

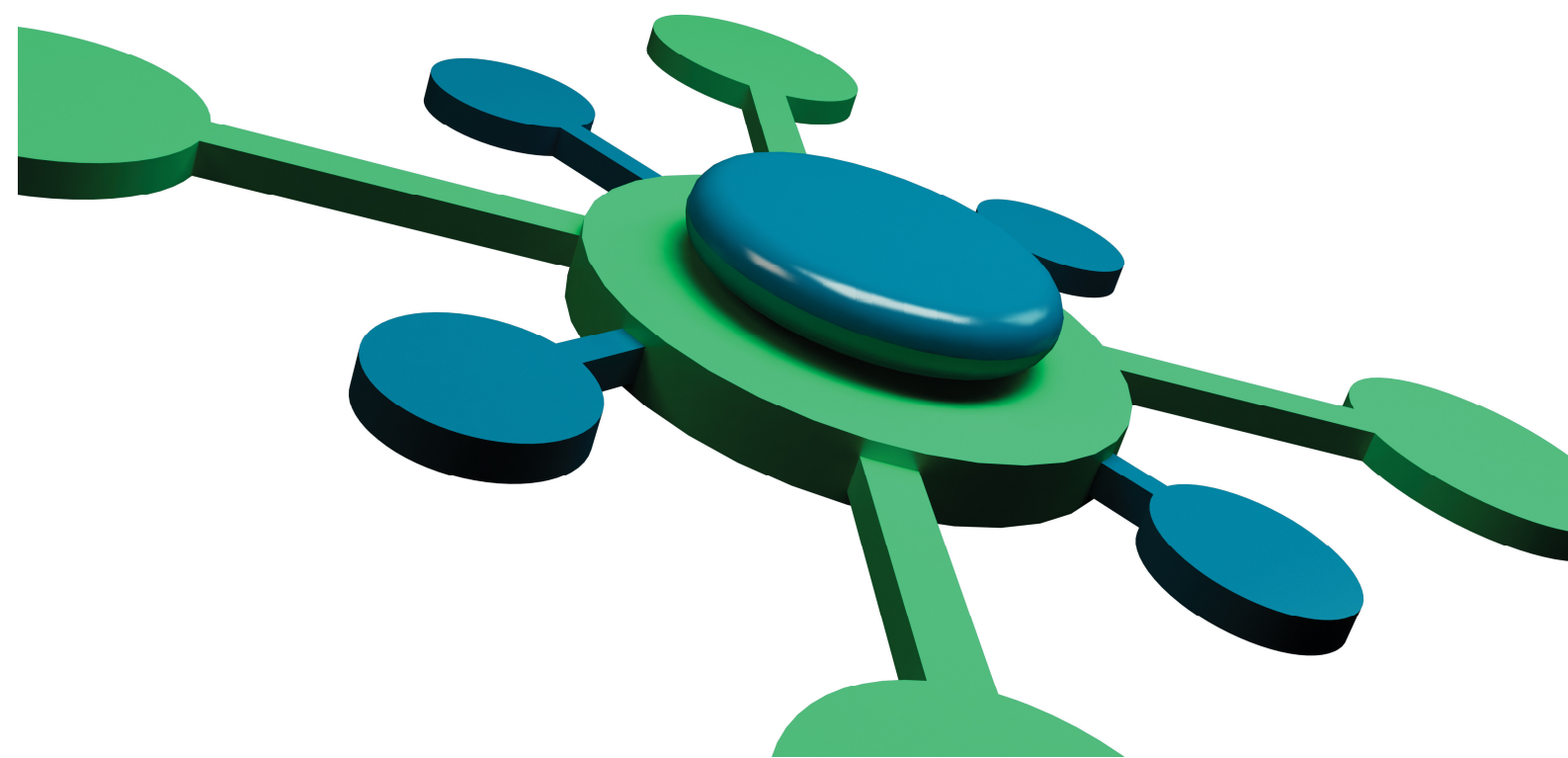
Youthnet

network for the
voluntary youth sector

SUBMISSION to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First
Minister for the:

Inquiry into 'Together: Building a United Community'

10 Oct 2014



1. About Youthnet

- 1.1. Youthnet is the voluntary youth network for Northern Ireland, an umbrella body that advocates for and supports voluntary youth organisations across Northern Ireland.
- 1.2. Our member organisations cover a broad range of activity for young people including: front line delivery of youth work in communities; work in rural and urban interfaces; outreach and inclusion projects; youth work programmes with young people described as NEET; and youth programmes supporting peace building.
- 1.3. Youthnet has been involved in the delivery of EU Peace Funds and was a Sectoral Partner for non-formal education in the Youth Education Social Inclusion Partnership (YESIP) in the distribution of PEACE III funding.
- 1.4. Our vision is of an equitable society where all children and young people are valued, respected and supported to flourish.

2. About youth work

- 2.1. The key purpose of youth work is to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.
- 2.2. Youth work contributes to a young person's personal and social development by offering them meaningful activities that are based on young people's needs and interests, for example:
 - leisure and non-formal educational experiences open to all young people;
 - personal development or issue based programmes (e.g. health promotion, citizenship);
 - outreach and detached work that engages with young people in their space;
 - developmental group work in schools;

- work with excluded or at risk young people (e.g. work with young people not in employment, education or training or involved in the youth justice system); and
- one to one support on health matters and well-being.

3. Relationship building is critical for long-lasting reconciliation

3.1. Youth work supports young people to build positive relationships with others across difference

3.2. The research literature identifies the building of positive relationships as a key outcome for youth work. Evidence suggests that in a youth work context this is very often with others from different religious, cultural, or political backgrounds (see appendix).

3.3. In the context of Northern Ireland youth work has played a key role in peace-building, often during times of significant tension and violence between communities. The youth sector continues to support young people to engage in positive relationships with others across different backgrounds and to create safe spaces for where all young people can engage in non-formal education.

4. Youth work, over the years, has made a significant contribution to peace-building across Northern Ireland

4.1. A review into the community relations work carried out by the education sector (formal and non-formal) acknowledged the contribution of voluntary and community sector organisations, over the period of the troubles and beyond. The report notes that often workers were required to push boundaries and take risks that had a significant positive impact on the young people involved (DENI CRED Policy 2011).

4.2. A number of other localised reports provide evidence of youth works contribution to peace building and the building of positive community relations.

- An Evaluation of the Youth Works Pilot Programme (2014) set out to enhance respect for difference and improve understanding of young people from different

community backgrounds. The greatest positive impact reported by respondents included the fact that they were, 'more willing to co-operate with or better able to get on with others'.

- In a review of the Department of Education's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy using the Young Life and Times Survey (2012) at least two thirds of respondents felt that CRED activities resulted in more positive feelings among participants. This applied to both school and youth settings. However, the perceived level of changing attitudes among participants in youth settings was generally higher than participants in school.
- A report on the distinctive contribution of youth education projects to addressing the legacy of the conflict in NI published by Youthnet (2006) found that out of the 140 projects surveyed upon completion:
 - 89% of projects indicated that participants were had a better or greater understanding of 'other' communities in Northern Ireland, than at the beginning of the project.
 - 91% of projects indicated that beneficiaries were more willing to meet with members of 'other' communities, than at the beginning of the project.
- A report on the YMCA Connect programme (a youth work programme in east Belfast) found that young people who participated felt more optimistic about community relations and were more likely to see religious diversity as a good thing.

5. Youth work plays a key role in challenging prejudice and promoting positive attitudes towards difference

5.1. A systematic review of the research literature on youth work (2013), commissioned by the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (ROI), identified 30 studies that showed the contribution of youth work to developing positive diversity attitudes.

5.2. Youth work across Northern Ireland is underpinned by the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence and seeks to provide a safe environment where young people can receive positive challenge on attitudes.

“Northern Ireland has a strong tradition of youth and community organisations with the skills, capacity, expertise, vision and will to dismantle barriers for young people to have the opportunity to embrace diversity, practice inclusion and enter into intercultural and intercommunity dialogue.” (Grattan & McMullan, 2010)

5.3. A report on the impact of youth work commissioned by the Department of Education (UK) found that almost three out of five young people that they talked to reported that youth work had helped them better understand people who were different from themselves (p 7).

5.4. Devlin and Gunning (2009), in a report on the outcomes of youth work, describe examples of how young people from different areas, neighbourhoods or social classes were coming together in youth settings in a way that did not (and would not) have happened otherwise (p 22).

6. Youthnet support the statement for a shared intent produced by the Community Relations Council NI.

7. Youthnet suggests the following elements are crucial to an effective peace building plan:

7.1. Building on current youth sector infrastructure to deliver quality inclusive youth work

7.2. Integrate good relations and community relations across programmes and initiatives

7.3. Develop an outcomes framework and implement good impact practice to ensure organisations can demonstrate the value of their work

8. Youthnet emphasises the importance of maintaining a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion as key elements to building

sustainable peace.

- 8.1. Peace building, good relations, tackling racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination should all be integrated into the content of programmes and not treated as an 'add on'.

9. Youthnet would like to see 'Together: Building a United Community' act as an overarching policy framework for sustainable peace.

- 9.1. There are clear links between TBUC and other government policy documents. There are also European Funding Programmes (PEACE IV and ESF) and other funding initiatives that complement the work of Government in supporting the building of peace. It is vital that there is OFMDFM as part of the *Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy* produces an overarching action plan and an outcomes framework that enables all of the work carried out under these different initiatives to work towards the same aims and objectives. This must move beyond 'strategic funded programmes' and to encompass the full breadth and depth of peace building work.



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Appendix

Overview of the research literature on youth work outcomes contributing to the building of positive relationships with others.

Working with young people: the value of youth work (2014) published by the European Commission – provides evidence of the importance of positive relationships built through youth work. The report shows how the building of positive relationships contributes to young people's well-being as well as helping to prevent anti-social behaviour (p 139).

Youth work: A systematic review of the literature (2013) commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the Republic of Ireland – examined 175 studies that provided evidence on the outcomes of youth work. Of these 66 research studies were categorised as being about young people's relationship with others. They examined the impact of youth work on positive peer relationships, positive relationships with adults, pro-social skills, leadership skills, decision making skills and empowerment.

A framework of outcomes for young people (2012) commissioned by the Catalyst Consortium and written by the Young Foundation – examines the importance of social and emotional capabilities to the achievement of all other outcomes for young people. The report identifies *relationships and leadership* as one of the key capabilities to which youth work contributes. The report provides a good evidence base which examines local and international research linking these capabilities to longer term outcomes such as educational achievement, employment and improved health.

The purpose and outcomes of youth work (2009) written by Maurice Devlin and Anna Gunning identifies the following outcomes for youth work at the social level:

- opportunities for association with others in a positive context
- strengthening bonds with existing friends and making new ones (often from diverse backgrounds)

- enhanced positive and pro-social behaviour and diminishing negative and anti-social behaviour

An evaluation of the impact of youth work in England (2004) Merton et al. – identified 'new friends' as a key outcome of young people's participation in youth work