



NI Youth Forum's
ANNUAL REPORT
2023/24

**NI Youth Forum
projects work to
promote:**



YOUTH VOICE

SOCIAL JUSTICE

PEACE BUILDING



**NI Youth Forum
Youth Manifesto for Change**

Youth led consultation response to the Draft Programme for Government.



**NI Youth Forum
Youth Programme for Change**

Youth led policy document focused on young people's key asks for change.

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WHO WE ARE

The Youth Forum is an independent, youth led regional body. We support young people to have a say on issues that affect their lives.



OUR PURPOSE

To promote the voices of young people and speak truth to Power. By working together we speak more loudly and we will make sure those in positions of power will hear your opinion.



OUR VISION

All young people have opportunities to have a say on issues that affect their lives.



OUR MISSION

Our mission is to empower young people to challenge disadvantage and inequality; effect change and contribute to building a just, fair and equal society.

OUR VALUES



YOUTH LED

The Youth Forum is youth led and adult supported.



YOUTH VOICES

All young people have the right to have a say and their views should be taken into account and acted upon.



CARING

We want everyone who works with us to feel safe, respected and valued. Kindness and how we treat one another is at the heart of what we do.



RIGHTS BASED

We are a rights based organisation and our practice is embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

All young people have a say; are welcome and should be supported.



CHAIR'S REPORT

The NI Youth Forum continue to advocate for positive, progressive and inclusive change that will make a real difference to our members everyday lives.

It is an absolute honour and privilege to serve as the NI Youth Forum Chairperson, working alongside our Executive Committee, staff team, young people, our funders and other stakeholders to promote youth voice.

I would like to thank Oisín-Tomás Ó'Raghallaigh, my predecessor, and everyone who served on our previous Executive Committee throughout the 2021-23 term. The significant body of work documented within this annual report is a testament to the leadership and drive shown by our Committee and their commitment to our organisation.



Moreover, our staff team go above and beyond to support the young people we work with across the NI Youth Forum. I would like to take this opportunity to say a special thank you to Chris Quinn who left the NI Youth Forum after more than a decade as our Director in September 2023. His leadership and dedication to youth voice, social justice and peace building has laid solid foundations upon which our new Executive Committee and leadership team continue to build.

On the day I was elected by our membership to serve as Chairperson, the role of Director remained vacant. One of my initial priorities was to ensure the organisation had a leadership team in place to deliver upon our strategic plan and operational objectives in the years to come.

I am incredibly grateful for the support, mentorship and tireless dedication shown by Amanda Stewart and Natalie Corbett who served as the organisation's Interim Directors from September 2023 to April 2024. Their leadership and support in guiding our organisation over those critical months cannot be overstated and I am so pleased that both are now in post as Assistant Directors.

This Annual Report attempts to incapsulate the breadth and depth of work staff and young people deliver here at the NI Youth Forum. From giving evidence on the implementation of the UNCRC in Geneva, closing out the youth work process with one Executive Committee, and electing their successors, this has been a year of transformational change at NI Youth Forum.

Events such as the North-South Youth Peace Summit, meetings of the new All Party Group on Youth Participation and our part in the Welcome to Your Vote Week campaign all highlight the role our Executive Committee and members have had in influencing government policy at a strategic level.

There is however a lot more to do. From working to ensure we deliver sustained, transformational government that meets the needs of young people, to building a fairer, more equitable and just society. We need meaningful change that is underpinned by youth voice, social justice and peace building. It is essential that this change is felt by everyone across our society.

I look forward to working with our membership, our Executive Committee, new CEO, Paul Dynes, our wider staff team and our stakeholders to promote youth rights and deliver change, together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cohen Taylor'.

Cohen Taylor
Chairperson and Trustee

CEO'S REPORT

2023-24 has been a momentous year for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum - one of great success accompanied by organisational evolution. Our annual report celebrates the many accomplishments of our members over the past 12 months, and illustrates the depth of work being delivered by NIYF's staff team, who continuously go that extra mile in supporting young people. We take pride in the variety of opportunities that were provided to young people while staying true to our core purpose of creating positive social change through meaningful youth participation.



This financial year has seen young people at NIYF achieve the first of their key asks from our Youth Manifesto for Change, the establishment of an All-Party Working Group on Youth Participation. In February 2024, when the Government returned, an All-Party Working Group was formally constituted with NIYF to fill the secretariat duties. This year has seen us support young people and work alongside key partners in the sector to not only bring youth voices to the decision-making table but to act upon young people's views, thoughts and opinions.

In September 2023, our long-serving director of 15 years, Chris Quinn, was appointed as Northern Ireland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. This achievement was celebrated by NIYF staff, members and partners as we felt it was not only a reflection of all Chris's hard work but vindication of the great achievements of NIYF during his service, thanks for everything Chris. Also, a special thanks to Natalie Corbett and Amanda Stewart for their time as joint deputy directors and joint interim directors. Their experience and dedication were invaluable during this period of transition.

At NIYF's AGM in September 2023, a new Executive Committee was elected/co-opted. I would like to thank previous Executive Committee members who had a profound impact on NIYF throughout their term. Specifically, you played a leading role in NIYF's organisational rebrand, the development and launch of a Quality Assurance Framework, the design and delivery of the Youth Manifesto for Change, constitutional reform and much more. The leadership of our previous Chairperson, Oisín-Tomás Ó'Raghallaigh, has been instrumental in the strategic development of NIYF. The new Executive Committee have built upon these foundations under the leadership of Cohen Taylor.

This is the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the NIYF. I am very proud to have been appointed the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. I look forward to building on the amazing achievements of 2023-24.

Paul Dynes

Chief Executive Officer

YOUTH VOICE 23-24

**UNCRC Government
Sitting, Geneva
17th - 20th May 2023**



**AGM 2023, NIYF
30th September
2023**



**TYF Summit, Windsor
Park Belfast, Friday
24th November 2024**



**Welcome to Your Vote
Week, Stormont Event
29th January 2024**



**North South Peace
Day, Belfast City Hall
23rd March 2024**



SOCIAL JUSTICE 23-24

Youth Start Launch, Belfast – 27th July 2023

Elephant Coming Out of the Dark – Critical Conversation on Mental Health and Well-being in Education, Belfast City Hall, 1st December 2023

The Showcase, Housing and Homelessness, 17th August 2024

Homeless Awareness Week social media campaign, “Homeless not Helpless”, 4th -10th December 2024

APG on Youth Participation, Mental Health meetings - 24/04/23, 6/06/23, 04/09/23, 16/10/23, 27/11/23, 29/01/24, 04/03/24.

STRATEGIC PLAN



Our Strategic plan is set by our executive committee and forms the basis of the how we do our work. It is based on 4 key areas of work:

1. MEMBERSHIP

Everyone aged between 11 – 25 who lives in NI can become a member. We want to make sure as many people know this and help them to take part in what we do.

2. PARTICIPATION

By participation we mean having a say on issues that are important to you. We have a wide range of programmes and activities for young people to take part in that are enjoyable and meaningful.

3. REAL LIFE EXPERIENCES

Our life experiences shape who we are and how we see the world. We want to help young people understand their own circumstances and experience new things.

4. CORPORATE

This is the stuff that helps us in our work. How we support our staff and how we raise our funds.

Our current strategic plan 'Unmuted' has laid a solid foundation for what has been a phenomenal year. We have worked hard to enhance young people's opportunities to Speak Truth to Power locally and internationally, as well as to continue to develop and embed new services and ways of working.

Both our outgoing and incoming Executive Committee have benefited from enhanced support helping them to grow in confidence and make changes to the way the organisation operates.

YOUTH MANIFESTO

OUR MANIFESTO HAS 4 OVERARCHING ASKS:

- A Minister for Youth
- **An All Party Working Group for Youth Participation** ✓
- Knowledge of Rights
- A Bill of Rights

ALL PARTY GROUP

Young People at the NIYF achieved the first of their four key asks as an All Party Working Group (APG) on Youth Participation was established, creating a mechanism for young people to engage directly with decision-makers on issues important to them. The NIYF acts as the secretariat on the APG, which has seen key community stakeholders and young people lobby on mental health and homelessness. Issues which detrimentally impact the lives of many young people

OUR MANIFESTO PINPOINTS SPECIFIC ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

These are: **Mental Health** | **Youth Voice** | **Education** | **Housing and Homelessness** | **Poverty** | **Policing, Justice and Safety** | **Transport** | **Environment** | **Peace Building**

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion underpin these themes. Empowering young people to challenge disadvantage and inequality.

THE YOUTH MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE HAS BEEN PRESENTED TO:

- Department of Foreign Affairs Conference
- Seanad Éireann sitting
- Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
- Fine Gael conference
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- United Nation Committee on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 92nd session
- Northern Ireland Office
- US State Department
- The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
- Advisor to President Biden at the Whitehouse
- British and Irish Embassies NYC, DC and Boston
- NI Bureau and the Scottish Government in Brussels

QUALITY ASSURANCE

In their previous term, the Executive Committee developed and launched NI Youth Forum Defined. A Quality Assurance Framework outlining what we do as an organisation, how we do it and how we reflect on our performance and plan for the future.

'Defined' consists of three strands which are:

- Developing People
- Developing the Organisation
- Developing Youth Work Practice

GOVERNANCE

The NI Youth Forum makes connections through online engagement and social media platforms with stakeholders including young people. The organisation has online profiles and all NI Youth Forum staff have online organisational profiles. NI Youth Forum staff have direct engagement with young people hosting 'Have Your Say Day' events, including the signposting to other youth organisations, outreach projects in communities and funded partnerships with statutory bodies and the private sector. We receive funding for our work from many sources with most of our programmes being commissioned through tender applications. We aim to fill gaps in voluntary youth work provision across the region and deliver high quality, fit for purpose provision that meets targets and fulfils its aims.

Our diverse funding streams provide flexibility within the organisation and allow the NI Youth Forum to work on a broad range of programme themes ranging from Speaking Truth to Power, Mental Health, Transport, Good Relations, Housing and Homelessness and much more. We are funded by the public, private and third sector. We ensure our management committee are aware of the rules and responsibilities of their role through training, policy access and discussion, review of our code of conduct, standing orders and constitutional review and engagement with organisations such as NICVA to communicate statutory requirements of holding a trustee position.

The organisation publishes an operational plan each quarter along with an annual report such as this, and a strategic plan every five years. All programmes and projects have in depth evaluation from all stakeholders which is reviewed in line management and supervision meetings to shape and improve practice. Each funder sets out programme specific targets and benchmarks which staff collate and produce programme specific evidence to demonstrate meeting such targets. Retainment of young people across multiple programmes is also used as an indication that such young people have experienced quality provision which has made them more likely to return for an additional programme. Capacity building within young people through both social and emotional change and attainment of additional qualifications speaks to their personal development within NI Youth Forum programmes and projects.



GLOBAL YOUTH WORK

Over the past number of years, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum have endeavoured to provide developmental international opportunities for young people and staff. In recent years we have seen young people access opportunities to engage in nationally celebrated programs in Switzerland, Palestine/Israel, France, Belgium and America.

In May 2023, young people from our executive committee had the opportunity to travel to Geneva to inform the reporting process, advocate on emerging issues and engage with decision makers reporting back to the UNCRC committee. This allowed for young people to have direct influence in the concluding observations which are set for government action. The key themes highlighted emerging concern around the cost-of-living crisis on young people's lives.

A number of our members engaged international exchanges involving young people from Switzerland, Palestine, Israel and both Northern and Southern Ireland. These programmes were facilitated in the Alps and Jura mountains in Switzerland, on Cape Clear Island off the coast of County Cork and different parts of the middle east. The experience has been described as incredible and life changing. The program focused on peace building, building work for local communities and political education.

A new opportunity arose this year were one of our members travelled to the Nicosia area of Cyprus with Her Story Ireland. The project focused on the role that local woman had in peace building in the area. This was an inspirational experience filled with learning that would be brought back and fed into the peace building and young women's work at the forum.



Staff were invited to present at the annual Ali Forney conference in New York City in April 2024. This global conference involved partners from across USA, South America, Central America, Africa and Europe. Ali Forney is an organisation that works with homeless LGBTQ youth in Harlem. The purpose of the conference was developing youth work practice when engaging young people. The NIYF presented on their Youth Apprentice Model which employs young people with lived experience of homeless. This was a fantastic opportunity, and we continue to engage in the this is global forum.

Young people and staff attended One Young World's global summit conference that was held in Belfast. The summit was a chance for the next crop of international young leaders to engage in workshops, seminars and attend speeches from some of the worlds most influential people. The young people brought this learning back to the NIYF and adopt into practice and programs.

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum partnered with University of Ulster to develop an evaluation of the Global Service Learning delivered this year. The report incorporates input from young people and staff while linking their experiences to youth work theory. This report can be found on our website www.niyf.org



**Tristin Nicholls,
NSYF Participant**



**Eric O'Connell,
NSYF Participant**



OUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



Our Executive Committee

The NI Youth Forum is a youth led body. We are governed by a management committee of young people. We have been able to provide additional support to our Executive Committee through the National Lottery Dormont Accounts Fund.

The term for the Executive Committee 2021-2023 ended in 2023 – some key highlights of their final few months in post include: Establishment of the Cross-Party Working Group on Youth Participation and later All-Party Group on Youth Participation Impact Report with Ulster University Delivering on NIYF's Youth Manifesto for Change Various 'Speaking Truth to Power' engagements including the UN Committee UK Taskforce members, the NIYF Political Champions and the PSNI Chief Constable. The members also closed their term sharing their stories with the wider staff team. To wrap the process the executive committee went on residential to reflect together at one last beach campfire - and a surprise appearance of some dolphins!

The new Executive Committee for 2023-2026 were elected on 30th September 2023. Once the full 20 were on board, we got started on introducing the roles to the Executive Committee members - including discussing our constitution and completing training on: governance, HR & recruitment and participation, lobbying and democracy training. They also took part in teambuilding as an Executive Committee and with the NIYF staff team.

The new NIYF Executive Committee have also been representing youth voice on a range of platforms. Cohen, our NIYF Chairperson represents NIYF on the Shared Island Youth Forum; Aoife, our NIYF vice-chairperson went on an international trip to Cyprus to learn more about women's role in peace-building; and all of our NIYF Executive Committee members are in subgroups to support promoting youth voice on areas within our Youth Manifesto for change.

This has been seen through supporting events and advocating at the All-Party Group on Youth Participation. Our new Executive Committee have spearheaded the recruitment process of our new Director and we were delighted to ensure young people were a part of this important change.





#LetsGoSafelyTogether



Summit

Staffline



028 4484 2319
INFO@SCDEVELOPMENTS.NET

CITY AUCTION GROUP



COMPLETE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

TRANSLINK YOUTH FORUM



Translink Youth Forum

Translink Youth Forum aims to improve public transport for young people across the region and ensure their voice is heard to decision makers and adults in power.

15 young people aged 14-24 from across NI meet on a Monthly basis to discuss all things transport, with further involvement in other Translink initiatives throughout the year.

Translink Youth Forum have continued to work alongside Translink to ensure young people are in the driving seat with regards to having their voice heard and meaningful positive change taking place with regards public transport.

A focus and passionate group of young people who are motivated to support Translink to bring about further change and ensure they have the best possible services available to them no matter if you live in the city or rurally.

Some recent highlights included:

- Taking part in Translink consultations.
- Site visits to the New Belfast Central Station and feedback provided to make improvements for young people.
- The design and launch of a peer led educational resource 'Change makers' which aimed to encourage dialogue on sustainable travel and the environment, this was delivered at COP26.
- Designed and hosted Translink Youth Summit November 2023 @ National Football Stadium, Windsor Park with over 100 young people in attendance.



Translink Youth Forum (TYF) in Partnership with Translink, is a real platform for young people to share their views and opinions on public transport with the leadership of Translink. The Youth Forum support and look forward to the finish of the new Belfast Grand Central Station, This will see further increase of passengers and will attract more young people to use public transport and accessibility to Belfast and other town and cities around NI.

TYF, has given young people a voice and helps to reach out across the region to hear the voices of those living rurally and often those voices unheard.

Translink Youth Summit 2023 @ the National Stadium Windsor Park was attended by over 100 young people representing schools from across Northern Ireland. Students had the opportunity to participate in interactive workshops and a Q&A with Chris Conway CEO Translink, Chris Quinn NI Childrens' Commissioner, Noyona Chundur of CEO Consumer Council along with Declan Lynch (Antrim GAA) and Marris Callaghan (NI Women) and Rachel Telford (TYF Member).

NIHE YOUTH FORUM



NIHE Youth Forum

The NIHE Youth Forum has been operational since 2018, with NIYF's partnership with NIHE dating back to 2008. This year saw the project develop and grow with now a 2-step phase. We have the development phase and the shadow/steering group phase.

NIHE Development group – The group have been extremely active with young people engaging in personal and social development, residential, social action, strategic planning and leadership workshops. Young people have completed bespoke training delivered by supporting communities to expand their knowledge and equip them to speak truth to power. This training has helped young people develop an understanding of community development, leadership, committee structures and code of conduct. Another key part of their capacity training was training in housing rights delivered by youth apprentices at the NIYF.

The social action project- The NIHE development group run a Christmas appeal which was a huge success in helping those in need. The project was able to provide food, sanitary products, male and female toiletries, toys for kids, gas and electric top ups which was then delivered to individuals and families in need to ensure Christmas time was enjoyable.

NIHE Steering group – The NIHE steering group includes participants who completed the development phase of the project in recent years. The young people worked alongside others in the housing sector to represent the opinions of young people on housing matters. This involved:

- Shadowing Good Relations Officers from the NIHE
- Shadowing Community Development Officers from Supporting Communities
- Engaging in cultural and community-based activities
- Engaging in the housing community network (HCN)

The steering group meet monthly to provide sector updates and connect their learning as they strengthen youth voice within NIHE structures.

Young people engaging at Central housing forum and the wider housing community network has been a great achievement. It has been an ongoing process pushing to place young people in arenas to influence and shape policy regarding housing... This is only the beginning, the participants involved are passionate and motivated to fully advocate on behalf of all young people. Young people are continuously supported by the youth work team during this process.

This year the project has worked with 24 young people across both phases of the project. The young people have

- Grew in confidence and self-belief
- Built positive supportive relationships
- Developed their knowledge of the statutory and voluntary housing service
- Developed an understanding of their rights
- Have had their voice heard in strategic arenas
- Supported the most marginalised in society

The year has been filled with many achievements that the young people should be proud of. Both phases of the project have went from strength to strength with young peoples drive and energy being central to all of this.

The
Electoral
Commission

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION YOUTH VOICE NETWORK

The Electoral Commission Youth Voice Network

This year we were delighted to continue working with the Electoral Commission. On this programme we work with young people who want to learn more about or have an interest in promoting politics and democracy to other young people. Another role of this group is to take part in consultations from the Electoral Commission on resources, campaigns, and messaging - an example of this is how the Youth Voice Network influenced the decision of this year's theme of welcome to your vote week – 'Your Voice Matters'.

The young people involved in the programme want to ensure the electoral commission has a more "user-friendly" approach by ensuring that it meets everyone's needs and that young people, and adults, can understand the language used, rather than being filled with political jargon - which some people may struggle to understand. As part of this programme, we have explored what democracy means, looked at different government systems, developed an understanding of the role of government and political representatives and we are eager to keep the momentum building.

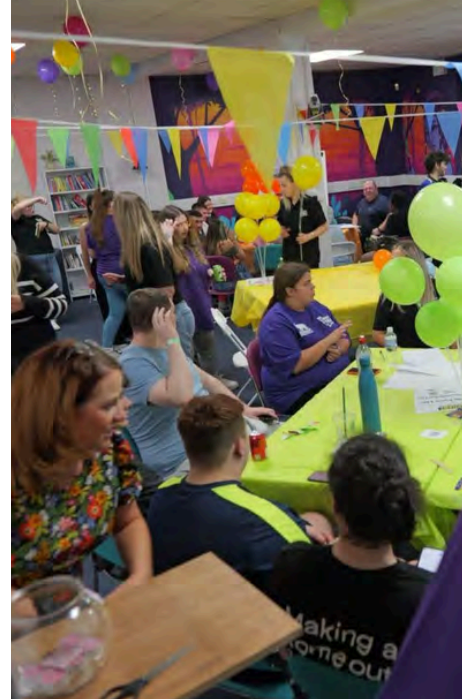


As a group, the participants want to have their say in a meaningful way by influencing politicians with events such as these and encouraging young people to actively involve themselves more in democracy, however big or small a role they feel that they can or want to play. This year for 'Welcome to Your Vote Week' the Electoral Commission Youth Voice Network decided to host an event in Stormont to bring together young people, MLAs, and officials from the Electoral Commission to discuss youth engagement in politics and the importance of voting.

As part of 'Welcome to Your Vote Week', the participants created unique social media content which has over 3.2k views on TikTok and 3.9k on Instagram & on Facebook. The group discussed the lack of political education young people in Northern Ireland receive and to address this decided to create a resource filled with activities and youth friendly information aiming to educate young people about politics and our government structures. This was launched as part of 'Welcome to Your Vote Week' 2024.

An Electoral Commission Youth Voice Network Participant said, "This group has allowed me to meet with other young people who want to learn more about or have an interest in promoting politics and democracy to young people - it is like a breath of fresh air given the attitudes to politics here in NI and really without this group I would never have had this opportunity, or the opportunity to speak at an event in Stormont".

ELEPHANT COMING OUT OF THE DARK



Elephant Coming out of the Dark

Elephant Coming Out of the Dark (ECOOTD) has been involved in some great lobbying and campaigning work throughout 2023/24. The programme grew stronger and became more established making more connections in the sector as the year went on. The power in youth voice was evident and people started listening more.

This program highlights key recommendations for change by young people for young people in terms of mental health services in Northern Ireland. It established key asks which the Elephant Coming Out of the Dark programme continues to lobby and campaign for.

From April 23, the youth steering group were involved in many different projects:

April to May 23 - Planning for Mental Health Awareness week (Social Media takeover) Young people's Social Media takeover to support Awareness raising of Mental Health Awareness Week.

June 23 - Self-Care Month with holistic therapies, meditation session, laughter therapy, team building session.

July – September 23 - Training – Mental Health First Aid, Eating Disorders Awareness, Autism Awareness, etc.

September to October 23 - Planning for World Mental Health Day Event on 10th Oct World Mental Health Day Event Evaluation of World Mental Health Day Event Support the Cross Party Working Group for Youth Participation who are currently exploring Mental Health as their topical issue.

November - December 23 - Planning for Practitioner Event at City Hall with Secondary Schools Student Union Northern Ireland (SSUNI) Planning for Social Action Projects Practitioner Event with SSUNI at City Hall on 1st Dec Social Action projects – website support services for website creation and 'Spreading Kindness' candy cane giving at Christmas Market.

January to March 24 - Follow up meeting with Dept of Education and the Well-being teams in the HSC Trust Vision boards and progression Closing Residential Evaluation of the 2-year programme 1-2-1 support for progression.

Key Data:

- 18 young people across NI engaged in the ECOOTD Youth Steering Group.
- 418 young people completed LIFEMAPS delivery across NI.
- 3 Key Youth-led Events – Mental Health Awareness Week Social Media Takeover 15th – 21st May 2023.
- World Mental Health Day Youth Event @ NIYF with over 100 young people on 10th October 2023.
- Support with Cross Party Working Group at Stormont – highlight Mental Health as young people's top issue.

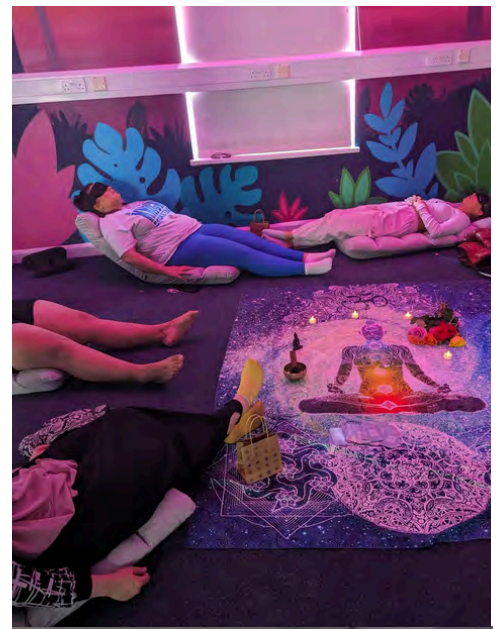
"The Elephant program has had a huge positive impact on me over the last 2 years. It has definitely come with its challenges, but none that I couldn't overcome with the support of other participants involved. This journey with Elephant has been amazing from the very beginning, I've made friends that I will never part with and have made memories that I shall never forget. I have always struggled with making new friends and using my voice. However, with the Elephant program over time, I found my confidence grew and I began to find it rather easy to voice my opinion as it was valued within the group" – L.W ECOOTD Steering Group Member

"Even though I was late to the party, I was welcomed to the Elephant family with open arms. From presenting a World Mental Health Day event to 'Spreading Kindness' at Christmas, I have been able to build my confidence, grow as a person and help the community more because of Elephant, while making lasting friendships along the way! It was an opportunity I am proud to have taken part in" – J.R, ECOOTD Steering Group Member

The
Henry Smith
Charity

founded in 1628

THE HOME PROJECT



The Home Project

Over the past 2 years the Home Project has allowed the NIYF to adopt a therapeutic approach when supporting our members. This wrap around approach has been invaluable as young people present with complex needs and struggle to access the relevant mental health support in a timebound fashion. Our youth work staff have been able to embed a therapeutic approach alongside their youth work practice. This approach has proven hugely successful and over the past 2 years we have been able to support over 200 young people.

This year has seen us support similar numbers of young people and the project has provided essential support to some of the most vulnerable in in society including:

- Those at risk of homelessness
- Young people facing mental ill health
- Young mothers
- Young men engaging in risk taking behaviour.
- Those presenting in crisis and a risk of suicide

A key element on the Home Project has been our counselling service. Our counsellors are trained to work with young people facilitating person-centred and solution focused therapy. We pride ourselves on the young people being able to access the counselling service within a number of days, this has been pivotal in ensuring effective intervention.

For the young people involved in the Home project, we have adopted a needs led approach which shaped the support provided. The young people who were vulnerably housed opted for a one-to-one support service which assessed their situation and through a peer led approach make choices and take action to improve their lives. The young people were also supported in other areas of their life as the focused on money management, connecting with community and improving their mental health.

Our young mothers engaged in a weekly group work support programme which improved their mental wellbeing. This consisted of peer-to-peer support and collaborative work with the Falls women centre to create a tailor-made wellbeing project which run for 6 months. The program seen the young mums engage in structured personal training session with 2 skilled coaches at AcademyJ Fitness as they improved their physical and mental fitness. Throughout the entirety of this program, we provided childcare for the young women, this rest bite has had a profound impact on their outlook.

The Home project has also created gender specific spaces for both male and female members. Our young women's work seen us engage homeless young people and newcomer young people as we offered both group work and one to one support. The program ran for 4 months looking at the concept of self-care. The girls engaged in mindfulness sessions and used art as tool for expression. The Project also supported the young women on a one to one basis around their housing situation and through times of crisis. Our male focused project seen us engage with young men at risk. We adopted a group work and one to one approach as we worked with young men for 4 months. Throughout their group work process the young men engaged in art therapy and created a joint community art piece. The final element of the project seen the young men engage in health and fitness project with a skilled PT that focused on improving overall wellbeing.

The Home project has been invaluable to growth of the NIYF. It has allowed us to tie a therapeutic support service into our youth work approach which has broadened our services and furthered our reach in regards supporting young people. We are proud of the fact that we have been able to support those in times of crises and over time watch them grow and develop into someone that they are proud off.

Another key element of the project was our residential work with our groups. The residential provided some of the most memorable moments as amazing relationships were built, and the magic happened.

“The project has turned me from a boy to a man”

“ I would have been lost without counselling, I really don't know were I would be without it”

Who we have worked with:

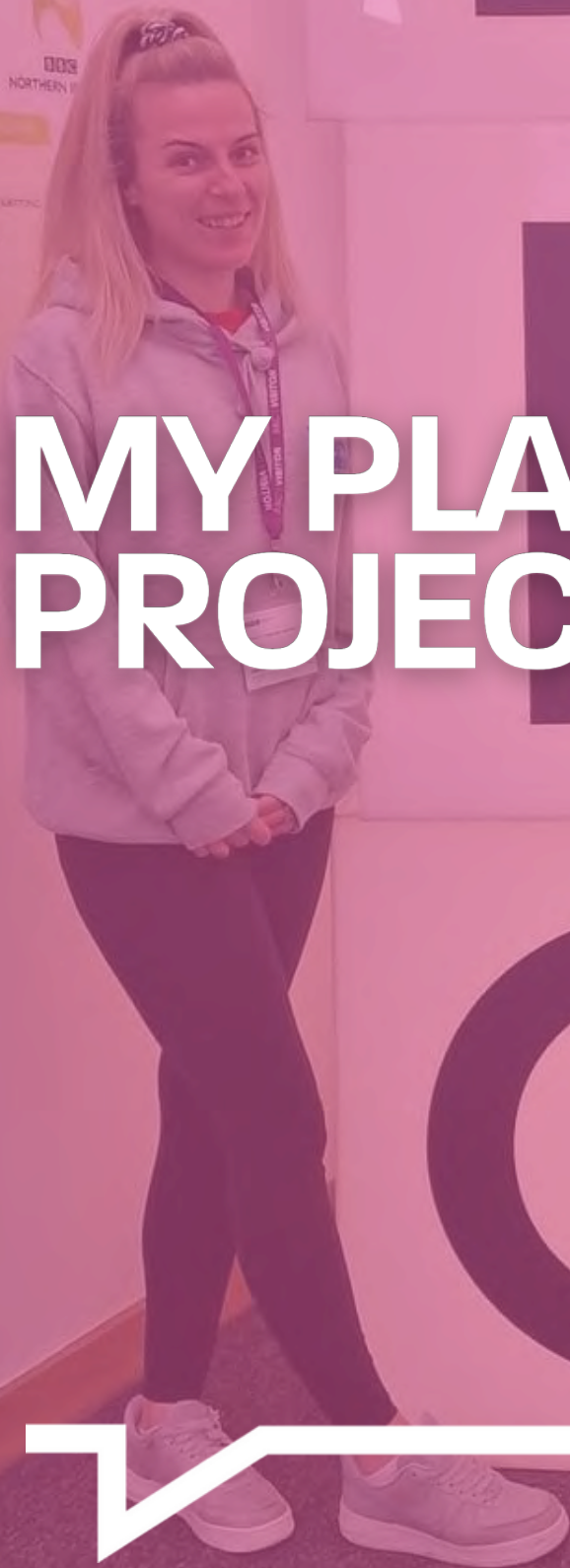
Counselling services | 21 young people with 212 sessions delivered | Focused Therapeutic Group work | 72 young people | One to one work | 22 young people

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**MY PLACE
PROJECT**



My PLACE Project

Northern Ireland Youth Forum identified a gap in housing support in relation to tenancy sustainment for those aged 18-30. Young people at times felt lost when faced with the challenges of running a household and they struggled to access the necessary support. The Housing Executive listened to these concerns and supported us to employ a trainee youth support worker who would support Housing Executive tenants.

To date the project has supported over 31 young people from South & East Belfast. Many of these young people have presented with multiple complex needs such as mental ill health, addiction, hoarding and agoraphobia. The youth support worker built trusting and transformational relationships with young people on the program. The youth support worker placed time, care, and attention to the development needs of the young people while connecting them with the support services within the Housing Executive. The project also made positive connections with local support services that young people could avail of including food banks, community groups, educational support services, mother and toddler groups. We also partnered up with the Cooperative Initiative who delivered a sustaining tenancy OCN which seen 9 young people gain the qualification.

The project has been highly successful at times taking young people from the brink of homelessness to thriving in life. Some participants have re engaged with further education rebuilt positive relationship with family and others for the first time since having a home feel financially secure

The work of the My PLACE Project has been highlighted and celebrated in the public arena on several occasions. A participant was supported to speak at our showcasing event highlighting her journey on the project. A young person who presented in crisis had built herself to a place to present in front of over 50 people including Housing Executive staff, decision makers and young people. She was then invited on to the Lynette Faye show where she shared her story live on air. This built self esteem and confidence within the young person while inspiring others.





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THE CHANGE PROJECT

The Change Project

The Change Project is funded by the NI Housing Executive. The project is based on adopting a peer approach to ending youth homelessness and enables NIYF to employ young people with lived experiences to support and educate their peers and speak truth to power on housing and homelessness related issues.

The project has now completed its fifth year of delivery which focused predominately on bringing our Homeless Prevention workshops to young people in schools and youth organisations across Northern Ireland. All groupwork was planned and delivered by our Youth Apprentices with the support of a Relentless Youth Worker.

NIYF Youth Apprentice Shannon Gordon says 'Homeless prevention work is vital, young people in schools and alternative educations are potentially falling through gaps as there is a stigma around homelessness. Many young people believed a friend allowing them to stay on their sofa is just a good friend when the harsh reality is they are homeless. Breaking down barriers and decreasing the stigma around homelessness allows young people to be more open in discussing youth homelessness. Sharing real life experiences of homelessness humanises the issue. DFC also educates young people on housing rights and how the NIHE works and most importantly who can support them if they themselves or someone they know is at risk of homelessness.

In addition to a successful year of programme delivery, Shannon and her colleagues attended the Centre Point's National Youth Homelessness Conference in Coventry where they had a stall to promote NIYF's Youth Apprenticeship Practice Model.



Young people who engaged in DFC Workshops:

**Include Youth Armagh: 4 | Include Youth Ballymena: 5 | Include Youth Belfast: 8
Extern Pathways East: 6 | Nelson Street: 5 | Springvale: 25
Lagmore: 30 | Abbey CBS Newry: 15 | Blessed Trinity School: 25
St John's Baptist Portadown: 25 | Keady High School: 80**

Youth Apprentice, Shannon states, "I can see that this work has a great impact on young people as they begin to empathise and begin to understand that people's journeys in homelessness don't define them. Also, it educates young people on housing rights and most importantly who can offer them support if they themselves or someone they know is at risk or ends up homeless."

RELENTLESS LEADERSHIP PROJECT

SCAN ME FOR VIDEOS!



Relentless Leadership Project

RLP is aimed at working with young people from 16-25 who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or vulnerably housed. The project supports these young people to gain the skills they need for their future by aiming to help them better their relationships with their support networks and communities.

RLP has now completed its second year of delivery and with the ever-growing needs of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland its services are needed now more than ever.

We have continued our work with Belfast Foyer and Flax Foyer and forged a new partnership with the Magnet Young Adult Centre in Newry. Out of these organisations we run our weekly drop-in services and work directly with young people to offer support through their journeys of homelessness and housing issues. RLP promotes personal and social development through experiential learning such as, team building and group work activities. They can also support and advise on housing rights e.g. navigating the NIHE points system, understanding how points allocation works etc. RLP staff can also offer one-to-one support sessions, so participants can voice their needs in a quieter dedicated space for them other than Drop-In. They also have access to therapeutic services like counselling and alternative therapies so to help young people manage their well-being without having to sit on a waiting list before accessing services.

This year seen our accredited University Experience successfully completed by two cohorts of young people, where they gained a level four qualification in Civic Empowerment through the Ulster University.

In December the RLP team and young people took part in our weeklong social media campaign for Homelessness Awareness Week 2023 "Homeless Not Helpless" where they highlighted the issues young people living through youth homelessness are facing, but also celebrated their resilience and determination to keep going through much adversity.

In February 2024 we had the opportunity to travel to Coventry for Centre Point's National Youth Homelessness Conference where our Youth Apprentices showcased our work on our youth apprentice practise model.

Key data:

Over 200 young people have engaged with RLP services over the last two years.

This year - New Drop-In Service opened in partnership with Magnet YAC, in Newry.

This year - 15 Young people received one to one support and advocacy work.

This year -18 Young people achieved a level four qualification in Civic Empowerment with Ulster University through RLP Uni Experience.

This year - 5 Young people accessed counselling without having to sit on a waiting list.

Nuala McCallam, Flax Foyer Manager comments 'The Relentless Change Programme has had a major impact on our young people. The leaders provided consistent, targeted group work and mentoring support, identifying challenging goals that enabled our young people to realize and harness their true potential. Our young people thrive on consistency and opportunity, the RLP has provided both with a passionate youth work focus. In the time the project has been facilitated in Flax Foyer, I have witnessed real growth and personal change, a lot of which would not have been possible without the dedication of the RLP team. The young people have challenged their leaders, made mistakes, and learnt many lessons, all helping to shape these young people to live more fulfilling and independent lives. The lives of young people living in Supported Living accommodation can be chaotic and complex, the RLP has given our young people the time out needed to think of a positive future they can believe in!'



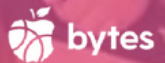
Funded by
UK Government

YOUTH START

A BETTER START IN LIFE & WORK



YOUTH START



Youth Start is a regional youth employability project targeting economically inactive young people aged 16-30 years old. The Youth Start consortium is a partnership between 7 leading youth work organisations (Youth Action NI (Lead Partner), Include Youth, Springboard Opportunities, Princes Trust, Start360, NI Youth Forum and BYTES) in NI who use a youth work approach to build young peoples skills for life, learning and work.

The Youth Start project delivers employability and high-quality life skills to support and grow young people's confidence and skills and improve their opportunities to enter, sustain and progress in the labour market, reflecting government priorities and plans to address economic inactivity. Youth Start supports young people to retain employment and to gain essential life and basic skills. Over two years, NIYF will recruit, engage and support 100 young people aged 16 to 30 who are economically inactive.

Young people who have engaged in the Youth Start programme at NIYF have focused on job searching, job application sessions, gaining relevant qualifications, c.v building, participated in work experience programmes, attended skills days, residentials, volunteering, personal and social development programmes and have been successfully supported into employment, education, and training. The programme will continue to support a further 50 plus young people in its second year.



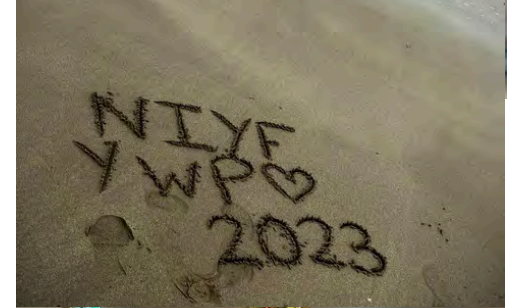


THE
PILGRIM TRUST

YOUNG WOMEN'S PROJECT



SCAN ME
FOR VIDEO!



Young Women's Project

The young women's wellbeing project was established 2 years ago and funded by The Pilgrim Trust. The programme is funded to work with young women regionally who are aged 16-25. Over the past 2 years we have worked with over 50 young women to support them in all aspects of their lives, with focus on improving their mental wellbeing.

Over the past year the young women's project has been an extremely important support for our members. Our focus is on group work, one to one support, peer support, providing rest bite, alternative therapies, and issue-based work. We found that mental health, anxiety, risk taking behaviours, lack of family support and parenting was the common themes with groups of young women we engaged. This year seen us work with 5 different groups. We met the young women on a weekly basis, created a safe space for them to share their stories, be supported, be listened too, and feel valued to use their voice. This weekly session became the bedrock of the projects.

Our program is inclusive of range of young women. One program worked specifically with young mums while another focused on young women facing housing issues and living through homelessness. We supported several young women on a level 4 university project facilitated at the University of Ulster and have just kicked off collaborative program with Mencap which looks at societal issues affecting young women.

There have been a lot of highlights this year. One of these was our 'HERstory' workshop, an inspirational storytelling session which inspired young women to speak up, speak out and create change. This led to a young woman from the NIYF to travel to Cyprus to take part in an all-women's activism project. The young person came back with so much knowledge and felt it was a massive driving force in fuelling her interest in women's work.

One to one support is a key pillar on the project. Our service works with young women during times of crisis. Others are supported over a sustained period as they focused on improving their living situation and build resilience. Focused counselling was also an option for anyone on the project. Residential work has been recognised by both the young women and the staff as highlights on the project. These have been used as a space for team building, fun based activities, educational workshops and intense wellbeing work. Most importantly this was a safe space for the young women to get away from their day to day lives and enjoy an build meaningful friendships.

Key Data:

52 young women engaged | 5 different female focused projects | 4 Residentials |

The project has had a profound impact on young women's lives. Subjects that were never talked about before were starting to be talked about, young women having the confidence to open up to others about their experiences while others expressed thoughts feelings and aspiration for the first time.

Some of the young women talked about how this program gave them a new confidence. One young person who struggled with anxiety and lacked confidence felt this program pushed her out of her comfort zone and supported her to secure a part time job. This was a goal she had been setting herself for so long but always felt it was unachievable. It was a massive help for her mental health, confidence and financially as the past year had been a struggle. Another young woman struggled with her mental health after childbirth and never thought she would have the opportunity to be in a group with like-minded women who support her. It's hard to put into words the impact this project has had on young women as it is more of a feeling of connectiveness.

These women and their real-life stories are living proof that bringing women together can build a foundation for the rest of their lives. There are stories off new friendships, newfound confidence, positive impact on mental health and young women finally standing up finding their voices and encouraging each other to use them.

"Every woman's success should be an inspiration to another, we're strongest when we cheer each other on"

SUPPORTED BY

BBC

**CHILDREN
IN NEED**

LEADERS INTERNATIONAL

Leaders International

BBC Children in Need, in partnership with the #iwill Fund and The Hunter Foundation, have funded NI Youth Forum to carry out a youth social action project with young people who have experiences of seeking asylum and safety in NI. The fund enables NIYF to build young people's confidence and skills, empowering them to take an active and leading role in developing solutions to issues which affect their lives and their communities.

The Leaders International Project successfully recruited a group of young people who are actively seeking asylum and safety in NI. The young people who have engaged in the programme which has helped to reduce the isolation and loneliness they feel, has created opportunities for the young people to engage in fun and meaningful activities and allowed them once again to enjoy life and it has also helped to increase their self-esteem and confidence. The young people are currently designing an educational resource and short video to help other young people who are seeking asylum and safety in NI to highlight services and opportunities that are available to them here in NI. The resource under certain themes as agreed by the group that are important also highlight their rights under the UNCRC. This resource will be available in many of the Belfast hotel sites where young asylum seekers are living with their families when they arrive in NI and available in some of the Belfast Colleges where young asylum seekers are studying. This project will run until June 2024.



LGFA TALK PROJECT

LGFA Talk Project

The Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) along with ourselves at NI Youth Forum continue to develop and work in partnership on the LGFA TALK Project, which is available to clubs in Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

The LGFA TALK Project is a six-week club-based initiative aimed at increasing the awareness of positive mental health in young members aged 13-18 years, and removing the stigma associated with the subject area. The project will only be rolled out for clubs in the six counties.

The aims of the project are as follows:

- To transform the club into a hub for positive youth mental health in the community
- To remove the stigma attached to discussing mental health amongst young members and their peers, mentors and parents
- To increase awareness of the impact of positive mental health on young members
- To provide tools for the project team to successfully implement the project in their club

Clubs who Participated in this year's programme included;

- Antrim: Patrick Pearses GAC
- Armagh: Madden Raparees
- Derry: Steelstown Brian Ógs
- Down: Carryduff GAC
- Fermanagh: Belhaleck GAC
- Tyrone: Urney St Columba's

The benefits of being involved in the programme are as follows:

- Exclusive access to LGFA TALK Project Resources.
- Expert education provided to project team through the NI Youth Forum.
- Increased awareness of positive Youth Mental Health in your club.
- Opportunity to share learnings and experiences with like-minded clubs across Northern Ireland.
- Better engagement with youth members in your club.
- Changes in attitudes towards mental health.
- Chance to set a positive example and make an ever-lasting impact on your young members.
- Sense of achievement as a club.
- Recognition as a leader in in this area by LGFA.





An Roinn Gnóthaí
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NORTH- SOUTH YOUTH FORUM



North-South Youth Forum

Partners: Ballymun Regional Youth Resource, Youth Work Ireland Louth & Youth Work Ireland Galway

The North South Youth Forum (NSYF) was established to create a platform for young people to speak truth to power and participate in meaningful youth-led engagement across the island of Ireland. The NSYF has been a driving force for consultation, cooperation, and action on issues for young people on a cross-border basis.

This includes meeting and engaging with many stakeholders across this island around the NSYF's vision and mission, with particular emphasis on seeking the support of political representatives to listen to young people and to take action. Its main purpose is for young people across the island to work on issues of common interest to make meaningful changes at individual, peer, community, and societal levels.

Over the past year, the NSYF has built on the amazing work which happened in phase 1 of the programme in 2021/22. We recruited a new cohort of young people to represent different regions of the island and began a process of team building and began to develop an understanding of the challenges and opportunities young people face in each region and explore the core issues which young people face.

As part of the programme, young people took part in core training focused on rights, democracy, and lobbying. The training was centred around what the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is, what rights young people have both North and South, what is a democracy and how can young people lobby and advocate for change. Participants also worked with university lecturers to explore history including how the border came about, the Troubles, the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and Brexit - to name a few key moments.

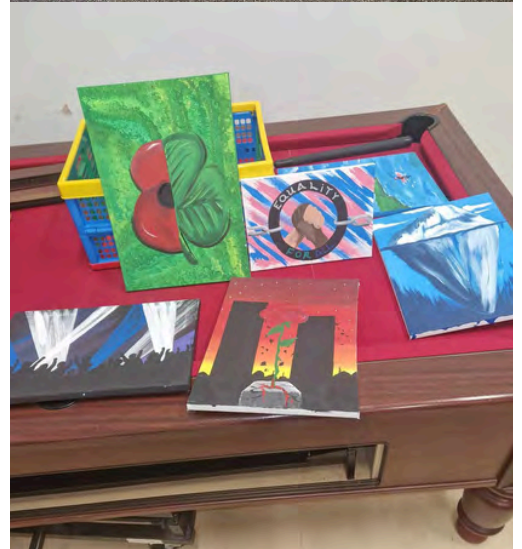
Throughout the programme, members came together every month online for team building and training. We have also had 'Together Days' where the NSYF partners and young people come together in person to develop their relationships, take part in training to learn more about our history and the challenges that young people face and to speak truth to power.

Throughout the programme, members of the NSYF have identified the issues most important to them and young people and met and engaged with local and regional politicians ranging from councillors, TD's, MLA's, MPs, and Government Ministers to make their voice heard and advocate for the change they wanted to see. A huge achievement of the NSYF was being able to present to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in the Oireachtas in February 2024. This committee is made up of TD's, Senators, and MP's. Representatives from the group presented on the key issues of regeneration, lack of services, mis/dis information, and political stability.

In March 2024, the NSYF hosted a "North-South Youth Peace Event" in Belfast City Hall which brought together over 100 young people and decision-makers to explore "Peace" and the other core issues which face young people today such as mental health, lack of services, the impact of mis and dis information and the challenge of political instability.

The programme has provided insight and learning for the participants on what issues other young people are facing, how we can face the same issues no matter where we live, how history can inform society and better understanding of each other's daily lives. Young people have had a range of learning experiences from exploring historic landmarks, to unique speaking truth to power engagements and their own personal and social development learning and socialising with other young people they may never have met.

THE THRIVE PROJECT



The Thrive Project

The Thrive project, funded by the Tudor Trust has been operational since 2018. The project is focused on supporting young people who are at risk of influence within paramilitary run communities. Our approach adopts a youth work methodology implementing a bespoke and needs led process. In November of 2023, we began our latest round delivery.

The Thrive Project has continued to grow, supporting young people who are marginalised. As part of this process we listen to young people, gain an understanding of their needs and challenges. We then adapt the process based on the individual or collective needs.

To date there have been 15 young people engaged on the Thrive Project. This has been broken down to those who participated in groupwork and those availing of tailored one-to-one support.

Groupwork – A group of 9 young males from White City and surrounding areas have actively been involved in a 5-month project. During which their attitudes, values, beliefs and choices were at the forefront of our planned sessions. The project has focused on

- Art based cultural project which focuses on community identity and expression
- Health and fitness project – An 8 week fitness project to improve wellbeing and create positive habits
- Overnight Residential that focused on challenging attitudes, beliefs and actions

One to one support is a cornerstone on the project as we support those most marginalised and at risk from paramilitary organisations, the Thrive Project has been able to consistently support 6 young people who display a range of complex needs. Through a consistent approach the project has encouraged better life choices, supported young people through judicial cases, supported their housing issues and made referrals to a professional counsellor to address mental health issues. We have worked with community based organisation to mitigate the danger posed to these young people

Key Data:

- Participants: (Groupwork 9, one-to-one 6)
- Breakdown: (14 M, 8 PUL, 6 CNR)
- Delivery: (24 Groupwork sessions, 34 one-to-one sessions)

The impact of the project has been exactly what it aimed to do, which was to provide a bespoke personal development and transformational project. The impact for the young people was understanding the choices we make and the consequences they hold, appreciation for identity and culture, increased understanding on the benefits of healthier choices.

Better informed choices – Through discussion-based workshops we explored how the decisions we make whether negative or positive always come with consequence. The areas explored looked at family, education, community, identity and future career goals. There is an increased sense of awareness from the young people around the impact of their actions.

Better understanding of self – Exploring Identity through the arts-based workshops, the young people had a better understanding of who they are, what's important to them, while also developing an increased sense of appreciation of their culture and beliefs.

Developing healthier choices – The Thrive Project young people expressed how the project has encouraged them to adapt healthier choices in their personal life. The health and fitness project highlighted the benefits of exercise and healthy diet to which the young people adapted in their life away from the project. They have all progressed onto employment, college and some remained in school, all striving to achieve their life goals.

The Thrive project has got off to a fantastic start over the past 6 months and we will strive to provide timely interventions and essential support over the next 2 years.

NIYF STAFF TEAM

Chief Executive Officer

Paul Dynes

Assistant Directors

Amanda Stewart and Natalie Corbett

Senior Youth Work Managers

Louisa Ward and Marty Kelly

Office Manager

Paula Williams

Youth Work Managers

James Begley

Rebekah Rushe

Relentless Youth Workers

Arón Hughes

Caitlin Ewing

Dearbhla Ní Ruanaidh

Lauren McAreavey

Lisa McCroy

Orla Trainor

Office Administrator

Victoria Patton

Youth Support Workers

Blair Anderson

Holly Clyde

Youth Apprentices

Demi Laverty

Shannon Gordon

Thank you to Chris Quinn, Phil Glennon and Clodagh Cooke, for their work to promote youth voice throughout 2023-24, we wish them all the best in their new roles.

NIYF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE & TRUSTEES

Corporate Affairs Team:

Cohen Taylor - Chairperson

Carla Hannan - Acting Vice Chair & Governance Lead

Ciara Ní hUisceith - Secretary

Eóin Millar - Treasurer

Trustees:

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Jack Dalzell (Trustee)

James Reynolds (Trustee)

Kseniia Heorhiieva (Trustee)

Laura Blackledge (Trustee)

Tristin Nicholls (Trustee)

Executive Committee Members:

Eimear Crozier (Executive Committee Member)

Genevieve McCollum (Executive Committee Member)

Ryan Kearney (Executive Committee Member)

Tomás Murphy (Executive Committee Member)

Thank you to our 2021-23 Executive Committee who concluded their term during 2023-24 for all of their work and dedication to our organisation. We would like to thank our former Chairperson, Oisín-Tomás Ó'Raghallaigh for his work leading the outgoing committee.



THANK YOU

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NI YOUTH FORUM



info@niyf.org
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