

## **Background and Purpose**

St Comgall's Youth Club (the Club) has been operating for more than 40 years, from a range of buildings throughout this period, providing a service for the young people of Antrim town and surrounding areas.

Our purpose is to further the personal, social, educational, and spiritual development of all children and young people without distinction, with the object of enriching their lives in a safe and appropriate environment and, to encourage them to have active and responsible participation in their community and society.

In 2016 the Club moved into the newly refurbished St Comgall's Youth Centre which offers an excellent facility providing access to a hall, outdoor areas, several smaller rooms suitable for arts and crafts, games, social and programmes. The Youth Centre also has a well equipped kitchen, pool table area, tuck shop, office, and meeting areas.

In 2021 the Club became a registered charity with our operating year running from 1 July to 30 June. We are a part-time Club, open on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.

Historically the Club received funding from the Education Authority (EA) for salary costs. However, with changes to the EA strategy, this funding ceased. As a result, the Club now operates through self-funding and a small generic grant from the EA for programme and some operational costs.

Following a period in 2023/2024 and mainly due to challenges in recruiting a Leader in Charge and funding, the Trustees made the decision to operate as a volunteer lead Club. In 2024/2025, having built up a small reserve the Club is now operating with a Leader in Charge, Assistant Leader in Charge and a range of volunteers.

## **Objectives and Activities of the Charity**

The Club aims to provide a space where young people can relax, unwind, socialise, meet other young people, and develop friendships in a safe environment; increase confidence, self-esteem, and emotional well-being; support the development of skills, increase awareness and active participation in their wider community.

## **Membership**

The Club is open to all young people aged from 8 to 25 years. The number of registered members has continued to increase from 240 in 2023/24 to 256 in 2024/25.

Attendance has remained high with on average 50 – 60 (P5's and P6's) attending on Friday nights and 35 to 45 (P7, Y8 and above) attending on Saturday nights.

## **Achievements**

The Club has continued to focus on confidence and participation and throughout 2024/25 we have achieved the following:

## **Kitchen**

This year we expanded our cooking and baking programme, introducing a dedicated Thursday evening baking sessions. Eight young people took part in making a variety of items, including sausage rolls, Easter rice crispy buns, filled cookies, and tray bakes. On Friday evenings we continued the same cookery from the previous evening however our junior members had the chance to get creative, experimenting with different fillings and decorative designs. The popularity and success of these sessions have inspired us to extend the nightly kitchen activities into a fuller, structured programme next year.

## **Art & Craft**

Over the summer of 2024 we reviewed and reorganised the space available and created a dedicated arts and crafts room which enabled our weekly programme to continue to flourish on Friday evenings, offering young people a wide variety of creative activities such as school bag charm making, slime production, colouring and laminated bookmarks, bracelet making, Hama bead fridge magnets, hair braiding with beads, and macramé plant holders. Across both Friday and Saturday sessions, themed projects were also delivered to enhance seasonal events including Easter, Halloween, Christmas, and the end of summer celebrations. Halloween proved particularly memorable, with 56 participants enjoying pumpkin carving on one evening alone. Regular sessions engaged up to 40 young people, giving them the chance to explore new skills, express creativity, and take home their own unique masterpieces.

## **Being Active**

Nightly sports activities, both indoor and outdoor, were delivered throughout the year and enjoyed by members of all ages. Young people took part in a wide range of games including pool, football, dodgeball, and table tennis, promoting physical activity, teamwork, and social interaction. We also refreshed our hall programme by introducing new activities such as chairball, parachute games, badminton, and junior games, ensuring variety and fun for all participants. In addition, we invested in new outdoor basketball nets, creating another opportunity for members to enjoy active play within our outdoor space and adding further choice to our already extensive games roster.

## **Self-Improvement Programmes**

An eight-week self-awareness and confidence building programme was delivered by an external facilitator on Friday and Saturday evenings, with funding support from the Clear Project. The sessions explored key themes including mood matters, self-belief, emotional regulation, kindness to self and others, and setting personal dreams and goals for the future. An arts and crafts element were incorporated to encourage creativity and reflection. The programme was well attended, with 50 young members taking part in one or more sessions. Feedback highlighted that participants reported increased confidence, improved coping strategies, and a stronger belief in their own potential.

One of our volunteers undertook their level 3 OCN in Community Youth Work through YouthLink, which they subsequently achieved. A significant part of the OCN was to deliver a 6-8 week programme, to be developed and lead by young people. The group choose to develop a quiet space which they named the Zen Den. This was something the young people were saying would be important to those young members who have additional learning and behavioural needs and needed somewhere to go if they felt over stimulated. The Club now has a dedicated space developed by the young people in the project who choose the space purpose for the space, the wall paint colours, the soft furnishings, colouring books, furniture, and lighting. The Zen Den.

On Thursday evenings, eight young people worked together to create a bespoke pool table cover to help keep the table clean and protected from dust and dirt. The large flat wooden board was first painted white, then added the details of the youth club logo, which they carefully outlined and filled in using acrylic paints. To preserve their artwork, the finished design was sealed with a coat of lacquer/clear varnish, leaving a durable and creative addition to the club.

### **Junior Leaders**

Junior Leaders have continued to support the operation of the Club working alongside our adult volunteers. They help by running the tuck shop, assisting the activities in the hall, supervision of the games room and the outdoor space. They play pool with other members encouraging them to participate in the nightly session. They have also taken part in our themed nights that we have had including our Summer Hawaiian Themed night, Halloween Spooktacular night and our Christmas Jumper Night.

### **Acknowledgements**

**Volunteers:** Like many community groups, we know how difficult it can be to find and keep volunteers, especially on a Saturday night. Even so, we are proud to have a pool of around 30 dedicated volunteers, some giving their time week after week and others stepping in when they can. The Trustees want to give a heartfelt thank you to all the parents and guardians who offer their time and skills — your support is what makes it possible for the Club to open its doors and welcome young people.

As we reflect on 2024/25, we are incredibly proud that we have continued to provide a vital and much-loved service for the young people of Antrim. This has only been possible thanks to the support of our Leader and Assistant Leader in Charge and dedication of our volunteers and the support of our community. While challenges around volunteer numbers and funding remain, we are delighted to have built on our membership year on year. We look forward with confidence to expanding our capacity, growing our expertise, and creating even more opportunities for learning, growth, and fun for our members.

**Funders:** We would also like to thank the following organisations for their support and funding. The Education Authority, The Public Health Agency /Clear Project, Black Santa. With their valuable financial support, we were able to provide a range of programmes and activities.