

Why young people join Why young people stay



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YouthPact is a project supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

Context

The voluntary participation principle is a core concept for youth work and one that is embedded in the Peace4Youth Programme. This principle is intrinsically linked with the notion of choice. For young people, it is both an operating principle (that young people choose to join and can leave or withdraw at any stage) and an empowering skill to learn (considering and using choice as a human skill). Whilst this is true for participants on Peace4Youth projects, the programme requirements are specific and timebound, the emphasis is on the longevity of participation on the programme and intensity of contact hours.

To balance this fundamental youth work principle with the demands of practice, youth workers are tasked with developing programmes, environments and connections that mean young people want to attach and persist for long periods of time.

This paper uses discussions and insights from two workshops convened by YouthPact that were designed to unpick some of the processes and ideas that build loyalty and engagement amongst programme participants. Presented in this document are both practical and conceptual ideas from youth work practice which promote the consistent engagement of participants on the Peace4Youth projects.



START STRONG
STAY STRONG

Conversations on...



“Conversations on...” was a series of ‘sharing the learning’ sessions organised by YouthPact, which focused on key elements of the Peace4Youth programme as identified by prior engagement with a range of programme stakeholders.

The Peace4Youth programme is underpinned by a set of common principles and has a set of expected outcomes, the range of programme ideas, approaches, content and the shape of projects are quite different, with interesting ideas being confined, at times, to a single partner or a single partnership. The rationale for the ‘Conversations on...’ series was that the sharing of these ideas might:



✓ **Boost the quality of practice across the programme;**



✓ **Have a positive impact on retention rates;**



✓ **Improve learning outcomes for participants; and**



✓ **Support and enhance workers sense of well-being.**

The aim of the ‘Conversations on...’ series was therefore to provide space for staff in different roles across the Peace4Youth Programme to come together, share, support and develop new perspectives in relation to professional practice. This paper is produced from two sessions and is focused on why young people join and why young people stay.



The Peace4Youth Programme aspires to an ambitious set of change-focused outcomes, which in turn demands a high level of professional expertise from its youth work delivery partners in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

The implementation of long-term cross-community projects, involving at least 3-4 days of participant contact activity per week over a six to nine month period, creates a range of professional concerns, not least the initial question of how to locate and sufficiently motivate young people to accept what may seem to be a daunting personal challenge.

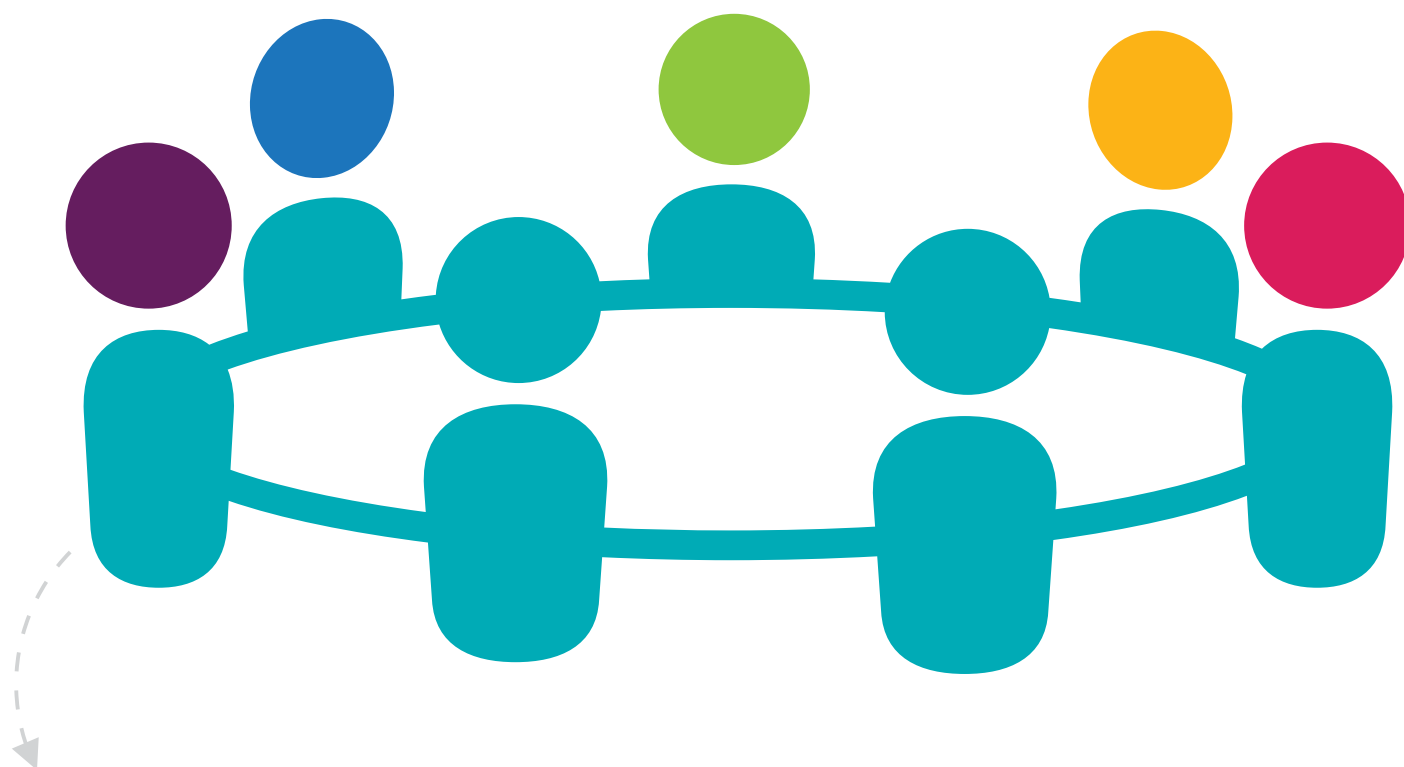
Once recruited onto a project, the Peace4Youth experience may prove to be intense for young people at times, whilst at other times their interest may dip. Life events which are extraneous to the project can put a brake on a participant's progression. A significant challenge for practitioners, therefore, is to sustain individual and group commitment, to anticipate and pre-empt drop-out, and ultimately to maximise the developmental and learning outcomes for all project participants. In short, the scale and complexity of Peace4Youth demands a particularly high level of sophistication in both youth work planning and delivery.

Recognising that there is already significant professional expertise among the various Peace4Youth partners, YouthPact organised two seminars aimed at sharing good practice and facilitating exchange of practical ideas. The specific aim of each event was:

Belfast: To provide space for Peace4Youth staff to share examples of good practice and develop new perspectives on recruiting, engaging and retaining young people through sharing professional experience and considering new approaches within their project delivery.

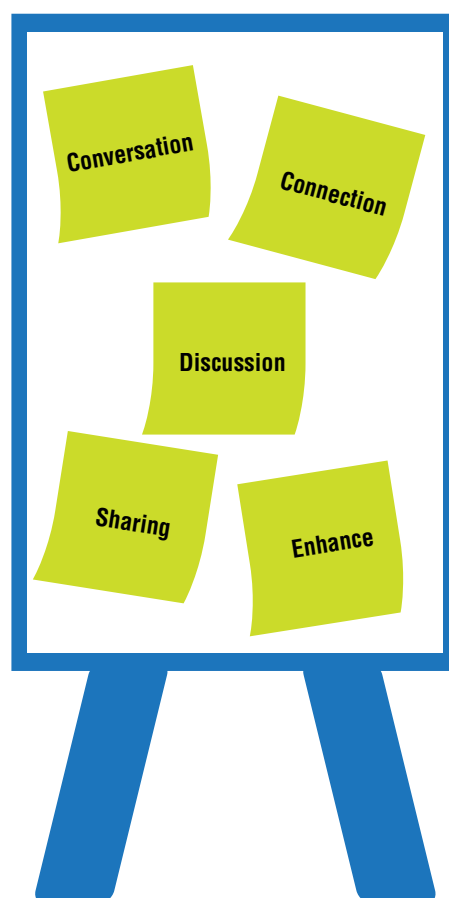
Derry/Londonderry: To provide space for experienced practitioners to develop new perspectives on programme logic, stages of design, programme activities and content through sharing professional experience and considering new approaches within their project delivery.

Approach



The Belfast seminar was attended by 43 youth work practitioners, drawn from a range of Peace4Youth projects. The Derry/Londonderry seminar was specifically targeted at experienced practitioners who wished to re-visit, re-think or refine their programme planning skills, and this was attended by 20 people. The lead YouthPact facilitator at the Belfast event was Joe Hawkins, with support from Leighann McConville and Eliz McArdle. The lead facilitator at the Derry/Londonderry event was Eliz McArdle, with support from Joe Hawkins.

Both seminars sought to facilitate a combination of personal reflection, table discussion, and whole-group interaction. Exercises were designed to be interactive and to promote a sharing of experience and ideas between the staff from different projects. Plenary sessions were used to feedback the key points, and table notes and flip chart pages were retained to inform the writing of this paper. The most valuable exercises and discussions are highlighted here to provide insight into why young people join the project and why young people stay.



Conversations on...

Recruitment,
engagement
and retention
of young people



9 Sept 2019 at the Europa Hotel, Belfast



To provide space for Peace4Youth staff to share examples of good practice and develop new perspectives on recruiting, engaging and retaining young people through sharing professional experience and considering new approaches within their project delivery.

The intended outcomes of the event were that each participant would have:

- Created connections to others working across the Peace4Youth programme.
- A clearer understanding of recruitment, engagement and retention for maximum impact.
- Gathered ideas on recruitment, engagement and retention from experienced peers.
- Reflected upon their own approach to recruitment, engagement and retention, with a view to identifying elements worthy of repeating and/or refining.
- Considered which aspects of recruitment, engagement and retention work towards or against the programme vision and goals.



Recruitment of young people

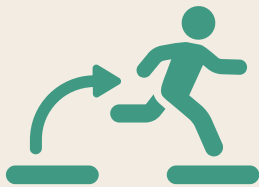
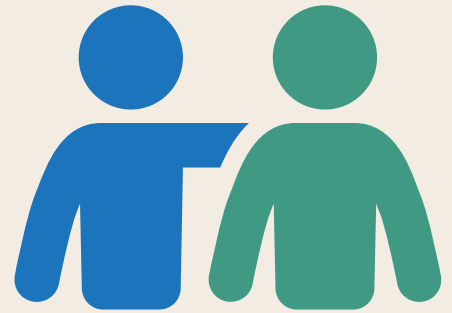


Process

Participants were asked to reflect on and share a personal memory of being new to a group. This brings workers into an empathic space with their participants, to understand the barriers to joining something new and the complex emotions attached to the initial engagement.

After sharing these personal insights, each table then discussed their Peace4Youth experiences of recruitment, reflecting on what was effective, what they would definitely do again, what didn't work, and how they had overcome any recruitment challenges.

Key points were then relayed at a plenary session and the most **effective methods of recruitment** identified were:



Taster Days

- Can be full/half days, open days, some taster sessions also held in schools.
- Use of high energy and fun games.



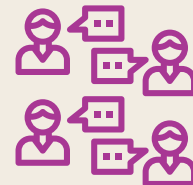
Clear information given

- Need to provide very clear information about the scale and scope of Peace4Youth projects to potential participants.



Referrals from other partners/organisations

- Once you've worked successfully with other agencies/groups there is a professional trust with them, they will have confidence to refer in future.



Young people's word of mouth/use of past participants

- Past participants recommend the programme to their friends and peers.
- Ask past participants to take part in open days/taster sessions.



Incentives – food, finance, travel, childcare, merchandise

- Provision of food and refreshments was highlighted as very important - also childcare and travel - depending on the context.
- Mixed views on the value of financial incentives; complicated by the fact that participants from the Republic of Ireland are not eligible for financial incentives of up to £8 per day.



Local knowledge of workers / local contacts

- Important to have local insights and knowledge for collaboration with locally based groups and agencies.



Social media

- *Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter depending on the audience.*



Quality, targeted leaflets

- *Leaflets need to give clear information, concise, be targeted at certain groups.*



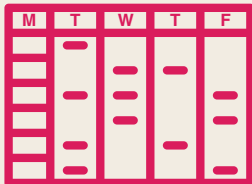
Detached / Outreach youth work

- *For example, recruitment at community bonfires proved effective.*



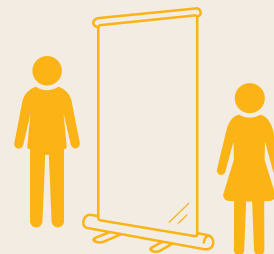
Engagement with schools

- *Allows access to those identified as pre-NEET, can be more effective than asking job centres to identify young people not in education, training or employment.*



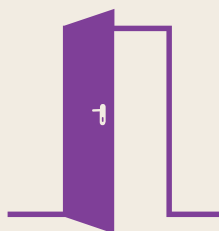
Project with pre-existing link with school

- *These links can mean guaranteed numbers and attendance, but the school timetable can create a challenge for projects.*



Pop-up events in centres, gyms etc.

- *Helpful to have free merchandise to give away.*



Contact with MLAs

- *To gain help with accessing audiences.*



Jobs and benefits offices

- *Mixed views with some groups finding these contacts helpful while others didn't.*



The main challenges

When asked to identify and prioritise **the main challenges** to recruitment, groups highlighted the following:

- ✓ Timing issues – Some projects experienced overlap with their cohorts; whereby they are trying to *recruit new participants* whilst *delivering with a previous cohort* at the same time.
- ✓ Conditions and regulations of funding related to budget, minimum hours for participant engagement and other boundaries.
- ✓ Issues of accessibility such as funding for travel in rural areas and interpreter costs.
- ✓ Maintaining a youth work approach whilst working within school structures.
- ✓ Time needed to work with young people with complex issues and needs means that it is difficult to complete the hours.
- ✓ Restrictions caused by Steps to Success.
- ✓ Gatekeepers to young people often close rather than open the gate. This was a challenge from other youth providers and from other Peace4Youth organisations.
- ✓ A sense, particularly with in within urban areas that organisations were 'competing' to recruit young people.
- ✓ Too many QUB participant surveys.
- ✓ Job centres.
- ✓ Getting direct access to young people and getting beyond indirect contact e.g. email.
- ✓ Budget constraints.
- ✓ Targets set for participants' community background.
- ✓ Staff retention.

Steps to
Success

Transport (Rural)

Gate keepers

Complex needs

Overcoming challenges

Participants were asked to share how they had overcome recruitment challenges and the lessons they had learned as a result. Having done that they were then asked to identify what they found worked best.



Adjusting the programme to fit the young person



Collaboration



Creativity / Thinking outside the box



Taster session with young people and breaking down barriers



Flexibility in working hours for staff, option to increase/decrease hours



Communication



Staying confident/positive – remain focused



Removing stigma in schools – through open days, events



Targeting people through social media to access wider spheres of influence

Other responses were:

- ✓ Reduce group size
- ✓ Set realistic targets
- ✓ Moved to schools to help recruitment
- ✓ Allowed young people to be with their friends
- ✓ Skilled youth work team
- ✓ Knowledge of local areas
- ✓ Giving more thought to what reasonable expectations of participants are
- ✓ Giving more thought to an overall structure for the project
- ✓ Formed partnerships to ensure more reach to young people, which meant there was less of an issue with encroaching in 'other people's territory'
- ✓ Received more resources to overcome challenges
- ✓ More flexibility around recruitment areas, more outreach
- ✓ Longer recruitment period
- ✓ Specialised staff - a recruitment officer, takes pressure off staff who can then focus on the programme
- ✓ Utilising staff strengths
- ✓ It's all about timing of the programme, the programme planning and organisation
- ✓ Having set recruitment times

Engagement with young people



Process

Participants were asked to reflect on their professional responses to a range of situations in which young people's engagement may be limited, to identify some of their effective 'go to' practices and then to share these with colleagues at their table.

Following discussion, each table shortlisted and presented one useful tip or activity to the full plenary. Practices which were selected by groups as effective in engaging young people included:

- A co-design approach to programme design is important - when young people have had significant input into the programme design then they share a sense of responsibility during implementation.
- The importance of sustaining a youth-led dimension within projects.
- Promoting citizenship and encouraging young people to integrate with, and contribute to, their community (an example given was hosting a family fun day).
- Activity-based exercises and games which encourage young people to view issues from the perspectives of others. A practical example was given of an activity where young people imagine themselves to be asylum seekers and need to select only six items in their suitcase. The game then presents players with a range of unforeseen barriers and is designed to increase their empathy and understanding of the additional challenges facing asylum seekers.
- Demonstrating positive energy as facilitators is important – conversely if youth workers appear to be bored then young people will mirror this. Youth workers should join in physical activities where appropriate, rather than just directing them.
- When groupwork isn't working it is important to stop, get feedback from the young people and to change accordingly - being responsive is essential within youth work.
- On occasions it has been helpful to bring in external agencies, in the recognition that youth workers are not experts in everything (the example given was of mental health). Experience has shown that it is effective to include this external input at the start of a programme, and then to build upon it with further in-house sessions.
- A practical example of citizenship was given in the form of a Dragon's Den activity, where young people are invited to 'sell' their ideas for a community project, and the idea which receives most votes is implemented by the group.





Retention of young people



Process

Each table was given a set of prompt cards to discuss the retention of young people at different stages of a project delivery cycle. Participants were asked to rank and arrange the cards onto a flip chart page and to present this at a plenary session.

Whilst each group chose to approach the exercise in a slightly different manner it was notable that there were several recurrent observations, including:

- It is vital to provide the right environment from the outset i.e. a welcoming and safe space, clarity and honesty from the worker about project parameters, and to help young people start the project with the sense of an end in sight, e.g. by setting clear goals.
- The quality of relationships at all stages of the delivery cycle is fundamental to the retention of young people. This involves building trust between workers and young people, and creating opportunities for bonding within peer groups, e.g. through the early use of residentials and team exercises. Young people's sense of belonging to a wider group can be supported at a later stage in the project, e.g. through social action projects, collective action or voluntary work in the community.
- It is crucial that projects are youth-led and adult supported at all stages of the delivery cycle, and this is enabled by taking a concerted co-design approach. There should be sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to ensure that activities are matched to young people's needs and interests, as well as being sufficiently challenging to build an incremental sense of achievement.

- The use of incentives was cited by most groups as important in supporting retention, although there was a level of disagreement about the need for financial incentives. The provision of travel expenses, food, and payments for childcare were all identified as important in improving retention.
- Practitioners constantly monitoring progress and adapting projects, where necessary. Seeking group feedback after each session and through reflective youth work practice on the part of the workers.
- Providing individual and group support to young people and building in transitions during the delivery cycle were considered important factors which improve retention, as was the celebration of growth and achievement throughout the projects.

Ultimately this exercise emphasised that all core features of youth work methodology, driven by underpinning principles and values, are central to improving the retention of young people. However as one group suggested, the interpretation of 'retention' should acknowledge that a young person's decision to leave a project early is not always a negative outcome. For example, if they leave to take up employment or to re-engage with education this could and should be viewed as a successful outcome. Several other groups noted that young people's individual circumstances may hinder their full attendance in a project – an example being of young people from Eastern Europe who may periodically travel abroad. Therefore, whilst steps can be taken to improve retention, this cannot always be guaranteed.

Conversations on...

Programme design and
content



13 Sept 2019 at UU, Magee Campus, Derry/Londonderry



Seminar aim

To provide space for experienced practitioners to develop new perspectives on programme logic, stages of design, programme activities and content through sharing professional experience and considering new approaches within their project delivery.

This event was specifically targeted at experienced practitioners wishing to re-visit, re-think or refine their programme planning skills. The intended outcomes of the event were that each participant would have:

- Created connections to others working across the Peace4Youth programme.
- A clearer understanding of intervention logic and sequencing of activities for maximum impact.
- Gathered ideas on content, programme activities and shape from peer experienced.
- Reflected upon the shape and content of their own project design, with a view to identifying elements for refining.
- Considered which aspects of programme design work towards or against the programme vision and goals.



Contextualising programme design



Process

After the initial welcome and scene-setting the seminar began with three different types of icebreakers as a way to consider the different experience which youth workers can generate through their programme choices.

Participants reflected on the process and outcome of each exercise, and in particular on the tone, pace, physicality (contact, movement), interactions between participants, emotions of participants, and the obvious and subtle outcomes of the exercises for participants. Their reflections illustrated how specific activities hold different intentions for the workers and can have different outcomes for participants.

It was emphasised that programme design must be grounded in contextual realities, and so the boundaries of the PEACE IV Children & Young People's Programme 2.1¹ (Peace4Youth) and the guiding principles of youth work are fundamental to the design of all projects.

Participants considered the defining features of youth work as presented by Davies and Merton (2009)², and these include:

- i. Voluntary engagement (as opposed to participation which has a deeper meaning in youth work)
- ii. Starting where young people are starting and going beyond the starting point
- iii. Building purposeful relationships
- iv. Participation ('taking power' as opposed to simply 'taking part')
- v. Working with and through young people's peer groups
- vi. Relating to young people in their community contexts
- vii. Working with young people's 'here and now' – and with their transitions (helping to prepare them for key moments in their lives)

¹ SEUPB (2016) Call Document for Children & Young People's Projects (Aged 14-24). European Commission. https://www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/file_entity_browser_thumbnail/public/PEACE%20Content%20Type/PIV_ChildrenAndYoungPeople_CallDocument_1stCall_14-11-2016_Amended.sflb.pdf

² Davies, B., Merton, B. (2009) Squaring the circle? Findings of a 'Modest Inquiry' into the state of youth work practice in a changing policy environment. Leicester: De Montfort University.



Intervention logic



Process

Working in four groups, participants were asked to isolate and explore aspects of emotional and intellectual learning, and subsequently to identify practical youth work activities or exercises which would address these specific areas of learning or development. Each group was given a different dimension to explore:

1. What emotions are you trying to develop in your programmes?
2. What personality traits are you trying to develop in your programmes?
3. What skills are you trying to develop in your programmes?
4. What ideas or concepts are you trying to develop in your programmes?

The subsequent discussion highlighted the interdependence of emotional and intellectual learning and the need to create a rich programme design which offers learning opportunities across all areas. Whilst individual activities are important, they must be strategically and logically sequenced in order to have greatest impact.

The group's insights and ideas are summarized overleaf:



1. What emotions are you trying to develop in your programmes? What exercises or activities are you doing that will develop this?

 Emotions	 Activity
Self-esteem, empathy	Mentoring
Respect	Good relations focused workshops. e.g. around other cultures
Owning your own identity	Identity shield
Self-awareness	Team games e.g. Tree Top Jungle NI, First Aid (Red Cross)
Self-belief	Team games Graduation ceremony
Resilience	John Muir Award (environmental 4 x day trips to explore, discover, conserve, share) Team games
Being realistic with how/who you are	Mentoring Good relations
Being mindful of your emotions	5 Steps to Wellbeing
Learning to control 'your' anger	Anger Management programme
How to express your emotions	Good relations programme Assertiveness
Satisfaction with life (including school, social life, social media)	Friends, sports clubs, etc. What's on my Plate activity



2. What personality traits are you trying to develop in your programmes? What exercises or activities are you doing that will develop this?

 Personality Traits	 Activity
Respect	Debating workshop Listening Activity e.g. 'One Word' in which a young person shares what a single chosen word means to them Group contract/revisit and display contract
Kindness	Reflective practice, workers should model kindness Act of Kindness task – young people decide what act to carry out, and share their story Mentoring
Independent thinking Ownership/Voice	Youth-led programme Citizenship project 'Choices' activity Young people are the 'expert by experience'
Resilience/bounce-back-ability	Mentoring Peer support Coping workshops Meditation/yoga Wellness Toolbox
Other traits: Self-awareness; critical thinking ; non-judgemental; empathic in views, opinions and beliefs; curious; self-starter; trust; flexibility	Young people put a 'fear in the hat' anonymously, for group discussion



3. What skills are you trying to develop in your programmes? What exercises or activities are you doing that will develop this?

 Skills	 Activity
Teamwork	Icebreakers, challenges, trips Team building activities (e.g. Egg drop, building towers)
Resilience Social skills (communication, interaction) Safety (road, stranger danger) Confidence, leadership, assertiveness Decision making, open mind, active listening Self-respect and treating others with respect	'Say what you see, Draw what you hear' back-to-back drawing activity Minefield (activities to travel across an imaginary minefield) Survival games (e.g. 'Escape the planet') Sheep and shepherd activity Human knot activity 'You have lost your marbles' game Use of music is effective to support confidence and mental health - create songs, raps, poems and public speaking Dragon's Den activity - effective for social impact Yes/No game - effective for confidence
Life skills (money management, cooking, hygiene) Health and safety, first aid Healthy coping skills	Practical workshops 'Come dine with me' (includes money management skills) Board games – monopoly Auction/bid games 'Real life gaming' – choose your own adventure, uses the idea of having '3 lives left' Kahoot Quiz / evaluations Mentoring
Conflict resolution	Scenarios / role plays for conflict resolution
Regulate emotions	Conflict Behaviour Tree (behaviour and feelings arising from needs)
Social awareness – motivation, diplomacy (etiquette), self-sabotage, avoidance, fight or flight regulation	1 to 1 mentoring - effective for building individuals



4. What ideas or concepts are you trying to develop in your programmes? What exercises or activities are you doing that will develop this?

 Ideas and Concepts	 Activity
Sense of identity (who am I? what do I believe?)	Lifemaps and Lifeshields Pick an item that represents you Vision Boards (on which individuals stick images of their likes/dislikes. The board can be left on the wall for peer sharing) Group playlist (each young person chooses a song) Peer sharing
Sense of belonging (what/who/ where is my community?)	Mapping activity / community mapping River of Life and Tree of Life Timeline Values exercise Community projects – Community garden Young people give back to the community, eg a litter pick Young people deliver to other young people Family Fun-days
Thinking and Understanding (broader horizons, widening world view, taking thinking out of the box)	Photography project, picture of specific items relating to an issue or that means something to them Intergenerational work – gaining skills while there Taking young people to places to see and hear for themselves, e.g. peace walls, Islamic Centre, etc.
Awareness and personal reflection (personal safety, what's out there, feelings and emotions)	Social enterprise
Resilience – stretching young people, building their capacity, self efficacy and self belief, autonomy and taking ownership and responsibility	Key working and 1 to 1 mentoring tailored to young people Youth-led ‘Not an island’, Peaceful society and long term goals, integration



Stages for programme design



Process

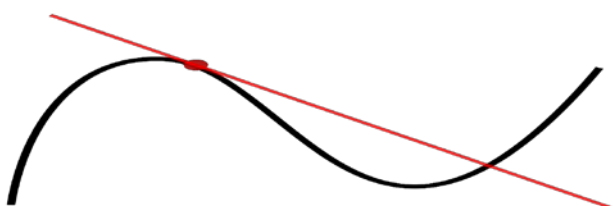
This exercise explored how youth workers sequence their projects and the principles and concepts they use (either consciously or sub-consciously) to develop this intervention logic.

Participants were asked to begin by considering the structure of a 3-day residential for young people, to anticipate the high and low points they would expect to see over the course of the residential.

This activity illustrated the natural ebbs and flows which occur at different times and the need to anticipate these when designing any piece of youth work.

Similarly, the overall design of a sustained Peace4Youth programme must anticipate and plan for the peaks and troughs during the entire delivery cycle, and try to pre-empt the lower points when young people's interest and attendance may wane. The delivery cycle should include several peaks and should allow young people to feel a sense of progression towards these high points.

Participants were asked to work alongside their own project co-workers, and to reflect specifically on the overall design of their project. Using the Concept Curve as a template, (see image below), they were asked to draw a graph of their project, labelling the peaks and troughs, identifying what young people develop at each stage and when are the significant activities.



This exercise aimed to sharpen a critical awareness of sequencing and logic within delivery cycles, identifying where new ideas can be integrated into the programme and whether there are points in the delivery cycle which need further attention.

The plenary session yielded two key concepts – the skills needed at the initial engagement phase and the need for balance in programme design:

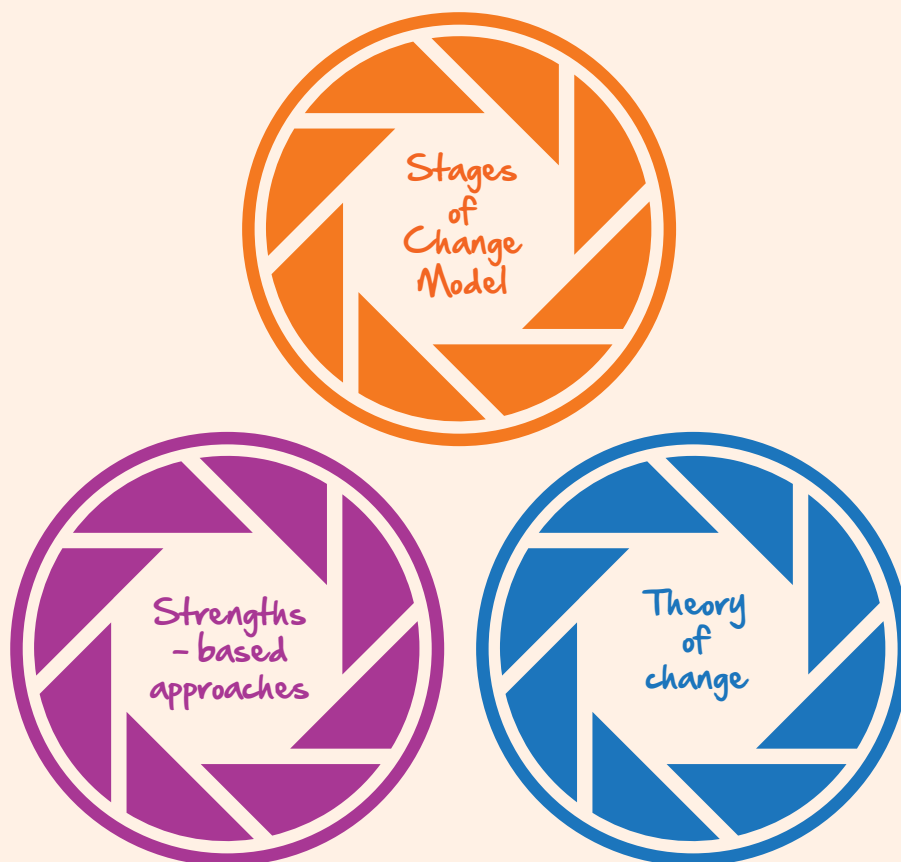
Initial stages of an intervention or programme should involve making a connection to the young person and making them feel personally included from the outset, e.g. finding out who they are, how do they feel, talking about personal experiences. This stage of the programme can incorporate a sensory or personal hook to draw out people's *evocative* memories, because we remember what has *meaning* to us as humans. If we begin with our own experiences we can break down barriers and establish empathy.

It was emphasised that striking a balance within programme design is key. For example, placing too much focus on the skills development aspect may be at the expense of sustaining young people's sense of ownership and personal growth.

In order to sustain young people's engagement and to ensure the experience is truly transformative, programme design should:

- adopt a logical sequencing of activities
- address the emotional as well as the cognitive and intellectual needs
- anticipate and pre-empt the low points
- accommodate time for review, reflection and appreciation
- ensure that young people feel a sense of ownership throughout the project.

Widening the lens – drawing on other models and practices



Although their subject matter was very different, both seminars served to highlight and reinforce the familiar values, principles and characteristics of effective youth work. Starting where young people are at, building purposeful relationships, experiential learning, drawing on group association, developing trust, and supporting meaningful engagement are among the incontrovertible features of a traditional youth work process, and central to the success of Peace4Youth projects.

However, some dimensions of the Peace4Youth projects extend beyond the familiar, associative youth work processes. For example, the formal inclusion of structured, one to one mentoring goes beyond the traditional parameters of youth work and demands an additional set of skills from practitioners. In this context there may be potential for Peace4Youth to draw on theoretical models and practices from other disciplines or academic fields, such as social work and positive psychology.

Indeed, the evaluation of the Derry/Londonderry seminar demonstrated a particular keenness among practitioners to explore new conceptual ways of thinking about their Peace4Youth projects. There is scope therefore for future practitioner seminars to focus on theoretical models and approaches to practice from other disciplines. Some relevant examples could include the Stages of Change model, the Strengths-based approach, and the use of Behaviour Change theories, which are briefly outlined overleaf. These models, and many others, may prove helpful in supporting the aspects of Peace4Youth which extend beyond, what may be considered, traditional youth work.



Prochaska and DiClemente: Stages of Change Model³

Although this model originates from the field of health and addiction it could have wider application in social and youth work professions in terms of understanding personal change and developing tailored interventions with individuals (such as the mentoring aspect of Peace4Youth). Essentially the model defines five stages which all people go through on the way to change, these stages being precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (examples of how these five stages have been translated into real scenarios are described in a publication by Sport England⁴). The authors propose that practitioners working with individuals should be able to identify which stage of the model each individual is at, and to adapt their interventions and use of language accordingly.

Strengths-based approaches for working with individuals⁵

One form of professional practice which is widely recognised in a number of social settings is the strengths-based approach. Whilst originating from the health sector, aspects of the strengths-based theory and praxis are highly compatible with youth work principles and practice. Essentially, the approach places focus on the inherent strengths of individuals and groups as a means to help them resolve problems and deliver their own solutions. Ontologically this reflects an asset-based rather than deficit perspective, and it encourages active collaboration and co-design in the achievement of outcomes. There are a number of specific approaches within strengths-based work – for example, Solution Focused Therapy or Strengths-based Case Management. There may be merit in exploring whether Peace4Youth projects can draw on these practices.

How to use theory of change for systems change⁶

Peace4Youth is explicitly change-oriented and seeks to achieve transformative experiences for its young participants. An understanding of the many models of change which are deployed in health and social professions could therefore be valuable in supporting the design and delivery of Peace4Youth projects. Whether the focus is systemic and/or individual change, the process of developing an organisational theory and model of change can help bring practitioners and stakeholders together to critically reflect on project purpose and methods. Abercrombie et al (2018) note that this reflective process can be challenging and at times uncomfortable, but that the end result can provide a logical rationale for delivery as well as a structure for impact measurement.

³ Singer, J B (Producer) (2009, October 10) Prochaska and DiClemente's Stages of Change Model for Social Workers [Episode 53] Social Work Podcast [Audio podcast] Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkpodcast.com/2009/10/prochaska-and-diclementes-stages-of.html>

⁴ Sport England (undated) Applying behaviour change theories - Real world examples from the Get Healthy Get Active projects

⁵ Pattoni, L, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Sciences (May 2012) Insights No. 16, Strengths-based approaches for working with individuals

⁶ Abercrombie, R, Boswell, K and Thomasoo, R (March 2018) Thinking Big. How to use theory of change for systems change. London: New Philanthropy Capital.

⁷ Harvey, C. (2018) Young Voices : Something to say about Peace4Youth. Belfast: YouthPact. Available at <https://www.cooperationireland.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=21525815-63e2-44f3-8417-78fa089563c0>



Concluding comments

A previous YouthPact engagement event with young participants illustrated very clearly how the Peace4Youth initiative can create a genuinely transformative impact within young lives.⁷ Alongside these positive stories, however, there are likely to be other young people who faltered during the recruitment stage, or who joined a project and subsequently left before completion. The overarching concern of both the Belfast and Derry/Londonderry seminars was therefore to try to maximise the impact of the programme for all potential participants, drawing on the bank of professional knowledge held within projects to find solutions which will prevent early drop-out.

On the subject of retention, several groups reflected on the inevitability of a degree of intermittent attendance or drop-out, often for reasons beyond the control of the project. One group challenged the premise that drop-out is always negative, suggesting that a young person who leaves a project early to re-engage with education or to take up employment is and should be viewed as a positive outcome. The discussions and exercises about retention underlined the importance of ensuring fundamentals are in place, with groups consistently identifying aspects such as 'relationship building', 'flexibility', 'welcoming environment' and 'safe spaces' as prerequisites to successful projects.

The importance of local partnerships was also note-worthy but brought with it a range of tensions to be managed, this was particularly felt within urban areas where organisations were 'competing' to recruit young people. Some practitioners sensed an undercurrent of territoriality within their areas and spoke of

the need to take time to continue to build local partnerships. Many participants also expressed the desire to forge stronger connections between the Peace4Youth providers, and to be able to call upon each other's skills in future.

At the Belfast seminar, participants exchanged practical ideas and activities to support youth engagement. The Derry/Londonderry seminar took this theme further, drilling deeper into the process of programme design and content. Starting from the premise that a long term and intensive youth work project such as Peace4Youth demands a high level of sophistication in its planning, the seminar emphasised the need for a logical sequencing of activities, and the importance of facilitating a mix of both emotional and cognitive learning. On a conceptual level, participants found the 'Peaks and Troughs' exercise particularly useful to help them stand back and view the 'bigger picture' of a project, and hence to anticipate situations when young people's interest may wane.

Youth Work principles and processes are repeated time and time again. Workers show confidence and belief in the core concepts of voluntarism, relationship-building, conversation and co-design in building programmes that young people want to take part in.

This paper offers a snapshot of practical ideas and concepts steeped in youth work practice. For a fuller picture of these processes, the paper can be read in conjunction with 'Young Voices: Something to say about Peace4Youth' (Harvey, 2018, *ibid*) and 'Distilling the Essence of Peace4Youth Practice' (McConville & McArdle, 2019)⁸.

⁸ McConville, L., McArdle, E. (2019) Distilling the Essence of Peace4Youth Practice. Belfast: YouthPact. Available at <https://www.cooperationireland.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e4358925-ec89-4c0f-a065-058a8a407489>

Appendix 1

Seminar evaluations



At the close of the Belfast event 39 of the 43 participants completed a written evaluation form, as did all 20 of the participants of the Derry/Londonderry event. All responses have been carefully considered by YouthPact staff and will help to inform the purpose, format and content of future 'Conversations on...' events. What follows is a brief summary.

Evaluation feedback was overwhelmingly positive in nature, with 38 of the 39 Belfast respondents, and all 20 of the Derry/Londonderry respondents, able to identify at least one constructive outcome resulting from their participation at the event. Participants at the Belfast event highlighted the value of sharing practical ideas about young people's recruitment (including ideas for taster sessions) as well as sharing advice to improve engagement during projects. Responses from both events emphasised the value of networking and sharing across other Peace4 Youth projects. Responses from participants of the Derry/Londonderry event indicated that they had learnt about specific youth work activities, as well as gaining new conceptual knowledge about programme design and logic.

Asked to identify what new understanding or increased awareness they had gained from the event, participants at the Belfast event noted their increased awareness of other Peace4Youth projects; the value of making new contacts; a sense of solidarity and shared

experience with workers from other projects, and the opportunity to draw on the wealth of professional expertise held by others. In addition, many noted they had gained new ideas for practice and organisational strategies, particularly in relation to the recruitment of young people. Participants at the Derry/Londonderry event gave a broad range of responses, and in particular highlighted the usefulness of the Concept Curve to predict highs and lows during a project delivery cycle, as well as learning about specific youth work activities.

The evaluation forms used at the Derry/Londonderry event asked participants for ideas for future YouthPact training/development sessions. The range of responses were:

- ✓ Creative ways to incorporate core themes into your programme
- ✓ More theory
- ✓ Sharing session and activity ideas
- ✓ Focus on the themes of citizenship, good relations and personal development / programme design focused on the outcome areas
- ✓ More activities / games for leaders
- ✓ Toolbox of skills by youth workers
- ✓ Dealing with challenging behaviours
- ✓ Mentoring training
- ✓ More networking
- ✓ YouthPact could build shared resource packages for PEACE projects

Appendix 2

What would we 'ask' from PEACE IV?



During the Belfast seminar participants were asked to identify their key 'asks' from PEACE IV which would facilitate local delivery. Comments were fed back at a plenary session and included:

- ✓ Remove the regulation that a young person can only sign up to one project.
- ✓ SEUPB should put greater trust in the judgements of youth workers / practitioners, for example, projects should be allowed to modify their programmes in respect of hours, etc. when appropriate.
- ✓ Fund projects to employ staff to help with recruitment - it is hard for projects to recruit and deliver at the same time.
- ✓ There should be support for a sharing of skills among and between the Peace4Youth projects, and this would reduce the need to bring in external facilitators.
- ✓ High transport costs - more money needed for transport and activities.
- ✓ Set budget/collaboration - more money for transport, leaflets, etc.
- ✓ Flexibility of being able to work with people outside of Belfast due to a saturation of programmes. It can become a competitive environment when there are multiple projects in one geographic area.

There was also some feedback from workers for Peace4Youth delivery agents and partnerships:

- ✓ Those working with schools need clear communication with the school staff from the outset, e.g. having access to a stock Programme presentation would inform the college about Peace4Youth and demonstrate how it complements a school/ college agenda.
- ✓ More outdoor activities/adventure learning for young people who are high risk/in need.
- ✓ Form agreements with other PEACE programmes.
- ✓ Better partnerships/linkages between other Peace4Youth programmes, to assist in delivery.
- ✓ Work together – a collaborative approach is needed – *'don't just protect your own but return the focus to the needs of the young people'*.



Appendix 3 YouthPact

YouthPact is the Quality and Impact body for the EU PEACE IV Children & Young People's Programme - Peace4Youth - funded by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The Peace4Youth Programme has the specific objective of enhancing the capacity of young people to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and to make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society.

YouthPact is a cross-border partnership of four regional organisations:

- ✓ Co-operation Ireland (Lead Partner);
- ✓ Ulster University;
- ✓ National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI);
- ✓ Pobal.

The role of YouthPact is to engage with the Peace4Youth delivery agents and their partners in the projects funded under the Programme, to enhance the quality and maximise the impact of their work with young people by supporting a high-quality youth work approach, and nurturing a strong focus on change and outcomes. YouthPact's work covers four main areas:

- ✓ Support, development and enhancing delivery;
- ✓ Youth participation and youth-led approaches;
- ✓ Supporting monitoring and measurement actions;
- ✓ Signposting and dissemination.





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