



Report to: OFMDFM C&YP Unit

Subject: Consultation on Ten Year Strategy and Action Plan

Date: 19th August 2009

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Relevant background information

This is a report on the Northern Ireland Youth Forum's (NIYF) consultation workshop on the Northern Ireland 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People and Action Plan (2008 - 2011), which took place on the 19th August 2009.

By enlarge young people enjoyed having a say on such an important piece of work although they agreed that more time was needed in order to explore the outcome areas in any great depth.

It was also agreed that to ask the young people to consider the UNCRC concluding observations as part of this workshop would be very confusing; as the Ten Year Strategy and Action Plan document alone is very complex. However, at the planning phase it was anticipated that issues relating to UNCRC would be raised as part of these discussions.

Methods

In total **18** young people took part in the consultation. They were from a variety of socio economic; geographical and religious backgrounds.

The consultation began with icebreakers and warm up exercises that were designed to encourage participants to think about the issues which would be addressed. The young people were then split into two groups where the six outcome areas were discussed.

Young people explored each outcome area by initially thinking about the following 4 questions:

- a. Discuss what this outcome area means?
- b. What kind of issues it relates to?
- c. What can be done to address the issues?
- d. What do you think of the things government are already doing?

The discussions lasted approximately two hours. A session plan can be seen in Appendix 1. This details the format of the consultation.

Key Issues

The following section details what young people said in relation to each outcome area:

1. HEALTHY

Young people discussed how in their eyes, health is a state of social, mental and physical well-being and is not the mere absence of disease.

Young people listed the following issues as relevant to them:

- Mental Health
- Body image – e.g. giving into peer pressure about how you look (size 0)
- NHS
- Obesity
- Anorexia

Body Image

There was in depth discussion in relation to what the Government could do. Some young people suggested that the Government should enforce laws against:

- The promotion of size 0
- Air brushing in magazines

Young people also discussed the need for a better level of services. They highlighted problems in relation to information on obesity/anorexia and mental health services for young people; as well as problems with the NHS – specifically less waiting time.

One young person also highlighted that 'Law is presently trying to be passed to ban size 0 from the fashion world. It already has been banned in certain countries.'

Mental health

Young people spoke about the need for more campaigning /awareness raising with regards to mental health and highlighted that it still is a taboo subject.

Young people also spoke about the lack of targeted services specifically for young people with mental health problems.

Opinion on what Government is doing

Participants also got the opportunity to discuss the things the Government are already doing.

They highlighted that over the past few years the Government have begun to understand the need to address mental health, therefore more money has been pumped into campaigning. However, young people did feel that services should be integrated / joined up as they felt that this would save money.

2. ENJOYING, LEARNING, AND ACHIEVING

Young people defined this outcome area as enjoying activity centres, youth forums and school.

Opportunities

Some young people spoke about gaining certified recognition e.g. 'Achieving certificates like the Millennium Volunteers' and participating on 'courses such as OCN in Community Youth Work or Future Leaders certificate'.

The young people also commented that those who engage within the youth service can avail of all of these opportunities, but 'those who don't engage within the youth service are unfortunately left behind'.

The sense of ownership and achievement were both seen as extremely important with regards to this outcome area.

Practical ways of learning

Young people spoke about things that they enjoyed with regards to learning and the methods used which had particular impact on them. They spoke about the impact of educational trips / visits, and that often when an incentive was provided that learning can be fun.

Young people also spoke of the need for more practical ways of learning, for example, more focus on vocational studies and apprenticeship schemes. They talked about how there is often too much emphasis on learning from books and there was a need for learning from and for life. They expressed the desire for more teaching practised outside of the classroom; and the need to 'change negatives into positives' 'for example, instead of hot wiring a car, fix a car'.

Opinion on what Government is doing

When young people spoke about what things the Government are already doing, they highlighted issues including the need for Government to understand that a minority of the youth population need more opportunities to enhance skills and learning and that the Government should focus more on people who do not have skills.

3. LIVING IN SAFETY AND WITH STABILITY

Safety in own area

The most important issue that young people felt extremely strongly about was 'Feeling safe in your own area'. In exploring the issue young people spoke about being afraid of peers, and how it can be extremely daunting 'if you're faced with a mob of hoodies on your street'.

Good relations

Young people spoke passionately about how more community work should be done to bridge divides; as well as highlighting the need for good relations work.

Some felt that there is a need to learn more about other traditions and cultures; that this should be done from an early age and be part of a process – not just one off exchange visits. Young people also spoke strongly about the fact that sectarianism and racism are still prevalent and often this is ignored. They also stated if we are to address these issues on the long term, that they need forums / opportunities to talk about 'hard issues like paramilitarism, marching and bonfires'.

To tackle the issue of feeling safe in one's community, young people suggested that more policing on the streets / community policing was a solution.

Opinion on what Government is doing

In relation to what the Government are already doing young people discussed how campaigns in the media are currently being rolled out. They gave the example of knife crime; they felt however that the Government need to do more than just placing adverts to tackle the issues.

4. EXPERIENCING ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

In discussing this outcome areas young people spoke about having 'the money to live' and specifically highlighted 'the basics - for things like food, water, heating and maintenance'.

They felt that this issue related to:

- Benefits
- Taxes
- Water rates
- Poverty
- Education

Educational Maintenance Allowance

EMA was a hotly debated issue; it caused frustration for those who did not receive the allowance as it was seen as unfair.

Extra costs for school

There was lengthy discussion in relation to extra costs for school. For example, problems when you have to pay for things e.g. educational trips, tuck shop, dinner tickets, and the problems that this created for young people whose parents could not afford to pay more money.

Schools

During the conversation some young people expressed the opinion that 'Schools are concerned with numbers not needs'. They talked about the emphasis on exam results and not the needs of the individual pupil. Young people highlighted that 'life style skills need to be taught in schools; covering things like sex and relationship education'.

Sex and Relationship education

The young people highlighted that 'parents and teachers are not very good at delivering sex education'. They spoke about how the quality and time dedicated to sex education varies from school to school and the religious ethos of the school also influences the sex education provided.

Young people suggested that everyone should receive sex and relationship education, at the same level, from an early age and throughout their education. In addition, they said that classes rarely focus on relationships, feelings or sexual orientation, they commented there should be a focus on these areas well as well as contraceptives and STI's.

Young people felt strongly that the issue of sex education has an impact on poverty, benefits and taxes.

Benefits

Some young people spoke about how they 'feel penalised if you are from a two parent family'. They highlighted that the benefit system needs to be fair, catering for the families where the parents live together but are on bread line as well as those families where the parents live apart. However, young people spoke of the need to tackle benefit (and EMA) fraud.

Furthermore, parental responsibility was discussed and the need to ensure that parents spend benefits on their children and not themselves. They agreed that the Government are doing some good things in this area, for example, uniform grants, free school meals, breakfast clubs and milk tokens.

One young person suggested that any benefit system needed to be based on 'need not want', and suggested that this could help address issues of poverty. It was further suggested that healthy food should be subsidised for the poor as young people acknowledged that it is this food which costs the most.

Poverty

Most young people did not know about the Anti-Poverty strategy, but were pleased it had been introduced. They were disappointed to hear that Government had aimed to half child poverty by 2010 at the time of writing the strategy, and that it was unrealistic that this would be met.

Some suggestions were given to tackle poverty:

- 'An EMA style scheme for trips etc, i.e. Government could subsidise these'
- 'A dinner ticket style top up card to get rid of the stereo typing'

Young people agreed that most of the issues discussed in this paper are related to or have an impact on poverty.

It was agreed that more could be done to support children and young people who may be living in poverty and that integrated services could be delivered at a community level to do this. For example, one young person highlighted that 'there is a good number of youth clubs and community centres in my area; there is also leisure centres churches and schools, but I'm not sure if they all talk to each other. Sometimes they have no funding and often the doors are closed when we need them most'.

Transport

Access to reliable and affordable transport was an issue that the young people viewed as having a major impact on their lives. This was a particularly important issue for young people in rural communities.

Young people made the point that they require transport in the evenings and at weekends, as well as for school and work related purposes. The fact that young people are charged an adult rate on buses from age 16 was a huge issue, as well as the fact that during school hours rates are different from those when young people are not in school. They suggested that bus passes giving free or concessionary transport should be available to all young people and should be available to use at all times not just during school hours. It was noted that over 60's get free travel but not young people.

It was agreed that free transport could have a cross cutting impact e.g. safe space to

socialise, reducing anti social behaviour and increasing career opportunities and that this should apply to bus and trains. (Trains were seen as extremely expensive).

One young person suggested that the Government should the lower driving age. Another suggested subsidising driving lessons during school and reflected upon a scheme that was once run by the Department for the Environment.

One young person also suggested a 'Cycle to school scheme' but highlighted that this requires safe cycle lanes – 'not like the ones on the Antrim Road that cars fly up and down in'.

Parental Responsibility

The participants spoke about the responsibility of the parent with regards to Economic and environmental well being. Some of the issues highlighted above touch on this issue; in addition young people commented that Parents Education schemes; home economics classes in all schools and learning life skills have an impact in this area.

Jobs for Young People

Young people having jobs was seen as a big issue. Young people discussed the inequalities with regards to this including issues such as:

- Difficulties in getting jobs
- Differing level of rights
- Working without a contract
- Working for very little pay
- The minimum wage

Young people spoke passionately about the minimum wage. They asked 'Why should a 16 year old doing the same job as an 18 or 21 year old not get the same pay?'.

Opinion on what Government is doing

Young people felt that more should be done to tackle poverty. They felt that it was extremely disappointing that the targets set in relation to halving child poverty by 2010 would not be met.

Young people felt that the benefit system was good but could be improved.

Young people had never heard of the free and half fare travel schemes highlighted in the discussion paper.

With regards to housing young people felt 'in the dark' with regards to the process of getting a house and disagreed with Government's 'sticking plaster approach' to refurbishing as oppose to redeveloping social housing in areas of high economic deprivation.

Young people also felt that Government was not doing enough with regards to environment. They felt that more effort should be made to promote renewable energy, recycling could be made easier and that the poor travel infrastructure in NI exaggerated air pollution problems.

5. CONTRIBUTING POSITIVELY TO COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

Young people initially found this outcome area very difficult to understand. Following more discussion and explanation by the facilitator's the young people began discussing what this issue meant to them.

Access to youth services

Young people talked about how through 'youth services' they had opportunities to contribute positively to society. However, some discussed how there is 'nothing in rural areas and west of the Bann' i.e. access to youth services. Others viewed transport as a barrier for young people contributing positively to community and society.

Youth Forums

Young people felt that youth forums were one way that they could contribute to community and society and agreed that these should be at local and regional levels, they also thought there should be more opportunities for young people to get involved in youth projects and youth participation projects.

Getting their voice heard

Young people spoke of their frustration with regards to having their voices heard. One young person said that 'we want to contribute positively to society; government says they want to listen to us; but often I find the way they do it meaningless'. Another young person, who has been working with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum for a number of years commented that 'often public bodies expect young people to respond to consultations out of the goodness of their hearts – why don't they provide better resources to the Youth Forum so that we can do this more effectively? Sometimes I think all this talk of participation is a load of rubbish on the Government's part!'

Government needs to listen

Young people talked about how the Government needs to listen and understand what they are saying. They felt that the Government definitely does not understand and listen. Young people also discussed experiences where they felt their opinions were sought as a tick box exercise.

Young people welcomed OFMDFM's presence at this meeting and they said that they should come to more events like this. When discussing what can be done in relation to this outcome area young people expressed the need to get 'more buy in from decision makers to NIYF and other such structures'.

Volunteering

Some young people spoke about the need for more volunteering opportunities for all young people; not just those aged over 18. This was seen as a huge issue. Furthermore, young people spoke about how they have recently expressed the desire to work with DSD on their volunteering consultation but were frustrated at the lack of opportunity to do this in a meaningful way. Young people felt strongly that workshops like this one would be the most appropriate way to engage in relation to such an important issue.

Young people also linked volunteering to benefits:

'When you volunteer you still have to sign on; it's not fair that I work in the community and don't get paid, and I still have to go to the brew and get hassle'.

Opinion on what Government is already doing

In relation to what the Government is already doing young people said that there is 'lots of talking but young people can't see impact'.

Young people looked at the section of the literature highlighting what the Government is doing and none of the young people have heard about any of the opportunities listed in this section of the discussion paper.

This outcome area was seen as very negative and almost stereotyping young people. Young people felt that there is a need to focus on prevention instead of cure.

There was the feeling that bad behaviour gets rewards and that there is a real need to tackle the social issues as opposed to throwing money at the result of them. They felt strongly that 'good kids are losing out'.

6. LIVING IN A SOCIETY, WHICH RESPECTS THEIR RIGHTS

When young people took part in discuss in relation to what this outcome area means, they listed the following:

- Fair treatment
- Link to UNCRC (although young people did not know much about this)
- Respect for young people's needs / issue / wishes
- Respecting opinion

Young people discussed that when a society respects young people's rights because they have to it is contradictorily.

Some of the issues that young people felt were important to this outcome area were:

- Education
- Access to health care
- Right to play / socialise in safe space
- Right for young people to get a job
- Right to practice religion
- Right to practice culture
- Having a say

Play and leisure

With regards to the right to play young people talked about how facilities for young people was a huge issue, and that this should not be at a cost. They liked schemes such as midnight soccer and reduced leisure centre access fees.

Young people expressed the opinion that they should be allowed play in streets; and that 'Dog poo is an issue in parks' that has an impact on this right.

Young people spoke about how a lot of youth facilities are faith based and this was a barrier for many of the young people.

The right to have safe space to socialise was again highlighted by the young people.

The play and leisure policy was discussed and young people expressed their desire to be part of rolling this policy out. They spoke about 'how teenagers often get forgotten' in

relation to play and leisure.

The group also suggested that a community based approach should be adopted to 'design this right into everyone's life'. It was suggested that 'the community could agree a time that it is acceptable for young people to socialise in the streets to ...'; i.e. advocating an agreement between young people and adults with regards to what is acceptable.

Education

In relation to the right to an education young people discussed:

- Fees
- Debt
- Focus on academia whereas there should be more focus on vocational studies and apprenticeships

Health

Young people agreed that the NHS was seen as a good thing.

Stereotyping

A really important issue that the young people discussed was stereotyping and the role of the media in this. It was seen as having a huge impact on this outcome area.

Opinion on what Government is already doing

When looking at the things the Government are already doing, young people said that 'there should be a focus on community and not cost'.

Young people said that often you don't notice what the Government is doing.

OTHER COMMENTS

The most important issues for the young people

In summing up young people were asked to suggest some of the most important issues to them; young people suggested the following (in no particular order):

- Jobs
- Safety
- The Recession
- Money
- Transport
- Education

How the Government could make things better for young people

Also as part of the summary session, these are some of the suggestions of the young people made to make things better for young people:

- Bring back direct rule (although we are unsure if this was a 'tongue in cheek' expression)
- Give young people more money
- Listening more to young people
- Give young people jobs
- Up the amount of EMA to reflect on city living costs
- Include young people more within decision making
- Put more money into addressing poverty, and less into war
- Provide free transport

- 'Give us safe space to hang out'

Government doing well

These are some of the things the young people agreed the Government are doing well:

- Nothing
- Education (although opinion was split on this). Some felt that too much money goes to schools that get good grades and not enough goes to 'less good schools'. Some members of the group also thought that Government are not focusing enough on those who do not engage with the education sector.
- Government has good ideas but are not doing enough

Government doing not so well

Young people felt that the something Government are not doing well was listening to young people enough. It was commented that the Government was 'all talk and no action'.

Additions

Young people were asked if there was anything they felt was missing from the Strategy. They felt volunteering and good relations were missing.

Other views on Strategy and Action Plan

They young people felt that the Strategy and Action Plan were not child friendly enough; the young people commented that the document produced by The Participation Network, while simplified was still too long at 18 pages.

They also discussed how they found the whole report difficult to understand. There was an element of confusion and young people highlighted that to work on this strategy more effectively it would require more time. They commented however that things were explained well at the workshop and therefore felt they understood better and knew more about the Ten Year Strategy and Action Plan.

The young people felt that the Ten Year Strategy does have an impact and that adults should 'do the strategy stuff' but young people also need to be involved in the discussions on an ongoing basis. They felt that in order for this to work it should be a two way process and not the tokenistic approach that often seems to happen, especially when young people are involved with Government research.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the session young people knew little or nothing about the Strategy and felt it had no relevance to them. By the end of the session young people understood the Strategy a little bit more and although they said they did not fully understand it, they did feel, by the end of the session that the strategy had an impact on them.

The fact that OFMDFM were at this session was seen as positive and it made young people feel 'more listened to'. By enlarge young people enjoyed having the opportunity to have a say on this strategy, however more long-term meaningful engagement is needed for young people to have their say.

Appendix 1: 10 Year Strategy Consultation – 19th August 2009 (12noon)

Welcome, thanks and introductions

Icebreaker: (5-10min)

Agree Disagree Game (10 min)

(Agree, disagree, not sure, don't know what you are talking about)

At intervals ask participants to explain their decisions

Pause for a thought (5 min)

Where the young people are just ask them for a moment to think about what are the most important issues for them as young people growing up....

Ask a couple to speak about what they were thinking....

Introduction and background to 10 year strategy for children and young people. (10 min)

Ask young people what they know about it...

Outline some key facts.

Outline Outcome areas

Small groups – looking at outcome areas (allow half an hour; then break for lunch and allow a second half hour if required after lunch)

Split into 2 groups

6 sheets, one for each outcome area;

Discuss what this outcome area means?

What kind of issues it relates to?

What can be done to address the issues?

What do you think of the things government are already doing?

If there is time try and think about which issues are the most important;

Closing statements:

Get group in a circle and encourage them to finish these sentences:

The most important issues for me as a young person are.....
To make things better for me I think government should.....
Something the government is doing well is.....
Something they are doing not so well is.....
Something that is missing from the action plan is.....

Final activity:

Agree disagree game:

I enjoyed today's session
I was confused by all the information I received

I have heard about the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People
I know about the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People
The 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People has an impact on my life
