

Cluster Group Meetings April 2021

Introduction

On 13th and 14th April 2021, 16 people from 13 organisations attended 2 online LINKS Cluster Group Meetings.

During these meetings attendees shared updates regarding how they were coping with the restrictions that the COVID 19 pandemic has placed on everyone, whether or not they were able to continue some aspects of their work or had to pause their delivery, the challenges they faced and issues arising from this unusual situation.

The Cluster Group Meetings were also a way of checking in with staff in the grant aided organisations to see what other support NCB could offer at this time as well as a way of giving and receiving support from peers. An update on the LINKS Young People Advisory Group was also provided.

LINKS Young People Advisory Group

The LINKS YPAG is for young people from grant holder organisations and outside, aged 8-25. It has a rolling recruitment and is currently looking for new members.

The YPAG:

- Act as a sounding board for NCB as the support contract evolves
- Provide a 'challenge function' to NCB, ensuring that the programme is relevant, responsive and 'real' in terms of supporting organisations to meet the needs of young people in similar situations
- Assist in the development of resources for the promotion of participation work with grant holders
- Test out such resources
- Participate in training that will be developed and that can be used with other young people in 'peer education' groups

The YPAG meet approximately 4 times per year, for about 1.5 hours a time and, at the minute, this is via Zoom. All travel and catering costs are covered by NCB, once meetings are face-to-face again.

Further information on the LINKS YPAG can be found here:

<https://www.ncb.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/ncb-northern-ireland/links/links-young-people-advisory-group>

If interested, please contact Gill Hassard on gassard@ncb.org.uk

- Scotch Street Youth & Community Centre has a Youth Forum that might be interested
- VOYPIC have existing Participation Forums and a particular young person that might be interested
- Solas has a siblings programme that might be interested in being involved.
- Shankill Women's Centre have an older age group of young women aged 17-25 that might be interested

Exploitation of Young People

There was a discussion on exploitation and human trafficking of young people increasing since the start of the pandemic, and before, in a number of ways:

Exploitation by paramilitaries

- Manipulation to take part in illegal activity including rioting at interface areas – particularly a problem for young men but can include young women and the grooming takes place from a young age
- County lines – young people exploited to take part in illegal drug activity by giving them jobs in the manufacture and distribution of drugs
- Young people targeted for exploitation on leaving the care system or juvenile justice system

Financial exploitation

- Young people leaving care targeted as they are entitled to benefits that can be taken from them, particularly when entitled to high levels of disability benefits
- Cuckoo'ing – when young people are exploited and used for the flats/houses that they are entitled to
- Young people used to launder money and act as money mules.

Sexual exploitation

- Similarly, vulnerable young people targeted leaving care or the juvenile justice system
- Barnardo's first national research study of CSE in Scotland published <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/first-national-study-child-sexual-exploitation-launched->

[scotland#:~:text=Barnardo's%20Scotland%20and%20Scottish%20Children's,child%20sexual%20exploitation%20in%20Scotland&text=The%20research%20confirms%20that%20child,communities%20and%20in%20urban%20Qareas](#)

- Only Fans – a subscription porn website which is becoming more mainstream and used by young people to make money by posting images or videos of themselves
- Only Fans pages are appearing in young people's Instagram bio's, normalising it as a way to make money
- Exploitative 'boyfriends' exert pressure on young women to post on Only Fans
- The website is over-18s so illegal to use for under-18s. If YP is over 18, it is difficult to deal with as it is sometimes a choice however YP can be educated on the consequences of their choices
- During COVID there has been a 200% increase in the reporting of paedophiles online
- Paedophiles pressure young people to make themselves available online, blackmail them, screen record them and sell this to other paedophiles. This control is very difficult to extricate themselves from.
- Online exploitation is an increasing problem in rural areas
- Sugar daddy dating sites – again the risks can be explained but action is limited for YP over 18.

What can Youth Organisation staff do?

- Often young people are not aware that what they are experiencing is exploitation - youth workers can highlight the issue of exploitation with their young people and identify it as a form of human trafficking
- Explain the risks and consequences of their choices whilst maintaining a shame-free environment
- Change perceptions – what if this was your younger sister? Future employers?
- Look out for over-sexualised behaviour

Impacts of COVID-19

COVID restrictions

On emerging from lockdown, the issue of confusion surrounding what youth organisations can and cannot do remains a big problem. The Department of Health and the Department of Education are saying different things.

One organisation can do face-to-face groupwork if they are registered under the EA Youth Service umbrella but yet they can't do sport outside. Another organisation can run their education programmes in their centre but the social development programmes are not allowed to be inside.

Some organisations found that it was a challenge to keep YP engaged when sport had been pulled by the COVID restrictions. The change of focus sometimes led to successes in other ways, such as the delivery of qualifications (Essential Skills) and developing employment opportunities for YP.

With the easing of restrictions, some groups thought that sport starting again would help with the mental health issues being experienced by YP.

Building Relationships with YP

Some groups starting projects during lockdown have found it difficult to engage young people as the online sessions involve new faces and they are reluctant to engage. Face-to-face work is so important to build those relationships and act as a foundation for future work.

One group works with young people with complex learning disabilities and online work has been a challenge.

Some groups found the end of 'group work' a real problem. Many adapted to one-to-one work online but it meant that peer relationships between YP in the group were harder to establish.

Providing Practical Help

Many groups have been providing emergency support over the past year e.g. food parcels, gas/electric money etc.

One group found that during the first lockdown, most of the focus of their work was on financial crisis, however this shifted during the third lockdown to be more on the mental health crisis of YP.

Other groups have been involved in social action programmes e.g. litter picking; improving green spaces.

Bereavement

Many YP have dealt with bereavement this year, either COVID-related or impacted by COVID restrictions (e.g. visiting dying relatives, funeral/wake

restrictions). This has been very hard to deal with as YP have been experiencing emotional loneliness, with the removal of contact with their peer group.

Cruse has a website for YP aged 8 to 25 who have been bereaved
www.hopeagain.org.uk

Transitions

Some groups have had the challenge of preparing YP for transition to other groups when many of these have been closed or staff furloughed. This is a particular concern for groups where their funding is coming to an end.

Groups have experienced challenges meeting their project's employability outcomes. One group is finalising a virtual work placement toolkit which will allow YP to complete work experience online.

AOB

Teresa mentioned the Involving Young People in the Recruitment & Selection of Staff workshop that will be taking place in June 2021. NCB will be sending out invitations and a proforma for case studies in the near future and would appreciate contribution from grant holders into the workshop.

Teresa also shared information on the SEND COVID-19 research project and directed participants to the interim report <https://www.ncb.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/news-opinion/impact-covid-19-children-and-young-people-special-educational>