



Annual Report 2024/25

Background

Since 1974 Holy Family Youth Centre has been delivering youth work programmes focusing on the Limestone Road area. We have been based in our current premises on the Limestone Road since 1975 and are the sole full-time Voluntary youth provider in the Limestone area of North Belfast and have over this period built up an excellent track record of high-quality governance, management and leadership over this period.

Through the support of funding from the Education Authority we were able to operate youth provision over 6 evening of the week, with Saturday the only evening we did not operate on.



Our work has been assessed over the past year by the EA through their moderation processes with *All Standards Met*. In one of the recent moderations one of the Moderators quoted that; “It was evident that a wide range of skills are developed within the provision” and that there is a “strong sense of belonging within and beyond the centre” This

reflects the organisations approach to building up the ownership of the youth centre amongst the young people and the wider community and contributes to the sense of the youth centre being a hub of community life.

This has also been supported with the continuous delivery of programmes and projects which have been delivered to meet the needs of the young people who engage with our services. We ensure that there is a commitment to continuous improvement with staff taking part in nightly checkouts to reflect on our practice as a staff team and information is shared with the wider staff team.

Holy Family Youth Centre has an excellent track record in relation to Governance of the organisation with a very strong and capable Management Committee which is populated with professional people, parents and young people who have made decisions to enhance and benefit the delivery of youth provision in this local community. We have excellent quality assurance systems in place that supports the organisation in compliance and the delivery of quality services. Holy Family Youth Centre has a very strong staff team who have shown commitment throughout the years. All staff are from the local community and includes a strong mix of professionally qualified workers, staff with specialisms in SEN and young people who have been developed through their participation and progression through the youth centre.

Programming

Throughout this period we delivered on ID-23-LA-BN-004: Core Youth Work Provision Limestone and Waterworks Area and we were the lead partner in ID-24-LP-BN-001: Emotional Health and Well-Being alongside New Lodge Youth Centre, John Paul II YC and Ardoyne Youth Centre. We were also a delivery partner on the Targeted Youth Work Response in the Oldpark DEA Lower (ID-24-LP-BN-003) with New Lodge Youth Centre taking the lead.

We have a current membership of 414 young people between the ages of 7-21

Our average nightly attendance over the year is 47 for junior sessions (P3-5 and P6-7's) and 52 for seniors (year 12 and above) with Thursday and Friday evenings being most popular with senior members.

We had a total of 176 programme delivery sessions involving 221 participants (124 individual young people) Of these sessions 67 were targeted at young people aged between 11-13 with the remaining 109 sessions aimed at young people 14 and over.

Programmes delivered ranged from sessions based on healthy eating, the dangers of vaping, playwork training, through to cross community work with our local statutory partner Mountcollyer Youth Club.



In this period with the support of EA Youth Service funding we were able to open the youth centre 6 evenings per week and we see our nightly Drop-in facility as a key 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 through the local primary schools 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



Over the past year we have delivered on the Targeted Youth Work Response in the Oldpark DEA Lower (ID-24-LP-BN-003) in partnership with New Lodge Youth Club.

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 and respond to issues where young people may find themselves at an increased risk to themselves and to others. A focus for our outreach and detached staff remains to be Alexandra Park where, unfortunately over the last year

there was a sharp increase in the number of sectarian clashes involving young people.

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.

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.

Interface

As Holy Family premises sit on the main Interface on the Limestone Road and our local park in 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.



Community Events

We utilised some of the programming in this year to better equip young people with the skills required 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.

Involvement in such programmes, whether by organising or helping out at the events is 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 such as the Lark in the Park, our Easter Meet the Neighbours event or the Limestone Winter Wonderland it was great to see young people so keen to get involved.



Physical and Mental Health

As we led up the Emotional Health & Well-being programme (ID:24-LP-BN-001) this gave us a particular focus on engaging with young people and providing opportunities to exercise both their physical and mental health.

Mindfulness programmes, Therapy sessions, Walk and Talk activities were some of the ways that we were able to actively engage with young people in both a group and individual manner and discuss ways that they could build up their positive mental health and know where to go to if they or any of their peers need support.

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 summer months 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.

Staffing

Over the three EA funded programmes we were able to employ a Senior Youth Worker with a staff team consisting of 14 part time youth workers with a total of 63 youth work hours per week. We also have a 16 hour administration worker and a 22 hour cleaner.

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 have 6 staff members qualified at degree level with another staff member entering his final few months of the course.

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.



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.

In terms of measuring the impact and celebrating success, we do this by utilising a variety of methods. We collect data through surveys, informal interviews with young people and participant feedback evaluation forms where we can grasp a clear understanding of the experiences of young people who participate in our programmes throughout the year. We also

regularly involve children and young people in updating our planning and evaluation wall in the youth centre that is a young people friendly way of gathering ideas and feedback from our services. In our most recent survey we received a 92% rate from respondents with one recommendation being that we produce a quarterly news-sheet that could be delivered in the area as there was a reliance on disseminating information through social media. By defining clear outcomes and indicators of success for the programme through the identified stages, we regularly evaluate these outcomes with young people to enable us to fully measure the impact on their lives.

Through inclusive monitoring, this has ensured that the evaluation processes are inclusive and accessible to all participants including those from diverse backgrounds and abilities where language and formats will be ready for them to understand. Through stakeholder engagement sessions, participants, families, staff and community members have been involved in the evaluation process. It

is significantly important to recognise that their perspectives and inputs can provide valuable insights into the programmes impact and helps identify areas for future improvement.

We recognise and celebrate the achievements of all young people who have participated in our programme through celebratory events, ceremonies and public acknowledgments with the young people's voices and planning at the forefront. Through this, the participants families have the opportunity to directly witness the impact of our programme on the young people involved and understand the value of them being involved in the planning of their own celebration event. Through highlighting success stories, we can motivate current participants and inspire other young people to join programmes of this nature in their local community.



Throughout all of our programme in the past year, we have ensured that the CRED policy which focuses on diversity, equality and inclusion have been integrated into all aspects of the programme being delivered. It is very important that this is embedded in our work, particularly in the geographical area where we operate where we can play a huge role in creating positive community relations amongst young people through equipping “children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding and recognition of, and respect for, difference”



This includes programme design and delivery, decision making processes to promote a culture of respect and inclusivity and staff training where applicable. With the youth centre directly situated on an interface area, it is crucial that the young people within the Limestone community are provided with this opportunity as we regularly witness anti-social behaviour, mental health issues and poverty within the young people of this community.

By incorporating the principles of the Emotional health and Well-being framework, we have designed activities that promoted emotional resilience, self-care and positive mental health among young people. Throughout the past year we have offered resources and activities that have supported young people to develop their coping skills through their participation and by having a 'wellbeing for all' approach to all young people who we work with we aim to maximise the impact that involvement in youth provision can have on their lives.

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.

We have also applied to the National Lottery Sustainable Community Building fund for support that will allow us to replace all the lights in the youth centre with energy efficient LED's and also install solar panelling and other energy efficient measures.

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.

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.

We have also started the process to paint the interior of the youth centre as it is in need of a refresh and are looking to renovate some of the rooms to further improve their use.

