

Cluster Group Meetings November 2020

Introduction

On 3rd and 10th November 2020, 16 people from 12 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.

Adaptations to Project Delivery

Many grant holders have had to adapt their project delivery in line with the COVID-19 restrictions. Examples include the following:

Online delivery

- Using virtual work placements. One grant holder has created a model with different employers, offering placements for young people online.
- Working with families online, rather than just the young people, to build relationships and to reassure parents.
- Engaging through online video games. Some organisations found that younger members engaged much better in this way, as an alternative to engaging over Zoom.
- Creative ways of engaging e.g. Fireside Chats online with people of interest to the young people, self-care at home packs.
- Young people with autism often liked the barrier of engagement via Zoom. They came out of their shells and engaged better than they normally did.
- When online engagement dropped off, some groups picked up the phone. One organisation phoned 50 families and the feedback from that was great. It was important to remind them of the support available. On the back of that they did some 1:1 support when families needed it.

Outdoor Engagement

- Organisations adapted engagement to meet young people outdoors for a walk and talk during lockdown.

Providing Practical Help

- YP involved in a social action programme in a small green space, cleaning up graffiti, planting, adding seating and signs up to stop people dumping.
- One organisation delivered packages of Lego and clay so that families they were working with would have something tangible to work with, rather than just talking.
- One organisation developed a FAB lab social enterprise with 3D printing – YP produced PPE, face shields etc.
- During lockdown, community was at the forefront of many projects. One project arranged planting packs to give out, to be planted in the community. Another project organised litter picks. A few organisations also involved young people in the preparation and delivery of food packs to those in need/vulnerable.
- Many organisations felt that their role in the community changed during lockdown but in a good way.
- One participant felt that, as they were providing practical help, their project was noticed more by the people they work with and they felt more appreciated, increasing their motivation.

Working from home

- One participant started their new job in lockdown which meant that they missed out on having an induction etc. They felt it was more difficult to get settled in and learn the ropes and some days it was a struggle to get going, with no energy from colleagues in a work environment.
- Some felt it hard to switch off with phone calls outside work hours, making it difficult to switch between work and home mode.
- Self-care for staff – one organisation has had a trauma therapist attend their team meetings.

Other impacts of COVID-19 on projects

- One organisation that works with YP who will be transitioning to other organisations/support once their funded project has ended has found this period challenging as the other organisations have not been open during lockdown.
- One organisation who works in schools was still able to deliver when the schools classed their workers as 'essential'.
- Pausing delivery of OCN qualification work.
- Challenges in recruiting new YP to projects as they are meeting online rather than face-to-face.

Other impacts of COVID-19 on YP

- Disrupted sleep patterns as normal routines lost.
- Financial hardship on families.
- Increased screen time – impacts on mental health.
- One organisation recruited a specialist trauma therapist to work with YP and their parents who are struggling with mental health – hoping to do more therapeutic intervention when the restrictions ease.
- School closures have had a massive effect on YP. For some, school is their safe place with food provided twice a day and being away from the abuse they experience at home.
- YP with autism have little support with their mental health – it tends not to be understood, addressed or given support.
- Suicide – some organisations have had to cope with the impact of suicide on their young people or the loss of a young person they work with to suicide. YP have struggled with how to mourn the loss of their friend in this way, especially during COVID restrictions. One organisation suggested making a memory book for the young person's family, rather than public mourning via social media which can be seen as insensitive to family members.

Learning Points

- YP are resilient and have responded well to the adaptations of projects – it has shown how the work that organisation's have done has paid off.
- Young men often have a bad press in local communities and the work that they have done for the community during the pandemic has changed opinions. They have been proactive, take pride in themselves and their communities.
- Agreement that YP have had their lives disrupted hugely. They're proactively helping the community and working in key worker roles, putting themselves at risk, and their hard work should be highlighted.
- Some organisations have had the space and time to plan their projects during COVID-19, before starting or during a pause in delivery.
- Most groups looking forward to getting back to normal.
- Lottery has been flexible in terms of changes to projects due to the pandemic, with many projects underspending as there have been no events/activities allowed under the restrictions.

Teresa mentioned the Qualitative Methods of Evaluation workshop and shared information on the SEND COVID-19 research project

