



Response to Review of NI Policing Board's Community Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and public awareness - locally and nationally.

Include Youth promotes the development of positive choices and opportunities for vulnerable and challenging young people in the community, residential care or custody. Include Youth promotes the use of community alternatives to care and custody for children and young people.

Amongst the young people at risk with whom, and on whose behalf, Include Youth works are young people from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

In order to inform the policy advocacy work that we undertake Include Youth actively engages with practitioners and young people. We run the Young Voices Project which is a youth participation initiative working with young people with experience of the criminal justice

system. Our Young Voices North Belfast initiative is a partnership with PSNI and the community to improve relationships between young people and police in the area. Therefore we have some experience and knowledge of police community engagement as it effects young people.

Response

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Board's review of its Community Engagement Strategy and agree that this is a core issue for policing in Northern Ireland. We have been very pleased to have worked with Policing Board staff in recent months exploring structures and processes for engaging young people and have found this process beneficial and productive. In view of this our response will be brief and is intended to simply supplement our engagement with the Board.

Our response is based in large part on our experiences of working with over 400 young people from various communities in North Belfast exploring the issue of policing. The quotes we have included are from this project.

1. In your view, do the aims form the basis of effective community engagement?

We believe that the aims identified provide sufficient scope to allow for community engagement to be flexible to the needs of local communities as well as specific groups. We appreciate acknowledgement later in the review of the confusion between the roles of the Board and the PSNI as separate entities. We would urge where efficacy and independence allows that there could be some pooling of resources and activities in this area between PSNI and NIPB.

2. In your view are there any other communities that the Board should include in the strategy?

Policing affects all in our society but it is difficult to target everyone. The groups identified are appropriate. Additionally we believe that consideration should be given to including victims of crime as a key group.

Include Youth, naturally can not stress enough the importance of reaching out to young people particularly those who live in marginalised communities, are perceived as participating in anti-social behaviour and who commit crime. There is huge issues with regards to confidence in the police amongst these young people. 62% of the young people we worked with in North Belfast stated that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police.

“We’d get lifted for nothing, but if something happened to us, if we went to them about it they didn’t follow it up” (young person)

“They never use to acknowledge you and they used to belittle us” (young person)

3. In your view is the development for Reference Groups and events an effective means of engaging with a diverse range of communities?

We believe that reference groups can support the development of processes and structures by which to engage communities generally and specifically. We would caution against considering the groups as the fulfilment of community engagement or indeed as being comprehensive representatives. The Board has to be able to continually reach out to as broad a range of representatives as possible on a regular basis ensuring that the work of the reference groups remains relevant.

Additionally we would remind the Board that reference groups are a means and that they can not replace the direct engagement of Board members and staff with communities.

We recognise that events are a helpful mechanism to engage but they are isolated and one-off rather than part of a process. Policing is such a difficult issue particularly for young people that meaningful engagement often takes time and considerable commitment.

The young people, police and community workers engaged with Young Voices North Belfast were clear that one of its advantages was that it was not short term.

Other projects “weren’t as regular, consistent or as focussed” as YVNB (police officer)

“N built up a good rapport with the group and communicated with them on their level which helped to tackle the initial problem of mistrust....” (Community worker)

“N lets us have our views – that helped us trust her” (young person)

4. In your view are there other approaches that the Board could use to further develop engagement with these communities?

Include Youth agree that one size can not fit all not only for different groups but also within groups. Our knowledge and expertise relates to young people and we are confining our comments to this group. When addressing policing we have opted for an outreach model working with small groups of young people in a tailored way however we recognise that this is only one of a number of models that should be adopted and pursued by NIPB and DPPs.

As stated previously we have been involved with discussions and debates following the reporting of the excellent consultation work undertaken by NI Youth Forum on behalf of the Board. We believe that we have made our views quite clear that an “advisory panel” or series of panels can only be one method to reach out to young people. We also have some knowledge of the pilot Independent Advisory Groups undertaken by PSNI and recognise that they have had some initial success and would support their expansion across all DCUs.

Our experience during the last 5 years is that young people who are considered “disaffected” or who have experience of the criminal justice system are generally reluctant to join such groups. Such young people are already sceptical of these processes and when added to their hostility towards the police makes any form of engagement and consultation challenging.

“I thought ‘Jesus what’s the craic here – police and young people?!’ I thought it was senseless, it wouldn’t work, stupid.” (young person)

*“I thought it would be like any other one – they’d come in and tell you what’s wrong and right and leave and say a whole load of s**** that you don’t want to hear.” (young person)*

We would urge the Board to consider complimenting any advisory groups with outreach activity to different groups of young people within their own environments these can include communities, schools, on the street, in JJCNI, children’s homes, youth groups, etc... In this way a breadth of experiences and views can be accessed that would ensure that as many groups of children and young people are accessed as possible.

Include Youth accepts fully that the Board must reach out to all young people, the majority of whom have little contact with PSNI. However particular efforts must be made with those who have the most contact with policing and the criminal justice system – because, after all, they often have the most to say. These contributions, given the right circumstances are often very insightful and to the point. The Board must also make resources available for such work.

5. In your view how best can the Board and DPPs work together to further develop effective community engagement?

Include Youth would suggest that there should be DPP representation on all the reference groups ensuring that the discussions take cognisance of DPP structures and processes as well as those of the Board’s and vice versa.

Should the Board take into account our suggestion of outreach the DPPs will then become pivotal. Such outreach will often be undertaken at a local level where local issues will be identified. Our experience in North Belfast is that the project and the young people have been able to interact directly with North Belfast sub-group of the DPP feeding into the local Policing Plan. However the experiences of the young people are also being used to influence policing on a NI-wide basis – hopefully!

Therefore, Include Youth recommends that mechanisms are established where local community engagement informs and supports regional processes and naturally regional processes should be able to inform local strategies and activities. DPPs must be able to identify and fulfil a role in the Board's strategy possibly by developing their own sub-strategies.

6. In your view does the framework provide an effective model for the monitoring and evaluation of the Board's Community Engagement Strategy?

Include Youth believes that the test for this strategy is not so much the framework which is appropriate but the actual commitment that the Board gives to this work. In order for the strategy to be effective in relation to young people the following must be considered:

- Long-term resourcing to ensure the use of a variety to models is used to meet the needs of different groups of young people.
- Qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation methods are adopted.
- Robust feedback mechanisms from the Board are implementing ensuring that groups are made aware of the impact (or not) of their contributions and engagement and the reasons.
- Short, medium and long-term performance indicators are developed.
- Patience – this is a long-term process requiring patience and expertise.

Conclusion

Include Youth is grateful to have the opportunity to comment on the review of the Community Engagement Strategy. We intend the above to be a constructive and useful submission and would welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues raised in our response. We have already stated our willingness to be involved with the Board in this work look forward to this.

“We know more about what to say to them and how to deal with them now”

“I still don’t like them, but I can challenge them on things now cos to the project”

Include Youth

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