted to the OFM & DFM by the 26th September deadline.

Agenda

10.00 a.m.	Bus picks up at Perry St. Car Park Dungannon	
10.30 a.m.	Pickup at Armagh Bus Station	
11.00 a.m.	Arrive at Newry Youth Resource Centre	
11.15 a.m.	Introduction to today's agenda and the Open Space Concept	
11.30 a.m.	Select Workshops	
11.50 a.m.	1st Round of workshops	"Experiences & Sharing"
12.30 p.m.	2nd Round Workshops	"Understanding and Causes."
1.00pm	Lunch	
1.45 p.m.	3rd Round of Workshops	"Solutions and Approaches"
2.30 p.m.	Youth Service/Youth Council actions	
3.00 p.m.	Final feedback and priorities for recommendations	
3.30 p.m.	Bus	

Education/Section7..... ISMs

Schools need to have a mandatory and permanent commitment to educating around and dealing effectively with the issues of all....Isms (Racism, Sectarianism, Feminism, Homophobia etc.)

Schools should teach awareness of isms through LLW and sex education.

They don't address gender issues

Only cover things in a text book way, avoid seeking and offering opinions

Some Youth Groups do offer a chance to discuss and explore issues like this.

Schools should give more time to these issues and seek to create a safe environment for all.

Better use of small group workshops and discussion for this type of teaching.

Integrated schools should be talking more about these issues rather they don't have a set religion like where a Catholic school has to stick to the catholic perspective.

Causes.

No "other Nationalities" represented in School Councils

More unpopular

Nothing to do with exams and grades so schools not interested will not make time.

Schools have set religious instruction to follow

Grammar schools should be open to everyone, be more mixed

What happens to people with mental illness or leaning difficulties?

In School they are segregated, made to feel stupid and are seen as less capable.

International teaching looking to overcome language barriers

Should be more sex education and support in schools

LLW. Should be changed to other things, "Let's talk about sex..." (Depending on the teachers)

Based on youth service (Voluntary) isms programmes

Pupils could be involved in the educating....running programmes in school

In RE can teach what they want in terms of topics

At Stran. Teachers have to be taught how to deal with isms and for it to be more a compulsory part of the curriculum; make it compulsory to talk to students about certain issues.

Catholic schools, "No sex before marriage" yet there are teen mums there and they still don't talk about it as its against their religion.

Some teachers just don't have the skills to facilitate certain group activities and issues.

Can't due to education board

Teachers are not the sole blame.

Some teachers are not taught to deal with specific issues and can't meet the needs of kids.

Classroom assistants could be a source of a second opinion when appropriate.

Certain questions you just can't ask in the school environment.

Why don't parents teach kids sex education?

Sexism isn't addressed enough

Women earn less than men do.

Sexism, eg; on a date the man should pay but we feel it should be equal.

Women used to be dependent on men

Trousers for girls in schools

Teach women to see themselves as equals, do things for themselves.

Expectations of men and women in schools

Gender binary....how girls treat girls and boys treat boys.

Exploring lack of Tolerance/Education

Tolerance is a learned thing, growing up in the right atmosphere.

Integration is the key to ensuring this happens and how are thinking and learning is shaped.

Schools are not as diverse as they should be. They should be giving information on the problems in our community and how that affects us.

We need to create events that bring about integration and mixing things like Music events.

Having a one Ireland team instead of a southern one and a northern one.

Segregation "Causes"/Educating"

Lack of experience ie; exposure to religious diversity due to the area you come from influences how sectarian you can be.

Your upbringing also plays a huge part in this

Older generations had no need or will to educate, had no diversity leading to generally more closed minds.

Sectarianism is passed down to children, especially within paramilitary relations "hero/Victim"

Lag Workshops etc. Young people in Youth councils and such organisations get a better education than the majority.

Football also sectarianism brought into people attitudes through the chants.

How do we combat it?

Schools shouldn't be segregated

LLW;- learn about cultures the beliefs and thinking of other peoples.

Integrated schools, cycle developed where the lower grades are associated.

That's why people go to schools with certain religions.

RE classes;- Should they be compulsory? Religious views are not rigid

Sectarianism.

Mix with other cultures from an early age

Might be are afraid of mixing because we don't know about our own culture.

Gay Pride parade Newry was more exclusive and less focussed on religious roots

Flags intimidate people

People jump to conclusions when they see loads of flags such as on an estate.

Schools shouldn't be all Protestant or all Catholic.

Boys and Girls should be going to school with each other (No single sex schools)

SELB doesn't have enough protestant reps for how many there should be.

See people for Who they are and not What they are!

Integrated Schools.

Racism/Immigrants and why people are angry about benefits entitlement.

A lot has to do with your upbringing.

Some black people are taught by their parents to be polite and courteous around white people and to be themselves only in black company.

We really need to challenge our own prejudices.

We shouldn't avoid the issues and we should talk about it....schools should provide workshops and there should be workshops for the parents too.

Even immigrants who have qualifications and doing jobs in N Ireland that people from NI don't want to do.

People should be allowed to speak in their native tongues in school. Some people have been given detention if they are caught not speaking English at school.

Need to challenge stereotypes.

Living with Disabilities

We feel there is a lack of understanding for people with physical disabilities

Better Job opportunities for those with disabilities

More accessible work areas

Better transport, ramps, chair and stair lifts.

Schools should provide more opportunities for students to do GCSEs or equivalent to

Education should be more open minded

Schools should also provide more opportunities (even for those without disabilities)

Eg; tech Courses as opposed to just stay for A levels

Learn about life

Young children etc should be educated to stop bullying people with disabilities

People can make insensitive and intolerant jokes about disabled people.

Lack of education- make people think twice and make people less ignorant by facilitating workshops

Need personal advice like living with disabilities, support with bullying, support for parents to help them.

More Support and inform children everyone is different so accept everyone.

Even families who are trying to help might not understand how best to help.

School staff need more training in understanding learning disabilities and speech impediments and how best to work with and help people.

Education and support hand in hand

Opportunities for special education students to pursue GCSEs and A levels or the next best equivalent.

Racism and Immigration.

Saying people only come to this country for the benefits and the NHS is racism.

Benefits aren't evenly distributed.

Everyone has different reasons for coming here to N Ireland. Some may come for benefits but others come because they heard about work but it wasn't available when they got here so had to settle on benefits.

Some people feel that immigrants are a threat.....Northern Ireland people are very territorial.

Other Parts of Europe are more multi cultural and have been for lang periods...they are more accepting as a result and we should aim to be like this too.

NI People feel that immigrants are “Stealing the Jobs” but in reality the immigrant people are just more willing to do any work even the staff we don’t want to do.

Need to give people education over time about racism and we have to challenge racism around us.

Look at America for example.

Mental Health and Hidden Disabilities. Stigma and exclusion.

Really common....much more than people think or aware.

Men won’t admit when anything is wrong with them....it looks weak or they might be seen as weak.

Afraid to go to seek counselling support in school

Hidden disabilities eg ; Scared to go and be diagnosed, or not immediately obvious.

Is Narcissism a Mental health issue?

First impression are very important and you never really see who the real person is because you don’t know what they are thinking.

Afraid of being treated differently

Have to report on Mental Disabilities and be reassessed....but it is to help you in the future, but not done correctly

People tip toe around it or judge others as “attention Seekers”

People exclude themselves like to not put their problems on others or they may have a disability.

Bullied for sub-conscious self-expression e.g. using hands to talk

Incorrect use of the term OCD and the word Crazy.

People often only have one disorder but are viewed ,(or it is assumed), as probably having more.

People don’t know how to approach or how to talk about the subject....even within families.

People don’t show how stressed they are around the issue.

Feel you can only really talk to certain people who are in a similar situation.

Fear of the unknown then leads to bullying

Media sometimes give dramatic statistics or it is over dramatized as a condition.

Derogatory terms are offensive but it does depend who says it and how..

If you are asexual people assume you are autistic.

More education needed, it has to be spoken about openly “Workshops” schools don’t get it

Is there enough about feeling stressed?

Brains a Margareta Pizza before the diagnosis, “Mental disorder adds to the person....like added flavouring!”

Homophobia....How accepting are our communities to those people who are LGBT?

Media highlights how Homophobia is still an issue.

Certain TV Shows are making steps to portray LGBT community but audience backlash (usually parents ,etc)

Less representation of bi sexuals and transgender, what representation there is of gay men and lesbian women are often stereotypical.

Bad light often shown on transgender people at times.

Local communities, more accepting than it was, however homophobia is still very present.

Sometimes it is more about a person being "different" rather than specifically homophobia.

Lack of support for young LGBT

Schools, religious schools teaching on marriage and homosexuality make it very difficult, if not impossible, for young people to approach teachers for help and support.

Attitudes of teachers as well as other pupils needs to change.

Formals....still an issue for in terms of taking same sex dates.

People still see the stereotype of gays

If you are not interested in dating than you will be seen as gay by other people.

Exclusion and Schools

Integrated primary schools then moving to Catholic High school....big difference

Protestants only come in in lower sixth

Difficulty finding out lower 6ths religions, we are afraid to ask.

Religion is a big deal in schools especially in Northern Ireland.

You are left to worry....never discuss issues in schools.....no workshops.

Newry High School does cross community stuff with other schools but we are still called names because of our uniform. Protestant related abuse.

Job Search.....didn't get a job because we went to Newry HS all the jobs went to the Our Ladies girls Grammar School/Catholics obviously "nice" girls not like "High" school lot.

Newry HS Stigma, effects jobs, uni why? Because it wouldn't be highly regarded as a school like the grammar schools. Not thought to be for "Smart" people (prejudice)

In fact the results show the High school does just as well as many grammar schools.

Not Catholic and Protestant schools in N Ireland

Catholics have their own schools

Everyone else goes to the State School

Prejudice towards the Grammar and "Royal" schools...seen as POSH- Doing 3 A levels seen as stupid, only care about grades, being made to feel less.

Point systems between schools differ

You have a drop a class in you look likely to fail (Grammar & Royal)

Teachers both put in effort for grades

Unpopular people (Cliques) treated differently

Can't fix that...unenforceable

Don't include themselves.

Prefects. Choose only the popular people, doesn't involve themselves

Unfair, school doesn't see what goes on outside.

Newry HS mixed prefects up.

Formal- choose their friends for awards everyone else left out

Sacred heart Sch. ...Head girl always from one class and area (Burren/Warrenpoint). Others put in hard work and get nothing to show for it

Romania trip- all HHS Students (School didn't even acknowledge it)

Elitism

Sectarianism, Should Parades be allowed, Why are so many youth clubs religious divided?

Even though you are protestant...you can still be excluded by the church you go to.

Housing and schools are all segregated here.

Communities don't interlink

No protestant Grammar Schools in Newry

Grammar schools are almost all catholic students

Names label you to a certain religion

Fear then of going into the other area or the different community. Ie a Catholic going into a protestant area or vice versa.

Even people new to Northern Ireland as new nationals find the need to learn quickly to identify people's religion by their names and surnames.

Parades.....do we really need so many??

Parades can happen so that people can embrace their cultures and identities but there is no need for so many.

It costs so much money to the government and taxpayers to police these parades.

Less flags and emblems flown as these scare people.Fear is instilled in people because of these over the years.

Many people don't understand the parades or the difference between the religions.

Families play a major part in sectarianism....Parents telling their children not to go out with, or be friends with, the "other" religion.

Schools do not do enough to challenge this or to try to re-educate students.

Foreign nationals don't want to understand the troubles as they think it is silly....as they can't relate.

Even collaborated lessons in schools would rather have one religion.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the age group of those present, it is not surprising that the school environment came in for significant criticism. The schools were seen as often unresponsive to exclusion issues.

The failure to react effectively was sometimes down to the religious background of single religion schools, but also down to lack of training for the teachers themselves in dealing with complex social issues.

Schools themselves were caught up in a rivalry that has led to elitism between schools, particularly between Grammar Schools and High Schools. Unfortunately this has left some people experiencing stigma as a result of how their school was perceived by the wider public rather than the individual as a person.

The Youth Service gets reference in a positive way as the methodology of group work and the associated workshops and experiential learning does seem, to those who have experienced it, as being more effective than formal teaching methods of school when addressing exclusion issues and fostering atmospheres of inclusions. They do recognise that fewer young people will experience the youth work programmes where as everyone receives formal education.

Sectarianism remains a big issue and much emphasis is placed on the fact that the community of Northern Ireland remains very segregated, not just in Schools but in housing, Youth Clubs and socialising. Repeatedly the fact that tolerance is a learned thing and something learned from experience of growing up in mixed and tolerant environments, throws the spotlight back on communities.

Parents and other relatives have a big impact on the lives and attitudes of young people. Is it enough to focus on educating young people? Is there a need for parents and wider community to understand the impact they have in retaining old ideas of segregation and instilling prejudice?

We note with interest that new Nationals learning to live in our communities have realised the need to understand how to identify people religious and community background from their names and surnames.

The flags issue remains current and, interesting to note in reference s to the flags, it is always seen as a threat, an indication of danger, a way of marking divides, keeping communities apart. None saw it as a right or something to be defended or even a cultural symbol.

Homophobia has moved on a pace and people welcomed the greater acceptance experienced within the communities and a wider awareness. There is still a long way to go but Pride Marches and greater public awareness have eased the Northern Ireland experience for many GLBT young people if to a lesser degree in bisexuals and transgender people. It is interesting to note the reference to asexual young people who also experience intense peer pressure to conform to 'social norms'.

Disability remains with lesser understanding and the confusion or lack of understanding that means where someone has one disability many others assumed is a big frustration. Greater understanding is needed and the role of disabled people as educators has merit in further exploration.

Mental disability and illness has probably the greatest misunderstanding and remains the great unspoken prejudice. Even attempts to address the needs of people with mental issues often are misdirected and end up creating further stigma. It was great to hear young people communicating this experience during the day and in a way that only someone who has really experienced it can articulate.

With all the emphasis on equality and fairness, acceptance and mutual understanding, the issue of gender basis is still very real. The continuance of single sex schools, dress codes and education differences serves to perpetuate old myths and biases.

It is not all outward pointing criticism, the groups were all aware of the need to remain self-critical and challenge those reactions within ourselves and those of your peers.

Most importantly is the learning of tolerance through experience. It will never be enough to change the young people ... the next generation. They go to school and to Youth Clubs, but they will always come back to their communities and streets and families. Our communities have to want to be part of the change and to strive to create within themselves the sort of community they want our young people to enjoy in the future.

For further information

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