

Client : Special EU Programmes Body - SEUPB

**IMPACT EVALUATION OF PEACE IV, OBJECTIVE 2.1
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 14 – 24**
Phase I Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Throughout the Northern Ireland peace process, funding from the European Union has sought to support and address economic and social development in Northern Ireland and the border counties. The current PEACE IV Programme focuses on a narrow range of activities to ensure that funding brings about significant change in four key areas: Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations. Specific Objective 2.1, Children and Young People, prioritises 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, are disengaged from the peace process, and are not in formal education, training, or employment.

Programmes funded through Specific Objective 2.1 provide young people with the opportunity to participate in shared, outcomes-focused programmes of activity incorporating quality learning experiences with an aim to, “*enhance the capacity of children and young people to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society.*” The Programme-level theory of change anticipates that through participation in purposefully designed projects, young people will develop capabilities in relation to three Programme outcome areas: Good Relations, Personal Development, and Citizenship. These capabilities, in turn, will support reconciliation processes and broader societal change.

The evaluation team from the Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations at Queen’s University, Belfast was contracted to complete the impact evaluation for Specific Objective 2.1. To do so, the evaluation team is conducting a mixed methods approach with multiple levels of analysis. This strategy enables identification of particular aspects of the implementation approach that may influence both project delivery and associated outcome indicators. The following is a summary of the major findings from Phase I of the Programme.

Main Findings

Youth Participant Surveys

Primary data was collected through surveys completed at multiple time points by the young people participating in funded projects. Each of the three core Programme outcome areas were measured using psychometrically validated items and scales that are appropriate for test-retest over the course of the evaluation and for use with young people of a similar age.

At the time of writing, young people have completed a maximum of three surveys. Funded projects varied in their start date and duration; as such, young people completed surveys based upon the bespoke timeline of their given project. The first was completed within two weeks of initiating their project activities; the second, mid-way through the project; and the final survey within the last two-weeks of project activities. Surveys measured the three outcomes, and their associated outcome indicators. Participants also completed a short participant profile that included a range of demographic information. These profiles could be completed at any time over the course of the project.

Survey Completion Rates

Data were received from eight projects funded by the PEACE IV Children & Young People Programme. At the time data analysis began for the Phase I report (20th August 2018), the completion rates were (excluding duplicates):

- Time 1 survey (n = 876)
- Time 2 survey (n = 464)
- Time 3 survey (n = 393).
- Participant Profiles (n = 862)

The number of participants, however, who completed all surveys (including a matched participant profile) was lower: matched participant profile and Time 1 survey (n = 844); matched participant profile, Time 1, and Time 2 survey (n = 151, 17.9% retention rate); and matched participant profile, Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 surveys (n = 53, 6.3% retention rate). It should be noted that not all participants had finished their projects at the time of data analysis.

Demographic Breakdown

Of the 862 participant profiles received, 47.1% of participants were female; 51.9% were male; and 0.9% indicated that their gender was other. The age range on the programme was from 12-26 years; 53.5% were between the ages of 14-17 years and 42.9% were between the ages of 18-24 years. The vast majority of young people were from Northern Ireland (80.5%) and a

minority from the Republic of Ireland (19.5%). Finally, in terms of community background, 59.4% young people reported they were from the Catholic community; 25.6% from the Protestant community; 12.6% indicated that they were from neither Catholic nor Protestant community; and 2.3% were unsure.

Participants who completed a profile (n = 862) were asked to provide the first half of their postcode or eircode. This enabled the evaluation team to demonstrate coverage of enrolment in the Programme across the eligible regions of Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. Mapping of this data alongside the location of funded projects suggests that there are gaps in coverage in the Causeway Coast and Glens area of Antrim and in more rural parts of Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone in Northern Ireland, and in Leitrim and Cavan in the Republic of Ireland consistent with the locations (or lack thereof) of the funded projects.

Distance Travelled

To explore potential changes in attitudes, affect, and behaviour over time, participants who completed any two time points were merged into one dataset (i.e. those who completed a Time 1 and Time 2 survey (n = 145); those who completed a Time 1 and Time 3 survey only (n = 156); and those who completed a Time 2 and Time 3 survey only (n = 52)). This gave a matched sample of 353 participants from which to explore the distance travelled as measured by the change in mean scores on each of the outcome indicators between the two time points. Statistical significance was determined through paired samples t-tests. Because the time points between the two surveys varied for each participant, a second series of analyses used statistical regression to control for length of time (i.e. how long participants were in the programme). Below we review the main findings drawn from these analyses.

Good Relations

For the Good Relations outcome indicators, there was evidence to suggest positive change in terms of *respect for diversity* and in multiple indicators of having a *positive predisposition towards others from a different community or cultural background*. This included the frequency and quality of contact with others from a different community background both during and outside of project activities, a greater frequency of contact with individuals from minority ethnic groups, more positive attitudes towards members of minority ethnic groups, and a stronger sense of self-efficacy for forming friendships with individuals from a different group than themselves. No change was evident, however, for participants' *understanding of their own identity* as measured through participant's strength of ingroup identity and perceived family ethnic socialisation and for the development of cross-community and cross-border friendships.

Taken together, these findings suggest that as a result of participation in the PEACE IV Programme, young people had developed a greater understanding of and respect for diversity; an awareness of and sensitivity to the values, beliefs, customs and traditions of others; respect for others from a different community and cultural backgrounds, abilities and orientations; and a positive predisposition to others from a different community / cultural background.

Personal Development

Similar to Good Relations, positive changes were evident across the majority of the Personal Development outcome indicators. Young people reported a significant increase in *confidence, planning and problem solving, leadership skills, resilience and determination, and other relevant knowledge and skills for supporting their own health and well-being*. They also reported significantly improved sense of personal *agency*; however, no change was evident on sense of agency in their community. There were no significant improvements in participants' reported *positive relations / working effectively with others* or levels of *self-awareness and understanding*. It should be noted that the scale used to measure positive relations / working effectively with others appears to show poor internal reliability; as such, these results should be viewed with caution.

These findings suggest that young people have developed confidence and agency; planning and problem solving; leadership; resiliency and determination; and other relevant knowledge and skills for supporting their own health and well-being as a result of participation in the PEACE IV Programme.

Citizenship

Across the majority of Citizenship outcome indicators young people reported significant improvements. In particular, reported *engagement with useful services, volunteering in communities of place and/or interest, and positive family relations*. There were no significant changes in young peoples' *positive community relations*. Interestingly, while there was no significant change in self-reported participation in sectarian behaviours, there were positive changes in reported civic engagement and support for peacebuilding.

As a result of participation in the PEACE IV Programme, young people have developed their capabilities for engagement with useful services; volunteering in communities of place and / or interest; and positive family relations; however, it may take more time to see a change in reported behaviours to match the evident attitudinal change

Youth Worker Focus Groups

In addition to participant profiles, a series of focus groups were conducted from June – July 2018 with 36 key project personnel from seven funded projects. The purpose of these focus groups was to discuss the key success factors and challenges affecting project implementation and any internal and external issues which they felt had impacted (positively or negatively) their ability to achieve their specific project objectives. Each of the key themes and sub-themes that emerged are discussed in turn.

Challenges in Project Initiation

In relation to the challenges that practitioners encountered during the project initiation stage, four key sub-themes emerged. The first focused on difficulties due to competition with other non-governmental and governmental programmes. This included challenges identifying appropriate partners as well as too many organisations recruiting for the same target group and staff in the same areas. While financial incentives were reported as beneficial to recruitment for young people in Northern Ireland, participants mentioned that the lack of incentive for young people from the Republic of Ireland made it particularly difficult to attract participants. This issue was most pronounced during cross-border activities when inequalities were made cognisant to the young people.

The second sub-theme highlighted the difficulties associated with recruitment criteria. This included difficulties recruiting a balanced cohort of young people given the demographics of particular geographical areas, age restrictions, and a bipartite system of social categorisation and community identification that a number of young people felt restricted by. The third sub-theme was to do with difficulties with getting the project established in a relatively short time frame. This was particularly difficult for those partnerships that did not have previously established networks in a given area. The relatively short time frame was also a challenge in terms of preparation time particularly given late letters of offer, pulling resources together for qualifications, and paperwork requirements. The final sub-theme suggested that practitioners found it challenging to coordinate with partner organisations when setting up the programme and recruiting young people.

Challenges in Achieving Programme Outcomes

Challenges which practitioners felt hindered their projects ability to achieve programme outcomes can be understood at three levels: macro, meso, and micro level. Macro level issues focused on the difficulties associated with financial incentives, bureaucracy and interaction with SEUPB and other government agencies, unique challenges working cross-border, and overall programme design. At the meso level, practitioners highlighted heavy workload,

transportation costs and retention rates, limited resources, and difficulties associated with the evaluation requirements. At the micro level, practitioners stressed that the challenges with working with this unique target population were not fully taken into account when designing the Specific Objective. This included the extreme levels of disadvantage faced by individuals taking part in the project, the reluctance and anxiety and / or fear associated with interacting with members of the other community, unanticipated levels of racism, and that participating young people did not perceive community relation issues as relevant.

Factors Contributing to Achieving Programme Outcomes

Practitioners highlighted a number of factors that supported programme implementation and the achievement of programme outcomes. The first focused on measures that facilitated recruitment of young people, including offering taster sessions and allocating resources to communities and organisations in the project areas before the start of the project as a means to build positive working relationships. Youth workers also emphasised the youth-led, creative and participatory nature of their projects, which gave young people a sense of ownership and increased retention. Structural factors that contributed to enhancing retention rates also were reported as key. This included offering financial and other incentives (e.g. childcare, transport and lunch) and flexible meeting times, as well as the advice and support of YouthPact, SEUPB project officers, and other external agencies who provided guest speakers and training courses.

Most importantly, the positive relationships built between project staff and participants, as well as the participants' parents or guardians, was argued to be a key factor in achieving programme success. Through these relationships, youth workers were able to adapt to the needs of the young person and shape the programme content accordingly. Further, they were able to address and tackle community stereotypes and hostile intergroup relations, while supporting blossoming cross-community friendships.

Influence of YouthPact

The positive influence of the Quality and Impact Body could not be overstated by the youth workers. Practitioners praised the quality of YouthPact's staff and their expertise. Trainings and support activities offered knowledge-exchange opportunities to address challenges and share best practice. It was cautioned that unless carefully structured, the focus on challenges could become toxic; however, the overall appraisal of the trainings was that they were helpful and supportive.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Phase II

Taken together the findings suggest that Phase I of the PEACE IV Specific Objective 2.1 Children and Young People has been successful in achieving its objective of enhancing 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 and should progress to Phase II. The overwhelming majority of outcome indicators show clear progression for young people because of participation in their funded youth projects. This is particularly the case for the skills-based outcome indicators that show the most progress. Those indicators that did not show movement appear to focus on more reflective-based youth work around increased understanding of identity and self-awareness. For example, while young people report a stronger support for peacebuilding they may not recognise that reducing or limiting their own sectarian behaviours could contribute to this wider goal. We suggest that greater capacity building and training is put in place during Phase II to support youth workers to engage with these issues on a deeper level.

In addition, discussions with practitioners highlight a number of key challenges that need to be addressed to sustain the success of the Programme. Moving into Phase II we suggest stronger lines of communication between SEUPB and the projects, as well as between the projects themselves. For example, open discussions about recruitment may shed light on areas and locations where young people currently are being underserved. Finally, we recommend that during Phase II, training and development is offered to youth workers around theories of change and intervention logic. This can be supported by a stronger feedback loop between the CIIR evaluation team, the Quality and Impact Body, and the projects in which research and empirical evidence can facilitate understanding of how programme design and content leads to intended outcomes.