

# include YOUTH

## **Response to the Department of Education's Consultation on Priorities for Youth: Improving young people's lives through youth work**

**Date: 10 December 2012**

*"it's more important to let **young people** decide themselves what they want the youth service to do and decide for **themselves** what way life's going to be"*

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## **Include Youth**

Include Youth is an independent non-governmental organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people.

The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, 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.

The Give and Take Scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self-esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. The Scheme works with approximately 135 young people aged 16-21 years old from a care or criminal justice background. The Scheme aims to support young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living. 75% of young people on the Scheme are care experienced while over a third has a background in offending.

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the Health Trusts for young people aged 16 + who have had experience of the care system. This service is designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to assist young people leaving care to prepare for, and engage in work.

Include Youth has also been a Specialist Support Provider to DEL's Training for Success Programme since 2007. This service helps improve retention and encourage progression for young people who present with multiple barriers to their learning.

Reflecting the profile of the young people we work with, Include Youth's two main policy priority areas are employability and youth justice. We have engaged closely with the development by the Department for Employment and Learning of the recently published Pathways to Success Strategy as well as with the Department of Justice's reviews of youth justice and prisons. We are currently engaged in follow up work arising from all of these reviews and strategies.

Include Youth's policy advocacy work is informed by relevant international human rights and children's rights standards, is evidence based, including that provided by young people and practitioners and is based on high quality, critical analysis.

## General Comments

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. Include Youth contributed to the pre-consultation in 2008 and therefore had been anticipating the announcement of this consultation for some time now.

In that pre-consultation response we emphasised that young people were not a homogenous group and that there was a need to ensure that the youth service met the needs of all young people, noting that:

*“Government through its youth services has a clear responsibility to reach out to its most disadvantaged young people including those who are looked after, have been in conflict with the law, have had a poor educational experience, have special needs or emotional health issues”<sup>1</sup>*

In anything the intervening period has created even more of an imperative to ensure that this happens through the Priorities for Youth strategy. Since the onset of the recession youth unemployment has soared, the numbers of young people who are classified as NEET has grown exponentially and levels of mental ill health and suicide amongst young people, particularly in disadvantaged communities, are at crisis levels.

Unemployment figures for the July –September 2012 period indicated that approximately one in five 18-24 year olds was unemployed, a much higher rate than the overall unemployment rate of 7.6%. Labour Force Survey (LFS) figures for April –June 2012 highlighted that 54,000 or 24.4% of young people aged 16-24 were NEET, a sharp rise of 4% since the last quarter of 2011.

The personal, social and economic costs of being classified as ‘NEET’ have been well documented. Young men who are NEET have been found to be three times more likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to have a criminal record than their peers.<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland has seen a sharp increase in suicide rates overall, but particularly among adolescents and young adults. In 2002 60% of all suicides were in the 15-34 age bracket but by 2008 this percentage had risen to 72%. The economic cost to society has been estimated at £250 million a year in Northern Ireland.

Public sector cuts continue to strip funding out of essential services, including from services for children and young people, and it is estimated that the welfare reform agenda will remove £600 million annually from the Northern Irish economy by 2014-15.

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<sup>1</sup> Include Youth (October 2008) Response to the Department of Education’s online questionnaire for Managers in Youth or related Children’s Services

<sup>2</sup> Audit Commission (2010) Against the Odds: Re-engaging young people in education, employment or training.

During the pre-consultation with young people in 2008 one of the main issues raised by them was that of negative perceptions of young people. Their concerns were echoed that year by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which highlighted

*“the general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents, which appears to exist in the State party, including in the media, and may be often the underlying cause of further infringements of their rights”*<sup>3</sup>

This ‘climate of intolerance’ was graphically described in the following terms by one of the young people Include Youth works with, when talking about the value of youth work:

*“(youth centres) stop people gawking at us when we just walk down the street, as if we’re going to do something [to them]”*<sup>4</sup>

The UN Committee recommended that the government *“Tak(ing) urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterization of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including in the media”*.<sup>5</sup>

The ‘particular circumstances’ of Northern Ireland i.e. that of a society transitioning from conflict and the particular dynamics created by that also form a very relevant backdrop to the development of this Strategy. Those ‘particular circumstances’ include the ongoing threats to the stability of the peace process and the associated dangers of vulnerable young people being targeted by paramilitaries and being drawn into violent conflict with the state.

All of this forms a fairly stark, and changed, backdrop to the current consultation on Priorities for Youth since the first pre consultation in 2008 and should inform strategic decisions and priorities regarding youth work for the next number of years.

On a positive note the prioritisation by the Northern Ireland Executive of the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training, articulated in its Pathways to Success strategy, also sets the strategic context for the development of this youth work strategy.

### **Positive aspects of the Strategy**

Include Youth welcomes the Department of Education’s stated intention, through the Priorities for Youth strategy, to address the strategic and operational weaknesses which have existed in relation to youth work. We also welcome the attempt to reverse both the perception and reality of youth work being viewed as ‘the poor relation’ of services for children and young people which are designed to help them achieve their full potential.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.GBR.CO.4.pdf> paragraph 24

<sup>4</sup> Include Youth consultation with young people in the Young Voices project November 2012

<sup>5</sup> Op cited at note 3 paragraph 25 (a)

This lack of recognition of the value of youth work was an issue that was highlighted by managers and youth workers consulted during the pre-consultation and it is one that Include Youth has repeatedly raised over the years

*“...it is the view of Include Youth’s practitioners that in practice youth work is still considered as more of an ‘add-on’ rather than an integral part of the education system in its broadest sense”<sup>6</sup>*

Include Youth therefore strongly agrees with the conclusions reached by the Department of Education following its review of the previous youth work strategy 2005-2008, that *“the meaning of youth work in education has been diluted over the years, and **the important contribution good quality youth work makes to achieving a range of education and wider social aims** has not been sufficiently recognised outside of the youth sector”<sup>7</sup>* (emphasis added). The value of youth work in contributing to wider social aims, including teaching young people about risks and how to protect themselves, is readily recognised by young people themselves. When discussing the purpose of youth work for 10-15 year olds, young people in Include Youth’s Young Voices Project variously described its purpose as:

*“getting them ready for the world – they need to know what’s out there, the risks and how to look after themselves”*

*“teach them what road to go down – not to go down the road we went down, crime. Teach them about right and wrong”*

*“stop kids getting bored and getting into trouble”<sup>8</sup>*

Include Youth also welcomes the clear signalling within the consultation document that there will be an increased focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people; this commitment is articulated by the Minister for Education in the consultation’s foreword:

*“I am also seeking to place a greater emphasis on the needs of disadvantaged young people and those for which youth work can provide a valuable link with future education and training”<sup>9</sup>.*

However we do have some real concerns as to whether and how this intention to ensure that youth work contributes towards achieving equality outcomes has been translated into strategic priorities and actions within the document.

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<sup>6</sup> Include Youth (2011) Response to the Department for Employment and Learning’s consultation on the Pathways to Success draft Strategy page 37

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education (2012) Priorities for Youth: Improving young people’s lives through youth work paragraph 2.16

<sup>8</sup> Op cited at note 4

<sup>9</sup> Ibid Ministerial Foreword page i

While the document states that in order to achieve the Strategy's overall aims there will need to be "*proportionate targeting of services based on need with a clear focus on those most in need of additional support to achieve their potential, embrace diversity and overcome disaffection*"<sup>10</sup> a number of proposals contained in the document would seem to run counter to that intention. Those proposals include the narrow alignment of the Strategy's priorities to only the Department of Education's priorities, as well as the reduction in the age range worked with and the capping of funding for regional voluntary youth organisations.

**We also regard as unhelpful the blurring of lines within this consultation document between strategic and operational matters and we would suggest that operational type matters are removed from this strategy document and addressed separately following agreement on the overall strategy.**

### **Concerns and Recommendations**

The following section of this response addresses a number of specific concerns Include Youth has in relation to the consultation document and makes a number of recommendations for amendment prior to the finalising of the Strategy.

### **Vision, Aims and Principles**

**We suggest that the Strategy would benefit from the inclusion of a vision for youth work, as well as a definition of what youth work is.** In our view this would help achieve greater recognition of and 'buy in' for youth work and its value beyond the Department of Education, thereby more accurately capturing the vital role youth work plays in improving the life chances of young people.

**We would suggest that the vision should not only focus on the contribution that youth work makes to improving young people's life chances but also in developing strong communities within which those young people grow and develop.** The role which youth work plays across the Executive in shaping and delivering broader policy aims, not just in education, must be reflected in both the vision and aims of the Priorities for Youth Strategy. Youth work has a vital role to play in getting more young people into education, training and employment, diverting young people away from the youth justice system and supporting young people to deal with sexual health and mental health issues, addiction problems and much more. Youth work can play a significant role in helping the Executive deliver on most if not all of its five strategic priorities over the next number of years.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid page 13-14

<sup>11</sup> The five priorities set out in the NI Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 are as follows:

- Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future

We also believe that the inclusion of a definition of youth work would greatly strengthen the foundations of the Strategy. **We endorse Youth Action’s recommendation that the Department of Education draw on the National Occupational Standards<sup>12</sup>, the ‘Shaping the Future of Youth Work’ report produced by the Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group<sup>13</sup> and Martin Seiligman’s PERMA model<sup>14</sup> in developing a comprehensive, inclusive definition of youth work.**

**The vision and principles of the Strategy, as well as its proposed priority actions, should also reflect and be compliant with the relevant children’s rights standards, in line with the Strategy’s statement that “equality, inclusion and rights are the cornerstones of an education system which enables every learner to fulfil their potential”.<sup>15</sup>** The relevant rights within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child include but are not limited to Article 29 on the goals of education, Article 31 on the child’s right to leisure, play and culture, , Article 2 on non discrimination, Article 3 on the child’s best interests and Article 12 on respect for the views of the child.<sup>16</sup>

**We suggest the explicit inclusion of a principle which states that a human rights / children’s rights approach, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant human rights instruments, underpins all aspects of youth work.** We were surprised at the absence of such a principle, particularly given the clear recognition of human rights and equality as mainstream responsibilities by the Department of Education.<sup>17</sup> It was also surprising to find no reference to children and young people’s rights in this section of the document given that it states in an earlier section that:

*“the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have been taken into consideration when developing these Priorities. This framework should promote children’s rights and reflect the main guiding principles of the UNCRC”<sup>18</sup>*

**In relation to this we would ask how the Department of Education conducted this exercise?** The Equality and Human Rights screening document appended to the consultation document includes a section titled ‘Consideration of Human Rights Issues’. In response to a question around how the policy/decision would affect anyone’s human rights

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- Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities
  - Building a Strong and Shared Community
  - Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services

<sup>12</sup> Life Long Learning UK (LLLUK) (2008) National Occupational Standards for Youth Work

<sup>13</sup> Youth Service Sectoral Partners Group (2009) Shaping the Future of the Youth Service

<sup>14</sup> Seigilman, M (2011) Flourish : A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing

<sup>15</sup> Op cited at note 4, paragraph 3.4

<sup>16</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/about-the-department/equality-and-human-rights.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Op cited ate note 7page 2

(the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is referenced here) the document indicates that the Strategy would have a positive impact. However no evidence as to how this conclusion was reached is offered, beyond a passing reference to enhancing the voice of the child.

Without conducting a full Children’s Rights Impact assessment (CRIA) it would not be possible for the Department of Education to reach such a conclusion. Indeed, a quick assessment of the consultation document would indicate that it could not be considered child rights compliant. For example the overemphasis within the Strategy on formal education does not meet the UN Convention’s standard in relation to education which defines education widely, to include “the *development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*”.<sup>19</sup>

**If, as would appear to be the case, such an exercise has not been conducted, we would recommend that the Department goes back and carries out a full Child Rights Impact Assessment of its draft Strategy, in line with its obligations under Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**<sup>20</sup>

### **Contribution of youth work to achieving education, training and employment outcomes**

As discussed above youth work has a significant contribution to make to achieving positive outcomes for young people in a many aspects of their lives, not restricted to the formal education sphere.

There is much evidence in Northern Ireland and beyond of the positive impact of youth work in both preventing young people from becoming NEET but also in engaging and supporting young people who are NEET to achieve positive education, training and employment outcomes.

Include Youth’s own employability programme, the Give and Take scheme utilises a youth work approach with very positive results – 57% of the young people leaving the scheme in the past year moved into education, training or employment. The Youth Works project, a DE/IFI sponsored partnership initiative involving a number of voluntary and community organisations, and which uses a youth work methodology to provide support to 16-17 year olds with no qualifications living in areas of greatest economic and social need, also achieves very positive outcomes with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. 64% of young people on the pilot project moved into education or training.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Op cited at note 16

<sup>20</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G03/455/14/PDF/G0345514.pdf?OpenElement> Article 45

<sup>21</sup> Include Youth, Artillery Youth Centre, Challenge for Youth, NI Alternatives (2012) Pilot Evaluation of Youth Works Programme

Addressing the growing numbers of young people at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET has been identified an urgent priority for the Executive as a whole, and that commitment is reflected in the Pathways to Success Strategy. Given this, and the move by the Executive towards more collaborative, integrated working, we would have fully expected to see some reference to the Pathways to Success Strategy and the contribution youth work can and does make to meeting the targets set out in that Strategy and accompanying action plan.

Related to policy priorities around reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET is the DOJ's priority around Reducing Offending, encompassed in the Reducing Offending Strategy. It is widely recognised that youth work approaches work with young people who are on the fringes of or formally within the youth justice system. Such recognition was articulated by the Youth Justice Review Team in their Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland:

*“the success of youth and community work in Northern Ireland should be built on by providing additional resources to support its expansion, allowing other agencies to draw on the skills and expertise of youth and community workers in engaging young people, especially those who offend”* <sup>22</sup>

Young people consulted with were also very clear about the potential of youth work to impact positively in relation to both youth justice and employability outcomes. Among the supports identified by young people which youth workers could provide to young people who are NEET were the following:

*“Careers advice, what jobs there are, what interests you have, how to go about getting a job, how to do application forms, everything”*

*“get them involved in voluntary work – give you a taste of it”*

*“(work with) people with drug addictions, all that s\*\*\*, keep them out of trouble”*

**We recommend that more work is done to ensure that the Priorities for Youth priorities are aligned with the Executive's priorities around tackling the issue of young people who are NEET as well as those of reducing offending among young people.**

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<sup>22</sup> Department of Justice (2011) A Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland. DOJ.

## Priority 1 –Raising Standards for All

**Include Youth is concerned about the proposal to effectively exclude young people over 21 years of age from the scope of the Strategy.** We note that the document states that *“services for young adults in the age range 22-25 will only be considered where there is compelling and evidenced need for youth work interventions for this age range”*.<sup>23</sup>

The rationale given for this decision is that *“(given) the pressure on the education budget for the foreseeable future, the current age range is too broad to provide a consistent level of services for all those in the age range 4-25”*<sup>24</sup>

In our view this does not constitute a rationale based on any objective assessment of need or indeed a cost benefit analysis and does not stand up to scrutiny. We note that just under 4% or 5,851 of young people engaged through the youth service fall within the 19-25 age bracket and would question this proposal even on the grounds of cost saving, which the Department of Education is positing as its rationale.

In addition, no definition of what would constitute ‘compelling or evidenced need’ is provided nor does it state who would make that assessment i.e. would it be youth workers on the ground or an official within ESA?

Include Youth knows from its experience of working with vulnerable young people, many of them who have come through the care system or have been in custody, that they quite often tend not to engage in a constructive way with services offered until the latter end of their teenage years and the early years of adulthood. As one young person put it:

*“when you’re young you don’t understand that education’s important, until you leave it too late, **that’s** when youth workers can help”*<sup>25</sup>

There is evidence to show that the social cognitive development of young people who have experienced trauma in early childhood progresses at a different and somewhat slower rate than their peers. Having a ‘de facto’ cut off point of 21 years would mean a much shorter window within which to engage and work with some of the most vulnerable young people in our society. Very often the voluntary youth service may be the only link those young people have into support services and it may take some time for them to move beyond an initial engagement level to active participation in programmes.

Young people consulted with were fairly unanimous in their view that the mainstream youth work service was geared to work with children and young teenagers, up to the age of between 16-18 years of age. They tended to base this view on an assumption that traditional youth work took place within a youth club/centre setting:

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<sup>23</sup> Op cited at note 7, paragraph 4.5. 7

<sup>24</sup> Ibid paragraph 4.4

<sup>25</sup> Op cited at note 4

*“11-17, because it’s somewhere for the younger ones to go, it keeps them out of mischief”*

*“it’s mainly for kids – I don’t know many teenagers who go to youth clubs, none in fact”<sup>26</sup>*

However, young people consulted with also recognised the important role that youth workers play in supporting young people on their individual journeys’ to full independence and towards achieving their goals:

*“put **steps** in place for young people – don’t **do** it for them, but help them, put steps in place just, so they don’t **rely** on them (youth workers) every day, but they learn to do stuff for themselves”<sup>27</sup>*

Disappointingly the benefits of such contact and engagement do not seem to be captured by the proposed Outcomes Framework, with outcomes being defined only as those that fit within recorded outcomes at Levels 1-3.<sup>28</sup>

**We would recommend that the Department of Education retains the current age range for youth work i.e. 4-25, which is in line with most European countries; in the words of one of the young people involved with Include Youth’s Young Voices project “there *shouldn’t be any age range, it (the youth service) should work with anyone who needs help at any age*”.**<sup>29</sup>

**Include Youth recommends that any future proposals by the Department of Education to change the age range, thereby altering its funding priorities, should be subject to an objective assessment of need in the form of a child/human rights impact assessment prior to any decision being made.**

Linked to this understanding of how young people transition into adulthood at very different rates, we also believe that the proposal that the priority for engagement with 18-21 year olds should be around the development of leadership skills is too prescriptive as currently framed. While it may often be appropriate for this age group, many of the young people Include Youth works with have complex needs and would not yet be ready to move into leadership roles by the age proposed. It should also be borne in mind that, as is the case in society generally, not every young person is ‘cut out’ to be a leader and that it takes a certain disposition and set of skills. **We would therefore recommend that the Department of Education reviews this proposal with a view to making it less prescriptive than currently framed.**

No explanation is provided as to why the distinct age bands proposed were selected but they do not appear to fit with developmental stages of a child and young person’s development and appear to be overly prescriptive as to what children and young people of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Op cited at note 7, Appendix 10 Example of Outcomes Framework

<sup>29</sup> Op cited at note 4

different ages are expected to conform to in terms of interests and abilities. For example, children and young people aged 14-18 as well as those in the 19-21 year age bracket may be interested in issue based programmes, depending on their particular experiences and situation. We know that children and young people's development is far from linear and **we would therefore recommend much less rigidity in relation to age bands.**

## **Priority 2: Closing the Performance Gap, Increasing Access and Equity**

As stated earlier Include Youth welcomes the indication in the consultation document of a greater commitment to meeting the needs of disadvantaged children and young people. In particular we welcome the plan to weight funding according to disadvantage, thereby determining a notional distribution amount for each District Council area.

We do have concerns however as to how disadvantage will be determined and whether particular groups of children and young people will be captured by such a determination. For example, even those NISRA super output areas (SOA) which rate highest on Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures will have children and young people living within them who are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable. These would include but would not be limited to Traveller and other minority ethnic children and young people, those with disabilities, those with experience of the care system and those with experience of the youth justice system. **We would ask how the Department of Education will be able to ensure that decisions re budgetary allocations factor in the needs of such children and young people?**

We welcome the reference to support being provided for targeted provision to help meet the needs of specific groups of young people, both within the Section 75 groupings or those who may be at a greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation. However, unless the initial local assessment of need effectively captures those specific needs and they are then reflected in budgetary allocation decisions and the Annual Youth Development Plans the tailored support needed by such children and young people is unlikely to be provided.

While we recognise that the list of vulnerable young people provided at 4.7.3 is not exhaustive **we would nonetheless encourage the specific addition of young people who offend and of young women;** these are both categories of young people for whom youth work has been under resourced in the past.<sup>30</sup> **We would also recommend the specific inclusion of young people with mental health issues;** again while this group of young people may be included in the category of young people with disabilities, in view of the high

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<sup>30</sup> McAlister, S. et al (2007) Still waiting: the stories behind the statistics of young women growing up in Northern Ireland, Belfast. YouthAction Northern Ireland.

levels of young people with mental health problems in Northern Ireland<sup>31</sup> they warrant specific mention.

A serious weakness in the draft Strategy is its failure to recognise the contribution being made by Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations to youth work. Despite the inclusion of the following statement regarding partnership working “the *Department fully supports the shared values and principles of the 1998 Compact, and which were restated in the 2011 Concordat, and is committed to working with Partners towards implementation of the agreed commitments contained in the Concordat*”<sup>32</sup> the role of RVYOs in the development of Regional and Annual Youth Development Plans is less than clear. **The involvement of RVYOs, on the basis of the Concordat principles at both the strategic and operational policy level must be explicitly stated.**

Include Youth knows that through their practitioners and networks RVYOs can reach young people whom others have not been successful in reaching. In particular those regional organisations ensure that the voices of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people are heard and listened to, something that might otherwise not happen.

**Include Youth therefore does not support the proposal to cap funding to support Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations (RVYOs) at no more than 10% of the youth budget available to support local units, programmes and projects operating at a local level.**

We believe that such a proposal fails to recognise the cost effective benefits of YCNI infrastructure funding to RVYOs and their ability to grow these resources.

**Include Youth is supportive of the proposal to prioritise access to, and longer opening times for, centres or units operating within areas of disadvantage and on or near interface areas, including during periods when community tensions are heightened.**<sup>33</sup> The challenge for those projects operating within or near interface areas will be in making the programme of activities sufficiently attractive to draw young people away from interface violence and rioting. **Clearly such plans should be operationalised in close consultation with local workers and the local community.**

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<sup>31</sup> The Chief Medical Officer has estimated that by the time young people have reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday over 20% will have experienced serious mental health problems.

<sup>32</sup> Op cited at note 7, paragraph 1.9

<sup>33</sup> Op cited at note 7, paragraph 4.7.5

### **Priority 3: Developing the Non Formal Education Workforce**

**Include Youth welcomes the proposals to develop a Practice Development Unit (PDU) and sees it as having a key role to play in the ongoing professional development of youth workers.**

As part of this ongoing professional development **we would like to see a commitment to the rolling out of a programme of training on children's rights/human rights and their practical application in the context of youth work provision to Managers, staff and volunteers within youth work projects.**

**We are very supportive of a proposal to provide youth workers with elements of support services for young people with additional needs, such as are available to schools currently.**

Include Youth's own experience of providing specialist support to young people on the Department for Employment and Learning's Training for Success programme both in training organisations and further education colleges demonstrates to us the crucial difference the provision of the relevant support can make to young people in achieving positive outcomes.

Young people referred for this support typically have issues with engagement, attendance, retention, progression and achievement. By providing direct mentoring and support and personal development group work programmes to young people who are dealing with mental, emotional and physical health issues, poor educational experiences, relationship and substance misuse issues we have supported young people to achieve positive outcomes.<sup>34</sup> **We would urge the Department of Education to make a firm decision to move ahead with this proposal.**

### **Priority 4: Improving the Non-Formal Learning Environment**

While we support plans to develop options for the mainstreaming of children and young people's participation in the youth service at a local, sub-regional and regional level, we are disappointed that the requirements on projects and practitioners "*to demonstrate and provide evidence of how they have supported an ethos and culture of active participation*"<sup>35</sup> does not appear to be reflected in the development of the Strategy itself.

Although we obviously welcome the production of a young person's version of the consultation document, in line with the Department of Education's Section 75 duties, the view of practitioners and young people consulted with was that it wasn't 'user friendly' and therefore militated against their fully informed participation in the consultation exercise.

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<sup>34</sup> In the period 2011-12 Include Youth's Specialist Support team provided mentoring support to 24 young people in five organisations for periods of 3-16 weeks dealing with a broad range of issues. Our personal development programme was delivered to 447 young people in 13 organisations over 19 sites.

<sup>35</sup> Op cited at note 7, paragraph 4.17.4

Aside from a listing in bullet point format of the main points raised by young people in the pre consultation there is little evidence in the remainder of the document to indicate that the views of young people have been given due weight in the drafting of the consultation document. One of the main issues raised by young people was that programmes were adult led and driven, and that there was a lack of real or meaningful opportunities to participate in planning and delivery. This issue was also raised by young people in Include Youth's Young Voices project:

*" It's more important to let young people decide themselves what they want the youth service to do and decide for themselves what way life's going to be"*<sup>36</sup>

Yet, as referred to earlier, proposals in relation to age bands, programme activities and the outcomes framework to be used seem to be yet again driven by adult priorities and lack the flexibility and openness that would be required to facilitate real participation by children and young people.

We note that children or young people are not represented on current Priorities for Youth Work in Education Stakeholder Group<sup>37</sup> and **ask whether there has been a parallel mechanism established for young people?** We note a reference is made in Appendix 11<sup>38</sup> to the active involvement of young people in the stakeholder advisory forums but not in the main document and **we would ask for clarification as to whether the intention is, as we would support, to have children and young people represented on these fora?**

### **Concluding remarks**

In conclusion Include Youth welcomes this opportunity to contribute to this important consultation. We hope our comments and recommendations have been useful. If it is helpful for the Department to meet with us to discuss any of the issues raised in our response we would be more than happy to do so. We would like to be kept informed of the outcome of this consultation and of the next steps in the process of developing the Priorities for Youth Strategy.

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<sup>36</sup> Op cited at note 4

<sup>37</sup> Op cited at note 7, Appendix 9 Terms of reference and membership of Priorities for Youth Work in Education Stakeholder Group

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, Appendix 11 – Context for participation of young people