

HOLY FAMILY YOUTH CENTRE



Bi-Annual Report

2022

2023

Background

Youth services in Newington began on Wednesday April 5th 1972 at a four story former house at 281 Antrim Road (where PIPs is now between Baltic and Oceanic Avenue). Mr B Henry and Dr Liam Conlon were instrumental in the initial set up with Danny Nolan being appointed the first Full-Time Leader in Charge in July of the same year.

A Management Committee was first established on the 13th May 1972 and the first Chairperson Michael Sherry was elected. This committee had the function of creating the first policies within the guidelines of the Board of Education and the Down and Connor Youth Council.

The Committee then set about to identify and procure new premises and plans were drawn up to site the youth club behind the parochial house in the church grounds. The building was completed in April 1975 at a cost of £90,000.

During the construction of the new building the football team used Holy Family Primary School, the boxing club were able to use a room above the sacristy and the table tennis section were able to use the school hall. The new building was blessed by Bishop Philben in January 1975.



The new youth club consisted of 'a large social area on the ground floor that could be divided into 2 sections; a large sports hall on the second floor with a small demonstration room on the third floor' Membership grew to 500 and a second full-time worker, Danny Mullan was appointed to help deliver the programmes. The first junior section of the club was also formed catering for children aged between 6 and 10 years old.



In September 1979 Martin Morgan was appointed the new Leader-in-Charge and this period seen the youth club take on an increased community outlook and sporting activities were also given a re-invigorated focus with Karate, Kung Fu, Gymnastics, Volleyball and Handball joining the established Football teams. In this period an International programme

began in partnership with Fortwilliam Youth Club based in the Mount Vernon area. Over the years the programme has seen scores of young people experiencing summers in Canada as part of this cross-community initiative.



There was also an increased focus on supporting young people into employment and this brought about what would be a fore runner to the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme that guaranteed paid work experience and support for a 12 month period.

Newington Youth Club underwent a name change around the turn of the millennium to

better reflect the area targeted and Holy Family Youth Centre came into fruition in 1998.

Ceri O'Reilly, a former member was next to take the reins of the youth centre. Next up was Joanne McGuinness and then Martin Kelly took over in 2001 and set about to rebuild the programmes that operated within the youth centre.

Key to this approach was to place a focus on equipping senior members at the club with the skills and knowledge needed to take on increased volunteering roles, which for some led onto paid employment.

Martin, then took the decision to step down and the current Senior Youth Worker, BJ McKevitt, took over in October 2022

The core funding structure of the youth centre has changed in the past 2 years with the youth centre now budgeting and managing the allocation from the Education Authority.

With wholesale funding cuts within the voluntary sector we now face the challenge of planning ahead and ensuring that we are able to face the next 50 years confident of delivering a quality youth service in the area.



Chairpersons Report

Having been in the role of Chairperson for a couple of years now, I can appreciate the amount and quality of work undertaken by the staff of Holy Family Youth Centre in planning and delivering schemes and activities for all in the local community and beyond, not just young people.



They have shown the Management Committee that we have a very strong and committed staff team at Holy Family who endeavour to do the best they can for all, especially the young people who they work with.

Funding as always is under pressure but we aim to continue to deliver a high quality of service and value for money for our funders. The Leader and staff have to be commended for the drive to obtain and use the funding available, including working with other youth work providers to address the on-going funding issues.

Looking forward we want to improve the quality of our service though this will continue to depend on the funding issues mentioned above. That said, the staff and Management Committee will seek to maximise this.

I, on behalf of the Management Committee, would like to place on record our thanks for the tireless work and dedication of the staff team and youth workers for the work they do, often unseen and unnoticed but greatly appreciated.

Finally I would like to thank the community which we serve as they have shown great support for the work that we do and on your behalf we will continue to seek and to deliver the service to the young people of this community.

George Walsh
Chair

Senior Youth Workers Message

It has been a real privilege to take on the role of Senior Youth Worker within Holy Family from Martin Kelly. I have worked in the Newington area for the past 30 years since I took up a part-time ACE post in Newington Youth Club (now HFYC) and have always had a genuine interest in helping to improve the lives of the young people I come into contact with. Whether that be through involvement in junior football, using the outdoor environment, through mentoring or groupwork programmes through to challenging negative behaviours at the interface it is all with the end goal of helping young people to grow into confident, forward thinking adults who can enhance their life opportunities and help to improve their community.



The work over the period covered in this report has been directed by myself in the latter stages and by outgoing Senior Youth Worker Marty Kelly, who since 2001 helped to restructure and rebuild the work of Holy Family Youth Centre.

I will speak on behalf of myself and Martin in this message regarding programme delivery throughout and beyond this period of immense uncertainty. The impact that the Covid 19 pandemic and the related restrictions had on the delivery of youth work services and on the development of young people cannot be underestimated.

The youth centre went from the position in 2019 of having 3 international residentials to none through the covid period and we have still not recovered from this. We have also witnessed young people's confidence wain and a rise in anxiety levels of a lot of young people. We organised therapy classes, mindfulness talks and walk and talk sessions to help young people through this period and this work continues today.

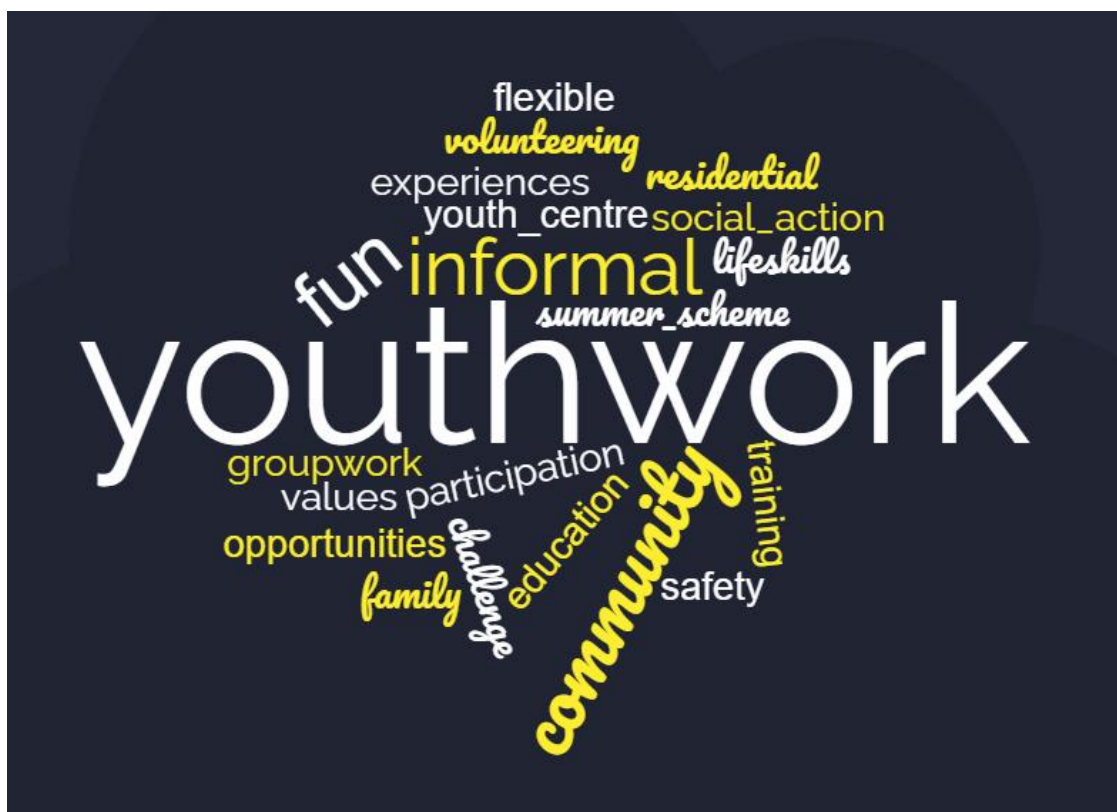


Coming into the final year (2022/23) of our 3 year specification there was always a degree of hope of increased financial support in the future but also a fear of the unknown. It is safe to say that we were underwhelmed with the details of the Specification which seen a near 30% cut in funding to deliver Core Youth Work Provision in the Limestone and Waterworks Area

The announcement of these wholesale cuts to the Voluntary and Community sector for 2023-24 has caused a lot of disquiet and anger across the sector. Rather than develop and grow our services we have been put in the position of shrinking services to our children and young people resulting in the potential loss of some of our staff members, curtailing of late night and weekend provision and the possibility of not being able to operate a programme over the summer period.

That said we will, as always, do our utmost best to work towards delivering a wide range of programmes and opportunities for young people we engage with and look forward to the next chapter in delivering youth provision in the area.

And finally, for someone who has a responsibility for the staff and volunteers at Holy Family Youth Centre I would like to thank the staff, volunteers, Management, young people and the community for their continued support over a period when things were very difficult and threw up many obstacles.





Holy Family Youth Centre Improvement Plan 2024

Purpose Statement:

Holy Family Youth Centre strive, through our work to create appropriate settings that facilitate the growth and development of the young people of Holy Family Parish and beyond.

We will work in partnership with young people as they seek to meet their political, social, personal, cultural, spiritual and physical needs. In working to achieve these aims we will strive to create a climate of mutual respect, understanding, equity, diversity and interdependence.

Context:

Holy Family Youth Centre was established as a voluntary youth provision for the Newington area of North Belfast. The initial reason for the provision of the youth facility was to divert the young people's energies into something more creative as opposed to the violence happening in the area. The Centre, over the last half century has provided a much needed resource for the area and its young people.

Holy Family Youth Centre is a voluntary youth organisation which relies on funding from various sources. The main support would be received through the Education Authority. Other fundraising is undertaken by the Management Committee by applying to various trusts and charities to run projects that benefit the young people and the wider community.

The youth centre is situated on one of the most contentious interfaces that has for decades seen violence, the Limestone Road. Without the Centre the young people would have nowhere to go and have little opportunity to participate in activities which allow them to develop as individuals and as members of the community. The Youth Centre is one of the main youth providers in the area which has a youth population exceeding 37.5% The area in which the centre is situated is an area considered to be at high a level of deprivation which has its own associated problems.

Holy Family Youth Centre seeks to provide a programme of activities which will enable young people to grow into mature and responsible adults who will play a role in their community. We provide opportunities through involving young people in a wide range of personal and group development programmes.

Over the last financial year Holy Family Youth Centre has held the specification for Local Area Based Funding – Waterworks Area (Limestone). We also received financial support through the Planned Intervention Programme to deliver work over the summer period.

Our staff team consists of a full time Senior Youth Worker, 12 part-time qualified youth workers, an administration worker and an ancillary worker. Of the youth work staff we have 5 staff qualified at degree level. We operate the youth centre 6 nights per week (4 generic and 2 targeted sessions) and also support young people through employment and skills support 2 days per week.

Our average attendances over the last 12 months have been as follows:

Juniors – 38 per session

Seniors – 54 per session

These figures often fluctuate during the summer period but through our outreach and detached work we are able to continue to support young people remotely.



We operate under the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and this helps us to plan, evaluate and adapt our youth work delivery, as well as growing as an organisation. Through this process we are able to identify areas for improvement that we keep high on the agenda at Holy Family Youth Centre. With that in mind we have reviewed recently how we deliver youth work to the young people that we engage with.

The specification (20-LA-BN-016) laid out the expectations for delivery of work at Holy Family Youth Centre by the Education Authority. The structure of the Centre and the face to face nature of the work was a task put on top of the specifications. In previous years we had seen a significant increase in the negative behaviours of young people in the area but we have over time been able to engage with a large proportion of these young people who would now be regular service users and as a result we have seen a drop in such incidents.

In the last 12 months staff have worked hard to ensure that all work within the specifications for delivery have been met. At various times, this has proved to be somewhat difficult due to a

number of factors, such as the continuing behavioural issues with young people. This has at times, dictated the length of programmes and projects delivered.

Data Collection

We have improved our data collection over the past year and ensured that young people who attend the youth centre are properly registered. We currently have 387 active members and in the coming year we plan to fully migrate to the Management Information System that will improve our recording of our youth work.

Additional Educational Needs

Many of the young people who are engaging with Holy Family Youth Centre present with additional Educational Needs. This in itself has created issues within the staff and the delivery of the above specifications. As part of our improvement plan we intend to focus staff training to ensure that staff are better equipped to deliver in the coming year. We will also look at adapting times and methods of delivery to ensure we meet the needs of all young people.

Partnership Working

As part of our specifications we have developed partnerships to ensure that the programmes and projects have been delivered. To ensure that we are best placed to deliver the required specifications we will continue to develop the needed partnerships that benefit the young people that engage with Holy Family youth Centre. We also realise we do not work within a silo and will be working with other groups and agencies such as Belfast City Council, PSNI, NIHE, Newington Housing Association etc to ensure we play our part in improving the lives of residents in the area.



Street Based Youth Work

Our presence in the streets and the parks of the area are invaluable in our efforts to engage with young people who would not normally use the centre and also with young people out and about within their community. Our role as a partner with New Lodge Youth Centre allows us to continue to develop this strand of our work in a joined up and supportive approach that will benefit young people in the Oldpark DEA.

At times we have found this work quite challenging, particularly when dealing with instances of interface violence. Responding to these incidents can sometimes leave us stretched so we are looking to acquire further resources to allow us to continue to engage with young people outside of the youth centre.

Governance

During this year we will have a renewed focus on ensuring that the management structure of Holy Family Youth Centre continues to grow and develop. To improve the working of the

Management Committee we will identify support and further training to ensure that they are effective in the management of youth centre. We will also over the next 12 months seek to increase the input that staff, volunteers and young people can have on the strategic direction of the youth centre.

Consultation and Planning

In the next year we plan to improve the way we gather feedback and opinions of various stakeholders and how we keep people informed of opportunities and the work that goes on within Holy Family. In the past we have tended to rely too heavily on one form of reporting and this may not meet the needs of many of our young people, parents, statutory and community partners and others.



Moderations

Throughout the last year we have been moderated on 3 occasions by Education Authority Officers and have been graded as either been Outstanding or Good. As part of our improvement plan we will ensure that staff, committee members and young people are better prepared and understand the process.

Community Engagement

Throughout the coming year we will work towards seeking resources that will allow us to increase the opportunities to work alongside parents, other residents and groups in the area to deliver on community based initiatives that respond to the emerging needs of children and young people who we seek to work with. By engaging in such initiatives we will help foster a greater sense of community and also encourage members of the wider community to become involved in positive community activity that will break down perceived barriers between generations.

Forward Planning

This has been a real struggle in this current specification as the effect of funding cuts, short term funding and low staff moral have all curtailed the planning for the year ahead. Working as we are at present on a quarterly basis takes away the certainty and security that staff have for the year ahead.

We will however strive to improve how we evaluate the effectiveness of our services while also developing a long term strategic blue print for the development of youth and community services in the area.

Programming

In the last few years we have faced many challenges in our efforts to provide a quality youth work programme to the community in North Belfast.

There were times when our programme had to be restricted or adapted, whether through pandemic guidelines, losing equipment to arson or by a reduction in funding by the Education Authority.



We worked through this as an organisation to develop innovative methods to continue to support young people and key to this was increasing our work in the wider community

Over the next few pages we hope that you get a flavour of the work that we were involved with over this period of uncertainty.



Being situated on the Limestone Road means we cannot escape the impact that the ***interface*** has on the work of the youth centre. While we can all agree that the Limestone area has transformed for the better over the years, we have unfortunately seen young people engaging in negative sectarian behaviours at the interfaces in Alexandra Park and the Limestone Road.

From a youth work perspective it saddens us to see young people making these negative choices that can have such a detrimental effect on not only their lives and future prospects, but also on families on both sides of the interface.

In the past 2 years our staff have worked tirelessly to create opportunities for young people to get involved in positive activities, both within the youth centre but also through engagement with our workers when on outreach in the park and at the interface.

We have, in this period developed very strong partnerships with Mountcollyer Youth Club, Newington Residents Group, the Dean Clarke Foundation and the community police team in a bid to address any negative behaviours involving young people.

Thankfully, as a result, incidents involving young people clashing at the interfaces in the area has drastically reduced in the past year and long may it continue.

Our premises on the Limestone Road remains one of our main assets with our nightly ***Drop in*** being the first point of contact for a lot of the young people we work with. It is where we can develop the relationship to a point when personal and group development work can then take place. Within the centre we try to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere where young people can come to and enjoy the company of other young people and chat with our youth workers.

The sports hall is well used with football being the main sport played although we have an equipment store that can be utilised to set up game sessions which prove very popular, especially with the junior section of the club.

Our ***junior*** sessions continue to be divided into 2 distinct groups to enable us to offer age appropriate programming. Children in year 3 to year 5 were put into one group with year 6's and 7's in the other group. This has proved to work very well as we were able to focus on the needs and tailor the activities to best fit each group best.



We operate late night and weekend sessions in a bid to involve as many young people as we can, with a focus on over 15's late night Thursday with Friday nights being a particular draw when we cook a nutritious meal for those attending.



'Our Road'

During the summer of 2022 a group of young people from Holy Family and Mountcollyer took part in a cross community project that would see the installation of a connected art piece on the Limestone Road reflecting the aspirations of the young people for the future of their community. We recorded the process and this was produced into a short film.

We were then informed that we were nominated for an award in the

Education Authority Oscars that took place in Derry in April. The film was nominated for an award under the Community Relations category and with confidence high and acceptance speeches written there was a bit of disappointment when we did not receive the award. As we were getting prepared for the journey home and with all the categories seemingly awarded we

got a very pleasant shock when we were awarded the best overall film of the EA Oscars. This made the bus journey home a lot easier!!

We then organised an event for members of the community to come together, the murals get an official launch and of course a Community 'Premiere' showing of the film

Holy Family Youth Centre and Mountcollyer Youth Centre worked in partnership on the Limestone Peace Run **TBUC programme**. This carried on from a successful cross community running group between the centres which seen young people and staff focus on health and wellbeing and good relations. The programme consisted of several youth work sessions alongside physical sessions such as group runs, circuit training and walks around the Newington and Tigers Bay areas. In October, the group went on a residential to Tollymore Forest Park and camped overnight, explored the forest park, canoed on Castlewellan Lake and took part in group activities facilitated by Journey Free. The young people really enjoyed the residential but due to the time of year, the temperature proved to be a hinderance, with cold temperatures leading to some water activities being cancelled.

After the residential, the group focused on the social action aspect of the programme and decided to deliver Christmas packs to local houses on the Limestone interface. The items were picked by the young people, bought and packed in the centre and delivered by the group directly to the community. The appreciation shown by the community towards the groups actions were



apparent, with many people expressing this at the doorstep or online. The group also took part in HFYC's annual Christmas Grotto, with many of the group leading families around the centre or manning stalls and greeting families as they moved through the route. Some members of the group also put forward the idea of cooking mini donuts at the event, leading to a new stall being added to the event. Feedback from the event again shone positive light on the groups behaviour and attitude to help out.

Plans are being put in place to have a celebration night for the group and looking forward to the next TBUC application, staff are identifying young people from the group who could take part in the next group as peer mentors.

Our involvement in the organisation of positive ***Community Events*** is key to the youth centres approach to working with the wider community and to help educate and involve young people in creating change within their community. It is a chance to build on the social capital of young people and to demonstrate the positive participation that young people can have in their community.

The ***Lark in the Park*** that has been organised each year is an event that sees young people taking on a vital role in the planning and delivery of a Community Festival in their local park. The Lark doubles up as a diversionary event as it takes place in Alexandra Park on the 12th of July, a day that has traditionally seen a rise in tension in North Belfast. We were supported financially by the Belfast City Council Events in the Park Scheme and by the ARCS funding we received.



Another event that has now become a regular in the community is our Christmas celebrations culminating in our ***Winter Wonderland*** event. In the past two years we have brightened up the area by erecting Christmas lights on the lampposts in the run up to the festive period. These Christmas tree lights were made in the youth centre by young people during Covid restrictions and in 2022 we were also able to extend the lights across the interface and down to the bottom of the Limestone Road.



Christmas 2022 and 2023 saw all the elves from Holy Family and Mountcollyer Youth Clubs busy transforming the youth centre into a walk through Winter Wonderland and this proved a great success with families from the Newington and Tigers Bay area attending, visiting Santa and taking part in activities on the route. Again this was an event that could not have taken place without all the young people from both centres giving their time up to volunteer.

Our interaction and work with parents since the Covid pandemic has proved to work very well by strengthening the relationship with families and the wider community.

With the cost-of-living spiralling and families sometimes struggling to make ends meet, we were in a very fortunate position to be able to deliver some programmes to offer some support to young people and their families.



We were supported through the National Lottery Awards For All programme to make up ***Larder Packs*** that would help some families at a time when they were struggling to put food on the table. The packs were designed by a group of staff and young people and included non-perishable and fresh fruit, milk, bread etc.

We have also developed very positive relationships with the North Belfast Community Foodbank, The Peoples Kitchen and others when working to support families needing a bit of support.

Now all children and young people attending the youth centre are offered free cereal, toast and hot meals as part of our drop in provision.

This was rolled out as part of our response to the Education Authority's withdrawal of the 'Holiday Hunger' payments for families when their children are off at school holidays.

Outdoor Education

We have also made a concerted effort to re-introduce using the outdoor environment when working with young people.

With the brighter nights of Spring and Summer we were able to hop on the minibus and head along the shore for a dander, up the Cavehill for an adventurous walk or further afield into the beautiful Mourne Mountains for a hike. This aspect of our work has proved to be very appealing to the young people involved and although at times it can be challenging for them, they get the reward of the views and contemplation when they reach the summit!



We have also been able to utilise our outdoor equipment we purchased by organising camping experiences for young people each year and in the summer of 2023 a group of young people took on the challenge of conquering Ireland's highest mountain as they climbed up Carrauntoohil in County Kerry. This was part of a Youth Justice Agency funded programme aimed at engaging young people in a positive challenge and keeping them away from involvement in any negative behaviours at the interfaces in the area. The programme was highly successful in engaging with this group and at the time of writing they are now beginning another project with the youth centre.



Environmental work – As part of our programme we try to get young people to take a bit of notice and respect their environment. Whether this be by encouraging them to pick up rubbish in the youth centre, streets or in the hills through to taking part in clean ups or anti-graffiti drives in the area. We find that these activities are very worthwhile in building a sense of pride for their community.



We were able to deliver on our most recent ***Summer Programme*** with the financial support of Newington Housing Association, NIHE, The Executive Office and the Youth Justice Agency. The programme was delivered throughout July and August and was a crucial factor in ensuring we had a peaceful summer.

Activities ranged from in centre activities, area scavenger hunts, games in the park, outdoor walks, lazer-tagging, combat games, go-karting and much more.

Our ***Outreach and Detached*** work continues to be a vital tool in helping us to engage with young people and the wider community in the area.



We began using this form of youth work to mainly keep in touch with young people we knew who were on the streets and in the parks around the area. While at times we were taking on a role more associated with policing, we ensured that we followed up any confrontations we may have had with young people with a conversation.

When looking back on this work, we were actually able to engage with a lot of young people who had not previously attended the youth centre and when the youth centre and group work sessions started up again we were able to bring these young people along with us.

In the last year (23/24) we are in a partnership with New Lodge Youth Centre and are currently delivering on an EA specification for Outreach and Detached work in the Lower North Belfast Area.

This method of engagement has proved to be very beneficial in the past two years and looking forward we will continue to utilise this form of work within our overall approach to engage with and help young people develop their skills.

Inclusion Work - In the past year we have been hosting a group of parents and volunteers who meet every fortnight with in the centre and this has been going very well. The group was previously run by the Down Syndrome Association prior to Covid but stopped meeting when restrictions came in.

We were approached about starting the group up again and we were more than happy to help out. We were fortunate to be able to provide the group with a small budget to work with for their year ahead, and they have been able to bring the group to a number of activities so far.



Another way we were able to engage with young people in a positive manner was the use of ***Sport and Fitness***, especially when using the outdoor environment. We were able to use football sessions in the Waterworks Multi-Sports Facility (once restrictions into outdoor group



sport eased) to engage with large numbers of young people over the weekends when there was a tendency for an increase in negative and perceived anti-social behaviour in the parks and at the interfaces in the area.

With other sessions incorporating boxing sessions with Newington Patsy Quinn Gym,

mountain biking, treks in the hills, coastal walks and park activities we were able to safely engage with young people and their families and better appreciate the local outdoor environment.

At Holy Family Youth Centre we recognise the importance of encouraging continuous ***Staff Training and Skills Development*** and keeping up with up to date with training in regards to child and youth development and child protection legislation.



We do this by supporting staff financially, the development of a resource library and by offering vocational training courses.

Over the 2 years we have had a further 2 staff members graduating in Community Youthwork degree with a further 2 staff members continuing their journey.

Playwork training was delivered to 15 young people in preparation for helping out over the summer programme, equipping them with the skills to deliver various forms of games and sporting activities.

Driving Theory classes were also delivered within the youth centre for young people preparing to get on the road and we regularly update our Child Protection Training and First Aid



Premises and Resources

Our premises on the Limestone Road are crucial for us to deliver our youth and community work and although we were successful in an application for capital works to the Department of Education, we will be waiting a while for any work to commence.

Our initial plan was to split the sports hall and build a new level that would accommodate additional groupwork space and a dance studio but this was deemed to be outside the realms of the work so we will be changing the layout of the ground floor to better suit the work for the future, This work will include the installation of a working kitchen and relocation and improvements to our toilet facilities.



In the meantime we have been required to carry out some minor maintenance works to ensure that we maintain a safe and welcoming environment. An example of this was when we had to erect new sports hall lights due to the existing lights being damaged and we have also gained more storage space by clearing the old water tank from the loft.

Our Minibus remains to be a vital resource that we have been able to utilise in providing young people with opportunities to travel outside the area, taking part in activities, trips down to Dublin to watch Ireland games, going for walks in the Cavehill or for just for a spin. It has proved to be a real asset particularly with the ever spiralling costs of hiring buses.



We have also been very fortunate through a series of successful funding applications to enable us to replace and renew old pieces of equipment and to identify and purchase further equipment for us to engage best with young people and the wider community.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank people who have helped us in the last number of years to deliver our programme of work.

To the funders who have supported us financially, in particular:

The Education Authority
Department of Education
UK Youth
Youth Justice Agency
NIHE
Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS)
Co-operation Ireland
Belfast City Council
National Lottery Community Fund
Girls Club Union
ASDA Foundation

To all the youth and community groups we have worked in partnership with. In particular:

Camberwell Court
Newington Housing Association
Mountcollyer Youth Club
Newington Residents Group
Artillery Youth Centre
New Lodge Youth Centre
Ardoyne Youth Club
John Paul II Youth Club
Dean Clarke Foundation
Waterworks Sports Facility
Limestone United

And to all our committed staff, volunteers and local residents who support us in delivering our work

And a big thanks to the young people for participating in the youth centre and all the parents / guardians for their support throughout the years