



The Youth Zone in a Shared Educational Campus

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to propose the concept of Youth Zones in the planning and development of new **Shared Education Campuses** in Northern Ireland as part of the 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy (TBUC). It is of paramount importance that DE's policies on Shared Education include both formal and non-formal education.

Our consultations have found that young people want state of the art youth centres in their communities that are fit for purpose and fit for the 21st century. The Youth Zone concept involves the development of a network of safe and shared spaces for children and young people across Northern Ireland.

“Building on our existing educational structures, shared education offers the opportunity to create a more cohesive education system in which children and young people from different community and socio-economic backgrounds can be educated together.” (John O’Dowd, Minister for Education, January 2015)

“Youth work’s non-formal approach to education is as important as formal education in terms of young people’s engagement in both learning & development” (John O’Dowd, Minister for Education 14/11/14)

The Youth Forum requested a meeting with Minister O’Dowd on the 13/2/13 to table a comprehensive study on youth zones which pulled together local research and reflected on the models being rolled out with huge success in the North of England. This meeting was declined due to the Minister’s attention to ‘more pressing issues’. We are hopeful that the papers sent to DE in February 2013 as well as this paper will given full consideration – especially given the fact that facilities for young people remains the priority issue for young people; interconnecting to a peplethoral of other youth related and societal issues such as youth support services; unemployment; education; health (mental, physical, sexual) etc.

A Youth Zone is a state of the art youth centre where a wide range of services and facilities are available all day, every day to meet young people’s needs. Nowadays young people are attracted to high quality spaces rather than dated and run down premises. Over the past thirty years housing, retail outlets, hotels and leisure complexes have developed as modern, state of the art facilities but can the same be said about facilities for young people? The days have gone where young people will flock to a run down youth club with inadequate facilities. They would rather stay on the streets or hang out in a

park or a shopping centre and there can be problems and risks associated with this.

In tune with **Priorities for Youth and DE's vision**, every young person participating in a Youth Zone will be supported in a safe environment to **achieve to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development.**

The strategic aims of youth work in support of the DE vision are also reflected in the Youth Zone model:

- Youth Zones will provide access to enjoyable, non-formal learning opportunities that help young people to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers and the inclusive nature and needs based interventions in the Youth Zones will contribute to closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people.
- Youth Zones are a bold and ambitious way of improving the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes.

The Youth Forum is promoting the Youth Zone model as a way of responding collaboratively and effectively to local and regional assessment of need and is arguing for the development of Youth Zones to be a key strategic part of the first **Regional Youth Development Framework (RYDF)** and the new **Shared Educational Campus** models in the **TBUC Strategy**.

2. Proposal

The 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy (TBUC), published on May 23 2013, is the Executive's policy for 'improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society'.

The Strategy outlines how Government, community and individuals will work together to build a united community and achieve change against the key priorities of:

- Our children and young people;
- Our shared community;
- Our safe community; and
- Our cultural expression.

Included in the TBUC strategy is a commitment to create ten shared campuses based on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus model. **The Youth Forum believes that a Youth Zone should be an essential part of any new shared educational campus in Northern Ireland.**

At the heart of the vision for Youth Zones is the ambition to improve attitudes amongst our young people and help to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations. This is completely in tune with the aims for children and young in the TBUC Strategy and will enable the summer interventions in the strategy to be implemented seven days a week and all year round.

In a Youth Zone, as envisaged in the TBUC priorities, everyone will feel safe in moving around and young peoples' life choices will not be inhibited by fears around safety and mutual respect and understanding will be promoted and supported as the norm.

Based on our extensive consultations with young people, a model Youth Zone will include facilities such as the following:

- Sports Hall with Climbing wall, indoor tennis, badminton, indoor football, unihock, netball, Gaelic Games etc.
- The sports hall will also be able to facilitate Music Events; Youth Conferences and Seminars etc.
- Two Multipurpose areas: One for dance, music, theatre (black box style) and one for arts and crafts, table tennis, gaming zone, DJ classes
- Kitchen / café area: healthy, nutritious food and drinks
- Mentor rooms: mentoring support, counselling, advice provision (demand led), wrap around services
- Recreation area: pool, table football, small games,

- Enterprise zone (informal education, IT and exploring learning),
- Chill Out Zone, meeting, relaxing, eating, drinking, being entertained areas
- 3G multi purpose pitch (outdoor): football (recreational and structured)
- Fitness suite: state of the art gym equipment
- Boxing / MMA gym
- Changing rooms / showers
- Coder DoJo / Fab Lab / Creative ICT space

An annual membership will be payable and help to build a sense of pride and ownership and a per visit fee for young people will provide unlimited access to all facilities, and contribute to running costs.

The Youth Zone will be open for all young people to join and inclusivity will be a core principle, welcoming young people from all communities, backgrounds and abilities and offering unparalleled provision for young people; doors are open seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, until at least 10pm.

The Youth Zone will provide a neutral space for young people from across Northern Ireland to come together. It will build the confidence of young people to move between different communities, and experience different opinions. It will promote good relations and peace building through its very being.

In the Youth Zone, young people decide what to do and when they want to do it. There will be a range of activities available every evening and there will be something for everyone regardless of ability and experience. Developmental opportunities will always be sought for those young people who have a desire to progress to a higher level in their chosen activity through linkages to the local Sports Development Team specialist sports clubs, or local music, arts and drama groups many of whom will be housed within the Youth Zone.

Young people's aspirations and desires will be nurtured, supported and encouraged every step of the way and through the wide range of service providers housed under one roof, young people will be able to tap into a range of opportunities in a range of disciplines.

Young People simply looking for an oasis from their life outside will find the Youth Zone's chill out spaces and recreational areas safe havens in which to make friends talk and hang out. The Youth Zone's mentoring and volunteering programmes will provide one to one ongoing support to disadvantaged young people in crisis. Youth Work through relationship building and the provision of a positive community attachment develops civic engagement, building confidence and self worth in young people.

3. Consultation and Development Process

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Youth Sector partners have been working together to develop their vision for Youth Zones for several years now. This process has included:

3.1 Consultation with Young People

The NIYF has consulted with 1,684 young people as follows:

- 'What We Want' Report (2009): 939 young people
- Big Deal, Priorities for Youth Consultation (December 2009): 114 young people
- North Foreshore Consultation (March 2010): 12 young people
- Priorities for Youth Consultation, (November 2012): 119 young people
- NIYF Have Your Say Day (June 2013): 84 young people
- DARD Action Planning (2013): 41 young people
- Valley Park Shared Space Consultation (2014): 153 young people
- 'Be Heard' consultation (2014): 187 young people
- Shared Education Campus for North Belfast Consultation (Nov 2014): 35 young people

NIYF specifically sought the views of young people that were not involved in youth services as well as young people that may be considered to be socially excluded, vulnerable or marginalised.

Young people consistently identified '**places to go**' and '**things to do**' as the most important factors that would improve their life experience. It was important to young people that these places and activities were available in the evenings and at weekends and were affordable. They should also give the young people the opportunity to 'hang out' and meet other young people.

Like the rest of the young people in the consultation, the young at risk of offending expressed a concern that they had no place in their communities in which they could go to feel safe; many simply wanted a place to go where they could hang out with their mates. In addition to this, there was a strong feeling that 'having nothing to do' made them vulnerable to experimenting with criminal activity.

Young people from disadvantaged communities were of the view that there was a lack of facilities in their areas. They felt that alcohol use was inevitable because there was nowhere to go and nothing to do.

3.2 Visits to Youth Zones

In recent years a network of Youth Zones have been commissioned by local authorities across England. The NIYF have made a number of visits to Youth Zones in England to see how an operating Youth Zone works on a day to day basis. A group of young people from the Executive Committee of the Youth Forum visited the Youth Zones in Bolton and Manchester.

Bolton Lads and Girls Club is an example of a successful Youth Zone, one of the first to be developed in England. For most of its life, the Club operated from typical, run down inadequate facilities but during the late 1990's the local business leaders with the active support of the local council raised £5m and then built a modern state-of-the-art centre for young people – the best of its kind in England. The new club opened in 2002 and it was an immediate and overwhelming success.

Today, 3,000 young people a week visit this state-of-the-art, custom-built, modern youth facility with over 20,000 sq ft of facilities covering the widest range of sport, art and enterprise activities, open 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year.

This Youth Zone is driven by a powerful combination of public, private and voluntary sector support.



Bolton Youth Zone

Lancashire County Council began developing its Youth Zone strategy in 2009 with the The Zone in Nelson, Pendle opened in 2011.

A good example of the development of a new Youth Zone is in Preston. The Preston Youth Zone will include additional facilities, including a full Sexual Health provision run by the NHS and a variety of Early Support services, all exclusively for young people. Young people are closely involved in designing the building and its activities.

For more information see <http://www.prestonyz.org/>



Preston Youth Zone

3.3 Youth Sector Partners Consultation

In 2013 a consultation including a series of consultation interviews and a roundtable discussion was carried out with the voluntary youth sector partners to explore their vision for the concept of a Youth Zone. (A list and description of the partner organisations involved is in Appendix I.)

The partners had a shared vision for the idea of the development of an ambitious collaborative, new, safe, shared and accessible Youth Zone where a wide range of services and facilities are available all day, every day to meet young people's needs. Most partners' vision was for a 'one stop shop' Youth Zone with different youth organisations working together to offer services and facilities including group work space, arts and crafts, creative ICT, outside 3G pitch and green space, auditorium, drama studios/theatre space, gym, indoor hall, rock climbing wall, dance studio, beauty room, music room, boxing gym, chill out area and a sustainable café run by young people,

Services available include essential skills, training and employability services, information, counselling, mental and sexual health services, a safe place for young people in crisis, after schools/homework clubs, creative industries training, recreation, arts and sports development opportunities.

The essential characteristic highlighted most commonly by the partners was accessibility in terms of location, shared space and transport. This means that a Shared Educational Campus is the ideal location for a Youth Zone.

Most partners' vision is for a large contemporary, attractive and high quality building with substantial outdoor space with all services in the one place.

The partners do not see a Youth Zone as a stand-alone initiative. The Youth Zone would be a developing a resource and focal point for existing youth centres to make use of as an extension and a resource to local community based initiatives. The Youth Zone would be accessible to and interacting with the schools on the shared campus, local communities and parents and would be promoted and signposted in local centres.



(The Factory Youth Zone – Manchester)

In relation to the delivery of Youth Zones on a partnership basis the main suggestions were that the private sector and young people needed to form part of any partnership. There also needed to be statutory sector and local community 'buy in'. Other specific partners identified included entrepreneurs, university departments, retailers, city/town centre management, local authorities, government departments and other voluntary youth & community organisations. The main outcomes of a Youth Zone identified by the partners were:

- Youth work relationships and opportunities to help young people to flourish;
- Promotion of good relations, a shared future, shared space and diversity (including different schools, ages, socio economic backgrounds) in the context of a divided society;
- Education, career, employment, self-employment outcomes;
- More opportunities and enhanced development for young people;
- A sense of dignity in young people as a result of ownership and pride in creating something as dynamic as this;
- Personal development including building confidence, communication and creativity;
- Wraparound support for young people;
- Breakdown of mental health stigma as a result of integrated counselling services and suicide awareness;
- Broadened horizons of young people;
- International opportunities;
- A hub of innovation and creativity with a volume of young people in one place that allows providers to become more innovative;
- Meeting the needs of young people and engaging them into their local community and local community regeneration;
- Greater sharing of resources between organisations;
- Working collectively to tackle NEETs issues and a more co-ordinated approach to tackling youth employment;
- Organisations merging.

4. Youth Zones

The vision is for the development of a **network of ambitious collaborative, new, safe, shared and accessible Youth Zones across Northern Ireland**, where a wide range of **services and facilities are available all day, every day to meet young people's needs.**

The Youth Zone is a substantial integrated, creative and informal space, with many opportunities for hanging/chilling out, socialising, recreation, youth development, learning, support and development.

It is a friendly and welcoming space with open access to all facilities and services underpinned by best practice in relationship based youth work.

Young people are fully involved in the design, management and operation of the Youth Zone and have a sense of ownership.

The Youth Zone is cross-sectoral (voluntary/community, private and public sectors) in development and delivery with a social enterprise/economy dimension with apprenticeship and employment opportunities for young people in areas such as maintenance, catering, ICT etc.

- Safe space
- Neutral environment
- Mentoring and support
- Employment
- One stop shop
- Skills Development
- Impact on poverty
- Capacity building
- Cost effective

The vision is for a partnership model that breaks new ground in terms of shared values, commitments and collaborative approaches.

Key centres will vary in size, depending on local demographics, suitable sites, available capital and revenue funding and opportunities to work collaboratively with statutory, third and private sector partners. In addition to providing positive activities for all young people, key centres will also deliver coordinated support for those vulnerable young people identified as priorities including work with Looked After and disabled young people and those at risk of entering the criminal justice system/young offenders, amongst others.

The local Youth Zone in a Shared Educational Campus would not be a stand-alone initiative. It will be a developing resource and focal point for existing youth centres to make use of as an extension and a resource to local community based initiatives.

The Youth Zone would be accessible to and interacting with schools, communities and parents and would be promoted and signposted in local youth centres.

Free transport between local youth centres and the Youth Zone and access to opportunities in participating sites will be vital to ensure an accessible, inclusive and flexible Youth Zone.

5. Partnership

The Youth Zone will be delivered on a partnership basis.

Young people require access to a range of services to satisfy their needs and desires. By housing a range of key organisations in one location, young people will benefit greatly. Furthermore the cost saving benefits to partner organisations will be clearly visible.

The Youth Zone will play a key role in the provision of joined up service provision for young people, which meets their needs. Young people are fortunate to already have access to a range of services; however, our service provision is sometimes described as fragmented and duplicated. Now, more than ever before, it is important that we have a more joined up approach to the way we work. If our services are co-located in convenient and accessible space we can save resources and maximise outputs.

The Youth Forum wants to extend partnership working on Youth Zones to include interested schools, educational partnerships, statutory agencies, private sector investors, entrepreneurs, businesses and retailers to discuss the concept further.

If you are interested in discussing the idea of developing a Youth Zone within a Shared Educational Campus please contact Chris Quinn at the Northern Ireland Youth Forum at chris.quinn@niyf.org

Appendix I: Youth Sector Partners

The following organisations were involved in a scoping exercise into the concept of Youth Zones in 2013.

Springboard

Established in 1992 Springboard has been committed to building capacity, building mutual understanding and building peace. Best known for the delivery of Wider Horizons programmes for young adults, the organisation also continues to provide and develop a diverse range of unique and innovative opportunities to meet evolving needs and dynamics.

Bytes

Bytes aim to remove individual barriers to training and employment by assisting young people to overcome extreme, social and educational disadvantage so they can make a difference in their lives, enabling them to become economically active and make a positive contribution to their communities.

Time to Shine Drama

Time to Shine Drama provides professional drama opportunities for youth groups, community groups, health and wellbeing groups, individuals and professional/corporate organisations.

Challenge for Youth

Challenge for Youth is a registered charity based in Belfast which engages and supports young people to realise their potential through personal development programmes, streetwork, adventure learning, leadership skills and volunteering. The group focuses on building relationships and engaging in a reflective learning process.

NI Youth Forum

The NIYF is a youth led organisation that lobbies, advocates, promotes and fights for the rights of young people. Believing that young people have an important role to play, the Youth Forum supports young people to affect positive change for themselves and for their communities.

Lighthouse

Lighthouse, a suicide prevention charity in North Belfast, supports those who have been bereaved through suicide, or another type of sudden death, and is committed to providing support services to families who have lost loved ones and for individuals who are in crisis.

Include Youth

Include Youth is an independent non-governmental organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. The organization undertakes activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness in the areas of youth justice and education, employment and training of young people.

