

Good Relations Work in Sligo and Leitrim

Connecting Young People aged 16-25
Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET):
Documenting practice of IFI-funded projects in Sligo and Leitrim



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| List of Tables and Figures | 4 |
| Acknowledgments | 5 |
| Foreword | 6 |
| Executive Summary | 7 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) | 7 |
| Contributing Factors and Consequences of NEET | 8 |
| Working with Young People NEET in Ireland | 9 |
| International Fund For Ireland's Personal Youth Development Programme | 9 |
| IFI Funded PYDPs: YESS Project (South Sligo) and New Beginnings Project (Leitrim) | 10 |
| Barriers for Young People NEET in Sligo and Leitrim | 11 |
| Identifying the Approaches Adopted by the IFI-funded Projects | 11 |
| Stakeholder Consultation – Themes and Key Messages from Practice | 11 |
| Recommendations and Conclusions | 14 |
| Introduction | 15 |
| Section 1: Research Scope and Rationale | 17 |
| Section 2: Research Methods Employed | 18 |
| Research Participants | 18 |
| Consultation | 18 |
| Research Challenges | 18 |
| Section 3: Research Background | 19 |
| International Fund for Ireland (IFI) | 19 |
| The IFI Personal Youth Development Programme | 21 |
| Sligo Leitrim CYPSC and the Children and Young People's Plan 2020-2022 | 23 |
| Sligo Leitrim CYPSC | 23 |
| Children and Young People's Plan 2020-2022 | 23 |
| Introduction to the YESS Project and the New Beginnings Projects | 26 |
| YESS (Youth Employment South Sligo) Project – Overview | 27 |
| The New Beginnings Project (Leitrim) – Overview | 28 |
| Section 4: Area Profile and Need | 30 |
| Demographic Profile of Sligo and Leitrim | 30 |
| Sligo / Leitrim combined | 30 |
| Nationality, Ethnicity and Religion | 30 |
| Labour Force and Education Levels | 30 |
| Family | 31 |
| House Ownership | 31 |
| Poverty | 31 |
| Demographic Profile of 16-24 Year Olds in Sligo / Leitrim | 32 |
| Age and sex of young people in Sligo and Leitrim (aged 16-24) | 32 |
| Post-primary education | 32 |
| Young People on the Live Register / Unemployed | 33 |
| Section 5: In Brief: Education and Training in Ireland | 35 |
| Nationally | 35 |
| Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB | 35 |
| Qualifications | 36 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Early Intervention Practice and Strategy for Young People at Risk of Early Leaving School | 36 |
| Alternatives to Post-Primary Education | 38 |
| Section 6: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) | 39 |
| Origins of the NEET Indicator | 39 |
| Characteristics of NEETs | 40 |
| Complex Needs and Potential Barriers for Young People | 42 |
| Consequences of NEET | 44 |
| Section 7: Effective Ways of Working With NEETs: National and International Lessons | 46 |
| Ireland | 46 |
| United Kingdom | 51 |
| The Role of Key Agencies and Individuals | 57 |
| Re-engaging Young People NEET in Rural Areas | 58 |
| Denmark | 58 |
| Finland | 60 |
| Norway | 61 |
| Conclusions | 65 |
| Section 8: Operation of the YESS Project and New Beginnings Project | 67 |
| The YESS Project | 67 |
| Meeting aims, objectives and outcomes of IFI PYDP | 68 |
| Case Study One | 70 |
| Group activities aimed at building relationships between project participants | 71 |
| Group activities aimed at fostering Good Relations | 71 |
| Group activities to build personal development and increase employability skills | 72 |
| Case Study Two | 73 |
| Case Study Three | 76 |
| The YESS Project – Outputs in numbers | 77 |
| New Beginnings Project | 81 |
| Meeting the aims, objectives and outcomes of IFI PYDP | 82 |
| Case Study Four | 83 |
| Case Study Five | 84 |
| Case Study Six | 86 |
| The New Beginnings Project – Outputs in numbers | 88 |
| Section 9: Identifying Good Practice | 91 |
| Common Barriers Faced by Young People in Both Projects | 91 |
| Themes and Key Messages | 93 |
| Theme 1: Identifying and Engaging Young People NEET - Processing Pathways | 93 |
| Theme Two: Building Relationships With Young People NEET | 96 |
| Theme Three: Developing Needs-based Programmes of Activities | 99 |
| Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Self-evaluation Mechanisms | 106 |
| Section 10: Conclusions | 107 |
| Section 11: Recommendations | 109 |
| Recommendation 1: Carry Out a Formal Needs Analysis | 109 |
| Recommendation 2: Provide Long-term Support to Young People | 110 |
| Recommendation 3: Develop Joint Partnerships and Collaborations | 111 |
| Recommendation 4: Consider Blended Funding Models | 112 |
| Recommendation 5: Consider Staffing Approaches | 113 |
| Recommendation 6: Engage Youth Services with NEETs | 114 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Recommendation 7: Facilitate Young People to Contribute to Their Communities | 114 |
| Acronyms Used | 115 |
| Bibliography | 116 |
| Appendix 1: Activity Agreement Sample | 121 |

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 3.1 Sligo Leitrim CYPSC CYPP (2020-2022) Summary | 25 |
| Table 4.1: Summary population of Sligo and Leitrim | 30 |
| Table 4.2: Sligo and Leitrim Live Register rates for whole populations | 32 |
| Table 4.3: Sligo and Leitrim – Summary population aged 16-24 | 32 |
| Table 4.4: Sligo – Breakdown of ages, 16-24 year olds | 32 |
| Table 4.5: Leitrim – Breakdown of ages, 16-24 year olds | 32 |
| Table 4.6: Sligo and Leitrim School Retention Rates | 33 |
| Table 4.7: Sligo and Leitrim – School Absentees for 2017/2018 | 33 |
| Table 4.8: Sligo and Leitrim – School Absentees for 2016/2017 | 33 |
| Table 4.9: Under 25 year olds on the Live Register for Sligo and Leitrim (ages 18-24) | 34 |
| Figure 5.1: Five National Outcomes for Children and Young People | 37 |
| Table 6.1 % of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Ireland | 39 |
| Table 6.2: % of NEET young people in Ireland aged 20-24 in 2021 | 45 |
| Table 7.1: Themes for engaging NEETs, working with NEETs, partnership working and organisational development as outlined in the SICAP Report (2017) | 49 |
| Table 8.1: Individual supports offered and provided to young people participating in the YESS Project | 75 |
| Table 8.2: Work-related placements or experiences, accredited courses and non-accredited courses for the two YESS Project cohorts | 78 |
| Table 8.3: Accredited Programmes Progression for New Beginnings Participants | 88 |
| Table 8.4: Personal Development Non- Accredited Programmes Completed by New Beginnings Participants | 89 |



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FOREWORD

As chairperson of the Sligo Leitrim Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC), I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the CYPSC's Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group for supporting the development of this very important research report.

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC saw the value of undertaking this research study and provided funding from the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures CYPSC Administration Grant for the research.

Through identifying the good practices used by The YESS Project in South Sligo and the New Beginnings Project in Leitrim – both Personal Youth Development Programmes funded by the International Fund for Ireland – the focus of this research was able to explore the very positive and successful ways in which to promote Good Relations through supporting young people who were not engaging in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

The research highlighted the need to foster and develop long term, intensive, individualistic and holistic programmes in order to effectively support such young people.

This is a very important research report that will undoubtedly add to the existing body of knowledge in this area. I would like to congratulate the author Davina Brady on the quality of the report and indeed all involved, particularly the young people, in the production the report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Traditionally, when looking at the labour market young people were not accounted for as a distinct needs group. The transition from school to employment was usually quite linear, with the expectation that young people went to school, progressed to further or higher education and got a job, or finished school and started employment straight away. However, over the past two decades, dramatic changes have occurred in the world in regard to technology, globalisation and deindustrialisation. This has meant that unemployed young people are facing a very different labour market to that of other generations (Sissons and Jones, 2012; Powers et al., 2015).

The linear line is not as linear as it once was and, while this route still works for many young people, there is an increasing number of young people with higher needs who are becoming disengaged. This 'one size fits all' approach does not work for all young people and, according to Eurofound (2012), it is now recognised that such linear transitions are increasingly being replaced by diversified and individualised trajectories from school to work. Modern youth transitions tend to be complex and protracted, with young people moving frequently in and out of the labour force. They may involve backtracking and blending of statuses – especially in times of economic turbulence (Eurofound, 2012).

Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2021), there are several countries across Europe where over 20% of their youth population are considered NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). These countries include Italy, Spain, France and Latvia. In Ireland, according to the OECD (2021) quarterly reports on NEETs across the European Union, the NEET rate for young males aged 20-24 is 12.9%, 12.4% for females of the same age, 7.2% for young males aged 15-19 and 5.1% for young females of the same age. Whether this is a direct result of the changing labour markets or the consequence of a more disconnected society due to technological changes and advances is still unknown. One thing that is certain though is that, for young people NEET, if they are not re-engaged back into employment, education or training, their life outcomes will decrease greatly. In the long run, this will have a much larger impact on the public purse than if the support was made available to them now.

The term NEET originated in 2011 when adopted by the European Commission to describe the indicator to represent young people not in any employment, education or training. Right across Europe, the NEET rate is concerning. According to the Central Statistics Office (2018) publication, 'Measuring Ireland's Progress', just over one in eight (12.6%) of those aged 18-24 in Ireland in 2017 was not in employment, education or training (the NEET rate). The EU28 average NEET rate was 13.7% and varied from a low of 5.4% in the Netherlands to 24.9% in Italy (CSO, 2018). In Finland, the NEET rate 11.2% of the youth population are NEET (OCED, 2018). In Denmark, it is estimated that 9.2% of young people aged 15-29 are NEET (Statista, 2020). In the UK, it is estimated that 10.6% of all 16-24 year olds are NEET (UK Government, 2021).

Contributing Factors and Consequences of NEET

Young people who are not in employment, education or training often have more complex needs and require intensive supports (Pierce, 2009; Mawn et al., 2017). Reasons for young people becoming NEET have been connected to low parental education, unemployment and economic adversity (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012, Yates et al., 2011). Low parental education has been linked to fractured transitions between school and work (Dorsett and Lucchino, 2014). Family economic deprivation has been associated with lower educational attainment and employment, while dropping out of school has been shown to be transmitted across generations (Kallio et al., 2016; Vauhkonen et al., 2017). A study by Vancea and Utzet (2018) found that parental expectation in terms of education achievement at the age of 14, around the time a young person begins to disengage mentally, was lower in NEETs young men than non-NEETs. Pitkanen et al. (2019) found that in Finland, social economic disadvantage in childhood was common amongst young people NEET. Power et al. (2015) found that young people NEET were four times more likely to have been diagnosed with a mental disorder during childhood or adolescents and three times more at risk of any mental health disorder or the increased odds of suicide attempts than non-NEETs. The study also found that NEETs were seven times more likely to experience suicidal ideation than non-NEETs. In Ireland, 26% of female early school leavers and 21% of males suffered depression according to a 2017 OCED report.

Disengagement from employment, education or training does not just happen overnight and often this process starts early on in education. As a result, some young people have negative ideas about the education system, creating a further barrier. For other young people, negative attitudes towards services may have begun as a child, especially if their family were connected to such attitudes in any way. Karlsdottir et al. (2019) found that young people often had an "attitude of rejection towards formal authorities". This is a barrier not to be overlooked when engaging young people as it will prevent them from going to seek support themselves.

The consequence of becoming NEET is that a young person's positive life outcomes will decrease. On an individual level, their potential lifetime earnings decreases massively in comparison to a young person who went the linear route (Mawn et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2012). There is also a growing concern about the development of soft skills. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) report (2017) found that by being out of education, employment and training, young people were less likely to develop soft skills. Research from Power et al., (2015) showed that the likelihood of struggling with mental health disorders and suicidal ideation was a lot more commonplace amongst young people who have disengaged from employment, education or training. Mental health challenges can be something the young person struggled with before becoming NEET, but can also be a direct result of being disengaged. O' Connor (2010) found that youth research participants agreed that being unemployed negatively impacted their sense of wellbeing. Research from Eurofound (2012), Scott et al., (2013) and McGinnity et al. (2014) found that young people NEET are more likely to be at risk of substance misuse challenges, criminal activity and are more likely to be an early or lone parent, all of which individually bring their own set of challenges. The point is, there is no one reason a young person disengages and it does not just happen instantly. It is a long process where each event adds to the needs of the young person and the gap between the young person and engagement becomes larger overtime. To support that young person, each one of those needs must be met and each barrier broken down to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Working with Young People NEET in Ireland

Working with this group and seeing what works and what is most effective with them is still in its infancy in many ways. In Ireland, the term 'NEET' has only entered policy in the last few years. There is little research in carried out to date with this group in Ireland; currently the only piece of available substantial research examining good practice with NEETs on a national level is the SICAP report (2017).

The findings from this research are essentially a toolkit for working with the NEETs cohort and show what is effective when engaging and working with this group of young people.

International Fund For Ireland's Personal Youth Development Programme

The priority of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) priority is the effect that the Conflict has had on young people in the border counties. The IFI recognise that social and economic deprivation is often a legacy of the Conflict which directly impacts on opportunities for young people in these areas. As such, the growing concern for the NEETs group is widening and the knock-on effects of having over 12% of our young people disengaged is something which the International Ireland for (IFI) Fund have recognised as concerning, especially in the border counties.

The IFI was set up in 1986 by the UK and Irish Governments. The Fund's mission is to:

"Promote economic and social advance; and encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout the island of Ireland." (www.internationalfund-forireland.com)

Since its establishment in 1986, it has assisted 6,000 projects financially throughout the six counties of Northern Ireland and the bordering counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo and directly and indirectly created 55,000 jobs. According to the fund, they have:

"Worked tirelessly and impartially towards achieving lasting peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties. In that time, countless individuals and communities across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties have benefited from the Fund's support." (www.internationalfundforireland.com)

According to the IFI, there is a particular need for greater work in areas suffering from high levels of economic and social deprivation who have had low levels of engagement in peace building and where the Peace Process has delivered limited benefits. Part of the 2016-2020 strategy was to deliver real and positive community transformation through reconciliation and capacity building interventions in these areas. A need was seen within the projects supported by the IFI, whereby some young people were struggling due to lack of opportunity. To target this group, the Fund established the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) in 2015 with an objective to:

1. Promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between communities there by reducing sectarianism.
2. Promote prosperity by increasing the skill base and future employment options of 'at risk' young people.

The IFI PYDP seeks to:

“Connect young people aged 16-25 to personalised learning, skills and employment opportunities with a central focus on Good Relations and preparing people for the world of work. It is interested in engaging potential participants that are vulnerable to polarisation/recruitment to organisations opposed to the peace process and face barriers to participation in mainstream provision.

PYDP is flexible with multiple entry points and encourages participants to explore their needs and make decisions that improve their lives, communities and interactions with others.

The programme engages with young people who face a range of issues including; leaving the education system early; substance abuse; affected by homelessness; difficult family backgrounds; been in or close to criminal justice system; suffer from poor health or mental health issues; mistrust of statutory institutions; not participated in civic society in a positive manner; and come from communities with a negative view of their future.”

(www.internationalfundforireland.com)

In 2016, the IFI funded the first Sligo project working with this NEET cohort under PYDP funding. In 2017, they funded the first Leitrim project working with this group of disengaged young people.

IFI Funded PYDPs: YESS Project (South Sligo) and New Beginnings Project (Leitrim)

The YESS Project in South Sligo was managed by Foróige and worked with 34 young people, split into two cohorts. The first cohort was supported by one project worker, while the second cohort was supported by an additional project worker who came on board in 2017. The Leitrim New Beginnings project was led by Youth Work Ireland North Connaught and supported 15 young people over a two-year period. It had one project worker for its duration.

As of April 2021, Sligo had 284 young people aged between 18 and 25 on the Live Register, while Leitrim had 142 young people on the Live Register in this age category. This is an indication of the number of young people unemployed and potentially disengaged in the county. These figures also show the need for support in each county, such as that provided by the YESS Project and the New Beginnings project. Using a very individualised, tailor-made approach, the projects collectively supported 49 young people through individualised progression plans.

Collectively, the YESS Project supported young people through 209 accredited courses and 93 non-accredited courses. The New Beginnings Project supported young people through 32 accredited courses and 45 non-accredited courses. It is fair to conclude that both of these projects were successful and demonstrated increase life outcomes for each young person who participated.

Barriers for Young People NEET in Sligo and Leitrim

To achieve this level of success and to support young people to develop the capacity and ability to enable them to progress required the breaking down of many barriers at a very individual level. Through consultation, 17 barriers were found to be commonplace amongst participants of the YESS and New Beginnings projects. These included:

1. Mental health challenges
2. Limited opportunity in their area
3. Rural isolation
4. Social isolation
5. Challenging close relationships
6. Partaking in risky behaviour
7. Little or no financial support to help progress
8. Homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless
9. Previous negative experiences with services and educational institutions
10. Low self-esteem and confidence
11. Limited self-belief
12. Lack of motivation
13. Lacked vision for themselves
14. Limited awareness of own ability to overcome barriers
15. Low level of communication and social skills
16. Disengaged for a very long period of time and completely isolated as a result.

Identifying the Approaches Adopted by the IFI-funded Projects

This research was led by MSLETB on behalf of the Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group of Sligo Leitrim CYPSC. Funding for the research was made available through Sligo Leitrim CYPSC. The research was carried out with a partnership approach between MSLETB, Sligo Leitrim CYPSC, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. The Economic Security and Working Group of Sligo Leitrim CYPSC saw the opportunity to conduct a piece of research and document the workings and good practice features of the projects. The barriers these young people had to overcome were complex and, in many cases, young people faced several of these barriers at any one time. It has been recognised by the Working Group that to break down such barriers requires several components, the presence of which are likely to be evidence of good practice.

Stakeholder Consultation – Themes and Key Messages from Practice

Through consultation with 17 stakeholders, 24 themes and approaches were found to be effective when working with NEETs young people, especially those from more rural and isolated areas. These themes are essentially a road map for future projects working with NEETs, in particular when identifying and engaging young people NEET and when working individually with them. The themes found here are supported by research globally and this is in itself evidence that both of these projects were effective when working with this NEET group.

Working with NEETs: Key Messages from Practice

| Themes | Key Messages From Practice |
|--|--|
| Theme 1: Identifying and engaging young people NEET | <p>Message 1: Prior to engaging young people, it is important that every service and school in the area is aware of the project and what it offers.</p> <p>Message 2: By making connections with services and schools early on, an opportunity is created to identify those in the target group.</p> <p>Message 3: Sharing information and working with other service providers when identifying and engaging young people is very beneficial. If set up correctly, systems enhance the fluency of the process and build Good Relationships.</p> <p>Message 4: An initial call by the project worker to the potential participant or their parent / guardian before meeting face-to-face works well with this group, especially if they have had prior experiences with services which may have been negative.</p> <p>Message 5: When engaging NEETs, using an informal, gentle approach breaks down any barriers or reluctance which may exist for that young person or their family in regard to services.</p> <p>Message 6: It can be helpful to link in with the referral agent for the first meeting with the young person.</p> <p>Message 7: Creating a network of services working with vulnerable young people can be a huge asset when working with this NEETs groups.</p> |
| Theme 2: Building relationships with young people NEET | <p>Message 8: Young people as direct referral agents are often overlooked but were shown to be of great benefit when identifying young people NEET for both projects.</p> <p>Message 9: Having the time to build the relationships slowly with young people, especially with those who may have more challenging barriers, is very important when engaging NEETs.</p> <p>Message 10: It is important for the project worker to be consistent and persistent when attracting and engaging NEETs young people at first.</p> <p>Message 11: When working with the NEETs cohort, a non-judgmental, holistic approach works best, especially when building trust.</p> <p>Message 12: Young people are not always ready to begin work related to employment, education or training. It is important that the project worker</p> |



Theme 3: Developing Needs-based Programmes of Activities

has the time and flexibility to work with young people intensively if required in order to help them to build both capacity and ability.

Message 13: The attributes of the project worker contribute to how much the young person 'buys in' to the process. Attributes such as 'being positive and motivating' and 'supportive and committed' seem to work well with this group.

Message 14: Individual progression plans work well with this group of young people. Honing in on personal interests is a good way to begin this process.

Message 15: Progression plans should be developed collaboratively between the project worker and the young person.

Message 16: Progression plans should be adaptable and changeable, allowing for the individual to move forward in a way that best suits their needs.

Message 17: The type of work that needs to be carried out with this cohort can be intensive. This requires a great deal of time and financial resources.

Message 18: For some young people, flexibility is required around participation and attending the project. The project should be flexible around attendance, acknowledging disengagement and reengagement of young people as a reality.

Message 19: To get to a place where a young person opens up takes time. It often takes up to six months to build a relationship with young people before any employment, education or training progression work is carried out.

Message 20: Having a project with an outreach strand is very beneficial when meeting the needs of young people NEET. It is especially important for those young people who are from rural or isolated areas, who are parents, who have caring roles, or who are suffering from mental health challenges.

Message 21: To meet the needs of young people NEET, especially those who are socially isolated, a project based in the community where the young person can 'drop in' or 'call up' is a massive asset. This helps young people to progress and creates a sense of community for that young person.

Message 22: When engaging young people NEET, giving the young peo-

ple an opportunity early on to gain certification or acknowledgement for attending a short programme can act as an incentive.

Message 23: Having access to specialist services is crucial for the progression of some young people.

Message 24: Having strong connections to education / training institutions and business institutions is very beneficial, especially in regard to providing young people with information and 'taster' days.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Both projects were effective in engaging and working with young people NEET. The themes generated through consultation with the projects' stakeholders represent a road map for future projects working with young people NEET. The recommendations therefore reflect the approaches and methods used by the projects. It is suggested that a similar approach, which uses the learnings from the IFI PYDP projects, is put forward for any future similar projects.

A collaborative, integrated, co-ordinated multi-agency, approach has shown to be most effective when working with NEET cohorts. Those multi-disciplinary teams which are shown to have the greatest impact include youth services, community services, education and training institutions, the labour markets including businesses and commerce in the local areas, specialist services such as counsellors and guidance counsellors, employment services, youth justice services and An Garda Síochána, as well as social and other statutory services.

For this type of 'wraparound' approach to be most impactful, a shared strategy which has been developed through consultations with stakeholders including young people needs to be developed. Sufficient staff time needs to be available to develop this multi-agency approach to supporting young people. A guaranteed commitment from each agency must be in place, with each agency knowing their exact role and responsibility within that strategy.

The value of research like this is never so much about the project it documents, but more about the projects that come afterwards. The projects in Sligo and Leitrim have the potential to be a reference point for other counties in relation to promoting Good Relations and working with the NEETs cohort. Having research, especially research which demonstrates that a high level of good practice occurred, and recommendations based on an international review of what is most effective with this group, is an opportunity to take the learnings from good practice in both of these IFI-funded projects which takes 'inclusion' of all young people seriously instead of a 'one size fits all' approach.

This research can be a template for future projects working promoting Good Relations with this NEET group in Sligo and Leitrim and indeed for other IFI PYDPs. With the limited research being conducted in Ireland in this sector, this research will also add value to the national archive of research exploring NEETs and how best to work with this cohort of young people.

INTRODUCTION

'The Troubles' have haunted Northern Ireland and the border counties for decades and, while peace and reconciliation processes took shape in the late 1990s and great work has been done within and between communities, there is still a great deal of work required to maintain peace and build relations. The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was set up with a consortium of members selected by both the Irish and British governments in 1986. It sought to promote:

"Economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland." (www.internationalfundforireland.com)


Since its establishment, the IFI has worked with over 6,000 projects. One key area of focus has been young people and, in particular, young people who are not engaged in education, training or employment and who may be at risk of being influenced by paramilitary groups.

The IFI invests on both sides of the border, with supports offered in all six counties of Northern Ireland and the southern border counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Louth and Monaghan. To date, the fund has invested over €1.7 billion in projects which promote reconciliation and progression in all 12 counties in which it works. When speaking about 'The Troubles', the border counties are often misrepresented in regard to the struggles they suffered for some 30 years. The IFI recognised this very early and has been working within the island of Ireland to target those who may be at greatest risk ever since.

In 2015, the IFI developed the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) to target young people who fall into this 'at risk' group. To date, they have spent over €15m in projects targeting young people aged 16-25 years on both sides of the border, who are disengaged and not in any education, training or employment. This group of young people usually have a variety of needs, with many barriers which need to be broken down before progress can be made.

The IFI has supported the operation of two PYDP projects in the Sligo and Leitrim area. The YESS Project (Youth Employment South Sligo) was first launched in 2016 and was led by Foróige. The New Beginnings project in Leitrim was set up in 2017 and led by Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. The South Sligo and Leitrim projects ended in early 2021. In March 2021, a new project in Sligo town was funded by IFI to support a new cohort of young people NEET. The work carried out by the two original projects was significant and both were very effective when working with this NEET cohort. Both projects yielded promising results for young people, supporting their personal development, as well as their educational and professional development. The projects also developed young people's understanding and acceptance of others and it supported them to participate in cross-border collaborations and events enhancing Good Relations. Young people's lives have directly improved because of the approach and resources to which these projects had access. The approaches used mirror the findings from national and international research regarding good practice and effective strategies when working with young people NEET. While neither project knew at the time they were established that their methods would show such positive results, the project workers and coordinators have shown that their approach to engaging and working with young people NEET works and international research supports this.

The work of both projects has been recognised throughout the counties they serviced. The Eco-



conomic Security and Opportunity Working Group of Sligo Leitrim CYPSC saw the opportunity document the workings and good practice of the projects. The findings of this research will ultimately support the development of new strategies for working with young people NEET. It also has scope to help both counties to attain further funding streams and continue the work that has been carried out with young people in both counties. The need for such support for this target group is clearly shown throughout this research. A gap now exists again in the counties due to the cessation of the Leitrim project and the timeframe in relation to the project that operated in South Sligo. This gap has been recognised by stakeholders and the new Children and Young People's Plan for Sligo Leitrim 2020-2022 includes an emphasis on the importance of working with young people NEET at this very personalised level.

Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB oversaw this research in partnership with Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group.

SECTION 1: RESEARCH SCOPE AND RATIONALE

Currently in Ireland, 12.9% of young males and 12.4% of females aged 20-24 are NEET (OECD, 2021). According to the OECD (2021), the NEET rate amongst 15-19 year old females is just over 5% and just over 7% for young males. The exact rate of young people NEET can be hard to determine, especially at local level. It is for this reason that figures from the Live Register or from Leaving Cert retention rates are sometimes used to determine an estimate. For example, in county Sligo as of August 2021, 170 of 1,150 young males in the county aged 18-24 were on the Live Register and 114 of 1,264 young females (Central Statistics Office). In Leitrim, 84 of 990 (8.5%) young males and 58 of 919 young females (6.3%) are on the Live Register. This suggests that one in 6.7 young men in Sligo and one in 11.7 young men in Leitrim are potentially NEET. Similarly, one in 11 young women in Sligo are potentially not engaged in any employment, education or training and, in Leitrim, one in 15.8 young women are potentially NEET. This does not include the 16 and 17 year olds who may go unnoticed due to the lack of a statutory 'radar' type system for this age group.

The need for long term projects to identify, engage and support young people NEET and those 'at risk' of becoming NEET is evident when we look at the figures above. In late 2015, the IFI launched the PYDP as a response to the need in border counties. In 2016 and 2017, two PYDPs in Sligo and Leitrim were funded by IFI. One was in County Leitrim (New Beginnings) and the other was in Sligo (YESS). Both Sligo and Leitrim have areas of deprivation according to the Pobal Deprivation Indices (2016). The Deprivation Index showed that 23.7% of the combined population are 'at risk' of poverty and that 13.4% of the population are in 'constant' poverty.

The YESS Project was based in South Sligo and managed by Foróige. The New Beginnings project was based in Leitrim and managed by Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. Working under the remit of the IFI PYDP, the two projects sought to *'help young people build and develop life skills that foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and make young people more employable'* (IFI). In all, the YESS Project supported 34 young people through 300 accredited and non-accredited courses and the New Beginnings project supported 15 young people to complete 77 accredited and non-accredited courses. This research explores and documents the work of these IFI-funded projects and also the approaches which were most effective when identifying, engaging and working with young people NEET in Sligo and Leitrim. While the research aim is broadly to explore and document the work of the projects, the scope from the learnings gained will be an asset not only to the counties they serviced, but to the whole of Ireland and to other projects working with young people NEET or young people 'at risk' of disengagement. This research has been conducted in South Sligo and in Leitrim and represents the views of stakeholders working with or for the relevant partners in the border counties. These include young people, project staff, service management and referral agents.

This research began in April 2021, with desk research taking place throughout April and May. Stakeholders were consulted throughout June, July and August and the report was delivered to the funders in October and finalised in December 2021.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH METHODS EMPLOYED

This research seeks to add to the current research both locally and nationally relating to young people NEET and the promotion of Good Relations. Through consultation with 17 stakeholders, 24 key messages arose that have shown effectiveness when engaging and working with this cohort in Sligo and Leitrim.

Research Participants

In total, 27 stakeholders were invited to participate in this research. The uptake rate to participate was 66% and this research group comprised of stakeholders from both projects, including young people, project workers, management level staff, referral agents, steering group members and the IFI PYDP fund manager. The research oversight group and the individual projects collaborated with the researcher to identify potential participants. In line with the requirements of GDPR, all potential research participants consented to the sharing of their contact details prior to the researcher contacting them by telephone.

Consultation

Consultations with stakeholders comprised face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and on-line surveys. During the data collection phase, Ireland was in and out of national lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that most interviews were carried out over the phone, with a limited number of face-to-face interviews being conducted. Surveys were distributed to the harder to reach young people. Each stakeholder group had a different set of questions, some open and some closed, which would allow the researcher to document the workings of the projects while documenting good practice.

Research Challenges

The uptake rate of stakeholders was proportionately different for each project. Staff who worked with the YESS Project in South Sligo were still employed by Foróige and this meant that access to referral agents and other stakeholders including young people was easier. The New Beginnings project had ceased and the project worker had moved on to a different role in another organisation. It took considerable time to get access to the project worker and the research 'data collection' phase was extended to allow for this. Complying with GDPR, the youth organisation then had to contact young people on behalf of the researcher to see if they consented to passing on their personal details.

To offset the length of time this could have taken, an online survey was made available for young people who had participated in the New Beginnings Project, which the youth organisation shared with the young people. The survey was first made available to complete for a two-week period, but as there was no uptake, a further three weeks was added to the timeline. In the end, only 40% of those who received the survey completed it, in comparison to 100% of the young people invited to participate in the research from the YESS Project, which was likely due to the fact that the project workers were still employed by Foróige. Nonetheless, while the uptake was relatively lower and this delayed the research, the added value of these young people's voices being heard through this research is significant.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH BACKGROUND

For Sligo and Leitrim, having access to IFI funding was an opportunity to work with a group of young people who were disengaged on a very individual level. The funding was substantial in comparison to other youth services and so had the capacity to really hone in on the needs of each young person while supporting them both personally and financially to break down barriers to progression. Sligo Leitrim CYPSC have recognised that this funding to support young people in this very tailor-made way was an opportunity and they have also recognised the effectiveness of the approaches used by the two projects. Following on from the success of the projects, the Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group saw the value in exploring and documenting the work which was carried out and so commissioned this research. This section will give a brief insight into the work of the IFI and its strategy and it will look at the new Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Children and Young People's Plan for 2020-2022 in relation to young people NEET. An introduction to both projects will also be provided in this section, giving readers a background to the service funding and management, as well as the output of each project.

International Fund for Ireland (IFI)

The International Fund for Ireland was set up by the British and Irish Government in 1986. An independent organisation, the IFI's mission is to;

"Promote economic and social advance; and encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout the island of Ireland"
(www.internationalfundforireland.com)

The IFI has a focus on Northern Ireland and the border counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. The Board members of the IFI are appointed by the British and Irish governments and the Board is assisted by an Advisory Committee comprised of senior officials who are appointed by the two Governments.

The administration of the Fund is provided by a Secretariat which is headed by Joint Directors General based in Belfast and Dublin. A wide range of organisations act as the managing agents for the IFI. Across the southern border counties, a team of Programme Managers act as local contact points for the IFI and they assist potential applicants in identifying and developing proposals. These Programme Managers also monitor the ongoing operation of projects, providing support and financial assistance as necessary.

IFI is currently developing their new strategy, which is being finalised at the time of writing. The objectives of IFI's 2016-2020 Strategic Framework were:

- To promote reconciliation and integration in interface areas.
- To continue to engage communities and individuals, particularly young people, who have only recently or have not yet participated in peace building and community reconciliation activities.
- To maintain the longstanding approach of the Fund in promoting economic and social ad-

vance in communities suffering from very high levels of economic and social deprivation

- To continue to build strategic alliances with other funders and government to ensure interventions are complementary, sustainable and can shape policies that promote peace and reconciliation.
- To extend the Fund's engagement with other peace builders on the island of Ireland and in other regions emerging from conflict as part of a wider effort to promote conflict resolution.
- To review by early 2019, the progress made by the Fund and determine if further work is required to secure the peace.

The strategy focused on four key areas of activity which were developed to bring communities together:

1. The Peace Impact Programme (PIP) launched in 2013 and was set up to bring real and positive community transformation through sensitive interventions in communities that have not previously, or only partially, participated in peace building and reconciliation activities.
2. The Peace Walls Programme (PWP) launched in 2012 and was aimed at designing and delivering a range of confidence and relationship building interventions which would work within and between interface communities. This would assist residents to reach a position where they felt safe and appropriate to proceed with the removal of Peace Walls in their area.
3. AMBIT is a yearly transatlantic study programme. In its 15th year, the programme enables community leaders from Northern Ireland and the southern border counties to engage and build long-term partnerships with similar projects based in the USA.
4. Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) was launched in late 2015 and was part of the Fund's Community Consolidation - Peace Consolidation 2016-2020 Strategy. The Programme aims to help young people build and develop life skills that encourage and foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and make them more employable.

Since the Fund was established in 1986, it has:

"Worked tirelessly and impartially towards achieving lasting peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties. In that time, countless individuals and communities across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties have benefited from the Fund's support."
(www.internationalfundforireland.com)

Over its duration, the Fund has impacted the communities it works with in a number of ways. Since its initiation, over 6000 projects in Northern Ireland and the border counties have been supported through the Fund. Just under €1.7 billion / £1.4 billion has been leveraged from other sources in this time period and, overall, the Fund has created, directly and indirectly, 55,000 jobs to the areas it covers.

The IFI Personal Youth Development Programme

Despite the remarkable progress which has been made since the mid-1980s in relation to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties, as well as throughout the whole island of Ireland, much work is still required to maintain peace and build positive relations.

According to the IFI, there is a particular need for greater work in areas suffering from high levels of economic and social deprivation who have had low levels of engagement in peace building and where the peace process has delivered limited benefits. Part of the 2016-2020 strategy was to deliver real and positive community transformation through reconciliation and capacity building interventions in these areas.

The PYDP is one key programmes which was designed to increase capacity and understanding which would in turn enhance relationships and the community. According to the Fund's website:

"PYDP seeks to connect young people aged 16-25 to personalised learning, skills and employment opportunities with a central focus on Good Relations and preparing people for the world of work. It is interested in engaging potential participants that are vulnerable to polarisation/ recruitment to organisations opposed to the peace process and face barriers to participation in mainstream provision.

PYDP is flexible with multiple entry points and encourages participants to explore their needs and make decisions that improve their lives, communities and interactions with others. The programme engages with young people who face a range of issues including; leaving the education system early; substance abuse; affected by homelessness; difficult family backgrounds; been in or close to criminal justice system; suffer from poor health or mental health issues; mistrust of statutory institutions; not participated in civic society in a positive manner; and come from communities with a negative view of their future."

(www.internationalfundforireland.com)

The PYDP projects are designed at a local level. This allows them to engage with the referral systems to provide both accredited and non-accredited opportunities. The aim of the project is to help young people develop and build upon their life skills, in particular those which foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and overall, make them more employable.

In line with the 2016-2020 strategy, the strategic objectives for the PYDP are to promote a greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between communities which contributes to a reduction in sectarianism, and; to promote economic prosperity by increasing the skill base and future employment options for 'at risk' young people living in the North or South.

The aim of the programmes sought to:

"Help young people build and develop life skills that foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and make them more employable."

(www.internationalfundforireland.com)

The two strategic objectives of the programme are:

1. To promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between communities there by reducing sectarianism.
2. To promote prosperity by increasing the skill base and future employment options of 'at risk' young people.

From engaging with supports and fulfilling accredited and non-accredited opportunities, the outcomes for young people include:

Good Relations (integral) – young people have an improved sense of self and awareness of self and others and have an increase respect for diversity.

Personal Development – young people have improved upon their social and emotional capabilities (inclusive of communication, confidence, leadership, managing feelings, resilience and determinism).

Skills and Social Development/ Education and Skills Development – young people have successfully achieved towards further learning or work.

Community Champions – young people positively engage in the community.

As a locally driven project, the IFI funds organisations which work with this target group to support them towards the four key outcomes above. Prospective groups / projects are sought through the Programme Managers and, while the criteria for funding is comprehensive, it is accessible due to the support from the Project Managers and because of the intended flexible nature of the project output. Priority is given to project applicants who:

- Clearly fit with the aim, objectives and outcomes of the Programme.
- Clearly seek to give young people furthest away from employment, the experience, training, skills and support they need to progress into work.
- Clearly commit to engaging in Good Relations training and activities.

In line with the aims of the 2016-2020 strategy, the Fund has a particular interest in working in areas of low peace impact and in those areas experiencing high levels of deprivation linked to youth unemployment and educational underachievement. The main target group for the PYDP is 16-25 year olds who are not currently in education, training or employment, who come from complex backgrounds and who are vulnerable to polarisation.

The PYDP is designed to offer young people the opportunity to join a long-term programme that provides them with the support to progress through the various stages of development until they are ready to return to education, access statutory training courses or enter employment.

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC and the Children and Young People's Plan 2020-2022

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC

The Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, now the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, originally established what are now the Children Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) in 2007, with a mission to improve life outcomes for children and their families at a local and community level. There are currently 27 CYPSCs operating in Ireland, focusing on the age range of 0-24 years.

CYPSC is a consortium of many agencies which work with children, young people and families in each area/county, that come together to engage in joint planning of services and supports. All major agencies and organisations working locally with and for children, young people and families are represented on the committee. Each CYPSC is assigned a coordinator to lead the work of the committee. This partnership is collaborative, integrated and shared in its approach, with all members moving toward the same goals of improving the lives of children, young people and families through planning and improved service delivery.

The National Policy Framework for Children and Youth People, 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020' emphasises the importance of agencies working together. CYPSCs are tasked with the role of organising and maintaining this inter-agency approach at a local and community level. The CYPSCs Shared Vision, Next Steps 2019-2024 paper continues the message of collaborative work to improve life outcomes while creating a roadmap for committees throughout the country.

'The shared vision for CYPSC over the next five years is to consolidate and build upon the positive work to date. The CYPSC infrastructure and intelligence of inter-agency working will be used to create the optimum circumstances to advance local and national priorities to enable effective systems change in local communities. Cultivating leadership through 'joined up working' and 'joined-up thinking', both locally and nationally, will be at the forefront of our efforts. CYPSC will be supported in their mission to improve outcomes for children and young people through coordinated, responsive and innovative services.'

(Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2019)

Each CYPSC is tasked to develop a three-year plan, which is known as the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). This plan provides a map of actions to be carried out by member organisations collaboratively in their respective counties. The CYPP aims to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in line with the Five National Outcomes for Children.

Children and Young People's Plan 2020-2022

The Sligo Leitrim CYPSC held its first meetings in 2014. Since then, the committee has developed two CYPPs. The first was approved and launched in 2017 (CYPP 2017-2019), with the second (CYPP 2020-2022) developed from 2019. The plan has been quality assured by the National CYPP Review Group, which comprises of the National CYPSC Coordinator, a representative of Tusla and a representative of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC initially established a number of working groups to address the need in the two counties and these were prioritized in the 2017-2019 CYPP. Working groups are in line with the Five National Outcome for Children and the aims of CYPSC:

- Active and Healthy Working Group
- Achieving in Learning and Development Working Group
- Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group
- Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group
- Connected, Respected and Contributing to their World Working Group
- Planning Working Group

The workings and management of each group is the same. Each group:

- Has a Terms of Reference
- Is chaired by a member of CYPSC
- Uses the 'priority actions' from the summary of the CYPP to guide their work
- Reports on the actions of their respective working group to CYPSC
- Works towards reviewing and supporting priority actions through their members.

In some cases, working groups have created sub-groups. These include, the Child and Youth Mental Health Sub-group, Parenting Support Strategy Sub-group, Knife and Concealed Weapons Sub-group, Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Community, School or at Home Sub-group, Steering Group for Young Travellers Project, and the Participation Sub-group Lab.

To date, Sligo Leitrim CYPSC has made a significant impact on the provision of services in both counties. The committee have assisted in the development of structures and processes for inter-agency work. This includes the development and enhancing of working relationships within the two counties, bringing agencies together in both preventative and early intervention work.

According to the Sligo Leitrim CYPSC (2021), a key impact of the committee has been the development of a range of supports to assist services to respond to identified gaps in relation to outcomes for children and young people. The committee sees the importance of early intervention and preventative methods and so have supported many different services to implement programmes to target this. These included the following:

- Supporting the Sligo Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service to expand to four post-primary schools in Co. Leitrim. Funded by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, this support will ensure fewer young people leave school early and that those young people, who could ordinarily fall under the radar, will get the support they need early on.
- Assisted Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) in the establishment of three Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN) in Sligo / Leitrim and supported the PPFS in the provision of 'training for trainers' in the evidence-based Parents Plus Parenting Programme.
- Up to 2018, there was a gap in provision and supports for young people in Leitrim who left school early, with no Youthreach or Community Training Centre. Sligo Leitrim CYPSC facilitated the initial discussions to develop a Youthreach service and a Community Training Centre in Leitrim. This collaborative approach ensured a new service in the country for young

people who may have sought an alternative to the mainstream in regard to their education. Up to this point, young people had to leave the county to avail of this support. Not having these supports for young people may have contributed to some young people disengaging. The rural isolation, the lack of public transport and the cost of traveling outside of Leitrim to avail of further education or employment were all barriers for young people up to this point.

- Implementing and supporting collaborative projects across both counties, including the development of a Participation Lab Toolkit for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim. Entitled 'The Local Practice Guidelines for Children and Young Peoples' Participation'. This programme was developed with children and young people and is now being used Nationwide. Table 3.1 shows a summary of the new CYPSC plan for Sligo Leitrim.

Table 3.1 Sligo Leitrim CYPSC CYPP (2020-2022) Summary

| Outcome Area | Local Priority Area |
|--|---|
| 1. Active and healthy, physical and mental wellbeing | 1. Nutrition and Food Poverty 2. Child and Youth Mental Health 3. Healthy Choices |
| 2. Achieving full potential in learning and development | 1. Education and Learning 2. Parent/Guardian Support |
| 3. Safe and protected from harm | 1. Safety 2. Trauma awareness 3. Violence |
| 4. Economic security and opportunity | 1. Transitions to adulthood for vulnerable young people 2. Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) 3. Overcoming barriers |
| 5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world | 1. Participation (0 - 25 years) 2. Connection (0 - 25 years) 3. Social Inclusion (0 - 25 years) |
| Change Management Actions | 1. Collaborative Working 2. Senior Level Commitment 3. Policy Alignment |

The CYPP incorporates work with the NEETs group by stating in its objectives that it seeks to facilitate the engagement of marginalised youth to be engaged in education, training and employment. One key activity to achieve this is to "document a model of good practice which has been developed locally in relation to NEETs". The YESS Project and the New Beginnings Project are a perfect template to learn from and to explore and document in regard to 'what worked' and good practice in developing Good Relations and working with NEETs, which has been recognised by the Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group. An action in the CYPP states that the committee will "work collaboratively with youth services to secure extended funding to continue programmes working with NEETs age 18-24."

Introduction to the YESS Project and the New Beginnings Projects

The two projects funded through the IFI as documented here were the YESS (Youth Employment South Sligo) Project and the New Beginnings project in Leitrim. The YESS Project was managed by Foróige and New Beginnings was managed by Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. From the outset, the IFI worked closely with both organisations to identify needs and seek to develop responses that contributed to the promotion of peace and reconciliation and Good Relations in Sligo and Leitrim. This work took place at the initial design and application stage of each project, as well as throughout the projects' implementation.

Foróige has been operating since 1952 and has grown to be one of the leading providers of youth services in Ireland. Working in partnership with young people, volunteers and the communities, the organisation works with over 57,000 young people every year throughout the country, with the support of over 400 staff and 5,000 volunteers. The work they do seeks to empower young people to achieve their full potential while making a lasting contribution to their communities. Foróige works with young people within the community to positively enhance the outcomes of that young person and in turn their community by building self-esteem, resilience, confidence, personal and social skills, risk management skills, critical thinking skills and the ability to better manage relationships. Programmes cover areas such as citizenship, enterprise and leadership.

Formerly known as North Connaught Youth and Community Services, Youth Work Ireland North Connaught is a regional youth service providing services in Sligo, Leitrim and Mayo. Founded in the 1960s under the name Sligo Federation of Youth Clubs, Youth Work Ireland North Connaught is affiliated to Youth Work Ireland and like it, supports the development of young people in becoming resilient and responsible people who can take control of their own life while contributing to their communities and to general society. Youth Work Ireland North Connaught works across the counties in partnership with young people, volunteers, communities, service providers and state funders. They are 'committed to pioneering and sustaining quality young work which maximised the potential of that young person' (www.youthworkireland.ie). Programmes offered are evidenced-based and both universal and targeted in nature.

Both organisations have a long-standing commitment in the youth and community sectors and they both have significant experience working in these areas. The YESS Project and the New Beginnings project benefited greatly by having such organisations managing them, not only because of this experience but also because of the wide range of supports and resources to which they had access.

The IFI have also vast experience working in these communities. Their experience with cross-border partnering allowed both projects to learn from them and this was enhanced by the connections with other PYDP cross-border projects. This knowledge, experience and infrastructure aligned with two established youth service providers, showed to be a very effective and beneficial partnership when re-engaging young people.

YESS (Youth Employment South Sligo) Project – Overview

Funded by the IFI and led by Foróige, the YESS Project was launched in 2016. The project sought to work with 16-25 year olds who were not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The project supported 34 young people throughout its duration. The area it serviced included south of Sligo town, Tubbercurry and Ballymote. The needs of the young people that the project supported included high levels of disadvantage, early school leaving, mental health challenges, at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour, adverse family circumstances, in receipt of a social welfare payment / unemployed or not in any form of training or education, and substance misuse challenges. The area it sought to service also had concerns and high levels of need, with male unemployment rates three times higher than that of the county's average.

The aim of the project was to support individuals to take better control of their lives by exploring and progressing in four key areas of their lives. These were:

- Good Relations
- Cultural identity
- Personal development
- Employment opportunities

In line with the IFI funding criteria, the YESS Project delivered and facilitated accredited and non-accredited training to young people based on the wants and needs of each individual. Through an individualised, tailor-made programme of activities that included emotional and social support, the project supported young people through a wide range of accredited and non-accredited programmes and courses. Below are examples of the types of accredited and non-accredited programmes young people were supported through as part of the YESS Project:

Accredited training programmes included:

- o OCN Level One and Two Good Relations Training
- o Customer Service
- o Healthy Diet Planning
- o Manual Handling
- o First Aid
- o HACCP Food Safety
- o CBT in Anxiety and Depression
- o Introduction to the Theory of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- o Leaving Certificate
- o Science of Wellbeing
- o Nutrition and Wellbeing

QQI Accredited training included (online and offline):

- o Level 4 Computers
- o Level 5 Special Needs
- o Level 5 and 6 Early Childhood Care and Education
- o Level 5 E-Business
- o Level 5 Nursing
- o Level 5 Healthcare Assistant
- o Level 5 Care Skills

- o Level 6 Child Psychology
- o Level 5 Palliative Care
- o Level 5 Healthcare Assistant with Disability Support
- o Level 5 Social Care
- o Level 8 Social Care Practice

Non-accredited training included:

- o Skills to succeed
- o Driving Lessons
- o Driver Theory Test
- o History - Gulf War
- o Personal Confidence and Self-Esteem
- o Starting Out Training for Youth Group Leaders
- o Leadership For Life

The project was supported by a steering committee and worked with several referral and support agencies to provide the best possible support for young people in South Sligo. These agencies include Foróige services, Garda Youth Diversion Project, Simon Community, Sligo Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service, Tusla, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB, St. Attracta's Community School, Tubbercurry Family Resource Centre, National Learning Network, Sligo Community Training Centre, Sligo LEADER Partnership, Youthreach, Education and Welfare and Sligo City School Completion Programme. The original YESS Project, which operated in South Sligo, ended in early 2021. However, further funding was subsequently allocated by the IFI and, from March 2021, the project closed in South Sligo and operated in Sligo town.

The New Beginnings Project (Leitrim) – Overview

The New Beginnings Project was launched in 2017 and led by Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. A youth development programme, it targeted 16-25-year-old living in county Leitrim. The project had the capacity to support 16 participants.

The profile of the young people that the project set out to support included early school leavers, those involved in or at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour and those in receipt of a social welfare payment. The needs in the area it sought to service included high levels of unemployment and high levels of social isolation.

The four main objectives for the project were as follows:

- Objective 1: The project will target young people that are vulnerable to polarisation and recruitment to organisations opposed to the peace process with personal development support through a multi-tiered programme.
- Objective 2: The project will seek to promote economic prosperity by increasing the skills base and future employment options of community members.
- Objective 3: The project will seek to enhance a greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between the two communities.
- Objective 4: The project will promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity between communities, thereby reducing sectarianism.

The aims of the project were as follows:

1. To help young people build and develop life skills that foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and that help them to become more employable.
2. To help young people build and develop life skills and resilience using an 'asset-based' perspective.
3. To promote confidence in the target group by developing increased social, literacy and numeracy skills.

The project offered a range of supports including one-to-one mentoring and support for young people in the NEETs target group. Depending on the needs of the young person, the project aimed to provide practical and emotional support tailored specifically to that young person to help them to improve learning, life skills and employment opportunities. Young people who participated had the opportunity to avail of and complete accredited and non-accredited training. These included:

Accredited training and QQI accredited programmes included:

- o OCN Level One and Two Good Relations Training
- o QQI Level 4 Construction Groundwork Skills – included Safe Pass certification and manual handling training.
- o QQI Level 3 Hairdressing
- o Veterinary Assistance Course

Non-accredited training included:

- o The Decider Skills (mental health support programme)
- o Copping-on programme (criminal and anti-social behaviour programme)
- o Youth Employability Programme – this included identify goals, completing career aptitude tests, identifying skills and qualities, career research skills, CV writing skills, job application skills, interview skills.
- o Putting the Pieces Together (alcohol and drug programme)
- o Social Light (risk assessment while socialising)
- o Mindfulness and stress management
- o Life Skills Support Planning (budgeting, cooking, cleaning)
- o Self-esteem and self-confidence
- o Art classes (portfolio building)
- o Empowerment Plus (a healthy social media workshop)
- o Driver Theory Test
- o Full license Driving Test

The project worked alongside several other agencies to identify potential programme participants. The New Beginnings Project had a steering committee that supported and guided the PYDP worker and together they sought to raise the profile of the programme within the Leitrim. Organisations involved in this project included Tusla, Probation Services, Garda Youth Diversion Project, Leitrim Youth Project and Leitrim Development Company. Other organisations that the project worked closely with included Leitrim Community Training Centre, National Learning Network, Department of Social Protection, local post-primary schools, Mohill Family Support Centre, Bee Park Community Centre, Leitrim County Council, An Garda Síochána Juvenile Liaison Officer and Sligo Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service.

SECTION 4: AREA PROFILE AND NEED

Demographic Profile of Sligo and Leitrim

Sligo / Leitrim combined

Sligo-Leitrim is a four-seat joint voting constituency. It comprises of the entire counties of Sligo and Leitrim and some Electoral Divisions (EDs) in counties Donegal and Cavan. Sligo-Leitrim is comprised of 178 Electoral Divisions (EDs). The population of the constituency at the time of the 2016 Census was 113,920. In Sligo-Leitrim, 24.6% of population was aged under 18 and 16.8% were aged 65 or over in 2016. Of the 113,920 people living in the constituency, 13,930 of these are aged between 15 and 24 years old. This equates to just over 8% of the combined population. See breakdown of population and sex in Table 4.1.

The summary population figures for counties Sligo and Leitrim is shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Summary population of Sligo and Leitrim

| County | Male | Female | Totals |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Sligo | 32,365 | 33,170 | 65,535 |
| Leitrim | 16,064 | 15,980 | 32,044 |
| Totals | 48,429 | 49,150 | 97,579 |

Data source: CSO (Census 2016)

Nationality, Ethnicity and Religion

The nationality of those residing in Sligo and Leitrim includes 88.9% Irish, 3.6% British, 2.3% Polish, 0.5% Lithuanian, 1.8% other EU countries. White Irish is the most common ethnicity, with 86% of the population stating this on the census. 0.6% of the population are from the Traveller community, 0.6% of the population are Black or Black Irish, 1.3% are Asian or Asian Irish, 8.3% are from other white ethnic backgrounds that are not Irish. 81.8% of the population are Catholic. 8.2% of the population are from other religious background, while 7.9% of the population have stated that they have no religion.

Labour Force and Education Levels

From a labour force perspective, 49.8% of the population are at work. The State average according to the CSO (2016) is 53.5%. 7% of the combined population of Sligo and Leitrim are professional workers, 26.9% work in managerial and technical positions, 14.6% of people work in skilled-manual roles, 18.4% work in non-manual roles, 11.1% work in semi-skills roles, 3.2% of people work in unskilled roles and 18.7% work in all other roles (CSO, 2016). At the point of the census, 0.8% of the population were looking for a job and 7.6% were unemployed having lost or given up previous job. This was higher than the state average of 7.1% according to the census. 10.9% of the population were students, 7.4% were either looking after the home or family, 18.1% were retired and 5% were unable to work due to sickness or disability. 25.1% of the population have achieved a level of education at

third level and above, 21.1% at intermediate level, 33.4% at secondary level and 14.1% of those who have completed their education did so at primary level. Over a third of the population completed their education aged 15-20 years old (38.5%) and 6% finished education under 15 years of age.

Family

In Sligo-Leitrim, there are 29,189 family units. 12.8% of these units were described as 'empty nests' according to census data, 12.3% stated they were retired, 7.3% were at 'pre-family' stages, and 13% of households had adolescent teenagers. 22.7% of families have two children and 27.22% of families have one child. In total, 19,734 of these family units have children. 14,771 (74.9%) of these families were couples with children and 4,963 (25.1%) were one-parent families. This means that one in four children are from one parent families.

House Ownership

42.8% of the household own their own home outright, in comparison to the State where only 36% own their own homes. People availing of local authority housing is slightly higher in Sligo-Leitrim than for the rest of the state (8.7% in comparison to 8.4%). 15.7% of households rent from private landlords. Access to a computer and the internet is lower than the state average. Only 66.9% of people have access to a computer in the constituency and 75% of people have access to the internet. Travel to work, school etc. varies for the population. 40.9% of people commute in under 15 minutes, for 28.8% it takes 15-30 minutes, for 13.8% it takes 45 minutes, for 3.7% it takes 45-60 minutes, for 3.2% it takes 60-90 minutes, 2.1% 90 minutes and over, and 7.6% did not state. 70% of this population have to travel by car. Only 11.1% can go by foot and 1% by bicycle. 8.8% use public transport. 3.9% work from home (pre-pandemic figures).

Poverty

According to the Pobal HP Deprivation Indices (2016), both Sligo and Leitrim are below the national average in terms of wealth:

- The deprivation indices rate for the state is 0.6%.
- Sligo is marginally below the average at 1.6%, while Leitrim is -3.2% below. The poverty rates in the combined county are higher the national average.
- 23.7% of the population are 'at risk of poverty' (State 16.5%)
- 25.9% of the population suffer some form of deprivation (State 21%)
- 13.4% of the population are in 'consistent poverty' (State 8.3%).

These figures show that one in four people in the Sligo-Leitrim area deprived in some way, one in four people are at risk of poverty and just over one in ten of the population are in consistent poverty. While the counties both have a worrying number of people at risk of or in poverty, those on the Live Register has been decreasing since 2018. This improvement has been seen more in Sligo, with 750 people less on the register between April 2018 and April 2021, in comparison to a 230 decrease in Leitrim.

Table 4.2: Sligo and Leitrim Live Register rates for whole populations

| | April 2021 | April 2020 | April 2019 | April 2018 |
|---------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Sligo | 2,096 | 2,682 | 2,443 | 2,847 |
| Leitrim | 1,445 | 1,573 | 1,581 | 1,675 |

Demographic Profile of 16-24 Year Olds in Sligo / Leitrim

Age and sex of young people in Sligo and Leitrim (aged 16-24)

Table 4.3: Sligo and Leitrim – Summary population aged 16-24

| Indicator | Sligo | Leitrim | Combined |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Population of young people aged 16-17 | 1781 | 876 | 2,657 |
| Population of young people aged 18-24 | 2,691 | 2,678 | 5,369 |
| Totals | 4,472 | 3,554 | 8,026 |

Data source: CSO (Census 2016)

Table 4.4: Sligo – Breakdown of ages, 16-24 year olds

| Age | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| 16 | 470 | 383 | 853 |
| 17 | 481 | 447 | 928 |
| 18 | 474 | 427 | 901 |
| 19 | 421 | 450 | 871 |
| 20-24 | 1796 | 1801 | 3597 |
| Totals | 3,642 | 3,508 | 7150 |

Data source: CSO (Census 2016)

Table 4.5: Leitrim – Breakdown of ages, 16-24 year olds

| Age | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 16 | 204 | 231 | 435 |
| 17 | 237 | 204 | 441 |
| 18 | 194 | 165 | 359 |
| 19 | 134 | 123 | 257 |
| 20-24 | 662 | 631 | 1,293 |
| Totals | 1,431 | 1,354 | 2,785 |

Data source: CSO (Census 2016)

Post-primary education

Retention rates up to Leaving Certificate in both counties are higher than the national average according to the latest Department of Education (2021) figures. Sligo has remained 2% over the average for at least five years, while Leitrim has been over the national average twice in this duration

and below it from 2015-2017. 10% of the school population in Sligo and 9.4% in Leitrim were absent from school at some point during 2017/2018. In 2016/2017, 5% of the Sligo school population were absent at some point with, 9.1% of this figure absent for more than 20 days. The tables below show both retention and attendance data.

Table 4.6: Sligo and Leitrim School Retention Rates

| Leaving Cert Year | Sligo | Leitrim | National |
|-------------------|--------|---------|----------|
| 2019-2020 | 92.9% | 93.2% | 91.5% |
| 2018-2019 | 93.3% | 91.9% | 91.2% |
| 2017-2018 | 93.5% | 92.2% | 91.5% |
| 2016-2017 | 93.8% | 89.5% | 91.6% |
| 2015-2016 | 93.8% | 91.06% | 91.2% |
| 2014-2015 | 91.07% | 90.01% | 90.2% |

Data source: Department of Education (2015-2020)

Table 4.7: Sligo and Leitrim – School Absentees for 2017/2018

| Absentee Type | Sligo | Leitrim | Connaught |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Mean % absences | 509 of 5,067 students (10%) | 263 of 2,795 students (9.4%) | 3,980 of 43,639 students |
| Mean % abs. 20-day absences | 1.2% | 0.6% | - |

Data source: Tusla (2018)

Table 4.8: Sligo and Leitrim – School Absentees for 2016/2017

| Absentee Type | Sligo | Leitrim | Connaught |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|-----------|
| Mean% absences | 5% | 4.7% | 5.3% |
| Mean % abs. 20-day absences | 9.1% | 6.4% | 9.2% |
| Mean % expulsions | 0% | 0% | 0.01% |
| Mean % suspensions | 0.11% | 0.01% | 0.19% |

Data source: Tusla (2017)

Young People on the Live Register / Unemployed

Sligo has 2,414 young people aged 18-24 and Leitrim has 1,909 on the Live Register and therefore assumed unemployed. Combined they have 4,323 according to the CSO census (2016). The tables below show the number of young people on the Live Register as of April 2021. One in ten young people in the area were on the Live Register, meaning that they are assumed out of work / unemployed. Finding the exact number of this group who are not engaged in any service or employment is very difficult, as there is no statutory radar which picks this up for the target group of 16-24 year olds.

Table 4.9: Under 25 year olds on the Live Register for Sligo and Leitrim (ages 18-24)

| | April 2021 | April 2020 | April 2019 | April 2018 |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Sligo: | | | | |
| Female | 114 | 175 | 113 | 155 |
| Male | 170 | 212 | 186 | 219 |
| Total | 284 | 387 | 299 | 374 |
| Leitrim: | | | | |
| Female | 58 | 63 | 57 | 71 |
| Male | 84 | 106 | 99 | 116 |
| Total | 142 | 169 | 156 | 187 |
| Combined: | | | | |
| Female | 172 | 238 | 170 | 226 |
| Male | 254 | 318 | 285 | 335 |
| Total | 426 | 556 | 455 | 561 |

Data source: CSO (Live Register)

While many young people in Sligo and Leitrim are performing well, with some of the highest retention rates for Leaving Certificate in the country, 170 of the 1,150 young males in the county are on the Live Register as of September 2021. For females in Sligo, 114 of 1,264 are on the Live Register. This shows that males in Sligo require further support to attain better outcomes for themselves and their communities. In Leitrim, 84 young males aged 18-24 are on the Live Register out of 990 of the general population of this group. 58 young females out of 919 are on the Live Register. While all figures in 2021 are lower than the three years previous, an estimated one in ten young people on the Live Register is a concern for both counties. It emphasises the need for services which supports these 16-18/ 18-24 groups, both personally and vocationally.



SECTION 5: IN BRIEF: EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN IRELAND

Nationally

The Department of Education has responsibility for primary and post-primary education in Ireland, with a stated mission to facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development. The Department has set out the following five goals:

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners.
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs.
3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve.
4. Build stronger bridges between education and the wider community.
5. Improve national planning and support services.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for policy, funding and governance of the Higher and Further Education and research sectors and for the oversight of the work of the State agencies and public institutions operating in those areas. The Department's stated role is to make sure that these sectors support and encourage Ireland's social and economic development and to make sure that public investment and policy in these areas give opportunities to everyone, including the most vulnerable in society.

Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB

Established in 2013 under the Education and Training Boards Act, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities which manage and have the responsibility locally for education, training and youth work. They manage and operate a wide range of education and training services including second level schools, further education colleges, training centres, multi-faith national schools and adult education centres throughout the country. Covering the three counties of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, MSLETB provides services to around 30,000 students and learners. The vision of the MSLETB is to be:

"A dynamic Education and Training Board providing a positive experience for all its learners in a professional, caring and collaborative education and training environment."
(www.msletb.ie)

The mission of MSLETB is to:

"Provide those in our communities with opportunities for life and living."
(www.msletb.ie)

As stated on the MSLETB website:

"Our core values of quality, professionalism, collaboration and pro-activeness underpin the work of MSLETB and relate to the work of the organisation with learners, staff and community. Alongside each of these values, corresponding behaviours have been mapped, outlining how we put the values in to effect."

(www.msletb.ie)

Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has ten levels of qualifications, which can be obtained via a wide range of educational institutions. In accordance with the NFQ, completing the Junior Cycle allows the student to obtain a Level 3 qualification. Completing the Senior Cycle would give the pupils a Level 4 or 5 qualification, depending on the number of higher-level subjects taken.

Post-primary education is typically a six-year cycle split into two halves. The Senior Cycle can be either 2-3 years depending on whether or not a pupil does Transition Year.

Students have three options within the school setting when choosing a route to certification. These include:

- Leaving Certificate (traditional)
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
- The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The traditional Leaving Certificate is the most final examination of post-primary education. Syllabuses are available in more than 30 subjects and students are required to take at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish unless an exemption is in place. The LCVP is similar to the traditional Leaving Certificate Programme, with a concentration on technical subjects and some additional modules which have a vocational focus. The LCA Programme is a self-contained two-year course, intended to meet the needs of those students who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate programmes. It is a person-centred course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject based structure. Like the Junior Cycle, subjects come under six headings. Students must sit a minimum of five exams to attain certification.

Early Intervention Practice and Strategy for Young People at Risk of Early Leaving School

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, set up in 2014, is an independent legal entity comprised of what were previously the HSE's Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board. It incorporates psychosocial services and offers support in other areas which involve children and families. Tusla is the national agency with the role of ensuring that every child attends school regularly or receives appropriate education through home-schooling or otherwise. Education is compulsory in Ireland and parents must ensure that their children from the age of 6 to the age of 16 attend a recognised school or receive a certain minimum education. However, there is no absolute legal obligation on children to attend school nor on their parents to send them to school. In carrying out its role in this regard, Tusla's emphasis is on helping families,

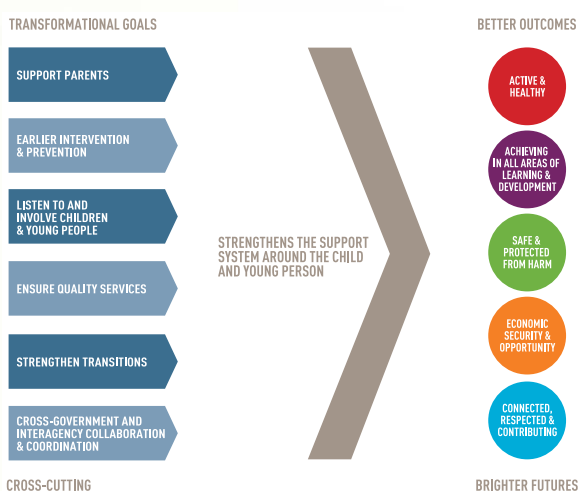
children and, schools rather than simply imposing penalties for non-attendance in school. The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) is the designated person at a local level to provide support and advocacy for the children and young people. They are the first point of call when absence is becoming a challenge for a child or young person's education or when challenges arise which may result in a child or young person not receiving an adequate education.

Currently, two main frameworks govern early intervention methods in Ireland for the period 2014-2020. In 2014, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2012-2020) was launched by what was then the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as the first national, cross-government policy framework for children and young people. The policy applies to all children and young people up to age 24 years. Five national outcomes were outlined in this framework, as illustrated below.

Figure 5.1: Five National Outcomes for Children and Young People

BETTER OUTCOMES: BRIGHTER FUTURES

THE NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 2014-2020



In relation to learning and development, an emphasis was placed on the role of prevention and early intervention to improve outcomes for children and young people. The framework also highlighted the importance of "educational transitions for children and young people and the need to strengthen transitions throughout the education system through methods such as consistency in curricular approaches and the use of peer mentoring initiatives". The National Youth Strategy (2015-2020), and the Framework for Children and Young People, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014-2020) reinforce the needs to strengthen methods used for transition in education throughout the system. It places an emphasis on the need for greater cooperation between formal and informal learning sectors with the aim of supporting people at risk of educational disadvantage and early school-leaving and enhancing employability and entrepreneurship.

The School Completion Programme (SCP) was set up as part of the Department of Education and Skills DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Strategy. An early intervention initiative, it seeks to:

"Increase the number of young people staying in primary and second level school, and in doing so improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or the equivalent. SCP work focuses on targeting and providing supports to young people identified to be at risk of early school leaving"
(Tusla)

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched by the then Department of Education and Skills in 2005. The plan focuses on children and young people from disadvantaged communities from pre-school through post-primary school. At primary level in 2016/2017, the DEIS programme funded additional supports in 640 schools. At second level, 185 schools received extra resources.

Alternatives to Post-Primary Education

Youthreach was launched in Ireland in 1988 as a two-year programme of education, training and work experience for unqualified early school-leavers in the 15-18 years age group. Initially, it was a temporary and experimental plan but has since grown to over 100 centres throughout the country. Young people have the opportunity to complete second level education in a student-focused environment. Class sizes are smaller than in mainstream schools, one-to-one support is offered if the need arises, and work takes place at a pace to suits students' needs. There is a Youthreach centre in Sligo town, and also in Mohill, Co. Leitrim, both operated by MSLETB.

The Youthreach programme is generally considered to be a model of educational reintegration (Cedefop, 2010; Nevala and Hawley, 2011). However, it could also be thought of as a prevention and intervention measure. Its purpose is to keep young people in education. Youthreach is comprehended as a further education training programme but in many respects, it is more like an alternative form of post-primary education. According to the Department of Education, in 2014, 795 young people moved directly from mainstream to training centres with over half of the entry cohort retaining a Leaving Certificate Applied or a QQI Level 4, which represents an upper secondary qualification. For young people who leave mainstream school early, of those who go on to achieve upper secondary education or higher, 60% do so through a vocational education training-oriented programme (European Commission, 2014). If Youthreach learners can successfully arrive at the same place as their secondary school peers, the issue is less about early school leaving and more about early leaving from education (McHugh, 2014).

Community Training Centres (CTCs) provide integrated education, training and work experience to young people aged between 16 and 21 years who have left school with incomplete or no formal qualifications. Centres have been set up with the needs of the early school leaver and the young unemployed person in mind, with services delivered in a friendly and informal manner. They provide a fresh opportunity for young persons to attain nationally recognised certification at their own pace and with the assistance of supportive staff. Learners attend for a maximum period of two years and during this time, will participate in personal, social and vocational skills training leading to major awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. Wholly funded by MSLETB, CTCs operate in Sligo town and in Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim.

Programmes such as Youthreach and Community Training Centres offer young people the extra support they require. Emotional and academic help is provided to give young people the opportunity to explore who they are and what they want from their life.

SECTION 6: YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEETS)

The dramatic changes in the world over the past two decades with regard to technology, globalisation and deindustrialisation has meant that unemployed young people are facing a very different labour market to that of other generations (Sissons and Jones, 2012; Powers et al., 2015 - SICAP). According to the Central Statistics Office publication, 'Measuring Ireland's Progress' (2018), just over one in eight (12.6%) of those aged 18-24 in Ireland in 2017 was neither in employment nor in education and training (the NEET rate). The EU28 average NEET rate was 13.7% and varied from a low of 5.4% in the Netherlands to 24.9% in Italy (CSO, 2018). The most recent OCED statistics of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) for the period 2016-2019 show that 7% of young males in Ireland aged 15-19 and 5.6% of females were NEET from this age category. Figures for 20-24 year olds are show in the table below.

Table 6.1 % of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Ireland

| Age | Male % | Female % |
|-------|--------|----------|
| 15-19 | 7.1 | 5.6 |
| 20-24 | 13.3 | 12.6 |

Data source (OCED, 2021)

According to Pobal (2017), there was 170 young people not in employment, education or training in Sligo and 110 in Leitrim. Using data from the CSO (2016), Sligo has 2,884 young people aged 16-24. Leitrim has 2,785 young people ages 16-24. In Sligo one in 16 young people are NEET and in Leitrim one in 25 are in the NEET category according to these statistics. This equates to 1-2 young people in every school class who are not engaged in employment, education or training after they leave mainstream school. In some cases, these young people are engaged in other services such as mental health services or youth justice services, making it easier to identify and support their needs but, for others, they are not engaged in anything at all and so may go completely unnoticed.

Origins of the NEET Indicator

Traditionally, when looking at the labour market, young people were not always accounted for as a distinct need group. The transition from school to work was usually seen as a step-by-step process that was pretty straight forward.

"It is now recognised that such linear transitions are increasingly being replaced by diversified and individualised trajectories from school to work. Modern youth transitions tend to be complex and protracted, with young people moving frequently in and out of the labour force. They may involve backtracking and blending of statuses – especially in times of economic turbulence."
(Eurofound, 2012)

The need for an additional indicator to capture young people who were not in employment, education or training was first seen in the UK in the late 1980s. According to Furlong (2007), this was mainly due to changes in the UK benefit regime, which left most of those aged 16-18 years without access to unemployment benefits. In the 1990s, the term Status Zero was used in a piece of re-

search carried out by Istance et al. (1994) to describe this group of young people aged 16-18 who were not in employment, education or training. The term was subsequently changed as it implied that these young people had no status. While it was adopted to describe a set of indicators for this group and not necessarily developed as a term to define the group, it may have been an indication of how society viewed young people in this group at the time.

In Ireland, there is no state monitoring system for this 16-18 or 18-25 year old cohort and, while retention rates to Leaving Certificate are increasing, there is a group of early school leavers and young people who fall through the cracks. However, a focus on this group has become more evident throughout policy in Ireland over the past ten years.

In 2010, the Employment Committee (EMCO) and its Indicators Group (European Commission DG EMPL) agreed on a definition and methodology for a standardised indicator for measuring the size of the NEET population among EU member states. It was agreed to define NEET as young people who were 'neither in employment nor in any education nor training' (European Commission, 2011a). This includes young people aged 15-24 years who are unemployed or inactive, as per the International Labour Organization definition, as well as those who are not in any education or training. The definition was then implemented by Eurostat and the indicator is used in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy. The NEET indicator was designed to measure young people (aged 15-24, or aged 15-29 in some countries) who, for a variety of reasons, were not "accumulating human capital through formal channels such as participation in the labour market or in education" (Eurofound, 2016).

The use of NEET as a term and/or category has been criticised for being too heterogeneous or, in some instances, for being used to stigmatise (Maguire, 2015). The terminology used within policy could also be reviewed with regard to people in society are seen. The term 'human capital' is used in policy and it suggests that an individual's 'worth' is based on the degree of engagement in the education system or the labour market. However, to attempt to intervene and support young people, an indicator and description is required in order to meet the particular needs of this very specific group of young people.

Characteristics of NEETs

To find out how many young people are in this NEET cohort in Ireland is very difficult. Identifying this group is where the challenge lies, which may be a result of the particular statistics that Ireland places emphasis on as a country and as a member of the European Union. Statistics exist for those receiving welfare payments monthly, statistics exist for those who sat a Leaving Certificate yearly and for those who enter third level education, but there are no annual statistics for those who enter training centres or Youthreach, for those who officially and unofficially leave school early, for those in receipt of a social welfare payment due to physical or mental illness, those aged 16-25 in the criminal justice system or those suffering from addiction. Having insight such as this on an annual basis would be very beneficial in identifying young people from this cohort nationally and locally.

NEET is a category that contains a variety of subgroups, some of whom are vulnerable and some are not, with very different experiences, characteristics and needs (Eurofound, 2012). In 2012 Eurofound developed a set of characteristics as indicators for young people NEET. This was revised in 2016, as below:

- Re-entrants: Young people who will soon re-enter employment, education or training and will soon begin or resume accumulation of "human capital through formal channels" as they have already been hired or enrolled in education or training.
- Short-term unemployed: Young people who are unemployed, seeking work and available to start within two weeks, who have been unemployed for less than a year. This group was disaggregated given that short periods of unemployment can be considered normal and their level of vulnerability can be expected to be moderate.
- Long-term unemployed: Young people who are unemployed, seeking work and available to start within two weeks, and have been unemployed for more than a year. This category recognises that youth are at high risk of disengagement and social exclusion as longer-term unemployment can damage employability, human capital and future outcomes.
- Unavailable due to illness or disability: Young people who are not seeking employment or cannot work within two weeks due to illness or disability.
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities: Young people who are not seeking work or are not available to work because they are caring for children or have other family responsibilities. This category is a mix of the vulnerable and non-vulnerable, given the variety of potential issues, such as lack of affordable childcare or in-home care.
- Discouraged workers: Young people who have stopped looking for work because they believe that opportunities are not available. These are often vulnerable individuals at risk of social exclusion and are likely to have experienced poorer outcomes.
- Other inactive: This group is likely to be more heterogeneous, spanning a spectrum of vulnerability – the most vulnerable, the hard-to-reach or at risk of being deeply alienated, the most privileged, and those who are 'holding out' for a specific prospect or who are constructively engaged in alternative paths e.g. arts, music or self-directed learning.

As a category, NEETs are considered a powerful "tool to inform youth-oriented policies" and through which specific vulnerabilities of young people categorised as NEET can be better understood (Eurofound, 2016). As a tool it is also important in identifying individuals in this group. Young people NEET are not necessarily considered as unemployed young people, as this is usually a description used when describing young people who are looking for work but have not found a job. They are engaged in the job search and application process and, while they may not be receiving support from an agency, they usually have enough self-determinism and belief to follow through and obtain a job.

On the other hand, the NEET young person may not even have the capacity to look for work nor the training to get a job. They may not have any confidence or belief in themselves and so their self-determinism is low or non-existent. They may have suffered adverse effects growing up which has impacted their emotional and social wellbeing and which may have had a knock-on effect on their educational needs. They are usually not engaged with education, training or employment because something else is going on. It is not because they do not want to achieve, they may just not have the capacity to even begin. The NEETs rate can vary from the youth unemployment rate for this reason. It really is a very different set of needs that these young people struggle with and so they need a very specific type of support.

Complex Needs and Potential Barriers for Young People


Young people who are not engaged in education or in the labour force may also struggle in other parts of their lives and this linear line from school to work is just not an accessible route for them at that time. Having more adverse needs than the typical young person means that some young people do not have a linear life and their education and labour status can sometime reflect this fact. It is not until their life becomes more stable that they have the capacity to re-enter the education or training system or enter the labour force. A common misconception is that young people in this cohort are early school leavers, but this is not always the case. Some may have completed second level education but for whatever reason did not progress. Some may have continued on, but for a range of reasons may have dropped out of further or higher education. Such causal factors and the needs of this group are complex and so must be viewed at an individual level. Each young person has their own story, their own challenges, their own barriers and each young person must be supported as such.

When working with this group of young people, it is important to explore and understand the complex needs which they may face. While it is not always the case, family background, socio-economic status and generational education and employment patterns can contribute massively to barriers faced by young people. Research suggests that low parental education, unemployment and economic adversity increase the risk of young people becoming NEETs (Duckworth and Schoon 2012; Yates et al. 2011). Low parental education has also been linked with fractured transitions (Dorsett and Lucchino 2014). According to Kallio, Kauppinen and Erola (2016), family economic deprivation is associated with lower educational attainment and unemployment and dropping out of school has been shown to be transmitted across generations (Vauhkonen et al. 2017).

A study conducted in Spain of the NEETs cohort showed that socio-economic background can be a contributor to a young person disengaging to a point where they are not in employment, education or training. In a study sample which included 933 women and 893 men aged 18-35, few respondents aged 18–24 years had tertiary education (18.8% women and, respectively, 17.9% men). Most were single (93.5%) and with no caring responsibilities (over 78%) or children (over 97%). Just over 11% of both women and men in this age group were NEET (Vancea and Utzet, 2018). NEET respondents in the study aged 18-24 years presented with lower educational levels and more of them had immigrant origins, in comparison with their non-NEET counterparts. NEET men between 18 and 24 years were more likely to have at least one parent born outside Spain, though less likely to have both parents employed at age 14, compared with non-NEET men. Parents' expectations in terms of educational achievement of their children at age 14 tended also to be lower for NEET than for non-NEET men in this age group.

Pitkanen et al. (2019) carried out a longitudinal study in Finland of young people NEET and found socio-economic disadvantage in childhood was common among young people NEET. The results of the study suggest that parental socio-economic resources are more important than adverse childhood experiences for the educational and employment transitions of young adults. According to Pitkanen et al. (2019), supportive social policy for socio-economically disadvantaged families may smooth these transitions.

For some young people, what they have experienced to date can have a negative effect on their mental health. For other young people, the stress of life and the expectations placed on them may



be overwhelming and thus affect their mental health negatively. While challenges for young people's mental health are not a new phenomenon, the prevalence of negative mental health amongst this cohort is increasing dramatically, especially among young females. Between 2012 and 2016 there was a 26% increase in the number of referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The Health Research Board (2018) found that a higher number of girls were being admitted to in-patient psychiatric units (60% of all under-18 psychiatric admissions). A report by the OCED (2017) showed that, in Ireland, the depression rate amongst female early school leavers was 26%. This is the second highest in the OCED. The depression rates for male early school leavers for the same period was 21%. Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, reported that 39% of its users experienced anxiety, 31% reported low mood, 25% reported issues with stress, 17% reported sleep disturbances, 15% said they had difficulties with anger, 14.5% had mental health issue due to family problems, 12% said they had low self-esteem and self-criticised, while a further 15% had suicidal thoughts (Jigsaw Annual Report, 2017).

To date, the connection between mental health challenges and young people NEET has not been researched to a great extent. In Ireland, a study by Power et al., (2015) yielded compelling findings which suggest that mental health challenges are connected to young people NEET. The research found that NEETs were four times more likely than non-NEETs to have been diagnosed with a mental disorder during childhood or adolescents. They were three times more at risk of any mental health disorder than non-NEETs, and two times more at risk of anxiety disorders. Furthermore, independent of prior mental disorders, the risk of suicidal ideation is seven times higher amongst NEETs than non-NEETs. A recent report by the OCED (2017) showed that, in Ireland, the depression rate amongst female early school-leavers was 26%. This is the second highest in the OCED. The depression rates for male early school-leavers for the same period was 21%. These worrying findings suggest that mental health is a contributor to NEETs and it further identifies the complex needs amongst this group.

Studies show that the more engaged a young person is, the less likely they are to partake in risky behaviours such as drug use (Valkov, 2018; Henry and Huizinga, 2007; Lieras-Muney, 2005). Henry and Huizinga (2007) state that truancy, understood as intentional and unjustified absence from compulsory education, was associated with higher risk of initiating alcohol, marijuana and nicotine use among adolescents in cities and urban areas considered at risk. A longitudinal study in post-primary schools throughout Victoria, Australia (Bond et al. 2007) found that young people with a good social and school connectedness in their final year was a predictor of the best possible outcomes in later years. The disconnection and disengagement from education, employment and training can happen at school age and this is why early intervention is so crucial.

Valkov (2018), a Bulgarian researcher at the University of Trakia, carried out a literature review to determine whether substance use was a result of early school leaving, or if early school leaving was a contributor to substance use. Valkov found that dropping out of school was not the root of the problem but rather the end result of another process that started earlier, that of school disengagement. Disengagement begins if the young person is experiencing learning challenges or mental health issues which could result in substance use, which may lead to dropping out altogether, according to the study. A report published in 2010 by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs found alcohol use amongst young people did not differ much between early school leavers (90%) and mainstream students (88%). For cannabis use however, the difference is much more significant, with 57% of early school leavers trying cannabis in comparison to 24% of mainstream school-go-

ers. Where young people's use of other drugs was measured, the difference increased even further: 41% of early school leavers surveyed had tried other drugs including cocaine, amphetamines, psychedelics and heroin, in comparison to 11% of their counterparts in school.

It does appear that, as a consequence of mental health challenges, substance misuse and addiction can also be a challenge for some young people. Valkov (2018) found that substance use may be a result of mental health problems. Substance misuse has been connected to early school leaving for many years, while less research has been carried out with the NEET group and so the connection is still not yet clear. While NEET young people are not all necessarily early school leavers, it is important to explore the connection between risk behaviour and the disengagement from society or the community and from education or employment and the connection between disengagement and mental health problems, especially in a world where mental health challenges are on the rise for this age group.

Consequences of NEET

When looking at the consequences of NEETs, one can look first at the consequences on an individual level and how disengagement over a long period of time can affect the outcomes for that person. Secondly, one can explore the consequences on a societal level and how it affects the connectivity of its citizens, as well as how it effects the public purse. Some of these consequences have already been explored in the previous chapter but, overall, there it is multi-layered impact of even just one person not engaged in employment, education or training, affecting the individual, their families, their communities and society at large. It is for this reason that the more we can understand young people NEET, the more we can support them through both policy, application and delivery.

One of the major challenges on an individual level for this NEET cohort is that their lifetime earnings potential greatly decreases in comparison to those who continue along the mainstream path and remain engaged (Mawn et al., 2017; Carcillo, 2015; Eurofound, 2012). A growing concern for this group is the under-development of soft skills such as resilience, time management, communication and motivational skills. These skills are crucial for both employability prospects and education attainment and, while they may ordinarily be taken for granted, they cannot be assumed as a given when working with this NEETs group. By being outside of education, employment and training, these young people are less likely to develop these 'soft skills' (SICAP, 2017).

As can be seen with research carried out with early school leavers, being outside of employment, education or training can increase risk behaviour. Research shows that NEETs in particular are at risk of substance misuse, criminal activity and early or lone parenting (Eurofound, 2012; McGinnity et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2013). As with early school leaving, NEETs can also be correlated with challenges with mental health. O'Connor (2010) found that 90% of youth research participants agreed that being unemployed negatively had impacted their sense of wellbeing. The knock-on effect of this can impact not only them, but also their relationships, which can further deepen their sense of exclusion.

This is perhaps another reason why this NEET cohort are more complex to work with. The layers of barriers a young person NEET has to break down can be extensive and so requires a great deal of resources to truly assist in a way which will positively enhance life outcomes. However, the nature of exchequer funding does not always allow for the kind of intensive, prolonged work that is sometimes required.

The concerning number of young people NEET can be seen right across Europe. Currently in Europe, one in six young people aged 20-34 were not in employment, education or training in the EU, an increase of 1.2% since 2019 (Eurostat, 2021). The table below shows the figures for NEET young people in Ireland at present, according to the Eurostat (2021).

Table 6.2: % of NEET young people in Ireland aged 20-24 in 2021

| Sex | Percentage of young people aged 20-24 NEET |
|--------|--|
| Male | 14.2% |
| Female | 20.3% |
| Total | 17.2% |

Source: Eurostat (2021)

These figures, even allowing for the pandemic, are stark. According to the SICAP report (2017), taking account of additional welfare payments, increased healthcare costs and lost revenue from taxes, NEETs have a significant economic impact on society. In 2016, the OCED estimated that, in Ireland, this equated to 1% of GDP. The SICAP report (2017) is the main national resource which provides good practice guidance on how best to work with the NEETs group. When consulting with stakeholders of SICAP and its services, 18 themes were found. Theme 13 states that: "Enterprise supports were considered inappropriate for the vast majority of NEETs and needed substantial investment and supports when appropriate". To reduce the cost on the public purse, great investment is required to break down the barriers some of these young people have in the way of their progression. It also requires further investment in earlier intervention and NEET-reduction approaches for those especially at risk of becoming long-term NEET.

A gap exists for young people aged 16 to 18 who are on the verge of becoming NEET. In the eyes of the law, they are still a child but once they leave the school system at 16, no statutory body is accountable for their engagement, unlike for those under 16 or those over 18 years of age. This represents a significant gap in statutory provision. At 16, young people are not entitled to state benefits so can go under the radar without being noticed. Having a service to support this particular cohort around this time in their life may be the difference in becoming long-term NEET and such young people reaching their full potential. In the context of the IFI, such young people who fall through the net are more likely to become involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour, as well as subversive or dissident activity. A national approach to this challenge is required. Until then, projects like the YESS Project and New Beginnings funded through bodies such as the IFI can seek to fill this gap in some way.



SECTION 7: EFFECTIVE WAYS OF WORKING WITH NEETS: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LESSONS

As can be seen in the previous section, the consequence of being NEET can be detrimental to a young person's later life. Much of the research over the past two decades has explored how best to re-engage young people back into employment, education or training while trying to minimise the amount of time between 'dropping out' and such re-engagement.

To explore good practice and what works best with this cohort, several significant pieces of re-search will be reviewed from the UK, the USA and the Nordic countries. Approaches include:

- Evaluation of two pilot interventions (e.g. The Activity Agreement Pilot) as conducted by the UK Department of Education in 2010.
- Review as conducted by the Centre of Excellence and Outcomes in the UK by Nelson (2011), entitled 'Strategies to re-engage young people not in employment, education or training'.
- Review of practice in the Nordic countries, conducted by Karlsdottir et al. (2019) on behalf of Nordregio, entitled 'Enabling vulnerable youth in rural areas not in employment, education or training'. This includes Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland.
- Pobal / SICAP report conducted by Gardner et al., (2017), entitled 'Kickboxing, kindness and going the extra mile: Good practice for working with NEETs under SICAP'.

Ireland

In Ireland according to the latest figures as cited in the previous section, 7% of young males aged 15-19 are NEET while 5.6% of females in this age category are NEET. 13.3% of males and 12.5% of females aged 20-24 are NEET. These statistics are concerning and, because of this concern, the way in which services work with this NEET group is changing in Ireland. Up to 2017, there was no singular document relating to NEETs dealing with good practice and effective ways of engaging and working specifically with this group. The Pobal (2017) document 'Kickboxing, kindness and going the extra mile – Good practice for working with NEETs under SICAP', is a comprehensive report based on the findings from consultations with stakeholders. The report found 11 emerging approaches which have shown to deliver good outcomes and 18 themes which were found to be effective when engaging and working with this group on the ground, when working through a partnership approach and at an organisational level. The themes identified are as follows:

1. Undertake a formal needs analysis for the area the programme seeks to service

Efforts to ascertain specific local needs, barriers, potential partners, and compositions of NEET populations are critical to the foundation of programme development (European Commission (a), 2016). Engaging a third party such as ETBs as well as potential employers can help align market opportunities and support development systems (Levels et al., 2014; Kelly & McGuinness, 2014).

2. Have structures in place to ensure good information management

These systems need to be robust as they help to ensure good planning and programming.

They should be viewed as a tool to evaluate needs and to monitor and record progress and outcomes (Carcillo, 2015; Gupta et al., 2016).

3. Have skilled and engaged staff

The importance of staff and their ability to engage and build trusting, respectful relationships with NEETs is considered to be at the root of success with this group (Pierce, 2009; Gupta et al., 2016). Several personal skills as well as higher education qualifications and the experience of project staff were cited in the SICAP report (2017) which are shown to increase the effectiveness of the programme. These include

- 'Cultural competence'
- Capacity to use a range of work approaches and models to change behaviours
- Creative problemsolving, critical thinking, and ability to actively listen
- Excellence at organising, managing and completing multiple complex projects and tasks simultaneously with thoroughness, accuracy, timeliness and good humour
- High levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and grit
- Life experience and/or overcoming personal struggle.

Research has also shown that investment in staff professional development can have a positive knock-on effect on the project (Peirce, 2009; Eurofound, 2015).

4. Engage young people in the programme design

In the 2015 report, Eurofound emphasised the need for young people to actively participate in both design and implementation, citing it as a critical success factor in many programmes across Europe. Research has also shown that involving young people in programme design, evaluation and adaptation benefits in regard to reaching the intended group, while also helping them building capacity for non-cognitive skills (Mason et al., 2013; Head, 2011).

5. Use an individualised approach of support for young person that they co-design

Within a core programme framework, individualised development plans that are co-designed with participants are a key component to increased likelihood of continued engagement and of individuals sustaining improvements in the longer term (Patton, 2011). The European Commission (2016) note that "workshops, peer to peer support, mentoring, advocacy, counselling and guidance delivered by specially trained professionals who empower young people to make informed choices" can be used in combination in these plans for the greatest results.

6. Intensive supports are more likely to be successful in regard to positive outcomes for that young person NEET

(Mawn et al. 2017) than 'low-intensity short-term interventions like job search assistance (Carcillo, 2015). Measures designed to reduce NEET figures require approaches that encompass prevention, re-engagement of the most challenged and hardest to reach, as well as active labour market policies for the young unemployed (SICAP Report, 2017). Roca, a NEET programme working with high-risk youth in Massachusetts is stated in the SICAP Report as a programme which has shown to have great success with this group. The programme uses a high-risk intervention model targeting disengaged young people. The programme is run over four years, with two years of intensive programming and two years of less intensive follow-up and support (Peirce, 2009).

7. Joint approach with good interagency co-ordination (including engagement with employers)

The SICAP Report reviewed several pieces of research (Advocates for Youth, 2005; Brunello & Schlotter, 2011; Devlin, 2015; European Commission (a), 2016; O'Reilly, 2015; Third Sector Capital Partners, 2013) and found the following good practice factors for greatest success:

- Close collaboration with all stakeholders (including employers and NEETs)
- Formalised by agreement and working processes when appropriate
- Specifically identified roles and responsibilities of stakeholders based on strengths
- Information and data sharing agreements
- Supported and incentivised partnership work.

Research carried out with Roca in Massachusetts showed how joint collaboration can work when carried out correctly. According to Wheeler (2006), staff were directed and evaluated on their ability to create layers of relationships amongst partner organisations. The programme invested a significant amount in resources to building and formalising multiple pathways into and between agencies. In many ways, the time spent on this is what made the programme successful.

8. The programme needs to be flexible

Research carried out in Ballymun, Dublin evaluating a pilot programme working with the NEETs cohort found that there is a vital need for effective research to inform the organisation's understanding of NEETs and their needs in order to direct resource allocation and staff capacity building (O'Reilly, 2015). The research found that there is a need to be flexible around how the young person engaged and, by knowing the needs of the group, the project will know the barriers which may prevent them from engaging and so can provide better support. Disengagement after being re-engaged is commonplace and it is for this reason that the programme needs to be flexible in its approach.

Approaches where a young person can re-engage multiple times have shown good results because, for some young people, having to attend constantly is a barrier until they have the capacity to fully participate. The @LIKE project working with NEETs in California acknowledged that this group of young people often had periods of engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement and so the programme needed to remove unnecessary barriers to re-engaging participants after periods of absence (Gupta et al., 2016).

9. Use targeted outreach and media campaigns

Inventive and comprehensive approaches to outreach are critical for NEETs, just as they are for potential partner agencies, employers and other stakeholders (Devlin, 2015). Gupta et al. (2016) found that during the evaluation of @LIKE programme that they employed a 'feet on the ground' recruitment and engagement strategy that included visiting non-traditional locations, such as tattoo parlours. @LIKE also had two dedicated staff roles to consistently engage and remove barriers for participants (Gupta et al., 2016). Eurofound (2015) suggest that 'a key approach to inclusion is to simplify access and bureaucratic procedures.' The Roca programme had a core component to outreach which led to the success of it. 'Relentless outreach and follow-up' were at the core of their outreach strategy. Roca staff were trained to anticipate failures to engage as part of the process that can be overcome by persistence (SICAP Report, 2017).

10. See the benefits of non-cognitive development and works on it with young person

Non-cognitive skills are just as important cognitive ability skills (Carcillo, 2015; Brunello & Schlotter, 2011). According to Mawn et al. (2017), the involvement of a behavioural change expert should be considered when designing programmes. A key component to the @LIKE programme was that young people had access to trained life coaches. They ensured participants had soft skills, identified areas of strengths and personal challenges and complemented the work carried out by traditional case managers (Gupta et al., 2016). Three programmes as suggested by Eurofound (2015) which help build resilience in young people include:

1. Your Own Power, a Dutch programme, builds resilience by providing young people with the tools to tackle their own problems with the help of their social network.
2. Cyberhouse, a Danish programme, provides online counselling services and sign-posting to young people in need of psychological support and advice.
3. Power is Within You, a Bulgarian programme, trains youth counsellors and social workers in methods to foster resilience in young people.

11. Support personal planning and the ownership of that plan by young people

Research has shown that personal planning or care planning is a key feature to many services working with vulnerable people. It has shown to increase clients' outcomes because it is developed collaboratively, giving the client a sense of accountability and ownership, both of which are crucial for progression (Third Sector Capital Partners, 2013; Gupta et al., 2016; Smyth & Eaton-Erickson, 2009).

Engaging with the NEETs cohort can be more complex than other services and supports aimed at increasing outcomes for young people. In a lot of cases, young people do not just wake up one day and say they are disengaging in society but instead, over a long period of time, because of layers of challenges, have slowly disengaged. This is why re-engaging this group is so difficult. The barriers which have built up over the years can be deep-rooted, consequently requiring intense support and guidance.

The SICAP report interviewed 42 managers within SICAP providers and found 18 themes which presented when engaging NEETs, working with NEETs, partnership working and organisational development. These are shown in the table below as per in the SICAP Report (2017).

Table 7.1: Themes for engaging NEETs, working with NEETs, partnership working and organisational development as outlined in the SICAP Report (2017)

| Theme Heading | Theme |
|----------------|--|
| Engaging NEETs | Theme one: Engage young people by having a community outreach presence and working with families Theme two: Social media is more useful for sustaining engagement rather than initially engaging young people |



| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| | <p>Theme three: Providing short, taster and interest-based programmes on what young people want increases engagement and progression</p> <p>Theme four: Ask about transport and childcare challenges and negotiate solutions to these</p> |
| Working with NEETs | <p>Theme five: Coaching is effective for young people with lower motivation</p> <p>Theme six: Staff require an array of skills and appropriate time to work effectively with young people with complex needs</p> <p>Theme seven: Complexity of need requires significant supports or 'hand-holding'</p> <p>Theme eight: Peer support is an important resource and can be encouraged by considered project planning</p> <p>Theme nine: Training programmes should mirror the requirements of the workplace</p> <p>Theme ten: 'No talk and chalk' - novel, unique ways of learning are needed to engage young people</p> <p>Theme eleven: Culturally appropriate supports increase minority groups engagement</p> <p>Theme twelve: Complex cases or low skill/motivation individuals benefit from individualised follow-up</p> <p>Theme thirteen: Enterprise supports were considered inappropriate for the vast majority of NEETs and needed substantial investment and supports when appropriate</p> |
| Partnership Working | <p>Theme fourteen: Partnerships benefit from structure and maintenance</p> <p>Theme fifteen: Engaging with schools can be useful for early intervention</p> |
| Organisational Development | <p>Theme sixteen: The physical environment is important in optimising youth engagement</p> <p>Theme seventeen: Systems and supports are required to effectively manage data (IRIS)</p> <p>Theme eighteen: Staff training and support is important in maintaining the diverse skill sets required and team morale</p> |

SICAP Report (2017)

What was found in the SICAP report, in the both the literature review and through consultation, is echoed in much of the research presented below for the UK, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Finland. Several pieces of research and case studies have been reviewed and, in combination with the data from the SICAP Report, a very clear picture of what an effective service does and is will be identified. This provides a good marker for future projects in Ireland and abroad in regard to this NEET group and acts as a marker for good practice in regard to the YESS and New Beginnings project.

United Kingdom

What works best when re-engaging young people into employment, education or training is something the UK Department of Education have been researching for the past two decades. Between January and March of 2021, an estimated 10.6% of all young people aged 16-24 were NEET (UK Government, 2021). In 2009, NEET figures stood at 11.2% for all 16-18 year olds and 15.5% for all 16-24 year olds. For the same period in 2011, NEET rates were at 15.3% for 16-24 year olds and 8.3% for 16-18 year olds.

Two very important pilots which may have contributed to the decrease in NEET numbers because of insights gained were the Activity Agreement Pilot and the Entry-Level Pilot. The research conducted to explore the success of the pilots was carried out by the UK Government in 2010 and found several key approaches which made the pilots effective and successful.

1. **The Activity Agreement Pilot** began in 2006 to test ways to re-engage 16-17 year old NEETs. It was piloted in eight 'high NEET' areas in England, covering around 50 local authority areas. Different groups were targeted at different phases of the pilot, including those who were 'long-term' NEET, those on Job Seekers Allowance and/or those who belonged to specific vulnerable groups. An agreement put in place with individuals was based on the idea the young person is the main driver in his or her own progression. In essence, it was a personally negotiated contract between the young person and their Personal Advisor / Keyworker. The young person received continuous support from the Keyworker throughout the process. An example of the agreement can be found in the appendices (Appendix 1.1).

Discretionary funding was made available to cover the cost of the activities under three headings:

Personal development activities to help deal with personal difficulties, or for activities which increase confidence and motivation. These included Anger Management Training, Money Management Training and an Independent Travel Allowance.

Skill development activities, where the young person filled training gaps or actively sought new training opportunities, and;

Work-related activities including work tasters, workplace behaviour training, CV writing and interview skills training. This is a similar model to the IFI PYDP, except that the PYDP seeks to provide the young person with support for as long as is needed, which often takes longer than 15 weeks because of the personal development elements.

The agreement was designed to reflect the needs of the individual and young people could start and end the programme at any time of the year. A time limit of 6-20 weeks was placed on each agreement and overall young people tended to stay on average 12-15 weeks.

The results for this pilot showed that, after three months, 49% of young people were engaged in education and employment related activities. This compared to 36% of the comparison group who had a similar demographic to the research group but who did not partake in the pilot. 28% of participants were studying towards a qualification. A very interest finding was that 27% of participants were in paid work without training, as opposed to 16% of the comparison group.

The impact of the 2006-2008 pilot was assessed two years following participation. It was found that Activity Agreements had a sustained impact on participation in work-based training or studying towards a qualification. The research found that some 48% of participants reported doing some studying or work-based training at the time of the follow-up interview, which is about 8% higher than would have happened without the Activity Agreement (UK Government, 2010). With regard to life outcomes and a better quality of life, employed Activity Agreement participants were working at a higher occupational level than young people in the comparison sample, and were more likely to have achieved a qualification. Tanner et al. (2010) found that Activity Agreement participants were more likely to have completed a qualification since the first interview than those in the comparison group (73% compared with 62%).

The pilot worked on a 'something for something model' and young people were offered financial incentives upon fulfilling their agreement. This is similar to how Community Training Centres and Youthreach work here in Ireland, except that payment to the young person in Ireland is weekly and the amount paid depends on the number of days attended that week. In the first four years of the Activity Agreement pilot, 25,000 young people took part. It was found that the cost of each participant was around £2,122 per fulfilled Agreement. This was in essence rather light on the public purse if it meant the young people was back in training or employment and off the Live Register.

2. [Entry to Learning Pilots](#) followed in 2008 and ran until 2011. It aimed to work with the voluntary and community sectors to help bridge the gap between re-engagement activities and more formal education and training programmes and worked with four local authorities. According to Bickerstaffe and Walton (2010), the pilots were designed to provide young people who were NEET with opportunities to improve their skills and employability through strengthening the progression between voluntary and community sector re-engagement activity and formal learning. Similar to the Activity Agreement, young people were assigned an Adviser to support them 'throughout their time on the programme (an average of 15 weeks) and to broker access to bridging activities that would help them progress to further learning, and which were accredited wherever possible (UK Government, 2010). A financial allowance was also offered during this pilot as an incentive to take part.

The main difference between the two pilots was that, within Entry to Learning some local authorities contracted with voluntary sector organisations (or a consortium of organisations), to employ Advisers and either deliver the learning provision themselves or commission this from other established providers. As a result, there were various approaches to

the delivery of the pilot, with some areas building on existing engagement work with young people, while others selected one voluntary sector organisation to act as a 'portal' through which the local authority worked to identify and access other voluntary sector providers. (UK Government, 2010)

Support was offered in three areas, which were flexible if required to bridge the gaps which were barriers to the young person progressing into employment, education or training. Young people were offered mentoring and support on an individual basis. They partook in personal development activities to boost confidence and motivation, including First Aid training, driving theory, activities to improve literacy and numeracy and group activities. Work related learning was offered in the form of CV writing, vocational taster courses and preparing for going on further courses, amongst other activities.

Approximately 1,500 young people participated at a cost of £1,757 per person. The average length of the programme for most participants was 15 weeks. Roughly one year on from the pilot implementation date, a pilot management evaluation upon leaving the programme and at a 13-week follow up showed that 61% had left the pilots and progressed to a positive destination - half to education and two-fifths to training (largely Entry to Employment or an Apprenticeship). The remainder had entered employment with training (UK Government, 2010). Of those who progressed to a 'positive destination', 72% were in the same place 13 weeks after the programme ended. Stakeholders noted a number of 'soft outcomes' which arose due to participation, including social and personal development and employability skills development (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

In 2011, Nelson (2011) carried out research on behalf of The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People Services, exploring strategies to re-engage young people not in employment, education or training. From a rapid evidence review, the researchers found that engaging those at risk of NEET or re-engaging those who have become NEET can be considered on four levels. These include:

1. **Macro-economic strategies** (national policy level) - local authority research emphasised a need for local authorities to have more freedom to vary the Education Maintenance Allowance payments according to need (Local Government Association, 2009).
2. **Local Authority-level strategies** – research from the Office for Standards in Education (2010) showed two very distinct strategies which were effective with NEETs from a local authority perspective. The first was at a strategic level whereby local authorities have a whole-area strategic plan for NEET reduction. Having the backing of council officials and having a strategy set out within all plans (youth plans, regeneration plans, local area agreements) which involved young people added to the effectiveness and the implementation of the NEET strategy. Sharing of information between agencies was shown to also be a contributor to the success of the strategic plan. At a practice level, this plan needs to be supported by good systems which monitor the progress and impact and which embody the idea of a connective service structure. The communication between services and schools is noted as an important part of this approach, especially around the transition from school to 'other'.

Local Government Authorities (2009) found four particular approaches were effective:

- The first approach was to intervene early with families at risk of poor outcomes. This can be achieved through emotional and social support, as well as educational and training support.
- The second was to develop informal learning and volunteering opportunities. According to Nelson (2011), this approach can be particularly beneficial for young people whose personal barriers to learning are less entrenched but who, perhaps, had a negative experience at school. In such cases, the young people need help to develop skills and qualifications in order to make the transition to the labour market (Nelson, 2011).
- The Local Government Association (LGA) (2009) found that 'developing alternatives and flexible learning opportunities' was crucial to any strategy as it assisted those young people who did not benefit from the conventional classroom experience. These young people could get support in a more 'needs based' way to enhance confidence, self-esteem and other soft skills which may act as a barrier to progression for them.
- The capacity to offer financial support also proved to be a part of the strategy which had great effectiveness. Tunnard et al. (2008) found that young people generally respond well to 'financial hooks and incentives.'

3. Programme-level strategies – The report found four main positive features of effective informal learning programmes (Nelson, 2011):

A flexible approach where an open-door enrolment policy existed, with frequent course starting dates available for programmes in which the young person could participate at their own pace to complete the qualification (Evans et al. 2009; Kewin et al., 2009).

Programme-level strategies are most effective when they offer a range of pathways, including vocational and work-based options (Evans et al, 2009). According to Evans et al. (2009), young people like vocational options as they have a practical feel and mark a difference from school. Hayward and Williams (2011) argue that such pathways are only useful if they provide a genuine vocational learning opportunity.

Having an excellent 'information, advice and guidance' (IAG) service was noted as a positive feature of effective programmes. Kewin et al. (2009) found that having an individual action plan, containing incremental achievable targets, or learner agreements, are an effective means of engaging young people and rewarding them for progress.

Developing positive relations between project workers and young people is pivotal (Evans et al., 2009, Kewin et al. 2009). According to Nelson et al. (2011), the best informal learning programmes are based around mutual trust, respect and clear boundaries.

Evans et al. (2009) found several other success factors to informal programme-based learning. These include:

Having a high ratio of staff to young people to enable one-to-one and small group work

- Having an outreach capacity to reach young people who are reluctant to visit a learning setting
- Having a flexible approach
- Providing access (through brokerage) to targeted support as necessary.

Other research into programme-based services and strategies shows something very similar in regard to what is effective when working with NEETs. For example, the CBYOs (Community-Based Youth Organisations) in the USA worked using approaches which mirror those outlined above and were found to also show effectiveness and positive outcomes for young people who engaged. According to young people who took part in the programme, these specific differentiating factors led to the success of the CBYOs (Balldridge et al., 2011):

- The ability to gain qualifications while earning money undertaking work provided by the programme
- A non-hierarchical, trusting relationship with CBYO staff
- Appropriate and consistent forms of discipline with a focus on hard work and punctuality. The fact that mistakes were viewed as opportunities for development rather than as cause for punishment.

Specific differentiating factors for the success of the Activity Agreement UK pilot include:

- They had a personalised and flexible approach whereby activities could be tailored to the needs of different groups of young people
- Intensive support provided by the Advisers was highly valued by the young people who participated and was cited as one of the main reasons for their continued engagement
- The financial incentives were a 'powerful engagement tool' (UK Government Department of Education Pilot, 2010).

According to Nelson (2011), common themes running through the evaluations reviewed was that effective young engagement programmes tend to be flexible, based on trusting relationships and are personalised in approach.

4. [School Level Strategies](#) – In their review of the research on working effectively with NEETs, Nelson et al. (2011) found limited research carried out in regard to school strategies to target this group in particular. While the young person is still in school, struggles and barriers can exist and, while they are engaged in person, they may not be in mind. The review found two particular pieces of research which suggest a number of ways in which schools can 'migrate against disengagement and to aid positive transitions' (Nelson, 2011). In short, research from Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) and Tunnard et al. (2009) found that the following could aid in both the transition phase and as interventions to reduce the number of young people disengaging:

- rural ACTION**

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The Role of Key Agencies and Individuals

While the four above levels of support have been proven to be effective with the NEETs group on both personal and vocational levels, the researchers do not miss the opportunity to explore the role of the key agencies and individuals which are crucial to the success and outcomes for that young person. According to the review, Nelson (2011) states that while they can be broadly categorised, three pivotal factors play a key role. These include:

- Adult role models providing personalised support
- Parents and families
- Multi-agency supports.

Nelson (2011) noted several pieces of research which have found that the presence of an adult role model had a massive impact on the outcomes of that young person (Benetto, 2009; Baldrige et al., 2011; Olgetree and Hancock, 2010). Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) found that schools who work alongside outside professionals such as counsellors have a lower rate of disengagement. The use of mentors and key workers has also been shown to be highly effective in regard to keeping a young person on track and this has been shown to be a particularly effective strategy when working with vulnerable young people (Kewin et al., 2009; LGA, 2009). Tunnard et al. (2008) and Baldrige et al., (2011) found that in alternative learning environments, project workers often need to adapt to many roles including mentor, motivator, facilitator, and even parent figure, if parental support is lacking. According to Nelson (2011), in some instances, project workers provide holistic support that, by necessity, is much broader than a focus on employability or vocational training alone. Continuity of contact in such circumstances is of crucial importance (Nelson, 2011). Evans et al. (2009) conducted interviews with service managers working with young people and they stated that:

'Some of the young people won't engage in any other service but they will with us. That's because we work at their pace. But we don't collude with them. It's about trying to build a relationship of trust.'

(Evans et al., 2009)

The role of the family and parents in particular when working with this group is sometimes overlooked. Connections have been made to parental education level and parental socio-economic status in the above sections and, while these have been identified as a contributor to a young person's attitude and motivation toward education, training or employment, the actual effect of this is something which probably needs more attention from researchers and both local and national supports. A young person at risk of dropping out of work and learning is shaped years before they face the crucial choices of work and training (LGA, 2009). Tunnard et al., (2008) found that parents influence not only young people's attitudes towards education, but also decisions on whether or not to engage with other positive social and learning activities. While research suggests that the influence of a parent carries great weight in regard to the young person's outcomes, Nelson (2011) did not find any strategies within the research which have been proven to be effective in engaging parents.

The multi-disciplinary approach to working with this NEET group and the alignment of services have been shown to have a positive effect. In most instances, but not all, young people in this NEET group have various barriers to progression that no one worker could help solve on their own. Nelson (2011) found that, from the review of the research:

'A number of items reviewed make the point that no one agency or individual can effectively develop a strategy for engagement or re-engagement, especially where the young person in question has deeply entrenched barriers to learning or employment.'

(Nelson, 2011)

Re-engaging Young People NEET in Rural Areas

With a focus on the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, this section will look at the interventions used to re-engage young people NEET from rural, isolated areas. Both Sligo and Leitrim have a large number of people who do not live in close proximity to services and the barriers and consequences of isolation are a common concern amongst service providers in these counties. One very important piece of research funded by Nordregio (2019) and conducted by Karlsdottir et al. (2019) will be explored here. This research piece carries out a review of work taking place in the Nordic region, while offering potential effective strategies for working specifically with the NEET group who are isolated and from more rural areas.

Denmark

Over 75,000 young people aged 16-24 were NEET in 2015 in Denmark. This figure has decreased and was at just under 70,000 young people in 2019 (Statistics Denmark, 2021). As of the last quarter of 2020, approximately 9.2 percent of 15-29 year olds in Denmark were NEET. The two interventions outlined below seek to support young people through training and to supply them with a job at the end of their placement. The aim is to bridge gaps in the labour force through an individualised approach where young people's needs are met, while the gaps in skill workers are lessened.

| Intervention details | Key Approaches |
|--|---|
| SUME - Two municipalities, project made up of employment services and a business development centre. Focuses on the provision of the municipal employment service and of vocational education to unemployed or marginalised young people who are on the brink of the labour market. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two municipal agencies working side-by-side (one to help young people build the skills they need and one to give them a route to progression). The project seeks to fill the gaps of the labour market in the area by making connections with businesses. These connections can lead to a young person securing a role in the labour market.• Both municipalities have their own strategy to work with the young people in accordance with need and they have an aim to make the young people who participate more employable.• Based on the needs of the individual. Personal development primary focus – they understand that a young person in the NEET group has other barriers which need to be dealt with prior to training or employment.• Both physical and emotional elements to the person are taken into consideration.• A space is provided for them where they can work in a relaxed |

| | <p>way with the employment services. They space is seen as somewhere they can build meaningful relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no time pressure and they can work at their own pace. |
|--|---|
| Intervention details | Key Approaches |
| <p>TAMU is a training school for labour market education that has five centres based around Denmark. An independent organisation, TAMU seeks to create a bridge where young people can learn the skills that are currently missing in the labour market of the area. The target age group is 18-30 year olds.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-judgemental approach. • The training provided is varied and has 18 difference options. • Enhancing social skills is at the forefront encompassing self-determinism, self-help, accountability, credibility, respect, co-cooperativeness and receptiveness. • An independent organisation, they are 75% funded by the state, making and selling products and services to make up the remainder of the required budget each year. This element adds to the learning experience of the young people participating. • It is a one-year programme where 50% is practical learning and 50% is social learning, but all through work. Young people live in the school, receive an allowance and are provided with three meals a day. |

"The strength of the SUME project is that it co-ordinates all the different partners in vocational education / training and the labour market that need to be engaged for a scheme that firmly follows up on progress, like Educational Track to Work does. Emphasis is laid on matching the needs of apprentices, whose incentives are met by remunerating them under the training period, and companies, which are remunerated by the municipality if they take on a trainee. In this way, a chain of incentive is created where the coalition of trade unions is also involved in mediating contacts between programme managers, students and recruiters, so that networks can be secured and expanded".

(Karlsdottir et al., The Nordregio Report 2019)

A concern when working with young people from isolated areas is that even if they get the training they require or the skills they need to progress; the opportunities may not be there for them in the area. Approaches and working relationships used by projects like that of SAMU and TAMU set up between employment services and local business is one way to offset this concern. If employment services worked with the business community, together they could provide a pathway to work which is both based on individual need and on the labour market need for that skill. County Councils and other statutory organisations could also play a part in this in regard to having connections with local training centres, whereby young people can gain experience, carry out internships and potentially get a job such organisations. The scope of job roles with these bodies is large, from practical to more administrative work, these bodies could be a portal for rural areas where young people in this category can gain the experience they need at a local level.

Finland

"Finland is the only country in the Nordic Region that demands municipalities to employ out-reaching youth workers who contact young people who have fallen out of school, work or are inactive. In some cases, they visit schools to meet youngsters in need of help or calling young people's parents. The outreach youth work centre of expertise is part of the youth work development efforts of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Youth work centres of expertise form a network that supports the implementation of the objectives of the national youth work and youth policy programme. The centres of expertise develop and promote skills, expertise and exchange of information in the field of youth work."

(Nordregio Report, 2019)

The NEET rate in Finland was 11.2% in 2017 according to an OCED report (2018). What is interesting about Finland is the rate of young people NEET who only have low levels of education (44.1%), in comparison to upper or post-secondary level education (14.2%). If a young person has a low level of education, it is likely that they dropped out of the mainstream school system early and, depending on how long that young person has been disengaged, their barriers to progression may be more challenging to those of the latter group who likely engaged for a longer a period. Finland have recognised the need to connect services and make engagement as easy and as accessible to young people as possible, especially for those who may have had previous negative experience with services or authorities.

The Uutta Virtaa (New Power) project was implemented in some small municipalities in Central Finland which were located around 50km from a large city. The project's main goal was to create a knowledge chain between public employment services and municipal authorities. The knowledge chain created an easier flow of information between services. This idea was that this would help to re-engage marginalised young people by enabling them either to enrol in education or to join the labour market.

When interviewing project managers for the Nordegio Report, the researchers Karlsdottie et al., (2019), found that in many cases those who were early school leavers did not know what they wanted to achieve in life, which posed a serious barrier to their personal development. It was noted by the project that an approach which involved achievable goals worked best with this group. The research found that young people often had an attitude of rejection towards formal authorities, which meant that the project had to spend time trying to find these young people. Project managers stressed that after extended periods of inactivity, in addition to unfortunate past experiences with the authorities, participants had developed a lack of social skills. Young people who participated showed an appreciation the 'someone was paying attention to them' (Karlsdottie et al, 2019).

This project sought to create a knowledge chain to ease the flow of information between different supports. Young people were provided with specialist supports and like the 'wraparound' approach, each young person had a team that collaborated for their greater good. Two key steps were taken to ensure young people's needs were met both personally and vocationally:

Step 1: Improving the work ability of participants, especially in terms of physical and mental health issues – a focus was put on mapping participants' health through continuous appointments with project nurses.

Step 2: Offering career guidance, with the help of the public employment services, focusing on assessing what young people had done in their lives before and what they wanted to do in the future.

Strengths were assessed through face-to-face meetings where the project manager had an opportunity to get to know the young person and vice versa. The report found that this turned out to be a strategy that gradually allowed project managers to determine the best path for participants. One very interesting finding that project managers stated was that the issue most usually raised by participants was that they had never been asked before what they wanted to do; they had only ever been given instructions, without taking into account their actual problems (Karlsdottie et al., 2019). To address this, project managers sought to 'listen, listen, listen' and to embody the idea that 'we have one mouth and two ears, so we listen twice as much as we speak!'. In addition, a working practice was adopted by managers of not limiting the time given to meetings with the participants. Uutta Virtaa builds on the notion that giving time, listening and paying attention to participants yield effective results in raising their motivation and, thereby, their chances to be re-engaged (Karlsdottie et al., 2019).

Another successful rural project is **The TOPIKS project**, which was implemented in a small rural municipality 45km from Mikkeli in the region of South Savonia, Finland. The main goal of the project was to engage unemployed young people and early school leavers into vocational education training, by diversifying the modes of delivery of education (ESEDU, 2017). The project worked with marginalised young people who suffered adverse effects such as poverty, substance abuse or mental illnesses. To achieve its goals, the project consisted of two phases.

Phase 1: Recruitment of participants based on close collaboration with the public employment services and social services of Mikkeli.

Phase 2: Rebuilding of participants' attitudes, mapping of participants' potential and finally enrolment in workshops.

In relation to rebuilding participants' attitudes, practitioners focused on guiding and coaching young people in how to acquire basic habits such as punctuality. Where interviewed, project managers stated that one goal of Phase 2 was to enable participants to be on time for the sessions five days a week. This was seen as an important step to accomplish before moving on to working on drafting a plan with the practitioner, which would help take the young person through the project. Project managers emphasised that "spending time with participants discussing their development was a powerful method, because that way we let them explain to us their situation without pushing them" (Nordregio Report, 2019). Once the young person moved on to vocational education which was based on on-the-job learning, the project continued to follow up on their progress while supporting them along the way with specialised teachers and weekly meetings.

Norway

Norway are often leaders in innovative approaches to community, youth, social and educational development. The NEET rate for Norway is currently estimated at 6.6% of all 16-29 year olds. This is significantly lower than other European countries and all of the Nordic countries cited here. Over the past two decades, they have tested and implemented several different approaches to meeting

the needs of the NEET group. Like Finland, Norway also seeks to bridge the gap in information linkages and emphasises the connection between local authorities and other relevant services such as employment and training services. The authors of the Nordregio Report (2019) evaluated several of the initiatives and found several projects which met the needs of this group on both a personal and vocational level. These initiatives will all be presented here as Norway's statistics show that they are essentially a leader in engaging young people and retaining that engagement.

Nordland County in Norway is a fishing industry region. It is not uncommon the young people here finish their second level education between the age of 24-29. This is substantially higher than any other region in Norway. The reason for this is young people often take a break from education to work within the fishing industry where they can get well-paid jobs. The rate of vocational / educational retention is 3% below the national average and, with the extended time period it takes for young people to finish second level, the need to focus on creating a more efficient process for them began to be emphasised to a greater extent in local politics. The focus for the region was to ensure that students graduated in an efficient way so they could contribute as an educated labour force member and be enabled to make progress with work experience. The region has 16 secondary schools and, at each school, there is a follow-up service that helps students to find strategies for completing school. Some also make use of the e-learning courses offered and continue to work while finishing their education. Retention started to improve gradually after local authorities initiated a special focus on this area, monitoring the situation with annual reporting (Nielsen, 2018).

According to the researchers of the Nordregio Report (2019), an important step in raising completion rates was the number of available training places that had a direct effect in raising motivation among students to complete it. Enabling young people to exercise their apprenticed skills for real is an essential ingredient in raising their motivation and reducing mismatch problems (Nordregio Report, 2019). The report noted that efforts being made in Nordland are systematic and demonstrate that broader structural efforts that are continuous and ongoing in increasing local availability of training contracts are effective.

Norway is known for its trailblazer approaches and one initiative which sought to increase motivation in vocational schools and has proved very successful is **Arctic Food**. Arctic Food is a locally organised event where professionals in the food industry travel from all over the world to work alongside young people from local vocational education programmes in Mosjøen. The idea of it is based on exposing young people to the 'world of possibilities' they have outside of school because of the skills they are achieving through education. This event gives them the opportunity to test out these skills with real-world role models in food production. The event is funded by local companies, the municipality and national stakeholders.

A range of internationally known Michelin chefs arrive in the small town at harvesting season to explore food-making and creativity and train local vocational students for a whole week. The initiative is co-ordinated with teachers from the school and students, and it is a long-term initiative. It provides the young person with a full-circle approach to the apprenticeship and real world employment, peaking once a year with the event and the specialised, exclusive classes.

As can be seen from the above initiative, local authorities have a major role in how the NEETs cohort is supported and are responsible for developing strategic counter-measures to tackle the barriers to progression faced by young people in their specific constituency or municipality. This means that

the needs of each young person are being met on a very local level where a community approach is applied. This project shows that using an apprenticeship model, with a more practical approach to learning combined with classroom learning, can be very beneficial when working with the NEETs cohort. This success can be seen in the examples given in the Nordregio Report of Oppland and Hedmark County.

The Status Report of Upper Secondary Education in Oppland County, which is the mandate given through the education programme '**Ny Giv**' and the sub-programme '**Fellesfag, Yrkesretting og Relevans**' (FYR), has allowed for increasingly tailored measures to curb early-leaver rates (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016). This has included the restructuring of the core school subjects to become more vocationally oriented and relevant for the students studying and for their future in the labour market. The success of this had a lot to do with the role of the school. Upper secondary schools in Oppland County redirected the focus towards the individual student, ensuring that vulnerable students are seen and supported, alongside good mentorship and securing the availability of apprenticeships as part of the vocational education (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016). This model was found to allow for training to take place both in the classroom and in the apprenticeship firm. This was found to motivate students and clarify the relationship between their educational training and their later professional lives. In all, over 70% of participants were given an apprenticeship contract (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016).

In 2019, the Norwegian authorities established an agreement on inclusive work life (the IA Agreement), which is in focus for 2019–2022 (Regjeringen, 2019). This agreement emphasises the efforts to increase the employability of young people who, for various reasons, have a reduced capacity to work. In Hedmark County, **Ta sjansen (Take the chance)** was established with NAV (employment agencies) centres in four municipalities in Hedmark County between 2013–2017, because at the time there were as many young people receiving social and unemployment benefits as there were jobs available in the county (Lien et al., 2018). The programme focused on young people under 30 years of age with who had specific needs and a reduced capacity to work.

The aim was to provide closed job fairs whereby local companies chose candidates from NAV through brief job interviews at the fairs. This cohort of young people has a particular set of high needs and limited capacity to work overall with little soft or hard skills which could be used in the labour market. However, opening up the doors to young people and employers showed to be successful in assisted 27% of participants to becoming employed.

Another very forward-thinking initiative from Norway was the **Youth and Vocational Training Guarantee** that was initiated as a pilot in the rural area of Trysil. In 2016, the youth unemployment rate in Trysil was 21%, almost double the national average of 11%. The educational level of inhabitants was also lower than the national average. Trysil municipality was the first in Norway to initiate a youth guarantee for young people seeking vocational training. Like other approaches in the country and in Finland and Denmark, it entails co-operation with local companies to take on apprentices. The participating workplaces and the students receive remuneration for their efforts. This approach has proven to work well, with one reason being the variety of apprenticeships it can offer young people, with over 25 different vocations offered through apprenticeship in the area because of the pilot.

JobbLoop is another initiative launched as a result of the inclusive labour market policy of the Work and Welfare Ministries. **The JobbLoop model** involves co-operation between NAV, the employ-

ment agency, and employers. The Nordregio Report (2019) focused on one particular municipality, Hordaland. The project here is different to others in that the project is driven by the employers, while the role of NAV primarily is to recruit potential candidates. The target group for this project is young people aged 18–30 who are considered to have many barriers to break before entering work life or who have physical, mental or combined challenges to deal with in their lives.

Private companies are also the target group because they can enable young people in their progression and NAV also work to engage these companies to participate. Young people who participate are still registered as jobseekers, but can stop the programme whenever they wish. It does not affect any statutory benefits or other financial assets received.

The programme lasts one year, four months of which is made up of three different work placements. According to Lien et al. (2018), the way it works is that each participant is in the programme for one year, rotating for four months in three different job places. The ultimate aim is to find a good match for both employers and the young person's interests. Each participant is offered support from a work life coach, which is deemed as an essential component in mediating the experience of both parties in the process. Several features have been noted for the success of this approach. They include:

- The young person is allocated a mentor from the work community
- Social attributes contribute to including the candidate into the work community
- The candidates are part of the usual staff, with the same expectations
- They participate in training to become responsible for certain job functions within the workplace, giving them a sense of worth within the systems and processes.

In many cases, candidates blossomed in the process when they realised they had capabilities they never believed they could master (Lien et al., 2018). In other regions in Norway, one criticism of JobbLoop was that it merely focused on bringing people off social benefits. According to the researchers of the Nordregio Report (2019), the authors stated that the project was a limited attempt to enable the most vulnerable youngsters to see the possibility of becoming active through their recruitment in an employer-driven project, where NAV merely acted as a supporting partner. However, as first attempted in Hordaland, it was a success given that all of the youth participants working at one company during the programme were employed by that programme after completion.

In **Finnmark** in Norway, a county which began to focus on NEETs when completion rates were as low as 37%, the county and municipality of Alta, where Finnmark is located, implemented a series of activities to promote health and well-being. Several factors were identified as causes of poor public health among youth:

- The milieu growing up (whether children were exposed to bullying or poor well-being)
- The learning milieu (early school drop-out rates and share of low educated)
- Mental health measures (troubling loneliness in school, increased mental challenges, suffering among children and 15–29 year olds)

Physical inactivity and nicotine dependence.

• (Finnmark Fylkeskommune, 2015)

"Students that report poor well-being are on the rise while the share of those who are bullied is falling. Increased well-being is at the core of public health work. The school is an important arena for children and youth. Many factors increase student motivation to learn and therefore also the challenges they face in everyday school life. In the long run, poor well-being can affect drop-out in upper secondary school because gaps created in the knowledge base from junior high are a contributing factor to leaving education. Especially for girls, well-being in school is closely related to life satisfaction."

(Alta Kommune, 2018)

Drawing their attention to some of the factors that contribute to well-being and social, physical and mental health, the regional authorities and municipalities could initiate actions to promote better health and thereby gain a better overview of where emphasis should be placed to follow up on further improvements (Nordregio Report, 2019). As a result of the initiative, drop-out rates decreased to 31%, 10% below the national average (31% vs. 21%).

Conclusions

In Ireland, the literature is limited regarding the NEET cohort. Internationally however, more research has been conducted and so looking outside of Ireland is a must when considering the NEET cohort. In 2017, Pobal conducted a significant piece of research with projects working with this cohort under SICAP here in Ireland. The report offers great insight into what an effective project looks like and explores what approaches worked best when supporting this group of young people. The SICAP report is a very important resource and a very useful tool kit for projects and services who seek to work with young people NEET in Ireland and indeed abroad. The themes presented are supported throughout the international literature review, adding even further weight to its importance.

Several key messages appear to echo throughout the European and international research in regard to effective approaches when working with the NEET cohort. Similarities in what has been found to work best are seen right throughout the literature review. Some of these messages include:

- The barriers such young people face are extensive. For these barriers to be broken down, access to further funding must be made available if a project or support service is to have the greatest impact.
- Giving young people the flexibility to move at their own pace proved to be a crucial component to any work with this cohort.
- Having a policy where the young person can link in and out with the project as they needed it was effective when working with this group.
- The quality of the project worker / young person relationship was found to have an impact on the success of the young person.

-
- An integrated, collaborative approach was found to be effective when working with this cohort where several services worked together to support the young person. This collaboration could include the young person, a project worker, a health coach, a life coach, a guidance counsellor, a counsellor and an employment agency. Similar to Meithal or the Wraparound Approach, this type of multi-disciplinary working showed great benefits for the young person.
 - Having a service the young person could attend but where they could be linked into several other supports and to employment opportunities seemed to work best with this group.
 - Right throughout Europe, countries are integrating commerce and statutory agencies by public policy to support young people through both training and employment. This joint partnership approach, where both local government and businesses seek to improve later life outcomes for the younger generations by working together to train and employ young people, particularly those young people NEET, seems to yield the greatest results when working with this cohort.
 - Outreach work was an important part of identifying and engaging young people NEET and projects who had an outreach strategy showed good results when engaging young people.
 - Building upon personal development and having the time to develop 'soft skills' and non-cognitive skills is very important for the young person who may have been disengaged for some time. For some young people, they may not have had the opportunity to learn what are perceived to be basic skills and so they must have that time to build these before they have the capacity and the ability to move towards training or employment.

The literature recognises the complexities of the lives of young people NEET. It suggests a very holistic, wraparound approach is effective, where young people have access to the support services they need to break down whatever barriers are in their way. Projects which are long term and individualised will have the greatest impact and this appears to be because of the time spent on personal development and building non-cognitive skills.

This integrated, holistic approach with business and specialist services, as well as employment and youth work services, appears to be the most effective approach when working with NEETs and the research in this report shows this. It would require a great commitment from all stakeholders and its best chance of fruition is if it is facilitated by local and national Government. Ireland requires a clear strategy for this NEET cohort as over 12% of young people aged 20-24 are NEET in Ireland (OECD, 2021). In order to really impact positively upon the lives of these young people, a coordinated response directed and funded by the Government is required.

SECTION 8: OPERATION OF THE YESS PROJECT AND NEW BEGINNINGS PROJECT

The IFI PYDP set out to support young people by providing a service for young people which would both enhance their life and enhance their connections to the community in which they lived. The two strategic objectives of the programme are:

1. To promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between communities by reducing sectarianism.
2. To promote prosperity by increasing the skill base and future employment options of 'at risk' young people.

The desired outcomes of the IFI PYDP centred around:

- **Good Relations (integral)** – young people have an improved sense of self and awareness of self and others and have an increase respect for diversity.
- **Personal Development** – young people have improved upon their social and emotional capabilities (inclusive of communication, confidence, leadership, managing feelings, resilience and determinism)
- **Skills and Social Development / Education and Skills Development** – young people have successfully achieved towards further learning or work
- **Community Champions** – young people positively engage in the community.

The YESS Project and the New Beginnings project were both successful in meeting and exceeding the strategic objectives and outcomes laid out by the IFI as funders. This section will explore how both projects met these objectives and outcomes. It will also explore the supports provided as well as presenting the level of output and impact of the project upon the lives of the young people supported.

The YESS Project

The YESS Project has worked with young people since 2016 and is currently still in operation in a revised format in Sligo town. The YESS Project has secured funding from IFI since 2016. The first round of funding in 2016 allowed for the recruitment of 15 participants, with additional funding applied for and granted in respect of a further 15 participants in 2018. In 2020, on request from the IFI Programme Manager, four additional young people from Sligo Town were taken on by the project. South Sligo was the area in which the service provided supports in the original funding phases, with Tubbercurry, Ballymote and their surroundings being the main target areas. The project began as a one-worker programme in the more rural parts of South Sligo and now, it has two project workers and covers Sligo town and its surrounding areas.

In all, the project has supported 34 young people through personal development and individual needs work, progression planning and goal setting, training (accredited and non-accredited), work

experience and tasters, as well as community relations and social inclusion work. The output of the project speaks for itself in relation to the progression and life outcomes of the NEETs cohort engaged. All of the young people consulted for this research stated that they have progressed since they began with the YESS Project and in turn are in a much better place now than before their engagement with the project.

"Before the project I was not growing, I was about to decay. Now, I am completely independent."
(Youth Participant – YESS Project)

The project helped me to build confidence. It got me motivated to start working. I have now qualified as an EMT and I am aiming towards becoming a paramedic."
(Youth Participant – YESS Project)

Meeting aims, objectives and outcomes of IFI PYDP

The aim of the IFI funded programmes is to:

"...help young people build and develop life skills that foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and make them more employable."

In respect of meeting the aims, objectives and outcomes for the IFI PYDP, the YESS Project was very much a model project in regard to both meeting the funding scope and also in how successful it has been working with NEET young people in such a short space of time. The YESS Project focused on engaging vulnerable young people through a range of intensive engagements and supports. This enabled participants to build their confidence and develop their life skills so that they had the capacity to foster Good Relations, increase their awareness of self and others, enhance employability skills, both soft and hard skills, and build resilience. This meant that, when the young person finished the programme, they had the skills to be independent young people who could sustain themselves.

"These young people presented with a range of barriers including those based on personal development. Some did not have the confidence, or the skills, or the ability to believe in themselves, to be able to seek out support or know where to go to get the help they needed"
(YESS Project Management)

From 2016 to present, the project has supported these 34 young people through over 350 work placements, work tasters, work experiences, accredited courses and non-accredited courses. These include:

- 52 practical work-related placements, experiences or tasters
- 209 completed accredited courses
- 93 non-accredited courses
- 4 ongoing accredited courses
- Progression to employment

The project offered support using an 'at your own pace' approach. This gave young people the opportunity to build strong, trusting relationships with project staff, which in turn helped them build

capacity, enhance their abilities and increase confidence and self-esteem. For some young people, this took time. In many cases, the motivation of young people to build themselves back up was not even there, so an intensive support approach was provided. One young person who engaged in the YESS Project had been disengaged for six years. The effect of this young person's poor social skills, confidence, resilience, self-esteem, motivation and self-determinism could have been very detrimental if they had not received support from the project. To work with a young person with such barriers required patience, it required time, it required resources and in many ways was dependent upon the level of trust that the project worker was able to build with that young person. Being able to work intensively with this young person meant that, together with the project worker, they could build their confidence and resilience sufficiently to begin to move towards partaking in education, training or employment.

"The project workers were just so nice and accepting."

(Youth Participant – YESS Project)

"The worker was exceptional. She was determined. She was dedicated and very good at her job. She believed in the young people's potential."

(Referral agent – YESS Project)

The relationship developed between the project worker and the young person played a massive role in regard to how the young person progressed, according to the young people themselves. This relationship also helped when building or strengthening their relationships with their families and their communities. This empowered them to become role models in the area they lived by taking on their social and civic responsibilities as a citizen. Before the project, some young people were completely disengaged from their communities as they were not taking part in employment, education or training. This made them very vulnerable and is why a project like this, which had the time and had the resources, made a profound impact on the lives of these young people. As one young person stated when giving feedback to the project coordinators:

"When I started with the project, I was stuck at home trying to figure out what to do with my life, but now I'm doing a college course, I have a job and I'm looking forward to getting another qualification to become a paramedic."

(Youth Participant – YESS Project)

By building confidence, developing resilience and improving Good Relations, the young people who participated in this project became undoubtedly employable, but not only employable. They became **'Community Champions'** and role models for young people in their areas.

Participants who engaged at Level 3 and progress to Level 4 engage in Foróige's Leadership Skills Programme in preparation for taking the lead and ownership of a project that benefits their community. Having completed the programme, individual participants have the opportunity to put forward proposals for initiatives for community improvements where they have identified a need. These proposals are assessed by a PYDP host group, in conjunction with IFI Programme Manager, with the winning proposal awarded additional funding to carry out their proposed plan with support and mentoring from their PYDP Co-ordinator.

The proposal that is selected for funding is led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision making, and has a clear intended benefit to a community, cause or social issue.

The following case study of the young woman quoted above is highlighted next. Her story shows exactly how successful this project was in supporting young people to meet their full potential and how successful the IFI PDYP concept can be if the funding and long term, intensive support, is present.

Case Study One

This participant was initially referred to the programme by the Home School Liaison Officer. She was not in education, training or employment for two years. She has gone through huge personal tragedy (the deaths of two family members in close proximity to one another) and, as well as being a single mother at a young age, she became guardian to her younger sibling. As this participant is dyslexic, she has overcome major challenges to progress to a QQI Level 5 qualification in Health-care. This participant has recently taken her truck driver theory test and completed an EMT course, finishing with top marks, in the hope of becoming a paramedic. She is leading the Community Champions 'Remember Me' group and has shown great initiative in bringing the two Community Champions groups together. "Without the YESS Project, I would have been stuck at home trying to figure out how to change my life. I have two small children and I look after my sister as well. It was through the YESS programmes and group meetings that I realised that I am more than just a mother. I have potential and I can be a person that my children look up to. Having them made me want to achieve more, but it was the project that gave me enough confidence to realise that I am able to do more. I can achieve things that I didn't know about. Through the project I found out about all the opportunities available to me. They helped me with lots of things from getting childcare, securing a house and help with getting a job. Until I did the First Aid course with the project, I really doubted my own capabilities. After it, I finally decided what I want to do with my life – I want to be a paramedic."

As part of its Good Relations work, to promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity within and between communities, the project sought to first work with the individual to build their capacity to engage with others at a project and community level. The project sought to work with young people at an individual level and a group level to foster Good Relations, increase personal development, build and enhance social and employability skills and to create individuals who were invested in their community. While individual barriers had to be broken down for some young people before they could begin to work within a group setting, group work was seen as equally as important when seeking to enhance and build new positive relationships for the young person, at home and with other members of their communities.

Day trips away with other projects and cross-border project outings were both noted as having an impact on both relationships between the group and on understanding of the communities around them. Increasing awareness and understanding around diversity was a major part of this project and this helped to foster Good Relations across borders. To enhance cross-border relationships between young people and the services which supported them, the Cross-border Youth Workers' Network was established. This brought together several agencies, including project workers from the YESS Project, Gamechanger Tyrone, Regener8 Newry, Fermanagh Sports and Cultural Awareness, IgnYte Derry, AYE Strabane, Foróige YETI Cavan and Focus Family Resource Centre Cavan. They took part in several joint activities, as described below.

Group work was utilised on three key levels. The first was to enhance relationships within the YESS

Project. The second was to increase Good Relations between border and neighbouring counties. The third, group work and activities, were geared towards personal development and employment skills development and enhancement. Below are examples of some of the activities which were carried out between July 2018 and March 2021.

Group activities aimed at building relationships between project participants

- Boda Borg teambuilding day trip – this trip's aim was to develop / enhance leadership, communication, social and teamwork skills, while building resilience skills as individuals and as a group.
- Bundoran Adventure Centre surfing trip – the aim of this trip was to be a teambuilding, diversionary activity.
- Group bonding outing to Lough Key Forest Park. A number of the participants who attended this outing started in the same college in September 2020. During this activity, participants were encouraged to develop their ability to support and encourage each other.
- Christmas party/ awards night – Participants went for Christmas dinner where they re-capped on all achievements of 2018 and 2019. Certificates were presented for achievements throughout the year. Courses and events in which participants had expressed an interest in attending for the coming year were discussed.
- Team building and Good Relations piece where the group watched the Derry Girls television series and discussed the significance of the events in Ireland that are portrayed in the TV programme. Participants talked about their understanding of the history of conflict in Ireland. This fed into a day trip with the cluster groups in Derry.

Group activities aimed at fostering Good Relations

- A Good Relations information session in Belfast in collaboration with representatives of Duncairn Peace Walls Project, Western Region PYDP groups and the International Fund for Ireland. This cultural exchange sought to bring groups together and have their voices heard. This trip was very much a reminder of how far the communities had come and was an effective way to teach young people about the Troubles and what happened during them in a positive way. It included a tour of the Peace Walls and Crumlin Road Gaol.
- Good Relations Trip to Omagh, Co. Tyrone and Lifford, Co. Donegal – Participants were provided with a guided historical tour with Vincent Brogan, who went through the history of Omagh which included the English plantations, the old prison, the courthouse and the events leading up to the 1998 bombing, including the area where the bomb detonated and the memorial site. Participants were brought to the Lifford Courthouse Escape Rooms where they carried out the escape room's activity before they were provided with a tour of the courthouse and jail. The participants were invited to take part in mock sentencing where they were provided with examples of the charges the prisoners who had been held in the prison. This led to questions and discussions around inequality.

- Community inclusion activity viewing of “Moll” the play – To enhance relationships between the young people and the community in which they lived, young people attended the play as guests of the community.
- Cross-border Good Relations Cluster Group activity in Derry with PYDP groups from Sligo, Cavan and Leitrim. “Young people participated in a guided tour which covered the points in the city that were of political historical interest. Background information was provided on religious discrimination against the Catholic and Protestants, the Civil Rights period, the Battle of the Bogside, the Bloody Sunday massacre and covered both inquiries into Bloody Sunday and the conflict that occurred there afterwards. [The tour guide] also highlighted how this history is portrayed on the Derry Girls sitcom and showed the participants where the TV series was filmed throughout the city. Throughout the tour she emphasised the importance of peace for the people who live here.” (YESS Project, 2021)
- Cross-border Mid-term Quiz in collaboration with Foróige YESS Sligo, AYE Strabane, Foróige YETI Cavan and Focus Family Resource Centre Cavan.
- “Superheroes of today” Cross-border Art Project, in collaboration with Foróige YESS Sligo, Gamechanger Tyrone, Regener8 Newry, Fermanagh Sports and Cultural Awareness, IgnYte Derry, AYE Strabane, Foróige YETI Cavan and Focus Family Resource Centre Cavan. A total of 24 images were received.

Group activities to build personal development and increase employability skills

- Cross-border / cross-community female empowerment seminar “Own Your Future” – Cluster group event held in Lough Rynn Castle. This event provided participants with an opportunity to hear the voices of several successful women from a range of businesses and services including hairdressing, childcare, beauty, fitness, millinery and hotel management. The aim was that young women on the project would get the opportunity to explore their prospects and feel more confident in pursuing their own goals. The event also included a motivational workshop at the beginning of the day and a self-defence session at the end.
- Tours and meetings were arranged with co-ordinators of courses in which the participants had shown an interest. These included attending the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB Apprenticeship Showcase Day and meeting with the instructors of the Vehicle Body Repair course; taking a tour of North Connaught College of Further Education and meeting with lectures from E-business, Healthcare, Beauty, Nursing, Security Studies and Childcare. It also entailed a visit to Sligo Institute of Technology where participants met lectures from Social Care Practice, Mechanical Engineering and Gaming Development.
- The 5th International Human Rights Lecture was held in the Mary Robinson Centre and led by Kumi Naidoo, a social justice campaigner. This was used as both an empowerment and a Good Relations activity.
- Foróige Tasty Bites – this programme, which could be carried out online, was aimed at increasing healthy eating on a budget.

- Accenture CV review and feedback – this gave participants the opportunity to write a successful CV and have it reviewed by a leading talent agency. Participants also received feedback and tips on how to better match their skills to their CV.

The second objective of the IFI PYDP was to promote prosperity by increasing the skill base and future employment options of 'at risk' young people. The above interventions were employed at a group level along with several accredited and non-accredited courses. However, the bulk of the work was on an individual level and involved a high-intensity approach built around the individual progression plan which the young person and the project worker developed together and adapted on an ongoing basis.

As will be seen in the Themes and Approaches section of this research, a high-intensity approach is required to get some young people to a place where they have the capacity to progress in their education, training or employment. The reasons for this included mental health challenges, substance misuse issues, homelessness, very long periods of disengagement and a very real nervousness or weariness around services. The challenges for each young person varied significantly. Case Study Two shows the story of one young man who had been disengaged for six years before the YESS Project identified and engaged him. This is his success story.

Case Study Two

A young male aged 25 who had been out of education and employment for a period of six years, concluded that education did not provide him with the skills or knowledge to succeed in the working world. He came from a difficult family background and, prior to engaging with the PYDP, had very limited engagement with others in his community and suffered poor mental health. Initially, work was carried out around developing his confidence and self-esteem. Support was provided to help him book and attend a doctor's appointment and access mental health services.

He completed the Open College Network Level 1 Exploring Employment Opportunities course and drafted a CV as part of this course. From this exercise, he expressed an interest in seeking a voluntary role to improve his communications, social and retail skills. Links were created with the local St. Vincent de Paul Charity Shop and he secured an interview. Preparation for this was carried out by the project during his individual sessions. He secured the position, initially starting one day a week and progressed to three days, along with being promoted to cashier, assisting with counting takings and assisting with locking up the business.

In conjunction with the local St. Vincent de Paul Charity Shop, he was supported to apply for the Tús scheme. He was successful with this application. This is a community work placement scheme providing short-term working opportunities for unemployed people. It was a twelve-month placement in a charity shop where he is required to work 19½ hours a week. He also applied for a number of positions with local retailers but has not yet secured a more permanent position.

He expressed an interest in returning to college part-time. He completed the Microsoft Office Course in North Connaught College and, in September, returned to the college to begin a part-time QQI Level 4 course in computers. Over time, he progressed to joining group work sessions, including a Basic First Aid course. He has completed the OCN level 1 Good Relations training, OCN level 1 Personal Confidence and Self-esteem and OCN level 1 Customer Service course. The

Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on his education and employment. North Connaught College deferred all part-time courses and the shop was closed for the better part of a year.

Initially, he struggled to adjust to the 'new normal'. Work was carried out on sleep hygiene, health and exercise routines and he was supported to link in with his mental health team. He progressed to working on an Open College Network Level 1 course in Healthy Diet Planning, along with a Health and Wellbeing course with the University of Aberdeen. In January, North Connaught College moved his course online and he completed the course remotely. He also studied a course on the Gulf War with the local library and had his CV reviewed by the Accenture team.

In his exit interview, he stated that the project helped him to "re-entry into society, helped me with my CV, created links for me in the community" and showed him what is available. He has noticed an increase in his social skills since beginning in the project, as he is better able to "talk to more people".

He has more friends and considers his manager in the shop to be his role model. He also stated that his position in the charity shop has made him more aware of the feelings of others as he has received a number of phone calls from people who are struggling. The most important point he has taken away from the project is that there is "more opportunity out there". He rated the project 10/10 as he felt that the project could not have done more for him. He reported that he was happy with his progression plan and is looking forward to returning to work.

Working with young people one-to-one and at an individual level was at the core of this project. It had the time, the resources and the budget to work with young people at their own pace to really hone in on what they wanted to do with their life. For some young people who participated, this was the first time they had ever spoken about what they wanted from their life. For others, they had an idea but just never thought they could achieve it. Having a project which could support in this process, and a project worker who genuinely cared about them and who believed in their potential, meant that these young people could begin to dream, to visualise that dream and, over time, watch their hard work come to fruition.

The individual work carried out was high-intensity in its nature. As can be seen from the case studies, young people's challenges and barriers differed greatly in many ways. Each young person was very different in relation to the support they required and, according to the project workers, *'you had to meet each young person where they were at – on their level'*. If a young person could not come in to the project or meet the project worker when they were scheduled to meet, there was no pressure put on them nor any sanctions enforced. Young people reacted well to this approach and it allowed them to grow and progress *'at their own pace rather than the pace of the project'*. Young people stated that, over time, they had built a strong enough relationship with the project worker that they knew they could *'go to them with anything and not be judged'*. This holistic approach was a vital ingredient to the success of this project and to maintaining relationships so that young people continued to engage. The project was flexible in nature and *'not a one size fits all kind of approach'*.

Using data supplied by the YESS Project (IFI Funding application Feb. 2018- Feb. 2020 and the IFI Board OBA Report Card), the table below shows the various types of supports required by young people. This also gives a deeper insight into the type of needs young people had on the project and how these needs differed from person to person.

Table 8.1: Individual supports offered and provided to young people participating in the YESS Project

| Individual Supports | Details of Support |
|--------------------------------|--|
| General individual work | <p>Individual sessions were provided to young people at all stages of the project. Individual sessions were used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build rapport and strong relationships • Identify goals • Develop a progression plan • Monitor progressions • Adapt the road map to meet the needs of the young person at that time • Alter the progression plans and for general support around courses training, employment options • Complete pre-evaluations for IFI (Baseline Survey, Personal Development Survey) • Support young people with general personal development work around self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness |
| General individual work | <p>Support young people with more challenging emotional and social issues - during the pandemic a “listening ear” and emotional support was required around family conflict issues and challenges with their own anxiety around it.</p> <p>This was a needs-led approach and sought to 'break down whatever barriers that young person met'. This was achieved by providing young people with support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and wellbeing – providing support around health and wellbeing and providing the young person with information in relation to sleep hygiene, good nutrition, mindfulness and stress management techniques and home exercise routines • Substance misuse reduction • Personal safety strategies – e.g. around self-harm, negative relationships, accessing services • Healthy relationships • Personal care skills <p>Coping mechanism skills – this was a continuous learning process and young people and the project worker would review and adapt them as the young person progressed. During the pandemic, the skills learned while participating in the project were harnessed and adapted as needed to best help them through it.</p> |

Practical support at an individual level

Each young person had a very different set of needs. The project worked to meet these needs while breaking down any barriers each young person met along the way which could only be overcome by the young person themselves with practical and indeed financial support. The YESS Project provided support by:

- IFI financial support - Transport to and from programme / courses, childcare, catering
- IFI financial support – funding for training programmes, registration, special interest programmes
- Housing Assistance applications
- Consistency in attending appointments / taking medications
- Identification of training options
- Budgeting
- Applications and interview preparation
- Transport to appointments, interviews, etc.

Referrals to and collaboration with appropriate services (e.g. Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Tusla, DSP, Rape Crisis Centre, HSE Addiction Service, FRC Counselling, Simon Community, intellectual disability services).

The case studies provided above show how the project opened many doors for participating young people. The next case study is a perfect example of how the YESS Project met the aims, objectives and outcomes of the IFI PYDP. This young woman about whom you are going to read, in only four years, progressed from a very challenging space of substance misuse and homelessness to travelling to the US as an advocate for young people, and returning to education to complete her degree in Social Care while fully supporting herself working in Social Care. The project provided this young person with the support they need emotionally, socially and financially. Without this project, this young woman may not have had the opportunity to progress in this way. This is her story.

Case Study Three

One participant who prior to starting in the project concluded that education did not offer the skills and experience she needed. She had been involved in substance abuse, is currently living in homeless accommodation, comes from a difficult family background, has previously been in the criminal justice system and was assisted to challenge this charge by the project workers. She suffers from mental health issues, had a mistrust of statutory agencies and had a negative view of her future, but reported that:

"From the first day I walked in I was met with encouragement, empathy and compassion. When I felt able, we discussed what my interests are and courses I might like to do. We started making small plans – day courses, workshops, events, working on my CV and interview skills. All at my own pace, doing what felt comfortable. I started doing courses like First Aid, Occupational Manual Handling, and Food Safety. I studied the Open College Network Belfast Level 1 Good Relations Training and we went on three Good Relations trips to Belfast, Derry and Tyrone; where we learned about

the borders and the trouble that existed in the past."

After carrying out research on courses she was interested in, she stated that she "would like to return to college to study Social Care Practice in Sligo IT, I could see the impact these professionals can have on young people's lives." As part of this course, she had to complete volunteer work placement. After expressing an interest in substance misuse education, the Foróige Drugs and Alcohol Education and Prevention programme was identified as a placement of interest. Assistance was provided by support staff to secure this placement.

She took part in the Emerging Leaders programme funded by the US Department of State's Education and Cultural Affairs Bureau and USAID. She was nominated for this programme because she showed exceptional ability and commitment to working with disadvantaged and at-risk young people with the Foróige Drugs and Alcohol Education and Prevention programme. Following a successful interview with the US Embassy in Dublin, she was one of only sixteen applicants from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland selected to participate in a two-week professional development programme to the USA. All additional costs relating to the trip were funded by IFI.

She says: "I remember getting that email saying I had been accepted and I would be flying to America in September 2019. This kind of happening is unheard of in my family, or in my area. I didn't think I would be able to manage it, but with great encouragement in my corner, I went. I spoke to Youth Workers, members of State Government, Social Workers, academic experts, addiction support workers, to mention a few. I had been on more planes in those 17 days, than I had been on in my life. The culture, the food, the people, the friends I made and the professional relationships made an impression that will last a lifetime."

Since this trip, she has progressed to the Level 4 of the PYDP (Community Champions) by setting up a Foróige junior youth club called "Next Generation" in her local community. She has identified a gap in provision of informal education and personal development for young people around substance misuse and mental health. She hopes to use diversionary and educational programmes with young people in the community to address this need. Staff have linked her with Foróige Regional Youth Officer who supports the initiative on an ongoing basis. She has recruited individuals to work as part of the team to support the club who are reliable and trained volunteers (some from the YESS Project). She hopes to incorporate Good Relations learning into everything she does, with the possibility of cross community cross-border exchanges with young people from diverse communities, to enhance positive inter-community relations:

"The International Funds for Ireland YESS Project helped me believe that I deserve positive opportunities and it is okay for me to give that to myself. I can literally do anything I would like to if I put my mind to it, I know that now."

The YESS Project – Outputs in numbers

The extent of the success achieved by the staff and the young people of the YESS Project is astounding given its the short duration. Since its implementation, the project has supported 34 young people (in two cohorts) through 52 work placements, 209 accredited courses, 93 non-accredited courses and four ongoing courses. Despite Covid and 18 months of restricted services, it has continued to support young people in the Sligo area. The IFI criteria for the PYDP was to assist young

people to remove whatever barriers prevented them from engaging in education, employment and training by supporting them through a needs-based, individual approach. As stated above, 52 work placements were sought and fulfilled by young people and certificates in just under 300 accredited and non-accredited courses were obtained by 34 young people. The numbers here speak for themselves in many ways, and that this was achieved in such a short space of time shows the effectiveness of the project. Through data supplied by the YESS Project, the table below list of all of the placements and courses / programmes completed by young people.

Table 8.2: Work-related placements or experiences, accredited courses and non-accredited courses for the two YESS Project cohorts

| Output name | Output details | No. of participants |
|---|---|---------------------|
| Employment, employment taster, work experience or voluntary work | <p>Positions/roles included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care assistant • Factory work • General operative • Bar staff • Kitchen / counter service • Shop assistant • Cast extra (acting) • Veterinary assistant • Security • Painter • Mechanic assistant • Afterschool childcare assistant • Special Needs Assistant • Customer service • Deli assistant • Youth Worker • Junior salon assistant • Shop assistant • Crisis volunteer • Student Council member as part of the Christmas Committee • Online mental health committee member with Flourish <p>This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14-day Work placement in Barcelona, Spain as part of the Erasmus scheme as a Childcare assistant • Trip to the USA to explore the strategies and solutions used there when working with young people with Emerging Leader. | 52 |
| Accredited Courses and Programmes Completed | Programmes and courses with more than five participants included: | 209 |



| | | |
|---|---|----|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Driver Theory Test• Driving Test• Level 1 Good Relations Training• Manual Handling• HACCP Food Safety Training• First Aid• Safe Talk First Aid (Suicide prevention)• CPR• Level 1 Exploring Employment Opportunities• Skills To Succeed <p>Programmes and courses completed that were QQI Level 5 or above included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level 5 Healthcare• Level 5 E-Business• Level 5 Criminal Law• Level 5 Nursing• Level 5 Intellectual Disability• Level 5 Care Skills• Level 5 Care of the Older Person• Level 5 Security Studies• Level 5 Healthcare Assistant• Level 5 Palliative Care• Level 5 Healthcare Assistant with Disability Support• Level 5 Social Care• Level 6 Special Needs• Level 6 Early Childhood Care and Education• Level 6 Child Psychology• Level 8 Social Care Practice | |
| Ongoing Courses as of March 2021 | <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sports and Recreation Leisure• QQI Level 5 Hairdressing• Gaisce 'The President's Award' Gold Award | |
| Non-accredited courses | <p>Personal development courses and programmes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foróiges 'Be Healthy, Be Happy' and Teamwork Skills• Gaisce 'The President's Award' Gold Award Overcoming Anxiety• Improving Self Esteem• Moneytalk with MABS• Self-esteem, mindfulness and resilience• Self-defence• Community walk group for six weeks for | 93 |



| | | |
|--------------|--|-----|
| | <div>Operation Transformation</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Driving Theory Session• Stress Control• Developing Digital Skills• Cookery Classes</div> <div>Special Interest courses include:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interior design• Acrylic painting• Gulf war• Beauty and make-up• Woodturning• Jewellery Design• Smartphone photography• Photography• Film Workshop• Contemporary Art</div> | |
| Total number | | 353 |

The progression path for each young person differed immensely, but each success was of equal importance and this is one of the reasons the project worked so well. It saw a barrier as a barrier, regardless of how big or small it was. If the barrier needed to be broken down, and the young person showed motivation and determinism, the project would do what it could to support that young person. The case studies from this project are evidence of its success and evidence the project worked and met the desired outcomes. The numbers who completed accredited and non-accredited courses and the number of work experience placements also show how well this project has worked. As one stakeholder said: "The numbers speak volumes", and in the case of the YESS Project, they do!



New Beginnings Project

The New Beginnings project was established in 2017 and ceased in 2020. Initially, a one-year project, the funding was extended for a further two years by IFI for the period 2018-2020. The project was based in Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim. It also operated with an outreach approach covering the whole of county Leitrim and west Cavan. The project had a particular interest in border towns county Leitrim / Fermanagh and this outreach approach meant it could support young people throughout the county and in particular in these more challenging areas.

The target group for this project were young people NEET aged 16-25. While it had a focus on young people who had disengaged, had not built up social and emotional skills and were vulnerable, the project placed specific interest on young people who were:

'At risk of being polarised or recruited to paramilitary organisations opposed to the peace process, particularly in border towns Ballinamore, Dowra and Blacklion.'

Other needs which presented in the county amongst this NEET group were mental health challenges, homelessness, substance misuse issues and a high potential of engaging in criminal activity for some of the young people.

Adapting an individual-led approach to supporting young people, the New Beginnings project supported 15 young people in its duration. It worked with young people by supporting them through their progression plans and providing focused education in regard to their chosen path. It provided support around work experiences, placements and taster sessions which were based on individual needs and strove to support young people re-engaging back into their community. In all, the project supported 15 participants in the completion of 77 accredited and non-accredited courses and programmes:

- 32 accredited courses and programmes
- 45 non-accredited personal development courses of programmes

Young people who participated stated how important the project was for them when it came to progressing. The individualised, tailor-made programme of activities was a key feature to this project and this approach demonstrated a massive impact on youth participants, especially in relation to personal development (confidence, motivation, resilience) and career guidance (seeking, applying and obtaining employment / training / college course).

"On a personal level the project helped me build my career. It helped me to realise and decide that I wanted to do Social Care".

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

"I was young and afraid before participating in this project. When I finished, I had a steady job and great confidence".

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

Meeting the aims, objectives and outcomes of IFI PYDP

The New Beginnings Project was set up in a time when Leitrim had no Youthreach or Community Training Centre. The isolated nature of Leitrim and west Cavan also meant access to support was quite difficult for most young people. The lack of alternative education in the area at the time was a definite contributor to why some of these young people were not engaged with educational and employment services according to stakeholders. 'Young people had to travel to Sligo and with the limited public transport and rural isolation, this was just not an option for some young people'. The need for the project like this in the area was very obvious for some time in the county and this is why a future project need to be considered following this project's footprints.

In regard to meeting the aims, objectives and outcomes of the IFI PYDP, the New Beginnings project succeeded. The aim of the IFI programme was to "help young people build and develop life skills that foster Good Relations, build confidence and resilience and make them more employable". As a project, the New Beginnings re-engaged young people back into education, training and employment by supporting young people to build and develop life skills that have fostered Good Relations, built their confidence, strengthened their resilience and over all made them more employable, engaged members of society:

"Before participating in the project I was shy with no confidence in myself. I now have confidence in myself especially around meeting new people"

Youth Participant – New Beginnings

To achieve this level of success, according to one stakeholder:

'...Required a very determined project worker who was prepared to do what they had to [to] support that young person'

(Management – Youth Organisation)

The type of characteristics and skills that the project worker possessed was shown to have been a key component of the impact of this project on the young people in the area. Having a deep empathy and an ability to build rapport was noted as being a crucial component to building the type of relationship required to support the young people in the way the project sought. For those young people who participated in the research, they stated that the project worker was a great support to them. When asked what kept young people engaged in the project, those consulted said, for example:

"What kept me in the project was the help and encouragement I received from the project worker"

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

"You could link in to the project when you needed to because the project worker was always there. She never made you attend if you did not want to"

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

Having the option to link back in with the project was very important for some young people. They may have left the project and completed the programme, but they still required support from time to time. This could be practical support or personal support. The knowledge that the project worker

was always there appeared to be a comfort to young people, especially those who may not have had the support of their family.

Several barriers to service provision did exist in the area and for the project from the onset. These included no youth training facilities, limited services and supports overall and the fact that, where services were available, they were under-resourced. This made the project worker's role quite difficult initially. According to stakeholders, services in general are lacking in the county and funding for those services is also lacking. One stakeholder consulted said that the service she worked for could not fund her with the expenses incurred in travel costs, thereby preventing her from providing an outreach specialist service to the participants of the New Beginnings project, even though it was part of her remit to provide outreach onsite support. This had to be reimbursed to the specialist service provider from the New Beginnings budget. Some stakeholders stressed a concern over access to services and said that, even if a young person knows they need help or support and want to seek it, they can not necessarily access it easily because of limited public transport options in the area, especially in very rural areas. This isolation was found to have weakened some of the young people's confidence and self-esteem, causing social anxiety in some young people.

This is one reason why having an outreach element was so important for this area and, through smart planning, the project worker was able to cover the areas most in need. The outreach element of this project was crucial to overcoming service provision barriers also, especially for the young people who were perhaps more isolated and who could not avail of public transport or pay for a transport service. It also benefited the young people who struggled with social anxiety or mental health challenges. Having the flexibility to go to the young person meant that even the hardest to reach young person could be supported. For one young man who struggled massively with mental health challenges, substance misuse and who had a poor relationship with a parent, the project helped him to build more positive relationships and find something which gave him purpose. This is his story.

Case Study Four

Young male aged 20 from targeted border area. He suffers from anxiety, low mood, struggles with drug and alcohol issues, is socially isolated, has a poor diet and irregular sleeping patterns. He lacks confidence and has low self-esteem. He has a poor relationship with his mother. This young man participated in drug and alcohol awareness programmes, family support and mediation. He completed the Good Relations training and this greatly improved his confidence around meeting new people and socialising. He attended a sound production programme for a number of weeks where he could write, record and make music videos for his own compositions. This helped him to express his emotions through the medium of music.

With respect to how the project met the objectives and the four outcomes of the IFI programme, the New Beginnings project used a targeted intervention approach. Using data from literature supplied by the New Beginnings Project, the project stated that they were seeing two types of young people who fit into this NEETs category throughout the programme period:

Group A: Young people who have left school early and have poor educational attainment and respect for the educational system. These young people have very little qualifications, poor self-esteem and confidence. The plan for these young people while engaging in individual

personal development was to engage them in group work, and provide them with short-term educational courses, such as the Good Relations training. This was with a view to them building on the confidence within an educational setting before progressing into more long-term education, or exploring employment options, work experience, etc.

Group B: A group of young people, who have attained a Leaving Certificate, but have a low self-image and confidence. While some have gone on to further / higher education or employment, they may have subsequently dropped out, and are at a loss as to how to positively engage in a structure again. (New Beginnings, 2018).

It was recognised that both of these groups were equally at risk. It was noted that substance misuse, mental health concerns, being alienated from society and distrust in statutory agencies diminished their chances achieving a positive outcome. Some of these young people were also from troubled family backgrounds, were completely socially isolated and did not engage with the community in any way. The reason for some young people being isolated was not always to do with where they lived, but rather because of the family connection to organisations opposed to the peace process.

Promoting greater understanding and acceptance within and between communities, especially in border communities was a major part of this project. The project focused on areas such as Blacklion, Dowra and Ballinamore and sought to work with young people who were vulnerable to polarisation and recruitment to organisations opposed to the peace process. With previous history in the areas of paramilitary organisations, there was a great need to identify and target this group of young people. The concern around this group was that they were more at risk of becoming members of such organisations because of family alignment to them, combined with the lack of other opportunities in the area.

On identifying this group of young people in these more at risk areas, the project worker stated that they were mostly young males, aged 22-24 and they were very hard to reach. The project worker stated that the young men seemed to have become used to their situation and, because those around them were in a similar situation, unemployed and on social welfare payments, this seemed to have been normalised for them. She stated that they had been disengaged for so long that it was difficult for them to become motivated enough to participate in any programme.

One project participant was completely isolated and had been home-schooled her whole life, so her connection to the community was minimal. Her family situation was complex and she suffered with anxiety resulting in panic attacks. Her progression shows how the project succeeded in what it aimed to do. This is her story.

Case Study Five

Young female, aged 18, from a border area who was socially isolated who had poor social skills when first engaging with the project. She comes from a large family and she and her sibling were home-schooled. The family do not engage with their community. Local knowledge would suggest that her father would be a non-aligned Republican. She suffered from anxiety and panic attacks and had low self-confidence. During her time on the project, she worked closely with the project worker in relation to her anxiety (utilising The Decider Skills programme). Once able, she attended the cross-border trip to Belfast and began a course with the National Learning Network with the support of the project. She progressed further to a two-year Hairdressing course. Her confidence has much improved and her anxiety has reduced significantly.

To promote Good Relations, the New Beginnings Project supported young people on an individual and group level. As noted by the project worker:

"Most of the work on the project was based on individual needs, on individual work, which could help them to progress in a positive manner".

(New Beginnings Project Worker)

Group work was used to improve understanding and acceptance between people in border counties and also as a tool to bring young people together. The project facilitated several young people to engage in events which brought them to surrounding counties. These included:

- The attendance of 'Born to Change' World Café Research Event in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal – this was a youth-led day with discussions about mental health and the services for young people, as well as workshops for youth workers in promoting resilience.
- Female participants attended the Cluster Group (PYDP projects) event 'Own Your Future' in Lough Rynn Castle. This gave young women the opportunity to hear from women entrepreneurs while reflecting on their own belief in themselves through a Mindset seminar and a Self-defence seminar.
- Participating in the Cluster Group cross-border event, young people visited Belfast to learn about the peace process and its history. They visited Crumlin Road Jail and visited the Duncairn Peace Walls Project.
- Young people participated in and completed 'Good Relations' training

Using a targeted approach based on the individual needs of the young person, the New Beginnings project worked with young people on many different levels to improve Good Relations, enhance personal development skills and to increase employability. The project supported young people to develop and fulfil their progression plan and in total, the project facilitated 15 individual young people through a tailor-made programme. The project supported young people by:

- Offering health and wellbeing support which would build self-esteem and confidence
- Providing resources on mindfulness and meditation
- Supporting young people to build communication skills
- Empowering young people by giving them the opportunity to make well-informed decisions
- Providing the facilitation of The Decider Skills programme
- Providing family support and mediation
- Supporting young people with anxiety and other mental health concerns
- Supporting young people to build on their life skills by providing information and practical tips on budgeting, cleaning and cooking
- Supporting young people around substance misuse
- Supporting young people around housing or homelessness
- Referring young people to special supports where required (counselling, guidance counselling)
- Identification of training and employment options through progression plans
- Support in CV-writing skills, applying for training, completing applications, etc.

Having access to support on various levels was very important for the types of young people the project worked with and so having a flexible approach and variety of interventions helped them most. Some young people have several barriers and this requires a very person centred, holistic approach. 'They need to go at their own pace' according to the project worker. When asked what helped them to break down those barriers one young person stated:

"It was the support of the project worker that helped me break down the barriers."

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

Having the time and resources to help young people break down these barriers was what enabled so many of the young people achieve better outcomes for themselves. Having the budget to break down the barriers some of these young people faced was shown to be one of the features of the IFI-funded programme that added most benefit to the young person's progression.

"The project gave me the opportunity to do things I wouldn't have been able to do myself financially."

(Youth Participant – New Beginnings)

The project sought to support young people in whatever way they could and, because the IFI-funded programme philosophy was not set out to be numbers driven, a young person's place was not simply given to someone else if they disengaged for a period. Having the opportunity to link back in as was needed was a massive benefit to some young people and this actually meant that young people had this continuous support running alongside them that they could tap into as required. Some young people may have completed the progression plan and moved on to education or to employment, but they still had that support there if they needed. This appeared to give young people a sense of security, and knowing that the project worker 'was always there' appeared to be also keep young people on track outside of the project.

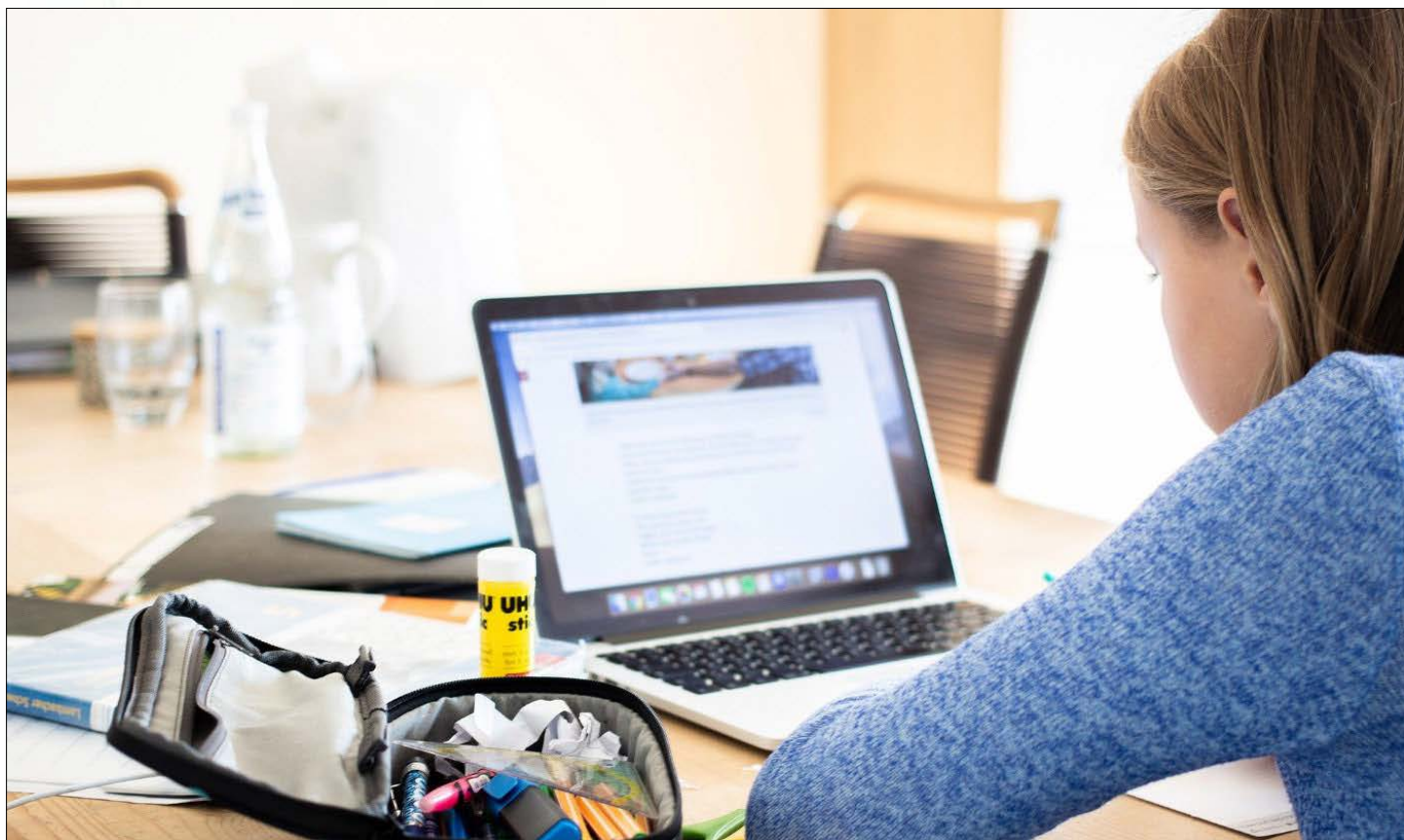
The relationship built up with the project worker was very important to the young people who were consulted for this research, and the belief the project worker had in their potential appeared to keep them engaged. One project participant who was supported to get a part-time post by the project had reached a point where she was sustaining herself emotionally, socially and financially. Nevertheless, she continued to link back in to the project especially around identifying what it was she would like to do as a career in the future. Having the opportunity to link in as she needed was a massive benefit to her. This is her story.

Case Study Six

Young female aged 22 from targeted border area. She lacks self-confidence and self-belief. She dropped out of college and this has had a massive impact on her confidence in relation to going back to study. During her time in the project, she has engaged and completed Good Relations training and has engaged in sessions relating to future employment suitability. Through this, she was supported to get a part-time job in accountancy. She continued to engage and participated in several personal development and Good Relations activities including the cross-border trip to Belfast. Her confidence has increased greatly since she began on the project.

While in the project, she had the support to explore her options and researched how she may go

about getting work in the media industry. The project gave her the opportunity to link back in as she needed. This proved to be a benefit to her. During her time in the project, she joined the Civil Defence and began to work for Sky in Derry.



The New Beginnings Project – Outputs in numbers

While offering a very individualised set of supports to young people which helped them to increase both personal development skills and employability related skills, the project also supported the 15 young people who completed the programme through 77 accredited and non-accredited courses / programmes. The details of these courses and the number who attained them are presented below in the table.

Table 8.3: Accredited Programmes Progression for New Beginnings Participants

| Course/ Programme | Description/ Accreditation / Level | No. complete/ongoing |
|---|--|---|
| Good Relations | Open College Network Level 1 | 6 complete |
| Youth Employability Programme | National programme aimed at young people seeking employment, provides the skills required to apply for and obtain a job. | 8 ongoing |
| Construction Ground Work Skills, plus Safe Pass and Manual Handling | QQI Level 4 | 1 complete |
| Hairdressing | QQI Level 3, Leitrim CTC two-year programme | 2 ongoing |
| Veterinary Assistant Course | Learning Cloud Course - online | Module 1 and 2 complete, Module 3 ongoing |
| Horticulture and Eco-Tourism | QQI Level 5 | 1 complete |
| Business | QQI Level 6 | 1 ongoing |
| Hospitality Operations | QQI Level 6 | 2 complete |
| Introduction to Make-up Artistry | Certified – Athlone Institute of Beauty | 4 complete |
| Safe Pass | Certified | 1 complete |
| Introduction to Woodwork Skills | Certified ETB / Leitrim Development Company | 1 complete |
| Youth Reach | QQI Level 3 | 2 complete |
| Special Needs Assistant | QQI Level 6 | 2 complete |

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Special Needs Assistant | QQI Level 7 | 1 ongoing |
| Social Studies | QQI Level 7 | 1 ongoing |
| Total | | 32 |

Table 8.4: Personal Development Non- Accredited Programmes Completed by New Beginnings Participants

| Programme | Description | No. |
|---|---|-----|
| The Decider Skills programme | Mental health support programme | 6 |
| 'Copping On' programme | Prevention of criminal and anti-social behaviour | 5 |
| 'Putting the Pieces' together programme | Alcohol and drug use Education / prevention | 5 |
| 'Social Light Programme' | Support young people to make a risk assessment when socialising | 3 |
| Mindfulness and Stress Management | Techniques to control anger, anxiety and stress | 6 |
| Life skills support plans | Budgeting / cooking/ cleaning | 3 |
| Self-esteem and confidence building | - | 12 |
| Art Classes | Building portfolios | 3 |
| Empowerment plus | Health Social Media Workshop | 3 |
| Driver Theory Test | Support and practice to pass | 6 |
| Driving Test | Support and advice to pass | 2 |
| Drumming and sound engineering | Building confidence up in the young person to be able to be part of a very demanding music industry | 1 |

As a project, New Beginnings was successful in meeting the requirements of an IFI. However, since its cessation and even though the county now has a Youthreach and a Training Centre, a gap still exists in the county for this NEETs cohort, in particular for young people who have been disengaged for some time and who have become normalised to disengagement. 15 young people were

support individually through 77 accredited and non-accredited courses throughout the duration of the project, improving the outcomes for the young people who participated.

The key difference between the working of the Leitrim and Sligo projects was that, if it was not for the flexibility around outreach, the New Beginnings would not have achieved what it did given the lack of opportunities at the time for young people in the county and the concerning lack of consistent public transport options. Leitrim as a county is rather under-resourced and isolation is commonplace because of the nature of its landscape and how people settled. The project worker noted that outreach was the only way to meet most of these young people and this is why more one-to-one work had to occur in preference to group work. Young males in the 22-24 year old age category were harder to reach, which appeared to have been largely due to their being disengaged for so long.

A project working with this NEET group does need a minimum of two project workers to reach these most at risk groups and the New Beginnings project would have benefited greatly from one outreach worker and one 'in-house, in the community' worker. This would allow for an even more targeted approach to reach these young people who, for whatever reasons, have been disengaged for so long. The level of outreach required was probably underestimated and it was not until the project worker started to try identify and engage potential participants that the resources it required became evident. In the future, a project working with this NEETs group needs to consider the strength of outreach and possibly design a programme that incorporates it as a key component to the project plan.



SECTION 9: IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE

Upon commissioning this research piece, the CYPSC working group set out six headings to be explored when looking at good practice. These included:

- Relationships between youth worker and young people
- Needs-based programmes of activities
- Clear programme aims, objectives and outcomes (see previous chapter)
- Processing pathways
- Monitoring and self-evaluation mechanisms
- Quality assurance of programmes

The aims, objectives and outcomes of the IFI PYDP were met by both projects and the previous chapter addressed and explored how each individual project achieved this. The output of both projects showed that the processes used worked with this NEETs cohort. The barriers met by both groups of young people, while they were different in regard to how each young person dealt with them, showed commonalities and these will be explored before looking at the themes which arose in practice. Barriers were broken down for the most part and the majority of young people from both projects progressed towards, if not directly to, employment, education or training while building confidence, self-esteem, resilience and self-determination.

Common Barriers Faced by Young People in Both Projects

1. Mental health challenges – young people who participated in the projects struggled with mental health. Social anxiety, anxiety / panic attacks and depression were amongst these challenges. For some young people, these challenges were a direct result of being disengaged from services and from the community at large. For others, these mental health challenges were as a result of previous life experiences such as negative family relationships.
2. Limited opportunity in Border areas, with social and economic deprivation leaving legacy in the area – for participants who lived in more rural areas, the opportunities for them were very limited. With the lack of public transport, even if an opportunity did come about, young people may not have been able to avail of it.
3. Rural isolation – many young people lived in areas that lacked public transport and, in some cases, they did not have the financial means to avail of transport services if they existed.
4. Social isolation – mental health challenges presented in most young people who participated in the projects and for some this was the reason they were isolated. For others, social isolation was attributed to their environment or family background.
5. Challenging close relationships – a number of young people who participated had negative relationships with family members.
6. Partaking in risk behaviour – some young people struggled with substance misuse and while a connection was not found between drug use and disengagement, it was viewed as being a preventative to them re-engaging.

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7. Little or no financial support to progress – for some young people, their only income was a social welfare payment and this, if they had bills to pay, left them with very little money for anything else. For others, parental financial support was not available either so even if they did have an opportunity, they may not have been able to partake in it because of transport costs, accommodation costs, childcare costs, phone credit costs, supplies costs, course costs, food costs and so on.
 8. Homelessness – some young people in this cohort were homeless or at the risk of homelessness and this was a direct barrier for them when it came to re-engaging with services or when looking for a job.
 9. Previous negative experiences with services / education system – some young people have previous negative experiences and this became a barrier for them to re-engage as they thought all educational / support services worked the same.
 10. Low self-esteem and confidence – lack of confidence was an issue for most young people and this was linked to them being disengaged for so long. For some their confidence dropped because of being so isolated.
 11. Limited belief in self – many young people who engaged appeared to have little belief in themselves and, in many cases, these young people may not have had the support system behind them that believed in them.
 12. Lack of motivation – it was not uncommon that young people lacked motivation to change or to push themselves forward.
 13. Lacked vision for themselves – many young people who participated did not believe they could aim for their dream and in some cases, young people had never even thought about what they wanted for their life and, in cases where they had, they thought there was no way they would ever reach this dream.
 14. Limited awareness of their ability to overcome a barrier – through consultation, it was found that many young people who participated in the projects did not know how to go about overcoming a barrier or how to break down a problem so it could be solved. They saw the barrier and just accepted it as that because they did not yet have the skills to break it down.
 15. Low level of communication and social skills – many of these young people were disengaged for some time and this contributed to them not building the communication and social skills required to progress positively.
 16. Low level of knowledge around career paths, job paths and course paths – many young people had left school early and so never had the opportunity to learn this. Others may have had some opportunity to learn about it in the school system but lacked the knowledge required to carry it through.
 17. Disengaged for a very long period of time and isolated as a result – some young people had

been disengaged for years and, while they may have wanted to progress at some point, being disengaged became normalised and so accepted as 'this is just how it is'. For some of these young people, the community they were from may have frowned upon progression or engagement and so this deterred the young person from engaging. For others, especially those whose family members may not have seen any value in education or training, they had no support to engage and grow personally or professionally. For a minimal number, disengaging was not their choice and from a young age, they were socially isolated by their family due to the families' possible connection to the troubles in Northern Ireland.

Themes and Key Messages

The themes and approaches below show how the New Beginnings project and the YESS Project achieved a very good standard of practice. These themes support the findings from other global research as shown in previous sections, which in itself pays homage to the work carried out of the project management teams and workers. On a local and national level, the workings and the practices of these IFI-funded projects could be used as a road map to providing an effective service to young people NEET. The educational and vocational success of participants from both projects in a short space of time show that this approach to engaging and working with young people NEET does in fact improve life outcomes for young people. In combination, these projects worked with nearly 50 young people throughout, with the Sligo project still supporting young people in this cohort in the county. The themes which have arisen throughout this research were generated through consultation with 17 stakeholders from the two projects including young people, project workers, management level staff, funding staff, referral agents, steering committee members and specialist service staff members.

The themes below have been divided into three headings:

1. Identifying and engaging young people NEETs - Processing pathways
2. Building relationships with young people NEET – the role of the relationship between project worker and young person
3. Working with NEETs - Needs-based programme of activities

Theme 1: Identifying and Engaging Young People NEET - Processing Pathways

In total, the YESS Project worked with 34 young people and supported them individually. The New Beginnings project worked with 15 young people and supported them individually. Neither area had a service like these previously and so identifying young people from the NEETs cohort was not a simple task. However, from consulting with stakeholders, several themes have been determined which could be very useful when identifying, attracting and engaging young people NEET in Sligo and Leitrim in the future.

Message 1: It is important that every service and school in the area are aware of the project and what it offers prior to engaging young people.

Stakeholders said that at the beginning it is important to contact each service and school in the area to inform them of the service. If such connections have not previously been made or through other work in the area, it can benefit to meet each representative face-to-face as a means of build-

ing a greater connection with them. It was stated that:

"Getting to know the worker was a massive help when referring young people. You had met the worker and knew what the project offered and how it might help the young person you were working with."

(Referral Agent)

Message 2: By making these connections early on, an opportunity is created to identify those in the target group.

This connection can be helpful when identifying potential participants. Building connections early on and spending time building this relationship will ensure that young people are brought to the attention of the project. It can also be very beneficial for joint identification whereby the worker and the referral agent work together to identify NEET young people in the area. While this was very beneficial work, it was also timely according to stakeholders and at the beginning it meant that *'all potential participants had to be identified through other services and schools rather than through the project.'*

The power of connecting with all relevant services is shown throughout the literature review. According to the findings by the Nordregio Report (2019), The TOPIKS project in Finland was dependent upon the close collaboration of public employment services and social services to recruit participants. Finland is the only country explored in the literature review, including Ireland, that demands municipalities to employ outreaching youth workers who contact young people who have fallen out of schools, work or are inactive. They leave no room for any young person to fall through the cracks early on. In Ireland young people who have left school early between the age of 16 and 18 have no service responsible for whether or not they are engaged in anything. When a project working with young people NEET has connections to schools and other relevant services, this may prevent young people from disengaging at all.

Message 3: Sharing information and working with inter-agents when identifying and engaging young people is very beneficial and systems if set up correctly, enhance the fluency of the processes and build good working relationships.

While adhering to GDPR requirements, connecting with services and schools and building strong relationships is vital when identifying and attracting young people to a NEETs project. The school / service has a very important role as they know the young people who may be in need of support or who may have disengaged completely. Due to GDPR, the project worker cannot just contact young people and so needs the agent to be the point of contact initially. In these cases, the school / service will contact the young person if over 18, or their parents if under 18, to inform them of the service and what it offers. Consent would be obtained from the individual or the parent / guardian to share their contact information with the project worker.

The following steps were taken by project workers when identifying young people for the project and getting them to engage:

1. Identifying potential services and schools with which the project could link
2. Working with these services and schools to identify young people

3. Seeking consent for contact details to be shared
4. Initial contact by project worker / initial introduction made by referral agent
5. Official referral and application process begins when young person agrees to participate
6. First face-to-face informative meeting.

Message 4: An initial call by the project worker to the potential participant or their parent / guardian before meeting face-to-face works well with this group, especially if they have had prior experiences with services which may have been negative.

Once the young person was identified and consent had been granted, the project worker could then reach out to the young person or family by phone and arrange an informal face-to-face information sharing meeting with them if they agreed to it.

Message 5: When engaging NEETs, using an informal, gentle approach breaks down any barriers or reluctance which may exist for that young person or their family in regard to services.

Stakeholders noted that several young people and their families had had previous relationships with services which may have been negative, and so a barrier existed before the project worker even made the first phone call. *'There was a reluctance from some to engage because of previous negative experiences'*, according to one stakeholder. Karlsdottir et al. (2019) found that young people often had an 'attitude of rejection towards formal authorities'. Whether this is from negative experiences in school or with services, some young people find it very hard to build strong relationships with service providers. When engaging young people who have been disengaged for so long, it took a lot more time to break down these barriers with them and so an approach which was informal and non-threatening was very helpful when trying to build the relationship. *'We had to meet young people where they were at and accept them as they presented.'* (Project worker, New Beginnings)

Message 6: It can be helpful to link in with the referral agent for the first meeting with the young person.

Linking in with the referral agent for the first meeting helps to build trust according to stakeholders, and it also makes the experience more comfortable for that more vulnerable young person. It was found that using the referral agent as a type of advocate for the project was helpful. Research also found that, by having the referral agent included in the first meeting, any barriers which may have existed because of previous negative experience with services or the education system could be broken down more quickly if the young person had a familiar person with them. This process proved to be a major asset when trying to engage young people due to the fact that the agent already had a rapport and a trust built with that young person. It also assured the young person that this new project could benefit them in some way as it was a person they knew and trusted telling them about it.

Message 7: Creating a strong robust network of services working with vulnerable young people can be a huge asset when working with NEET groups.

The initial phase of the project is an opportunity to create such networks. Having a collaborative working approach was shown to be effective when working with NEET young people, especially at

the identification stage. This needs to be harnessed and nurtured by involving each service in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. This allows for an easier transition between services before, during and after the programme ends for the young person. It also enhances the systems around information sharing, resource allocation and resource pooling. Having a knowledge of the roles and the responsibility of each service is important when creating such networks to prevent the overlapping of services. Both projects in this research created a type of infrastructure between the services just by being the only support in both counties working to support this NEET group. Stakeholders noted the role the project worker had in bringing these parties together. One project worker stated that they had to be out in the community advocating and lobbying on behalf of young people to yield the greatest results for young people in the area overall.

A lack of fluidity and connectedness between services in general did exist and was noted by stakeholders as being a barrier for young people, especially those who have had to tell their story several times. The type of robust network necessary for a longer-term project takes time to build and, due to the funding phase of the IFI projects, this network was not built formally. Nevertheless, the connections which were made were vital to the success of both projects. The Sligo project funding phase was different to Leitrim and so had longer to build a more structured network. This can be utilised in the future.

Message 8: Young people as a direct referral agent is often overlooked but proved to be of great benefit when identifying young people NEET for both project.

Young people themselves were shown to be a great resource when identifying young people who could benefit from the project. Some participants from the New Beginnings and YESS Project referred a friend or family member to the project or informed them about it. Project workers said that once young people could see the benefits of the project, they wanted to tell their friends. For other young people, they could see that a friend or family member could do with the extra support and so told them about it. The strength of this was significant as it not only empowered young people to try and help others, but it showed the project workers and organisers that the project was having a positive impact.

Theme Two: Building Relationships With Young People NEET

The relationships between the youth worker and the young person was found to be vital to the progress of that young person, with several research participants stating that 'having that one good person who believes in you makes all the difference'. Jigsaw (2019) found that having the support of one good adult improved the mental health of young people. They also found that young people who had this support tended to have increased self-esteem, more success in school work, were more likely to seek help if they needed it and were less likely to partake in risky behaviours. Young people in this research noted the kindness, compassion, understanding and non-judgemental approach used by project workers as being a factor in them engaging in the project and staying for the duration. According to Gupta et al., (2016), staff and their ability to engage and build trusting, respectful relationships with young people NEET is considered to be at the root of the success with this group. The power of this relationships can be seen in the workings section of this report, where young people stated the importance of the project worker and the relationship they built with them. Part of this success was down to the project workers' flexibility to work with young people on a very personalised level. They were able to work closely with young people to build both soft and

hard skills as well as support them in personal and educational development. This required time and funding and these projects were designed so the projects could give young people both as needed.

Message 9: Having the time to build the relationships slowly with young people, especially with those who may have more challenging barriers, is very important when engaging young people.

In some instances, young people were very willing to be involved but, for other young people, it took longer for them to feel able to participate in the project fully. In these instances, the project worker had the flexibility to support them to build the skills they needed to attend and engage in the project steps. This time spent building up these skills and easing into engagement was of major benefit to young people who had higher needs and a variety of barriers. Young people lacked confidence and for them to begin to build themselves back up they need to begin to see their own worth. This time spent trying to engage them as well as the time spent to enhance their skills made them feel cared about according to one stakeholder.

"The programme was life changing for me. I wasn't in education, employment or training. I was a broken soul, I wasn't looking after myself."

(Youth Participant)

"The programme impacted me a lot. Before it I was very depressed and very anxious. I didn't trust myself and I would second guess myself."

(Youth Participant)

Young people were encouraged to build up soft skills and complete short, accessible and manageable courses which gave them a quick, easy to reach reward. This helped to build confidence, resilience and it was said to have motivated participants to want to do more. From a good practice perspective, the SICAP (2017) report found that the projects which work best with this group 'see the benefit of non-cognitive development and work on it with the young person'. According to Carcillo (2015), non-cognitive skills are just as important as cognitive ability skills. Both projects recognised this and time was spent with young people enhancing these skills. The LIKE programme as referred to in the literature review gave young people access to a life coach which they worked with to build these 'soft skills'. This evidenced massive benefits when implemented alongside the work carried out by the case managers.

Message 10: It is important for the project worker to be consistent and persistent when attracting and engaging NEET young people at first.

If participants have had either negative experience with services previously or they have been disengaged for some time, they will not always want to engage straight away and may require extra efforts to engage them. Factors such as the lack of trust, fear of the unknown, negative past experiences, social anxiety, parental or family attitudes towards education, background and current situation, as well as their lack of motivation, were all noted as being barriers for the young person at the beginning of the process. To break down such complex barriers, it is crucial that the project worker is both consistent and persistent in their approach. The Roca project in the US used a 'Relentless Outreach and Follow Up' strategy and found that persistence was a contributor to getting young people to engage in the programme.

"The young person has to know you are not giving up".

(Project Worker)

"After a while, I just knew _____ was not going to go away and this actually encouraged me to join the project....."

(Youth Participant)

The term 'one person who believes' was used very often throughout the research by all research groups. Being consistent and persistent helped young people see that 'the project worker has their back'.

"These young people needed a service that was available, to build relationships and be non-judgemental the worker had to be willing and able to listen, to support."

(Management level stakeholder)

One very interesting finding from the Uutta Virtaa project was that project managers stated that the issue most usually raised by participants was that they had never been asked before what they wanted to do; they had only ever been given instructions, without taking into account their actual problems. To approach this, the project sought to 'listen, listen, listen' and to embody the idea that 'we have one mouth and two ears, so we listen twice as much as we speak!'. (Karlsdottie et al., 2019)

Message 11: When working with the NEETs cohort, a non-judgmental, holistic approach works best especially when building trust.

It was noted by young people that not being judged by the project worker made it easier to trust them. Some young people stated that it was a shock at first when telling their story because

"You expected a reaction the same as others would, but when that didn't happen, it made you think - it made you open up more."

(Youth Participant)

Using a non-judgemental approach helped the project workers to build relationships with the young people and it also created a space for the young person which was safe and supportive for them to share.

"They could open up on their own terms and share what they wanted to share with no pressure."

(Project Worker)

Message 12: Young people are not always ready to begin work related to employment, education or training and so it is important that the project worker has the time and flexibility to work with young people intensively if required in order to help them to build both capacity and ability.

Having a project where the project worker can work with young people around their barriers before ever engaging in a group setting is vital. Barriers which present for young people are not always the same and each young person is at a very different place than the next. Both projects had the opportunity to build relationships slowly and to help young people work at their own pace to achieve their individual goals. Having a project which could allow for this was very important for this NEET

cohort as some required this very personalised, tailor-made approach to building both capacity and ability. According to Mawn et al. (2017), intensive supports are more likely to be successful in regard to positive outcomes for that young person NEET. The Roca project in Massachusetts in a four-year programme uses a high risk intervention model, providing young people with two years of intensive support and two years of less intensive support.

"Young people needed time to figure out what barriers were in their way and how they were going to approach it. Support needed to be holistic where they worked at their own pace."

(Management level stakeholder)

Message 13: The attributes of the project worker does contribute to how much the young person 'buys in' to the process and personal attributes of the project worker such as 'being positive and motivating' and 'supportive and committed' seem to work well with this group.

Findings from the SICAP report showed that when staff are skilled and engaged, the project is more effective in regard to this NEET cohort. Having the capacity to use a range of approaches, being a creative problem solver, a critical thinker, able to actively listen, an excellent organiser, able to carry out several tasks at once, good humoured, emotionally intelligent, empathetic, and grit were shown to increase the effectiveness of the project according to SICAP (2017).

Through consultation, it was found that the project worker required several skills and attributes to fulfil their role. As they were 'lone working' roles, a particular type of individual was required. Management level staff stated that they had to be 'self-determined, strong individuals.' Project workers themselves stated that they needed to be 'self-assured, confident in your practice, able to form strong trusting relationships with young people, innovative and creative, flexible in the working approach and able to overcome any obstacles which may get in the way of project providing the support it needed to'.

Theme Three: Developing Needs-based Programmes of Activities

The programme of activities offered to young people were tailor-made in essence and delivery. Each young person was supported intensively one-to-one and the level of support was dependent upon their needs. To meet the funding aims, objectives and outcomes, young people were provided with the support they required, but also the opportunity to work as part of a group, build relationships and become participating members of their communities. This research shows that using an approach which provides a needs-based programme of activities to young people in the NEETs cohort can and does have a positive effect on life outcomes. Intertwining this personal development work with group activities and community interactions enhances the skills and attributes they have attained through working on personal development and therefore enhances their overall life.

Both projects sought to meet young people 'where they were at' and to design a needs-based programme of activities around individualised progression plans. Research found that while the progression plan was a great tool to use, several factors had to be in place prior to designing / developing the first progression plan with the young person. Not all young people had the capacity or the ability at point of contact to start an education, employment and training progression plan and so they needed more intensive support in the first instance. For others, they were ready to progress on this route but may not have had the skills or the 'know how' to move forward on their

own. The needs of the young person were not always known or obvious, so focusing on building a relationship where they could be supported to enhance their capacity and ability was crucial prior to designing the progression plan. This relationship, once trust was built, allowed the young person the space to re-engage at their own pace and gave both the project worker and the young person an opportunity to explore and identify their individual needs and the barriers they were faced with.

"Some of the young people do not really know what their needs are or what barriers are in their way so it is almost like a jigsaw puzzle where you are helping them to put all the pieces together."
(Project worker)

Message 14: Individual progression plans work well with this group of young people and honing in on personal interests is a good way to begin this process.

Each young person worked on individual progression plans with their project worker and whatever barriers were in their way were identified with an aim to break down that barrier. A solution focused approach, young people got the opportunity to explore their dreams and aspirations and to develop a plan towards achieving them. The remit was to break down any barriers which got in the way of young people progressing toward accreditation and the progression plan approach allowed for the project worker to invest time in all young people who wanted to participate but who may have needed extra support prior to engagement into the group setting.

"Young people found it hard to get out of bed in the morning. They lacked self-esteem, self-confidence, motivation. They had personal issues, so accessing opportunities was always going to be difficult for them so it actually took a long time. The beginning of the process was slower and it required that very individualised, holistic approach in relation to getting them to a point where they were able and they had the capacity to access the education or the employment opportunities that we could find."
(YESS Project Worker)

Message 15: Progression plans should be developed collaboratively between the project worker and the young person.

According to Patton (2011), within a core framework, individualised development plans that are co-designed with participants is a key component to increased likelihood of continued engagement and of individuals sustaining improvements in the longer term. Findings from Eurofound (2015) emphasised the need for young people to actively participate in both design and implementation and they stated that this has been cited as critical success factor right across programmes in Europe.

"We were able to tailor the programme to suit the young person rather than get the young person to suit the service"
(Project Worker)

It was found that working on the progression plan collaboratively was a very important part of the process for the participants in the YESS Project and New Beginnings project. Firstly, young people felt supported while going through each step and if they have any problems, they knew they could turn to the project worker for support. Secondly, young people may not have had such support in their life before and so learned how to work alongside someone who also had their best interests at heart. This was noted as a motivator for some young people. The projects were not designed

to fit young people into it as such, but instead were designed to fit around the needs of the young person. This was very empowering for the young person as they felt the freedom and the support to really grow. It gave young people the responsibility to take control of their life and ownership of it. They knew they had the support along the way that was not going away. Research shows that working on these plans collaboratively can give the client a sense of accountability and ownership, both of which are crucial for progression (Gupta et al. 2016; Symth, Eaton-Eriksson, 2009). In essence, project workers were there to support and guide young people but 'it was the young people who had to do the work to succeed' according to one stakeholder.

Message 16: These progression plans should be adaptable and changeable allowing for the individual to move forward in a way that best suits their needs.

The progression plan approach gave young people the opportunity to progress at their own pace and in the way they needed. It also allowed the young person the time to deal with challenges which may arise as they went along their path of progression. If they needed to stop and reassess their goals, they could. If something changed or they sought a different direction along their progression path, they could alter the progression plan as they saw fit. They could add goals and remove them as their needs changed. This was a massive asset to young people as they could alter their plan as they changed and grew as a person. It gave them an opportunity to dream and to envisage their future in a way some had never before. It gave them the confidence to believe they could achieve their dreams and the opportunity to be supported fully as they aimed to reach them. Research carried out by Mason et al. (2013) shows that being part of the design, evaluation and adaptation of progression plans helps to build capacity for non-cognitive skills. This was something stakeholders in this research noted also, stating that young people may have never carried out any type of goal orientated work and this gave them a tool to bring with them into the future and the confidence that they could reach any goal if they put their mind to it.

Message 17: The type of work that needs to be carried out with this cohort can be intensive and this requires a great deal of time and financial resources.

For work to be intensive, two factors must be in place. The first is the budget to provide whatever support is required in relation to the breaking down of barriers. Secondly, the project must have the time to work with the young person at their own pace. Where the support required is intensive, time is first needed to build the relationship enough so that some kind of plan can be formulated. Many young people from both projects struggled with their mental health and with social anxiety in particular. The support needed by these individuals was intensive and they needed this time at the beginning to build relationships and to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

According to the findings from The Activity Agreement Pilot in the UK, intensive support provided by the Advisers was highly valued by the young people who participated and this support was noted as one of the main reasons for the young people's continued engagement. As shown above, the relationships were crucial to the success of the young people's progress and it was the persistence and consistence over time that got them to engage and stay engaged.

The barriers some of these young people face requires this intensive support built upon a trusting relationship, but it also requires a large budget that can break down these barriers as much as possible. Another reason The Activity Agreement Pilot was shown to have great success was

partly attributed to the discretionary budget which was made available for personal development activities, skills development and work-related activities. Young people in the YESS Project and New Beginnings Project identified that one of the key barriers to their progression into training and employment had been lack of financial means.

Young people did not have the ability to pay for courses, transport, food on course days, childcare costs or course materials and so this financial support was vital. Without the larger than typical budget through the IFI funding, many of these young people may not have progressed so positively. Intensive work takes time and resources and to break down the barriers which present for these young people so that they can move forward and achieve greater outcomes for themselves requires a substantial amount of money.

Many of these young people did not have families who could support them financially and most were on a social welfare payment. If these young people were to progress, they needed greater outside financial support. According to some stakeholders, young people would not have had the opportunity to progress if it was not for the project and the resources it had:

"The project has impacted everything in my life. I had one child when I began and the project worker helped me get her into childcare and I could start training."

(Youth Participant)

Message 18: For some young people, flexibility is required around participation and attending the project. The project should be flexible around attendance (disengaging and reengaging).

Stakeholders noted that some young people need to take time out from the project because of childcare challenges, family problems or personal problems and so it is important for them to still have a place to return to when they were able. Project workers noted that this is a vital factor in retaining young people in the project. The LIKE project in California had great success with the NEET cohort and recognised that these young people would have periods where they did not engage, so they removed any unnecessary barriers for young people around this (Gupta et al 2016).

Message 19: To get to a place where a young person opens up takes time. It often takes up to six months to build a relationship with young people before any employment, education or training progression work is carried out.

The strength of relationship built between the young person and the project worker is a component in the success of projects working with young people according to this research. This relationship can take some time to build, and it is not until it is built that work concerning the young person's education, employment and training can begin. Once they have gained the skills they need to move forward, they may struggle with what to do next, as perhaps they had not envisaged themselves moving forward. It is not uncommon that young people are unaware of the progression they want to take and so need the support to find out what it is they want to do and how it is they go about doing it.

Time taken early on to figure this out is very important as it is a gradual, non-threatening process.

"Some people were ready to go straight to employment, while others had to start from the begin-

ning with basic job skills. It was really flexible in the pace they could work through the programme so they could go up and down the levels as they needed to"

(Project Worker)

Message 20: Having a project with an outreach strand is very beneficial when meeting the needs of young people NEET. It is especially important for those young people from rural or isolated areas, who are parents, who have caring roles, or who are suffering from mental health challenges.

The outreach element of these projects was paramount to their success with this NEET group. Many young people were socially or rurally isolated, living in areas which were not serviced or serviced poorly by public transport. Some young people were parents and had no options for a child minder. Other young people did not have the finances to travel to and from the project space. Having an outreach element to the project allowed the project work to go to the young person in their home or their locality. This automatically broke down a barrier for the young person. It also gave the project worker an opportunity to build relations with the young person's family in some cases.

While both projects provided an outreach option, The New Beginnings project was largely an outreach project according to the project worker, with most of the work being carried out on location rather than in a project setting.

The dispersed nature of the population in the county meant that many young people were very isolated and because of the lack of public transport, it was crucial that the project worker could travel to the young person. According to Devlin (2015), inventive and comprehensive approaches to outreach are critical for NEETs. Their lives often have many challenges and so they may not always be able to attend a club or project space.

Other research suggests that using outreach to target specific areas or spaces is also beneficial when engaging this group. The LIKE project in California employed a 'feet on the ground' recruitment and engagement strategy and the Roca project also saw the benefits of having an outreach strategy in place which targeted specific areas and spaces like Tattoo parlours and other unconventional places.

Message 21: To meet the needs of young people NEET, especially those who are socially isolated, a project based in the community where the young person can 'drop in' or 'call up' can be a massive asset. This helps young people to progress and creates a sense of community for that young person.

'The youth and community combined approach was key to this – we were very accessible to them, we were in the community, we had a building, they could pop in even if they were not scheduled to.

(Project Worker)

Eurofound (2015) suggested that a key approach to inclusion is to simplify access and bureaucratic procedures. Through consultation with projects workers working with the YESS Project and New Beginnings project, it was found that having an 'open door policy' was important for young people NEET. Some young people may have needed brief support or assistance with something and being able to call up the project worker for support was shown to be of massive benefit to the young people. For the Sligo participants in particular, being able to drop into a space was beneficial. The

YESS Project building was in the community and young people could simply call up and if the project worker was there, they could have an informal catch-up or one-to-one.

For the Leitrim-based project, while it had a space to work from, not all young people were from the locality and so a space to go was not always accessible to them. It was more one-to-one, individualised work as a result, but young people from the project still appeared to have received the same type of 'consistent and 'on-hand' support as those on the YESS Project, even though it was offered more on an outreach level.

The physical environment has been found to be important when optimising youth engagement nonetheless (SICAP, 2017) and so should be considered strongly when starting a project working with young people NEETs.

Message 22: When engaging young people NEET, giving young people an opportunity early on to gain certification or acknowledgement for attending a short programme can act as an incentive.


This research found that young people were motivated by achieving certification and getting a tangible certificate for the work they had done. At the beginning, capacity and ability may have been weaker for some and to build confidence, project workers organised for them to do short courses where they received certification. This helped them to enhance self-esteem and in turn pushed them to continue progression. Giving young people the opportunity to do training and courses in topics which interested kept them interested and made things easier:

"It helped them see they could set a goal and achieve it and sometimes rather easily."
(YESS Project Worker)

Message 23: Having access to specialist services is crucial for the progression of some young people.

From consultations with stakeholders, it is apparent that some young people struggled with mental health and substance misuse issues. In order to be able to fully engage in the programme, they required specialist support to build up their capacity. The project provided them with the support they needed to seek that help and to engage in that support until they were ready enough to progress. Having access to guidance counsellors, job coaches, employment services, or money services such as MABS was also shown to add benefit to the provision of supports as well as for the young person's progression. It was noted by stakeholders that at times young people did not even know where to start when it came to education or employment. If the worker did not have all the information they needed to support the young person around this, they could seek advice from the specialist services or arrange for a meeting with that service.

The Uutta Virtaa project in Finland created a knowledge chain between public employment service and municipal authorities which would create an easier flow of information between services. This connection was found to be significant with regard to re-engaging of young people back into education or into the labour market. Specialist support was offered around their overall health and wellbeing, with regular visits to the project nurse, and young people received regular guidance counselling support. Developing these strong links allowed young people to progress more easily. From a GDPR perspective, consent would be required to share the young person's contact details



and 'case' details. This information should only include information that could be deemed important for the partnered service to support the young person. For example, if the partnership was with an employment service, only employment related information would be shared.

Message 24: Having strong connections to educational / training institutions and business institutions is very beneficial, especially in relation to providing young people with information and 'taster' days / open days.

By having connections to education and training institutions, projects were able to team up and collaborate to deliver taster days for young people where they could go in and try something out. If, for example, they thought they wanted to study or work in a particular role, they could partake in a 'taster day' and try out the role or they could attend the local college and speak to the lectures about the course topics and course details. This was a massive benefit to young people especially those who may not have been sure what they wanted to do. It gave them the opportunity to 'test things out' and only commit to something if they truly wanted to.

At an early intervention level, Nelson et al. (2011) found that a programme offering vocational tasters, work experience and other vocational options can be a way to offset young people disengaging in the first place. A theme which arose in the SICAP report (2017) which was shown to be effective when engaging this NEETs group was that providing short, taster and interest-based programmes based on what the young person wants increases both engagement and progression. The benefit of having these strong connections is that these type of experiences and opportunities can be set up easily and navigated fluidly. They can also be more frequent and re-occurring, with potential pathways set up for young people to gain employment at the end of the project.

The US-based programmes, CBYO, showed great results using this approach with young people, stating that one of the key reasons they engaged was that they had the ability to gain qualifications while undertaking work provided by the programme. Both of the programmes from Denmark highlighted in this research, SUME and TAMU, were based on a two-tier approach connecting education with business.

TAMU was an independent organisation which was essentially an enterprise that young people were a part of and took ownership of. According to the researchers of the SUME project in Denmark, Karlsdottir et al. (2019) found that the strength of the project is that it co-ordinates all of the different partners in vocational education and training and the labour market that need to be engaged for a scheme like SUME to work. They both showed great results when working in this way with this NEET group.

Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Self-evaluation Mechanisms

Both projects delivered quality evidence-based projects which enhanced confidence, self-esteem and resilience. The YESS Project used evidence-based programmes which targeted elements of personal development. Foróige as an organisation have an abundance of evidence-based programmes that they work from and having access to these programmes was of benefit. Young people worked on Foróige's 'Be Healthy, Be Happy' and Teamwork Skills programme. Other non-accredited programmes included MABS Moneytalks programme and the National Driver Theory programme.

The quality of the accredited courses in which young people completed were also of a particular standard, the majority of which were accredited by QQI and recognised through National Qualifications Framework. New Beginnings participants were provided with quality assured and evidence-based programmes also, including the Decider Skills programme which is proven to increase mental wellbeing in young people. Both projects also provided a programme in Good Relations from the Open College Network. They both offered the opportunity to work with these programmes on a group level as well as a one-to-one level. This meant that young people could go at their own pace and work on areas most significant for their individual progression.

The Foróige YESS project was the first to become an accredited centre through the Open College Network in Belfast. This allowed for the development and facilitation of the accredited Level 1 Good Relations training for the participants of the project in South Sligo.

The progression plan design by each young person in collaboration with the project worker was a constant marker of how well the project was doing. Each individual had a set of goals to meet and a number of barriers to break down to achieve that goal. As each goal was met, micro or macro, this was an assurance that the support of the project was meeting the needs of the young person in a significant way and that it was directly impacting their life outcomes positively. When reviewing the case studies in this research, the level of progression for some of these young people was immense and this proves that the approaches the both projects took were effective.

Monitoring the progress of the projects overall was carried out by way of quarterly reports and annual report cards to the funders. Having this reporting system allowed projects to see the output, assess what has worked and what had not worked and also created a space where project workers could evaluate their work and input. Case files were kept and reviewed for each participant and project workers received supervision from the project managers.

The duration of the projects and working with a consistent client base which was small did not require anything further in relation to monitoring the work being carried out. However, for a longer standing project or in the case of an extension to the length of the project, similar to what happened with the YESS Project, a more comprehensive plan was required. The YESS Project currently uses a Logic Model for individualised plans and evaluation, which has been very effective.

SECTION 10: CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to document the workings and good practices used by the YESS Project in South Sligo and the New Beginnings project in Leitrim. These two IFI-funded PYDPs had a very significant impact on the lives of the young people with whom they worked and the communities in which they were based. Using an individualised approach, based on the needs of each young person, these projects were very successful in that they supported young people to re-enter education and / or employment while building resilience, confidence and self-esteem. The YESS Project supported 34 young people through individualised programmes of support completing 300 accredited and non-accredited courses combined. The New Beginnings project supported 15 young people through an individualised programme of supports, completing 77 accredited and non-accredited courses combined. The level of achievement did vary from young person to young person, but it was evident from consultation with young people that their lives had changed greatly because of the support they received from the IFI programmes.

The Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Economic Security and Opportunity Working Group saw an opportunity to document the work of the YESS Project and New Beginnings project because of this success. They recognised the significance of these learnings locally and nationally. Locally, the importance of documenting this work and the practice approaches is that the findings can be used to shape future projects aimed at promoting Good Relations and supporting young people NEET. Nationally, research exploring work with young people NEET is limited and so having access to further research will be an asset to the island going forward.

In Ireland, over 12% of young males and young females aged 20-24 are NEET according to the OECD (2021). Ireland is slightly below the EU28 average of 13.7%, but these figures are still concerning. Some countries such as the Netherlands have a NEET rate of 5.4%. For other countries, a quarter of their youth population is NEET (Italy 24.9%). What contributes to a young person disengaging is not always a simple answer and often there are several contributing factors. Research has connected low parental education, parental involvement in their child's education, parental unemployment, economic adversity and mental health challenges as contributing to a young person disengaging from education, employment and training. (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012; Yates et al., 2011; Pitkanen et al., 2019; Kallio et al., 2016; Vauhkonen et al., 2017; Vancea and Utzet, 2018; Power et al., 2015).

Findings from this research showed that young people had a variety of barriers which prevented them from progressing personally, vocationally and professionally. These included mental health challenges, rural and social isolation, challenging close relationships, participating in risky behaviour, limited opportunity for them in their area, limited financial support to help them to progress, homelessness or at risk of homelessness, previous or negative experiences with services and educational institutions, low self-esteem and confidence, poor motivation and vision for themselves and limited awareness of their ability to overcome a barrier. This meant that levels of resilience were low, poor communication and social skills and for some, they had been disengaged for a long period of time and completely isolated as a result. The point is there is no one contributing factor or barrier, but often a multitude of them. The longer a young person remains NEET, the more complex these barriers become.

Supporting a young person who has disengaged for whatever reasons requires a very intensive approach (Pierce, 2009; Mawn et al., 2017). As can be seen from the findings of this research, often young people have many barriers in their way and to break them down requires a great deal of time, access to a wide range of expertise and services and access to financial resources. The IFI-funded projects had all three (time, expertise and a strong budget) and their success could definitely be attributed to this combination. Using a partnership approach, the IFI entrusted youth work services and approaches to manage and facilitate the two IFI projects. This has shown to be a very effective partnership from a Good Relations and cross-border perspective, a service provision perspective and from an expertise perspective. The combining of the aims and objectives of the IFI PYDP and the aims and objectives of the youth service providers, created two very unique projects with similar approaches to supporting young people NEET.

Through consultation with the relevant stakeholders from both projects, 24 key messages were determined. The themes and key messages found in this research identify ways of engaging and working with young people NEET that have been shown to be effective. Messages found in this research, which mirror the global research reviewed in this report include: a long-term, intensive, individualised, holistic programme of support is most effective when working with young people NEET; using a collaborative approach to identifying young people NEET was useful; easy access to specialist services is important; having access to financial resources that could break down young people's barriers is crucial; the attributes of the project workers was shown to have a significant impact on both engaging and retaining young people in the support; being able to link in and out with the service helped to keep young people engaged; and having a flexible working approach to allow for outreach work was vital especially when re-engaging young people NEET.

Having the time, resources, budget, expertise and combined approaches of IFI, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland North Connaught and their stakeholders, these projects were able to support young people at a very individual level to both visualise and realise their dreams. As a result of participating on the programmes, young people attained QQI Level 8 qualifications, started working in a jobs they never imagined they could aspire to, became 'Community Champions' and, above all, young people who once lacked confidence, self-esteem and motivation, began to believe that they could dream and began proactively reaching for those dreams.

The learnings from this research are significant from both a local perspective and national perspective. Ireland has a high NEET rate amongst young people aged 20-24 which is concerning. As a country, we need more research about this group and how best to work with them. We also need to place more worth on intervention and prevention services by giving them the financial resources they need to break down barriers in the way that these two IFI projects did. It is this level of support that young people NEET require if we are to make a real difference to the lives of these young people. Services that support young people NEET need to be long term and intensive.

They need to be coordinated and integrated. They need to be collaborative in nature and have a multitude of agencies working together to improve the lives of young people. For such a coordinated response to be possible at county level and long term, a state-level initiative would have to be in place to ensure a county and country wide commitment.

SECTION 11: RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature presented in this research shows how other countries including the UK, the USA, Denmark, Norway and Finland are engaging and working with the NEET cohort. The findings from this research show something very similar in regard to working and engaging this cohort, with many of the themes identified supported by the literature. The themes which arose in this research through consultations with stakeholders are evidence of good practice and they have shown to be effective when working with this NEET cohort. The lives of young people that participated in both projects have improved greatly along with their life outcomes, with some young people working towards Level 8 qualifications or progressing towards a dream career which they thought was out of their reach prior to participating with the project. It is for this reason that it is suggested that if a further project was to be funded in the future that worked specifically with this group, these themes would be taken into consideration when designing the project and delivering its supports.

The effectiveness of these projects and the impact they had on the young people they supported is measurable by the progress of the young people. One young person was socially isolated for six years prior to engaging with the project and suffered terribly from anxiety. That young person is now almost finished their Hairdressing training. This type of progression is proof that the projects were effective in not only engaging young people back into employment, education or training, but that the projects supported young people to become independent, resilient individuals who are now very much in control of their life and are engaged members of society. What is most significant about the work carried out by both projects is that they were both the first projects specifically set up in the counties to work with this cohort.

They did not have the opportunity to partake in a full needs analysis before commencing, nor had they the time at the beginning to build connections with other services to ensure fluid and robust systems were in place. Nevertheless, because of the type of workers employed, the criteria and budget supplied by the funders, and the young people themselves, these projects still managed to make a very significant impact in a short space of time and to promote Good Relations in the communities in which they were based.

Going forward, a future project working with this NEETs group should consider following the footprints of the YESS Project and New Beginnings project. All the themes which arose through consultation have shown effectiveness and are supported by the literature. Besides following the themes around identifying and engaging young people, working with young people NEET and building relationships with young people NEET, the following recommendations are offered for consideration in the design and delivery of future projects:

Recommendation 1: Carry Out a Formal Needs Analysis

Prior to designing the project and prior to engaging young people in the project, it is important to carry out a formal needs analysis of the area where the project seeks to provide a service. This analysis of the area will help the project to build a more targeted approach to service provision while also helping the project coordinators and workers learn more about the area where the service is to be provided. It may be advisable to have this needs analysis carried out by in-house staff as this would also give the new workers an opportunity to get to know the other service providers in the area.

Recommendation 2: Provide Long-term Support to Young People

Due to the nature of the funding stream under which the projects were supported, the programme duration was for a specific timespan. The length of the New Beginnings project was initially one year and then extended to two years, supporting one cohort. The South Sligo project supported two cohorts of young people. In both projects, young people engaged for varying amounts of time, with some requiring longer and some shorter phases of support. What was noted by stakeholders was that young people, even though they may have only needed intense support for a short while, continued to link in with the project sporadically if or when they needed extra support. The Activity Agreement in the UK worked with young people over a 6-20 week period. With the entry to learning programme, participants stayed on the programme for an average of 15 weeks. Both of these programmes offered young people an incentive to engage and they were rewarded when they met all the outcomes in their activity plan. TAMU in Denmark was a one-year programme with 50% social learning and 50% practical learning.

The practical element of this was seen as a way to help young people apply what they were learning, which helped their personal development as well as their vocational development. Like TAMU, the JobbLoop model in Norway is a practical and social programme that works with young people over a year long period and within that time frame they are provided with three work placements.

However, as this research has shown, it can take a young person up to six months to build both capacity and ability before they can truly engage in a progression plan that will lead to employment, education or training, so one year may not be enough. For others, it can take them much longer and this needs to be considered when designing the programme length, especially for a programme working with young people NEETs where their barriers towards progression are so vast and complex.

Research shows that a project which offers long-term support has the greatest impact on this group of young people (Like Project, Roca project). According to Piece (2009), the Roca project showed great success because it worked with young people over a four-year period, two of which were based on intensive work and the latter two based on less intensive, follow-up work.

The New Beginnings and YESS Project worked with young people on a two-year cycle and having this time to really hone in on themselves showed to have a great impact on the lives of the young people. They were able to gain real understanding of their situation while building themselves up to become the person they wanted to be. Working at a young person's own pace was something most research findings found, including this one, to be crucial to progression and retaining young people (Evans et al., 2009; Kewin et al., 2009; SICAP, 2017; Karlsdottir et al., 2019).

A future project working with this NEET cohort should think about providing a long-term service to young people that really helps them develop as the IFI projects have done. Having an extra year with the groups was shown to have a greater impact overall and it is likely that the same amount of work would not have been carried out if the programme was only offered for one year. A project which gives the young person a support system for up to two years with the option to extend the support on a less intensive level for a further two years may be most effective with this group. Stakeholders stated that having a follow up service would benefit this group significantly.

Recommendation 3: Develop Joint Partnerships and Collaborations

Both projects worked very well with inter-agents and formed strong working relationships. As the projects were new to their respective counties, connections needed to be made very early on. No resource was available at the time which could identify all the potential stakeholders or inter-agents. Sligo and Leitrim have the online Sligo Leitrim Directory of services, which is very useful but this was not available upon the initiation of the first cohort. It was not until later in the project that this was of benefit. The advisory group in South Sligo along with Foróige's connections from working in the county supported the development of these connections and facilitated interagency working. For any future projects working with this NEET cohort, a joint approach with good interagency co-ordination would be most effective when working with this group. Research from the UK, the US, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Norway has shown that having these joint partnerships between specialist services, education and training providers, employment agents or services and the varying labour markets can be very beneficial and have shown very good results when working collaboratively. Effective approaches to a joint partnership and collaboration which has the potential to yield good results working with NEETs include:

- a. A project which works in partnership with specialist services, including mental health and counselling services, career guidance services, job search services, probation services, the Department of Social Protection and youth services would be effective when working with this group.
- b. A project which works collaboratively with employment agencies, employers, and other agencies which promote career and job development. A pathway could be developed to employment and / or work experience tasters. This research found that young people benefit from taster programmes and having these connections continuously with a variety of industries could give the young person the opportunity to both learn skills and test out potential progressions.
- c. A project which joins up with the labour market and the education / training institutions to fill the gaps in the labour market by creating direct routes to employment. This requires connections with many types of markets and businesses to offer young people a variety of choice. According to researchers of the SUME project in Denmark, a project aimed at filling and bridging the gap between training and employment, the strength of the project was that it co-ordinated all the different partners in vocational education and training and the labour market, which all need to be engaged for a scheme like SUME to work (Karlsdottir et al., 2019). Both municipalities had their own strategy to work with this group, but both strategies had an aim of making young people more employable in an individual way.
- d. A project which has a preventative model, whereby connections are made with the local schools to target young people in the 16-18 category who have left school early or who are about to leave school and who do not know what to do next. Karlsdottir et al. (2019) found that in many cases, early school leavers did not know what they wanted to achieve in life and this posed a serious barrier to their personal development. This research of the two IFI-funded projects found something very similar and perhaps this is a contributing factor to young people disengaging - they simply do not know what they want to do but they know school is not for them. A service which offers a programme based on personal development

and helping that young person develop the skills they need to identify their needs, the barriers in their way and their dreams would be most beneficial for this 16-18 year old cohort. This would be very much dependent upon a collaboration between the local schools and the project which would need to be in place at a policy level (school policy, youth service policy) to be most effective.

- e. A project with a shared vision and strategy that has been designed by members of each institution as stated above, county level officials and young people themselves would see they greatest benefit to the young people and society at large. Each stakeholder group would have the opportunity to conceptualised and formalise their idea of what a project working with NEETs would look like. Together, the board of members would create a strategy to identify and engage young people in a needs-based way with the aim of securing either a further / higher level educational opportunity, an employment opportunity, or an apprenticeship.

Recommendation 4: Consider Blended Funding Models

A project working with young people NEET requires a large budget and in many instances government funding is not enough to break down even the smallest of barriers. Young people NEET have a higher level of need and often, due to either personal or family circumstances, require greater financial support if they are to progress. A future project would likely need several funding streams to have a similar impact to the IFI-funded projects. Potential funding could come from the following streams:

- i. Partly government funded, partly fundraised through the managing body.
- ii. Partly funded through a social enterprise model and the government. The TAMU project in Denmark is 75% funded by the government but 25% of its incomes comes from a social enterprise it has set up whereby they sell products they have produced in the project. With regard to the learnings for young people participating, this approach could be beneficial in that it would help young people learn skills in a practical way while giving them opportunities to build their knowledge base of entrepreneurship, business and manufacturing. Skill-sets would also be gained in whatever the products are that they sell and young people will have the opportunity to gain work experience in a real world functioning social enterprise.

Within a fully operational business like this, several roles would be required, including those mentioned above. Other roles could include marketing, sales, distribution, logistics, creative design and so on. A training plan could be developed around the roles that are required to run and operate a business such as the one chosen for the project. While it would take a large amount of funding to set this up, if managed correctly, this approach could be very effective when working with NEET because of the practical and the application to real-life element to them.

- iii. Partly funded through private investors. These investors could also be employers within the shared network / partnership working on the NEET board of members. Connecting with businesses has shown to have great success in Denmark, Norway and Finland. One selling point to the business sector is that it could be a way to fill any expertise gaps within their

market. They could invest in young people's training and those young people could then work for them for a period of time once qualified. For this to work a number of industries need to be involved and, in this way, the variety increases and young people have a greater scope to choose if they want to go this route. This route would guarantee a high level of training and an employment role at graduate level.

Recommendation 5: Consider Staffing Approaches

A project working with young people NEET needs a minimum of two project workers per cohort of young people. With only one project worker each to begin, both projects achieved a lot, which could be attributed to both their work ethics and personal / professional attributes. However, in counties such as Sligo and Leitrim where rural isolation is a barrier, a future project would be most effective if it employed two workers. One worker would be dedicated to outreach support and one to an 'in house', community-based support role. The roles of the workers would differ in many ways in order to meet the needs of the young people in a very fluid, accessible way.

- i. Outreach worker – This worker would work with referral agents and other support networks to identify young people. They would be the first face the young person would see. The outreach worker would work with young people who are harder to reach and spend the time required to help them progress to a level where they have the capacity and ability to start training or education. They would also work with the young person who may not have the access to the 'in-house' service on a regular basis, but may need ongoing support. They would work with young people and their families in their homes or in a place which best suits the young person. They would also work on breaking down the barriers which prevent young people from engaging in education or other group-based activities. The outreach worker would work with the young person on their first progression plan before they join the group or the in-house supports or training.
- ii. 'In-house' worker – This worker would be the 'face of the space'. When young people get to a point where they can move forward with their progression plan and engage with the supports and training offered in-house and with the other participants, this is who they will work with. This project worker will work on the progression plan with the young person. Together, the young person and the in-house worker will set short term goals to start the progression plan. The worker will assess the young person's needs with the young person and link the young person up with whatever specialist services they require, including guidance counselling, job tasters or work experience, counselling support. This worker will be stationed in the youth space to allow the service to provide a 'drop in' support.

Using a 'key worker' model could also be very effective. The key worker would work with a young person from the beginning and support them until they are ready to move on. They would work with a specific number of young people all at different stages of development and stay with them for the duration. To provide an outreach component to this approach to working could be achieved by having both workers scheduled to similar work hours. This would ensure that there is always one worker 'in house' to provide a drop-in service.

Recommendation 6: Engage Youth Services with NEETs

Youth and community approach to work with a focus on the shared strategy of all organisations involved. It is very plausible to say that part of the projects' success could have been attributed to their connection to two of Ireland's leading youth services. With well over 100 years of experience between the two organisations, this was no doubt the best option when looking at who would manage such projects. The experience, knowledge, resources and overall ethos of both were contributing factors in the projects being supported so well in the general service structure of each county. Going forward, it simply makes sense to engage youth services with the task of facilitating such NEET projects.

Access to a physical building that young people can drop in to is important and so, if a future project was to be long standing in the community, it is advised that these projects have their own unique space either within the organisations building or in a separate building. The space should be designed in collaboration with young people and the space should feel like a safe, supportive haven for them where they come to learn, grow, have fun and build strong meaningful relationships.

Recommendation 7: Facilitate Young People to Contribute to Their Communities

Having a Good Relations focus to the project as well as an aim to get young people more involved with their community was definitely beneficial to young people. The value added to their lives from connecting with those around them in their community made young people feel more included and part of something bigger than them. A future project should consider the benefits of having a 'community work' or 'community enhancement' element to it. The young people who made the most difference in their communities did seem to show the greatest progress personally and this indicates a correlation between our success and our connections.

Research shows that young people begin to disengage mentally from the school system at 13-14 (Nelson, 2010). As part of the 'community relations'/ 'community enhancement' strand of the project, young people NEET who are engaged in the programme could develop a short seminar and go into schools and speak to young people in first or second year about what it means to leave school early and how they overcame the barriers and returned to employment, education or training. The opportunity to learn and to build vocational and personal skills in an activity like this are endless. These young people are heroes in all senses of the word and this could be a way for them to empower others, while also empowering themselves and enhancing their communities. While it is recognised that not all young people would be interested in doing this, the knowledge that their voice is worth listening to, is a learning in itself.

ACRONYMS USED

| | |
|--------|---|
| AA | Activity Agreement |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services |
| CBYO | Community-Based Youth Organisation |
| CFSN | Child and Family Support Networks |
| CSO | Central Statistics Office |
| CYPP | Children and Young People's Plan (of Children and Young People's Services Committees) |
| CYPSC | Children and Young People's Services Committee |
| DEIS | Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools |
| EMCO | Employment Committee |
| ETB | Education and Training Board |
| EWO | Educational Welfare Officer |
| QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| IFI | International Fund for Ireland |
| LCA | The Leaving Certificate Applied |
| LCVP | Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme |
| LGA | Local Government Association |
| MSLETB | Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education Training Board |
| NEET | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| NFQ | National Framework of Qualifications |
| OCED | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PIP | The Peace Impact Programme |
| PPFS | Prevention Partnership and Family Support |
| PWP | The Peace Walls Programme |
| PYDP | Personal Youth Development Programme |
| SCP | The School Completion Programme |
| SICAP | The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USA | United States of America |
| YESS | Youth Employment South Sligo (The YESS Project) |

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APPENDIX 1: ACTIVITY AGREEMENT SAMPLE

Agreement Example Name: _____

YP Identifier: _____

Name of Personal Adviser: _____

Date Agreement started: _____

Original Goals: This section is used by the young person together with their personal advisor/key worker to set out the young person's long term goals, which might be, for example, to prepare for college or for employment in a certain occupational area.

Steps on the way: This section is used by the young person with the help of their personal advisor/key worker to identify and agree the steps required to achieve the young person's long term goal. Steps might include finding somewhere to live, basic skills, and learning to manage money and assistance with setting up a bank account.

Who can help: This section is used to identify and name who will be supporting and helping the young person to achieving their goals, which might be for example their Connexions Personal Adviser, YOT Key Worker, Drug Rehabilitation Worker and Social Worker.

What next: Agreed actions _____

By whom: _____

By when: _____

Total number of hours:

I am willing for this information to be shared with providers in order to help me. I am aware that the information may be held on a computer system and that I am entitled to see any information held about me I understand that if I do not complete the activities agreed for this week I will not receive my allowance.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signed Personal advisor/key worker: _____

Name of Personal advisor/key worker: _____

Date: _____



Youth Work Ireland
North Connaught



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Education and Training Board



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

Sligo Leitrim

