

include YOUTH

**Response to Programme for Government Draft Outcomes
Framework**

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For further information contact Paula Rodgers
Policy Co-ordinator, Include Youth, 14 College Square North, Belfast, BT1 6AS

028 9031 1007 paula@includeyouth.org
www.includeyouth.org @includeyouth

Include Youth

Include Youth is a regional rights-based charity for young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met to improve their employability and personal development. 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, newcomer young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, engaging in unsafe or harmful sexual behaviour, or at risk of being harmed themselves. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

Our 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. We work across 9 primary sites and a number of outreach locations. 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 has a background in offending. We offer a range of tailored programmes including:

- Core - for young people aged 16-21 referred to us through the Health Trusts, a 12-24 month intensive employability programme for care experienced young people who are furthest away from mainstream education, training and employment opportunities. In 2019/2020 101 young people participated in Core.
- Start Programme – a collaborative partnership employability programme with community based organisation Northern Ireland Alternatives, targeted at young people in the North Down, Ards and Belfast areas. In 2019/2021 111 young people participated in Start.
- Outreach – for young people requiring additional support to move into employment, education and training and delivered through community groups and schools throughout Northern Ireland. In 2019/2020 191 young people participated in Outreach.

- One to One – for young people at risk of child sexual exploitation. In 2019/2020 13 young people participated.
- Transitional support – for those moving on from our Scheme and into mainstream education, training or employment or access work related courses. In 2019/2020 60 young people received support.

As part of our programme we offer care experienced and other disadvantaged young people the opportunity to gain essential skills and qualifications. Our Learning for Action programme is delivered by a team of in-house tutors who deliver weekly classes and one to one tuition to enable young people to gain qualifications at entry level, level one and level two in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT. Learning for Action is a core component of Include Youth's Give and Take scheme. Young people are given a second chance at learning and an opportunity to gain essential qualifications in settings that are informal, adaptable, flexible and that cater to their individual needs. In 2019/2020 162 young people, on the Give and Take scheme, received 240 qualifications.

Meant to Work is a one to one mentoring service for young people aged 16-24 which helps young people gain and sustain meaningful employment. Meant to Work Plus is delivered in partnership with Belfast Trust and supports care experienced young people access employment and other vocational opportunities. These programmes have supported 70 young people in 2019/2020.

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the five 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. 179 young people have received this service in 2019/2020.

Strive is a cross community, cross cultural, and cross border programme that engages young people aged 14-24 in good relations, person development and citizenship. We deliver this with our partners Newstart Educational Centre, Northern Ireland Alternatives, Youth Initiatives and Lifford/Clonleigh Resource Centre. The programme is delivered through local youth groups, schools and Youthreach. In 2019/2020 200 young people participated in Strive.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in the areas of employability, 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.

General Comments

Include Youth welcome the opportunity to comment on the Draft Outcomes Framework and are fully supportive of the Executive's approach to develop the framework through a process of co-design and engagement, using an outcomes-based approach. We agree that pursuing a framework which has 'well being for all' at the centre is critical. Accountable and transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements will be vital to ensure that identified outcomes are being met. Undoubtedly COVID-19 has exposed failings within public services and has exacerbated difficulties which already existed for the most vulnerable groups, including children and young people. Include Youth had already raised issues of concern pre-COVID-19, regarding particular groups of young people not being able to reach their full potential in areas such as education, health and economic well-being. We are concerned that the barriers that exist for vulnerable young people, including care experienced young people, have been heightened in the last 12 months and a concerted and targeted effort must be made by all government departments to address the needs of specific young people. We know from our direct work with children and young people that there are very few governments departments whose work does not impact on the lives of children and young people.

The document acknowledges that government alone cannot address the challenges and problems that exist. Rather a societal approach is needed, drawing together expertise and experience across the wider public sector and various partners, including those in the community and voluntary sector. The community and voluntary sector have responded to the last 12 months by ensuring that those most at risk continued to receive services through the most challenging of times. Include Youth was no exception to this, and we have sustained a high level of support to all our young people throughout this period, delivering personal and practical support and ensuring young people continue to engage in learning. While we welcome the Executive's approach to partnering with civic society to develop an outcomes based PfG, we would stress the need for this approach to be practically demonstrated by a significant investment and commitment to ensuring financial stability for those community and voluntary sector partners who are currently delivering vital services. It is imperative that the PfG ensures that existing and future expenditure is protected and secured for all services connected with delivering to vulnerable children and young people.

We understand that the current draft framework is a high level document which seeks to set out a number of 'statements of societal well-being'. While we support the development of these high level statements and associated outcomes and key priority areas, the process of data gathering and decisions around indicators and measurements will be critical to the overall success of the PfG. We are keen to see how data will be collected and how indicators will be developed and measurements arrived at, especially in relation to improving the lives of children and young people.

The collection of data to give a complete picture of the reality of many children and young people's lives is vital. Include Youth have long called for more efficient data collection in relation to all aspects of children and young people's lives. Without such data we cannot correctly assess how our children and young people are progressing and most importantly identify why too many children and young people are struggling to achieve in education, secure training and employment opportunities or are being caught up in the youth justice system. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly called for the development of a mechanism to collect and analyse data on the areas covered by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Include Youth are represented on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and associated sub-groups. The PfG must align with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership priorities and support partnership working with all those stakeholders involved in the Strategic Partnership.

We welcome the Executive's efforts to make an easy read and children's version of the consultation document available. Young people from Include Youth's Strive programme took part in a virtual focus group discussion with officials from The Executive Office and the young people's comments are included in the final section of this response. Due to current constraints we were unable to engage with more young people across our programmes, but we have drawn on existing evidence we had from previous discussions with young people, to inform our response. We would hope as restrictions ease in the coming months that Executive officials will reach out again to engage in face to face discussions with young people and ensure their voices are included as actions and strategies are further developed.

Specific Comments

Our children and young people have the best start in life

We agree that the outcome 'our children and young people have the best start in life' should be included.

We welcome the Key Priority Area of 'Care' which commits to providing stable, nurturing environments for care experienced young people and 'newcomer' young people.

There are many children and young people who come to live in Northern Ireland who have particular vulnerabilities and complex needs. Include Youth have seen a dramatic change in the profile of the young people who are currently engaged in our Belfast Give and Take Core programme as there are now a large percentage of 'newcomer' young people on the programme. These young people have experienced extreme trauma and are dealing with multiple barriers in their lives. We are therefore very

encouraged by the Executive's commitment to this group of children and young people and would welcome any intervention to ensure their needs are being met.

This commitment should address the disadvantages that care experienced young people currently face regarding educational attainment, health and well-being, economic stability, housing and employment and training opportunities and provide financial support to those organisations working to address such barriers.

This commitment must also address the continued criminalisation of care experienced young people. There is also continuing concern about the criminalisation of care experienced young people, with 28% of young people involved in custody subject to a care order in 2018/2019 which is an increase from 17% in 2015/2016.¹ Recommendation 19 of the Youth Justice Review stated that looked after children should no longer be placed in custody, either through PACE, on remand or sentenced, where this would not have been the outcome for children in the general population. This recommendation was deemed by CJI to having not been achieved in 2015. In the year that the Youth Justice Review team published this recommendation, 37% of admissions to Woodlands were looked after children.² In 2019/20, 30.9% of admissions to Woodlands involved young people subject to care orders and 20.8% were in voluntary accommodation.³ CJI have noted their continued concern that care experienced young people are overrepresented in the justice system.

It is regrettable that so many years on from the recommendations of the youth justice review we still appear to be grappling with long standing issues which have yet to be effectively addressed and which formed part of the recent DoJ/DoH consultation proposals on the establishment of an integrated care and justice campus. While we welcome the developments to address the complex needs of the young people who come into the justice system and the acknowledgement by authorities within the DoJ Transitioning Youth Justice model that children should be treated first as a child and second as an offender, we are still concerned that the overall direction of travel will not deliver for those young people most in need. We welcome the recognition that these young people require non justice interventions but still believe that the current proposals could have been more transformative in their nature.

In 2020 the NI Audit Office concluded that more needs to be done to make the desire to transform how we work with and support children in and on the edge of the justice system into a reality. They stated:

¹ Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2018/2019, published 14th November 2019

² A Review of the Youth Justice System in NI, 2011, page 78

³ YJA Annual Workload Statistics 2019/2020

‘other than the completion of the repurposing of Woodlands JJC by 2022, there is currently no clearly defined end-state design for how the entire youth justice system will work.’⁴

The repurposing of Woodlands is just one aspect of how we might support some young people, but it will not deliver on a wider level. Indeed, focusing on this one aspect has potentially drawn attention away from what needs to happen on a wider and more strategic level, a level which requires commitment and resources from a range of stakeholders at both statutory, community and voluntary level.

The current PfG Draft Outcome Framework must include addressing the needs of those children and young people in contact with and at risk of contact with the youth justice system. This must include addressing the current low minimum age of criminal responsibility. Despite a ‘Raise the Age’ campaign involving organisations working with children and young people, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, and children’s rights advocates, the age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland remains 10 years. This contravenes international children’s rights standards, and repeated recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to increase it.

Addressing the current state of play in relation to how NI is meeting international standards on the age of criminal responsibility and the continued criminalisation of care experienced young people must be a priority within the PfG

Further details on Include Youth’s position on youth justice developments can be found in our submission to the consultation on DoJ/DoH proposals for an integrated care and justice campus.⁵

We welcome the Key Priority of ‘Skills and Attainment’ which commits to addressing persistent educational underachievement and supporting children and young people with specific needs. This priority must address the educational underachievement of care experienced young people.

All evidence indicates the outcomes for care experienced young people are significantly below those of their non-care experienced counterparts. This is especially true in relation to educational attainment.

In 2019/2020 of the children of compulsory school age and who have been in care for 12 months or longer:

- 24% had a statement of Special Education Need (general school population 5.5%)⁶

⁴ NIAO, Update on Managing Children Who Offend, 2020.

⁵ [Submissions | Include Youth](#)

⁶ [Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2012/13 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

- 61% received some sort of special educational support (general school population 19.3%)⁷

In 2019/2020 of those leaving care aged 16-18 years old:

- 56% leaving residential care had *no* qualifications.
- 23% had statement of SEN (5% NI average)⁸.
- 34% left school with no qualifications⁹ (0.6% general school population).
- 27% achieved 5 GCSEs grade A* - C (NI average 86%).

In 2019/2020 of care leavers aged 19 years old:

- 27% who were in contact with HSC Trusts were economically inactive or unemployed.
- 27% were not in education, employment, or training (NEET)¹⁰.

Despite attempts to improve the educational outcomes of care experienced young people emanating from the current PfG, the statistics reveal how far we still have to come to ensure these young people are given every opportunity to reach their full potential. The Access All Areas report compiled by an alliance of voluntary organisations made several key recommendations. We would like to draw the Executive's attention to the recommendations in relation to education and ask them to take these into consideration when developing proposals to improve the outcomes for care experienced young people. Access All Areas key recommendations include:

- 1. Increase understanding of and respond to educational barriers faced by care experienced young people.** Significant resources are being provided to improve the educational attainment of care experienced young people. While the picture is improving, a considerable gap still exists when compared to the general population.
- 2. Recognise and respond to unique needs of care experienced young people within educational, training and employability programmes.** Many care leavers' educational pathways are seriously disrupted. Employability services and alternative education and training programmes are vital provisions. All relevant government departments and agencies as corporate parents are in a position to ensure there is flexibility within these structures to support care leavers and to provide additional employment and training opportunities.
- 3. Collaborate to reduce financial barriers and obstacles to engaging in and sustaining pathways into employment.** Corporate parents need to fully address the financial barriers and obstacles faced by care leavers engaging in and sustaining

⁷ [Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2012/13 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](http://health-ni.gov.uk)

⁸ [Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2019/20 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](http://health-ni.gov.uk)

⁹ [Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2019/20 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](http://health-ni.gov.uk)

¹⁰ [Northern Ireland Care Leavers 2019/20 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](http://health-ni.gov.uk)

pathways into employment. Current systems create financial disincentives to young people accessing or changing routes into education, training or employment.

Include Youth would also like to draw the Executive's attention to the financial inequalities that exist in relation to financial support provided to different groups of young people who are pursuing further education. Young people attending our programme remain ineligible to claim Education Maintenance Allowance despite the fact that their peers attending Further Education courses or mainstream training programmes qualify for this payment. This inequity had previously been addressed with the decision to introduce the Pathways EMA in the Pathways to Success Strategy in 2012. This decision followed a lengthy campaign by young people on Include Youth's Give & Take scheme and their advocates. Our campaign highlighted the inequity of a situation whereby young people continuing on in school post 16, participating in FE or Training for Success all received a financial incentive and support for their efforts, while those young people who faced the most barriers to participation and were the most disadvantaged received no such incentive. On the publication of the Pathways to Success Strategy, Minister Stephen Farry indicated that he had listened to the concerns expressed, including by the Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee, and that the introduction of the Pathways EMA was a response designed to "address the anomaly that exists in the system for those who are participating under the European Social Fund schemes".¹¹ Unfortunately, this decision which was based on addressing inequality was short lived and we continue to campaign for our Executive to recognise the financial plight of young people attending Include Youth's Give and Take scheme and similar programmes. Young people participating in such schemes, who are most in need of support to participate in education or training, should be entitled to receive non means tested EMA alongside their peers in mainstream education and training. We would recommend that this inequity is addressed in future actions to address the skills and attainment gap of care experienced young people within the PfG.

We know from the statistics cited that there is clearly a need for dedicated projects to support care experienced young people, such as Include Youth's Give and Take programme. The young people represent a number of communities and localities but their life experiences and in particular the challenges they face are all too similar. Of the care experienced young people who participated in our Give and Take programme, 75% were from deprived areas, 61% were experiencing mental and emotional health problems, 55% were in unsettled accommodation, 54% had experienced abuse and neglect, 50% had substance misuse issues, 42% had an offending background and 30% were at risk of suicide and self-harm. Similarly, in our Start programme, 95% were

¹¹Official Report (Hansard) Mon 2 July 2012 Vol 76, No 3, page 194

from deprived areas, 57% had emotional and mental health problems and 33% had an offending background.

We know that without the input of holistic, tailored support, the combination of these life experiences presents our young people with enormous barriers to them fulfilling their potential. Based on our experience and through the voice of our young people we have developed a Give and Take model of practice comprised of 5 core components: employability, essential skills, personal development, mentoring and transitions support. These are all underpinned by a youth work approach and are delivered by professionally trained staff. We have been delivering essential skills for over 15 years with a high level of success. Initially we accessed essential skills teaching through local colleges, but this resulted in limited success as in 2007 we achieved only 14 qualifications. Include Youth recognised that change was needed and applied for funding to employ its own tutors through the Big Lottery Fund. The success of this was significant as in 2011, 138 young people had achieved an essential skills qualification. Our Essential skills provision has grown from strength to strength through continued support from the Big Lotteries Fund. Over the course of our previous Big Lottery Funded programme we exceeded our targets with 520 young people gaining 853 essential skills qualifications. We are currently in our third and last round of funding from Big Lotteries. Unfortunately this funding is due to finish in December 2021 and without securing a new funding source, this vital work which is increasing the educational achievement and life chances of disadvantaged young people will cease.

We are confident that what we provide at Include Youth in terms of direct service provision to some of our most disadvantaged young people is directly addressing educational underachievement. The young people in our programmes benefit from our model of working and succeed in achieving the necessary qualifications for them to proceed to mainstream education, training and employment. Evaluations of our essential skills provision demonstrate that there is a continued need for essential skills to be delivered as part of small group youth work setting, linked to personal development and employability. As our independent evaluator says:

The young people who join the Give & Take Scheme carry varying levels of trauma both from their childhood, and that are ongoing, resulting in barriers to education. A mainstream further education setting, while suitable for some children and young people from a care background, is not suitable for many at this stage. If mainstream was an option, it would have worked before now; something different is needed. The Give & Take Scheme provides space for nurture in the form of belonging to a group (for Start and Core), and relationship with youth workers and tutors helps change

attitudes to education. In time this changes attitudes to and choices in employment, and ultimately leads to greater choices in life.¹²

Young participants confirm the positive aspects of the programme:

My time in Give and Take was a wonderful experience. I started off with no education whatsoever, having failed multiple GCSEs at school I felt like an absolute failure. Give and Take taught me that learning can also be a wonderful experience, in my two years in the programme I started my music career, got my Maths and English and started a full time employment. With the help of Give and Take I have been working there over 8 months. ...I want to thank Give and Take for giving me a second chance at life. (Give and Take Core participant)

When I first came here, I didn't believe I would ever be capable of gaining a qualification. I have come so far. (Give and Take Core participant)

I left school before I was sixteen with no qualifications. I didn't get on with the teachers, they were too strict, there was no freedom... In Start, the tutors would have sat beside you and helped you through it. (Give and Take Start participant)

[What attracted me was] The qualifications, because I left school with none.

I joined because I wanted Maths and English essential skills, and then I progressed. If it hadn't been for Start, I wouldn't have qualifications. (Give and Take Start participant)

We are hopeful that through the identification of care experienced young people and those groups experiencing persistent educational underachievement as Key Priority Areas within the Draft Outcome, the Executive will recognise the vital contribution programmes like Give and Take are making. The fact that Include Youth's Give and Take programme is referenced in the 'A Life Deserved' Strategy for Care Experienced Young People, as a model that meets the specific needs of care experienced young people is testament to the success of this programme and in our opinion further highlights the need for its continuation through sustained cross departmental government funding.

Further information on Include Youth's concerns with regard to the education of care experienced young people and ideas for how these concerns can be addressed are included in our written evidence to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement.¹³

We note that under the Key Priority of 'Care' that the Department of Education and Department of Health are listed. We would recommend that the Department of Justice

¹² David Thompson, Independent Evaluation for Include Youth for Essential Potential (The Essential Skills Component of the Give and Take programme), 2018.

¹³ [Microsoft Word - 276EE5CA2E0AFA49C08DF39378278056.docx \(includeyouth.org\)](#)

is included. Under 'Skills and Attainment' we recommend the inclusion of the Department of Health, given their corporate parent responsibility for care experienced young people.

Key Priority Area that is missing:

We would welcome an addition of a Key Priority Area under this outcome, which addresses the Mental Health needs of children and young people. We recognise that there is a specific Outcome that 'we all enjoy long, healthy active lives' but such is the deficit in provision to meet the mental needs of children and young people, we believe the mental health of children and young people should be identified as a Key Priority Area under the outcome on children and young people having the best start in life. The failure to include the improvement of the mental health of children and young people as a key priority is a glaring omission within the current framework.

The issue of mental health is a priority issue for many of the young people we work with. In the course of responding to a number of policy consultations in recent years, including the Children and Young People's Strategy and the Looked After Children Strategy, we have asked the young people on our programmes what their views are on current mental health provision. While the young people acknowledged the need to meet the physical needs of children and young people it is clear that the urgent need to address mental health concerns amongst themselves and their peers is top of the list.

The big issues are mental and physical health, suicide and self-harm.

We cannot overestimate what a pressing issue this is for the young people we spoke to. Many of them had experience of or knew people who had experienced mental health problems and they were worried about the lack of adequate provision for children and young people to get the help they need.

Mental health is the main issue for young people – there are not enough services out there.

There are mental health problems from about 14 years and up - suicide, depression, self-harm.

A lot of young people are not getting the mental health they need.

It's a massive problem.

Some of the young people had experience of CAMHS and in particular of Beechcroft. They felt strongly that there was not enough provision to address children's mental health needs and that the geographic spread of support was too sporadic. Several

mentioned the dissatisfaction that there was only one residential facility and that it was very often far away from children's families.

There is only one hospital for children – Beechcroft.

The fact that they are really far from home when they are at Beechcroft is really bad.

People struggle for years and don't get the help they need from CAMHS – you just can't get the help.

You have to wait far too long to get medication.

There was a real sense of urgency from the young people we spoke to about the need and demand from young people in care, to access mental health support.

“cos people are committing suicide.”

“you need help and support.”

“I waited 8 months to get help and support.”

They also identified the very vulnerable time when they have to transfer from children to adult mental health services and the concern they have that adult provision is not tailored to their age and particular needs.

And then they chop you off when you reach 18 and adult services aren't the same.

The young people were not positive about the contribution that schools make to supporting children and young people's mental health and claimed that many schools were not equipped to deal with young people experiencing problems.

No – they (schools)are no help for that.

They don't want to help you in school about mental health stuff. The teachers would just tell everyone. . I wouldn't trust them to tell them.

It just gets picked up as bad behaviour, but really it is because there are things going on for you underneath everything.

We also conduct consultations with our practitioners on key strategic documents and they also frequently raise the issue of mental health in relation to the barriers and difficulties that the young people they work with face. Practitioners agreed that mental health was one of the most pressing issues for children and young people and even thought that the level of poor mental health amongst young people was under represented because so many of the young people still do not want to reveal it. As one practitioner said:

A lot of schools don't do counselling, and the young ones don't want to talk to their parents, so they come here to talk to us. A lot of kids dealing with drugs don't attend school so this education needs to be offered outside school as well. (Practitioner)

Another practitioner commented:

We don't have enough provision for children in mental health. There should be a requirement for it to be provided in schools. The number of children who are self-harming, even 10 year olds, is going up. Teachers should be trained and be more aware...: Most people, especially men, want to keep it to themselves. I would say that 80 – 90 % of the ones we see in here have mental health problems. They use drugs to try and escape .(Practitioner)

Strategies Missing:

We would welcome further detail on how the Children's Services Co-operation Act will be implemented within the Programme for Government. The Act places statutory obligations on government departments and all statutory agencies to co-operate with each other in order to contribute to the improvement of well-being for children and young people. It is critical that the Executive takes a lead role in ensuring that the Act is developed in both policy and practice across government.

We would also welcome reference to the following strategies/policies/reports:

- DoJ Transitioning Youth Justice
- DoJ Strategy on Women and Girls in contact with the youth justice system
- DoJ/DoH Proposals for establishment of integrated care and justice campus
- Mental Health Strategy
- Report (forthcoming) from Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect

We agree with the inclusion of this outcome and agree with the Key Priorities listed. We support the commitment to tackle the issues that lead to inequality and disadvantage in terms of welfare and poverty. We would welcome specific reference being made to the need to tackle child poverty.

We are supportive of the commitment to tackle sectarianism and to build respect and identity. Include Youth is currently delivering a programme which seeks to build good relations and supports young people to explore issues relating to citizenship and personal development. Strive is a Peace4Youth programme supported by the Special

EU Programmes Body with match funding from the Irish Government's Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the NI Executive. Since our launch in late 2017 we have worked with over 600 young people. Strive works with young people aged 14 to 24 and is led by Include Youth in partnership with Youth Initiatives, Newstart Education Centre, Northern Ireland Alternatives and Lifford Clonleigh Resource Centre in Co.Donegal. This cross-community and cross-border programme engages young people in a transformative process focusing on good relations, citizenship and personal development. As a youth-led programme young people who are 'Expert by Experience (EBE)' having come through similar situations use their experience to lead on design and delivery across the programme sites. We target young people who are 14 to 24 years, who are disadvantaged and marginalised, have deep social and emotional needs, and are at risk of becoming involved in violent paramilitary or dissident activity, who may be involved or are on the edge of becoming involved with the care and/or youth justice systems. The majority of participants are at risk of becoming early school leavers or are in need of education, training or employment. Detached street work often forms a basis for initial engagement as well as working alongside local youth and community groups, alternative education providers and schools to identify potential participants.

We are now concerned about the future of the Strive project and the impact of gaps in funding during the transition to Peace Plus. We are concerned that there is no bridge funding available to address the gaps in services to young people and the wider community that the ending of Peace4Youth will create. This gap in services is likely to be for a significant period (if not all of 2022) and potentially into 2023 as well. It is likely that a break in funding will result in momentum, expertise and learning. There are 230 staff employed across Peace4Youth with around 200 of these in youth work posts. Our partnership alone employs 28 staff – the majority of this in frontline youth work posts. Without further funding being secured the project will close in December 2021 and staff member will be made redundant. We are committed to pursuing all options available to us to secure the future of the programme given the vital support that young people are availing of through our intensive and essential youth work provision.

It is critical that the actions emanating from the PfG Outcome on developing a 'secure and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect' ensure programmes like Strive are supported to continue their vital work with young people.

We all enjoy long, healthy active lives

We agree with the inclusion of this outcome.

We would welcome the inclusion of a key priority area which specifically addresses the health needs of children and young people.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of focus on children and young people's mental health, as outlined in our earlier section on giving 'children and young people the best start in life'.

Everyone can reach their potential

We agree with the inclusion of this outcome and the commitment to support people to realise and achieve their full potential by addressing issues which lead to underachievement and removing barriers to employment.

We support the commitment to address zero hours contracts.

Through our direct practice with young people, Include Youth is delivering to support the personal development of young people, building confidence and self-esteem. Improving employability is at the heart of our work, both of care experienced young people and of other young people facing multiple barriers to employment.

Include Youth has extensive experience of supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to access training and employment. Young people with complex unmet needs were already finding it a struggle to access training and employment, but those barriers have multiplied even more in the last year, due to the impact of COVID-19, lack of employment opportunities and increased competition in the job market. The young people we work with are increasingly feeling that they have no future or prospects and they have slipped even further down the employment ladder. We would like to have seen an explicit reference to address the needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

It is essential that the PfG helps our most marginalised young people develop their skills set and employability and that this should be done in such a way that takes into account the individual and often complex needs of the young people.

It is imperative that the PfG takes account of the particular needs of at risk young people and enables them to develop their skills and employability in programmes which are best suited to their needs.

Employers must be named as having a role to play in tackling the issues effecting young people who are not in education, employment or training. A significant level of intervention is required in this area. It is essential that employers working within the public and private sectors improve employment and work-based training opportunities for young people.

We recommend that reference is made under this outcome to the contribution that ESF funded projects have made to increase the prospects of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, combating poverty and social exclusion. We are

concerned about the lack of any clear plan to ensure continuity of funding for ESF projects and the lack of detail on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund's design, purpose, implementation and level of funding. It is critical that no gap in funding exists between the end of ESF funding and the succession programme. ESF funded programmes in NI have been instrumental in delivering core services for young people not in education, employment or training. The targets and outcomes from the current programme have consistently been delivered on and it is vital that this good work continues to be developed. Any gap in funding would significantly impact on this important work, resulting in already disadvantaged young people being further disadvantaged. We know that young people are predicted to be acutely affected by the economic impact of COVID-19, in particular school leavers and the young unemployed. It is critical that under the PfG that the supports currently provided for under the ESF programme are maintained and protected so that they can continue making a vital contribution to tackling poverty and addressing social exclusion, which we anticipate shall be critical to the COVID-19 recovery response and beyond.

Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other

We agree with the inclusion of this outcome and the commitment to divert young people from entering the justice system.

Key Priority Area of Access to Justice

We support the commitment to improve the speed of justice and tackle delay in the system. This is especially relevant to the speed at which cases involving children and young people are dealt with.

Key Priority Areas of Addressing Harm and Vulnerability

As a society transitioning out of conflict and violence, there are a number of specific circumstances that pertain which have relevance to and impact on the safety of children and young people. These include the ongoing threats, intimidation and attacks against young people accused of 'anti-social behaviour', particularly in economically deprived areas associated with high levels of conflict-related violence. The extent to which violence or the threat of violence represents a real risk to children and young people's safety, particularly in certain communities, cannot be underestimated.

The presence and threat posed by paramilitaries has been highlighted by young people during the course of our numerous consultations over recent years with young people on a range of issues including safeguarding, policing, the care system etc.

Paramilitaries know you – there's certain areas just not safe for me, certain estates close to where I live.

The way they are doing it now (paramilitary attacks), they are much worse. We'd be safe if it wasn't for the paramilitaries.

It's the paramilitaries who make you feel unsafe – they know everything, know everyone ... so if they want you they will always get you.

The subject was once again raised by the young people we spoke to in January and February 2017 in relation to the consultation on the Children and Young People's Strategy.

Some paramilitaries try to help you.

No, they are scumbags. I hate that they get children, you can get brought into them too easily, they want kids to do stuff for them, to do their skivvying for them.

Kids are committing suicide because dissident paramilitaries are trying to get them to do stuff they don't want to do.

There should be more done to tackle paramilitarism.

The ones joyriding and all and the paras are trying to get that stopped and they threaten to knee cap them.

Too many people are stuck in the past and the older ones pass it on to the younger ones and it goes on. It just keep them (paras) in power.

The threat from paramilitaries is ridiculous. It's a disgrace. The paramilitaries have the advantage and all the propaganda that goes out, around the 12th July and the Easter Rising and all, they have money to do what they want, the spotlight should be changed from them and should be put on young people.

Only one young person that we spoke to felt that paramilitaries were not a major threat to their own person safety, perhaps reflecting the different experiences for young people depending on the area they live in.

Paramilitaries are not a big issue here.

However, this opinion was soon counteracted by the views of other young people.

They so are!! Paramilitaries are a massive issue here in Derry!! There is lots of paramilitary activity, there are ones going round with bats and 17 and 17 year olds getting beaten up all the time.

If you grow up in an estate you grow up with people around you getting beatings. It makes us think that's alright – my Daddy died when I was wee and I put my foot through a shop window because I thought that was ok. When I saw him (one of the young person's relatives) kerb jumping someone, like smashing their head on the ground, it was awful. A lot of people see stuff like that.

It's (paramilitary activity) mostly in estates and all that, you wouldn't get it in posh areas.

The paramilitaries run the estate, it depends on what area it is for which paramilitary group it is.

When you are younger they (the paramilitaries) protect you, they look out for you, everyone looks out for everyone else, but when you hit 16 they are on your back

As part of our preparation for our submission to the Local Policing Review consultation we spoke to young people about their views on policing and specifically about how they feel the police protect and keep young people safe. It was clear from these discussions that young people living in certain geographical areas are experiencing high levels of coercive control and exploitation from criminal gangs as the following quotes show. Young men we spoke to who were detained in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre felt that an issue which needed to be addressed in their local communities was terrorism, and more specifically the impact and actions of paramilitaries. They wanted the police to do more to address the actions of paramilitaries, especially in relation to paramilitary style assaults on children and young people. They believed this issue was closely linked with drugs.

“Why if when one of us goes out and shoots someone we would get put in here but when paramilitaries shoot someone they get away with it. I think the police are working with them, that's what I think.”

“Yea, because when we get out of here, the paramilitaries know our addresses.”

They also said that they were fearful of the ‘punishment beatings’ that they would get from paramilitaries if they phoned the police and that they would rather turn to the paramilitaries for help instead of the police. When asked what could change to solve this issue, they were not convinced that there was a solution.

“Nothing will change as long as paramilitaries are around.”

We support the Executive's commitment within the draft framework to addressing the harm and vulnerability of children and urge them to address the continued harm caused by paramilitaries.

Key Priority Area of Early Intervention and Rehabilitation

We welcome the commitment to intervene early and develop rehabilitative interventions. We would recommend that a commitment to divert young people out of the justice system is made within this key priority area. One action that would deliver on diverting children from the criminal justice system is a commitment by the Executive to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

We know that the Department of Justice has expressed a commitment to early intervention and diversion and that the Youth Justice Agency has increased its focus on early intervention work. We believe that early intervention services should be supported by but not directed or carried out by the justice system, but rather should be delivered through partnership working between the health sector and community and voluntary sector providers. Children and young people should not be stigmatised or criminalised for welfare-based concerns.

Include Youth supports a community-based response in the form of community diversionary measures. We believe that there should be community-based solutions to community problems, diverting young people from any contact with the criminal justice system. Include Youth defines diversion from the formal criminal justice system as being diversion from all engagement with statutory criminal justice agencies, and processes prior to having been convicted for committing a criminal offence. Include Youth supports the principles and ethos of restorative justice, and diversionary measures which seek to steer children and young people away from the criminal justice system. Community based disposal measures which have the support and trust of local communities through the use of restorative principles and practices and are centred on strengthening and supporting young people, their families and communities are more likely to ensure prevention of offending and anti-social behaviour and the effective diversion from prosecution.

We recommend that the PfG should include an output which commits the Executive to ensuring there is sustained support and resourcing for the development of community-based restorative justice programmes across NI in a way that meets the needs of each community.

We would also recommend reference to the important role that effective education, training and employment support programmes can play in diversion and rehabilitation. Include Youth's pre-vocational employment support programme, Give and Take, is an example of a model of learning that is effective at supporting young people with complex needs. We believe young people both at risk of entering and young people in and exiting the criminal justice system would benefit from access to the Give and Take model.

We recommend that the Department of Economy is added to the list of government departments with a responsibility to deliver on this key priority area.

We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives

Key Priority Area of Housing

We support the inclusion of tackling homelessness within the framework.

We would like to draw attention to the need to tackle youth homelessness and specifically on the needs of 16-17 year olds and 18-21 year old care leavers.

Many of the young people Include Youth works with have experienced unstable accommodation and the issue of homelessness comes up on numerous occasions during our discussions with young people.

The following quotes from young people reflect the reality of living in unstable accommodation:

It's awful, it's really hard.

I was in a hostel and then in a flat, I was 16 with no help. Social services didn't want to help me, they said they couldn't help me anymore.

Housing is a massive issue, especially if you are care experienced. We need better financial support.

We need more help for 18 year olds (for those in care)

There should be a system in place what you don't need to go through the Housing Executive – because I made myself intentionally homeless and I didn't appeal it so they can't get me anywhere.

*I got put in a family hostel in ***** when I was 16, then I got a flat but was kicked out by paramilitaries.*

We need financial support when you move out at 18. When you take off what you need for gas and electricity and all that then there is nothing left.

We look forward to the initiatives which will emerge from the Executive's commitment to address homelessness and would urge a particular focus on the housing needs of care experienced young people.

Young People's Views

Young people from our Strive programme met with officials from The Executive Office to share their views on the Outcomes Framework. The young people raised the following points:

Education: more focus needs to be given to equality of education as there is mass inequality between education in different areas.

EMA: there is a need to provide young people with financial supports and encourage students to stay in education longer. Because of financial concerns, some students are having to leave school early to go into full time employment, in the hope they can return when they are more well established and financially stable.

College fees: Further education should be more accessible for young people and older people. The outcome framework should include an action to address this.

Gyms/ free access to services that support health and wellbeing: the expenses of joining a gym are too much for young people. Young people want to become more active, but they cannot because of the costs. There is a need to make things like this accessible for young people to have a healthy life from a younger age.

Mental health: we would like to see money invested in provision of counselling/ mental health services instead of medication. Mental health funding is one of the biggest issues we are facing. There is not enough money given to support mental health of young people.

Teenage mums: we need more support for teenage mothers and help them to achieve in education and have better mental health.

Communities: there should be enough interventions for young people in communities. We need interventions for both older generation and young people.

Job seeking: the PfG should not just be about creating 'better jobs' we just need jobs. We need better access to entry level jobs alongside creating better jobs. Investing in business and investing in younger people or people with little or no educational attainment needs to be addressed in the plan.

The value placed on youth work and community support within communities: this needs to be addressed in the plan in order to support the work that youth and community groups are doing on mental health, sectarianism, community relations and good relations across the North.

Refugees/asylum seekers/EU nationals: needs to be addressed in the plan. The government should support families and people who are coming here from other countries and help community groups that are trying to support these families.

Working together: The plan should encourage cross department working for it to fully work.

Concluding Comments

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the framework and are keen to provide continued support to the NI Executive as they move forward with future plans. We are happy to provide clarification on any of the points raised within our response.