

include YOUTH

Response to The Executive Office Race Relations Order consultation June 2023

We have been called many names, I mean two A4 pages wouldn't be enough to write them all down on.

(Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child on Include Youth programme)

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Include Youth

Include Youth is a rights-based charity for children and young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met. We work to improve their employability, personal and social development enhancing inclusion, integration and good relations. We work with over 800 young people a year aged between 14-25. Our main offices are in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Newtownards and Omagh.

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, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have come into contact or are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, at risk or experience of CSE. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

One of our programmes, the Give & Take Scheme, adopts a youth work approach to improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream training. The core components are personal development, mentoring, training, work experience, essential skills and transitional support.

Many of these young people have experienced social exclusion, poverty or have other complex challenges in their lives and therefore need additional support to overcome these barriers and positively progress their education, training or employment needs. Seventy-five per cent of young people on the Scheme are care experienced, while over a third have had contact with the youth justice system.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in a range of areas including employability, education, mental health, youth justice and policing. This 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.

Our Care for Change project which started in September 2022 will employ 15 care experienced Expert By Experience (EBE) Youth Mentors over two years and across 6 Give and Take sites. Our current Youth Mentors are being trained and supported to mentor other young people to become change makers and policy advocates and to contribute to consultations and policy responses, meet with decision makers and co-facilitate focus groups.

General Comments

As well as responding to the online survey for this consultation, Include Youth wanted to ensure that TEO were aware of the direct views of young people on the area of race relations. We have considerable experience of working directly with separated, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, many of whom experience racism. Their views make up the body of this response.

Include Youth`s work with Separated, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People

For the last seven years, the five Health and Social Care Trusts have been referring S/UASC directly to our Give and Take **Core** Programme. Belfast Give & Take programme has worked with the highest numbers of these young people but we also work with young people in Armagh, Ballymena, Derry and Lisburn.

In 2014 Include Youth began work with young people from Somalia who were part of the HAPANI (Horn of Africa Peoples Aid Northern Ireland) group and joined our Give & Take **Start** Programme (a community-based project in partnership with Northern Ireland Alternatives). During their time on the programme they gained Essential Skills qualifications, Employability and Personal Development OCN NI Level 1 Awards. Their English language skills improved through finding new friendships and taking part in group activities.

Our work with S/UASC has since grown and we now work directly with many of these young people.

Include Youth have been recruited to run a pilot programme delivering ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children and young people residing in the Belfast Trust. In January 2022 we began a scoping exercise assessing the need for ESOL provision, we held an information and recruitment day in March whereby young people could attend and register for an ESOL class. After that, further referrals were received from Social Workers.

Include Youth`s ESOL programme began in May 2018 with a qualified tutor (Cambridge ESOL Level 5 Certificate in teaching ESOL). Two Part Time ESOL Tutors initially delivered 4 ESOL classes per week at Beginner and Entry Level 1 & Entry Level 2. Now 3 ESOL classes are delivered per week, with levels ranging from beginner (Pre-Entry), Entry Levels 1, 2 & 3 to Level 1. We have also been offering ESOL with Numeracy as an additional class.

Three of our Essential Skills tutors are now currently undergoing ESOL training due to the increased demand, both in the Belfast Trust area and in other trust areas. The total number of ESOL students engaging since January 2019 is **60**. We have recently received approval from NOCN and are now an accredited centre for ESOL.

A high percentage of these young people have progressed beyond further education and are currently doing higher education courses such as foundation degrees at local colleges. After the young people leave Give & Take programmes, they move on to our **Transitions** programme which encourages and supports their learning and wellbeing for a further year. The young people are supported in their move on and provided with practical support for any challenges including support to apply for job/training, identify area of employment/training they are interested in, build CV, prepare for interviews, identify challenges while in the new job/training, maintain regular contact with ETE provider.

From the outset, there have been success stories, with the first participant on ESOL successfully passing his Level 1 and Level 1 Literacy exams. He was accepted on to the Computer Studies course he had applied to at Belfast Met and he acknowledged the contribution of ESOL in assisting him to do this. *'Give and Take has been a great support for me coming to Belfast. The staff and tutors have helped me a lot. I am a hard worker and with the help of Give and Take I know I will do well'*.

Young People`s Voices

To inform our response to this consultation we consulted with 15 young people from our Give and Take programme, many of whom were referred to us by the Trusts as Unaccompanied Minors.

We also participated in an Education Authority led focus group, with EA staff who visited our Belfast office to speak to young people. Our views will also be represented in that EA submission.

Specific Comments

What is Racism and Experiences of Racism

The young people we spoke to were all well aware of racism and sadly, many had directly experienced racism, sometimes in different forms, but they were all clear about what racism looks like and feels like for them.

In real life racism looks like a lot of different things.

Judging someone on the basis of their skin colour, religion and cultural background.

It's discrimination.

Having stereotypes.

Treating someone unfair because of where they are from.

Bad words.

Violence.

Eye contact – long eye contact – sometimes you can tell from that, looking on me in a scary way.

Vandalism.

Feeling unsafe in your home.

Differentiation.

We have been called many names, I mean two A4 pages wouldn't be enough to write them down on.

Some of the young people believed that racism was especially prevalent in the online world and that this form of communication provided a convenient and effective vehicle for people to spread racist hate language and incite racist actions on others.

Online, videos and stuff, that`s another level.

More likely to happen online.

Their view was that some people were more likely to use racist language online than directly or face to face with someone, because there was a misconception that online was a safer and less identifiable forum to use. But as one of the young people said, there should be a greater awareness of the dangers of targeting racist abuse at someone online, because ultimately it could be revealed, lead to a criminal record and impact employment.

Even if you say it online, it could impact someone`s career.

During the discussion, when the young people were sharing their experiences of racism, they were supporting each other and giving advice on how to react to it.

That`s why I try to say to people, if you are experiencing racism, just hold up your phone, record it, it`s with you 24/7.

Education

The young people were able to cite examples where friends had gone into mainstream education but had experienced problems there in the form of racism. They talked about how other pupils had mistreated them, solely because of their race. Some pupils had been picked on and this resulted in the young people reacting to the racism they were

experiencing, not being able to concentrate on class work and ultimately not reaching their full educational potential.

For the ones I know who went to school it was so difficult for them, it was about their culture, the kids just made fun of them because they thought that was cool, but it's not, they struggled then in their grades, and they ended up fighting, and having behaviour that effected their grades. They really did not like to go to school. Some were not confident and just went into their shells mentally, so there was no good solution – nothing balanced.

For other young people, the racism they experienced at school resulted in them leaving the school.

I remember one girl who came to my school, I can't remember what country she had been from, but she had been through a lot, the people at the school were absolute pricks, she had been forced into marriage and stuff, and the people at school took the absolute hand out of her, it was horrendous, she left, I don't know where she went but she never came back again.

In terms of solutions to this, the young people suggested that schools, as well as taking direct action on racist bullying, should do more to counteract the ignorance and lack of awareness about different cultures.

I think there should be better education on different cultures because it is only talked about briefly in school, it's not talked about a lot.

I don't remember any talks at school about racism, like they would do in Assembly about mental health or LGBTQ plus issues. They should do that.

This education should go beyond children in schools to families and communities in general.

I think a lot of racism comes from parents too, children hear it.

The young people expressed the views that schools should be more tolerant and accommodating when it comes to uniform policies and do more to respect when a pupil's religious belief and practices may come into conflict with school policy.

There was also a desire for schools to expand their teaching to include a range of religions.

I think we should learn not just about Christianity, but we should know about other religions.

A number of the young people who had arrived as newcomers to Northern Ireland, had already gained qualifications in their home country, but were having difficulty getting those qualifications recognised here. This resulted in them having to delay

accessing particular courses or having to sit exams which they felt they already had the qualifications for. The information on how to translate qualifications from other countries appears to be difficult to come by. The young people also felt they were being discriminated from reaching their full educational potential because they did not always find information easy to find on what available courses there were or what suitable pathways they could access. There was a sense that some young people are encouraged to enrol in subjects and courses which they are not suited to, interested in or that best apply to their life goals and career ambitions. The young people we work with in Include Youth who have arrived as unaccompanied minors are incredibly ambitious, hard working and eager to learn and secure employment. They should be given every opportunity to pursue their goals.

I know a guy and he needed to do a GCSE but he couldn't get in, they wouldn't let him into the school, so he missed a year because no one gave him direction on where he should go. One of the schools wouldn't accept him for some reason.

I think it is hard to get information.

Yes, that's important, they should recognise our qualifications from home. If you have a qualification from your own country you are not allowed to use it in college, you have to do access course, or restart programme or something.

I did translate mine through some service, it took a while to sort out and it was costly, I needed to do it for university, I had Maths and I didn't need to study for it again.

Employment

Many of the young people had experienced racism and harassment when they were in employment. They had been on the receiving end of racist verbal abuse and in many instances did not feel like the employer had supported them. This resulted in some young people leaving the job they were employed in and for one young woman it has resulted in her deciding never to work in a public facing role again. There was a sense that this level of racism at work was just something that happens and the young people end up being the ones to make the changes to protect themselves rather than it being addressed directly in the workplace and creating a working culture where everyone should feel safe and respected.

Yes, I get it (racist abuse) all the time, I used to work in surgery reception and the first one was because I am a woman of colour, the second one was because of my religion, that's why I don't work anymore in public facing jobs. I prefer to work just in the back.

Employers could report more when it happens.

Or you should report to their managers, and make sure you have evidence and a witness.

Employers should support you, because you are not going to be as productive as you could be if you are not treated well.

The young people also thought that it was a good idea for employers to produce guides to support training and to promote awareness raising courses. Although some of the young people expressed the view that:

People shouldn't need a guide, they should just treat people with respect.

Another suggestion was for employers to have a dedicated physical space where it would be safe to raise issues of discrimination and harassment, so that more people would feel able to come forward.

Would be good if they had a safe zone, somewhere they could go and raise it if they have a problem.

A number of the young people commented that because of the lack of support with learning English they felt that they were being denied opportunities in employment or were struggling to hold placements/jobs because of language difficulties.

My friend had a job in a supermarket but his English wasn't good, so he was struggling and ended up leaving.

They have interpreters if you have an appointment with your GP, but you need to learn before you get a job. Hard to get a job if you don't have English.

The young people were surprised to hear that some people from countries are not able to work for the Government. They were totally against this and wanted to see the rules changed to prevent this.

That sucks. Everyone should be equal. If they had more people like us in those jobs then they might know better what our needs are too.

Services

The young people were able to cite examples where they or their friends had been excluded from joining some clubs.

My dad is Jamaican. I tried to join a wee hockey club when I was young but they said that it was only for people from Northern Ireland. I grew up here, I was born here, I've never been to Jamaica, I don't think people understand that just because there is something different in your DNA, doesn't mean that you're not from here.

Some young people had also experienced racist attitudes in shops, saying they had been followed around the shop and treated as if they were going to steal something.

Yes, I get a lot of it in shops, or you always have someone to follow you when you are in a shop, it's so bad.

We went to a shop where I live and we went to buy something and the price was like a pound and she said `it`s five pounds for you`.

There appeared to be a shared feeling that whenever these incidents happened onlookers were slow to speak up and challenge the racist behaviour.

There are incidents that happen that don't even get reported, things like in public happen, like if you are in McDonalds and treated differently and stared out of the place, and still, no one acts about that, or when you are shopping.

I was in a Library and it was very full, everybody was studying because there were exams and everyone was reading and I was sitting at a desk and a woman came up and told me to stand up and then to move because she wanted to use the desk, I was so shocked, I didn't know what to say to her, I just took my stuff and my bag and then left. I was just there to read and wait until my class started, but she was like, stand up, I want to take the desk and the chair. I was just standing there and everyone was actually looking at her doing that and did nothing.

One young person had experienced an incident while visiting the doctor.

It happened to me once, the doctor didn't say anything to me, he just said some stuff to my PA, and she said that he had said something bad about me, but she never told me what, I asked her but she wouldn't tell me, but she reported him for it. She said "this man has said some bad stuff about you and I have to report him".

Another young person had been intimidated in her home and despite reporting it to the police she still did not feel safe or protected. This young person no longer feels safe not just in her home here but in Northern Ireland generally, and is now considering moving away.

Things do get reported to the police. I had this issue and we spoke to the police and I don't feel like they do care, and we have been blackmailed that if we don't move from this house that something bad is going to happen to us, so we are not safe, last night we didn't sleep. And the police came but they said we can't do anything about it, you guys just need to move, like why we would you have to move, why would I have to move from my own house? I pay for the rent, we do everything, we feel like it is our house, but instead of doing something to that person, they are just moving people. Our landlord got a letter from someone saying because he doesn't like women of colour, that if he doesn't move us, then.... I just want to do my own thing. ...I feel like

racism is coming more at me during 2023, I've dealt with it three times, I feel like Northern Ireland is not a safe place for us anymore.

One young person reported hearing anti-semitic comments.

In my area there is a lot of anti semitism at the moment, I'm not Jewish or anything but I do hear a lot around my area, people say stuff, it's really rude.

Another young person made a connection between racism and paramilitarism.

I think men can be worse than women when it comes to racism, because men can be very territorial, especially when it comes to the paramilitaries, they don't want people in their country. I can see a connection between racism and paramilitaries.

What would make a difference?

The young people were asked what could be done to improve the situation and tackle the racism they had experienced and described. They wanted more action from those with authority to tackle racism. In some cases they wanted wider systemic change of government policies and practices which they see contribute to racism.

Change the immigration situation.

Better awareness from the police, more effort.

The young people also want to see racism recognised and punished more.

I think racism should be taken seriously, like if a homeless person stole food they would do jail time but if you're racist to someone like there would be no punishment at all.

Higher punishment rates. Not just 'don't do that again', there should be a deterrent, or they will just come up and say the same thing again.

The young people want more awareness of different cultures.

To stop other from feeling different, teach everyone about different cultures and holidays, rules etc, to be more aware.

More lessons.

Ultimately young people want to see all forms of racism ended and for everyone to be treated equally, without discrimination or prejudice.

Racism to not be a thing as it's not fair on other people.

Get rid of racists, discrimination, stereotypes.

Everyone should be treated equally.

Understand what it is to be a human and humanity.

People who care or people who will have your back.

More kindness, more open mindedness.

There were other more practical suggestions made to support ethnic minorities.

Maybe community centres, different things for different cultures.

Given the fact that many of the young people had experienced racism and had also felt unsupported by those who had witnessed the incident, or the name calling, or the demeaning actions intended to make them feel less than, it is hardly surprising that they want to see more people standing up or intervening.

More people speaking up.

And the sad part is that people would see you being treated like that and they wouldn't speak up.

I think if people speak up or tell the guy in front of him or whoever he is, you could mind your business, and everyone would be happy or you could make a scene and make it embarrassing for everyone.

I think some people are scared to speak up because they already get enough hate, they feel if they speak up that it could end up in conflict.

You don't need to fight, just speak up and make eye contact.

One young woman said that while she would want to be able to confront an abuser and stand up and speak if she saw someone else facing racism, she would find that hard to do, because she thinks it would just make things worse or result in even more abuse.

As a black woman I would never answer to someone from here (Northern Ireland), like "what's your problem", I would just leave or not say anything because I know that they would just add more and more. I wouldn't honestly, I wouldn't go speak to them.

Concluding Comments

We are more than happy to provide further information if required and are open to facilitating direct conversations with some of our young people, if that would be helpful.

We look forward to seeing the results of the consultation. To conclude with the words of one of the young people.

Understand what is humanity more, we are all human, if that gets shouted down, hate will still be here, we are all human but we come from different cultures. We have the right to live here in peace.