Peace4Youth

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Northern Ireland - Ireland
European Regional Development Fund

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youth pact
QUALITY
& IMPACT

YouthPact Evaluation:

Relationship, Relevance and Rigour to Maximise Impact within Peace4Youth

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Northern Ireland
Executive
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Foreword

Co-operation Ireland, on behalf of the project partners, is delighted to share this evaluation of YouthPact, the Quality and Impact Body for the EU funded Peace4Youth Programme.

A key element of the approach underpinning the work of YouthPact has been the development of a learning culture within the Peace4Youth Programme, leading to the identification and dissemination of effective practice models as they emerge during its implementation. It is within this vein, that we are sharing the learning from the initiative.

It is important to note, the evaluation didn't set out to capture and relay all the actions and activities of the project, it is less about what we did and more about why and how we did it: through building relationships, maintaining relevance and professional rigour.

I wish to thank our YouthPact partners, National Youth Council of Ireland, Pobal and Ulster University for the focussed and fruitful role and contribution they made through the Joint Management for the project. We commend SEUPB for their foresight in conceiving a Quality and Impact Body and are grateful for its support in funding the YouthPact project. We also wish to acknowledge SEUPB's flexibility when working with us to modify and develop the project in order to maximise the benefits of the projects to organisations, workers and ultimately the children and young people taking part. We further acknowledge and appreciate the collaboration and support from the Department for the Economy of Northern Ireland and the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth in Ireland.

I also want to thank the project team for their commitment and dedication to the project. The team, led by Eliz McArdle (UU), has been consistent and adaptive in its make-up and its approaches, which have been key factors in the success of the initiative. The team's ability to create, hold and facilitate a range of spaces to hear workers' professional concerns and pressures, as well as developing ideas and brokering solutions, is also recognised as a key skill in a Quality and Impact Body's toolbox.

The evaluation reminds us of the effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic and the ensuing public health measures, which led to the rapid transition to online and home-based working. The pandemic highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability as well as the capacity to improvise to meet need in the face of change. Examples of YouthPact's ability to respond in this way are illustrated throughout the evaluation. It is however worth noting that these are core youth work skills. They were essential ingredients pre-pandemic and have subsequently been tested significantly in this pandemic. These approaches are possibly even more relevant now as we seek a way out of it.

Finally, our aim in producing this evaluation was to ascertain YouthPact's effectiveness and impact, with a view to formulating recommendations for future similar projects. It is our hope that this report will help inform and shape the development, nature, range and scope of such Bodies in the future, not just in PEACE PLUS, but across the statutory funding landscape on the island of Ireland.

Context and Background

Peace4Youth is the programme specifically developed for the Children and Young People Objective 2 (Action 2.1) of the European Union's PEACE IV Programme. It is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and supported by the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in Ireland.

This is a four-year peacebuilding project (2017-2021), operating across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. The programme uses a youth work approach to address some of the most entrenched insecurities, inequalities and instability, targeting 7600 young people aged 14-24 who are disadvantaged, excluded or marginalised, have deep social and emotional needs and are at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, violence or dissident activity. There are 11 Peace4Youth delivery projects within the funding stream entitled Peace4Youth, as well as YouthPact, the Quality and Impact Body.

The focus of the Peace4Youth projects is on Good Relations, Personal Development, and Citizenship, which will bring about a positive change in the form of clear, meaningful, and sustainable 'distance travelled' for those young people who participate. The overall Peace4Youth programme aims to enhance the capacity of children and young people to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society.

YouthPact, as the Quality and Impact Body for Peace4Youth, works with the 11 delivery projects to promote and support a culture of continuous improvement and to provide training and resources that enhance the impact of the work for participating young people.

YouthPact is a partnership of four organisations: Co-operation Ireland (Lead Partner), Ulster University, the National Youth Council of Ireland and POBAL.

The evaluation team from the Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations at Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) was contracted to complete the impact evaluation for Specific Objective 2.1 of the European Union's PEACE IV Programme.

Evaluation Report Structure

This report reflects on six key areas of YouthPact's work: training events, partnership specific events, coordinators' meetings, Young Voices events, reflective practice hubs and accredited youth work training. YouthPact have proposed improvements and recommendations as part of each key area, that emerged from analysis of the available data. These were drawn from a range of sources including participant feedback forms, focus groups, and interviews, spanning the four years of the Peace4Youth Programme.

Acknowledgement

The YouthPact team would like to thank all the coordinators, workers and young people that we have worked with. We particularly want to thank those who took part in this evaluation.

Evaluation Methodology

Aim and Objectives of Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to gather the views of workers and stakeholders on the role and function of YouthPact; to ascertain its effectiveness and impact; with a view to formulating recommendations for future similar projects.

The objectives of this evaluation are to:
- Understand the impact of having a 'Quality and Impact Body' for workers and subsequently for young people who took part in the Peace4Youth programme.
- Identify aspects of YouthPact's role which were most and least effective.
- Identify the elements that were most important, least important or missing from YouthPact.

Project Methods

A mixed-methods approach was used in this evaluation:

Desk-based research
This involved a quantitative and qualitative analysis of existing materials gathered through the life of the YouthPact project from 2017-2021. This includes:
- Participant attendance at YouthPact events
- Recorded outputs from YouthPact activity
- Review of Phase One and Phase Two mid-term evaluations of Peace4Youth by Queen's University Belfast
- Analysis of a series of participant evaluations carried out after each of the sessions. This analysis is based on participant evaluations from:
  - 21 of the training sessions.
  - 11 Cluster group sessions.
  - 4 OCN programmes run in Derry, Fermanagh, and 2 cohorts in Belfast.
  - 10 Partnership-development events.

Jisc online surveys
The online survey gathered qualitative information from Peace4Youth workers on the extent of their contact with YouthPact interventions and to elicit their views on their experience of and with YouthPact and the impact of same.

Qualitative Semi-structured Interviews
This evaluation used semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of individuals with experience and/or knowledge of the various YouthPact interventions and training programmes.

(a) Paired semi-structured interviews:
In paired semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to discuss one specific YouthPact intervention that both interviewees have been involved with. Each paired interview focused on a specific intervention – thus leading to data on 5 different interventions. These interventions were:

1. Partnership development sessions
2. Coordinators' reflection hub meetings
3. Reflective practice hubs/cluster groups
4. Young Voices
5. Training Events

(b) Stakeholder semi-structured interviews:
In Semi-structured interviews with external stakeholders, participants discussed their involvement with YouthPact, their views on the impact of YouthPact within the Peace4Youth programme and any wider impacts beyond the programme.

Participant Selection Criteria

All respondents have had previous substantial contact with YouthPact and the Peace4Youth programme. Purposive sampling was used as follows:

- For the Jisc online survey, 23 workers from across 11 projects were targeted. These workers had all taken part in more than three YouthPact events over three years.
- For semi-structured paired interviews, 10 workers from 10 different projects were targeted. These workers had taken part in a specific intervention, designed and delivered by YouthPact.
- For semi-structured interviews with external stakeholders, 2 external people who have had extensive contact with YouthPact over the past three years were targeted.

35 adults in total took part in this evaluation.

Data Analysis

This evaluation is a qualitative analysis of the work and experiences of the YouthPact project. This data was thematically analysed to identify and collate common perspectives from the experiences of Peace4Youth participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). NVivo12 was used for qualitative data analysis due to its efficiency in managing data in disparate formats and for its thematic analysis functions. The dominant themes were drawn from the data gathered in order to interpret the YouthPact experience from the worker's perspective.

YouthPact deliverables, targets and quantitative outputs are presented to illustrate activity and reach.
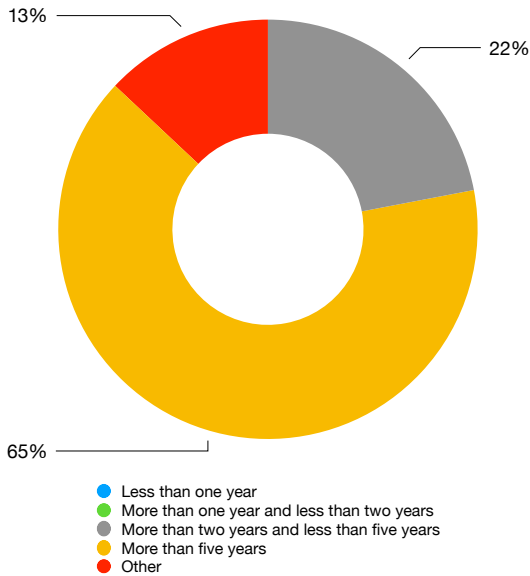
Evaluation Team

The evaluation was undertaken by YouthPact's Ulster University Project Manager, Ulster University Development Officer and Co-operation Ireland Capacity Building Development Officer.

Arnold and Norton (2018) emphasize Zuber-Skerritt's notion of 'practice-changing practice'. With this goal in mind, the research adopts the perspective of the 'pracademic', those 'bridging the ivory tower and the world of practice for the benefit of our communities' (Powell et al., 2018:62). The concept of 'pracademic' is variously understood and defined in academia and literature, with Powell et al (ibid) presenting two specific models evident in this YouthPact evaluation. First, is a pracademic relationship which is a collaboration between 'academics who are interested in practice concerns and practitioners who are reflexive and seek to implement based on research' (ibid, 64). These partnerships are deemed to yield shared understandings with greater opportunities for real-world application. The second conception of the pracademic is of a single person who acts as both a practitioner and a researcher. This pracademic requires high levels of self-assurance to have confidence and legitimacy in both worlds (Kuhn, 2002) and brings the added value of 'practitioners with field experience and who are willing to still step back and critically seek to understand the literature in an effort to determine its value on society' (Wooster and Shaffer, 2005 cited in Powell et al, 2018: 65).
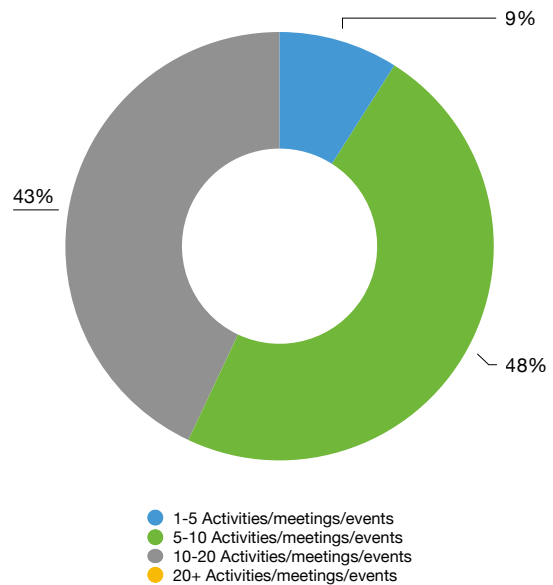
The configuration of this research team incorporates both these models of pracademic. Joanne Stainsby, Co-operation Ireland Capacity Building Development Officer is a YouthPact practitioner co-writing this evaluation; Leighann McConville, UU Development Officer is a pracademic as conceptualised in the latter. The YouthPact Project Manager, Eliz McArdle is an academic, working to the former definition of the pracademic relationship; of the collaboration of academics and researchers, with impact in mind.

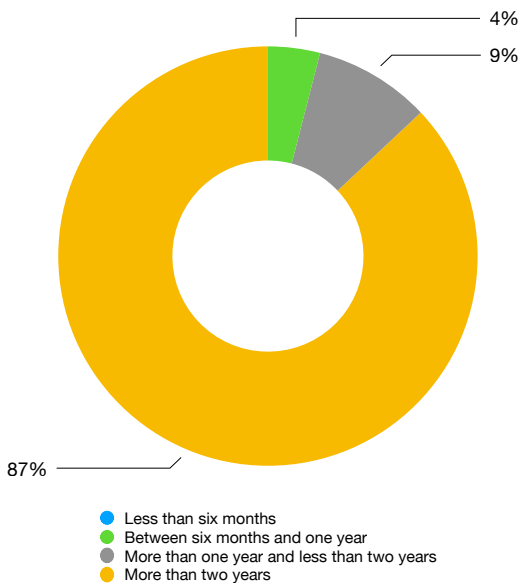# YouthPact: Role and Functions with Peace4Youth Projects

23 Peace4Youth workers participated in an online survey to evaluate the role and function of YouthPact from their perspective. For the purposes of this report, comments from participants of the Jisc online survey are identified as OS1, OS2, etc. All projects were represented in the online survey. The respondents were all experienced practitioners, each with more than two years' experience.

13%
22%
65%
● Less than one year
● More than one year and less than two years
● More than two years and less than five years
● More than five years
● Other

Those surveyed had substantial involvement in the Peace4Youth programme with 87% having been employed for more than two years in Peace4Youth projects.

4%
9%
87%
● Less than six months
● Between six months and one year
● More than one year and less than two years
● More than two years

Similarly, respondents reported having significant contact with and involvement in YouthPact activities with 91% having attended 5 or more YouthPact meetings/events over the past four years:

9%
43%
48%
● 1-5 Activities/meetings/events
● 5-10 Activities/meetings/events
● 10-20 Activities/meetings/events
● 20+ Activities/meetings/events

Quality and Impact

In terms of quality improvement, staff training is just one piece of the jigsaw, with YouthPact taking on support roles that were outside of teaching or passing on knowledge. (The project management/ organisational development work is described later in Partnership specific events on page 22). For some this role was a motivational one:

Q. Describe the role that YouthPact played:

'Vision for youth workers' (OS4)

'Having the workers to talk to – I find people with passion inspiring' (OS19)

For others the role was in a brokering capacity; relaying information to SEUPB from the collective voice of Peace4Youth projects:

> 'YouthPact has been very supportive to our project especially during the coordinators' meeting as they took on feedback and relayed this back to SEUPB.' (OS15)

Respondents referred to their learning from YouthPact staff and YouthPact events feeding into an improved delivery with young people:

> 'I think that YouthPact has, over the course of the programme, ensured that appropriate tools for delivery have met a high standard. Their guidance, advice as well as workshops have been beneficial and appropriate.' (OS3)

> 'YouthPact has provided training opportunities to youth workers on the [project name] programme which has helped to support the young people and improve the programme delivery.' (OS14)

> 'Launch of publications and resources enabled me to get an understanding of how to use certain resources during sessions that young people would benefit from and enjoy.' (OS13)

Training in practical resources, tools and methods were cited by respondents as important for improved delivery:

> 'Also, it was memorable getting ideas of exercises, tools, icebreakers etc. to use with young people.' (OS7)

> 'All the training, but also the resources that have been regularly sent out – it was great to have so much information to refer to in one place (e.g. the e-zine). (OS21)

Individual sessions or themes were specifically mentioned by respondents as noteworthy, as these sessions occurred in a timely fashion, responding to a specific or emerging need for the young people:

> 'Kicking' [Mental health resource] was amazing. It has helped my group open up and me to assess the need of the group and identify supportive approaches to help young people.' (OS17)

> 'Youth work in a digital space. As this became our only method of delivery for a few months. I was able to apply the learning and skills development from this training to my practice. Even though we are back doing face-to-face work I have been able to use these skills to be creative and flexible to be able to deliver sessions remotely to young people and engage online if they are unable to make it into the youth centre.' (OS13)

> 'Dr. Gail and mentoring. The 'conversations on mentoring' session had a big influence on how I approached the mentoring side of my job. It provided me with the knowledge to adapt my approach depending on the particular young person I was working with at any given time.' (OS9)

For Peace4Youth workers, not only was the quality of the response significant, but its speed and relevance to the contexts that workers were encountering with young people, was critical. The ability to pivot, adapt and respond quickly was a feature of the YouthPact approach and informs a key recommendation for a similar Quality and Impact Structure within the PEACE PLUS Programme. When asked about the need for this type of body and function for the future, Stakeholder One responded unequivocally making reference to the necessarily responsive nature of the work:

> '100% absolutely no doubt about that. Yeah, and especially in the, you know, with the time frames of these kinds of programmes where you don't have the luxury of time to sort of work through issues on your own. Like you know you need, you really do need to have that – That responsive body in place to quickly pick up on the issues with you and work through the issues with you so that partnerships are running more smoothly, professional development training needs are addressed quickly as well.' (Stakeholder One)

The YouthPact Knowledge Exchange

Across the Peace4Youth project, 446 unique participants have been involved with YouthPact taking part in training events, reflective practice hubs, entry level training and the OCN Introduction to Youth Work Practice Certificate/Award. With such a vast number of participants with wide-ranging interests and expertise, YouthPact employed a knowledge exchange paradigm to maximise peer learning. This approach begins with bringing workers together and facilitating collective enquiry on themes or issues of common concern:

> 'A chance to share struggles, ideas, solutions and celebrate achievements with colleagues across programmes.' (OS10)

The dialogue that ensued was enriching as it brought together voices that are not usual bedfellows and in doing so, workers felt comfort in recognising that their own professional issues were echoed in other places:

> 'Bringing workers together who you would not normally have the opportunity to meet with.' (OS12)

> 'Hearing that other staff were struggling with digital youth work online and listening to the issues they were facing helped me be creative and use different methods of engaging with young people online which helped resolve issues my project was facing.' (OS13)

The value of YouthPact training and contact has been felt right across the Peace4Youth workforce from more experienced workers to recent entrants to the youth work profession. For experienced youth workers, the training was significant in acting as a refresher of youth work concepts and for deeper reflections on the purpose and principles of the work:

> 'Just being able to refresh on 'Why we do youth work and the purpose'. (OS4)

> As a worker, YouthPact has given me opportunities to look at the work I do on a deeper level.' (OS6)

> 'Some of the training I participated in gave me a refresher of training I had completed before and stuff I had learnt when doing my degree.' (OS13)

For newer workers, the training provided space for the gaining of knowledge while building confidence and core skills for youth work. This comment comes from a respondent with between 2-5 years' experience, to illustrate this:

> 'The training provided has helped me build my confidence and knowledge in key areas and themes that have helped in my facilitation and delivery to young people.' (OS14)

Trust in Expertise

Knowledge exchange is about opening knowledge to a wider audience; ultimately that academic knowledge has societal reach and impact. The knowledge and practice wisdom of the YouthPact staff was recognised by research respondents as significant for them – the contact they had with YouthPact staff members was as a direct result of the perceived levels of expertise and knowledge they had:

> 'YouthPact staff had been really helpful and innovative; that had in-depth knowledge of working with young people and their communities....' (OS16)

> 'YouthPact staff have been very supportive. Whilst providing training, they always have provided intense support, guidance and follow-ups to these.' (OS17)

The team knowledge and expertise was not just important in terms of the wisdom that could be imparted, but the sense of trust and confidence that individuals felt in the YouthPact team emanated from this respect:

'I use this word trust a lot, but people really did trust you and I think they had such faith in the guidance that you were able to give and so on. And you know because you were saying this having such a high level of expertise and experience in youth work and in you know peace programmes as well and that depth of knowledge of youth work approaches.' (Stakeholder One)

The support was sought out due to the respect that individuals had for the YouthPact staff and the reputation for objectivity:

'YouthPact has at times felt like a go-to place and through their own youth workers offering advice has allowed me to steer a path that suited all young people no matter their abilities.' (OS3)

'My [YouthPact] project officer provided a listening ear when needed and an objective viewpoint when sounding out concerns and issues.' (OS2)

Adaptability was a further feature of the team approach that was appreciated in responding to changing and emerging project needs:

'You couldn't have had a better team or people you know to be in place for helping youth workers' professional development and you know arranging training programmes and training courses and being responsive to training needs as they came up.' (Stakeholder One)

The 'added value' associated with the YouthPact team for their objectivity and experience is hard to quantify but has been a notable aspect of YouthPact's role and function. However, the adaptability and trust in the expertise came to the fore during the Covid-19 pandemic where the Peace4Youth projects made a swift move to online delivery. The Peace4Youth response was a resilient and resourceful one (McConville and McArdle, 2020) and the support role of YouthPact was viewed by one interviewee as integral to this transition:

'I don't know what would have happened to the programme. I mean everybody like worked their asses off to move heaven and earth to move the programme online and… to work with you guys and to work with each other to share - share best practice. Even like the very simple stuff - technical abilities like how do you work Google Classroom? How do you work Zoom?' (Stakeholder One)

This was made possible by the strong foundations of trust and relationships having been laid in the early part of the programme:

'By that stage there were really good relationships. People, you know, knew each other from the different projects and so on and… To be able to share the resources and to lift up the phone and you know to go on to a zoom call with 20 youth workers and say "look, I've tried this and it worked really well". I mean to keep the programme going, at that point…. I mean if those relationships - if you guys hadn't helped broker all of those relationships in the early stages of the programme like it would have been, I think that switch to online would have been much more difficult.' (Stakeholder One)

Building a Peace4Youth Programme Community

The vision for the Peace4Youth programme was to 'enhance the capacity of young people to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society' (EU, 2017). Whilst this is the common goal for all the delivery projects, the delivery mechanisms, methods and curriculum content differed widely across the eleven partnerships. The requirement for a Quality and Impact Body was developed to mitigate the potential for mission drift that can emerge across a large programme such as this, with many different small and large partners, whose priorities and approaches could have been somewhat disparate:

'I thought we could have ended up with a very fragmented disparate PEACE strand and PEACE programme if we didn't have something that would drive it up to a programme; if we didn't have something to drive conversations between providers; to find commonality in what they were delivering or what they were meant to be delivering. We need something in the middle to make this a programme.' (Stakeholder Two)

The role therefore was more than practitioner support and quality improvement but about fostering a cohesiveness within the programme. The cohesion was two-fold – first for projects to maintain close alignment to the programme principles and outcome areas that connect to the overall vision:

'We needed a mechanism at the heart of it to keep bringing things back to what or how the... the policy translated into the outcomes and principles' (Stakeholder Two)

Secondly, where projects build collegiality with each other, a stronger collective amongst delivery organisations could build reciprocity and mutual appreciation; which can feed into a collective pride and identity. This role, in bringing people together in a purposeful way, was also seen to be instrumental in building towards a common vision. This function was a core feature of the YouthPact approach:

'It's building a community, a programme community rather than having x number of projects doing their own thing. Working as a community with projects, is a good way to put it. YouthPact create a feeling of....maybe unity is too strong....but you create a feeling of common purpose, moving in the same direction. The outcomes were there, everybody was charged with working with young people towards those outcomes. You covered that, you covered principles, you covered the way of working. There is a sense of community in the programme.' (Stakeholder Two)

'Having YouthPact as the glue holding the whole thing together.....holding the youth work practice together.' (Stakeholder One)

In a busy programme such as Peace4Youth, all support and development actions by YouthPact needed to be well-timed and devised for the maximum impact so that workers felt the interventions to be worthwhile. Discussions were about 'not just what you are delivering but how you are delivering it' (Stakeholder Two). Where some organisations had a particularly sharp focus on delivery targets, with less attention to the approach and the process, YouthPact played a role in developing the reflective space:

'Opportunities for deep reflection amongst the players; probably people didn't want to.... They just wanted to get on and deliver the programme..... YouthPact has brought people together to talk about issues and opportunities and challenges together in a reflective space as much as a delivery space.' (Stakeholder Two)

The range of learning methodologies used by YouthPact in different formats and for different stakeholders were pivotal to achieving this. These are explored in detail throughout this evaluation.
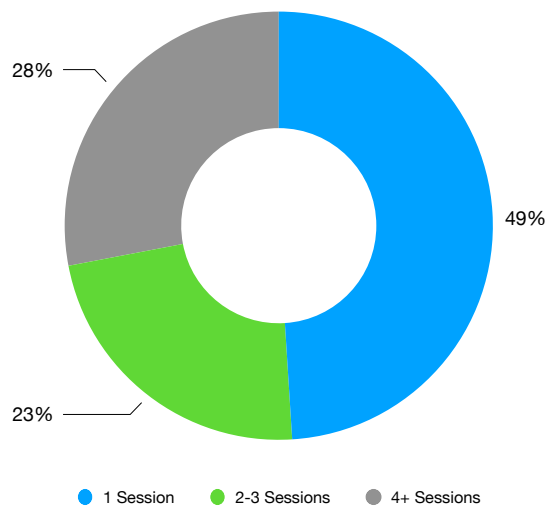
Training Events

Between December 2017 and November 2021, 86 training events with 446 unique participants were carried out. This includes large and small-scale training events, reflective practice clusters and the OCN Level 2 Award & Certificate in Youth Work Practice. Each event was open to all projects, with some events targeted at early career practitioners and others at more experienced practitioners.

(The OCN programme and the reflective practice sessions will be explored later. This section will focus on training events only).

Number of Training Sessions Undertaken by Participants

28%
49%
23%

● 1 Session   ● 2-3 Sessions   ● 4+ Sessions

Breakdown of Participants on Training Sessions per Project

19%
9%
6%
6%
5%
7%
7%
6%
6%
10%
10%
9%

● Amplify   ● Breakthrough   ● Futures
● Heroes   ● Journeys   ● MPower
● Peacebytes   ● Strive   ● Thirdspace
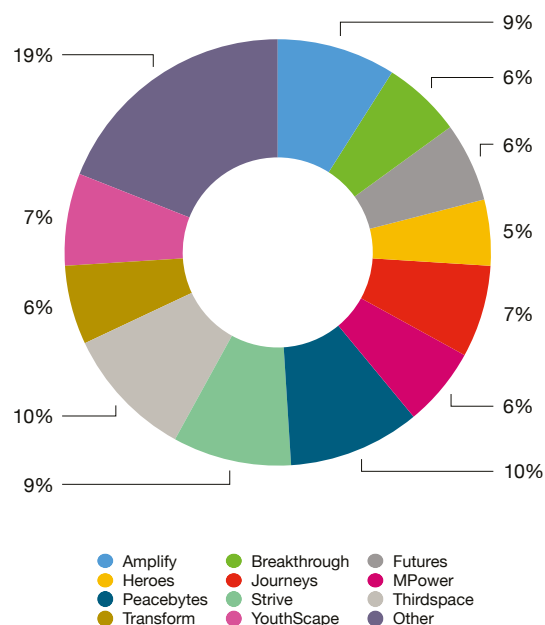● Transform   ● YouthScape   ● Other

Training events were delivered by experts in the training area. Each event was attended by at least one YouthPact Development Officer who was a contact point for the facilitator and the participants. Some partnerships went on to seek training for their specific partnership as a result of positive feedback from their staff. Presented is an overview of the comments from Participant Evaluations regarding training along with YouthPact practitioner insights.

YouthPact have delivered a vast array of training events over the course of the programme, the themes of which are outlined here (see table of sessions and themes on page 15). However, the design and delivery of youth work training for Peace4Youth workers is not simply a matter of devising curriculum materials that cover the necessary skills and themes. YouthPact training worked to explore the complexities of the contexts that workers encountered in their work and expand the thinking and attitudes needed to navigate the messy realities of doing youth work. Bessant (2011:60-61) describes the education of youth workers as a place to understand setting, to gain technical skills and knowledge, whilst widening horizons of thought:

> '*Youth work in common with other forms of modern human service work, requires the capacity to make good judgments, to design and engage in complex and often diverse social interventions. It is multi-faceted, dynamic, messy, and unpredictable work that requires expertise that cannot be rote learned by following rules or instructions.*'

> '..... *the skills and knowledge that make up good practice cannot be separated from the ideas, knowledge and interest that inform them.*'

The YouthPact training sessions contained content of interest and salience to the participants but of equal importance they were run by facilitators using youth work methodologies; thus, modelling the behaviours and learning approaches which are applicable to community youth work developmental settings. Learning was derived through three approaches (a) activities and learning; (b) experience and learning and (c) praxis.

Activities and Learning

Activities have been consistently viewed as a driving force for youth work practice. Where limited analysis or purpose is attached to the activity, it can appear that activities have frivolous intent and outcomes. In truth, even these are more recently given greater meaning, with light-hearted activities being recognised as stress-releasing, with mental health benefits. In efficacious youth work, activities are not run for their own sake, but chosen and delivered with purposeful intent and for their potential for learning. Harte (2010:90) states that activities are tools that allow 'the educational processes of youth work to take place' and 'act as a catalyst to initiate and hasten young people's development and learning.' The use of individual and group activities was a feature of YouthPact training sessions.

Experience and Learning

Experience and learning are differentiated from experiential learning by Usher (1993) who views the former as insights gained through everyday lived experience, whilst experiential learning is formulaic structured activity to draw out the learning. For YouthPact learning events, a programme of activities and encounters are constructed to extract the learning. However, as Harte (2010: 93) describes, it is within the debriefing and the reflexivity that meaning and learning is constructed:

'The key to learning through experience lies not only in the quality of experience, which is to be had, but in the ability to reflect upon, deconstruct, internalise and use the experience to promote growth. In short, the evaluation of the experience is, in the youth work context, often the most significant contribution towards the learning of all the parties.'

The training events have been deliberately and purposefully constructed to draw from the professional experiences of the workers and draw out patterns and meanings with insights helpful for the individual worker and for his or her peers who are part of the group.

Praxis

Praxis is the process whereby a theory, lesson or skill is enacted. Smith (2011) describes practice and theory thus:

'Practice is often depicted as the act of doing something. It is usually contrasted to 'theory' – abstract ideas about some thing or phenomenon.'

From theory, lessons or insights can be derived and these can be shaped or infused into practice. Praxis is the considered action of a thinking reflective practitioner. YouthPact considers theory to be a core part of all their learning events, to help understand the social world. However, understanding is not enough. Without action to improve practice, theory is pointless. For YouthPact, this formed the ethos for all learning events.

Themes for Training Events

The training calendars and choice of themes was developed with a two-prong approach, listening to the on-going needs of the projects and being tuned into opportunities available that they have not specifically asked for but may be relevant to them or of interest to them. Training events related to the three core outcome areas of the PEACE IV Children and Young People's strand: Good Relations, Personal Development and Citizenship.

Themes also emerged from participant feedback at events, whereby ideas were sought about further training needs of the workforce.

To extend reach, many training sessions were run across more than one location – e.g., mentoring in Derry/Londonderry and Jordanstown. Other training sessions were run by different facilitators to draw in various perspectives on one theme – e.g., Maria Perkins and Debs Irwin on young people as social activists. Specific sessions were designed to provide workers with resources that could be rolled out in their workplace – e.g., peacebuilding resources from both Dr. Martin McMullan and David

Gardiner. Experts with extensive research were enlisted to bring specialist voices to comment on specific topics such as Dr. Ken Harland and Dr. Colm Walsh on work with young men or Jarlath Benson on advanced groupwork. Youth Work is at the heart of this programme and youth work approaches were promoted and practiced, with bespoke training on online youth work by Eliz McArdle to the distinctiveness of youth work practice by Dr. Mark Hammond. To more fully understand the nature and range of seminars covered, the following groupings illustrate the variety of themes and approaches:

Thematic training seminars	Citizenship Border Lives Young people with autism spectrum conditions What is this peace? Diverse connections Adverse Childhood Experiences Young people as social activists Working with young men – Introduction and/or Advanced work
Youth work approaches and skills	Groupwork training Mentoring training LIFEMAPS – youth work to boost mental health Distinctive elements of youth work practice. Introduction to youth work Introduction to facilitation skills Introduction to life coaching Introduction to motivational interviewing.
Operational issues for running youth projects	Conversations on safeguarding Conversations on programme design and content Conversations on recruitment and retention Self-care Introduction to youth work in the online space Digital Youth work skills. How to make the most of monitoring and evaluation.

For the purposes of this evaluation, comments from participant session evaluations are noted as P.E., followed by the date of the event. Commentary from paired interviews with youth workers are noted as YW1, YW2 etc.

New Voices, New Concepts

Workers appreciated the range of voices and trainers running these events. Session evaluations consistently referred to the expertise and experience of the facilitators:

> *'Well-delivered by an expert in the field of young men's work' (P.E., 30/01/2020)*

> *'Excellent training and great to listen to Eliz who is clearly very knowledgeable and passionate about this.' (P.E., 14/06/2019)*

> *'Duncan Morrow's input was very helpful, encouraging us about how what young people learn now on the programme, can birth something for future living.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

> *'Emily's theory about phronesis really encouraged me.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)*

> *'The diary is very useful. Gail is very insightful.' (P.E., 30/05/2018)*

The training gave Peace4Youth workers easy access to a wide range of voices. Hearing different ideas and perspectives was valued by workers:

> *'I think at times you can get a wee bit 'stale' in the things you're delivering and sort of look at the same old things and having that different approach from different people and staff I think.' (YW1)*

However, hearing other voices in and of itself is not enough – it is the merit attached to the facilitators and the respect attached to their experience and track-record that was appreciated within the training sessions:

> *'The advanced workshop with Ken Harland with young men [was memorable]. He had done so much research with different groups, all over the world like, and just the wealth of knowledge that he had was something else.' (YW2)*

> *'Having people like Joe Hawkins we talked about [already in the interview]….Awk everyone… Gail Neil, Ken Harland. These are people that have worked in youth work and progressed and because they have a wealth of knowledge in the area and research, but they also have a wealth of experience and practice so when they facilitate learning with you and sort of teach you something, I get a lot out of it.' (YW1)*

The importance of this expertise was not merely sharing space with individuals who were eminent in their field, but how the facilitators impart this knowledge to the learners. For YouthPact events, the participants identified specific concepts or theoretical knowledge they could take away with them:

> *'Clear definition of citizenship and how it is still relevant in today's society.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

> *'Using mentoring as a sense-making process.' (P.E., 30/05/2018)*

> *'Positive mindset to "barriers" (P.E., 16/11/2020)*

> *'Corey Keyes model of mental health.' (P.E., 14/06/2019)*

> *'The whole idea about building trust across Lederach's pyramid.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)*

> *'I'm leaving with a greater understanding of our [Group work] contract is important and that conflict is a positive energy in our group.' (P.E., 17/04/2018)*

> *'Groups grow by what they can share – Rule #1' . (P.E., 17/04/2018)*

> *'Supporting the idea of global youth work.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

> *'History and evolution of youth work.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

> *'Contact hypothesis.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)*

*'The idea of positive peace and negative peace.'
(P.E., 21/09/2018)*

'Theory of online working' (OS13)

Youth workers bring and require a great deal of motivation in their roles. Participants from these training events were inspired and motivated by what they heard. In some instances this was motivation for new ideas, but for others it was re-igniting motivation, where they had previously had a passion for a theme or area of work:

'It was almost like a re-discovery of why I want to do this and how I got involved and why I'm so good at it and then that builds into your confidence and self esteem and you become, you just become a better worker.' (YW1)

'New motivation about citizenship.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'New knowledge; passion awakened.' (P.E., 30/01/2020)

'That we have the power to be agents of change.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)

This notion of training for increasing motivation is also connected to extracting some new skill or practical tools to transfer directly to working with young people:

'New techniques and frame of mind.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)

'Useful action points to inspire/encourage young people to engage in citizenship.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'Resources, activities that worked well in exploring cultural diversity'. (P.E., 16/11/2020)

'Online resource sharing tool' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'New methods of how to run sessions and start the conversation on diversity.' (P.E. 16/11/2020)

'I've been, I've just pointblank stole methods and things that work really well or where as I like to say, sorry I adopted them.' (Laughter). (YW1)

'I have like this big box of you know skills that I didn't have before. You know I can pick and choose from which ones I want….' (YW2)

The concepts were not always new to workers, but often training reinforced the worker; reminding them of existing knowledge or acting to underline their current knowledge and skills:

'Not to underestimate the positive benefits and values of the relationship we build and develop with the young people.' (P.E., 14/06/2019)

'I will continue to make the group fun.' (P.E., 14/01/2019)

'I forgot about group maintenance, concentrating so much on content.' (P.E., 17/04/2018)

'That we are doing mentoring already and doing good.' (P.E., 30/05/2018)

'Sometimes you really wonder what you are doing and if it is credible. That theory [phronesis] validated a lot of my practice and thoughts.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)

In such busy programmes, the space to think and reflect was also a feature of training that participants valued. Where workers identified programme ideas that they had learned, in most cases this came from the sharing and discussions with other workers:

'I got some good ideas for engaging activities from other youth workers'. (28/02/2019)

'Yes, I learned a lot from my subgroup during breakout sessions, hearing about their experiences, barriers and approaches. Being less experienced than some of the others this definitely helped me.' (16/11/2020)

'Different ideas from different projects that I could use with my young people.' (P.E., 28/02/2018)

The connections were appreciated not just for the sharing of knowledge but also to connect with workers from other Peace4Youth organisations to share their experiences of the programme:

'Useful to see how to connect and chat with other programmes.' (P.E., 16/11/2020)

'Working more with other programmes and projects.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'Good to meet the other project staff working under Peace4Youth.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)

The sessions also acted as multiplier events, whereby workers took the ideas and knowledge gained through the training and brought these back to peers and project teams for maximum impact:

'Have my team reflect; swap knowledge with staff team.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)

'What will you start doing? Disseminating knowledge to the staff.' (P.E., 30/05/2018)

'Building more reflections into team meetings around 'What is this peace? [YouthPact publication and workshop].' (P.E.,21/09/2018)

The concept and practice of sharing sessions is further explored in reflective practice hubs on page 45

where specific sharing sessions were facilitated by YouthPact. Coupled with the sharing of practice, workers commented on the value of the reflective space. Often the space to think and reflect on professional practice can encourage workers to challenge their own thinking or approaches. For YouthPact the reflective sharing discussions were designed with this in mind. In this space, workers are not only reinforced in their effective practice, but notice ways in which their skills and knowledge could be strengthened:

'Find more creative and imaginative activities.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'Using history to plan sessions.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

*'Challenging myself.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

'Ask how do young people achieve all these: voice, contribution, decision making, status etc.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'More forward thinking and re-creating current programme.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

'Co-design; getting more input from young people.' (P.E., 28/02/2019)

In one training programme, participants were asked if you would change your practice as a result of the training - with all answering yes. This illustrates the transformative nature of the training and the willingness for new ideas or skills to be incorporated by workers into their practice (P.E., 08/03/2019):

Q3 Do you think you will do anything differently in your role as a result of this training?

Answered: 11
Skipped: 0
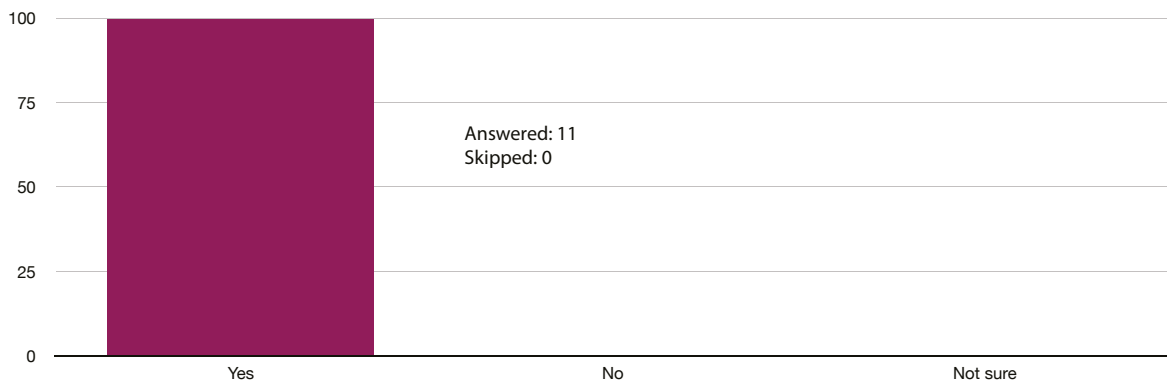
In participant evaluations, workers were asked to identify any areas of training they would like YouthPact to deliver or any areas of training that had not yet been addressed. These generated a roadmap for many of the future themes for forthcoming seminars:

> *'Understanding the impact of trauma on young people's lives.' (P.E., 30/05/2018)*

> *'The health of the worker.' (P.E., 30/01/2020)*

> *'Would like more practical tools or take aways.' (P.E., 30/01/2020)*

Following recommendations for further training, YouthPact have sourced experts and/or developed new bespoke programmes to meet need. In this case, specialist training was delivered across two geographical areas on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Self-care sessions were developed for Peace4Youth workers, and a mental health toolkit entitled 'Kicking' and Peacebuilding resource training has been delivered.

However, the themes which emerged most consistently was for opportunities to share practice:

> *'More time for project workers to get together.' (P.E., 17/04/2018)*

> *'More days like this coming together, listening and learning from one another.' (P.E., 21/09/2018)*

> *'Online resource sharing tool'. (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

The rationale for the sharing of practice through training sessions is two-fold: first it can be perceived as easier to be honest or more truthful about your feelings or practice with a group of strangers. In this way, there is potentially a liberating feeling in being with people that you don't usually work with:

> *'A colleague of mine noted to me one time…... he got more out of it when he got talking to people in Omagh, people he wouldn't see again, he could be a bit more authentic because he didn't have*

> *to worry about someone bringing it up.' (YW1)*

Secondly, the sharing of practice offers workers a cross-fertilisation of new ideas and perspectives that may not be a feature of their own partnerships. In this interview, we hear from a worker who yearned for different voices:

> *'I would have liked to have done the xxxxxxx training with people from different projects as well. I think it's good to have input from people you don't know or be able to sit with people that you don't know and hear what's going on for them.' (YW2)*

Whilst workers often requested additional training, the development officers needed to be mindful of the alternative commitments which workers had to their delivery, programmes and young people. So, some balance was needed to ensure that sharing could take place, but that training did not consume the energy of the Peace4Youth workers:

Two gaps were identified in YouthPact training events – the first thematic; and the second was practical. In some instances, workers specifically asked for behavioural training with an emphasis on managing challenging behaviours (P.E.,30/01/2020). The concept of managing difficult behaviours is a deficit-based approach which doesn't align well with youth work. To address this using youth work methodologies and the concept of assets-based approaches, sessions were run on life coaching, motivational interviewing, working with young men and youth work with young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions.

It is also noteworthy that the timing of specific training themes did not always align to the needs of a group or worker at that particular time. This results in workers deriving limited benefit from taking part in the training that is less relevant to their short-term needs. One example from interviewee YW1 related to training in life coaching which has a goal-oriented, future-minded orientation, whereas *'for me and again for the young people I was working with at that time, it wasn't really beneficial. I don't think the life coaching would have been effective for them while because they were still dealing with the issues now'.*

The second gap relates to practical arrangements which some participants found wanting.

> *'Room was a bit too warm. Food was lovely'. (P.E., 17/04/2018)*

> *'No wifi was difficult being out of contact all morning'. (P.E., 28/02/2019)*

> *'Venue was in the middle of nowhere. No signal or wifi'. (P.E., 30/01/2020)*

> *'Receptionist didn't know where the training was!'. (P.E., 30/05/2018)*

These are illustrative of the wide range of venues and facilities used for training with disparities in service which are acknowledged by the YouthPact team.

Overall, training with YouthPact was considered to be of a high quality and offered participants increased awareness of the issues, increased confidence in working with young people and new knowledge to support their approaches:

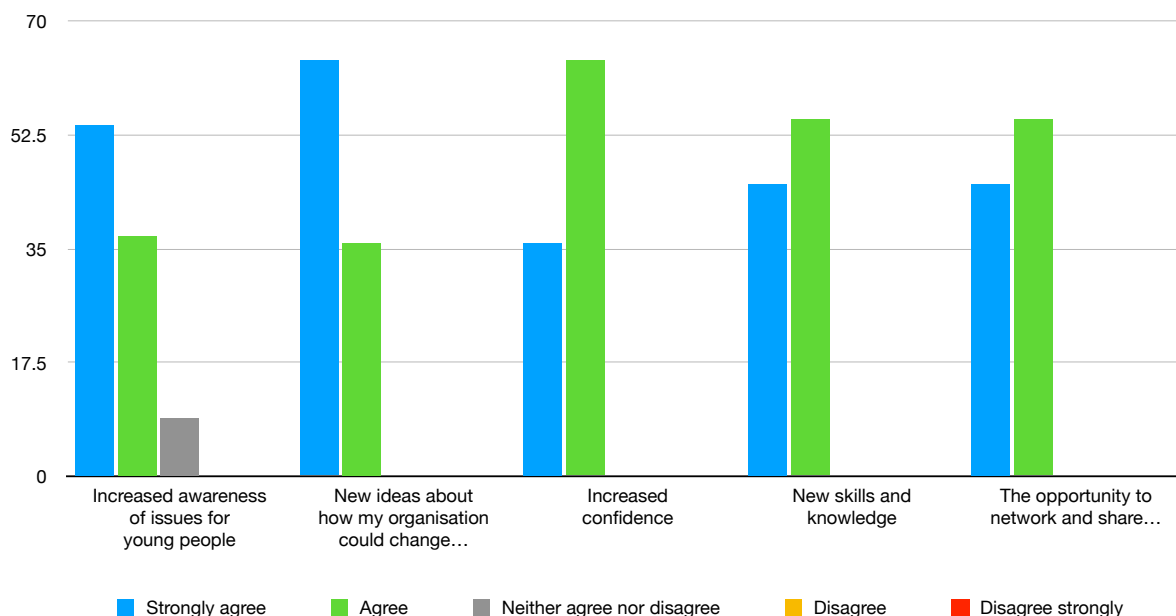> *'It was amazing from start to finish. Jarlath was excellent and very relevant'. (P.E., 17/04/2018)*

> *'Brilliant day. Gained so much knowledge'. (P.E., 30/05/2018)*

Any other comments or feedback on the event?

Thank You 😊

(P.E., 21/09/2018)

Q2 Do you think the training today gave you any of the following?

(P.E., 08/03/2019)

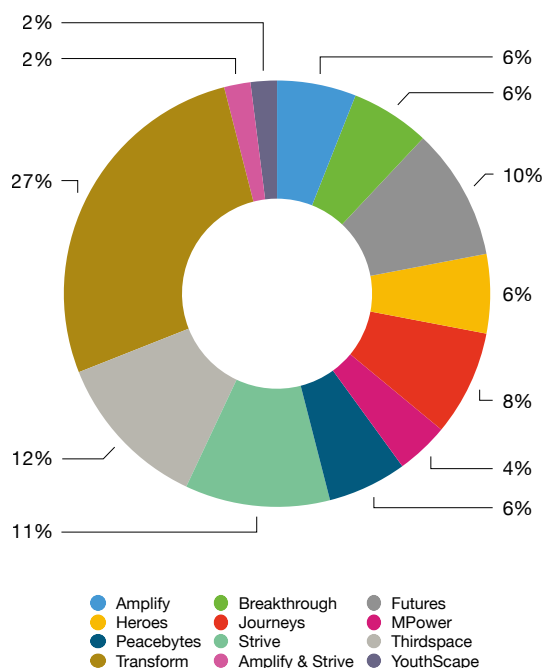## Improvements & Recommendations for Training Events

1. Interviewees proposed three practical suggestions related to improving training. First, the possible use of webinars was proposed, allowing for workers to access recordings of these after the session. Second, for online forms to be distributed regularly to workers asking about new and emerging training needs. Thirdly, it was proposed that follow-up or check-in sessions be held approx. 6 weeks after each training event. This would encourage those who took part in training to consider more deeply how they embed their new learning in practice, as stated by interviewee YW2: *'if you know you have this coming up you're more likely to use some of the techniques you've learned and keeps it fresh in your head'.*

2. As the Peace4Youth programme evolved, so too did the training needs. However, the breadth of the workforce in terms of their previous youth work experience and training meant that there was a consistent need for training at all levels – from entry-level, through to graduate level and specialist training. The YouthPact team undertook a small piece of work to understand the qualifications and experience of the workforce, which became vital to designing the training offered across the Peace4Youth programme. This audit of the youth work workforce could be done earlier in order to inform the needs of the workers and training to meet these needs.

3. The diverse range of needs and diverse geographical distance meant that training increasingly attracted smaller groups of workers. YouthPact therefore ran many more training events than anticipated to meet the target numbers across a wider range of themes. This format with 12-15 workers worked consistently allowing for all the variations in training needs, themes and worker experience.

Partnership Specific Events

- 2%
- 2%
- 6%
- 6%
- 10%
- 27%
- 6%
- 8%
- 4%
- 6%
- 12%
- 11%

● Amplify	● Breakthrough	● Futures
● Heroes	● Journeys	● MPower
● Peacebytes	● Strive	● Thirdspace
● Transform	● Amplify & Strive	● YouthScape

Partnership Specific Events

A core component of the work of YouthPact in phase 2 of the Peace4Youth programme included delivering bespoke support across the eleven Peace4Youth Partnership Projects, with the involvement of approximately 49 youth and community organisations.

These partnership specific sessions/events consisted of the YouthPact Project Manager and Development Officers, supporting the eleven individual partnerships using a range of tailored approaches that included partnership specific:

- Thematic Training Sessions
- Team Building Sessions
- Reflective Practice Sessions

Although each partnership engaged with YouthPact differently, the support provided was based on the needs identified by project coordinators and project staff.

YouthPact Development Officers facilitated 51 bespoke events, often with full teams of project workers and programme coordinators, whilst on other occasions YouthPact facilitated discussions involving specific personnel within a Peace4Youth partnership. 232 Support & Development Meetings were held with individual Peace4Youth project coordinators across the life of the project.

Stern and Green define a partnership as 'a programme that has a high level of commitment, mutual trust, equal ownership and the achievement of a common goal' (2005: 270). Bennett and Anderson (2002) suggest that partnerships include the following elements: collaboration; mutual accountability; voluntary entry; and an assumption of equality, although McQuaid (2000) contends that partnership might not necessarily involve equal power relationships, for instance if one partner has access to resources or expertise that give it a legitimate claim to dictate the direction of a project.

The model adopted and adapted by YouthPact in a supportive capacity of the eleven Peace4Youth partnerships, was built around key principles of good partnership working that broadly included:

- Collaborative and Collegiate Working Relationships
- Confidence in Partners
- Maintenance of Clarity and Purpose
- Adaptive and Responsive Approaches
- Cultivation of a Balance of Power and Resources

YouthPact had no monitoring or formal reporting role in terms of the projects progress against their targets and deliverables – other than within the boundaries of safeguarding, fraud, and data protection. This message was important for confidentiality and frank discussion and was reinforced at the beginning of partnership-development sessions that YouthPact facilitated.

Key Features of Partnership Specific Events

YouthPact aimed to create 'safe environments' for sharing honestly, reflecting on, and unpicking aspects of practice, in ways that were both affirming and challenging. YouthPact worked collectively with projects to deconstruct an issue of practice, operations or management; and then piece it back together again with a project in a way that was stronger, more durable, and consistent - to enhance the quality of the learning experience for young people.

Through the partnership specific sessions, regardless of the content or theme, YouthPact aimed to support the eleven individual Peace4Youth partnerships, using the following key features:

i. Facilitating safe spaces to discuss challenges, share ideas and recognise successes

'Groups grow by what it can share; and what it can share is what it can communicate/talk about, and what it can communicate/talk about is what it has in common, e.g., language and experience'. (Foulkes, cited in Benson, 2021)

At the outset of any partnership, it can take time to build relationships and trust. Therefore, partnership specific sessions provided an opportunity for workers to meet, get to know each other, and build rapport:

'In 2018 and 2019 these [partnership meetings] happened every quarter, in a different location, because we were scattered across the country. The YouthPact Development Officer, came to facilitate those which I think was really great, because it gave us a break. We didn't have to do any planning or preparation going into it. They gave us a chance to relax and spend time together'. (YW4)

In March 2020, the governments of Northern Ireland and Ireland, like the rest of the world, was grappling

with how to respond to Covid-19. In this period these partnership meetings became a particularly important space for some of the projects, in maintaining connections between workers across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland:

'When the shift came to working online, YouthPact again listened to us and asked, 'what can we do for you?, what will help you?', and so that shifted from meeting each quarter to every 3 or 4 weeks. That is what we needed, especially in those early months when you just felt like you were firefighting, and it was good for us to have that step back and take a pause and reflect on what we were doing. Also, to share ideas and hear what others were doing and their experiences. Also, I suppose sharing the stress of it and kind of know of others sitting in their homes feeling exactly the same as you'. (YW4)

ii. Focusing on purpose and outcomes

A crucial aspect of an effective partnership is being clear about the purpose and agreeing what impact you hope to make, from the outset. The eleven Peace4Youth partnership projects funded under the Children and Young People strand of the SEUPB funded PEACE IV Programme aimed to "enhance the capacity of children and young people to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society." The three outcome areas that underpinned the Peace4Youth partnerships were Personal Development, Good Relations and Citizenship. From the beginning, YouthPact aimed to support Peace4Youth partnership projects to work effectively together to achieve these collective goals and improve the opportunities for the young people they engage with.

It was identified in the Peace4Youth Phase One Impact Evaluation, conducted by Queen's University Belfast (Blaylock et al, 2019), that further work was needed to ensure that staff on the ground were connected to and understood their theory of change model, and how this connected to the outcomes for the overall programme:

'Developing effective project content for Phase II of the Programme requires in-depth understanding on behalf of the project coordinators and youth workers on their project's theory of change.' (Blaylock et al, 2019: 71)

In Phase Two of Peace4Youth, YouthPact specifically responded to this recommendation proposed by the evaluation team at Queen's University Belfast (QUB):

'Ensuring that projects have a clearly developed theory of change that they are working from, and that youth workers are cognisant of how project content fits in with the model, and their role in implementing the content, is paramount. This works hand in hand with a more reflective work practice of how project content leads to Programme outcomes. Moving into Phase II we recommend holding professional development and training exercises with project coordinators around their theory of change and encouraging them to hold training sessions of their own with their youth workers.'

The YouthPact team developed two tailored training sessions to support projects to re-focus on the actions they identified in their original theory of change; tease out how these approaches translate into their programme planning, implementation, and organic approaches; and prioritise those approaches which were strongest, in leading to positive participant outcomes. These key training sessions focused on

- Understanding and Implementing Theory of Change and
- Outcomes and Indicators of Peace4Youth.

Theory of Change

The Programme-level theory of change anticipated that through participation in purposefully designed projects, young people would develop capabilities in relation to the three programme outcome areas and subsequently these capabilities would support broader societal change. The overall Peace4Youth programme was underpinned by this theory of change approach, and the eleven partnership projects committed to identifying their own theory of change models.

YouthPact developed and delivered bespoke theory of change training to project workers across five Peace4Youth partnerships: Futures, M-power, Peace Bytes, Strive, and Third Space. (This opportunity was presented across all eleven partnerships.) The aim of this training was to support workers to further understand the theory of change approach, how it can be applied, and why it is relevant within their Peace4Youth projects.

Some participants shared that they were somewhat confused by what the theory of change is, however following the session they had a clearer understanding:

'It was a lot of information to digest, however by the end of the training I had a greater understanding of theory of change. I also had a greater understanding of the rationale and reasoning behind the work we are doing.' (P.E., 12/06/2019)

Other workers however reflected on the content of the theory of change sessions, describing them as "Heavy", and "Intense". Some suggested that:

'More time was needed with a more succinct explanation of theory of change and simplified language.' (P.E., 12/06/2019)

'Perhaps the heavy content made the activities more challenging.' (P.E., 06/12/2019)

YouthPact also supported projects to further build and develop on their own theory of change models and produce visuals to illustrate their project-specific rationale and interventions. Below are examples from two of the partnerships:
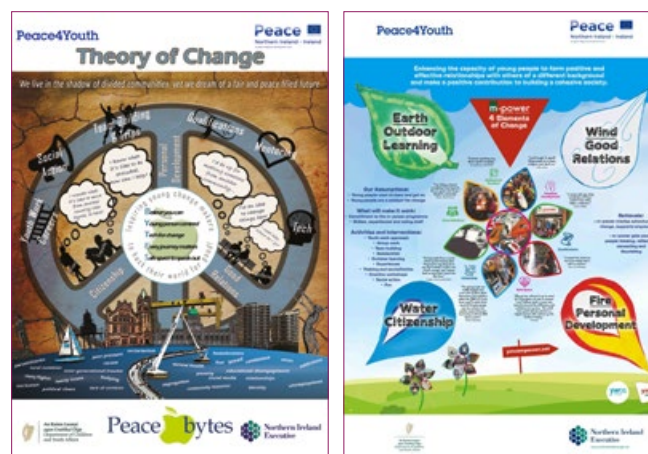
Workers reflected that this approach of working through the ideas and then drafting a product that the collective team contributed to was particularly beneficial:

> *'The most useful part of the training was having all our ideas come together to produce something real.' (P.E., 04/10/2019)*

> *'Our finished product was really impressive.' (P.E., 06/12/2019)*

Outcomes and Indicators

To support Peace4YouthProjects on working together to deliver the agreed outcomes, YouthPact facilitated partnership specific training that explored Peace4Youth Outcome areas and the 17 sub-outcome indicators; and unpacked how these inform their practice delivery. Three key questions were asked to get to the heart of what the outcomes meant to each individual worker:

- What do these core outcomes mean to you?

- Do you have agreed definitions or personal definitions?

- Could you capture them in a sentence?

A snapshot of the nature of the feedback shared is detailed in the table below. This was followed by more in-depth discussion exploring the 17 indicators and where these fit under the outcome areas.

Discussions highlighted that depending on the role and the Peace4Youth Project, workers interpreted the indicators in very different ways. While some project workers were delivering on a very specific outcome area (e.g., delivery of a qualification in Community Relations), others adopted a more overarching delivery approach. However, there was a consensus that many of the outcomes and indicators were overlapping, and that project delivery was more effective when this was the case (Record below from partnership development event, 16/11/2018).

Good Relations	Personal Development	Citizenship
Wider than sectarian issues, also includes relations between ethnic minorities, Traveller community as well as inter family relations. Also need to cultivate good relations between statutory groups and organisations	Becoming ever more important, young people presenting with a range of issues from mental health to drug and alcohol abuse and much more. These issues almost need dealt with before the other areas can be tackled.	Partaking in events and active citizenship Gaining/achieving qualifications

Peace4Youth Outcomes

Peace4Youth Outcomes		
Personal Development	*Good Relations*	*Citizenship*
Content is expected to develop the social and emotional or 'soft' skills of the participant.	Content is expected to contribute to lower levels of community division, sectarianism and racism, and will make a positive contribution to reconciliation.	Content is expected to develop the capacity of the participant to make a positive contribution towards their participation in family, community and society.

Peace4Youth Indicators

Peace4Youth Indicators		
Personal Development	*Good Relations*	*Citizenship*
· increased self awareness, understanding; · confidence; · agency; · planning and problem solving; · relationships, working effectively with others; · leadership; · resilience and determination; · other relevant knowledge and skills for supporting their own health and well-being.	· understanding and respect for diversity; · an awareness of and sensitivity to the values, beliefs, customs and traditions of others; · an understanding of their own identity; · respect for others from different community and cultural backgrounds, abilities and orientations; · a positive predisposition to others from a different community/cultural background.	This will involve developing their knowledge and understanding of their role and developing capabilities for: · engagement with useful services; · positive participation in community structures, initiatives and democratic processes; · volunteering in communities of place and/or interest; · positive family and community relations.

iii. Working collaboratively to identify bespoke solutions

Given the nature of the individual Peace4Youth partnerships, different issues presented that would require work to identify specific solutions that would best fit the context. Therefore, partnership specific support sessions took a different form depending on the requirements of each respective partnership. As well as YouthPact facilitating sessions involving all project workers from a particular partnership, on occasion this could also mean supporting project coordinators and senior personnel within the respective organisations, to unpack specific challenges they were facing:

> *'I remember one time YouthPact came to one of our board meetings to do a bit of work with ourselves because you know what partnership meetings are like, sometimes not everyone agrees. Having someone come in, neutral, really stabilised things. It was really beneficial. Someone that was like, 'right let's get back to business.' We only had to do this once, but it was there, and it was beneficial.' (YW5)*

In these instances, the YouthPact Project Manager or YouthPact Development Officers provided a listening ear, careful mediator, and adopted the role of critical friend. Costa and Killick (1993:50) describe the role of a critical friend as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the group is working toward. The critical friend is an advocate for the success of that work"

The Finnish organisation, Crisis Management Initiative (2018:7), further builds on this concept of Critical Friend to include a "dimension of a 'trusted insider', who can in a safe space support an organisation's own reflection by providing constructive challenge and criticism, raise questions and surface operational and organisational issues to be addressed, but also

build trust within the team. However, they also come with an 'independent outsider' perspective, in terms of being sufficiently removed from the focus of enquiry, and having an independent position and expertise, to provide inputs to support reflection. The process is often iterative and builds from one stage to the next and is thus flexible in addressing the needs of the team or organization."

This independent yet respected role was noticed and described by Stakeholder One in how YouthPact worked with the management of partnerships or at the governance level:

> *'Specific partnership meetings as well to smooth out issues, and particularly at that beginning stage where people were getting to know each other. Or they have maybe worked together as a partnership before and there were maybe different, slightly different agendas, or people have different theories of change...... again yourselves as independent eyes, but expertise with the expertise as well to, sort of, to guide people through these.'*

iv. Partnership Development Themes... The Offer that was made

YouthPact offered the eleven partnerships opportunities to take stock and consider their strengths and areas for improvement, at key junctures over the four-year period. There was a particular focus on offering partnership specific sessions that supported staff and organisations in developing self-evaluation and self-improvement plans. These sessions took into consideration existing quality assurance structures such as the National Qualifications Standards Framework (relevant to Ireland) and the Quality Assurance Framework (recognised in Northern Ireland) and self-improvement plans that many organisations were already familiar with through other funded programmes.

The following list of partnership-specific options were offered by YouthPact across all eleven Peace4Youth projects. Those considered most salient by project coordinators or managers were selected and YouthPact staff designed and delivered bespoke session plans on the specified theme:

Area / Topic / Theme
Recruitment & Retention - reaching out, target groups, numbers, attendance
Assessing Needs - induction, context, baselines, action plans, reviews
Co-design/Young People-led - nature, scope, extent
Effective Practice - what enabled/hindered, who with, when, how, why
Outcomes Focussed - recognising, recording, demonstrating, reporting
Personal Development, Good Relations, Citizenship - more than skills, emphasis, meaning, programme breadth, balance
Quality Assurance - reflecting on/in, recording, sharing, improving practice
Mentoring - purpose, function, approaches in practice
Celebrating Achievements - showcasing, recognising, owning, valuing
Signposting, Transition & Progression - next step opportunities, intention, aspiration, approaches and resources
Theory of Change - relating the concept to practice
Policy & Procedure - administration, data, finance, safeguarding, reporting, accounting
Staff Working Practices - co-working, lone working, specialist, training and readiness
Working in Partnership - communication, co-working, co-operation, cross-border, collaboration, consistency

Impact of Partnership Specific Events

These sessions, in all their forms, provided workers within Peace4Youth partnership projects with the opportunity to reflect on their practice as a wider group, unpack what it is they are doing and trying to achieve and consider how this work fits in to the overall Peace4Youth Programme Outcomes:

'It was really good for us from a theoretical perspective to step back, have a sort of helicopter view, and actually reflect on why we are doing the things that we are doing, and just to be I suppose be accountable in that sense.' (YW3)

Youth workers across the Peace4Youth projects shared how they valued the partnership events facilitated by YouthPact as they provided workers with the opportunity to share their learning, gain new insights and knowledge, and helped to maintain connections with colleagues. Workers shared that the partnerships involved staff at various stages in their careers, from those new to youth work to very experienced workers, and those in between. Partnership specific meetings gave everyone the opportunity to contribute and share approaches, but also to listen and learn:

'I think doing it together was good because we had a lot of expertise in our partnership, who had different specialities, and that for me was one of the standout things. You also had people just out of university coming into a job, a full-time job for maybe the first time in youth work, and then you had people with maybe 10-15 years' experience. Then you also had YouthPact Staff, who helped people to engage. The facilitation was fantastic. I think it made a difference, especially on very weighty elements or topics. It helped all the more to have someone who knows their job and does it in a way that actually enables others to learn and engage.' (YW3)

At moments, the partnership specific sessions were used to provide external support with issues and partnership challenges and identify solutions. These partnership specific sessions provided the space to try to address issues and work collectively to identify potential resolutions or approaches. YouthPact Development Officers facilitated these conversations, as neutral facilitators and critical friends, to support partnerships to reach the best outcomes, and to improve the quality and impact of their work:

'The best thing I found of having the outside voice coming in for those project worker meetings was it was somebody who I suppose didn't know our specifics or every detail of what was going on in each of our cohorts. YouthPact was coming in with that wisdom of youth work, to kind of dig at us a wee bit more and kind of get us into that reflective practice a bit more. I think YouthPact allowed that very intense reflective practice to happen. So, what worked well was the listening that happened.' (YW4)

Improvements and Recommendations for Partnership Development Events

1. Partnership development events worked best when they had a clear purpose but were not too 'agenda-driven'. Where specific staff and partners felt that messages were subliminally (or explicitly) being imparted or that meetings were too task-focused, participants were unenthusiastic to engage:

   'In our [partnership/staff] meetings they were always very agenda-driven. I understand there has to be some agenda or focus for the session, but I think particularly when it was then online, we just wanted to talk, we just wanted to ask kind of 'What are yous doing?' 'What's working for yous?', 'Can I get some ideas

from you?' or just to kind of sit and go 'I've had a really terrible week' and we just kind of just wanted a bit of space. So even though we did feed that back a few times, it felt like a while before that was listened to. When this did happen, it was facilitated quite well over zoom, using small breakout rooms, and this worked well for us'. (YW4)

Similarly, some participants felt that the content of partnership development meetings was too heavy – e.g. exploring theory of change concepts and models. These comments act as a reminder that partnership specific meetings need to be nourishing or enriching for all stakeholders taking part, with a balance of task and process roles that take account of the social needs of individuals in the group.

2. Partnership development events were developed in collaboration with the lead partner. Whilst this was vital to the coherence of the programme, this meant that the programme was derived by the priorities of the lead partner. More work with embedded partners and their organisations would have revealed possible areas of development which were more pressing for the embedded partner. Greater access and contact with embedded partners would open up these possibilities.

3. The development and maintenance of the eleven Peace4Youth partnerships was a key element for the effective delivery of programmes to and with young people. Where difficulties arose at this managerial level, it was often difficult to get back on track. Stakeholder One proposed that YouthPact could mitigate this by enlisting experts from a management background to work these challenges through with the specific partnership.

Coordinators' Reflection Hub Meetings

Critical Reflective Practice

Critical reflective practice is described by Fook and Gardner (2007:10) as 'a way of standing back and seeing the issues from a different perspective.' For many professional workers, organisational risk management and complex systems and structures are often the backdrop for their work. Ethical issues arise with clashes between the needs of individuals and the expectations for specified outcomes and organisational protocols. Increasingly, navigating your way through these contexts requires more knowledge and wisdom than the documented rules and regulations of the profession. Notions of a learning organisation and a learning culture (Gould and Baldwin, 2004) have developed as a response to this complexity, with critical reflective practice as the cornerstone.

Youth Work has a long-standing culture of reflective practice most often based on Schon's model of reflection (1983). For Schon, the theoretical knowledge of the 'high ground' did not always match the knowledge and wisdom of the 'swampy lowlands where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution' (ibid, 1983:42). To make sense of and within the 'swampy lowlands' Schon recognised the need for knowledge to be generated differently, through a process of uncovering the different rules that practitioners use to inform their actions in flux situation (Fooks and Gardner, 2007: 24). Through this, patterns can be recognised in how the practitioner responds to a given situation. These reflections can generate the practice wisdom that acts as a guide for practitioners and in this case for the Peace4Youth coordinators.

For the coordinators, the reflection hubs used reflexivity as its central process. Fooks and Gardner (ibid: 27) describe this as a 'turning back on itself', whereby workers look both inwards and outwards to make connections between the personal and professional self and our social and cultural perspectives. Reflexivity recognises that individuals interpret information in particular ways, ignoring some knowledge and including some other, in conscious and unconscious ways. The process for coordinators' reflection hubs was to notice and name what is often unconscious or assumed, via self-reflection exercises, discussions about practice in context and open conversation. Coordinators were asked to participate for

maximum learning through being both a reflector on their experiences and extracting new perspectives from hearing from others.

The process aligns to the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, understood as practice wisdom or practical knowledge. This form of knowledge takes account of the context, with the position that knowledge is variable, that 'knowledge is needed for good deliberation or what might be termed as judgment-in-context-for-action' (Stanton et al, 2018: 42). The connection between analysis and action is a cornerstone of reflective practice, whereby deeper understanding can lead to a more considered, focused action. This was a feature of the coordinators' meetings.

Background and Context

The coordinators' reflection hub meetings were not part of the original workplan for YouthPact. They were developed in response to a request from two coordinators to have a shared meeting or event. After the first meeting in April 2018, follow-on meetings were arranged, until these formed a regular part of the YouthPact calendar. In March 2019, these meetings were formally recorded as a YouthPact target and have been an important feature of YouthPact's support for quality and impact across the Peace4Youth programme. QUB, in their Peace4Youth Phase II Mid-Term Impact Evaluation Report evaluation, stated:

'The coordinator meetings were described as crucial for sharing the learning from the projects and for utilising the combined expertise in the room to find solutions to problems:' (Blaylock et al, 2020: 149)

Since April 2018 and June 2021 there have been 24 coordinators' reflection hub meetings. The meetings were initiated to reflect on the key issues emerging from the early stages of programme implementation, however the purpose evolved across the span of the programme with times where one of the following was perhaps prioritised and another function given less attention. The purpose of the coordinators' reflection hub was to facilitate a space for co-ordinators where they could:

- Network and communicate with each other.

- Review work, identifying areas of success and examples of best practice that can be shared across all delivery partners.

- Identify any areas where further training and support is required.

- Respond where possible to emerging needs / issues / developments in practice.

This was done through a carefully constructed agenda, balancing reflective activities with management/operational discussions. The first few meetings were scheduled for two hours, and co-ordinators requested that they be longer to facilitate reflection, discussion and planning. Subsequent meetings were then extended to four hours. The meetings were open to those in a coordinator or team lead role in each of the eleven projects. A decision was taken to avoid substituting places at the meetings unless the alternate was of the same level and had similar decision-making capacity. This was to ensure that the task and work element of the meetings had a similar level of experience and responsibility on which they could reflect and share.

The coordinators' reflection hub meetings had two distinct phases. April 2018 – February 2020 is the pre-Covid phase and March 2020 – November 2021 is the Covid-19 phase where the governments of Northern Ireland and Ireland imposed restrictions due to the global pandemic. There were nine coordinators' reflection hub Meetings in the pre-Covid phase and fifteen in the Covid phase. Through the Covid phase, the volume of meetings and the timescale of the meetings changed, with meetings typically lasting 1.5 hours and held almost on a monthly basis:

'I think the balance was right, even during Covid when we did go, I think we went monthly if not more for some months, they were needed at that point.' (YW6)

At moments, however, the proliferation of co-ordinators meetings became somewhat of a hindrance and as a result, YouthPact scaled back on these meetings:

'Indeed, youth workers reported collaborating in multiple ways, sharing ideas facilitated by YouthPact, and attending other types of training, to the extent that there are almost too many emails about it:' (Blaylock et al, 2020: 126)

However, even throughout the Covid phase, the purpose of the meetings continued as support, learning and discussing and acting upon issues of common interest.

The full YouthPact team were in attendance for the coordinators' reflection hub meetings. This was a deliberate strategy with a two-fold purpose:

- Devising a coordinated response – In these meetings, the YouthPact team and coordinators had direct discussions about issues and progress across Peace4Youth. The discussions were frank in terms of the delivery challenges. With all of the Development Officers in attendance, information is clearly communicated; not lost in translation in second-hand communication. This meant that issues

were more accurately understood and a collective coordinated response could be devised and implemented.

– Access to the team - coordinators heard about YouthPact training and activities being delivered across the full range of partnerships and could request similar themes or events for their own partnership.

Methodology for Coordinators' Reflection Hub Meetings

The methodology for the coordinators' reflection hub meetings begins with a clear communication of the role and remit of YouthPact. As a Quality and Impact Body, YouthPact held neither a delivery function with young people, nor a monitoring and evaluation role. Like each of the eleven Peace4Youth partnership projects, YouthPact was funded through SEUPB, had an appointed Case Officer, and was subject to the same accountability and reporting mechanisms. This distinctive role was continuously outlined in coordinators' meetings:

'Yous were always good at (Leighann and Joe still does it to this day) - at the start of every session, at each presentation, you remind us that we are not a, we're a quality and impact not a monitoring and evaluation.' (YW5)

Crucially this message leant itself to the creation of a safe environment where individuals felt at ease in discussions without fear of issues being reported to the funder:

' .... I could then share things and open up and, and you knew it was in a safe environment'. (YW5)

In creating this atmosphere of safety, Project Managers were inclined to contribute freely in meetings:

'Feel safe hearing the collective voice and trust in team, the support is relevant and happy to be participating and contributing to the meeting.' (P.E., 23/04/2020)

'Great as usual to hear the similarities between project issues etc. and it is reassuring.' (Zoom Chat 17/06/2021)

The coordinators found solace in this space where they could air their professional concerns, outside the earshot of staff, management or funders:

'But it was a release for some staff who could let it out because they maybe couldn't let it out in there, people maybe within their organisation maybe didn't understand fully or they couldn't do it to the funder so they could just do it in this environment because everybody knew what they were going through and what they were experiencing.' (YW5)

The consistent format for the coordinators' meetings was of a reflective space on one hand, with task-oriented business on the other. Balance was key to creating and maintaining a reflective space for conversation to flow, enabling a sharing of feelings, practice and concerns as well as coordinators having space for programme-related business and concerns:

'Having that flexibility of spending maybe two hours doing the 'What works well?, What didn't work well?' rather than focusing on what maybe the career service can do for us like or what the next YouthPact training for the staff teams are. Because we were getting that information some way and it was more valuable to spend the time on the reflection, the discussions.' (YW6)

Flexibility in the approach and format meant that the YouthPact team could adapt and meet the needs of coordinators in an agile way:

'Just the approach, having that flexible approach was important to me because it didn't mean I was going to a meeting that was very rigid structure and I wouldn't have the opportunity to delve into a conversation more or if it was beneficial to me as a coordinator or group to share.' (YW6)

Each meeting had a reflection piece that focused on an area of practice at coordinator level, related to the Peace4Youth programme, but tangential to the programme outcomes. These were delivered using youth work approaches, using ice-breakers, Leanne, and interactive exercises to maximise self-reflection and sharing:

> *'Your fantastic ice breakers Leighann that forced us to discuss things that maybe we wouldn't normally think of. You know we wouldn't have naturally done without your input so I definitely feel it has, that had a huge impact on it is the atmosphere and the environment you created.' (YW5)*

Three examples from different sessions included:

- What does peacebuilding mean to me?
- What kind of a leader am I?
- How do I motivate staff?

Learning and practice development was facilitated through these personal and professional development reflections. Participants were asked to identify something they would action as a result of the session and their comments show how the reflections can motivate towards self-improvement:

> *'Being more aware of my leadership styles— listening to others more.' (P.E.., 31/01/2019)*

> *'Create/implement Crisis Communications Strategy.' (P.E.., 31/01/2019)*

> *'Looking more at my leadership style and facilitating those discussions with my team.' (P.E.., 31/01/2019)*

Whilst reflective moments were valued, it was important that balance was maintained, with practical resources and ideas shared between the coordinators. This became more crucial when moving into the Covid-19 period, whereby the rapid move from in-person working to online working became a pinch point for many already-squeezed workers:

> *'How did coordinators' meetings impact on the work with young people? It was finding out about different approaches, [Name of YW5] had said, that opening and sharing of knowledge, session plans, evaluation stuff, even the policy stuff like [Name of project coordinator] had shared, they were really beneficial especially during Covid because we were all learning what the new normal of how do I facilitate a group online and the open discussion of around different platforms and what people had tried and didn't work. Like, we would have wasted so much time finding that out ourselves whereas I was like confident coming back from coordinators' meetings that like '[name of other coordinator] tried this on [name of project] project and said it was brilliant", "let's not waste time exploring like that other stuff", because there was like that trust in the room as well.' (YW6)*

Sharing of resources was a feature of these meetings, building further trust and reciprocity:

> *'Shared experience, it's nice to see all so honest and all working through it and willingness to help each other.' (P.E., 26/03/2020)*

> *'Good to hear from all of the groups and how everyone is approaching and reacting and committing. There is a connectedness and readiness.' (P.E., 02/04/2020)*

Building Collegiality

From the outset a high degree of collegiality was established:

> *'A collaborative opportunity to share practice/ issues.' (P.E., 4/10/2018)*

> *'There is an atmosphere of camaraderie rather than competition.' (P.E., 04/04/2019)*

> *'Sense of Connection.' (P.E., 26/03/2020)*

A variety of benefits came from making time for the coordinators to talk about their experiences and their work together. For some these were motivational and for others they gained new knowledge:

> 'The commonalities and passion to improve the programme.' (P.E., 04/10/2018)

> 'Hearing how well the programme is working.' (P.E., 4/10/2018)

> 'Informed and content'. (P.E., 26/03/2020)

The relationship between coordinators and YouthPact staff developed as a result of these meetings, leading to greater trust and further collaborations:

> 'Felt I could pick up the phone and to the likes of yourself, Eliz or Joe anytime and chat with yous for advice, support, guidance ..... yous as staff were interested in us as individuals and professionals as well and interested in our wellbeing. You know because we are always looking after our staff teams and you know our young people as well but yous were interested as us as managers'. (YW5)

Relationships developed between co-ordinators within these sessions, which extended beyond the meetings:

> 'By going to those coordinators' meetings, it helped me build a relationship outside those coordinators' meetings with other staff that I could pick up on things and meet outside of it.' (YW5)

This support network was an important structure in Phase One of the Peace4Youth programme, when projects were getting to grips with the complexities of the programme:

> 'Listening to other coordinators and how they are facing similar challenges as myself. We are not alone in it.' (P.E., 04/10/2018)

In the Covid phase, with a move to online working, these well-established connections served the group well. The coordinators' reflection hub meetings also focussed on combatting isolation and keeping spirits up in difficult circumstances:

> 'Uplifting and positive'. (P.E., 26/03/2020)

> 'These meetings are really good to connect with peers and bounce off each other. Honest and supportive. See value in the meetings especially these zoom meeting.' (P.E., 02/04/2020)

> 'Generally, a very positive meeting and all working together for benefit of the young people'. (P.E., 11/11/2020)

> 'Feeling optimistic and more settled.' (Zoom chat, 17/06/2021)

Sharing of Pressures

As this was a group of managers sharing their professional experiences, the space was used to share pressures and stressors:

> 'Most of the time people don't realise what you are doing or the pressure you're under from the funder for stuff, so it was good in that sense that you knew everyone in the room understood the pressures that we're under.' (YW6)

The solidarity here was appreciated in helping managers feel valued and validated:

> 'Comfort - all in same boat and coming up with new ways and everyone focused and motivated'. (P.E., 26/03/2020)

> 'I find this zoom meeting the most valuable meeting and humour gives a good feeling to the meeting'. (P.E., 02/04/2020)

> 'Refreshing everyone in the same boat with same problems'. (P.E., 11/11/2020)

'Enjoy the meetings and good to know facing same challenges and can reach out to each other and really beneficial having these meetings.' (P.E., 11/11/2020)

'Feeling lots of empathy and feeling valued.' (Zoom chat, 17/06/2021)

Collective Concerns...Leading into Action

This collegiality involved a 'feel-good factor' for coordinators; but had further tangible practical gains. Coordinators shared information regarding programme regulations, working practices and verification processes as a way to test for consistency across the eleven projects:

'Initially I thought it's just my [SEUPB] Case Officer has a different viewpoint, but then when we realised we were all getting told different things here; it's without the coordinators' meetings a lot of stuff I don't think would have got challenged as much.' (YW6)

'"Am I the only one going through this?" but then when you got in those meetings you were like no actually there's another 10 coordinators alongside you, going along with the same thing and or the same struggles with SEUPB.' (YW5)

Where there was a recognition or realisation of collective concerns, the coordinators moved towards collective action to address issues that spanned the entire Peace4Youth programme:

'Anyways a lot of stuff we are talking about that we wanted like a unified response.' (YW6)

The first example of this was in proposing amendments to the QUB Survey that the young participants in the Peace4Youth Programme were asked to complete on three occasions throughout the programme (and one year after completing a project). QUB and the coordinators had a common goal to make amendments where possible to ensure the evaluation was as accessible as possible for young people. The coordinators'

meetings were the vehicle for these discussions with the QUB evaluation team. This had a significant impact on coordinators because a listening environment was created where practical action was delivered as a result of the meetings.

'Great that the meeting wasn't just a talking shop and that action has come out of it.' (P.E., 04/10/2018)

Collective action became a feature of coordinators' reflection hub meetings. A number of these actions were collaborative ideas that demonstrated a united front across all the Peace4Youth projects – e.g., all the eleven groups worked together on a common information flyer for all Peace4Youth participants affirming and confirming their efforts during the pandemic:

More of the collective actions were devised and enacted in relation to grant management, verification and programme monitoring issues. A number of issues emerged in this forum which related to challenging grant conditions; from participant contact hours to issues of reasonable adjustment, through to the timely payment of claims. To take action on the most pressing managerial issues, YouthPact took an active role in brokering meetings between coordinators and SEUPB, preparing papers related to specific issues and tabling pertinent items. Sub-group meetings of coordinators and YouthPact staff were held to develop papers for the attention of SEUPB and the responsible government departments (of Ireland and Northern Ireland). An example of this process was documented in the mid-term evaluation of Peace4Youth:

'In April 2020, Programme coordinators shared their concerns regarding the challenges they faced, particularly in relation to contact hours, activities, and outputs, and put forth a series of suggestions which was collated by YouthPact and submitted to SEUPB. On 22nd May, 2020, in response to the Covid-19 crisis, the Special EU Programmes Body sent a memo to the lead partners in the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 projects providing guidance on the temporary arrangements put in place around outputs and recruitment during lockdown. The guidance was developed following engagement between the project leads and YouthPact around the evolving experiences of each project because of the Covid-19 pandemic. New arrangements for payments were put in place to support projects and temporary changes were made to the requirements outlined in the output indicator guidance from 1st March 2020 until further notice.' (Blaylock et al, 2020: 33)

Throughout the Covid period, these changes were enacted, however these collective actions did not always generate the requested or desired response. Some issues raised here, such as the contentious self-identification of young people as 'protestant', 'catholic' or 'other' are expected to be considered in the operationalisation of PEACE PLUS. However, the issue of reasonable adjustments for those who are included within Section 75 categories of the Northern Ireland Act is one example of an issue addressed by the coordinators but with limited success. For one coordinator, this issue was not pursued by the group and YouthPact with the vigour required to drive change:

'Some of the other times, like collective bargaining type activities that for me I didn't see, I thought it was wasted capital from the group to focus on something when we could've been focusing on the numbers or on the religious breakdown or trying to get our claims paid to us on time and stuff like that but I am very conscious that it's not YouthPact's role to manage that or facilitate that process that was something that yous [YouthPact] added in, you seen we needed to have that frank and open discussion with each other.' (YW6)

This advocacy role was not part of YouthPact's initial brief; nor is this activity included in the project's targets or deliverables. However, this has emerged as a role that was valued by coordinators and one that might be considered within the PEACE PLUS programme.

Improvements and Recommendations for Coordinators' Reflection Hub Meetings

1. The coordinators' reflection hub meetings offered a protected space for the Peace4Youth managers. This was developed through ensuring that those who attended were only those at the management/coordinator level, thus creating the space for peers to share concerns and barriers they experienced in the programme. This led to the building of trust among and between coordinators and the development of solutions-focused approaches in the meetings.
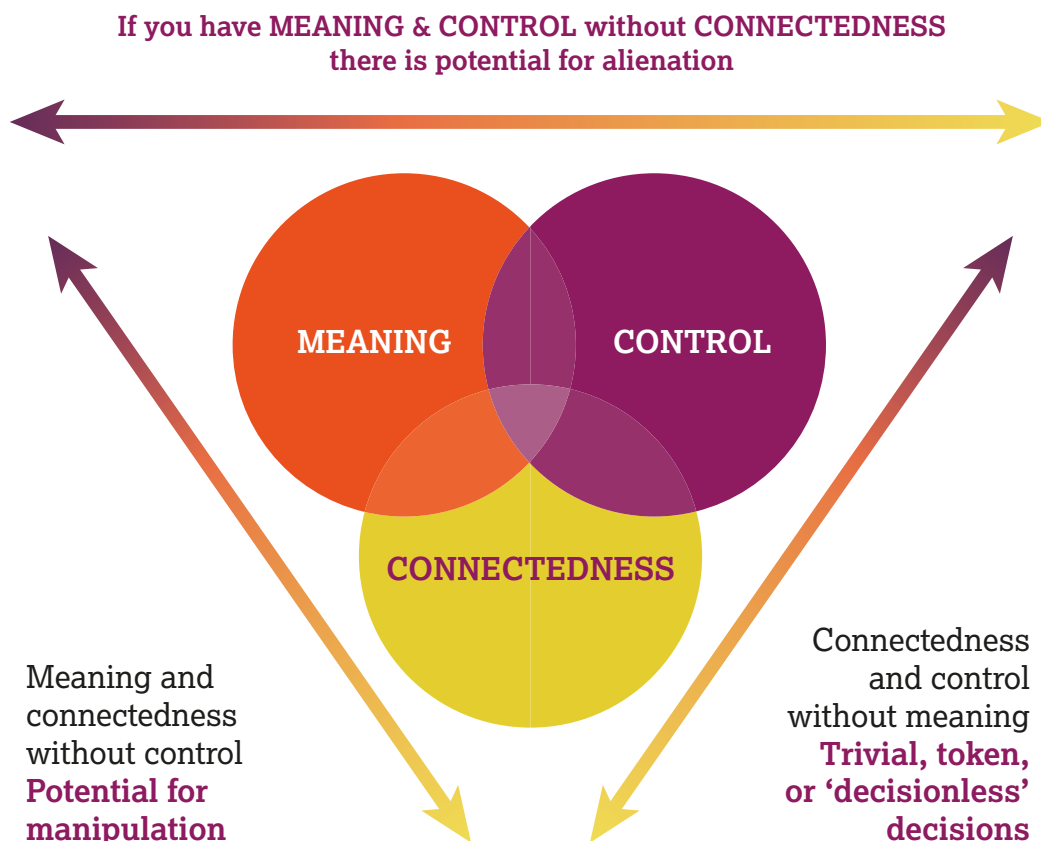
Young Voices

YouthPact's Young Voices initiative drew upon the NYCI-led EU Youth Dialogue framework and was underpinned by a model of 'youth participation' that has been developed and integrated as the policy and practice framework for The Foundation for Young Australians (2002). Youth Participation, as a youth work concept, differs from the pedestrian understanding of participation. Youth Participation in this context refers to the processes of decision-making and young people taking power, not merely taking part.

This model consists of three interlocking circles of guiding principles necessary for meaningful decision-making processes of youth participation. Wierenga (2002) emphasises the need for the environment and parameters for youth decision-making to be explicitly established, if youth participation is to be meaningful for young people and society.

Youth participation is at its best when it has meaning, control and connectedness for young people.

- For meaning, there must be a recognition that young people are co-creators in their own lives and communities and their participation work will have relevance for them and their lives. The participation work is to be important for the young people and in its outcome.
- For control, young people must have real power or a real say in decision-making. This means making provision for the resources, support and skills for young people to have greater control.
- For connectedness, young people are to feel 'part of something bigger'; so not only connected to other people but connected to a bigger purpose that connects us to other networks of people.

If you have MEANING & CONTROL without CONNECTEDNESS there is potential for alienation

MEANING

CONTROL

CONNECTEDNESS

Meaning and connectedness without control
Potential for manipulation

Connectedness and control without meaning
Trivial, token, or 'decisionless' decisions

For YouthPact's Young Voices, the meaning came from taking part in processes which were relevant to their own lives – from PEACE IV to Brexit. The control was increased where YouthPact worked with partners and stakeholders who had power to make changes, where their commentary could have a direct impact on the shape of PEACE PLUS or the directions of the thinktank Pivotal. The connectedness was derived from the solidarity of being with others and being together on issues.

Overview of Young Voices Events

1. Something to say about Peace4Youth

The first Young Voices event created the space for young people from across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, to come together and share their experience of participating in Phase 1 of the Peace4Youth Programme, with a view to influencing the development of Phase 2 (Harvey, 2018).

YouthPact shared the information gathered during this event to inform the evaluation of Phase 1 of the Programme. It also complemented the data collected through Queen's evaluation survey and the 'Practice Studies' that YouthPact carried out, to further illustrate the impact of a youth work approach.

2. Something to say about Brexit

The second event created the space for young people from across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, engaged in the Peace4Youth programme, to come together and share their views, opinions and concerns on the potential impact and opportunities arising from Brexit for themselves, their peers, family, community, and wider society.

'It [this event] has been educational in my eyes, because I'm only young, I haven't really understood the main reason of it [Brexit] and I'm learning.' (Young person, Radio YNP interview)

'As a group we would meet three times a week and wouldn't discuss Brexit. But it does have an impact on the South as well, but I didn't really know much about it, and I wouldn't have been discussing it much with the young people. So, when they went to that Young Voices event, yeah, they learned a lot, and I did as well.' (YW7)

YouthPact co-facilitated this event alongside The Centre for Cross-Border Studies (CCBS) (http://crossborder.ie/). The CCBS input outlined the background to Brexit and then concentrated on what had or had not been agreed at that point. They provided up-to-date information on how Brexit would or would not impede rights to travel, work, education etc. Radio YNP (www.radioynp.com/) also joined this event and conducted interviews with young people and workers, which were recorded and distributed as a podcast available at https://www.mixcloud.com/RadioYNP/youth-pact-dungannon-event-2019-04-10/

'It was good listening to different views from the young people and especially ones that are living in Northern Ireland but are here from another country. They were wondering about their grants and everything, and their status, and whether they will they lose their place in college. Like, it was a worrying time for young people.' (YW7)

3. Something to say about a Vision for 2040

This third event provided space and time for young people from across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, engaged in the Peace4Youth programmes, to come together, to create and share their Vision for 2040. YouthPact co-facilitated this event with Pivotal, the recently established public policy 'think tank' in Northern Ireland. Pivotal shared information from their recent study on public policy priorities such as health, education, the economy, climate and community relations which provided the foundation for young people's discussions: https://www.pivotalppf.org/about-us

The event involved a mix of interactive, group and team exercises that captured young people's ambitions for society in the future, identified potential barriers to realising their aspirations, and recognise the contribution they can make to a Vision 2040. Participants' responses were fed into Pivotal's VISION 2040 initiative available at https://www.pivotalppf.org/our-work/projects/1/vision-2040.

> *'The main activity was to do the newspaper front cover and it was like what articles would you like to see in the future, and it was things like mental health services getting more money, or equality laws being passed, all that kind of stuff. I kind of saw it as young people being consulted and asked to share their opinions on their vision for the future.' (YW8)*
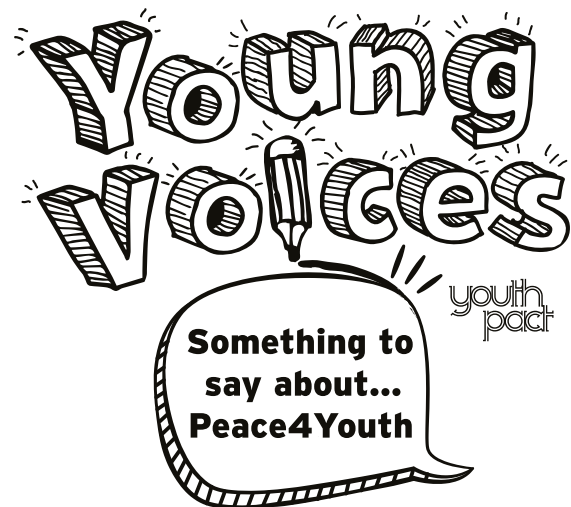
4. Something to say about PEACE PLUS with SEUPB

This fourth Young Voices event was requested by SEUPB as a way to capture the voices of young people on a proposed future funding scheme, referred to as PEACE PLUS. Young people were invited to consider what positive impact they would like to see because of PEACE PLUS funding, as well as the key areas they felt would be a priority for this funding.

> *'I think it was really valuable having SEUPB at this event because it gave them an insight into the actual groups and they were able to see the young people and hear directly from them, which I think was really good'. (YW8)*

5. Something to say about Covid-19 - 2020 in 4

The fifth YouthPact Young Voices event reflected on young people's experiences of being participants on Peace4Youth during the Covid-19 pandemic. Taking an online approach, due to the ongoing public health restrictions, young people were asked to share their experiences of '2020 in 4' – that is 4 words, 4 phrases, 4 lines, 4 verses, 4 images or 4 sounds:

'2020 in 4' was about building on the excellent work of Peace4Youth projects in supporting young people through that period of rapid change and helping make sense of their experience of the pandemic. The purpose was to invite workers, to pause with young people, create the space and time to consider 'what just happened there, how did you feel about it, can you give voice or expression to your experience and emotions, and to consider what they were, or were not looking forward to as they entered into a new year...' (YouthPact 2020)

A secondary purpose was to complement the YouthPact research undertaken with Peace4Youth workers on their response to Covid-19 (McConville & McArdle, 2020).

A gallery of responses can be found on Padlet at https://padlet.com/youthpact_padlet/Bookmarks and these examples illustrate the sentiment and experiences for Peace4Youth participants whose projects continued to deliver throughout the global pandemic.

YouthPact submitted the '2020 in 4' Young Voices online gallery to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education's 'My Life and Learning in Lockdown,' which was investigating the impact of lockdown and restart on the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people. They used 5 of the contributions from Peace4Youth project participants in their input to the 23rd June Education Committee meeting.

5 Takeaways from '2020 in 4' were:

1. Young people are significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (loss of connection, isolation, disrupted relationships, education, opportunity).

2. Youth work helped mitigate that impact (by holding connection, "being there", maintaining relationships and hope).

3. Young people demonstrated resilience and drew on their own sense of self-efficacy to sustain themselves through the pandemic.

4. The experience, whilst sharing similar characteristics with that of their peers, was different for individual young people.

5. There is need for tailored responses and significant investment in youth work as we prepare again to emerge from the public health restrictions.

D — Difference
Difference coming together.

E — Equality

F — Friendship

I — Independence   Isolation
Inviting   Icebreakers

N — Not long enough
Not allowed out

E — Equal

Building Bonds
Reliant on technology
Exams cancelled
Anxious
Kahoot quizzes
Trips to Cavehill
Health
Roadtrips
Online school
Unmotivated
Grieving
Happiness

6. Something to say about PEACE PLUS

At the request of SEUPB, the sixth YouthPact Young Voices event, saw YouthPact facilitate a consultation with young people involved with Peace4Youth Projects, to gain an insight into their views on the proposed areas for the future PEACE PLUS Programme. This consultation was the sixth and final Young Voices Event.

YouthPact facilitated 11 online focus group sessions with Peace4Youth projects, during April/May 2021. 66 young people, both current and past Peace4Youth participants, took part over a period of 17 hours of discussion, and were supported by 18 Peace4Youth workers.

Young people were invited to reflect on and share their own experiences of participating in Peace4Youth: what attracted them to the project they chose to participate in, what helped them to stay involved and consider what one thing they would change. This was then used as a platform for considering the six themes and investment areas contained in the PEACE PLUS Programme proposals. A short video produced by SEUPB specifically for this youth consultation was used to guide the discussion, introduced by SEUPB Chief Executive, Gina McIntyre, who briefly explained the role of SEUPB before outlining the scope of each of the six themes. Following each clip YouthPact staff used additional information from the SEUPB consultation documents to generate discussion amongst the young people on each proposed theme. The third aspect of the consultation focussed on the question of identity, and invited young people to share their feelings and reactions to being asked, 'do you identify as Catholic, Protestant or Other?'

In late October 2021, SEUPB published its Summary of Consultation Responses. The report draws significantly on the YouthPact Young Voices PEACE PLUS Consultation Report. Young people's views were specifically highlighted under each of the six future programme themes, with a particular focus on Theme 3: 'Empowering and Investing in our Young People'. In

this section of the report (pages 30-35) SEUPB stated that it "places great emphasis on the young voices comments on the content of this Theme", and they go on to make a commitment that it "will incorporate the comments into the call development process." They have backed this up with an increase in the budget allocation to this theme of over €13m. The increase in the allocation to Theme 3 was very welcomed and demonstrated that the voice of young people has been heard and valued in this consultation process.

The Impact of Young Voices

To understand and appreciate the effect of the Young Voices events, the Wierenga model of meaning, control and connectedness offers a framework for analysis:

Young People being connected

For the Young Voices coordinator, building a sense of connection between young people from across a range of projects and with a range of interests and abilities was the challenge and the task. The challenge is summarised thus:

> 'The themes were so wide ranging that it was hard to target it. There was massive age range and a massive level that the young people were coming from, you know some were in a position ready to talk about that deeper stuff whereas some weren't, and you had some with disabilities, and things like that. So, I think it was incredibly hard for you to pitch it right, it was either too easy or too challenging, you know it was hard to get it right for everybody. So, I'd say that was maybe one of the things that I struggled with about them, but how you would've navigated round that, I'm not too sure.' (YW8)

This sense of connection was even more challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the fifth and sixth Young Voices events both being conducted using online platforms. Although young people were represented from almost all of the Peace4Youth Projects in both events, this presented some resistance, as projects reported that a reluctance from some young people to engage in online events:

'I don't know, the last Young Voices I couldn't get anyone to go on Zoom you know. It was very hard to get them to engage, they'd come on and they'd leave again, or leave their cameras off, that was very challenging. I know you couldn't do anything about that, you couldn't meet in person, but none of mine were willing to zoom. It just didn't work for them'. (YW7)

Nevertheless, the sense of connection to others was expressed consistently from Young Voices events. Pitching the right tone for the sessions required detailed planning in accessible, interactive approaches and skilled interpersonal communication. For each of the projects, their task was in identifying young people to take part who could benefit from the experience and have the confidence to contribute. Harvey (2018:22) recorded how young participants of the first Young Voices event referred to 'the benefits of connecting with other Peace4Youth projects, hearing about other young people's journeys and having the opportunity to share their own experiences'. The approach used to achieve this is further documented by Harvey (ibid: 4) and can be viewed in the diversity of approaches used across all 6 Young Voices events. The comments from young people on the Young Voices experience (ibid: 22) acts as a sober reminder of the power of being given space to express ourselves and space for listening.

Young People with Control

Young Voices is built on the concept of speaking with those who have access to power. The attendance and involvement of key partners with influence and resources was instrumental in bringing this aspect of Young Voices to fruition. This is best illustrated by the experience of 'Young Voices 6: Something to say about PEACE PLUS'. This event was requested by SEUPB to maximise youth voice in the co-design of the PEACE PLUS programme. This material was influential in the development of the call documents and the PEACE PLUS priorities for children and young people. An email to Joe Hawkins, Young Voices Coordinator (26th Oct, 2021)

demonstrates the power of Young Voices when those in power have a listening disposition:

'The views of young people as outlined in your report helped to shape the final PEACE PLUS Programme. We still refer to the views of young people in your report and indeed those who responded from youth organisations in our consultation when developing the Investment Areas of the Programme. We will continue to do this during the call development process.

I hope you are pleased there has been an increase in the final budget for Theme 3, Empowering and Investing our Young People.

Thank you very much for the valuable report you both produced. As you can see from our Summary of Consultation Responses Report, your report contributed significantly'.
(E-mail from SEUPB to NYCI Development Officer, 26/10/2021)

Young People and Activity that has Meaning

The themes explored across the six Young Voices events were rooted in key areas of discourse that were timely, relevant, and important to young people:

'The topics were good, they were kind of responsive to need and responsive to what was happening at the time.' (YW8)

Young people were keen to share their views on the big issues, as well as their experiences of how they are directly impacted by issues like BREXIT, mental health support and provision, and the global pandemic:

'I think it would be very easy to look at some of the topics covered in Young Voices and think "nah young people wouldn't be interested", but there's a lot of young people that are really interested in different topics, and they're bringing a lot of perspectives that nobody has thought of, because you know it's about their lives'. (YW7)

Young people openly shared their lived experiences and the reality of how some of these issues played out and shaped their lives. In the BREXIT discussions, for example, young people from other EU countries, outside of the UK and Ireland, outlined their concerns around how and if BREXIT would impact on their ability to access further education opportunities on the island of Ireland. Having the space to discuss issues like this, raised awareness not just with other young people, but with professionals, including youth workers, and amplified some of the issues that people, from ethnic minority communities, for example, are grappling with:

'Borders, that was a basic worry for us at the time. Will we have to sit in a queue in traffic for 2-3 hours to get a bit of shopping. We went to that Young Voices, and we actually learned and listened and seen how it was going to affect many young people from different cultures and at different stages. At the beginning we didn't really understand it but through Young Voices we had a better understanding'. (YW7)

However, as well as providing meaningful insights into their lived experiences, and how they are impacted by wider social issues, Young Voices also provided a platform for young people to put forward practical recommendations on addressing barriers. During the second consultation into PEACE PLUS themes, young people emphasised the need to create more opportunities for people from different community and cultural backgrounds to meet, share stories, and raise awareness of issues impacting on them. Young people shared however that these spaces, and the responsibility of breaking down barriers, should not solely focus on young people:

'It can't all be about young people doing the heavy lifting.' (Young Voices Participant 1, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 20/05/2021)

'We need to do more to inform everyone about the past, why we live in segregated communities, but also the impact that living separately has on all our

lives.' (Young Voices Participant 2, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 25/05/2021)

'Coming from a minority community, moving from one segregated country to a different country where segregation is also prevalent, was difficult. At school I often felt excluded, as people were not used to other cultures or communities. It can be difficult to make space for other minority communities in a divided society'. (Young Voices Participant 3, Young Voices, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 06/05/2021)

Young people also highlighted the inconsistencies and mixed messaging they face regarding mental health. For example on one hand, young people are encouraged to reach out to a trusted adult, such as a teacher, if they are struggling. However when they do, the responses can sometimes demonstrate a lack of empathy:

'What have you got to be sad about? School days are the best days of your life.' (Young Voices Participant 1, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 20/05/2021)

This can further exacerbate a young person's mental health issues, and close down the potential for a timely intervention. Furthermore, young people shared experiences of seeking help, and finding that service provision is under severe pressure:

'During the pandemic some young people sought support from their GP only to be told there is a 14-month waiting list, and basically "come back when you are on your last legs"'. (Young Voices Participant 4, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 06/05/2021)

This experience was reiterated by many young people across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. There was consensus amongst participants in Young Voices that significant investment is needed in addressing poor mental health, however they also highlighted the need for further consultation with young people about where and how resources are invested:

'It's good SEUPB are agreeing to invest money in the mental health of young people – however, do they know how or what they are going to spend it on? Will they spend more in the most crucial areas that need addressed? Will they engage with young people to inform them as to what the issues are?' (Young Voices Participant 5, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 06/05/2021)

'Promoting wellbeing - and what this looks like - needs to be at the forefront of all programmes and run through all the strands of the funding. What is it to be human, first? What do we need to be healthy and happy humans?' (Young Voices Participant 6, Something to Say about PEACE PLUS , 12/05/2021)

Improvements and Recommendations for Young Voices:

Reflecting on the approach developed by YouthPact, including the feedback shared by Peace4Youth workers and Project Participants, the following have been identified as potential areas that could enhance the experience going forward:

1. Given the wide age range of young people involved with Peace4Youth Projects, and taking onboard the feedback from Peace4Youth workers, it could be beneficial to consider increasing the number of Young Voices Events, and organising these into age categories. This structure may be more reflective of how projects categorise their groups, for example, 14–16-year-olds, and 16–24-year-olds.

2. Further consideration could be given to follow-up support arising from the Young Voices events. YouthPact could support Peace4Youth workers to have follow up discussions with young people within their respective projects, particularly around technical issues such as the EU Exit/BREXIT.

Reflective Practice Hubs

A core role for YouthPact lay in creating spaces for sharing and learning from peers across the Peace4Youth family of projects. This was a feature of all YouthPact sessions but was the central aim of the Reflective Practice Hub sessions.

Reflective practice sessions have been variously called 'Support Bubbles', 'Self-care Clusters' or have been geographically based – 'Belfast cluster', 'Fermanagh Cluster', 'Border Cluster', 'Western Cluster'. The origin of these sessions was to offer a space for reflection on practice and peer support, with discussions of barriers in practice, recruitment, retention, sharing of practice resources and opportunities to network and meet others locally in a similar position to you. There was a decided shift in this approach with the onset of Covid-19 and the changes to working practices. To support staff through this professional jolt, the reflective practice sessions took on thematic interests such as self-care, the sharing of project resources and the delivery of digital youth work. The most recent iteration of the reflective practice hubs were the 'Support bubbles' which were in many ways a return to the original concept for the reflective practice clusters, of peer learning and sharing rather than thematic sessions.

Building Social Capital through Support Networks

In the Peace4Youth family, the reflective practice sessions were designed for bonding social capital whereby workers' connections were to be strengthened by building internal networks allowing for 'like-minded people' to build up their ties. They also helped to boost a common sense of identity for these PEACE IV-funded programmes:

'Meetings like this help to make project staff aware that their project is part of the wider Peace4Youth strand and not just a stand-alone project.' (P.E.,07/09/2018)

'More understanding of the network and links.' (P.E., 16/06/2018)

'Like meeting like-minded people and was nice to meet people from other projects. It was nice to see how compassionate everyone is. Really enjoyed first time attending one of these sessions.' (P.E., 22/06/2020)

The sharing of experience is called 'capitalising' by researchers, whereby the re-telling of an experience can allow us to re-live the emotions and moments of this experience. When we meet people who want to connect with this or who facilitate this well, they can ask questions that help us to make greater sense of the experience. This then adds richness to the experience, through awakening of emotions and the full range of senses. In the case of YouthPact support sessions, this process of capitalising built peer empathy and a stronger bond:

'Everyone is feeling the same.' (P.E., 25/5/2018)

'Everyone is experiencing the same problems.' (P.E., 25/05/2018)

'There is a commonality of issues and practices which are useful to share in order to dispel the sense of isolation that project staff can sometimes feel.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)

Workers repeatedly referred to the sense of isolation they felt in their professional roles. The support sessions presented as an antidote for this, recognising and using the strength of the collective:

'We are not alone, there is support out there.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)

'Very important to have cross-[project] clusters as it can be very isolating and sharing best practice is valuable.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

Not only was the support invaluable during the sessions, but it also provided workers with the confidence to seek further support in the future from newly-discovered peers:

> '*Think it's really good to get comfortable with other projects to make it easier to pick up the phones.' (P.E., 29/6/2020)*

Support was mentioned as a core feature of the hubs. This support was not just mentioned as a method of combatting isolation or of providing reassurance to workers. The aim of support was directly linked to providing a better quality of service to young people. Workers saw their participation in these sessions through the lens of improvements to their practice and outcomes for young people:

> '*That we are not alone, we are all doing our best to deliver a quality effective programme.' (P.E., 16/06/2018)*

> '*Support - the group really provided a level of support and reaffirmed the positive impact our work is having on young people.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)*

Communities of Practice

Improvement in practice through peer networks is presented by Wenger-Traynor as 'communities of practice' (2015). This theoretical concept refers to a learning approach based on 'bringing people together who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.' There are three characteristics of a community of practice which have been consciously re-created through the reflective practice sessions; particularly in the support bubble model designed to build a small group of consistent members who meet regularly. These are domain, community and practice.

Community of Practice Characteristics	YouthPact Support Bubble Approach
Domain: Community members have a shared domain of interest, competence and commitment that distinguishes them from others. This shared domain creates common ground, inspires members to participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions.	In this instance community members were all Peace4Youth workers, delivering programmes with young people across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.
Community: Members pursue this interest through joint activities, discussions, problem-solving opportunities, information sharing and relationship building. The notion of a community creates the social fabric for enabling collective learning. A strong community fosters interaction and encourages a willingness to share ideas.	Support Bubble Members were all youth workers, recruiting and working with young people during the Covid-19 global pandemic.
Practice: Community members are actual practitioners in this domain of interest and build a shared repertoire of resources and ideas that they take back to their practice. While the domain provides the general area of interest for the community, the practice is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its core of collective knowledge.	Members were all interested in reflecting on their experiences and challenges of youth work during the pandemic; sharing practical ideas/resources to support youth work engagement and delivery; and to further develop connections with youth workers within and across Peace4Youth Projects.

To give meaning to this community of practice, the members used this space to gain and give knowledge and skills within the Peace4Youth network. The notion of sharing collective knowledge is a valuable hook for members of these reflective practice sessions; whereby workers can clearly identify practical ideas, tools or techniques that they obtain through taking part:

'Using google docs.' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

'How to create breakout rooms.' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

'Using the emojis hand to convey I'd a question or thumbs up to convey I'm good etc.' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

'Online powerpoint interaction.' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

'6 steps for resilience.' (P.E., 04/12/2020)

'I have learned to use a lot of new (to me) online platforms such as Google classrooms, Google slides and also how to use Zoom more efficiently.' (P.E., 04/12/2020)

'Recruitment ideas.' (P.E., 25/05/2018)

The emphasis on practical skills is to enhance the quality of the programmes delivered with young people. The added value in the reflective practice sessions lies also in the YouthPact session design, exercises and facilitator style. Sessions were developed so that the exercises used to generate critical discussion and thinking can be directly translated to youth programmes. In so doing, the YouthPact Development Officer's facilitation style and session content provide food for thought for youth workers who can extract learning from the experience:

'Joe's micro-habits is a gem and will take that away from the session as a wee gem.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

'Plan my sessions to be more interactive!' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

'Will take away the 'Character strengths form' used in this session and will use it with young people after this session.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

'Took away that roller coaster analogy and will use it with groups as an evaluation tool with young people as really enjoyed it.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

'Positivity of groups – facilitators' ability to bring that out.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

'Daryl and Joe were great at keeping it very engaging and fun. They were able to answer any question thrown at them and gave us the opportunity to learn from each other. No improvements necessary. Thanks again guys!' (P.E., 18/08/2020)

Motivation and Mindsets

Peace4Youth has been a busy programme, with set targets for project workers in terms of direct engagement with participants and target numbers of completers. On top of this, Covid-19 has added to the usual pressures of a time-bound funded programme. The reflective practice sessions have given space and attention to explore challenges and barriers that project workers faced. The issues discussed range widely from personal to partnership issues; from organisational procedures to participant issues:

'Policies are sometimes different from one partner to another with little consistency.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)

'Turnover of staff adds to the issues.' (P.E., 12/09/2018)

'Some larger organisations have lots of different young people involved who would fit the profile for the PEACE IV programme, so there are lots of recruitment opportunities potentially here.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)

'Been difficult trying to get a new project up and running and also meet needs.' (P.E., 12/09/2018)

'Residentials are really positive.' (P.E., 07/09/2018)

'Dealing with the complex needs of young people is tough on the workers.' (P.E., 12/09/2018)

'Structure of programme allows for the relationships between staff and participants to be nurtured.' (P.E., 12/09/2018)

'Youth participation enhancing the programme.' (P.E. 12/09/2018)

Whilst these issues were regularly discussed in reflective practice sessions, the work of the facilitator was to ensure they did not dominate or overwhelm workers, whereby the negativity could become toxic (Blaylock et al, 2019: 9). Space for exploration was given and valued by participants; but the space to consider their own responses to these fears was explicitly crafted by YouthPact. Workers identified their own unhelpful thinking patterns that would be best halted:

'Stop panicking.' (P.E., 16/06/2018)

'Stop worrying so much'. (P.E., 16/06/2018)

'Stop putting myself down'. (P.E., 25/05/2018)

To manage these pressures, workers require much resilience and a positive mindset. This has been a particularly efficacious outcome of the reflective practice sessions, with workers leaving sessions with a more hopeful and more motivated disposition than before:

'Taking away that there is hope and it is very easy to get sucked into challenges which also shows resilience and perseverance.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

'Good to see other people still motivated on other projects and hope everyone is proud of themselves.' (P.E., 22/06/2020)

'Really enjoyed talking to others today and the session has brought encouragement and ideas.' (P.E., 29/06/2020)

The reflective practice sessions became a counterbalance for some workers as a way to manage stress. In this space, the environment was created to recognise and acknowledge the stress, but also to re-motivate workers towards actions to improve their practice:

'They certainly did change the way I think about and reflect on what was going on with my groups and improved the way I wrote my reflections.' (YW9)

'They did make you sit down and think "wait, ok I could do this a lot better and it will improve not just my reflections but everything going forward" because then you do start to think a lot more about how can I do this better.' (YW9)

'I mean it's the same end goal that we all have. I think putting a face to all these organisations is great, instead of having a vague notion of who they are.' (YW9)

'I loved sharing my ideas because I was so proud especially when we moved online all the different games and for those that were prepared and came with their ideas it was great to kind of think about them and implement them and add them into our programme as well.' (YW10)

The reflective practice work emerged as a method of self-care which improved motivation and mindset. Within this, practice ideas and resources were shared, to give tangible project materials for the workers; but equally valuable were the intangible outcomes with increased resilience helping to sustain workers through professional challenges:

'I was part of the micro sessions and support bubbles online and I think for me what I enjoyed about those was coming together and hearing from other groups and getting reassurance that everyone was on the same path'. (YW9)

'I found them very valuable getting to talk to other workers and maybe try to you know spark relationships with other youth workers.' (YW10)

'I was more energised and more reassured that we were doing the best, and like the use of the workers being able to tell you in the clusters as well, so like the morale was good in the team and I think that does have a positive impact on the young people.' (YW10)

Improvements and Recommendations for Reflective Practice Sessions

1. Reflective practice sessions moved from geographically-based sessions, through to thematic reflective sessions onto support bubbles. The format and structure of these sessions diverged from the original reflective practice set. This ability to adapt and manoeuvre is a strength of the Reflective Practice Hub concept.

2. As outlined by the QUB Phase One report, the most negative voices can dominate this space. This requires a tight structure and a skilled facilitator to allow for participants to express themselves freely but to ensure this negativity does not overwhelm the tone of the session or the voice of other workers.

3. The online support bubbles – there was discussion around the limited representation at these sessions – and representation is really needed for generating energy and sharing ideas. Wider representation would have enhanced these sessions further:

'Think about how to attract more people to them because it is so beneficial. I think it's just getting people there because it will be a benefit regardless of what you do but I just felt like the attendance, or the representation of different projects was low, when it went online'. (YW10)

The following was suggested by one interviewee to address this:

'Maybe like something managers recommending that youth workers attend these because they will get something out of it. You know, make them a bit more mandatory, or you have to attend half of the sessions, like 3 of the 6'.

Accredited Youth Work Training

Peace4Youth projects employed a significant number of staff drawing on expertise from across a variety of disciplines. Programme delivery staff had backgrounds, for example, in formal education, early years, or community development, and many projects were also supported by a pool of volunteers. Project coordinators identified a training need in relation to supporting this cohort of staff and volunteers to gain a recognised youth work qualification to further enhance their delivery with young people.

Accredited Qualification

YouthPact responded to this identified need and secured additional funding from SEUPB to deliver a range of entry level training opportunities, including the roll out of an accredited Open College Network Level 2 Award and Certificate in Youth Work Practice. Following a procurement exercise YouthPact worked in collaboration with YouthAction Northern Ireland to deliver this qualification to 39 Peace4Youth staff and volunteers in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

OCN NI youth work units have been mapped to the 2012 National Occupational Standards for Youth Work and have been designed to provide the necessary training and qualifications for youth work staff and volunteers who work or intend to work in youth work settings.

The OCN NI Level 2 qualifications in Youth Work Practice enable progression from Award to Certificate and Diploma and also to a Level 3 qualification in youth work. These qualifications are recognised by Ulster University and will assist learners to apply for the Level 4 Certificate in Youth Studies and the BSc (Hons) Community Youth Work.

In 2019-20, twenty two learners participated in a face-to-face setting, in Fermanagh, Belfast, and Derry. Due to the pandemic however, the roll out of this qualification was adapted to facilitate online delivery in 2020-21. 17 participants from across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland were involved in this online cohort. Although not without its challenges, there was a clear sense that online participants benefited from this coming together during a time of

significant upheaval, meeting with others working in different jurisdictions and geographical locations:

> *'I enjoyed meeting new people from different organisations and places, that I will keep in contact with.' (P.E., 21.04.2021)*

Outline of OCN Level 2 in Youth Work Practice

The OCN Level Two in Youth Work Practice is split into two parts, the Award and the Certificate. To achieve the Award, learners complete six mandatory units:

- Principles and Values of Youth Work in Practice
- Understand the Developmental Needs of Young People within Youth Work
- Effective Communication Skills in a Youth Work Setting
- Understanding the Role of the Youth Worker
- Safeguarding Young People within a Youth Work Context; and
- Managing Challenging Behaviour in Youth Work Settings

A further four mandatory units are required to achieve the Certificate:

- Group Development within Youth Work Programmes
- Planning an Activity Based Youth Work Programme
- Facilitating Activity Based Youth Work Programmes; and
- Evaluating Activity Based Youth Work Programmes

Delivery and Approach

YouthAction NI prepared and delivered the training sessions and coordinated the administration requirements for OCN. YouthPact provided individual learner support, including catch up sessions, as well as supported YouthAction NI colleagues with learner assessments. Upon completion of the qualification participants across the face-to-face cohorts as well as the online cohort reflected on their learning including new knowledge acquired; personal highlights; and key takeaways from the training experience:

New Knowledge & Insights

'Values & principles of youth work, the importance of effective communication, and giving young people ownership in projects'. (P.E., 11/2019)

'Learning different forms of communication and learning how to adjust my leadership style depending on the young people and their personalities'. (P.E., 20/04/2021)

'The unit on managing challenging behaviour was particularly useful especially as my programme works with such diverse range of young people'. (P.E., 11/2019)

Personal Highlight

'Exploring the different methods of working with young people & how I can tailor my approach to suit my own facilitating style, as well as the young people's own learning style'. (P.E., 04/03/2021)

'I loved the group work, hearing every body's experience and advice'. (P.E., 11/2019)

'It was great to plan my own sessions & deliver them, as real-world practice is so important to ensure you can put all the skills you have learnt into place'. (P.E., 04/03/2021)

'I really enjoyed meeting the rest of the course participants. As our group came from such a diverse range of backgrounds, it was a great opportunity to learn and share knowledge/ experience'. (P.E., 11/2019)

Key Take-Aways

'I think the course has given me reassurance that there is no set way to be a youth worker and that it is ok to have your own style. We will continue to learn with every experience'. (P.E., 04/03/2021)

'I have learned how to navigate online youth work a lot better with the course being held online. Another key aspect was learning about the different stages that young people will go through when starting out as a group together'. (P.E., 20/04/2021)

'Experience is so important and helps you to grow as a youth worker. Everyone experiences ups and downs in youth work'. (P.E., 20/04/2021)

Participants also commented on the quality of the training delivery and learner support they received:

'Firstly, the training provided was excellent. Plus, all the participants taking part in the training had invaluable experience and were willing to share their expertise'. (P.E., 20/04/2021)

'I enjoyed working remotely & both the facilitators, (Maria and Joanne) were amazing. They were super helpful & attentive, & I felt very comfortable being myself'. (P.E., 20/04/2021)

'The sessions were all split up very well, so it was never too work heavy, as they would intersperse with icebreakers, games & discussion pieces'. (P.E., 11/2019)

'The way this training was facilitated was fun, informative and also engaging'. (P.E., 11/2019)

There was an appetite and demand for an accredited qualification in Youth Work across all the Peace4Youth projects, and the additional investment made by SEUPB in resourcing this was very well received.

During the pandemic substantial efforts were made to ensure this training could be offered online, within quite a short timeframe. Careful consideration was given as to how to deliver an engaging and inclusive training experience, that could also be responsive to the range of issues and unexpected challenges, that frequently presented. YouthPact would like to acknowledge the commitment (and patience) demonstrated by all learners involved, and to our colleagues in YouthAction NI.

'If you had asked me six months ago if it would be possible for me to deliver this qualification online, I would have said not a chance'.
(YouthAction NI Facilitator, 04/03/2021)

Improvements and Recommendations for Accredited Youth Work Training

YouthPact surmised that the need for accredited, entry-level training was much higher than originally anticipated. The workforce audit revealed a large section of Peace4Youth employees were new to youth work approaches and therefore needed the necessary building blocks to support their developmental roles with young people. A limited number of providers deliver the Level 2 OCN in Youth Work Practice, therefore this needs to be planned well in advance, and form part of the early work for the Quality and Impact Body in the future.

Conclusion

The role and function of YouthPact, the Quality and Impact Body, was 'to perform a quality assurance and impact support role' (SEUPB Call document, 2017) to funded Peace4Youth projects and to provide training and resources that enhanced the impact of the work for participating young people. This evaluation report is a reflection on the role and impact of YouthPact to ascertain its effectiveness. The following is a summary of the key impact areas identified through analysis of the data.

Faithful to the Peace4Youth Principles and Objectives

From the initial stages of the Peace4Youth Programme the YouthPact team aimed to support projects with embedding the three core outcome areas, Good Relations, Citizenship and Personal and Social Development into the lifeblood of their work, using youth work methodology. This included supporting Peace4Youth workers to unpack the 17 outcome indicators and consider their theory of change as outlined in their respective applications. It was highlighted by respondents as part of this evaluation that this work was also effective in supporting stakeholders and project participants, to feel connected to the wider programme, and have a fuller overview of how they are contributing. This work was also useful in reiterating the purpose of Peace4Youth and what it saught to achieve.

Relational Learning

YouthPact did more than simply organise and deliver a series of training and events. The YouthPact Team placed significant importance on relationship building, developing relational approaches to learning and communication across all areas of their work. This approach was highlighted in the evaluation report as being something that project coordinators, project workers and young people responded positively to, and valued. Stakeholders referred to YouthPact staff as providing motivation, inspiration, and vision, that were all important ingredients in shaping the overall Peace4Youth Projects.

Quality and Relevant Training

The training opportunities that were developed and facilitated by YouthPact helped to enhance the quality of programme delivery, built confidence of Peace4Youth workers and unpacked important themes that emerged over the life of the programme.

The importance placed on relational communication ensured that YouthPact were well positioned to identify timely and appropriate interventions that responded to the needs of a project and its staff. This was welcomed across all projects and the feedback shared over the four years has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly referencing the insights shared by different individuals on the YouthPact team.

The range and quality of the expert facilitators appointed to deliver specialist training, broadened the skills and knowledge of the project workers. The ideas presented, and the approach taken by these facilitators resonated with Peace4Youth workers and they respected the breadth of knowledge and expertise that was shared. These inputs positively informed their own practice.

Brokering Capacity

YouthPact facilitated spaces for stakeholders to come together, discuss collective concerns and agree key actions that communicated shared ideas, challenges, and recommendations. YouthPact gathered key points on behalf of different stakeholders, most notably from coordinators at different junctures throughout the project, and communicated these to the relevant agencies, for example SEUPB. This role was highlighted by different stakeholders, as something that they considered an important and beneficial part of the YouthPact remit.

Space To Air Professional Concerns, Pressures and Ideas

YouthPact facilitated plentiful opportunities for staff within projects to come together to discuss their work, address challenges and celebrate successes. Respondents considered this one of the most rewarding aspects of their engagements with YouthPact, sharing that YouthPact staff created environments that people felt comfortable to have conversations that could sometimes be difficult, however with careful facilitation, YouthPact supported workers to navigate through issues, reflect on their practice, and identify practical solutions.

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Appendix 1: YouthPact Achievements against Targets 2017-2021

Target	YouthPact Achievements
Sharing and learning events: **Target:** 3 Learning and sharing events to promote sharing and learning for 60 participants (Dec 18; Dec 19; Oct 21) **Achievement**: 11 Learning and Sharing events completed.	**Event 1** (across 3 meetings)- Monitoring events with QUB Evaluation Team- Jan 2018 & Feb 2018 **Event 2** Community Youth Work & Autism Spectrum Conditions – Jan 2019. **Event 3** Distilling the Essence of Peace4Youth Practice – May 2019. **Event 4-7 Cluster Group meetings:** North-West cluster group – May 2018 Monaghan cluster group -June 2018 Fermanagh cluster group – Sept 2018 Belfast cluster group – Sept 2018 **Event 8-10 Coordinators' reflection hub meetings:** Coordinators' meeting – April 2018 Coordinators' meeting – June 2018 Coordinators' meeting – Oct 2018 **Event 11** North-South Youth Work Managers Event – Feb 2021
Training events: **Target:** 12 Training events to provide support, learning and best practice opportunities to enhance the depth of participant outcomes across target areas. (1 in 2017, 2 in 2018; 3 in 2019; 3 in 2020; 3 in 2021) **Achievement:** 17 Training Events Completed	1. The distinctive elements of Youth Work – Dr. Mark Hammond – Dec 2017 2. Advanced groupwork training – Jarlath Benson – April 2018 3. Mentoring processes and principles – Dr. Gail Neill – Magee, Derry/Londonderry – May 2018 4. Mentoring processes and principles – Dr. Gail Neill - Jordanstown – May 2018 5. Border lives – Ruth Taillion – Centre for Cross-border Studies – June 2018 6. What is this Peace?' - Dr. Martin McMullan, Dr. Emily Stanton, Andy Hamilton – Sept 2018 7. Citizenship – Professor Duncan Morrow – Feb 2019 8. Conscious Use of Self – Anne Walsh, NYCI, Belfast – Mar 2019 9. Bringing the Agreement Home – Dr. Anthony Soares, Centre for Cross-border Studies -Mar 2019 10. LIFEMAPS training – Eliz McArdle – June 2019 11. Peacebuilding resources for young people – David Gardiner -Nov 2019 12. Young People as social activists – Maria Perkins- Nov 19 13. Peacebuilding Resources – Dr. Martin McMullan - Jan 2020 14. Young people as social activists – Debs Irwin – Mar 2020 15. 2020 Sharing Peace4Youth Practice Micro-sessions – Nov 2020 16. Digital Youth Work Skills - Daryl Moore & Seana Carmichael -Aug 2020 17. Life Maps, Eliz McArdle – July 2021

Support & Development Meetings:	Period 1 – 4 Support & Development Meetings Period 2 – 27 Support & Development Meetings Period 3 – 33 Support & Development Meetings Period 4 – 13 Support & Development Meetings Period 5 – 10 Support & Development Meetings Period 6 – 15 Support & Development Meetings Period 7 – 13 Support & Development Meetings Period 8 – 14 Support & Development Meetings Period 9 – 17 Support & Development Meetings Period 10 – 6 Support & Development Meetings Period 11 – 21 Support & Development Meetings Period 12 – 13 Support & Development Meetings Period 13 – 20 Support & Development Meetings Period 14 – 9 Support & Development Meetings Period 15 – 9 Support & Development Meetings Period 16 – 8 Support & Development Meetings
Practice & Policy Papers **Target:** 6 Practice and Policy Papers (1 in 2018; 2 in 2019; 2 in 2020; 1 in 2021) **Achievement:** 12 Practice and Policy Papers completed.	1. What is this peace?: A review of literature on youthwork and peacebuilding - 2018 2. Young Voices: Something to say about Peace4Youth - 2018 3. Community Youth Work and Autistic Spectrum Conditions - 2019 4. Perspectives on Partnership - 2019 5. Distilling the essence of Peace4Youth Practice - 2019 6. ARK paper on 'The Role of youth work in peacebuilding' completed with virtual launch - 2020 7. 'Why young people join, why young people stay' -2020 8. A toolkit for Youth Work to promote diversity and Inclusion. Bridges and Barriers to Unity - 2020 9. Understanding Group Work for Individual and Social Learning -2021 10. ARK paper: Reclaiming Youthwork - 2020 11. At the Threshold: Youthwork through the Covid-19 pandemic 2021 12. Young Voices Something to say about PEACE PLUS – 2021
Expert Advisory Meetings **Target:** 3 across three years (2019-2021) **Achievement:** 3 Expert Advisory Meetings completed.	1. Ark Roundtable The role of youth work in Peacebuilding – Oct 2019 2. Ark Youth Work Principles and Practices during Covid-19 – Nov 2020 3. Fire in the Belly- Young Women Peace and Security – Oct 2021

Online modules **Target:** 5 Online training modules (1 in 2018; 2 in 2019; 2 in 2020) **Achievement:** 5 Online training modules completed.	Launch of 5 online training modules 1. Communicating Youth Work 2. Youth Participation and Non-formal learning 3. Ethics and Human rights in professional youth work 4. Youthwork in diverse societies 5. Youthwork in the digital world
Young Voices Events **Target:** 6 Young Voices Events (1 in 2018; 2 in 2019; 2 in 2020; 1 in 2021) **Achievement:** 6 Young Voices Events completed.	1. Young Voices 1 – Something to say about Peace4Youth- Aug 2018 2. Young Voices 2 – Something to say about Brexit, with Centre for Cross-border Studies- April 2019 3. Young Voices 3 – Vision 2040, with Pivotal - Nov 2019 4. Young Voices 4 – Something to say about PEACE PLUS, with SEUPB - Feb/March 2020 5. Young Voices 5 – '2020 in 4' Something to say about Covid-19 - Dec 2020 6. Young Voices 6 – Something to say about PEACE PLUS -May/June 2021
8 steps to inclusive youth work resource **Target:** 1 publication of 'Eight steps to inclusive youth work' with virtual launch by Dec 2018 **Achievement:** 1 publication 'Eight Steps to Inclusive Youth Work' completed.	'Gearing up for Transformative Practice' – 2019 A resource to support youth workers in embedding diversity and inclusion across their programmes, groups and recruitment strategies.

| Coordinators' reflection hub meetings

Target: 9 across 3 years (2019-2021)

Achievement: 21 Coordinators' meetings completed. | Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 31st Jan 2019
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 4th April 2019
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 21st June 2019
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 6th Sept 2019
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 19th Nov 2019
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 17th Jan 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 23rd March 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 26th March 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 2nd April 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 23rd April 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting –28th April 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting –12th May 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 18th June 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 30th July 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 7th Sept 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 11th Nov 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 10th Dec 2020
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 13th Jan 2021
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 29th Jan 2021
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 17th June 2021
Coordinators' reflection hub meeting – 4th Nov 2021 |
| Partnership-specific events

Target: 33 Across 3 Years (2019-2021)

Achievement: 51 Partnership-specific events completed. | **2019**
21 Partnership-specific events
Amplify x 2, Transform x 4, Strive x 4, MPower x 1, Journeys x 2, Futures x 4, Heroes x 1, Third Space x 2 & YouthScape x 1

2020
14 Partnership-specific events
Amplify x 1, Transform x 5, Strive x 2, Futures x 1, Heroes x 1, Third Space x 2 & Breakthrough x 2

2021
16 Partnership-specific events
Transform x 5, Strive with Amplify x 1, MPower x 1, Journeys x 2, Heroes x 1, ThirdSpace x2, Breakthrough x 1 & Peacebytes x 3 |

Peer support cluster groups/ reflective practice clusters **Target:** 12 across 3 years (2019-2021) **Achievement:** 21 Peer support cluster groups/ reflective practice clusters completed	Belfast cluster – May 2019 Western cluster – May 2019 North West cluster – May 2019 Conversations on safeguarding – Aug 2019 Conversations on mentoring – Aug 2019 Conversations on recruitment, retention & engagement – Sept 2019 Conversations on programme design and content – Sept 2019 Queens workshop on recruitment, retention & engagement – Oct 2019 Queens workshop on transformative moments in Peace4Youth projects – Oct 2019 Conversations on Safeguarding – Nov 2019 Cross Project Cluster (4 Sessions)– June 2020 Self-care cluster – Dec 2020 Support bubbles (5 Sessions) – Feb-Apr 2021
Entry-level events **Target:** 9 Across 3 years (2019-2021) **Achievement:** 9 Entry-level events completed	Introduction to work with young men – Dec 2019 Introduction to life coaching session – Jan 2020 Introduction to youth work (4 sessions) - July - Aug 2020 Introduction to youth work in the online space (4 sessions)-Aug 2020 Introduction to Youth work in the online space – Sept 2020 (3 sessions) Introduction to facilitation skills in youth work -Feb 2021 Kicking Training (Open Training) – Sept 21 Kicking Training (Youthscape) – Sept 21 Kicking Training (Open Training) – Nov 21
Entry-level accredited training/Fees **Target:** 30 trainees for OCN intro to youth work course **Achievement:** 39 trainees for Entry level accredited training/fees completed	OCN NI Level 2 Certificate in Youth Work Practice: Derry Cohort -Autumn 2019 OCN NI Level 2 Certificate in Youth Work Practice: Belfast – Autumn 2019 OCN NI Level 2 Certificate in Youth Work Practice: Autumn 2020 Online Cohort
Specialist training events **Target:** 6 across 3 years (2019-2021) **Achievement:** 7 Specialist training events completed	1. Adverse Childhood Experiences - Oct 2019 2. Adverse Childhood Experiences – Nov 2019 3. Adverse Childhood Experiences – Nov 2019 4. Advanced work with young men – Jan 2020 5. Motivational interviewing – Feb 2020 6. Diverse Connections – Nov 2021 7. Wellness and Wellbeing within Youthwork teams and projects during Covid-19, - Mar 2021

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