

Report of a Youth Inspection
Sunlea Youth Centre

October 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sunlea Youth Centre is situated in Cross Glebe in Coleraine and is managed by the Education Authority (EA) as part of the Causeway Coast and Glens youth team. The centre works with young people aged 8-21 years from across the Coleraine area. There are 11 Super Output Areas in Coleraine, of which 5 are ranked in the 25% most deprived (Ballysally 1, Central, Cross Glebe, Ballysally 2 and Churchlands).

Recovering from a low point following the pandemic, both registration and attendance have risen steadily over the last three years. In 2023-24, overall registration rose by just over two-thirds from 2021-22 to 296 young people. The average weekly attendance across the general youth provision was 130 young people from a range of different community backgrounds. In addition, an average of 12 young people from other local youth centres across Causeway Coast and Glens attend the Horizons programme facilitated at Sunlea Youth Centre on a weekly basis. At the time of the inspection, there were 95 young people registered with the project.

The key areas identified by the staff in respect of the young people's needs include: health and wellbeing; risk taking behaviours and food poverty. The priority areas identified by management for 2023/2024 include: increasing the participation of senior members; building and maintaining community relationships; and meeting the needs of the young people.

The EA Youth Service has based the following staff on the site: a senior youth worker team leader; a centre-based youth worker; and a Creative Arts and Digital Innovation (CADI) youth worker. At the time of the inspection, the centre's work was mostly facilitated by part-time youth work staff, with additional support from full-time youth work staff based in the Causeway Coast and Glens area. Due to staff absence, the centre has only recently reopened after a summer break and is currently accessible three evenings each week for young people. Key programmes within the centre include the junior, intermediate, and senior clubs, and the Horizons programme.

The staff have developed a range of partnerships to support their work with young people, including local primary and post-primary schools.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAFF

The young people reported that they feel safe and secure and know who they can talk to if they have any concerns. In discussions with the inspectors, the young people said that they appreciate the welcoming ethos in the centre and enjoy the chance to make new friends from other schools and meet them regularly. The young people understand and express clearly why feeling safe is important, stating: "It allows us to have fun". The young people appreciate the care, understanding and kindness which they receive from the staff and say that they enjoy the range of programmes, are involved in planning, and have a sense of belonging to the centre. They also spoke of how the staff reward them and "not just for doing hard things". In addition, a group of the senior members spoke with pride of the three months they spent decorating their 'calm room.'

The small number of parents who spoke to the inspectors talked about the skills they had learnt whilst attending the centre themselves, and how their children are involved in and benefitting from the social action programmes facilitated by the staff.

In discussions with the staff, they highlighted their understanding of the young people's needs and the challenges which they face. They have a good understanding of the youth work curriculum and an empathy for the broad range of young people who attend. In discussion with the full-time youth workers supporting the provision during the inspection, they spoke of the collegial approach by staff from across the area to support the part-time staff at the centre, through additional resources and capacity building to develop further their youth work skills.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside Sunlea Youth Centre to consider how well the provision:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The young people's personal and social development, including their emotional health and wellbeing, are prioritised appropriately through a range of engaging programmes which align with the centre's vision: 'Empowering youth, inspiring change'.
- The young people regard the centre as a safe space, where they develop positive relationships, learn new skills and explore their identity.
- The young people value the inclusive, supportive ethos in the centre and appreciate the opportunity to make new friends both in the centre and across the Causeway Coast and Glens area.
- The staff know the young people well, respond sensitively to their needs and enable them to integrate with one another.
- The staff and management value and promote continuous professional learning, identifying and addressing the developmental needs of both young people and staff.

- The self-evaluation by the staff does not reflect fully the impact of the youth work practice on the young people.
- The young people's achievements and successes are celebrated regularly within the centre and across the wider community.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. The staff would benefit from professional learning and training by the EA in developing the adult safeguarding arrangements in the youth environment.

Area for further consideration:

- for the staff to develop further their self-evaluation in order to understand and articulate more clearly the impact the youth work provision has on the young people's lives.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The managers and staff team have developed and agreed a vision for the centre that aligns to the EA vision: "To inspire, support and challenge all our children to be the best that they can be". The vision for the centre is: "Empowering youth, inspiring change". The vision is motivating and is reflective of the staff's enthusiasm for working with young people, in particular, their focus on the holistic development of young people. The young people have a strong sense of belonging to the centre and are proud of the current logo which they designed.

The staff have created a vision board using images of the Causeway hexagonal stones to demonstrate for the young people how they can support them through youth work approaches in their personal and social development. The vision board highlights the youth centre as a safe space to develop relationships with their friends and a space where they can learn new skills, explore their identity and gain knowledge. The work on the vision board also includes contributions from a group of the senior members who have explored their personal vision; for example, in respect of their health, career and relationship goals.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The young people are involved in the planning and evaluation of their programmes and progress successfully in their youth work experiences. Through the Horizons programme, the young people develop their leadership skills and are learning about fundamental aspects of youth work practice. The young people engage positively in the range of learning experiences and participate confidently in the group work, decision-making and problem-solving tasks. In discussions with the senior members, a small number expressed an interest in a youth work career and others recognised the value of youth work skills in their future education and career choices.

The part-time staff know the young people well and are responsive to their needs, interests and aspirations. Their knowledge of the young people is reflected in the depth of conversations they have with the young people while they are engaged in activities. They listen to the views and opinions of the young people and use the information and ideas from the young people to plan the evening programmes.

The curriculum is broad, responsive and matched to the needs of the young people, with a clear focus on both the emotional health and wellbeing of the young people and enhancing their leadership skills. The staff understand and refer to youth work frameworks, such as Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice, when discussing their approaches and the rationale for their planning and engagement with the young people. In the effective practice, the staff used skilfully their facilitation skills in formal and non-formal group work and progressed the young people in their learning.

A majority of the young people demonstrate an understanding of their learning, in particular, the skills and knowledge which contribute to their personal and social development. The personal and social development needs of the young people are understood by the staff, and nightly reflections are carefully considered when planning future youth work practice. The staff have recognised appropriately the benefits of enhanced engagements with parents and carers to support the young people's wellbeing and personal and social development.

Current challenges regarding the absence of key staff are managed well by the leadership team, through for example, the deployment of CADi, FLARE (Facilitating Life And Resilience Education) and the OLS (Outdoor Learning Services) as well as support from local area youth workers. The leadership team recognises the need to extend the evening provision for the young people as soon as a full staffing complement is in place. Through staff supervision and reports, the leadership and staff monitor and reflect on the quality of youth work practice. The staff use the document Quality Assurance Framework for the Youth Work Sector in Northern Ireland (Quality Assurance Framework for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland, Supporting a Learning and Growing Environment in Youth Work, Curriculum Development Unit, 2011) to inform the monitoring and evaluation of the provision; and they are reflective and empathetic in their evaluations of the young people's challenges, needs and achievements. The leadership of the centre understand the importance of self-evaluation of youth work practice and recognise the need to develop further the planning and evaluation processes to capture better the impact of youth work on the young people.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Sunlea Youth Centre has a long-standing cross-community relationship with another youth group in Ballycastle which has enabled the young people to recognise and challenge sectarian attitudes. Their most recent shared project, Tribal Islands, was part of Good Relations Week and it enabled the young people to discuss and explore their views on identity.

The staff's support for all members in their personal and social development was articulated well by the young people who spoke appreciatively of the 'Uberheroes' programme, which helped them to recognise and develop their own abilities and social skills; for example, to express their own views more confidently and make presentations to groups of their peers.

Reflecting the centre's inclusive culture, the young people who have additional needs integrate well with their peers. They build strong relationships with other members and engage well in the activities. The staff have a thorough knowledge of the young people: they respond sensitively when individuals need 'time out' in quieter spaces and help them to stay engaged in the programmes.

To support further the centre's inclusive culture, the junior and intermediate age groups participated recently in an anti-bullying programme, which helped them develop an understanding of the impact of bullying behaviours and the importance of caring relationships.

In response to consultation with the young people, the staff created a safe space to explore issues related to LGBTQIA+. The programme developed the young people's understanding of the importance of inclusion and developed their skills to challenge oppressive or derogatory language; a priority identified by the young people. The high level of participation in the programme reflected the young people's commitment to the focus on LGBTQIA+.

The staff are aware of the impact of disadvantage on some of the families living in the area and have identified appropriately the importance of providing hot food for the young people at each session. This aspect of the provision also gives the young people a chance to socialise, talk with peers and, importantly, build relationships with the staff.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The staff celebrate and acknowledge the successes of the young people on a nightly basis through giving and receiving group reflections on what the young people have achieved. The young people's progress is appropriately monitored and shared through celebratory events such as volunteer of the month awards, certificates, displays of their work and posting videos of the young people participating in fun, purposeful activities. At the recent Empowering People In Communities Northern Ireland Awards celebration hosted by the local mayor, nine young volunteers from the centre received the Bronze Award for successfully completing 50 hours of volunteering.

The young people know that they are listened to through the staff's promotion and highlighting of 'You asked for, We planned', demonstrating clearly to the young people that they are influencing the programmes. The young people have developed skills of negotiation through meeting decision-makers and having their voice heard and valued around issues that affect them directly. The young people report that they welcome the opportunities to meet groups of young people from other centres, for example, through trips away, inter-centre events and football competitions. A noteworthy success of the 'Myths and Legends' programme was celebrated during the week of the inspection with the publication of a book the young people designed and wrote creatively.

The staff report that they feel confident, are well supported by each other and are motivated working in the centre, which in turn is exhibited to the young people. The staff and volunteers are being invested in with purposeful opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge, and to inspire others through their values of openness, respect, excellence, equality. The staff spoke about how they inspire, support, and challenge each other and the young people by “being a learning staff in a circle of courage.”

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff value and promote continuous learning for all through their vision of ‘Empowering Youth, Inspiring Change’. Staff professional learning is planned strategically to address the needs and interests of the young people and the youth work staff. The staff avail of training that is flexible and responsive to the context of the centre. There is an appropriate focus on recruiting new leaders and developing young leaders and volunteers in their role within the youth centre. The welfare of staff is addressed through wellbeing events and the staff know they are valued and work together well as a team.

The full-time youth workers across the area communicate effectively by meeting together to identify the needs of the young people, and plan and coordinate support services for young people across the area. There is appropriate use being made of the external partnerships to support the young people’s development, particularly in the absence of key full-time staff. The staff, working collegially, have developed effective resources to support young peoples’ emotional health and wellbeing which are now being utilised across the region.

There are effective partnerships with local schools particularly to support children in the transition from primary to post-primary. Within a post-primary school partnership, pupils have received sustained support from the staff from Sunlea Youth Centre to build their capacity and willingness to engage with one another and in their learning.

There are clear pathways for the young people, which prepare them well to develop their personal and social skills moving on into leadership training. The young people make progress in their learning and youth work experiences through availing of the appropriate opportunities, based on their needs, and through this extend their skills development and prepare for further learning and employment. The young people display appropriate levels of participation in evaluating, influencing and structuring the programme going forward. There are continuous opportunities for young people to identify how to improve the centre and then to work together creatively to address the issue themselves, such as the creation of a quiet space for young people to go to when they need time away from the busyness of the activities. The provision is valued by the local community and the parents and recognised as providing a fun, engaging community of learning for both staff and young people.

F. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection aligns to the current statutory guidance. The staff would benefit from training by the EA in adult safeguarding arrangements in the youth environment.

4. GOING FORWARD

The young people value the inclusive, supportive ethos in the centre and have a strong sense of belonging. The vision “Empowering youth, inspiring change” is reflected in the staff’s focus on the holistic development of young people.

Sunlea Youth Centre is well placed to take forward the areas for consideration as laid out in this report and ETI will monitor the progress through the district inspector. Inspectors identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the inclusive ethos which promotes equity and fairness; and
- the sensitive and supportive interactions by the part-time staff to meet the needs of all the young people.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most - 75%	-	90%
A majority - 50%	-	74%
A significant minority - 30%	-	49%
A minority - 10%	-	29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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