


STRIVE
#BelieveAchieveSucceed



EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE



a youth-led approach

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Include Youth in partnership with Newstart Education Centre, Lisburn YMCA, Northern Ireland Alternatives and Youth Initiatives Poleglass.



Strive United Youth Pilot is one of 13 pilot programmes funded under the Northern Ireland Executive and part of their Together: Building a United Community Strategy



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BACKGROUND

by DEARBHLA HOLOHAN
Programme Coordinator

In 2014 the Northern Ireland Executive made a key commitment to young people under the 'Together: Building a United Community' strategy. As part of this strategy a pilot good relations programme was launched, called United Youth, providing 16 to 24 year olds, who were not in education, employment or training with flexible, high-quality and young-person centred opportunities.

Include Youth, in partnership with Newstart Education Centre, Northern Ireland Alternatives, Lisburn YMCA and Youth Initiatives Poleglass, submitted a proposal and were successful in receiving government funding to deliver one of 13 United Youth pilot programmes.

We called our pilot 'Strive' as it means 'to make great efforts to achieve' and 'to try very hard to do something or to make something happen, especially for a long time or against difficulties'. Through many programmes that our different organisations had been involved in we saw young people do just that, which is why we felt the name was perfect.

Through United Youth we had the opportunity to apply as a 'youth-led' programme, as opposed to coming up with a programme solely designed by youth work managers and practitioners. This presented us with a challenge to do thing differently and enhance levels of participation within all of our organisations. It also gave us the opportunity to involve young people who had previously been through programmes in our organisations and had valuable learning to share around what works.

Working from the principle that young people are experts in their own lives as a result of all of the experiences they have had - *be that growing up in a particular community, positive and negative educational experiences, personal challenges and successes* - we decided to form a group of 'Expert by Experience' (EBE) young people to help us design and run Strive. We felt that young people who had received support from the different Strive partners and who had been through similar experiences, in particular needing employment, training or education, were best equipped to shape the programme.

Strive ran from four delivery sites: **Newstart Education Centre (Lower Falls), East Belfast Alternatives (Woodstock), Lisburn YMCA, and Youth Initiatives (Poleglass)** and each delivery partner nominated one 'Expert by Experience' to represent their site. All of the young people selected had previously been on programmes with one of the organisations

and acted as our founding EBE group. When given the option, all the EBE young people decided to also sit on the 'Strive steering group' with senior managers from each organisation for the duration of the pilot.

Working from the principle that young people are experts in their own lives ...

Strive ran from August 2015 to March 2016 and focused on the four main United Youth themes: **good relations, citizenship, personal development** and **employability**. The EBE worked through a series of development plans with support from programme staff, most notably Cherith McClay our Good Relations & Participation youth worker employed by Include Youth. Cherith's role was to facilitate the design and implementation of the EBE plans.

The first plan that the young people completed covered recruitment, quickly followed by good relations and cross site activities. Once Strive was up and running young people, who were currently on Strive, were elected to join the EBE group and the group went from four to 16 young people. The EBE developed plans around citizenship, personal and social development, employability and transitions. These plans acted as the blueprint from which the youth workers ran the programme.



THE RESOURCE

Through the process of developing our EBE plans we were continually struck by how much material was generated. We wanted to find a way to capture the voices of the EBE young people so that future United Youth pilots, youth work practitioners, project managers and other young people could get an insight into the thoughts of our EBE group.

As with all aspects of Strive this resource has been developed by young people and designed in partnership with young people. It focuses on the four key themes of United Youth:

-  GOOD RELATIONS
-  CITIZENSHIP
-  PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
-  EMPLOYABILITY

FOUNDING

‘EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE’



Mary Laverty

Newstart Education Centre

“I was being bullied in mainstream school and became really anxious and withdrawn. I couldn’t be out and about anymore. I went to Newstart Education Centre as it was an informal setting and a smaller group. I mixed with other people there who I wouldn’t have mixed with otherwise. I gained all my GCSEs in a year and went to additional classes in the evening at Belfast Met. I gained my A Levels and went on to receive a First class degree in Sociology at Queen’s University. I hope to go back to university and study social work. I’m excited about Strive as I gained so much help from Newstart. From my own experience, I hope to see Strive change young people’s lives the same way mine was changed.”



Kayleigh Clarke

Lisburn YMCA

“I was on the very first Start Programme at Lisburn YMCA two years ago and gained 17 qualifications. After the support and mentoring I received from my Start youth worker, I came through it deciding I wanted to work in a similar role. After I completed my Level 2 in Youth Work the manager at the YMCA came and spoke to me about Strive. He thought it would be a good programme for me to gain more experience in a leadership role, so I signed up. Being an Expert by Experience on Strive excites me and I can’t wait to give back the experience I had to other young people.”



Natasha Franklin

Youth Initiatives

“I study Youth and Community Work and Practical Theology at Centre for Youth Ministry Ireland and have a placement at Youth Initiatives. Andy, the manager at Youth Initiatives, thought I would be perfect for the EBE role as I had been at a place where I couldn’t find work, my confidence was low and I didn’t know what career path to take so could relate to the young people joining the programme. It’s great to be able to share my thoughts and experiences and show the young people how programmes like this can make a big difference in helping you discover what type of career you’re interested in.”



Ashleigh Scates

East Belfast Alternatives

“I went to Give & Take in Include Youth from when I was 17 to 19 but even when I left I still wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. I had my baby boy and came back to finish off my Essential Skills. Shortly after that I heard about Start Programme in East Belfast Alternatives. I had calmed down a lot and was more focused and my confidence grew. Being on Start made me realise I wanted to do youth work and being an EBE has given me an idea of how youth work programmes are organised. I had a mentor on Give & Take and I wanted to support other young people the way I was supported back then.”

GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

DIVERSITY VALUES

ROLE MODEL

The young people identified 'good relations' work as being an opportunity to *'promote equality and diversity', 'be open-minded to other cultures and ethnic groups'* and saw *'LGBT issues as a part of it'*.

In particular they felt good relations presented a chance to *'overcome specific barriers that led to the conflict'* and *'share community backgrounds, views and stereotypes'*.

They suggested that young people benefited from engaging in good relations work during the programme because:

"YOU REALISE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE CITY ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT"

"CHANGED PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENT AREAS AND PEOPLE"

"WE GOT EXPERIENCE OF OTHER GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES AND HOW THEY WORK"

SHARE



They felt that the good relations work they had engaged in helped them form new *'friendships'*, improve their *'knowledge of The Troubles'* and *'other groups'*, and helped them with *'breaking down stereotypes'*.

The young people who were Experts By Experience defined good relations as:



"Breaking down barriers through promoting good relationships regardless of age, gender, values, sexual orientation or anything that could make a person seem different. Good relations is about moving forward, while still able to share cultures, views and different community background experiences."

OPEN MIND



The young people also talked positively about how the good relations work they had been involved in specifically benefited them.

"It gave me an opportunity to meet with young people from different areas and backgrounds."

"I've grown in confidence around people."

"It has removed sectarian thoughts."

"I feel like I can approach things with an open mind."

"It gave me a fresh look at stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination."

"It helped me humanize the 'other' religion – I realise now we are all the same."

"You come out of the programme a better person and a role model to other young people in the community."

"Mixing with different cultures and learning about different religions has been good"

"Strive helps you meet people from different communities and also different parts of the world."

CULTURES

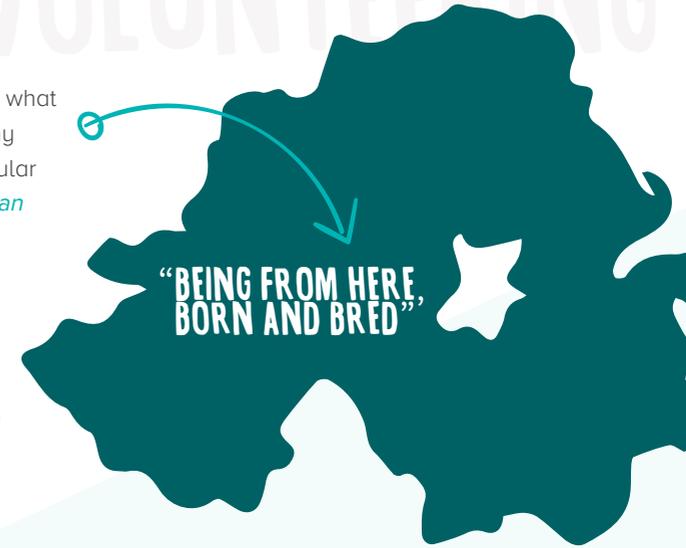
CITIZENSHIP

Young people talked about how they felt others perceived them in their communities. Many felt they were viewed as *'druggies'*, *'scumbags'*, *'hoods'*, *'under achievers'* and *'disrespectful'*.

One young person said they were viewed as *'immature'* while another, the only one in the group, had a more positive experience and felt their community viewed them as being *'supportive'*.



The young people brainstormed what 'citizenship' meant to them. Many felt it was about *'rights'*, in particular *'the right to have a say'* or *'take an interest in politics'*.



Others saw citizenship as another way to describe *'volunteering'*, *'activism'*, *'being a good neighbour'* and *'good behaviour'*.

The young people all agreed that it was important for them to have a role around citizenship where they lived because:

"YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PHYSICALLY ABLE, THEY WANT TO BE GOOD CITIZENS AND THEY HAVE A DESIRE TO GIVE BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITY"

The Experts By Experience group defined citizenship as:

"Being part of your community and making a contribution by being a good neighbour, knowing you have rights and are equal."

SUPPORTIVE

COMMUNITY

EQUAL

RIGHTS

VOLUNTEERING

NEIGHBOUR

CONFIDENCE

CAREER

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the first few weeks of Strive young people described some of the issues they were facing at that time including: *'alcohol or drug addiction'*, inability to communicate and a lack of *'motivation'*.

Many young people described feelings of *'low confidence'* and *'low self-esteem'* as well as a sense of not having *'emotional control'*. Other young people were concerned with relationships they had formed and their *'sexual health'*.

Other issues including *poor time keeping* and *no desire to participate* were also raised.



In order to help address these issues, the young people suggested that the programme focus on specific activities including, *'one to one discussion that focused on them as individuals, similar to the one to one sessions about careers'* and to grow in confidence through *'volunteer placements'* or *'speaking in front of other young people'*.



The young people also suggested they would benefit from gaining *'qualifications in drugs and alcohol'*, taking part in *'sexual health workshops'* and sessions about *'self-harm and suicide awareness'*.

A number of young people also felt that support could be given to young people through mentoring and listening to people who had went through similar experiences.

Towards the end of the programme young people said:

"IT'S A SAFE ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU CAN DISCUSS YOUR PROBLEMS AND GET ADVICE."

"I'M HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE."



"LIFETIME EXPERIENCES, MEETING NEW FRIENDS AND I GOT TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY FOR THE FIRST TIME."

"I'VE MET NEW FRIENDS, OVERCOME FEARS AND SET NEW GOALS, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE INFORMAL APPROACH."

"I'VE MET NEW PEOPLE AND MADE NEW FRIENDS."

"STRIVE IS SOCIAL, YOU SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS LEARNING HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS."

"WE ALL GET ALONG, THERE'S GOOD RELATIONSHIPS BET WEEN YOUNG LEADERS AND STAFF, THEY GIVE YOU LIFE GUIDANCE."

"IT HELPED BUILD MY CONFIDENCE."



ADVICE

MONEY

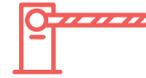
MOTIVATION

EXPERIENCE

EMPLOYABILITY- ABILITY

During the early stages of Strive many of the young people felt the term 'employability' was *'scary'* and *'intimidating'*. Some young people even suggested that the idea of gaining employability skills would be *'boring'* or *'too serious'*.

Initially many of the young people perceived the idea of having a job as having to give up their freedom and not be able to do what they want. In particular they suggested they would receive low pay or *'not enough money'* and would be bossed around by their colleagues or *'told what to do'*. Some also worried that they might *'get treated badly'* in work or would struggle to *'get on with colleagues'*.



The greatest barriers and perceived barriers to employment for the young people on Strive were the reliance on benefits, *'lack of jobs'*, *'not enough experience'* and the perception that *'other people from different countries were taking the jobs'*.



"I'D HAVE TO PAY RENT AND COME OFF THE BRU"

"The benefits system has destroyed my ability to think about a normal wage, is there any point?"

"I don't have the amount of experience needed - I need two years for a cleaning job."

Other young people felt they didn't have enough confidence to apply for jobs or take part in job interviews. A small number of young people said they were not used to *'having a schedule'* while a few others suggested they were too *'lazy'* to work.

In particular they saw work as an *'opportunity'* to *'learn new stuff'* in order to gain *'good employment'* in the future. Overall the young people felt having a job would *'boost confidence and self-esteem'*, help gain *'independence'* and cause *'less stress'* than not working.

As the months went on the young people's perceptions of having a job started to change with more viewing being in work as a potentially positive experience.

"It's okay if you don't get the job first time."

"I've got several qualifications, maths, English, first aid and food hygiene."

"Having a job means you can be involved in something you're passionate about."

Upon completion of Strive the young people suggested that the employability aspect of the programme had helped them with their *'confidence'* to apply for jobs and *'motivation'* to gain employment. They also had positive messages for other young people looking for work, including:

"You can double the money you get on the bru."

"The process isn't scary."

"Keep trying and don't give up."

The young people perceived work as a way to *'pay bills'*, earn *'money'*, establish a *'routine'* and *'gain experience'*.

"I've got self-awareness, experience, confidence, friendship, support, motivation and routine out of Strive."

"Learn about time keeping."



ROUTINE

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAD TO SAY...

"I was involved in discussions around what Strive should look like and helped design the logo and leaflet. I attend Steering Group meetings with the managers from each site and have taken sessions with the young people exploring their hopes and fears. I completed a recruitment plan for the Colin area and completed a good relations plan, deciding on how cross site activities should take place."

"I have just completed a sexual health training course, which I hope to deliver to young people at the YMCA. I am also hoping to do a course in sexual health and contraception and would love to open up a sexual health drop in. Once both of my girls are in school I would like to get a full time job in youth work."

"From being on Strive I've gained a lot of qualifications, OCNs in Good Relations, Food Hygiene. I've done hairdressing work experience. It's given me the opportunity to see what I'm interested in."



"I've gained a lot of friends throughout the Strive programme, not only with my own group, but with the other groups as well. There's a whole lot of different characters - the way they behave and get on - they're just easy to get on with."

"For me it's about giving back what people gave to me, as my youth workers put everything they had into helping me. Now that I am at university I want to be an advocate for young people and want to be a support for them."

"Staff are there to run the programme and deliver it, whereas an EBE works in the background making decisions, evaluating what works and what doesn't and looking at issues that could affect the programme."

"I'm going to miss being able to come up here, sit with all my friends and have a laugh. I'm going to miss the workers that I've met as well, like John has been really supportive and helpful with everything."

"The Newstart building itself, it's like... you come in here and all the staff are like family. They treat you equally to everybody else in the building."

ORGANISATIONS AND STAFF



Include Youth is a voluntary organisation that works with 16 to 24 year olds who need education, employment and training, or are in conflict with the law. Include Youth was the lead partner on Strive and was responsible for securing funding for and overseeing the day to day running of the pilot, communicating with funders and partners, and leading on the delivery of cross site activities and participation for Strive.



Steering Group Member:	Nicci Smith
Programme Coordinator:	Dearbhla Holohan
Good Relations & Participation Youth Worker:	Cherith McClay
Finance Officer:	Fiona Cash

NI Alternatives is a government accredited community-based restorative justice programme that aims to promote and develop non-violent community responses to the issues of low-level crime and anti-social behaviour in areas across Northern Ireland. Strive was based in East Belfast Alternatives on the Woodstock Rd and worked with 14 young people from across East Belfast and further afield.



Steering Group Member:	Andy Moorhead
Strive Youth Worker:	Rosy McLean
Strive Youth Mentor:	Danielle Truesdale

Youth Initiatives is a cross community youth work organisation which aims to awaken hope, inspire initiative, and mobilise youth to make a vital contribution to their community and to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Strive was based in their Poleglass centre and 13 young people from across the Colin area took part in the pilot there.



Steering Group Member:	Andy Hewitt
Strive Youth Worker:	Paul McKeown
Strive Youth Mentor:	Lizzie McAree/Frances Dunlop

Newstart Education Centre is a community organisation based in the Lower Falls area of West Belfast that provides alternative education for young people who are excluded or disengaged from the mainstream education system, as well as running classes for adult learners. The aim is to re-engage learners in a positive working environment to realise their potential. 13 young people from across West Belfast were part of Strive in Newstart.



Steering Group Member:	Mary Nolan
Strive Youth Worker:	John McComb
Strive Youth Mentor:	Brodie Evitt

Lisburn YMCA provides a wide range of programmes and services to young people, families and vulnerable groups in the Greater Lisburn area in partnership with voluntary and statutory organisations. 11 young people from across the local area took part in Strive.



Steering Group Member:	Kevin Hughes
Strive Youth Worker:	Conor Durkin
Strive Youth Mentor:	James Freeman

STRIVE PARTICIPANTS

Newstart Education Centre

Margaret-Rose
 Jamie
 Shona
 Ciara
 Maelsheachlainn
 Caitlín
 Courtney
 Debora-Leigh
 Paul
 Ryan
 Stacey
 Cassie
 Niall

Youth Initiatives

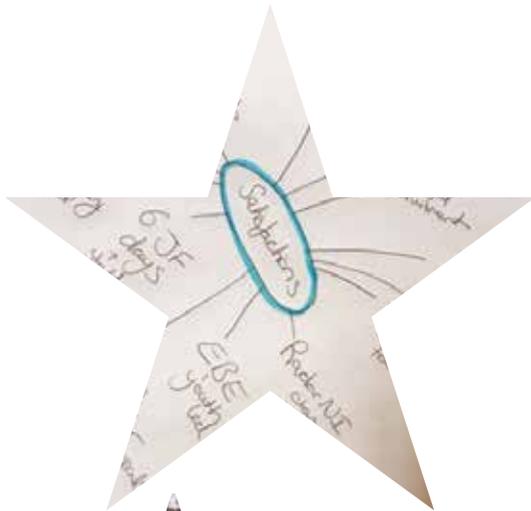
Caitlín
 Aisha
 Bobby
 Jack
 Liam
 Declan
 Shannon
 Brian
 Joseph
 Josh
 Niamh
 Aaron
 Gavin

East Belfast Alternatives

Graeme
 Matty
 Lee
 Clarissa
 Kirsty
 Hayley
 Emma
 John
 Glenn
 Mellisa
 Dylan
 Jack
 Jason
 Eden

Lisburn YMCA

Lauren
 Vikki
 Nathan
 Reece
 Connie
 Danielle
 Andrew
 Marcus
 Mark
 Ashleigh
 Aaron



include YOUTH

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