

# BUILDING RESILIENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE: YOUTH WORK IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR



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# PART 1: BACKGROUND

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing in Northern Ireland. Results from the Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey [1] in 2020 found that rates of anxiety and depression amongst children and young people in Northern Ireland are around 25.0% higher compared to other UK nations with 1 in 8 children and young people in Northern Ireland experiencing emotional difficulties. Tackling the scale of this issue requires a multi-agency approach from all sectors which focusses on how to improve the wellbeing of children and young people.

Recognising the role that voluntary youth work providers already play in supporting young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, the YMCA, Youth Initiatives and The Bytes Project commissioned Stats & Stories to conduct a scoping survey to establish the nature and extent of the work. An online survey was developed with the purpose to gain greater understanding of the current services delivered by the sector, including the reach and type of activities which support and encourage young people's wellbeing, identify current networks of support used by voluntary youth work providers and to explore potential areas for future development.

## Northern Ireland Policy Context

Priorities for Youth (2013) [2] is the central policy for youth work in Northern Ireland. This policy, developed by the Department of Education (DE), outlines a set of priorities for youth work within education which focus on raising standards and closing the performance gap, developing the non-formal education workforce and learning environment and issues around governance and management. As a result of this general focus, Priorities for Youth makes no reference to young people's mental health or emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, there has been a change in emphasis since 2013 in which positive mental health and emotional wellbeing are recognised as playing a significant role in young people's ability to develop, learn and contribute. This shift towards a more holistic understanding of supporting children and young people has been reflected in a number of subsequent policies related to children and young people including the Northern Ireland Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy 2020 – 2030 for Northern Ireland[3], and the Children

and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework (2021)[4] jointly developed by DE and Department of Health. Significantly, children and young people's wellbeing has been defined by eight interconnected characteristics as set out in the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 [5]. These characteristics are understood to contribute to children and young people's wellbeing and include:

1. physical and mental health;
2. the enjoyment of play and leisure;
3. learning and achievement;
4. living in safety and with stability;
5. economic and environmental well-being;
6. the making by them of a positive contribution to society;
7. living in a society which respects their rights;
8. living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share that characteristic.

This legislation is also significant as it places a duty on Children's Authorities such as Departments, District Councils, Health and Social Care Trusts, Health and Social Care Board, the Education Authority, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Police Service NI and the Probation Board to work together to improve children and young people's wellbeing. This includes both co-operating with one another and to co-operate with other children's service providers. Co-operation under the Children's Services Co-operation Act also provides the opportunity for statutory agencies to pool budgets and share resources as a way to drive improved services for children and young people.

## **Methodology**

As the purpose of this scoping study was to quantify and understand the potential of voluntary youth work to provide more services which support and encourage positive emotional wellbeing for young people, the research was quantitative in nature. An online survey was developed and covered areas such as the profile of the workforce, the reach of the voluntary youth work sector, funding and moderation and activities related to supporting young people's mental health. The questionnaire was available for two weeks in October 2021 and was completed by 54 organisations representing every council area in Northern Ireland. Three case studies were also developed to supplement the data captured by the survey and to provide a examples of how voluntary youth work providers can deliver a range of targeted, specialised and schools work to support young people's wellbeing.

# PART 2: RESULTS

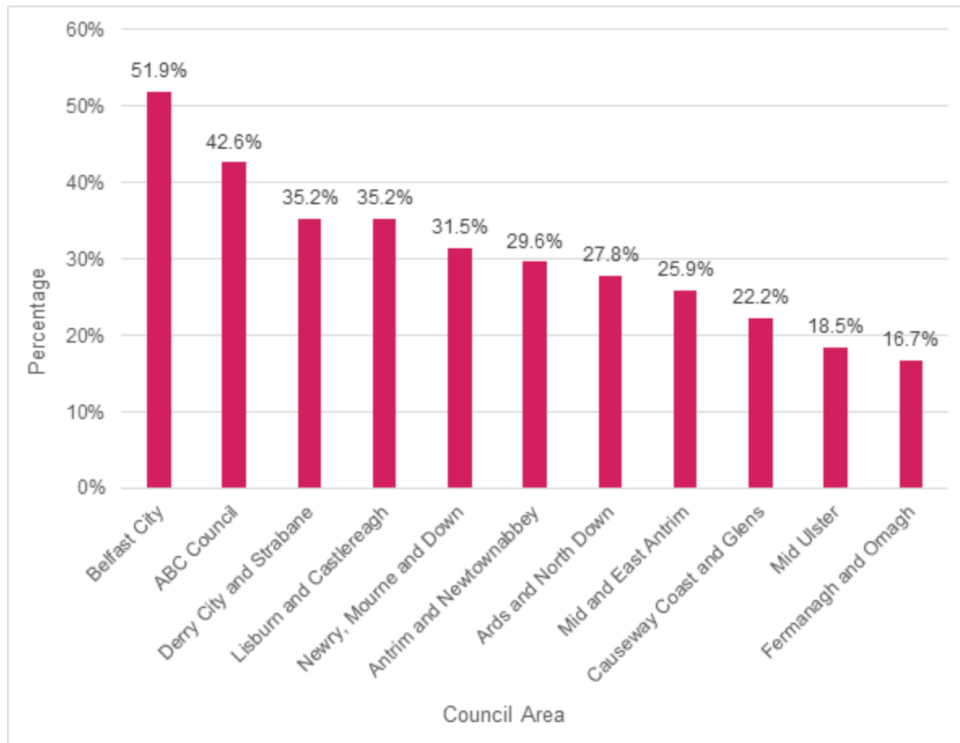
## Key Results

- 17,210 children and young people aged 4 – 25 years old accessed voluntary youth work provision on a weekly basis with most common age groups: 14 – 18 year olds (88.9%), 9 – 13 year olds (83.3%) and 19 – 21 year olds (75.9%);
- 828 activities or programmes per week (based on a minimum of 1 hour in duration) were provided by voluntary youth work providers that support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- 64.8% of organisations provided ten or more different types of youth work;
- 41.5% of organisations reported that they had 20+ volunteers with a further 43.3% supported by 1 – 12 volunteers;
- Organisations reported collaborating with 4.5 other organisations to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- 51.0% of organisations reported that their income was between £100,001 - £750,000;
- 94.4% of voluntary youth work providers received Education Authority (EA) Youth Service Funding with 96.3% of organisations accessing at least one other additional source of funding;
- 100% of organisations who had received the outcome of a moderation visit were assessed by EA to be either ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’;
- 95.7% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that better opportunities for collaboration with others within the voluntary youth sector would improve support for young people;
- 97.8% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that with additional resources, their organisation has the potential to deliver more work to support young people’s resilience.

## Section 1: Demographics

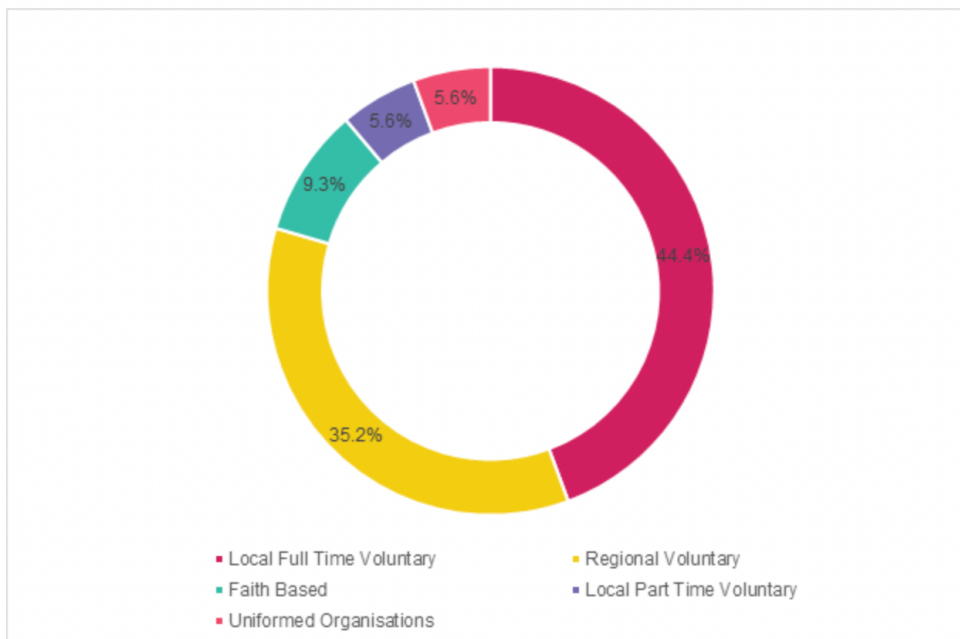
A total of 54 youth work organisations completed the survey. Participants were asked to indicate which council areas their organisation operated in. As shown in Figure 1, responses were received by youth work providers operating across all 11 council areas in Northern Ireland with the majority of organisations delivering services in Belfast City Council area (51.9%).

**Figure 1: Youth Work Providers Across 11 Council Areas in Northern Ireland**



In terms of type of youth work provider, the majority of organisations that responded were identified as local full time voluntary youth work providers (44.4%) or regional voluntary youth work providers (35.2%) with 9.3% from faith-based youth work providers. A further 11.2% represented local part time youth providers (5.6%) or uniformed organisations (5.6%) as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Types of Youth Work Providers in Voluntary Sector**

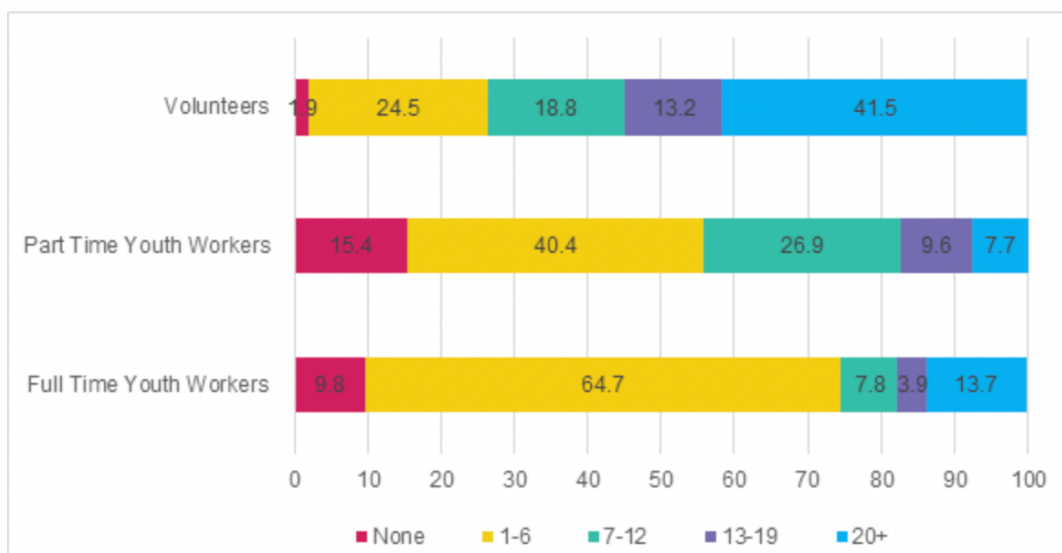


## Profile of Workforce

Participants were asked to estimate the workforce of their organisation in terms of full time youth workers, part time youth workers and volunteers. Findings indicate that most organisations employ between 1 – 3 full time youth workers (51.0%), with a further 13.7% of organisations employing 4 – 6 full time youth workers. Estimates developed using the mid-point in each category indicate that the organisations participating in the survey employ over 300 full time youth workers. Similarly, most organisations employed between 1 – 3 part time youth workers (21.2%) with a further 19.2% of organisations employing between 4 – 6 part time youth workers and 17.3% employing between 7 – 9 part time youth workers.

Estimates suggest that the participating organisations employ over 349 part time youth workers. Figure 3 shows the profile of the workforce across participating organisations.

**Figure 3: Profile of Voluntary Youth Workforce**

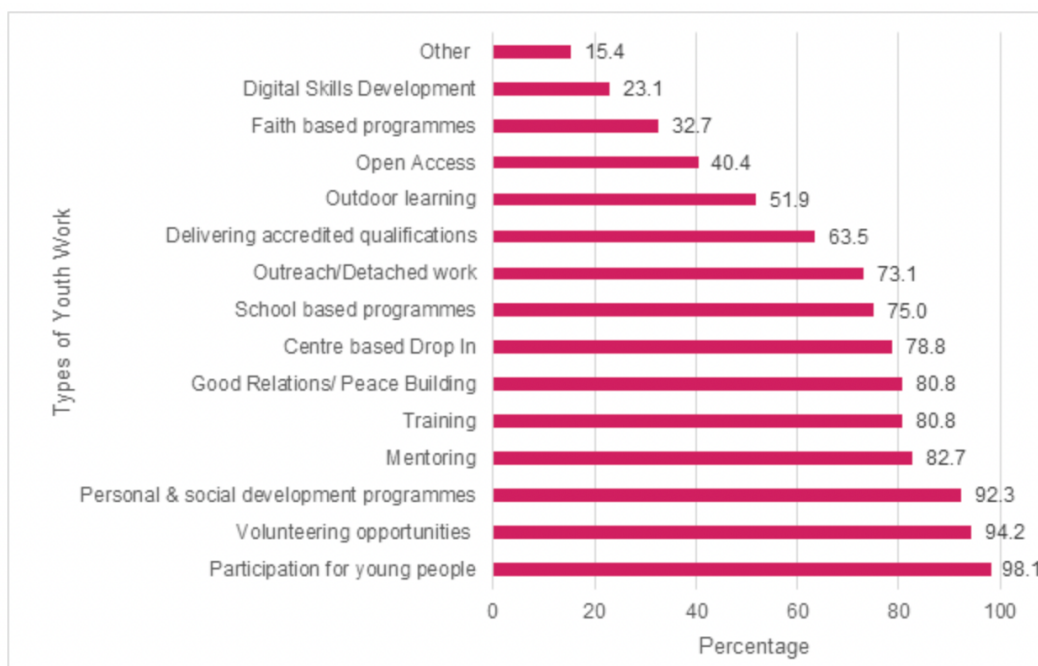


Results show the importance of volunteers in supporting the work of voluntary youth work provider organisations. Estimates suggest that of the 54 organisations that participated in the survey they have engaged over 691 volunteers. Over forty percent (41.5%) of organisations reported that they had 20+ volunteers with a further 43.3% being supported by 1 – 12 volunteers. Only one organisation reported that they did not have any volunteers. Further analysis shows that the majority of regional voluntary youth providers (61.6%) have over 20+ volunteers followed by forty percent of faith-based organisations (40.0%). While some local full-time provision (29.2%) reported having 20+ volunteers to support their work, this group was more likely to have between 1- 6 volunteers (41.7%).

## Section 2: Service Delivery Supporting Resilience

The results in this section present the types of work voluntary youth work providers undertake to support young people's mental health and build resilience. Results from the survey show that the voluntary youth work providers offer multiple options for young people to participate with over 64.8% of organisations providing ten or more different types of youth work. This ranged from group work and programme, to one to one work, training and outdoor learning. As illustrated in Figure 4, over ninety percent of organisations reported that they supported young people's participation (98.1%), provided volunteering opportunities for young people (94.2%) and provided personal and social development programmes (92.3%). In addition, around eighty percent of organisations reported that they provided mentoring (82.7%), training (80.8%) and work around peace building (80.8%).

**Figure 4: Range of Youth Work Provided by Voluntary Youth Sector**



Results indicate the numerous opportunities of all young people to engage either as an individual or group with the voluntary youth work sector. Findings demonstrate the diversity of the sector in delivering services across a range of settings including youth centres, schools, detached work on the streets and outdoor learning. This versatility offers greater accessibility and provides a way to connect with harder to reach young people.

Case Study 1 highlights the approach Youth Initiatives takes to providing support for young people on the streets. This work is viewed as a first step in engaging young people in a relationship on a long-term basis.

## CASE STUDY 1: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ON THE STREETS - YOUTH INITIATIVES

While the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021, sharply reduced the ways in which youth work provision could be delivered in person, Youth Initiatives in west Belfast delivered detached work five nights a week in the local area reaching over 3,000 young people during the year. This built on Youth Initiatives' long established practice of detached and outreach work focused on reaching out to young people least likely to access youth provision.

Youth Initiatives staff recognise that forming positive relationships with difficult to reach young people on the streets requires long term commitment, time and consistency in order to build trust and understanding about the young person's context. In this way, youth workers are intentional in their aim to establish a regular pattern of contact in young people's social environment as a first step in building a durable relationship: "We want to connect with them so you are reaching out to them first and meeting them where they are at rather than just saying, "Come with us now" because you need to build trust, you need to build a connection, you need to build a relationship with them before they are able or willing to trust the process", said Leah McPeake, Youth Worker. The ability to build positive relationships with young people outside of a building or specific programme provides young people with support for their wellbeing which they may not have otherwise have had and can be a gateway to voluntarily participate in other types of youth provision such as a summer scheme, drop in or programmes.

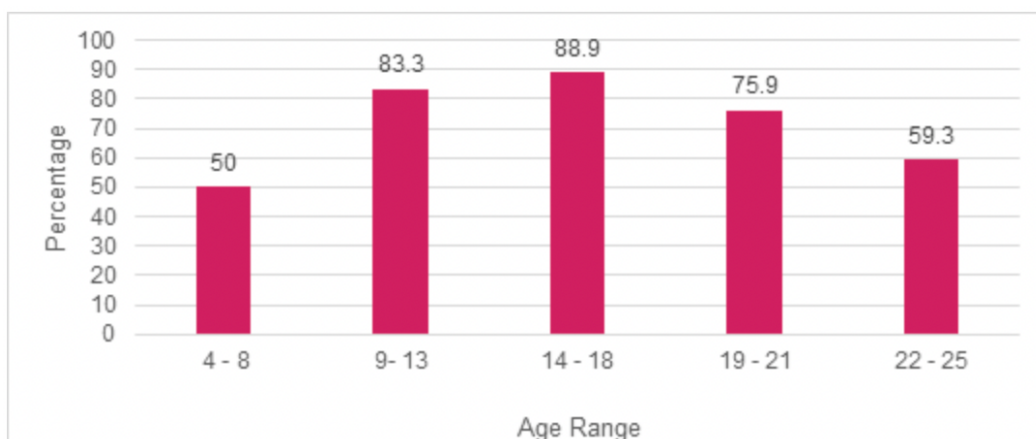
The value of being accepted as a regular presence within young people's social spaces means that detached youth workers are uniquely placed to intervene early, challenge risky behaviours and to be easily identified as a trusted source of support. The presence of youth workers based on the street is particularly important during times of crisis in the community such as a suicide as Siobhan Darragh, Deputy Chief Officer explained, "Those on the street being present and willing to have conversations help young people and guide them through which really helps to build into mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience and being that support network." Youth Initiatives' approach is supported by regular coordination with community partners such as Safer Neighbourhood, Belfast City Council, social housing, the Public Health Agency, PSNI and schools to share information around issues and events arising in the community.



## Numbers of Young People Reached by Voluntary Youth Work Providers

Participants were asked to estimate the number of young people they reached during April – September 2021. This time frame was chosen as it is both the period that youth services were able to begin to operate in a limited way after the lockdown at the start of 2021 and it captures the start of the new funding scheme for youth services by EA. Using the age categories set out in the Department of Education’s Priorities for Youth policy, participants were asked to estimate the numbers of children and young people they worked with in an average week between April – September 2021. Overall, findings indicate voluntary youth work provision is accessed by children and young people across all age ranges. As shown in Figure 5, the core age demographic that the majority of organisations work with on a weekly basis are 14 – 18 year olds (88.9%), 9 – 13 year olds (83.3%) and 19 – 21 year olds (75.9%). Additionally, nearly sixty percent of organisations worked with young people aged 22 – 25 years old (59.3%) and fifty percent of organisations reported working with children aged 4 – 8 year old on a weekly basis.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Organisations by Age Group Per Week**



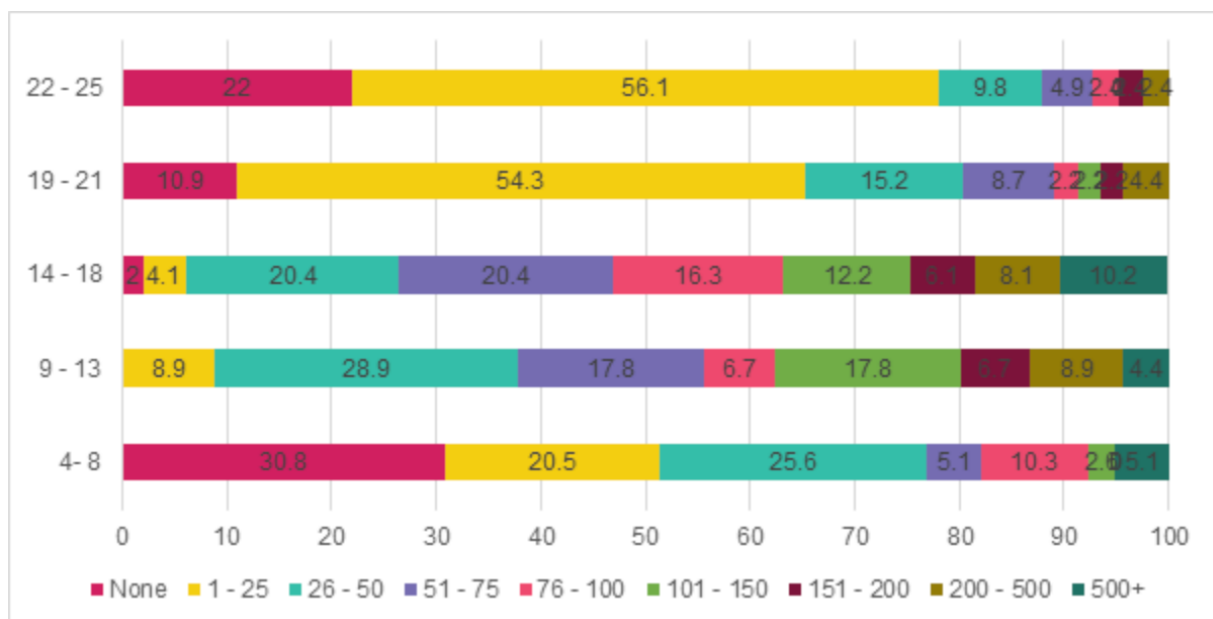
In order to develop an estimate for the numbers of young people worked with in a typical week, the mid-point in each category given was used. In this way, it can be estimated that the 54 organisations that participated in this survey worked with over 17,210 children and young people aged 4 – 25 years old per week. Table 1 shows the estimated weekly reach for each age group.

**Table 1: Estimated Weekly Reach by Age Group**

Age Group	Estimated Numbers
4 - 8	1775
9 - 13	5225
14 - 18	6900
19 - 21	2138
22 - 25	1175
<b>Total</b>	<b>17213</b>

Results indicate that the children and young people aged 9 – 13 years old and 14 – 18 years old are worked with most on a weekly basis as 37.8% of organisations worked with between 100 – 500+ 9 – 13 years old and 36.6% of organisations worked with 100 – 500+ 14 – 18 years old. An overview of the estimates of numbers by each age group is displayed in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Overview of Numbers of Young People Worked with by Age Group**



### Activities Supporting Young People’s Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

In order to gain an understanding of the ways in which voluntary youth work providers promote positive mental health, participants were asked to estimate both: (i) the number of activities or programmes that support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing; and (ii) the estimated number of participating young people on an average week across the following four themes:

1. Universal programmes / activities building relationships and develop resilience for all young people. This may include drop-in activities, open access or volunteer led programmes.
2. Targeted, preventative support for young people identified as at higher risk of poor emotional wellbeing or needing additional support. This may include mentoring or group work programmes.
3. School – based work to support young people on a range of areas including learning, life and work skills and relationships with others to promote wellbeing.
4. Specialist interventions typically involves therapeutic interventions such as counselling to address mental ill health.

Results presented in Table 2 estimate over 12,000 young people per week participate in 828 activities or programmes delivered by the voluntary youth work sector supporting mental health. Universal programmes or activities were the most common type of work in which 50.0% of young people participated in. One quarter (25.0%) of young people worked with on a weekly basis, accessed school – based programmes or activities delivered in partnership with the voluntary youth work providers. A total of 19.6% of young people participated in targeted, preventative work while 5.5% of young people accessed specialist interventions.

**Table 2: Estimated Number of Weekly Activities Supporting Mental Health by Theme**

	<b>Estimated Number of programmes/activities per week (minimum of 1 hour engagement)</b>	<b>Estimated Number of Young People per Week</b>
<b>Universal programmes/ activities</b>	353	6113
<b>Targeted, preventative support</b>	222	2400
<b>School – based work</b>	184	3063
<b>Specialist interventions</b>	69	675
<b>Total:</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>12,251</b>

## CASE STUDY 2: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE - START 360

Start360 has delivered its award-winning ESF funded Switch onto Employment programme for nearly a decade. Switch onto Employment is aimed at young people aged 16-24 years old who face multiple adversities and who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme is an intensive 26-week course designed to help participants develop their personal and social skills, build resilience and move into employment. All participants have the opportunity to undertake a range of activities which support their wellbeing in addition to gaining qualifications such as Essential Skills in English and Maths and Open College Network (OCN) qualifications in ICT Employability and Personal Development.

Staff delivering the programme specialise in working with young people with chaotic lives and use a core youth work approach providing a safe and warm environment using trauma informed practice. By using an approach that is strength-based, tailored to the individual and focussed on making a positive change, young people who previously found it difficult to progress within mainstream services can begin their journey to employment with the supports they need to achieve. “Mainstream services are fantastic when they work but for a lot of the young people we engage, they become problematic. They fall out of them for lots of different reasons – non-compliance, their issues being too complex, requiring sensitive management, we come across a lot of undiagnosed illnesses” reflects Stephen Barr, Start360 Service Manager. “We support people with thoughts that life is not worth living, often going on to harm themselves.”

Staff provide programme supports around issues young people face such as mental health, poverty, relationships and substance use. This holistic approach is a key success in how the programme demonstrates a 76% retention rate (Nov 2021). Staff from Start360 work with young people to develop individual action plans which emphasise realistic goal setting, monitoring and review. In addition, participants can access other internal specialist support services offered by Start360 such as addiction services, mental health supports, additional personal development programmes supporting inclusion and/or be referred to external supports.

The Switch onto Employment programme has been recognised by the Education and Training Inspectorate as providing participants with “very good outcomes” [6] with 100% of young people who completed the programme reporting that they felt a positive change since engaging with Switch onto Employment.



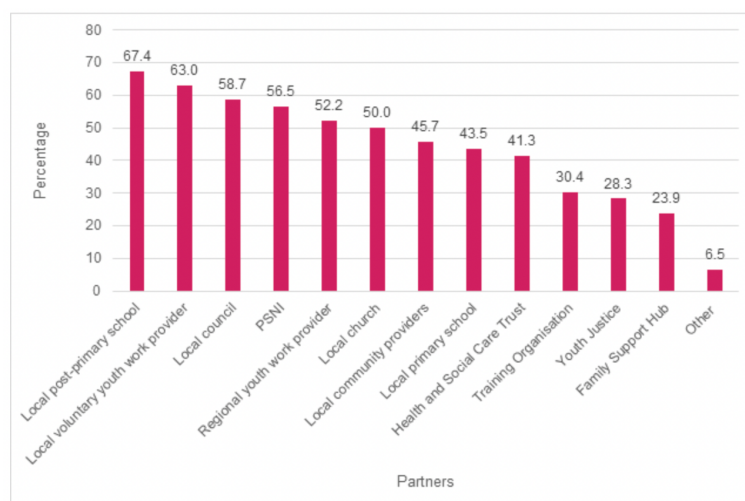
Case Study 2 shows how Start360 combine targeted work with specialist interventions to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing in order to help them into employment within the context of their Switch onto Employment programme.

### Working in Partnership

Participants were asked to indicate which partners they had when delivering their work to support young people’s mental health. Findings show that voluntary youth work providers had established multiple relationships with statutory agencies, community organisations and schools. On average, voluntary youth work providers reported collaborating with 4.5 other organisations to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing. As shown in Figure 7, schools are a significant partner in this work as two – thirds of voluntary youth work providers collaborated with a local post-primary school (67.4%) with 43.5% working with their local primary school. The benefits of working in partnership with schools on the shared goal of building resilience and improving young people’s wellbeing are illustrated below in Case Study 3 on the Enable Youth Project developed by the YMCA and delivered in partnership with Craigavon Senior High School.

Collaboration to support young people’s mental health and wellbeing within the voluntary sector is also substantial as 63.0% of organisations work with another local voluntary youth work provider with 52.2% working with a regional youth work provider and 45.7% working with another local community provider. Further evidence of partnership working can be shown through the extensive network of statutory and non-statutory partners such as the local council (58.7%), PSNI (56.5%), local church (50.0%) and Health and Social Care Trust (41.3%).

**Figure 7: Partnerships Supporting Young People’s Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**



### CASE STUDY 3: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS - YMCA

The Enable Youth Project, delivered in partnership between YMCA Portadown, YMCA Lurgan and Craigavon Senior High School aims to empower young people to form positive relationships with others and to increase personal development while making a positive contribution to building a cohesive society.

Pupils in Year 11 from Craigavon Senior High School who have been identified as having poor wellbeing or at risk of educational underachievement attend the programme held in the YMCA Portadown Centre one day a week. The change of venue from school to youth centre is significant. The Centre provides an informal, safe space for young people to interact in smaller groups and to have in-depth conversations around the issues that affect their wellbeing. Key to having these conversations is relationships with others. Nathan White, Youth Worker who co-facilitates the Enable Youth Project says, “We prioritise building the relationship first. We find normally that when there is a good, purposeful relationship with young people that those conversations and ideas flourish.”

Young people can participate in various activities that have been developed by qualified youth workers from the YMCA with the purpose of promoting positive mental health. Sessions cover understanding and managing stress, how to use affirmations and positive self-talk to build resilience and how to access support for their mental health and wellbeing. Goal setting is used to motivate young people to focus on the future and promote a sense of self-mastery and achievement. The participants have responded positively to the youth work approach as demonstrated by their high attendance rates and their positive engagement with both youth workers and other young people on the programme.

The collaboration between staff in the YMCA and Craigavon Senior High has been effective in delivering a coordinated approach to providing a safe space to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing within a community setting. Nathan White says, “Everything we do here is intentional to ensure that young people feel like they belong here, that they feel safe and they are valued.” As a result, young people participating in the Enable Youth Project have developed positive relationships with youth workers to talk about their mental health and wellbeing, gained the opportunity to reflect on their strengths outside of a school setting and increased their support network within the community.



## **Evaluation**

Participants were asked in what ways they evaluate their work related to building young people's resilience. The most common methods of evaluating work related to building young people's resilience reported by participants were an evaluation survey at the end of a programme (82.6%), recording observations (76.1%) and pre/post questionnaires to measure progression (69.6%). Other methods of evaluation used by organisations include surveys at prescribed points in a programme (47.8%), focus groups with young people to collect their views (45.7%) and standardised measurement (32.6%). This would suggest that there is a good evidence base within the voluntary youth work sector around "what works" to support young people's mental health and wellbeing.

## **Section 3: Funding of the Voluntary Youth Work Sector**

Participants were asked to indicate their annual income for year 2020/21. The majority of organisations (51.0%) reported that their income was between £100,001 - £750,000. This accounted for 69.5% of local full time youth work providers and a third (33.3%) of regional voluntary youth work providers. A further 30.2% of organisations reported their annual income to be under £100,000 with 13.5% reporting that their annual income was under £10,000. This group with an annual income of under £100,000 predominantly consisted of two-thirds of local part time youth providers and a third of faith-based youth work providers. Fewer participants (18.9%) reported that their organisation had an annual income of £750,000 and over. Eighty percent of this group were mainly drawn from regional youth work providers.

## **Funding Sources**

Results show that the majority of voluntary youth work providers receive Education Authority (EA) Youth Service Funding (94.4%). This financial support provided by EA varies across the sector and may only part-fund work within organisations. As a result, the voluntary youth work sector has diversified their funding streams to ensure the continuity of their services. Participants were asked about additional sources of funding accessed by their organisation in the past two years. A total of 96.3% of organisations reported that they had accessed at least one other additional source of funding in the past two years. Of those organisations that did access other financial support, this ranged from 1 – 9 different funding sources with participants most commonly reporting that they had accessed four (25.9%) or three (22.2%) sources of funding.

A further 16.7% had accessed one with 13.0% accessing two additional funding sources. A total of 18.6% had received financial support from five or more funders in the past two years. As displayed in Figure 8, the most common sources of funding included local council grants (66.0%), donations (54.7%) and the Big Lottery (49.1%).

**Figure 8: Diversity of Sources of Funding Accessed by Voluntary Youth Work Sector in Past Two Years**



Reflecting the diversity of funding sources utilised by the voluntary youth work sector, the largest response to 'other' included grants from local charitable foundations or trusts.

Participants also reported that they received funding from health-related statutory bodies such as Health and Social Care Trusts, Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Department of Health through the Mental Health Support Fund. Other government departments were also identified as sources of funding including the Executive Office and Department of Communities.

### **Education Authority Moderation**

For those organisations that receive EA Youth Service Funding it is necessary under the new Funding Scheme for Regional and Local Voluntary Youth Organisations to receive a moderation and monitoring visit. The frequency of moderation and monitoring is dependent on the level of funding awarded per each funding stream. Moderation visits will focus on one core area per moderation visit.

These core themes include:

- Outcomes for Learners;
- Quality of Provision;
- Leadership and Management.

Overall, around fifty percent of participants (49.0%, n= 25) who received EA Youth Service Funding had received at least one moderation visit. A total of 45.1% (n = 23) of organisations had received a moderation for Quality of Provision with 43.1% (n= 22) receiving a moderation for Outcome for Learners and 42.0% (n= 21) receiving a moderation in Leadership and Management. As shown in Table 3, all organisations who had received the outcome of the visit were assessed by EA to be either 'outstanding' or 'good'.

**Table 3: Results of Organisations EA Moderation Visits by Core Theme**

Moderation Theme	Overall % received visits	Number of Organisations	% assessed outstanding	% assessed good	% awaiting outcome
Outcome for Learners	43.1	22	40.9	50.0	9.1
Quality of Provision	45.1	23	30.4	47.8	21.7
Leadership and Management	42.0	21	52.4	33.3	14.3

At the time of the survey, 15.7% (n= 8) of participating organisations had received a moderation visit for all three areas. This group consisted of one regional voluntary youth work provider and seven full time voluntary youth work providers. All voluntary providers who had received the outcome were assessed as either 'outstanding' or 'good' across all three areas. In contrast, 18 organisations (35.3%) who received EA Youth Service Funding had yet to receive any moderation visits at the time of the survey.

## Section 4: The Future

In this section, participants were asked to consider a number of statements about how their work relating to young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing may be further developed. Participants were also provided space to share ideas of how the voluntary youth work sector could be better utilised to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people. Drawing from both the responses to the statements and the qualitative data, three main areas for future development emerged as outlined below.

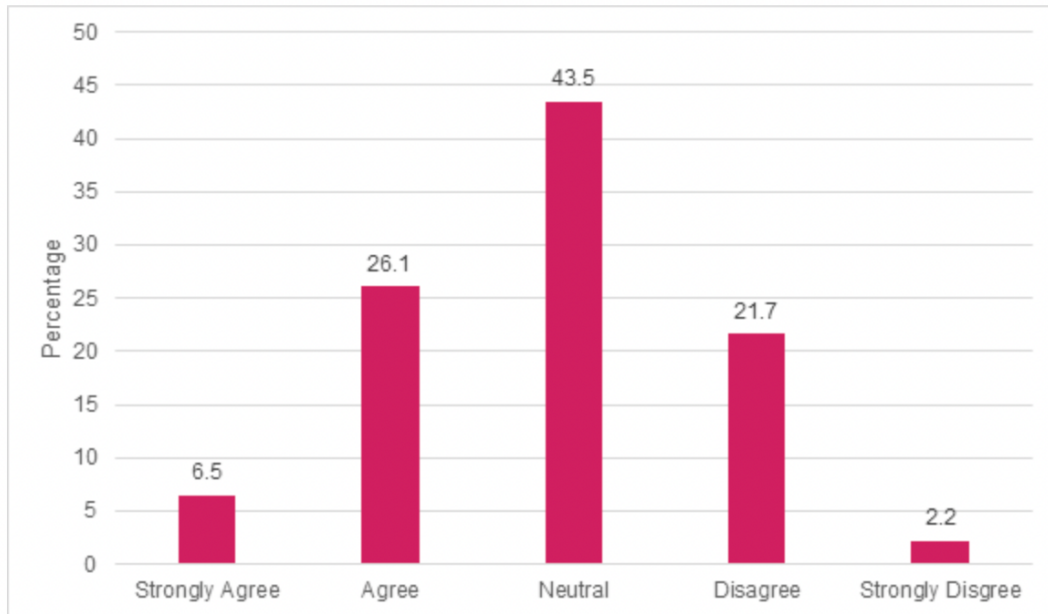
**Collaboration:** The majority of participants (95.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that better opportunities for collaboration with others within the voluntary youth sector would improve support for young people. Participants described these opportunities to collaborate in terms of developing a collective approach to both supporting young people's mental health and advocacy work with greater opportunity to share good practice within the voluntary youth work sector:

- *“Further collaborative approaches across the sector would be a significant benefit, this would enable a wider perspective and a number of voices and eyes.”*
- *“Sharing practice and learning will inform others how to best navigate between the gaps in services in regard to mental health.”*
- *“There needs to be a collective approach with all appropriate bodies being involved.”*

Respondents also recognised that there is opportunity to improve partnership working with statutory agencies such as EA, PHA and CAMHS. Suggestions for improvement included increasing awareness of the work of the voluntary youth work sector amongst statutory bodies and enhancing multi-agency approaches to improve young people's wellbeing.

Participants were less emphatic in their response to how effective statutory agencies are in working in partnership with the voluntary youth work sector as displayed in Figure 9. Over forty percent of participants chose to remain neutral on this issue (43.5%) with 32.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing that statutory agencies were effective in working in partnership with the voluntary youth work sector. A total of 23.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that statutory agencies were effective in working in partnership with the voluntary youth work sector.

**Figure 9: Participants' Perspective on Effectiveness of Partnership between Statutory Agencies and the Voluntary Youth Work Sector**



**Funding:** As shown in Section 1, voluntary youth work providers have the ability to secure funding for their work from a wide range of sources. However, single year funding cycles or short-term funding creates uncertainty for the workforce and may reduce consistency around both staff and programmes offered. A total of 95.6% agreed or strongly agreed that short term funding of the voluntary youth sector places limitations on supporting young people with their emotional health. The need for longer term investment to support young people was also reflected in the qualitative comments:

- *“Funding geared towards ongoing support and resilience building of young people would allow better impact and influences of young people suffering from short term quick fix programmes and lack of support to tackle mental health first hand with people they trust and feel safe with.”*
- *“The consistent relationships that voluntary providers build with young people is undervalued and underutilised. This needs to be supported and longer-term investment needs made to ensure long term engagement and support with young people is enhanced.”*

The current system of short term and temporary funding is a significant factor in planning future work. A total of 97.8% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that with additional resources, their organisation has the potential to deliver more work to support young people’s resilience.

**Utilising the Workforce:** All participants agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation could demonstrate that the model of delivery they use is effective to meet the needs of young people. This is corroborated by findings in Section 2 which showed that organisations are using a range of methods to evaluate how effective their work is in supporting young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Comments from respondents suggest that the voluntary youth work sector could be better utilised to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people through more training opportunities in the area of mental health and wellbeing.

## PART 3: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The purpose of this scoping survey was to gain a greater understanding of the current services delivered by the voluntary youth work sector which support and encourage resilience for young people and to explore potential areas for future development. This study with 54 participating organisations has confirmed that the voluntary youth work sector is currently making an important contribution in supporting young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Drawing from the data, a number of strengths have been identified which demonstrate that voluntary youth work providers are well placed to respond to young people requiring different levels of support and intervention for their mental health and emotional wellbeing:

- **Extensive Service Provision:** Results demonstrate that a wide variety of services are simultaneously offered by voluntary youth work providers to support young people's emotional wellbeing with most organisations providing ten or more different types of youth work. Services supporting young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing range from universal provision for all children and young people, targeted preventative work, specialised services and delivery in schools. The ability of the voluntary youth work sector to provide such a comprehensive range of programmes and activities acts to increase accessibility and inclusion for large numbers of young people as well as providing multiple opportunities for young people to participate in a way that they feel comfortable with.

- **Versatility:** Youth work is not limited to a particular setting or location and can be conducted in community settings, the streets, schools and outdoor learning centres. Furthermore, the range of styles and methods voluntary youth work providers can employ provides the flexibility to adapt services or programmes to suit the distinct needs of individuals or groups of young people from diverse backgrounds at a local level.
- **High Quality:** Results show that independent moderation of the sector conducted by the Education Authority (EA) has assessed the services provided by voluntary youth work providers to be outstanding or good. The EA moderations are based upon the Education Training and Inspectorate Self Evaluation framework that details the key elements of successful youth work.
- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Results demonstrate that the voluntary youth work sector has been successful in establishing partnerships with statutory agencies and community organisations to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing. Specifically, schools were identified as a key partner. While multi-agency collaborations have been working at a local level, this is an area in which the potential of the voluntary youth work sector to support young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing has not been fully realised. Findings show nearly all organisations would support better opportunities to collaborate with others within the voluntary youth work sector and acknowledged that there was further work needed to develop effective partnerships with statutory agencies. Increased collaboration would be significant in increasing innovative multi- agency approaches, reducing replication and making better use of available resources.
- **Value of Volunteers:** A key strength of the voluntary youth work sector is the use of volunteers to support their work. As results indicate, the amount of volunteers supporting voluntary youth work providers has doubled the available pool of adults. Volunteers are valuable assets to organisations as they can increase the capacity to support young people’s wellbeing in a cost-effective way. The majority of voluntary youth work providers also offered opportunities for young people to volunteer within their organisation. This was seen as a way to promote a sense of belonging, increase their confidence and develop leadership skills. Further work is required to understand and quantify the contribution made by volunteers within the voluntary youth work sector and how best to invest in this resource.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this scoping study presented in this report, the following recommendations have been made:

### **Recommendation 1: Strategic Vision**

Priorities for Youth should be updated to strategically align with the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020 – 2030 in which wellbeing is understood in a holistic way encompassing nearly all aspects of children and young people's lives. The support youth work can provide for young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing should be identified as a key priority area in the new policy. This policy should be evidence informed and include:

- recognition of the role of voluntary youth work providers as a strategic network with capacity to support universal provision for all children and young people, targeted preventative work, specialised services and delivery in schools;
- provide opportunities for voluntary youth work sector representatives to engage with the roll out of the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework;
- support for collaborative working across the statutory and non-statutory sectors;
- focus on youth work approaches that promote positive mental health, build resilience and assist early intervention; and
- meaningful consultation with young people at each stage of policy development.

### **Recommendation 2: New Funding Model**

New funding models need to be developed. This will increase the level of funding available from multiple statutory sources such as the Department of Health, Education and Communities, reduce the use of temporary, short-term funding in the voluntary sector, and support more work that improves the wellbeing of young people on a sustainable basis. A new model of funding from statutory sources should ensure that:

- Greater use of the power to pool resources, as outlined in the Children's Services Co-operation Act, is required by statutory Children's Authorities to enable service delivery by the voluntary youth work sector rather than provide services themselves.

- preference is given to funding work which promotes long term support for emotional health and wellbeing and can demonstrate positive outcomes for young people.
- funding supports the infrastructure of voluntary youth work organisations to deliver a wide range of quality youth work services that focuses less on outputs, and more on outcomes for children and young people;
- the voluntary youth work sector is enabled to deliver a wider range of services that support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people specifically:
  - universal provision for all children and young people;
  - targeted preventative work;
  - specialised services; and
  - delivery in schools.

### **Recommendation 3: Supporting Partnerships**

Improvement is required to current approaches to partnership building in two main ways:

1. **Partnerships within the Voluntary Youth Work Sector:** Consideration should be given to ways to support collaboration within the voluntary youth work sector including creating regular opportunities to share good practice as a way to build capacity and ensure continuous improvement.
2. **Partnerships with Statutory Agencies:** Supporting the development and strengthening of partnerships between voluntary youth services and statutory agencies, including strategic partnerships, should be a priority area for development. Specifically, schools should be viewed as key partners for the voluntary youth work sector in order to make best use of resources and successfully improve services which meet the needs of young people. Further partnership building with statutory agencies could be increased through greater representation from voluntary providers in key strategic bodies such as the:
  - a. Children and Young People Strategic Partnership;
  - b. DE Emotional Health and Wellbeing Team;
  - c. The Executive Office Together Building a United Community (TBUC) Camps Board;
  - d. Other relevant cross departmental Boards with DE ie Fresh Start, Participation.
  - e. Education Authority Regional Advisory Boards.

## Recommendation 4: Workforce Development

Investment in the voluntary youth work sector workforce should be ongoing with a specific focus on:

- greater access to training for youth work practitioners and volunteers with specific focus on raising awareness about the factors that can negatively impact young people's wellbeing;
- more opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that would collectively build capacity to improve the voluntary youth work sector's ability to respond effectively;
- understanding the contribution volunteers make and how to maximise the potential for this resource.

### Next Steps

Results from this scoping survey will be disseminated by the YMCA, YI and Bytes to promote the strengths of the voluntary youth work sector and to inform others about the ways in which youth workers support young people's mental health and help build resilience. Activities will include:

- Hosting online seminars with voluntary youth work providers to outline the results of the scoping survey and provide space to discuss and inform future actions based on the recommendations. This will focus on:
  - Local voluntary providers;
  - Network of regional voluntary organisations; and
  - Uniformed HQ Organisation.
- Sharing the value of the voluntary youth work sector to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people in structures that support improved levels of belonging and opportunities to access self-directed learning;
- Wider engagement with civic leaders and politicians through Committees and All-Party Groups. Initial engagement will be with:
  - Minister for Education and/or Departmental Officials;
  - Education Committee;
  - Northern Ireland Commissions for Children and Young People;
  - Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership;
  - Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland;
  - APG Mental Health and Children and Young People APG.

- Develop a series of infographics for use on social media to highlight the type of support the youth work sector can offer children and young people.
- Conduct a further piece of research exploring the contribution voluntary youth work providers make in terms of community wealth.

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