

The Needs of Rural Young People – Young People’s Response for RAG

The timing of the meeting has acted as a barrier to participation. Young people have therefore prepared this response. Information was gathered via NIYF networks using face to face discussion with young people and online engagement.

Young people welcome the fact that this piece was carried out but would like to see some more research in this area.

Young people would suggest that rural Youth Work effects everyone – not just those that provide services in rural areas. More young people should be given a say in the policy making process with regards to the needs of rural young people; youth work and grant giving.

The next regional assessment of need (RAON) should be designed in such a way to allow for more ‘minority issues’ to be heard and it should not purely be a statistical piece.

Key issues for young people living in rural areas identified as:

- Transport
- Mobile and broadband connection and speed
- Access to Jobs and Education
- Isolation

School aged young people highlighted that:

- There are limited opportunities for transport outside of that that is provided for getting to and from school. Young people spoke of the lack of public transport as a huge issue and indeed how the current arrangements made it difficult or impossible for young people to engage in afterschool activities.

The ‘Digital divide’ is huge for rural young people and they spoke about lack of accessibility to ‘infrastructure’ – e.g. community development; facilities; services. Poor internet connection can have negative impact on social connections; education; benefits and welfare; managing finances; employability; etc. given the move towards online service provision.

Loneliness; isolation and lack of self esteem were discussed as key and indeed how this impacts on young people’s mental health.

Ways of life that are ‘normal’ for urban young people such as travelling to the shops can be difficult for some rural young people. Obtaining a driving licence is seen by many as a huge step in improving mobility and what young people highlighted as ‘life chances’.

Recent proposals to changes in the law that could disqualify young drivers from carrying more than one passenger aged between 14 and 20 is seen as age discrimination and also extremely detrimental to young people living in rural areas.

Role of Youth Work:

Young people agreed that youth work plays a massive role in supporting young people from rural areas to overcome barriers in their lives. It was suggested that more should be done to ensure that all young people can access youth work across the region and that discussions need to take place at a strategic level with regards to:

- The impact of closing small / community / rural schools in favour of larger 'super schools';
- The transport and roads infrastructure in NI;
- How the lack of an Assembly is detrimental to innovative policy making that could help overcome barriers;
- The Priorities for Youth Policy and how we assess need and indeed disadvantage;

Young people spoke about the value of youth work in terms of rural issues in that it plays an important role in:

- Connecting young people to their peers; other organisations; opportunities and support networks;
- Promoting positive mental health;
- Enhancing self esteem;
- Enhancing career opportunities;
- Helping young people step out of their comfort zones;
- Providing opportunities for personal and social development;
- Promoting inclusion;
- Empowering young people to address social issues;
- Developing social connections including friendships – something that all humans need;
- Helping young people develop enhanced life and independent living skills;
- Providing opportunities for experiential learning;
- Combating isolation;
- Training and capacity building;
- Providing opportunities to travel;

An important aspect of youth work was highlighted as young 'Enjoyment' and 'having fun' with other young people.

For many rural young people their main friendship group is from within a youth work; sporting; cultural group environments.

(Ref: NIYF 'Sons of Ulster' and 'Mise Éire' studies into the views of young people in loyalist and republican marching bands – where young people spoke about the sense of belonging and purpose that being part of a band can bring.)

Rural isolation:

Young people spoke about isolation being an issue generally amongst young people; and how this is perpetuated for those living in rural communities. They spoke about how being alone can make other issues worse.

When speaking about loneliness young people referenced the Youth Loneliness report – ‘A place to belong’ August 2018; UK Youth. Although not specific to rural young people it included six key insights:

- Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem they observe in young people;
- Youth workers think the problem is made worse by cuts to youth services;
- Youth workers are aware of the complexity of youth loneliness, especially around when it occurs, and how it can be both a cause of problems and an effect;
- Youth workers identify four key risk factors to loneliness in young people: going through difficult situations, having weak social networks, having high expectations of their social networks, and not having the skills to cope with difficulty;
- Although most youth workers feel able to identify loneliness generally, doing this on an individual level with young people is still challenging due to its sensitivity and complexity;
- Youth workers report that young people don't generally actively seek help for loneliness, either through not identifying it themselves or not wanting to admit it.

Mental Health and resilience were discussed in relation to isolation.

DE's Home to School Transport review was referenced including issues around how this can perpetuate isolation as the only real transport infrastructure for many is school buses

Brexit:

Young people are concerned that Brexit will impact young people living in rural areas around the border tremendously negatively.

Many young people cross the border on a daily basis for to access services, for educational and social purposes. Young people are anxious with regards to Brexit and the impact it will have on them. A no deal Brexit could be potentially catastrophic for rural young people along the border.

Recommendations:

Undertake a **youth led** scoping exercise to see how youth services are planned, funded and delivered in rural areas in other parts of the UK and Ireland.

Invest in young people to develop their own 'vision for rural youth work' and make recommendations for the delivery of youth work in rural areas.

EA should make schools available at weekends and in the evenings for youth work across the board.

EA should invest in rural youth work. Young people believe that everyone is entitled to quality youth work – similar to the entitlement framework in schools.

EA buses should be used to transport young people from rural areas to youth provision. Where buses aren't available or practical taxis or community transport should be made available and paid for by EA.

EA should consider investing in mobile units – that can go to rural areas providing a pop up youth club – similar to Wheel Works Art Cart.

EA should consider the use of outdoor education peripatetic (mobile) services in rural areas.



(Above - Wheelworks Art Cart)