

include YOUTH

**Response to consultation on proposals for a new regional
model of service for separated and unaccompanied asylum
seeking children in NI**

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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

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the content of proposed regional model of service for separated and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (S/UASC) in NI.

Include Youth`s work with S/UASC

For the last five 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, 26 in the last 3 years.

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. HAPANI continues to signpost young people to Include Youth programmes.

Include Youth`s ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme began in May 2018 with a qualified tutor (Cambridge ESOL Level 5 Certificate in teaching ESOL). The service was initially a one-to-one programme and developed over the last 2 years to work with 18 young people attending weekly ESOL classes. The groups are split according to ability, beginners`, and pre-intermediate to intermediate. Since March 2020, weekly ESOL classes have been facilitated over Zoom, materials are uploaded onto Google Classroom so that participants can revise what has been covered over Zoom. When the ESOL beginners have progressed to a certain level with English, they are able to access all modules of the Give & Take Programme, and participate in Essential Skills Classes, Employability and Personal Development activities.

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'*.

Another young person stated over COVID-19 lockdown period *'Give and Take are helping me with anything that I ask for. With electricity, gas and food, so I am glad to be with them from the start to right now, they are helping me. I do not have enough words to explain how grateful I am'*.

Introduction

We welcome the establishment of the Task and Finish Group, the commitment to review current service provision and to develop an overall strategic direction and a regional service delivery model.

Reference to the obligations under the UNCRC is to be welcomed and we would draw attention to the recent report which was submitted by the Children's Law Centre to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, NGO Stakeholder Report to Inform the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.

We agree that co-production should be central to the design and development of the new service delivery model. Ensuring children and young people's views inform future decisions will be critical to the success of the model. We would encourage the Department to seek out the views of young people who have experience of current provision. While we acknowledge that there was some consultation with young people and welcome the work done to date by VOYPIC and Barnardo's we would like to see increased efforts made to access young voices. Include Youth will provide support to access young people's voices as required.

Context

We concur with the assessment that all of the children and young people arriving here have experienced trauma and require a very specialist trauma informed approach. We also agree that the young people demonstrate diverse cultural needs.

We share the concerns that the increased numbers of S/UASC, coupled with an already overloaded system, dealing with the highest numbers ever recorded of children coming into care and increasing numbers being registered on the child protection register, makes for an unprecedented level of pressure on existing services. The aftermath of Covid only serves to further increase pressure on a system which was already struggling to meet needs pre-pandemic.

We agree that the current service provision for S/UASC needs to be enhanced if it is to meet the needs of these vulnerable children.

Rights, entitlements and particular needs of S/UASC

We welcome the commitment to be guided by applicable human rights standards, in particular, the UNCRC.

We agree with the statement in paragraph 3.9 that `children seeking sanctuary may have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences and trauma in their country of origin or pre-migration or during their migration journey`. We also know from our work with young people that this trauma can continue while they are in NI, as they seek to navigate the asylum process, interact with numerous professionals and agencies, often having to tell their stories repeatedly to different people. Securing appropriate accommodation and accessing the welfare system, healthcare and education can result in complex barriers and impact on mental health and wellbeing. Concerns about family left behind can be a source of great worry. The service model must address trauma that has occurred pre-migration as well as that acquired in NI.

Education, training and employment pathways

We know from our direct work with young people that securing appropriate education provision is a high priority for many young people newly arriving in NI. Include Youth is provided tailored educational support to young people in our Belfast office. As well as providing tutors in ICT, Literacy and Numeracy, we also provide an ESOL tutor.

While we note that the provision of `enhanced education provision`, `employment and training` and `clear pathways to working with HSCT employability teams` are listed in the Additional Requirements (7.3) section of the document, we would welcome further detail and a higher priority being given to these services. Many of the young people we work with display high levels of motivation to learn and to advance in their chosen career. This ambition is also reflected in the consultations carried out by VOYPIC and Barnardo`s. As noted in the consultation document, young people from VOYPIC `highlighted the importance of learning English and being able to access further learning opportunities`. Similarly, the Barnardo`s report noted that `common aspirations expressed by the young people included to continue to study, to create a life and to be able to have a job`.

It is imperative that this desire to advance is recognised within the new service model and appropriate services developed as a result.

Any new provision should recognise the particular learning needs of these young people and if necessary, ensure there is accessible and sustainable provision outside the mainstream provision, when mainstream is deemed not to be suitable or able to meet needs. Within our Give and Take programme, learning is provided in a holistic,

wraparound, youth work-based setting. At Include Youth, young people work alongside tutors who are skilled in working with young people who have experienced and are still experiencing numerous barriers in their lives. Their patient and sensitive approach allows young people to learn in an environment which recognises learning can only happen when the needs outside the `classroom` are recognised and attended to. Our one to one and small group learning suits young people who may find it difficult to learn in larger class size setting. The S/UASC young people we work with often speak about the importance of being treated equally, with respect and recognition that they are individuals in their own right. Include Youth`s youth work model demonstrates a rights-based approach and building respectful relationships is the cornerstone of everything we do.

Given the trauma these young people are experiencing, we need to question what educational context is best suited to meet their needs. We know from our experience of supporting care experienced young people that not all are ready to enter mainstream education, training, and employment. This is especially true for some S/UASC young people. As one staff member commented:

“Given the trauma these young people are experiencing I think it’s unrealistic to expect that all will be able to cope with the demands of accessing and maintaining their place within mainstream ETE.”

Give and Take provides young people with a supportive environment in which to learn and provides the extra support so often needed. Some of the U/SASC young people we work with have attempted to access mainstream FE learning and have not had a positive experience. As one of our staff commented:

“Young people we have worked with have struggled in the likes of Belfast Met as the numbers are too high and they do not get time to build relationships with tutors and do not have youth work support or a youth work approach. “

We would welcome an increased recognition of the particular learning needs of S/UASC within the document and a clear commitment within any new model of service of the need to provide opportunities for S/UASC to access education/employability services that will meet their individual needs. We note that Education Provision is listed as a core component but believe that there is a gap with regards to training and employability needs.

Access to small ESOL classes is also critical. As our ESOL Tutor states:

“the small group ESOL classes programmes such as Give & Take, which the young people are referred to, are a very important component in assisting the integration of the young people into our society. Some beginners, if they manage to get a place in FE ESOL courses, do not engage well in the large classes. Others have spent many months on the waiting lists for FE ESOL courses and get frustrated with the wait. The

small group ESOL model can complement the FE ESOL model, for those who get a place on a course, or can provide standalone ESOL provision.”

Peer Support

We welcome the inclusion of Peer Support as a core component. Include Youth are fully supportive of a peer support approach and young people at Give and Take are seen as EBEs (experts by experience). Young people who have been on our programme provide invaluable support and direction to any new unaccompanied minor who joins our programme.

Increased awareness

Our staff believe that more could be done to introduce the young people to the area they will be living in. They also suggest that a fuller explanation be given to young people on the reason they will have social work support and the importance's of LAC meetings etc. Young people would benefit from knowing more about the process and why certain topics are discussed at LAC meetings.

Legal representation

We would welcome the inclusion of specialised legal representation for children regarding issues related to trafficking within the service model.

Options for a future model of service delivery

We understand the reasoning for Option 3 as the preferred option but would welcome further detail to fully understand how the model would work in practice. In particular we are keen to know more about how the regional social work team will interact with other trusts and how continuity of service and equity of service will be maintained. We firmly believe that it is in the best interests of the young person to have a key point of contact with the social work team, a consistent social worker, someone they can build a relationship with and fully trust as they navigate the various pathways. Moving from social worker to social worker is not advantageous for young people. This consistent social worker would be a specialist in this area, highly skilled and trained to support these young people with specific needs.

Young People`s Views

As part of our preparation to submit this response we spoke to 2 young people about their experiences to date. The following is an overview of their feedback.

- Do you think authorities keep you safe/protected?
“I have felt safe and protected since I have arrived in Northern Ireland. “

- Do you have information provided in a way you understand?
“When I had arrived and met the authorities, they always had an interpreter so therefore it had help me understand what was said and what the next stage would be.”
- Do you think your cultural identity/religions is respected/ catered for?
“I feel that my religion and cultural identity is respected however sometimes I find it hard to express that as English isn’t my first language. “
- Do you feel you were supported during claims process for settled status/asylum etc? Was the legal advice good?
“The solicitor/lawyer has supported me very well throughout my process of seeking asylum here in the UK. “
- Were your accommodation needs met? How was move from supported accommodation to semi or fully independent living?
“When I first went into accommodation I was in a foster family and that is where I had experienced my first bit of racism in Northern Ireland it was very hard to live with them however with I was given another foster family and they made me feel welcome and it had made me feel happier. My appointed Social worker and Guardian had helped me gain accommodation within the community, with their help I was able to gain a house.”
- Were your health needs met?
“When I arrived into Northern Ireland and I was settled at the accommodation I was taken to get a GP so if I need any medical advice it was provided, however due to my injuries from the past I wasn’t able to see a specialist as there is a big waiting list and every day I live with pain. “
- Were your education/training/employment needs met?
“I feel that my education needs have been met, as I am on the Give & Take programme, and they provide me with essential skills and ESOL classes as some of our friends that are here wouldn’t receive the same support and education that we do in community. “
- How were you supported re: language barriers? Access to interpreters?
“I feel that I can access interpreters when I am going to big meetings for example going to find out what is happening with my asylum and also when I am talking with my solicitors about this process. With the ESOL classes it has helped me with the language barriers in small bits hopefully that will change in the future as I learn more English. “
- What were your experiences of Independent Guardian (if assigned one?)
Both young people stated that they have amazing independent guardians, and they are able to contact them 24/7 if they need anything.
- Have you felt welcomed?
From the moment I have arrived I have felt welcomed here in Northern Ireland. My first experience when I first arrived was not great as I had suffered racial abuse from my

first foster family. This young person has now been placed with another foster family, where they are very happy and feel safe.

- Generally, how do you feel you have been treated?

“Apart from my first foster family things have been great. The waiting list to see a doctor is my only issue, everyone here is friendly.”

- Did/do you feel listened to? Able to make complaints?

“If I was wanting to make a complaint I was able to do so through the interpreters.”

We hope that these views will prove to be informative for the DoH/HSCB Task and Finish Group, and we are happy to work alongside officials in the future development of the service model and to facilitate consultation sessions with young people as necessary.