At the Threshold: youth work through the COVID-19 pandemic

youth pact
QUALITY & IMPACT

Eliz McArdle and
Leighann McConville

Acknowledgements

Ulster University

co-operationireland
working for a future together

pobal
government supporting communities

nYci
national youth council of ireland
COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA NA NÓG

Contents

Executive Summary

This research was carried out with youth workers delivering youth programmes throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic. Respondents were employed as youth workers in the Peace IV Children & Young People's programme, Peace4Youth. The Peace4Youth programme is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and supported by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth (RoI) and the Department for the Economy (NI).

The Peace4Youth programme is a peace-building programme with three outcome areas – good relations, citizenship and personal development. Research was conducted with 43 youth workers through observation of staff meetings and semi-structured interviews, five youth workers took part in one-to-one interviews and two took part in a paired interview.

Summary of findings

Youth Work values and principles acted as a roadmap for practitioners during these uncertain times. Ethical issues, safeguarding of young people and protection of those most vulnerable were considered in the early stages of developing new youth work policies and procedures due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Peer learning, reflective practice and sharing of new skills amongst youth workers enabled the workforce to quickly build capacity and re-design their programmes for the digital space. For research respondents, the safety and welfare of young people was their first priority. The continuous presence and actions of youth workers has had a significant role in mitigating some of the effects of the pandemic, such as isolation, poverty and the potential mental health impact on young people. Peace4Youth workers offered practical support such as food parcels, digital connectivity through dongles and other support and care packages and continued to connect with young people to maintain trusted relationships.

The vehicle for engaging and connecting with young people was through delivering a programme that gave a sense of purpose and cut through the isolation young people were experiencing. Workers provided programme activities that were both developmental and supportive. Workers at times walked a tightrope to hold a balance between delivering the programme on one hand, and maintaining the care and welfare of individual young people on the other.

Understanding engagement and dis-engagement by young people on digital platforms is multi-faceted. Many structural issues have an impact such as poverty, broadband infrastructure and digital access. Furthermore, the impact of lockdown restrictions has had a disproportionately negative impact on young people and their mental health. Those who have been marginalised in the face-to-face space, are at even greater risk of disappearing from view in the online world.

Respondents articulated the need for flexibility and self-care strategies from their employing organisations, during this pandemic and in the future, in order to process the impact of this period personally and professionally.

Summary of insights for policy and practice

A. For all that changed in the practice of youth work during the COVID-19 restrictions, the core of the work remained the same.

B. Organisations that embed reflective and reflexive practice as part of the professional routine can build adaptive responsive staff teams that are capable of moving quickly and skilfully into and through flux environments.

C. This crisis period has demonstrated the role that youth work can contribute across the full multi-disciplinary spectrum and across a range of mental health, educational, recreational and social policy priorities set by government.

D. Youth workers have built a bank of digital skills throughout this period while remaining faithful to the primacy of relationship and the human skills that permeate both the virtual world and the face-to-face world. The challenge is in blending the best of both approaches, within a wider ethical debate on the nature of youth work.

E. To sustain a healthy workforce, organisational policy and practice needs to reinforce the work of managers and teams, building a health-promoting organisational culture.

1. Introduction

YouthPact and Peace4Youth

The EU (European Union) PEACE IV Children and Young People's programme (Action 2.1), entitled Peace4Youth, is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), with all-island support from the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) and the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth (Republic of Ireland) (formerly Department for Children and Youth Affairs). The programme employs a youth work approach to address some of the most entrenched insecurities, inequalities and instability in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, targeting 7600 young people aged 14-24 over a 4 year period (2017-2021) 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.

YouthPact, the Quality and Impact Body for the Peace4Youth Programme, works with the funded 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.

The focus of the work 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. "It will result in an increase in the percentage of 16-year-olds, who socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community; who think relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than they were five years ago; and who think relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better in five years' time".[1]

Background & Context to the research

In March 2020 the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Dáil in the Republic of Ireland imposed restrictions on many areas of life due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. One consequence was the inability of youth workers to meet face to face with young people which necessitated a rapid response by youth workers and organisations to the changing circumstances for young people. This research captures practice in a time of unprecedented disruption to the delivery of youth work. Youth workers working directly with young people were the subjects of the research; data collection took place through observations at organisational meetings that were already taking place, therefore avoiding adding to the many demands on youth workers at this time. Five youth workers involved in the observation meetings subsequently took part in a one-to-one interview, and two youth workers took part in a paired interview allowing for more in-depth discussion on themes emerging from the observations.

The research articulates the youth work practice that has continued throughout the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. It highlights the processes undertaken by youth workers and the underpinning values and principles that support their work as well as areas of practice that has been sustained and developed as a result of the change in working situation.

The aim of the research is to understand, identify and articulate core elements of youth work practice that have been conspicuous through this period; and elements of practice that have been strained. The research analysis points to lessons extracted to be built into future youth work practice.

---

1   Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey (2015)
    https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2015/

2. Methodology

Aim of the Research

The aim of the research is to understand, identify and articulate core elements of youth work practice that are being used by Peace4Youth workers during the Covid-19 restrictions and to take learning from experience that can be applied to future practice.

Objectives of the Research

- To identify the barriers and opportunities arising from working in the 2020 restrictions due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.
- To consider how methodologies and processes have adapted or been lost in the virtual online space.
- To identify and articulate elements of key practices, values and principles which are most prominent.
- To illustrate the elements of youth work practice that have persisted through this period and those elements of youth work practice that have been strained.
- To identify learning from the experience of practicing youth work in the pandemic and use it to influence future planning and practice.

Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was chosen to allow for a depth of understanding of the experience of youth workers to emerge and become clear. Suter (2012:344) states,

'Qualitative research, in all of its complex designs and methods of data analysis, is guided by the philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry: To understand a complex phenomenon, you must consider the multiple "realities" experienced by the participants themselves—the "insider" perspectives. Natural environments are favoured for discovering how participants construct their own meaning of events or situations.'

A grounded theory approach was deemed suitable because it 'seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in peoples' lives' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 cited in Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006:26). They argue,

'the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather, issues of importance to participants emerge from the stories that they tell about an area of interest that they have in common with the researcher.'

This approach is consistent with the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and gave participants the opportunity to explore their understanding of their practice with the researcher as the experience was unfolding. Used well, Charmaz (2006: 14) argues that grounded theory,

'quickens the speed of gaining a clear focus of what is happening in your data without sacrificing the detail of enacted scenes. Like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view.'

Charmaz (2006:14) describes this process as a system of meaning-making which builds on the interactions at the heart of grounded theory.

The data collection phase began with observations, followed up by five one-to-one interviews and one paired interview. Throughout this time 'memo'ing was taking place:

*'memos perform a number of functions in the research process that justify specific examination. For convenience, these functions can be described using the mnemonic '**MEMO**': **M**apping research activities; **E**xtracting meaning from the data; **M**aintaining momentum; **O**pening communication.'*

(Birks, Chapman and Francis, 2008:70)

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al (2015: 534),

'Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest.'
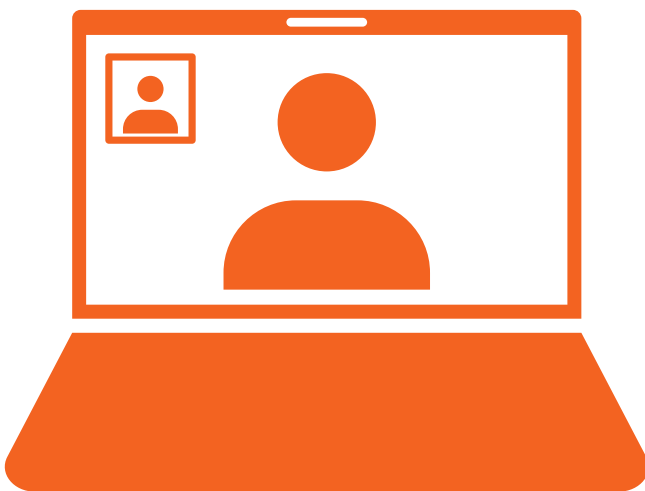
Data Collection:

The strategy for data collection for this research is in three parts:

1. A short **literature review** was conducted concurrently with data collection. The review of literature focused on emerging data during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and youth work values, principles and methods.

2. The researcher attended and conducted **observations** at project staff meetings held by nine of the eleven Peace4Youth Projects. The researcher attended staff meetings that had already been scheduled by the project coordinator. This was to avoid adding further meetings to the youth worker's busy workload. Issues and emerging themes were identified, and this data shaped the questions for the one-to-one and paired interview. The researcher did not contribute to or ask questions during these observations. Consent forms were completed by all participants.

3. **Semi-structured interviews** were carried out with seven youth workers. Participants were identified from each of the observation groups and a verbal or email invitation sent directly to them. This invitation was accompanied by a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which was completed and returned prior to interview.

Due to public health restrictions in place during the time of data collection (May-August 2020) the research was carried out via online platforms. Data protection and safeguarding considerations were examined and agreed prior to the research commencing.

Research Sample

The purposive sample was drawn from full-time and part-time youth workers employed on the Peace4Youth programme. 43 youth workers participated in the observation phase of the research. One-to-one interviews were carried out with five workers; and two workers took part in a paired interview. Whilst it was not intended to be a representative sample, the researcher was attentive to variables such as gender, age, community background, geography, to optimise balance across the study. The sample has representation from nine of the eleven projects of Peace4Youth and from workers, North and South of the border.

Recruitment was via the Peace4Youth project co-ordinators in the first instance and subsequent requests were made directly to individual workers to participate in the research. The invitation was made via an email with the offer of a follow-up conversation if deemed necessary by co-ordinators, youth workers and/or the researcher.

Where individuals showed an interest in taking part, the researcher distributed the Information Sheet, Consent Form and followed up with a verbal explanation of the research to discuss any ethical concerns. While the research was limited to the Peace4Youth programme, the roles of youth workers in this programme are consistent with roles that are carried out across the youth work sector and therefore findings have relevance to the wider youth work field.

Each of the one-to-one interviewees and the paired interviewees have been given a pseudonym. The Observations are styled as Observation 1-8. Comments are not attributed to individuals involved in the observations.

Ethical Considerations

This project has been reviewed and approved by the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences Ethics Filter Committee at Ulster University.

The ethical issues outlined here relate to the care of research participants, informed consent, confidentiality and safeguarding procedures, data protection, privacy and use of data.

A key consideration in undertaking the research was the considerable strain that workers in the Peace4Youth programme were under in their daily work. To avoid adding further pressure, two key decisions were made:

• An observation approach would be used for the larger group data. The researchers were confident that the content of these meetings would provide rich data on the impact of COVID-19 on practice.

• Young people would not be included in this part of the research. It was decided that both workers and young people were in a time of great upheaval and research conducted from outside their own organisation would create additional pressure.

This study presented minimal risk for the participants or the researcher. The following actions were taken to mitigate potential risks:

- The observation sessions were pre-arranged meetings convened by the projects. The online platform used was the project coordinator's choice. The observations were not digitally recorded by the researcher to maximise privacy for project workers.

- The researcher used Ulster University's BlackBoard Collaborate to conduct the one-to-one interviews and the paired interview. These interviews were recorded and deleted within the agreed timeframe of them being transcribed.

- The researcher conducted a check-in with participants pre and post interview

- Secure storage of audio/transcribed materials was on a password-protected laptop. Any transcripts that are printed were destroyed by shredding where access to confidential waste was not available.
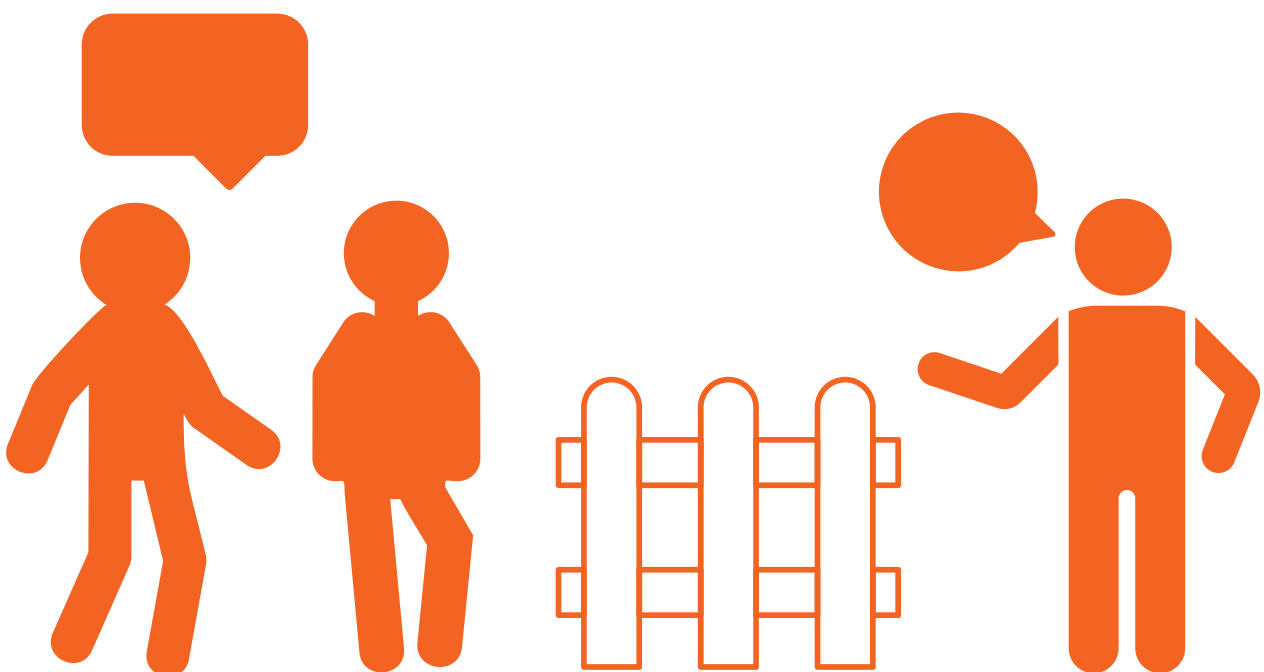
3. Review of Literature

Issues for young people through the COVID-19 pandemic

Economic and social inequality

A distinct feature of youth work is its commitment to work with all young people but especially those young people who are disadvantaged. McCready (2014:5) adds, 'with particular focus on vulnerable young people who experience multiple exclusions'. The Peace4Youth programme targets these young people who are in highest need:

'Specific Objective 2.1, Children and Young People was designed to prioritise those young people aged between 14-24 years who are most disadvantaged / excluded / marginalised, and who have deep social, emotional, and good relations needs. Many of these young people are at risk of becoming engaged in antisocial, violent, or dissident activity, and are disengaged from the peace process and will not be in formal education, training, or employment.' The issues facing this target group of young people are multiple and complex but not insurmountable. However, to address the issues they must be named and understood.'

(Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations QUB, 2020:12)

The issues that affect young people have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic. In April 2020,The National Youth Agency, in their report *'Out of Sight'* captured a range of concerns for vulnerable young people during the time of pandemic, three in particular are *'increased mental health problems, missing from education and "at risk, at home"'* (National Youth Agency 2020:12).

By October 2020, the repercussions of these and other concerns became evident:

"In many instances, stressors caused by the pandemic have culminated in high proportions of young people reaching clinical thresholds for depression".

(Gilleard, 2020: 7)

Gilleard et al. also highlight how the pandemic has added to young people's levels of sudden 'food insecurity' in previously secure communities (ibid, 2020:8). Given the growth of inequalities emerging in this period, it is unsurprising that Hutton, writing in the Guardian Newspaper in April 2020 considers that COVID-19 is creating a 'super crisis cohort'. Smith (2020:6) warns that,

"Unless government, business and society collectively act, what lies ahead will be unfairness heaped upon unfairness".

Smith goes further in expressing deep concern that *'some children and young people feel that they have nothing to live for'* (Smith 2020:6). The economic stressors young people are facing are articulated by Stella O'Malley in *'The Journal'* , where she outlines the economic gravity of the situation for young people, after the initial allure of bread-baking and binge-watching had worn off:

"There is an estimated 50% unemployment for the younger generation who are already under the cosh of the financial bailout during the global recession and are now on course to inherit the financial burden caused by this pandemic."

(The Journal, 9 November, 2020)

Furthermore, digital connectivity is an area where inequality has grown through the COVID-19 pandemic. Perkins (2020: par 5) references findings from Ireland and Northern Ireland on the state of internet connectivity, stating,

"In the Republic of Ireland, the Central Statistics Office estimates that 9% of households are without internet access. In Northern Ireland, according to the OFCOM Connected Nations (2019) report, it is estimated that 20,000 homes cannot access a decent fixed broadband service. Once again those most likely to experience digital poverty are the old "have nots" - asylum seekers, refugees, students, the sick, disabled, unemployed, those living in rural areas and those who live in urban areas of high deprivation."

Internet connectivity has become essential to the delivery of youth work since the original 'lockdown' and the ongoing restrictions that necessitated the move from 'in person' contact to online contact. However, issues of connectivity have a considerable impact on young people's ability to engage, often reinforcing existing exclusions and impacting on wider education issues, as identified in the global study, '#CovidUnder19':

'Children with no access to internet (84%) or with poor internet access (69%) were much more likely to say that access to good education was better before the outbreak.'

(Centre for Children's Rights QUB, 2021:2)

The multiple disadvantages experienced by many young people impact on an individual's ability to exercise their own agency (Rikala, 2020: 1023):

'As for young people in marginalised positions, considering the constraints on agency caused by their disadvantageous location in power structures is especially significant. Recently, discussions of youth marginalisation have highlighted the varying impacts of the global economic crisis and European austerity programmes on young people's possibilities to invest in their lives.'

The interactive mix of social and economic distress along with poorer health and affected life chances have an impact on young people's general health and well-being. Evidence is emerging to suggest that the mental health of young people is being heavily impacted by the effects of COVID-19.

'Put together, it is obvious that social inequalities play a significant role in shaping youth transitions fractured by depression. The social antecedents behind the rise of depression more powerfully affect those already lacking power, resources, and opportunities.'

(Rikala, 2020:1025)

The socio-economic issues of poverty and inequality have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and with long-term impacts for young people and their families. However, there is evidence to argue that youth work can act as a mitigating factor in tackling poverty and educational disadvantage. Hirsch (2007:05) suggests that,

"a key feature of successful projects working with excluded children (a small minority of those facing social disadvantage) was to build close relationships, not just with young people but with their families, addressing family circumstances as well as the child's learning needs, and making education a shared enterprise between family, educator and child."

Mental health and wellbeing

Evidence is emerging that suggests young people have been disproportionly negatively impacted by the pandemic. In June 2020, Gilleard (2020: 5),drawing on global research throughout the pandemic, highlighted that,

'The full mental health impact of lockdown measures for children and young people is not yet known, but research to date suggests that children and young people are experiencing anxiety, fear and stress as a direct or indirect result of the pandemic.'

'Stress and worries may culminate into physical effects such as poor sleeping, sleeping more than usual, or going to bed later and waking up later.'

Poor routine, limited exercise and increased screen time can impact on mental health over a sustained period of time for the general population. However Gilleard further highlights the deepening issues for young people with pre-existing mental health needs; Gilleard (2020: 18) states:

'Half of all mental health conditions first occur by age 14, and three quarters by age 24 and a half. Where young people have existing mental health needs, they report feeling more concerned than usual about their own wellbeing during COVID-19. Mental health concerns are also more prominent amongst those young people facing other risks or disadvantages, including amongst care-leavers and those with disabilities.'

The impact of the pandemic on young people will continue to emerge in the coming weeks and months. The youth work profession has a role to play in supporting young people with the skills and resilience of youth workers a significant component in mitigating the negative impact where possible. Youth workers have been working with variations of many of these issues during their careers. The pandemic does however exacerbate the issues for young people and therefore sharpens the focus of the work.

However, we must be cautious not to add negatively to the prophecy of a 'crisis cohort', instead we can make use of the considerable experience, skills and values within the youth work sector to support young people as we move beyond the pandemic.

Smith (2020: 8), presents specific insights for youth work during the pandemic, for offering young people some respite and security,

'They (young people) need to be in settings where they are not subjected to constant demands and where they can escape, or at least contain, stress and anxiety. They may want special spaces – times and places – that allow them to feel safe and connected'

Community, sanctuary and hope are presented as conditions to be created which can soothe young people in this time of increased anxiety. Smith proposes the following model:

'(Hope)… looks to creating environments where people can start to move forward and to sense that flourishing is possible.'

This provides us with a starting point and language to help make sense of things; a 'vocabulary of hope' to imagine change for the better. Here we see it as a process of:

- *learning from our experiences and conversations,*
- *thinking about what we would like to happen and steps we might need to take, and*
- *believing in the possibility of it happening.'*

(Smith,2020:11)

Amid the increased pressures young people and youth workers have worked to be "holders of hope". Youth workers have worked alongside young people to strengthen the connection between young people, family and community and to promote ongoing courage and optimism.

Youth work principles and values

Participation

The power of the principle of voluntary participation has been highlighted in this time of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Voluntary participation should not be confused with youth participation or participation as 'active citizenship' (Collin, Lala and Fieldgrass, 2018:185). In this context it is simply the act of young people exercising their free will to take part.

Never before have young people had the opportunity to opt out of a group or a programme without the usual social pressures to stay at something they have committed to. Ord (2019: 39) suggests that,

'voluntary participation [in youth work] is unique as there are few other educational or even welfare services which young people are in receipt of, that they access of their own volition.'

This point came into sharp focus in March 2020 when youth workers and young people moved from in-person work to meeting in the online space. Smith (2013) makes a pertinent point regarding voluntary participation and young people's ability to freely join and freely leave in a youth work setting, stating,

'This has fundamental implications for the way in which youth workers operate and the opportunities open to them… It also means that workers either have to develop programmes that attract young people to a youth work agency, or they have to go to the settings where they are.'

(Smith,2013:para 27)

Banks (2010: 10) captures the primary benefits of young people's participation in terms of connecting with others. She states,

'The value of association, which involves young people working together in groups, fostering supportive relationships and sharing a common life.'

The benefits of participation are highlighted by Smith (2020:10)

'Joining networks of relationships that provide support, information and access to opportunities.

Developing shared norms and habits such as tolerance, reciprocity and trust.'

A commitment to young people

A key principle of youth work is a 'commitment to the primary target group' (McCready, 2014:5). Youth workers demonstrate this commitment through a variety of behaviours. These behaviours are underpinned by values and principles and shaped by theories such as Carl Rogers' three core conditions of 'empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard' (1957).

These concepts form the environment where meaningful and transformative relationships can be established and maintained. Due to COVID-19, the conditions of practice highlighted the balance that youth workers need to strike and the ethical approach crucial to their work.

Boundaries and managing expectations are important in the youth work relationship. Sercombe (2010: 78) argues that,

'Lack of clarity can easily lead to conflicts of interest, real ethical dilemmas and a sense of betrayal from young people when expectations are disappointed."

The personal experience of the commitment of a youth worker was shared by a young person in an article published by the Guardian Newspaper on 29th April 2020. The article, was inspired by the interaction with a young person, who lives alone in supported accommodation and illustrates the impact of such a commitment,

'I usually do lots of activities with the youth service and was really worried about it all ending," he says. "So, meeting Gav [my youth worker] gives me structure to my week – it's a real highlight. It's the only time I eat a meal with another person.'

Spier and Giles (2018: 332) propose that this commitment to the young person is borne out of personal and professional development by the youth worker,

'The thinking here seems to be that as good youth workers pursue their own excellence and develop virtuous character traits for themselves (including 'care'), they are simultaneously enabling the young people they work with to do the same.'

The commitment to young people is not limited to workers offering help and sympathy to young people, but shown in their facilitating young people in building civic engagement. Smith (2020: 9) argues that the work is not limited to a sense of belonging, expressing,

'But the work we do moves well beyond this. It also involves creating environments in which friendship can flourish, social capital is developed, and associational life and social change encouraged.'

Self-awareness and reflective practice

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a change in practice and a step into previously unchartered territory in terms of practice and personal resilience. Workers have been grappling with the physical, emotional and psychological demands of working in a pandemic. The OECD (2020:2) describe the climate through the COVID-19 pandemic as 'a context of rapid uncertainty' with trade-offs between economic, social and health priorities being made by Nation State governments.

The social, economic and personal impact characterised by 'radical uncertainty' speaks to the insight from Rewa & Hunter (2020:5) that workers should expect to do much less in the online space, and that it would take more time. This captures a reality that is challenging for people who like to be efficient and have control over their planning and delivery. Reflective practice is embedded into the fabric of youth work training and delivery, and it could be argued it has been a cornerstone of the response by youth workers. Trelfa (2013: 8) argues that, for youth workers, 'stepping into the unknown' is achieved by awareness of,

'their emotions, skills, dispositions, their sense of self, the possibilities uncovered by their moment-to-moment action in that situation.'

Harris (2012, cited in Trelfa, 2013:8) notes,

'the result is that in an unknown situation reflective practice enables professionals to work with what they know to "articulate, question and explore" their practice and thus "develop, hone and change it in order to become more effective."

Schön (1983) in his seminal text, 'The Reflective Practitioner', describes the milieu in which practitioners find themselves. He states,

"The swampy lowlands, where situations are confusing messy incapable of technical solution and usually involve problems of greatest human concern."

(Schön, 1983:42)

Practice conditions in the youth work sector during COVID-19 deserve the title 'swampy lowlands'. Individual youth workers have been navigating a path through new and unforeseen situations in their day-to-day practice which has enabled an entire sector to respond to the changing needs of young people.

Flexibility, agility and creativity to meet the needs of young people

The work undertaken by youth workers during this time was characterised by a skilled use of each of Aristotle's three domains of knowledge, Episteme, Techne and Phronesis (Aristotle, Nic.Ethics, cited in Stanton et al 2018:42) The concept of phronesis is underpinned by something ethical, showing that, through the use of practical wisdom, the worker is driven to take positive action. Phronesis is therefore a moral and ethical term, in the same sense of Freire's (1970) concept of 'conscientization' - it is unlikely individuals will not take positive action when they have awareness and insight into a situation. Bessant (2009: 434) argues,

'good youth work relies upon a worker's phronesis, which guides them to respond to variable situations in ways that exhibit context-sensitive virtues, such as 'courage, fortitude, endurance, generosity, and humility [and care?]'

In the context of a global pandemic practitioners were thrown into the unknown, there was no blueprint to verify their responses in a rapidly changing world. Practical wisdom was needed and utilised by workers as reflective practitioners, reflecting in and on action (Schön 1983:311).

Practitioners responded in a way that Schön (1983) refers to as a 'learning society'. Schön uses the analogy of the swampy lowlands and the highlands to explain how practitioners can make sense of and learn about 'problems of greatest human concern' (Schön, 1983:42). He states,

'The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation'.

(ibid, 1983:68)

The youth worker is constantly assessing the needs of the individual young person as well as the whole group deciding what action needs to be taken in response. This reflective and reflexive approach is inherently a dynamic and creative process. This process requires both skill and faith:

'group work requires …. that the worker functions out of a deep conviction and vision of the wholeness, creativity and possibility inherent in the group, which matches the faith of the believer who knows what is and what can be.'

(Benson, 2019:139)

The promise and curse of digital youth work

'Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least'

(Goethe)

This sentiment is central in keeping focus on what we as a sector extract from the experience of the pandemic. Technology has been used to maintain and, in some cases, build relationships with young people that would have been impossible without it. However, some caution is needed to ensure against sacrificing core youth work values and principles such as emancipatory practice when we enter unquestioning into technology-heavy practice. Carr (2010: 4) states,

'…it could be argued that technologies have 'Bulldozed' any cynicism we may have '…with its bounties and conveniences. It is so much our servant that it would seem churlish to notice that it is also our master.'

Husband (2020: 1) warns against an unquestioned acceptance of technology as a method of engagement and suggests a more cynical and perhaps even sinister motivation from tech companies, stating,

'Technology firms are now utilising techniques that transcend our conscious awareness and act out in ways so complex and subtle, that we cannot untangle or understand their effect.'

This view must be given some consideration when placed alongside the youth work values of providing a safe and welcoming environment for young people. He points to the potential of technology being used as a cost saving tool, with underlying elements of social control evident in the English youth service context (ibid, 2020:3):

'Perhaps suggesting that statutory youth work was always, in part at least a form of social control (Jeffs and Banks, 1999) and in the case of panopticonism, the global markets of neo-liberalism have offered a new cost-effective alternative to face-to-face youth work.'

The caution proposed by Carr (2010: 4) lies in unquestioningly embracing technology without considering the underlying implications. The decisions for the youth sector regarding the continued use of technology are best judged against a robust, coherent and transformative set of values and principles. Smith (2020: 4) states,

'concern is to develop more remote ways of working with children and young people – and to reduce the cost of teaching and physical plant. The beneficiaries of this are dominant technology companies such as Amazon, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook; companies that are part of the existential threat we face.'

Two significant areas of concern are herein identified: seeing technology as an easy and or cheaper alternative to face to face work with young people and the more sinister warnings of a neoliberal mechanism to exercise social control over young citizens and line the pockets of multi-national companies at the expense of young people benefiting from the youth work process. Caution is urged to ensure that future strategies to embed these 'new approaches' are carefully considered and mapped out.

Wellbeing and professional development in practitioners

Issues of worker wellbeing have become increasingly prominent for workforce stability and for ensuring that programme delivery for young people maintains quality standards. A more deliberate approach to worker self-care was required to maintain the health of the workforce during COVID-19, underpinned by a deep understanding that mental health is complex and multi-faceted. Grant and Kinman (2014: 24) explain,

'Emotional resilience may be a particularly important quality for helping professionals, as it can help them adapt positively to stressful working conditions, manage emotional demands, foster effective coping strategies, improve wellbeing and enhance professional growth.'

Preventing burnout in these stressful times is worth much consideration. Kolad (2016: 2) proposes 'healthy narcissism' as a strategy towards resilience, stating,

'taking pleasure in one's beauty, in the workings of one's mind, in the accomplishment of a tough job well done…. Although the joy of healthy narcissism can be fleeting, it is a powerful and sustaining sensation.'

She argues that healthy narcissism can 'sustain a person through times of frustration and failure, thus preventing the likelihood of burnout' (ibid, 2016:1). Narcissism often evokes negative connotations and perceptions, but in the context of *healthy narcissism* this concept draws upon pride and a growth mindset to develop and maintain a resilient workforce.

The skills of a modern workforce are wide and varied and youth workers have demonstrated in abundance the competencies required to meet the challenges of an ever changing environment. The OECD (2005, 2019) detail the breadth of cognitive and interpersonal competencies required by workers in a well-functioning society. A capacity for reflective thinking is an underlying principle within the OECD Skills and Education framework (ibid, 2020: 8).

'reflectiveness implies the use of metacognitive skills (thinking about thinking), creative abilities and taking a critical stance. It is not just about how individuals think, but also about how they construct experience more generally, including their thoughts, feelings and social relations.'

This research reflected these priorities and demonstrated respondents' capacity for reflective thinking. The OECD Skills 2030 project illustrate how the agility and adaptability of workers and organisations are increasingly valued within industry and the wider public sector.

Conditions must be in place where the workforce is valued, supported, challenged and stimulated and encouraged in order to ensure flourishing and prevent burnout.
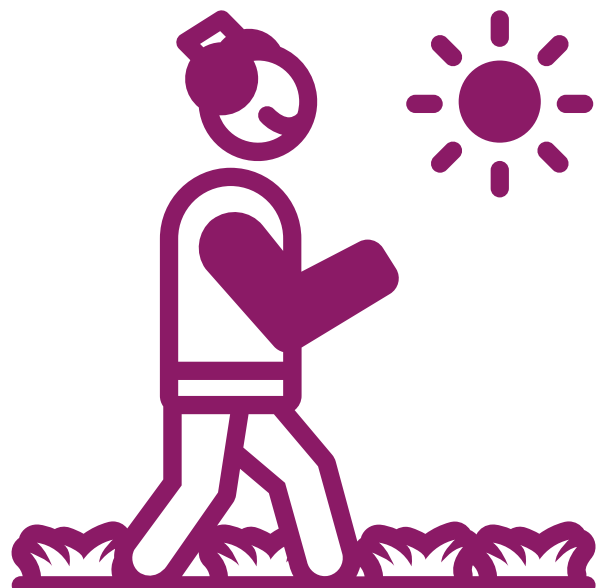
4. Presentation and analysis of findings

The research findings broadly fit into four categories

- **Issues and support for young people during this period**
- **Retention and engagement of Peace4Youth participants**
- **Programme responses and youth work strategies**
- **The personal and professional experience for workers during COVID-19, 2020**

Issues and supports for young people during this period

Meeting the needs of young people took many different forms throughout the pandemic, from practical help to emotional support, from connecting young people into their communities through to developmental activities that stimulate and motivate. This section presents findings on the range of supports and approaches used to connect with young people, highlighting the priority actions taken by youth workers with the support of their organisation.

Practical Supports

For some young people, the pandemic brought additional pressures that necessitated Peace4Youth workers providing practical support with food, housing and access to technology. Youth Workers responded with care packages that ranged from food, vouchers, practical resources and materials to help ease the pressures during lockdown. A few respondents spoke about an additional complication arising from the lockdown restrictions, which resulted in a few young people who had been 'sofa surfing' having to suddenly find alternative accommodation.

'During the pandemic, young people faced the same issues for example, two young people became homeless...it was tough dealing with the home circumstances. A lot of hostels came down quite hard and access was difficult. Staff worked in the same way being responsive week to week.'

(Observation 2)

'We got letters from the organisation, to show to police if we had to, when we were out delivering care packages for young people, and leaving it at their door or at the bottom of the garden. Care packages included food and for some it was something that helped them stay in touch digitally.'

(Observation 8)

These practical support measures were rarely explicitly mentioned by workers, as these welfare activities are accepted as integral to the youth worker role and responsibilities. However, the scale of activities that addressed the basic needs of young people during COVID-19 restrictions, is worthy of note. Research by YouthPact, (2020) revealed that in April 2020 alone, 1590 support actions were taken to deliver food parcels, resource packs, mobile data, care packs and Easter eggs to Peace4Youth participants (https://cooperationireland.org/projects/youthpact/youthpact-resources/).

Creating a 'safe enough' space for young people

Some of the actions that were required as an immediate response to the public health restrictions were counter-intuitive for workers. Many remarked on the juxtaposition between their professional and organisational training and polices that require establishing and maintaining clear boundaries between work and private life. For this new situation some of the existing professional boundaries no longer served the needs of young people or indeed of the youth workers. However, the need and desire to maintain a safe space for young people and youth workers remained:

'When working with young people we are creating a safe space.'

(Observation 1)

One youth worker remarked, 'let's make sure we have the right tools' (Fra and Jo) while another youth worker stated:

'to make it [the venue] safe. So, in some ways it was very slow. But you know, in a good way… Trying to regroup and see what would work and in some ways, we actually probably enjoyed the first while. I feel as if there was so much panic and even as a practitioner, you know that whenever you're in the field working with young people and it's constant, then you're very heavily invested in young people's lives.'

(Robin)

This approach is reminiscent of the experience for detached workers captured by De St Croix (2016:121)) which recorded the need to tread cautiously in territory that was not their own – a slowly, slowly approach that is used to enter into a space that you ordinarily would not access.

Creating and maintaining a safe space was not straightforward, as is demonstrated here:

'However, the times whenever it [Spring 2020 lockdown] was happening you know there was family members that were right beside them, maybe under the influence of alcohol. So, in some ways it wasn't just young people coming on to [an online session] and they're in their bedroom and, not that there'd be anything inappropriate, but it was just more about, that's their space and this is my space.'

(Robin)

Being there for young people remained a constant focus for youth workers. While the employing organisations did what they could in terms of creating a safe space there was recognition that for some young people being at home, or not being able to go out to the physical meeting space of the organisation, was a source of pressure. This could range from the understandable need for the young person to be in a different space away from their family, to the home having a negative impact on their emotional well-being:

'…but their homes can often be a place of, a source of so much of their emotional experience and trauma, emotional trauma. We go through it every single day. We're so unaware of it. Yet they're being exposed to it 24/7, no space. They're at an age where they mightn't be able to identify or regulate it. I felt so strongly that I have a duty to support and be there for these young people.'

(Brook)

Youth workers were confident that safety had been created and that young people felt the benefits of this safe environment:

'Young people have seen the value of the work. Through the lockdown we were there for them.'

(Observation 2)

'…in a Pandemic to not have [project name] I think would have been so damaging. Like even that girl in the choir, like she was saying if it wasn't for [project name] it would have been a mental battle for me. And I think we stayed the same. Yes, we adapted but we were always there.'

(Alex)

Connecting with parents – bridging the gap

Youth workers reported the enhanced connections they had with parents during the transition from face-to-face work to online youth work. This has been particularly important for those who work with young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Youth workers have been acutely aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people and the concerns of parents in these instances:

'We've developed a group, using WhatsApp and everything goes on there. So, they're communicating through that. We tend to give them as much independence and go through the young people first, but for some things… or there are a few parents that I would ring on a fortnightly basis just to give them feedback. They're not hard to contact - people are getting back, all the parents are very enthusiastic about their young people being on the project, which is good.'

(Morgan)

This comment articulates the concern that the practitioner shows, to balance the independence of the young person on the one hand with the increased communication with the parent on the other. The intention is for the communication with parents to compliment rather than substitute direct communication with the young person. For parents of young people with learning difficulties the heightened communication can add a degree of security:

'We know [workers name] and [workers name] are there.'

(Observation 6)

And this can work both ways, with youth workers being alerted by parents to any issues that are emerging for the young people:

'Parents have been helpful – a WhatsApp group for parents was established before lockdown. Parents can give the "heads up" of something that is coming up for their young person – or they can ask a question. Easy way for parents to stay in touch.'

(Observation 6)

Retention and engagement of Peace4Youth participants

Programmes were in different stages of delivery when the restrictions first came into place in March 2020. For some, recruitment to new programmes was imminent and project staff acted quickly to put plans in place to recruit young people to exclusively on-line programmes. One project talked about recruiting and retaining young people from across the full geographical area of the Peace4Youth programme and the opportunities this offered:

'We recruited a group and they knew the programme was going to be on-line. They are loving it and there is a really high retention rate.'

(Alex)

There was obvious concern expressed amongst workers about programmes that were in the initial stages (up to three weeks in) and then, later in the lockdown, concern among workers about how to recruit and build relationships with young people without meeting them face to face.

'We are working towards the end of a group in August and wondering what impact this [pandemic] is going to have on recruitment. There is a strangeness about recruiting online, we are considering the impact of building a new group and building rapport – will it be the [project name] experience?'

(Observation 5)

One project, that had just closed a group, decided to invest energy in maintaining contact with that group of young people to mitigate the initial shock of the COVID-19 lockdown:

'We had just finished with a group and we hadn't got a group recruited. We knew it was going to be difficult to try and start another group. And we just wanted to reach out to young people that were going to be isolated and maybe their mental health was going to suffer, because, again, as I said, a lot of ours have disabilities and autism and they are fairly isolated. So, we reached out to Phase One cohorts and then Phase Two, cohort one.'

(Morgan)

In a Memo circulated to Lead Partners of the Peace4Youth Peace IV programme on 22 May 2020 SEUPB reduced the target contact hours by 50% to take account of the complex circumstances and issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a significant positive effect on staff and on the retention of young people on the programme; firstly, because the amount of on-line contact for participants was more manageable due to the COVID-19 restrictions and secondly, because it provided some relief for staff who were working significantly longer hours and more intensively to deliver their work in the on-line space. This reduced hours of contact has had a significant and positive impact on the retention of participants for the full 6-9 months duration of the programme.

Engagement, retention and disengagement in the online space

There was a high level of jeopardy here whereby young people may have withdrawn from the programmes, however, the experience proved to be the opposite. A proportion of Peace4Youth co-ordinators reported higher retention rates during the pandemic. They particularly attributed this to the programme content that continued to meet the needs of the young people and that firm and meaningful relationships

between young people and youth workers had been established.

Youth workers tried and tested a variety of on-line platforms to engage with young people. For the most part they succeeded in finding a platform that would work. For some young people the external barriers they faced prevented them from engaging fully:

'At home some young people are holding back - maybe because sometimes there is somebody in the background.'

(Observation 3)

'Many young people just don't have the personal space to engage.'

(Observation 3)

'Young people with siblings or a busier household don't have the private space or access to technology.'

(Observation 3)

'Young people struggling themselves – there is little you can do if you cannot contact young people.'

(Observation 5)

'Introverted young people may feel more comfortable – the louder ones, it gives them a different way of working. We are learning how to develop these relationships.'

(Observation 2)

For others, online engagement was just not desirable:

'Some young people don't want to engage on-line.'

(Observation 5)

Workers considered that young people's rationale for engagement or dis-engagement cover a wide spectrum. Some young people were struggling with the online space for a variety of reasons while others were enjoying the online experience even more:

'Young people on our project have responsibilities [to the programme] which others don't, and in terms of this programme – there is a conflict at times because you don't want them to be glued to the screen all the time.'

(Observation 5)

'There is a huge challenge, young people's mental health is deteriorating.'

(Observation 5)

'Some young people are grand on zoom – some are on 10/12 zooms per week, some want them more regularly.'

(Observation 5)

Some of the issues facing young people during this period, may also have been a factor in the face-to-face space; but it is easier for young people to disengage or disappear in the online space, leaving the youth worker feeling powerless. Conversations with colleagues supported workers to feel confident in deciding how often to contact a young person and when it was prudent to step back.

Accessibility and inaccessibility in the online space

Digital poverty, access to digital equipment and online platforms have been a real concern for youth workers. Furthermore, where young people already experienced inequalities or marginalisation, this was often exacerbated by the move from the face-to-face programme to the online experience:

'We had a few in mind that were on a waiting list …. one person with Down's Syndrome, one person was very socially isolated and in school.. But they didn't want to engage. I think they couldn't or didn't have the technology or the Internet to engage. And then this wasn't for him, whereas if we had of met face to face, it might have worked better. And so that was the other thing… The diversity in who we can actually reach out to, … there might be some more people out there that are in need that we're not getting to.'

(Morgan)

This worker raises a question of who was being missed or left behind because of the pandemic. She went on to describe her tenacity and strategies to ensure access for each young person they were in contact with:

'They have a lot of other stuff going on in their lives, but I really felt that the young person would have benefited. But I persisted and offered support in how to download and access Zoom and different platforms … so what I agreed is that we will keep them on the waiting list for the next cohort and hopefully the time will be better then. But I would never give up if there was somebody's not able to…. I always have them on a waiting list for the next year.'

(Morgan)

This is one of many examples of workers taking seriously their commitment to all young people and especially those who are most vulnerable.

For some projects, the digital space has opened up rather than diminished opportunities and access to a wider network. This worker illustrates increased access for young people who are geographically hard to reach:

'So, I think the online work definitely made the project more accessible to a lot of younger people, we're based in [name of town], but we have [name of town] and the surrounding areas. Some of our people live quite rurally and so living rurally myself, I know whenever I was going to [project name], you just always felt like a bit of a torture for it and especially because our project is so many days a week. I'm sure it is a bit of a burden to come into [name of town] that often.'

(Fra and Jo)

Engagement and disengagement in schools-based programmes

The distinction between schools-based programme and community programme became evident through the analysis of findings. One project had the experience of an entire school group disengaging; in this instance, the worker considered that young people may have associated the programme with school. For some that association may have led them to engage as though they were in school; but in this case, their disengagement might also have reflected a disengagement with school. Engagement and disengagement for the Peace4Youth programme is perhaps related to school culture or related to the pre-existing commitment by young people to the programme:

'One school group engaged instantly – another school, very little contact. Not sure where it came from – maybe school culture, one school had been preparing young people, maybe the other school didn't.'

(Brook)

'I do believe that young people in the [school 1 name] had more barriers. But that's not to take away from [school 2 name] guys. They have barriers too and maybe [school 2] guys felt like they could get more out of it? I don't know. It's really hard to - we really struggled with what more could we do. I think one of the massive commonalities would probably be their school you know, and school expectations and maybe a school culture. [School 2] were required to do more work, continue more work online.'

(Brook)

'Trying to get voluntary engagement within a school setting – the level of need was very high; we have managed to get from A to B. We're looking at participation models, Ani Wierenga to help us think it through.'

(Observation 3)

There was no fixed pattern regarding school's engagement on the programme. In some instances, a well-established pre-existing relationship has been important but not enough to retain the young people on the programme:

'One group have disappeared although the project has had contact with the school. This has led to a concern over hours being completed.'

(Observation 6)

In other cases, practical arrangements had very profound consequences. For one project, the parental consent information and process was contained in school records, therefore the youth workers did not hold participant details to contact the young people directly:

'For [school name] we don't contact young people directly and that's a weird dynamic – some young people have been taking this as a long summer holiday. Half are interested – half have no contact.'

(Observation 6)

This administrative issue had unforeseen consequences for individual group participants and the project as a whole.

Programme responses and youth work strategies

Two approaches were central to meeting the needs of young people throughout this time. Firstly, the quality of the relationship and the ability of workers to connect with young people where it was needed, was of paramount importance:

'We always made a conscious effort to ask "how can we really build a relationship with these young people?" "How can we connect online?"'

(Robin)

The centrality of relationship is a feature of both the face-to-face and the digital space.

Secondly, creating an adaptive purposeful programme was made possible by reflective practitioners who could judge the right approach to employ at a particular time. Workers needed confidence in their own ability to shift between different gears, and to have confidence in the programme offered to young people. This chapter presents findings on programme responses and youth work strategies to address changing needs.

'The on-line space has been a real transformation for some young people, there was one young woman who would not speak in the group before lockdown, she is now speaking and leading conversations. We are now using one to one work to explore how we can take those skills into the real world.'

(Observation 2)

Worker confidence in their programme

Youth workers are usually confident in their programme and in the process due to their ability to plan, prepare and create a safe space where learning can take place. This confidence was called into question when the necessity for online work became apparent. Confidence, by the youth worker, in their own programme, emerged as a key component in maintaining a positive experience for young people. Where workers felt confident about the programme, they reported a high level of engagement from young people.

'We had a wobble about the programme, but we talked about it, we looked at our programme and we believed that the content was good enough to be adapted to the on-line space.'

(Observation 2)

Workers were managing oscillating feelings between confidence and putting themselves under pressure to deliver the volume of the programme at the same pace that was expected prior to COVID-19.

'A challenge has been being able to manage the personal turmoil of uncertainty.'

(Observation 3)

'I have my personal expectations of delivering OCN's at 80% - and the need to adapt to what the young people want and need to do online. Lowering our own expectations of ourselves and young people.'

(Observation 5)

'OCN has been difficult – a lot of work, one-to-one support and we are trying to figure out how we give the time.'

(Observation 6)

Creativity and adaptability in programme design

With very little time, youth workers made changes to their programme creating content to meet the needs of young people which suited the unique environment in which they were operating. Respondents ran online bingo, scavenger hunts, thematic sessions, litter-picking and nature sessions, photography, digital quizzes, personal identity sessions, diversity sessions and social action projects. The variety and scope of the activity was a key engagement and retention strategy.

Some projects have had their programme cycle totally disrupted, with major changes needed to design:

'big parts of the programme are lost – the residential element is lost.'

(Observation 5)

Workers immediately identified that it was not possible or desirable to spend the same amount of time face-to-face with young people in online applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangout as it was in 'real' space. This posed questions about the need to adjust programme content to meet the emerging needs of young people. Flexibility and adaptability among programme staff were consistently apparent in the data:

'So, it's just different things … that if young people are wanting to do stuff, there are other options, so it's just about getting creative and also the ability to negotiate and compromise.'

(Observation 8)

The challenges were significant, but the flexibility and adaptability of staff ensured that there continued to be a quality programme offered to participants. In the following example, the timeframe for sessions needed to be radically changed to take account of disrupted routines and sleep patterns:

'At 2.00pm they weren't out of bed, so we were giving a task of starting the day with asking them to go outside and take a picture.'

(Observation 5)

As youth workers have been developing their skills and programmes, they have discovered aspects of digital youth work that could be blended into future programmes:

'Smaller numbers can be easier – games can help in keeping the relationship.'

(Observation 6)

'Cross-community work has continued.'

(Observation 6)

In some cases, the outcomes are unexpected and even counter-intuitive:

'The group is potentially stronger – they have created their own community. They have come to rely on and support each other.'

(Observation 6)

'Introverts – loving life in lockdown, if they have a good support network.'

(Observation 6)

'Some young people really like it and are benefitting from the on-line space. This is to do with time and personal preferences about engagement.'

(Observation 7)

Worker adaptation to online youth work

There was some anxiety among workers about how they would deliver their programme in the online space. Youth workers' skills levels have increased because of the necessity to make use of on-line technologies. They have used technology in a positive way to provide and enhance learning for the young people in their projects and the speed and comprehensiveness of the learning has been marked. Some workers have expressed a personal pride in what they have achieved.

'It made me think we are more important than ever in terms of having to respond where other services were skeleton.'

(Observation 2)

'Well, personally a greater confidence in myself in terms of online…'

(Charlie)

'Yeah, we had challenges to use technology differently, I think that was great. You can definitely be a lot more creative through technology than, I would have realized before. Just another element to my work, which I think can enhance… I mean, we can't do everything virtually online but that different type of learning I think will be integrated and use of technology I think will carry forward.'

(Brook)

Young people enjoyed many elements of the blended learning and on-line programme, and workers were pleased with how successful they have been in the on-line space: however, the predominant feeling was of relishing the prospect of engaging in face-to-face work with young people in a physical space.

'Using games like human Olympics were good for creating the buzz around the group, I think they worked really, really well. And especially if we're doing face to face and online delivery of our next group. I think that could play, that could marry each other quite well and - but other than that - I just can't wait to be back to normal.'

(Fra and Jo:19)

Limitations of youth work in the online space

There are some things that simply cannot be replicated in the online space, and while mitigating factors have been put in place by youth workers, in some instances they remain a shadow of what they are in the physical space.

'… it's not the same - one young person will say [workers name] can I have a wee chat with you here a second? Or [co-workers name] can I have a chat if there is something going on. Yes, I'll do it via the phone. But it's not the same, you know? In terms of adapting yes, I certainly had to adapt, and I touched on it again earlier, I think you had to be more focused right away.'

(Charlie)

'So, there is only three of us so we can only talk to three groups of people at a time and maybe over at the pool table there isn't a youth worker there but there's about five young people playing pool and they're working away on their own building their relationship, but not just over Zoom.'

(Fra and Jo)

The online space doesn't easily allow for those fleeting ad-hoc conversations or getting a sense of what issues are lurking in the background for young people.

Youth workers were cognisant of the need to get the balance right between encouraging young people to take part in online youth work and putting pressure on them to take part:

'I know [colleagues name] said earlier, it's like pestering young people to come because we definitely pestered before this anyway, but it's about that kind of encroaching on their personal space.'

(Fra and Jo)

This level of nuance was not available during the pandemic and youth workers wanted to ensure they were not simply 'pestering' young people.

Cues missed in the online space

The reference to 'before this anyway', from Fra & Jo, articulates an easier relationship pre-pandemic where verbal and non-verbal communication between young people and youth workers is shared and understood.

Unsurprisingly there was some anxiety among youth workers about how to transfer the engagement skills used in the physical space, into the online world. Youth workers reflected on how informal cues, body language and group work are so instinctive in the physical space; but can be missed and missing in the online space.

'The sound of silence – it's difficult to pick up the social cues. The group work process is difficult. Difficulty in reading the room – e.g., jokes, are they angry – some young people found it socially energising.   Others have found it more difficult.'

(Observation 6)

'So, then we had to write up things differently as well and create that learning process that I feel we very much take for granted, like a group process, like that group talking and sharing ideas. We had to create that thought pattern (for the online space). And that's a learning experience on an online PowerPoint you know, like that was very hard, how do I take young people on the same kind of thought pattern whenever I can't actually engage in that conversation with them.'

(Brook)

Youth workers also considered the impact that on-line working had on their ability to engage in a meaningful way with the young person and how challenging it is to make connections in the online world.

'I value being with people. I value that connection, the human connection. And I think that it did challenge me a lot whenever I was on Zoom because, you do pick up on body language, you do pick up on the eye contact, you pick up on all the things that were taught and all the things that you pick up on just subconsciously.'

(Robin)

Online youth work as a cost-cutting exercise

While there was a 'can do' and a 'let's make this work' attitude towards online work with young people, it is not a methodology that youth workers anticipate as the norm for future youth work. However, some recognised that organisations and even funders may see it as an opportunity to cut costs or see the apparent efficiency that on-line work can offer:

'I'm not privy to what my boss is thinking but I'm sure, like any boss, she's looking at costs. And I'm sure schools are maybe looking at 'is online safer, cleaner, not strangers coming in'. I would be amazed if the powers-that-be are looking at what's happened over the last 14, 15, 16 weeks and going, "how do we make it safer and cheaper and a viable option"'

(Charlie)

However, the overall tone was that many of the core approaches and functions of youth work cannot be achieved to the same effect in the online space.

'I think we should definitely continue on some things. I just think not intensively… Might be X, Y & Z but the things that don't work are, for example, big group discussions. I would be suggesting to our organization, work with what worked well for you in Zoom and let go of what didn't and let's try to create a strategy or some form of way of working,'

(Robin)

The limitations of online youth work were acknowledged by the funders of the Peace4Youth project, with SEUPB adjusting the required contact hours for project participants. For some senior staff and managers, the concern regarding targets, outcomes and outputs added an extra layer of stress during this period. Ultimately, the experience of youth work which continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how adaptive responsive youth work practices *require adaptive and responsive measurement and outcome frameworks* to operate within and ultimately a culture that promotes and supports reflective, responsive and innovative practice.

Personal and professional experience for workers during COVID-19, 2020

The reflective practitioner

Practitioners found themselves working in what Schön (1983) describes as the 'swampy lowlands'. This unknown situation necessitated ongoing response, with reflective and reflexive practice. In some areas of practice 'instinct' took over and the youth worker's practice wisdom was called upon. Many practitioners faced the uncertainty of whether young people would want to engage under these circumstances. This youth worker reflects on how they followed their instincts to determine what they felt was the right course of action:

'But in hindsight these young people do want to engage, and it's been good in some ways… but you still question it, if you want to hold yourself to high standards of work and you want to, you want to follow …the values and core beliefs… But I think you have to stick to your guns sometimes and it's about reflecting in the process.'

(Robin)

Youth workers were reflecting in and on action continuously. This reflection was needed to ensure that programme delivery was relevant to the changing emotional and social needs of the young people.

'It was a bit of a shock, we had to readjust our programme massively, we were constantly reflecting on what the right approach was.'

(Observation 6)

The reflections needed to be swift but measured to continue the delivery of an engaging programme, whilst making space for young people to make sense of their own experiences. Managing the tensions between the difficult circumstances some young people were in and working within an ethical framework required intelligence and intuition on the part of the workers.

The personal impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on youth workers

One youth worker made a throw-away remark, that holds some deeper resonance - *'Bring on the zombie apocalypse – we are ready!'* This articulates an intense sense of having worked through a time that will leave an indelible mark on individuals, the world and on the young people in the Peace4Youth projects. Whilst this quote illustrates the stain left by COVID-19, it emphasises the resilience and feisty nature of the workers and hints at the very real human cost felt by workers.

Working from home has had a significant impact on workers with a range of experiences and emotions. For some it was a largely positive experience, while for others the stresses of combining their personal and professional life took its toll. Some workers spoke about the pressure to be productive and what it was like to watch images on social media of people doing well and being productive. Workers reflected on their own feeling of inadequacy and empathised with how young people may be feeling. Some took the opportunity to talk through these ideas with their groups, with specific reference to the pressures and illusions of social media.

'at points I felt myself being under pressure with all the images that people were sharing [online] about the different things they were achieving, the 5K runs and the baking. I was thinking if I feel under pressure then this is an insight into how young people feel under pressure about how they present themselves on social media. We were able to use this to open up a conversation with young people...'

(Observation1)

Guilt, tiredness and working hard to stay motivated permeated many of the observations and interviews. Comments included:

'I have mammy guilt – trying to be a teacher and work and finding it all difficult.'

(Observation 3)

'It's becoming more and more challenging working from home. Being back in the office has been a big motivating factor...'

(Observation 8)

'It is important to take the advice that we give to young people; when your cup is empty, you cannot give. This is about authenticy and self-awareness.'

(Observation 3)

'Staying self-motivated is difficult. Glad to see the office.'

(Observation 6)

'Not having to do night-time work means I get to spend more time with my kids.'

(Observation 2)

'Personal difficulties for people because of their caring responsibilities.'

(Observation 5)

'Working from home and being aware of mental health aspect of being a parent – children expect you to be present.'

(Observation 5)

While workers were content to continue to provide a quality programme for and with young people, it did have a physical and emotional cost:

'Using up a lot of our resources in the first few weeks – we burnt ourselves out – the novelty was wearing off.'

(Observation 3)

'I have brought courage to this, personally I have had to dig deep and get the courage to appear on video and to show young people that it is possible.'

(Observation 8)

Working patterns, policies and procedures

Alongside the rapid societal change, the youth workers' patterns and approaches also changed.   Workers shared a variety of approaches they were using to help themselves, however, in the cacophony of innovation, activity and maintaining contact, it has been a testing and tiring time for workers:

'I think there was one week I had 10 meetings in one week on top of everything else, you were continuing to do, and I was exhausted. I was thinking 'goodness, this is exhausting' and completely different than face to face and meeting people and that that kind of energy sometimes just can't be transferred through a screen the same way it can be shared in real life.'

(Brook)

Workers spoke of how they turned to each other for support and communication to continually check in that they were doing the right thing:

'It has been important to manage our own expectations. If you don't do this, it will impact the group. [Project Leader Name] is a big promoter of looking after staff. It is reassuring that colleagues are facing the same things. It has been important that we continue to talk to each other and communicate with each other.'

(Observation 2)

'We share our expectations of each other as workers. We have a really detailed plan of how we communicate with each other.'

(Observation 2)

'We were doing an environmental programme and we invited staff to plan and carry out work in an area where they had an interest. As a workforce we were sharing ideas, making connections and offering insights. The diversity of our workforce in terms of background and educational interest has been beneficial.'

(Observation 8)

Improved team communication was an effective strategy for workers to lean on colleagues and gain support when they had professional doubts and worries about the programme:

'During lockdown I questioned my role. I had the conversation with young people and whether what we were doing was sustainable. We as a staff had to readjust our expectations. We were asking ourselves if young people were getting the best experience. Being part of a collective of youth workers we picked each other up.'

(Observation 2)

The co-working relationship is normally used both as a groupwork approach and as a model of collaborative relationships for participants to experience. For some youth workers this dynamic was more challenging and did not easily translate into the online space. This worker articulates how as co-workers they used their relationship in the physical space to create a fun working environment for their groups and how this felt compromised in the digital space:

'So, like me and [co-workers name] get on so well that I think sometimes we've missed out on the banter of it all. Then I think our banter and our good relationship makes our work flow really well because the group see that. So, whenever we've lacked in that area, I'm not saying it has had an impact, but I think it'll get better, and it'll make work more fun again just to actually be out of this living room and working with people.'

(Fra and Jo)

'Being out of the living room' also reminds us of the wide range of circumstances and 'work environments' that individual workers found themselves in. Many situations were not conducive to a work-life balance when working from home.

From an organisational point of view, working practices had to be amended and policies re-shaped. Project leaders were keen that youth workers would not accrue a significant amount of leave, but with few or no places to go, youth workers were often reluctant to take time off.

There was a wide range of home working experiences, including those people who had home schooling responsibilities as well as others who were living in their parental home and had less personal space to work in.

Furthermore, managers were cognisant of the need for workers to take leave for their own personal wellbeing, but the demands of delivery and needs of young people were forefront in the minds of workers and managers:

'We have had questions around annual leave and when is the best time to take it. We want to get the balance that suits the organisation's needs and the worker's need; between taking a break and building up leave and taking it all at one time.'

(Observation 8)

Organisations made physical adjustments to their work spaces to accommodate workers and adhere to changing restriction guidelines:

'We have had to look at reconfiguring our space in order to maintain social distancing requirements.'

(Observation 8)

The implications for organisations and workers in terms of future practice and procedures are yet to be fully understood. However, great care needs to be taken by youth work managers to work through the professional and personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youth work workforce.

WORKING FROM HOME

Exercising caution – A blended approach for the future.

Creative and innovative approaches made it possible to continue to deliver consistent quality work with young people. However, prudence is required in deciding what is worthy of integrating into work practices in a post-restriction era. This was a difficult matter for workers to contemplate while still in the midst of pandemic restrictions:

'we need to reflect on some of this stuff before we just automatically carry it forward.'

(Brook)

There was, however, a recognition of the need to return to the fundamentals of the youth work discipline – relationship-building, experiential learning and group process.

'I think that we do need to stand up as a profession and say this isn't actually what is the best way working with young people. I think there should be a fine line and the fine line should be more towards engaging young people face to face, because that is where it works at and where our skills lie'

(Robin)

'But some things that I will be bringing with me is reflecting on how important process is and just how important that relationship and learning through experiences and that they massively underpin youth work and what youth work is. That relationship process, learning through doing and being and yet we're doing it through computers. But we weren't being hands on and that's a huge element of, youth work you know, well, it's getting up, walking around room and taking part in something that's using our ourselves holistically, which was very much limited through this time.'

(Brook)

5. Insights and implications
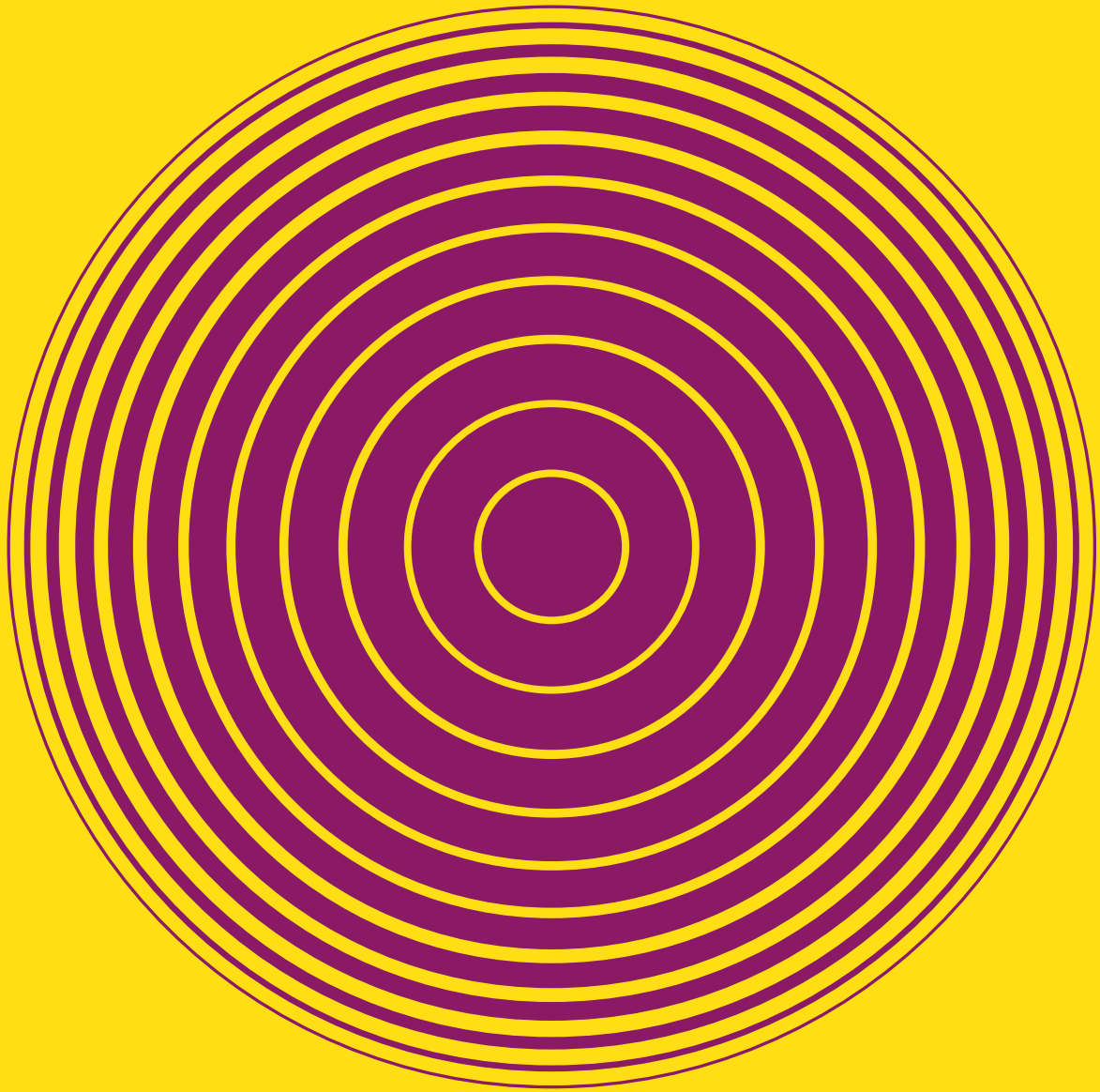
A. Core youth work principles offer a stable anchor for practice

For all that changed in the practice of youth work during the restrictions brought about by the global pandemic, the core of the work remained the same. The research demonstrated that the scaffold of the values and principles of youth work was crucial to withstand constant change:

'There are certain ways of doing things, but the core element of the programme never changed.'

(Alex)

These values were youth centred and youth focused:

- starting where young people are at;

- showing and feeling concern for all young people especially the most vulnerable;

- creating a safe space;

- the primacy of relationship.

In the midst of unprecedented changes to everyday life, youth workers provided routine, purpose, practical help and support for the young people in their projects. Programmes were adapted continuously to meet the shifting needs of young people; building activities that would support, excite and challenge young people. Judgements were made as to when to encourage a young person to get involved and when to hold back and leave the door open for another time. The primacy of the relationship was reinforced as a core process for youth work; from initiating contact to providing support; from developmental sessions to exploring social and personal themes as well as outreach and civic engagement in the community and public decision making.

B. Agility and creativity is bound to reflective practice

Workers displayed the ability, flexibility and willingness to make the changes required to provide a quality programme for and with young people. Many workers demonstrated how they brought energy to the task and enjoyed the challenge and stretch in their knowledge and skills.

'I remember me and another co-worker, [co-workers name], were talking, and it was like we got a different job. The principles, like our passions, the voluntary participation of it all, all stayed the same, but the admin side of it, the delivery side of it was like a whole new world. So, it was like adapting to that and as a youth worker that's one of the skills we all pride ourselves on being able to adapt in times like this which no one could ever have foreseen that was coming... But it was just that adjustment period just to get into the swing of things. So, when I felt I got into the swing of things, I did think it was better. I could start to see the positives, I could start to say, right, well, if you're matched with some young people who did have mental health issues, they had physical health issues and couldn't leave their house or anything that - online could be great for them.'

(Alex)

Moving the programme to a predominantly on-line space was not without challenge or cost. However, the enabling factor lies in organisations and workers who embed reflective and reflexive practice as part of the professional routine. Workers drew on their own self-awareness and relationship with co-workers to assess their practice in terms of ethics and effectiveness. This allowed them to make considered judgements of adaptations and programme responses needed to meet individual and group needs.

C. Youth work appreciated within multi-agency strategies

This crisis period has demonstrated the role that youth work can contribute across the full multi-disciplinary spectrum. Harrison and Wise (2005:14) state that 'youth workers are the last of the generalists'. This notion resonates with the role youth work has played throughout this pandemic, whereby youth workers have acted as the glue to maintain connections for young people with family, friends and service providers.

The role is one of building social capital (Putnam, 2000). Youth work has much to contribute to nurturing bridging and linking capital, especially important for young people who experience difficult socio and economic realities. Bridging capital is characterised by building connections between diverse groups of people. Smyth (2014:8) states,

'youth workers are normally particularly good at this as we have to mediate on behalf of young people between different worlds...the youth worker can be a trusted individual by a number of groups simultaneously. Whilst the groups might not trust each other...each group trusts the bridge builder.'

In addition to the bridging capital youth workers also build 'linking capital', similar to bridging but more likely with individuals that young people would not usually have access to. Building these links is a core part of supporting young people to have influence over decisions that affect their lives. This increased sense of agency and self-efficacy can promote and support wellbeing in all areas of life.

Smyth (2014:9) proposes,

'A key aspect of social capital theory is the concept of 'well-being'. Being part of a group and having experiences beyond their normal world allows individuals to grow, learn and thrive. Aspects of well-being include the growth of trust and reciprocity. People grow to trust and support each other...'

During this period, youth workers adopted the role of 'trusted other' who moved easily between professions and ages. This aptitude for bridging and linking holds potential within multi-disciplinary priorities and actions that impact on young people. This will be of particular relevance as we move through and beyond the current COVID-19 crisis and as the lasting impact on young people begins to emerge.
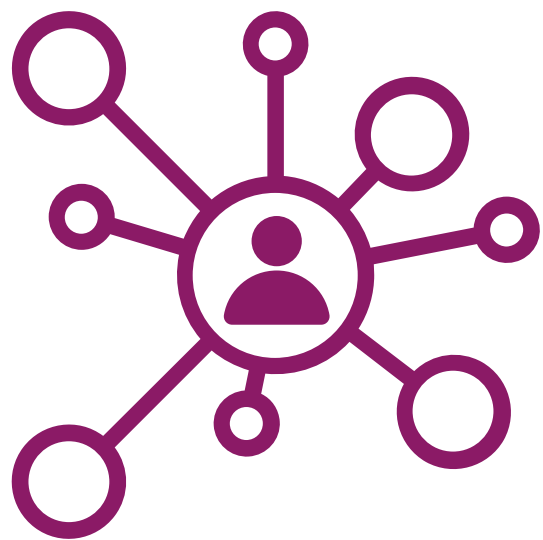
D. Skills for a 21st century youth service

Workers have built a bank of digital skills throughout this period and have been reminded of the human skills that permeate both the virtual world and the face-to-face world. The research demonstrated that workers used their tacit knowledge of the significance of maintaining relationship with young people, to reach out and hold connection in the days, weeks and months following the introduction of Public Health Guidelines.

Immediate responses to connect and support included phone calls, check ins with young people, access to technology, support for housing issues and basic essentials such as food. In order to offer a digital lifeline to young people in their groups, the Peace4Youth workforce not only developed their digital skills, but adapted and created content more suitable to the online space.

This period has forced youth workers to learn skills that have been hitherto under-prioritised. This period has also highlighted the need for blended skills – to consider the communication and ethical limitations of online youth work while also embracing the wider reach it can offer into far-away spaces.

E. Workforce sustainability needs organisational backing

The findings demonstrate two key elements for sustaining the Peace4Youth workforce.

First, the communication, care and connection between workers became more critical in the crisis environment. Second, there was a need for heightened organisational support for workers living and working with the competing demands of work, family, schooling or sickness.

Workers were coping with personal and professional challenges that are wide and varied depending on individual circumstances. Collegiality among youth workers was demonstrated through their willingness to share programme ideas, offer support by listening and empathising with others. This level of congruence helped sustain them through difficult circumstances. Fellowship, compassion and humour helped sustain working relationships. New ways of using apps such as WhatsApp aided worker communication while they were in groups with young people and throughout the working day.

To sustain a healthy workforce, organisational policy and practice needs to reinforce the work of managers and teams. Increased staff meetings in the first few months of the restrictions built a sense of common purpose. Workers at times were ambivalent about the meetings , as it was extra work in what had become a very time-consuming job; but in retrospect they appreciated the time with each other and the support of their organisation. Clear unambiguous communication went a long way to supporting people to stay motivated.

'there has been a lot of time and effort put in to support the communication elements of the programme – and to communicate with staff including affirmation of staff and the work that has been undertaken.'

(Observation 8)

Where organisations were proactive in stating what they could offer in terms of flexibility this appeared to work well for staff. However, the good intentions on behalf of organisations did not always match the reality – e.g. where an offer of flexible working was made then expectations on staff availability needed to change to reflect this. Conversely, staff recognised the pressures their organisation faced to achieve targets and wanted to continue to work to meet the project goals. The pressures felt by youth workers and managers have been immense during this period.

Low cost and no cost activities support self-care, including well timed team meetings, support from the quality and impact body YouthPact, daily walks built into work time and flexible working patterns. A one-size-fits-all approach to self-care and staff wellbeing is not sufficient or desirable, however, it is most effective when there is an organisational investment and it is embedded into organisational culture.

Conclusion
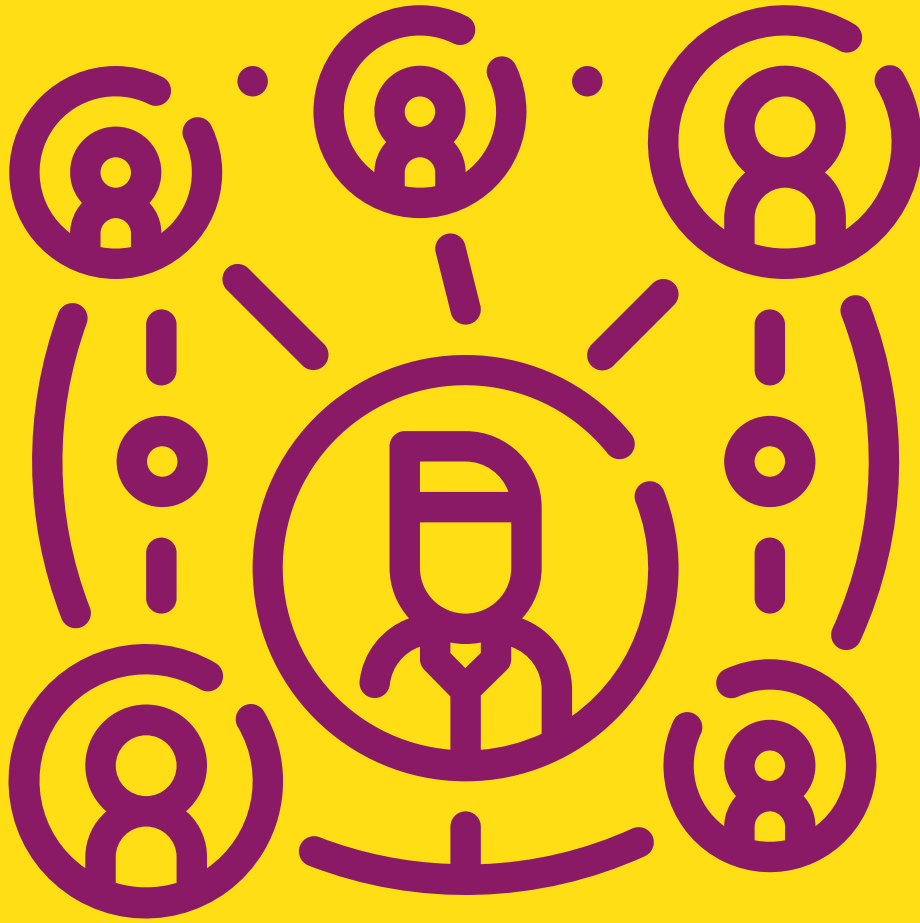
This research has illustrated the adaptability of youth workers and the steadfast nature of their engagement with young people. Given the predicted long-term impact of COVID-19 on the lives of young people, these are features that will be needed for the foreseeable future.

Youth workers and their organisations maintained and held true to the values and principles that enable meaningful and transformative work to take place. They remained committed to all young people, especially the most vulnerable, They worked with young people as partners in the learning as everyone found new ways to be together. The quality programme that continued to be offered was underpinned by the primacy of the relationship and the commitment of youth workers to continually reflect in and on practice as they navigated the stresses and strains of living and working during a global pandemic.

The research demonstrated that while these changes were taking place, workers along with their managers were making decisions on how to provide individual and group support that adhered to an ethical framework. Youth workers were conscious of the necessity to adapt and change what they were doing in order to meet the changing needs of young people.

The continuation of the work was arduous at times. Youth workers made major changes to their approaches, methodologies and programme content and worked tirelessly to continue to provide a meaningful, quality programme for and with young people. This was at considerable personal cost to workers in terms of their time, energy, homelife and emotional life.

Sustaining youth work programme delivery, while simultaneously minimising burnout is a conundrum, not just for youth workers and managers, but for youth work organisations, trainers and funders. The squeeze that youth workers have experienced here is unsustainable. Unless priority is given for reflection and new thinking on youth work policies, structures and funding, the lessons learnt during this pandemic are at risk of being boxed up and put away. The philosophies of care, community and learning that drive youth work practice, must be embedded in organisational culture and workforce development.
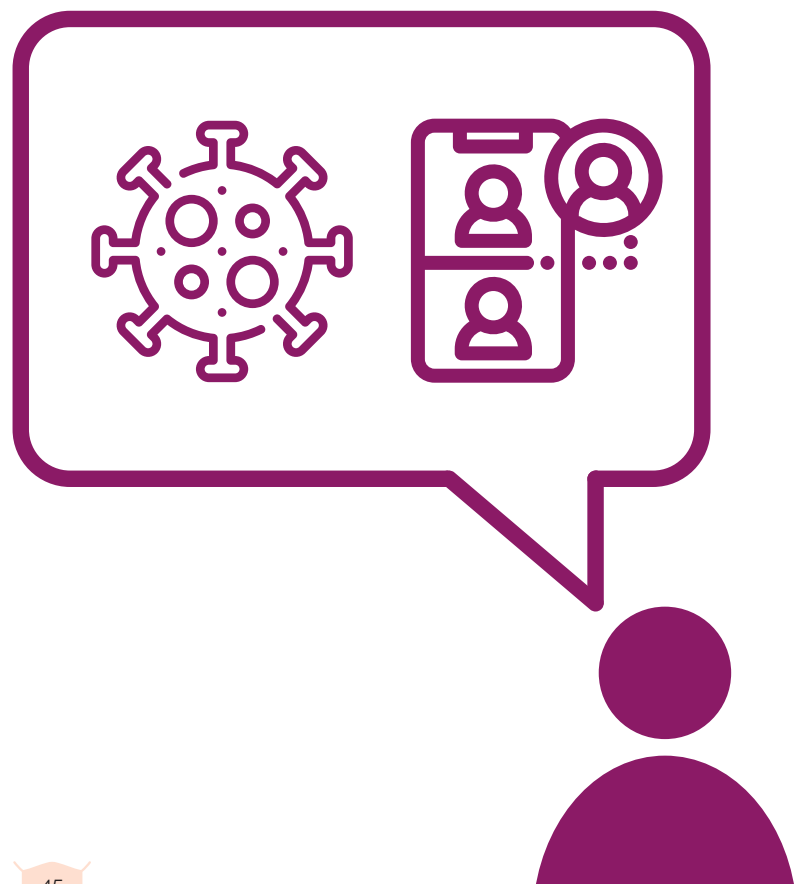
Rererences:

ARK. (2015) Young *Life and Times Survey, 2015*. Available at ARK www.ark.ac.uk/ylt. Retrieved: 14 May 2016.

Banks, S. (2010) 'Ethics and the youth worker', in Banks, S. (ed.) *Ethical Issues in Youth Work*. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 3-23.

Bawden, A. (2020) 'Meeting my youth worker is the only time I eat a meal with another person', *The Guardian*, 29 April, 2020.

Benson, J. (2019) *Working More Creatively With Groups*, Fourth edn., New York: Routledge Bessant, J. (2009) 'Aristotle meets youth work: a case for virtue ethics', Journal of Youth Studies, 12(4): 423– 38.AF

Birks, M., Chapman, Y. and Francis, K. (2008) 'Memoing in qualitative research - Probing data and processes', *Journal of Research Nursing*, 13 (1): 68-75.

Carr, N. (2010) *The Shallows: How the internet is changing how we think, read and remember*. Atlantic books: London.

Centre for Children's Rights, Queens University Belfast (2021) *What does the pandemic mean for children: Covid Under 19 Global Study*. Retrieved: 10 March, 2021.
Available at https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforChildrensRights/NewsEvents/COVIDUnder19-GlobalChildrensConsultation.html

Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations, Queens University Belfast (2018) *Impact Evaluation of PEACE IV, Objective 2.1 Children and Young People 14 – 24 Phase I Evaluation Report*, Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, London: Sage.

Collin, P., Lala, G. and Fieldgrass, L. (2018) 'Participation, Empowerment and Democracy: Engaging with Young People's Views', in Alldred, P., Cullen, F., Edwards, K. and Fusco, D. (ed.) *The Sage Handbook of Youth Work Practice*. London: Sage, pp.183-196.

De St Croix, T. (2016). *Grassroots youth work: Policy, passion and resistance in practice*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

Gilleard, A. Lereya, S.T. Tait, N. Edbrooke-Childs, J, Deighton, J. and Cortina, A. (2020) *Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health.* London: Evidence Based Practice Unit - A Partnership of UCL and The Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families.

Grant, L. and Kinman, G. (2014) Emotional Resilience in the Helping Professions and how it can be Enhanced. *Health and Social Care Education*, 3:1, pp. 23 - 34.

Hirsch, D. (2007) *Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Harrison, R., and Wise, C. (2005) *Working with young people.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Husband, M. (2020) 'Tracking Technology. Youth work in a society of control', *Youth and Policy.* Available at https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/tracking-technology-youth-work-in-a-society-of-control/. Retrieved March 18, 2021.

Hutton, W. (2020). Young Britons have been hit hard. We owe them a future they can believe in, *The Guardian*, April 19, 2020. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/19/young-britons-have-been-hit-hard-we-owe-them-a-future-they-can-believe-in. Retrieved April 19, 2020.

Kolad, S. (2016) 'What is Healthy Narcissism? The ability to experience joy in yourself can get you through difficult times.', *Psychology Today.* Pp. 1-3.

Mills, J., Bonner, A. and Francis, K. (2006) 'The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), pp. 25-35.

National Youth Agency (2020) *Out of Sight*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.

Neill, G., McCready, S. and Spence, J. (2014) *Communicating Youth Work*, Antrim: Curriculum Development Unit.

OECD (2005) *The definition and selection of key competencies – Executive Summary.* Available at www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf. Retrieved: 18th March 2021.

OECD (2020) *The territorial impact of COVID-19: Managing the crisis across levels of government,* Paris: OECD.

OFCOM, (2019 reissued 2020). *Connected Nation 2019 UK Report*, London. Available at https:// www.ofcom.org.uk/.../186413/Connected-Nations-2019-UK-final.pdf. Retrieved: 15th April, 2020.

O'Malley, S. (2020) 'Young people have suffered so much this year - they need our support', *The Journal.ie*, 9 November, 2020.

Ord, J. (2009) 'Thinking the Unthinkable: Youth Work without Voluntary Participation?', *Youth and Policy*, Vol. 103: 39-48.

Perkins, M. (2020) *Access Denied*. Available at: https://sites.google.com/view/youth-work-dialogue-ni/reflections-on-practice. Retrieved: 17th November 2020.

Palinkas, L. Horwitz, S. Green, C. Wisdom, J. Duan, N and Hoagwood, K. (2015) 'Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research', *Administration & Policy in Mental Health.*, 42(5), pp. 533–544.

Putnam, RD. (2000) Bowling Alone: *The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rewa, J. & Hunter, D. (2020) *Leading Groups Online: a down and dirty guide to leading on-line courses, meetings, trainings and events during the coronavirus pandemic*. Available at https://www.trainingforchange.org/training_tools/leading-groups-online-book/. Retrieved: 11th March 2021.

Rogers, C. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, Vol. 21(2), pp.95-103.

Rikala, S. (2020). Agency among young people in marginalised positions: towards a better understanding of mental health problems. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23:8, 1022-1038.

Schön, D. (1983) The Reflective Practitioner: *How Professionals Think in Action.* London: Avebury.

Sercombe, H. (2010) 'Youth workers as professionals: managing dual relationships and maintaining boundaries', in Banks, S. (Ed.) *Ethical Issues in Youth Work.* New York: Routledge.

Smith, M. K. (2013) 'What is youth work? Exploring the history, theory and practice of youth work', *The encyclopaedia of pedagogy and informal education*. Available at www.infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/. Retrieved: 28 January 2021.

Smith, M. K. (2020). Dealing with the 'new normal'. Offering sanctuary, community and hope to children and young people in schools and local organizations. *The encyclopaedia of pedagogy and informal education.* Available at https://infed.org/mobi/dealing-with-the-new-normal-creating-places-of-sanctuary-community-and-hope-for-children-and-young-people/. Retrieved: 6 February 2021.

Smyth, P. (2014) *Exploring the Impact of Youth Work.* Antrim: Curriculum Development Unit.

Stanton, E., McMullan, M., McConville, L. (2018) *What is this peace? An examination of the Impact and Legacy of conflict, theory and practice of peacebuilding.* Belfast: YouthPact.

Strauss, A.L. Corbin, J.M. (1990) *The basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Spier, J. and Giles, D. (2018) 'An Ethics of Caring in Youth Work Practice', in Alldred, P., Cullen, F., Edwards, K. and Fusco, D. (ed.) *The Sage Handbook of Youth Work Practice.* London: Sage, pp 329-341.

Suter, W. N. (2012). Qualitative data, analysis, and design. *In Introduction to educational research: A critical thinking approach* (pp. 342-386). SAGE Publications Inc.

Trelfa, J. (2013) *Reclaiming the Practice of Reflective Practice,* Antrim: Curriculum Development Unit.

YouthPact (2020) *A snapshot in time - Peace4Youth work through COVID-19 April 2020 infographic.* Belfast: YouthPact. Available at https://cooperationireland.org/projects/youthpact/youthpact-resources/. Retrieved: 19 March 2021

Eliz McArdle
Project Manager
Ulster University
T: +44 (0) 28 9036 6858
E: e.mcardle@ulster.ac.uk

Joanne Stainsby
Development Officer
Co-operation Ireland
T: +44 (0) 28 9032 1462
E: jstainsby@cooperationireland.org

Seana Carmichael
Administrative Officer
Co-operation Ireland
T: +44 (0) 28 9032 1462
E: scarmichael@cooperationireland.org

Daryl Moore
Development Officer
Pobal
T: 00353 (0) 1 511 7500
E: dmoore@pobal.ie

Joe Hawkins Development Officer
National Youth Council of Ireland
T: +44 (0) 28 9089 1020
T: +44 (0) 77 3831 3965
E: joe@nyci.ie

Leighann McConville
Development Officer
Ulster University
T: +44 (0) 28 9036 6409
E: l.mcconville@ulster.ac.uk