



Annual Report 2023/24

Programming

Throughout this period we operated from our premises 6 evenings per week and our nightly Drop in facility is key as a first point of contact for a lot of the young people we work with. It is often where we can first develop the relationship to a point when personal and group development work can then take place. 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 sport 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. Crucial to the delivery of our junior sessions is the involvement of some senior members in volunteering their time to help out.



We operate late night and weekend sessions in a bid to involve as many young people as we can and Friday nights are a particular draw when we cook a nutritious meal for those attending.

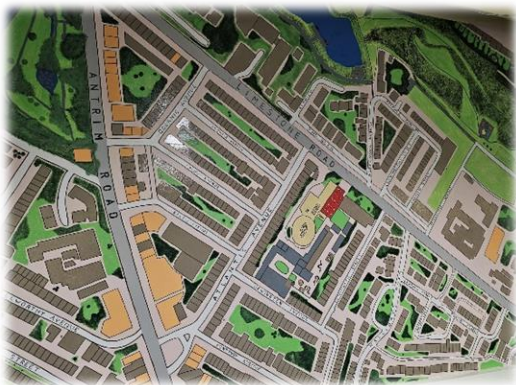
Our junior sessions continue to be delivered to 2 distinct groups to enable us to offer the children age-appropriate sessions. These sessions were first split as a result of Covid 19 restrictions but we decided to continue to go with the split sessions as numbers were so high. Children in year 3 to

year 5 were put into one group with year 6's and 7's in the other group. At certain times numbers of the upper age range had fallen but with a bit of promotion we were able to raise the numbers

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.



Outreach and Detached Work



Our Outreach and Detached work is a crucial part of our work and it allows us to keep in touch with young people while not in the youth centre. There have been times over the past 12 months that we had been put in the position of a de facto policing team when dealing with incidents of violence at the interfaces in the area, particularly in Alexandra Park. Over this period we have worked closely with our colleagues in Mountcollyer Youth Club in order to identify and challenge young people on their behaviours.

We have also helped deliver on a North Belfast wide Outreach and Detached specification in partnership with Ardoyne YC & John Paul II YC and led by New Lodge Youth Club.

This method of engagement has proved to be very beneficial in the past year 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.

Community Events

We continued to involve young people in the organisation of positive Community Events in the area throughout the year and feel that this was a key factor in 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 was a chance for young people to build on their social capital and to demonstrate the positive participation that young people can have in their community. From anti graffiti drives, litter picks, inter-generational work through to the organising and delivering of large community events it was great to see young people so keen to get involved.



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. Another event that has now become a regular in the community is our Christmas celebrations culminating in our Winter Wonderland event. Over the past three years we have worked to brighten 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 and in 2021 we were also able to extend the lights across the interface and down to the bottom of the Limestone Road.

Christmas 2023 saw all the elves busy transforming the youth centre into a walk through Winter Wonderland and this proved a great success with 280 children and young people attending with their families, 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 giving their time up to organise and volunteer.

Interface

As Holy Family premises sit on the main Interface on the Limestone Road and our local park is divided we cannot hide from the issues taking place. And while we can all agree that the Limestone area has transformed for the better over the years, we unfortunately continue to see young people engaging in negative sectarian behaviours at the interfaces in the area. 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.

Our staff have worked tirelessly to create opportunities for young people to get involved in positive activities, but quite often we are dragged away, and what seems like dragged back in time, to help deal with these incidents, often involving young people who travel to the area to cause trouble. Our message is simple – It is not wanted, so stay away if you are intent on causing trouble.



Health and Fitness

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 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, and with the beautiful Cavehill literally on our doorstep we find it a great place for young people (and staff) to challenge themselves both physically and mentally to take on the hill.

It has also proved to be a great place for a bit of reflection.

Funding

In the 2023/24 financial year we were successful in obtaining financial support from the Education Authority, UK Youth, Belfast City Council, Assets Recovery Agency, Youth Justice Agency and Newington Housing Association.

Through this funding we were able to deliver our youthwork programme as planned and were also able to deliver on a number of events such as the Lark in the Park and our Winter Wonderland event and for an environmental project in Alexandra Park.

We continue to work under a 25% cut to our core funding that was put onto the voluntary and community sector. We were able to utilise other funding to minimise the effect that these cuts could have had and ultimately we were able to stave off any possible reduction in our opening hours.



Going forward we will continue to look to further diversify our sources of funding to ensure there is no over reliance on one source of funding.

Staffing

BJ McKevitt remains as the Senior Youth Worker with a staff team consisting of 14 part time youth workers delivering on EA specifications and other funded initiatives throughout the year.

We continue at Holy Family to recognise the importance of 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.

In the past year we have had 3 members of staff attending Ulster University completing their Community Youthwork degree and 2 young people supported through Dept for Communities Jobstart Scheme.

We are also blessed to have a committed team of young people who have helped us to deliver on our junior sessions, summer schemes and community initiatives throughout the year long programme.



Premises and Resources



The youth centre premises on the Limestone Road are crucial for us in delivering our youth and community work. The premises are 50 years old and although we try our best to keep on top of maintenance we are probably in need of a focused upgrade.

With this in mind, we continue to wait on the Department of Education allocating financial support to enable us to carry out a refurbishment of the youth centre. This work will include the installation of a working kitchen and relocation and improvements to our toilet facilities. 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. Although we were successful in our application

for the refurbishment it seems that due to budgetary matters no work will be commencing in the foreseeable future.

We therefore continue to have to resource funding and carry out any maintenance works required ourselves when required to help maintain a safe and welcoming environment for all. It is also disappointing that our Overheads budget through the EA cannot be used for crucial work such as maintaining our fire extinguishers or alarm system. We have upgraded our lighting in the sports hall and are replacing any lights that go with more energy efficient LED units. We also had to fix our sports hall flooring that had swelled up creating a 'speed ramp' that created a hazard.

Our minibus also continues to be an invaluable resource for us in carrying out our work with young people, particularly over the summer months and when young people are off school. Our trailer that we had purchased in 2021 was sold as it was very rarely used.

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.

In this period we have also been able to build further storage space for our equipment as we had identified this as an issue. Industrial shelving was purchased and installed in the loft area with further shelving erected in other equipment and storage areas.

In the coming year we are now looking at involving some young people and local residents in helping us to refresh the interior and exterior of the youth centre.

