



COUNTY KILDARE LEADER PARTNERSHIP

REVIEW OF SICAP YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Dr Maria Quinlan July 2020



County Kildare
LEADER PARTNERSHIP



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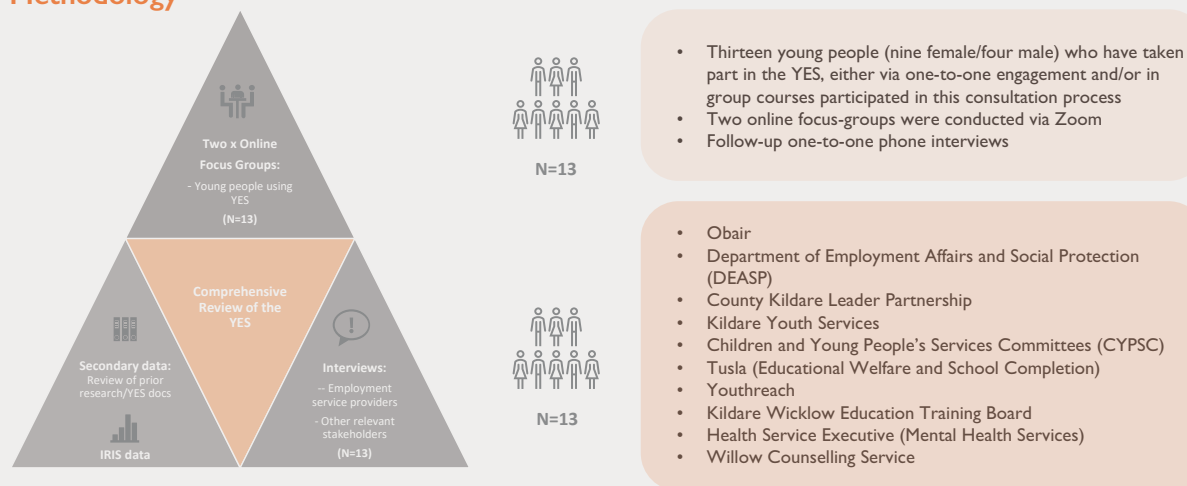
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The objective of this project was to undertake a review of the Youth Employment Services (YES) which have been provided to young people in County Kildare who are unemployed and not in education, training or employment, through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). In terms of timeframe, the review focused on the work carried out with the support of SICAP since 2017. The chart below provides a summary of the objectives, methodological approach, and outputs of the project.

Review Objectives

- Review of both the group-based programmes run in conjunction with other stakeholders, as well as a review of the supports provided to individuals on a 1-2-1 basis (as per Goal 2 of the SICAP objectives)
- Assessment of the effectiveness of supports provided to individuals across County Kildare by SICAP from 2017 to date.
- Analysis of the contribution that SICAP has made to the mainstream service provision in County Kildare, and to the development of additional services for young people who are unemployed and not in education, training and employment.
- Identification of the Impact, Progression and Key Learnings from the service provided to date.

Methodology



Review Outputs

- Report of findings from the review.
- A set of conclusions and associated recommendations which aim to provide actionable insight that helps drive the direction of SICAP services for the coming two years; and which will feed into the development of an overall strategy for youth employment in County Kildare.
- Executive summary in line with the requirements of the SICAP Case Study for 2020 from County Kildare LEADER Partnership.



Overview of the SICAP Youth Employment Service

A Youth Employment Programme (YEP) was initially implemented in Kildare Town in 2016 as an action under the Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC). The CYPSC brief had widened to coordinate services from 0 – 25 years of age and youth unemployment was one of the strategic themes identified by CYPSC. County Kildare LEADER Partnership acted as lead for the Youth Employment Programme and brought together a steering group which consisted of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB), Kildare Youth Services, an Garda Síochána and CYPSC.

This collaboration identified a group of young people aged 18 – 22 in Kildare Town for a pilot project and sourced funding under the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP) Activation and Family Support Programme, Kildare/Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB) tutor hours and staff and programme funding from County Kildare LEADER Partnership under the Local Community Development Programme. The programme involved three elements: pre-development support, groupwork and follow on one to one support with progression plans. The programme was supported by a part time Coordinator seconded by Kildare Youth Services.

Core funding for the employment of a full time Youth Employment Worker was sourced in 2017 under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). The availability of a full-time worker has facilitated a concentration of support through 2018 and 2019 in Athy as well as offering support to unemployed youth in other parts of County Kildare on a one to one basis. Group programmes have been run in Athy each year and an additional programme was offered in 2019 in the Kildare Town / Curragh area in response to a need identified by the local School Completion Programme.

In addition to the support provided directly to young unemployed the Youth Employment Service funded under SICAP has also facilitated applications for funding for the Ability Programme, Youth Employment Initiative, and an application through the Rural Development / LEADER Programme for a Digital Readiness Programme. In total €334,751 in funding has been secured.

All of the applications have been successful in leveraging additional resources to support initiatives to tackle specific issues affecting young people who are unemployed in County Kildare.

Target Group

- Young people under 25 years of age and not in education, training, or employment in County Kildare.
- A young person can self-refer by contacting the Youth Employment Support Worker or they can be referred from other agencies for additional employment support. Appendix A provides an overview of the services and programmes offered by the YES.

Previous Research

Several reviews of youth employment initiatives within the Kildare region have been conducted over the past several years, including the following;

- Kildare Town Youth Employment Programme SICAP Case Study 2017
- Review of Athy Youth Employment Programme 2018
- Rural Youth Need Report, draft report funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020
- Evaluation of Heads Up Kildare; A programme targeting Young Men aged 18-24yrs.
- Evaluation of The Youth Employability Initiative Athy 2019



These reports identified the need for a more holistic approach to engaging and working with young people who are not in employment or education, and the YES has developed and been guided by the needs identified. These include the requirement for a longer pathway of confidence building and life skills development and the need for this to be maintained in the post-programme progression stage; the need for integration into addiction and other mental health services; and the use of flexible, person-centred youth work approach to support young people with complex needs.



St. Patrick's Day Parade



Practicing night driving with curragh/kildare youth employment group



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In keeping with previous reviews of the Youth Employment Service, the key findings from this review are that the YES provides a valuable, person-centred service to young people within the Kildare region. The YES is unique in its flexible, youth work approach which puts the young-person at the centre and aims to meet them where they are, and to provide them with a tailored, bespoke sets of interventions which are appropriate to their presenting needs. In this way, it is different from other services operating within this space, many of whom can be constrained in terms of the flexibility and person-centred approach that they can provide to young people.

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholders across a range of services - whether operating within the employment activation, space; providing education and training; or mental health supports – feel that the YES has a positive impact on the collective service provision for young people within Kildare. For many stakeholders YES bridges the gap for their clients between where they currently find themselves and moving into full-time education or employment.

All stakeholders believe that the YES provides real value to the overall service provision for young people in the area, and would like to see the programme expanded, and provided with the resources it needs in order to provide consistent support to a wider cohort of young people across Kildare.

Client feedback

In terms of the key benefits of participating in the YES services, the young people identified both the social and the practical aspects of the programmes as being very helpful in supporting them to move on with their lives. Several use the word ‘stuck’ to describe how they felt before they accessed the YES, and talk of ‘blooming’, having an increased sense of confidence, and feeling like they have many more opportunities available to them now having had the support of the YES.

The young people identified three key areas which the YES has helped them – firstly in terms of building confidence and social skills; secondly in providing them with access to very useful practical skill-sets; and thirdly with access to pathways to progression – to both further education and to employment

Recommendations

In terms of next steps in the development of the YES, the following six recommendations are made:

1. Extra resources are required to both maintain and expand the YES.
2. Youth employment strategy for Kildare - to provide guidance and clarity for YES strategic planning process for coming two years.
3. Client strategy needs to be reviewed - thought needs to be given to what client base the YES should focus on and prioritise.
4. Programme development - continued focus of need-based programme development; potential movement into online/blended learning.
5. Capturing holistic impact of the YES.
6. Focus on continuous improvement of service collaboration and integration.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YES CLIENT BASE

As part of the review process, a high-level analysis of the YES IRIS CRM data-base was conducted to ascertain the characteristics of the client-base which the programme serves¹. This helps to contextualise the qualitative data gathered from both the clients and the stakeholders during the consultation process.

In terms of the overall size of the case-load, from the start of 2018 to Q1 2020, N=394 clients were registered on the YES IRIS database.

- The duration of engagement ranges from less than one month to two years, with an average duration of engagement of between five and seven months. On average clients receive five interventions, however a substantial proportion (22%) have received more than that, with some clients receiving more than 20. This is in keeping with the feedback from the stakeholders regarding the range of clients presenting to the service in terms of the variety of complexity and requirements.
- There is a continuum of support provided to clients – progression from the YES is not always linear, in that some clients who may be referred to another service (e.g. a short industry-certified course; an affiliated programme; or a mental health service), or who have engaged in employment, return for ad-hoc support as and when required.
- Sixty-eight per cent of the client base is male; 90% are Irish; and the highest level of educational attainment for 65% of clients is Upper Secondary (NFQ 4 or 5) or higher.

2019 Client Progression

In 2019 N=134 clients engaged with the YES service. In terms of progression, as outlined in Table 1, and Figure 1;

- Twenty-nine percent (n=39) returned to education or enrolled in a short training course. Of these 13 enrolled in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, five in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and three in National Learning Network (NLN) courses. Short courses include industry-certified QQI Level 3-7 training, such as Career Skills; Barista; Care Support; Forensics; Computer Science; Retail Skills; Youth Studies; and Warehousing.
- Twenty-seven percent (n=36) went on to employment; 11% (n=15) were referred on to other programmes/services; and 25% (n=34) are looking for employment or for further education opportunities.

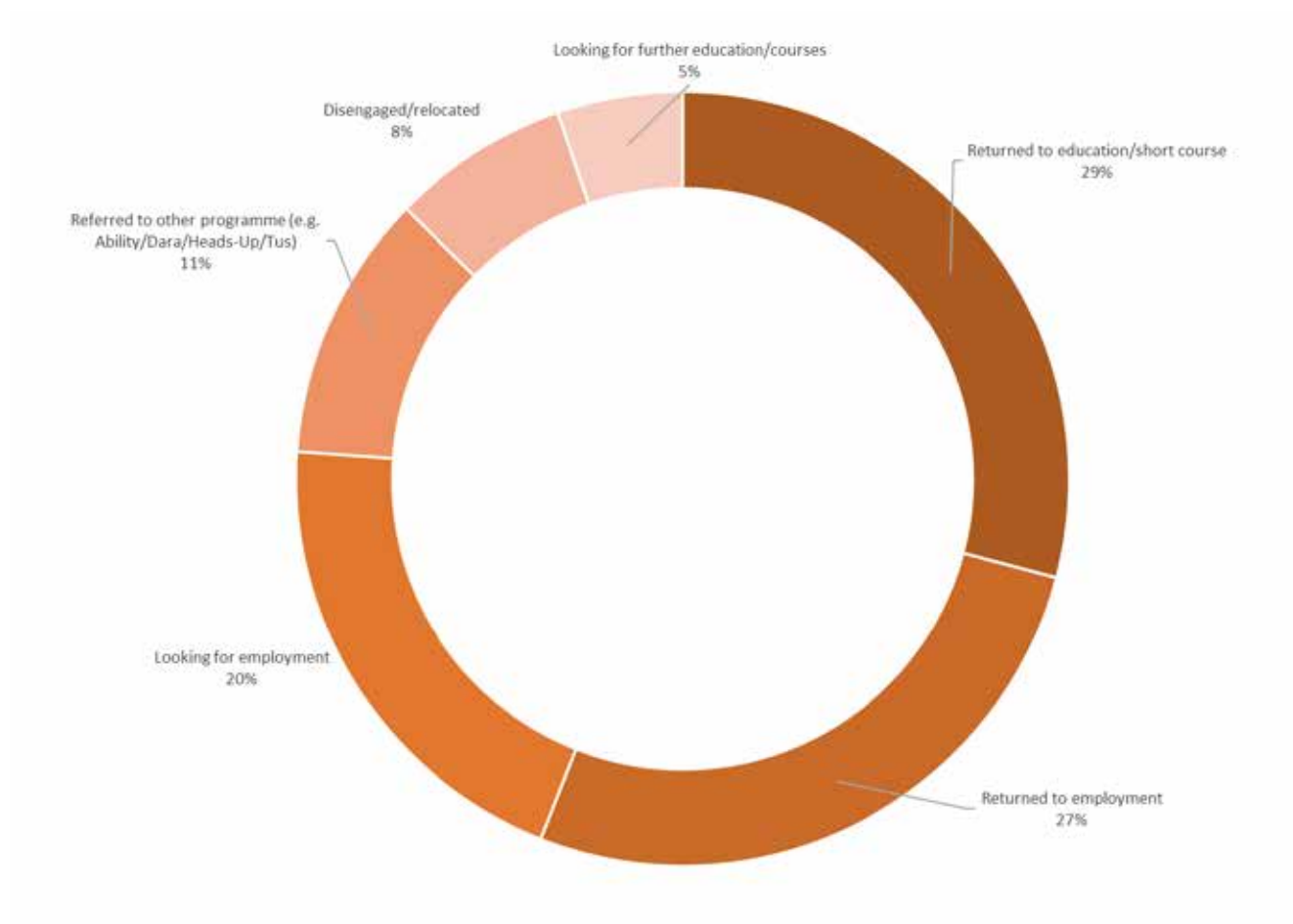
Progression is also assessed via a variety of outcome measures which aim to assess clients in a more holistic way. This includes the Distanced Travel Tool, which assesses improvements across a variety of so-called 'soft' skills, including confidence and connection with others². This is used alongside other scale measures such as Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder of Life Satisfaction, and the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) with clients on an individual basis to discuss progress and guide goal-setting.

¹ IRIS is the CRM system used to record interventions for SICAP.

² <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/social-inclusion-and-community-activation-programme-sicap-2018-2022/distance-travelled-tool/>

**Table I: 2019 Client Progression****2019 CLIENT PROGRESSION (N=134)**

Returned to education/short course	39	29%
Returned to employment	36	27%
Looking for employment	27	20%
Referred to other programme (e.g. Ability/Dara/Heads-Up/Tus)	15	11%
Disengaged/relocated	10	7%
Looking for further education/courses	7	5%
	134	100%

Figure I: 2019 Client Progression

Further detail regarding the client-characteristics from 2018-2020 are outlined in Figures 2, 3 and 4.



Figure 2: General Overview



N=394

- From start 2018 to Q1 2020, N=394 clients were registered on the YES IRIS database
- Average duration of engagement - between five and seven months
- On average clients receive five interventions
- 68% male (n=269)
- Highest level of educational attainment for 65% of clients is Upper Secondary (NFQ 4 or 5) or higher
- 54% experience Transport Barriers (n=214)
- 40% come from Jobless Households (n=157)
- 90% are of Irish Nationality (n=353)
- 29% of Referrals come from the DEASP, and 19% are word of mouth. Remainder are from a mix of other agencies and direct publicity

Figure 3: Highest Level of Educational Attainment

Highest Level of Educational Attainment

Advanced Certificate / Completed apprenticeship (NFQ 6)	5	1%
Higher Certificate (NFQ 6)	12	3%
Honours Bachelors Degree/Professional Qualification (NFQ 8)	7	2%
Lower secondary (NFQ 3)	111	28%
No formal education	3	1%
Ordinary Bachelor Degree/National Diploma (NFQ 7)	6	2%
Postgraduate Diploma or Degree (NFQ 9)	1	0%
Primary (NFQ 1 or 2)	19	5%
Technical or Vocational (NFQ 4-5)	55	14%
Upper Secondary (NFQ 4 or 5)	175	44%
	394	100%

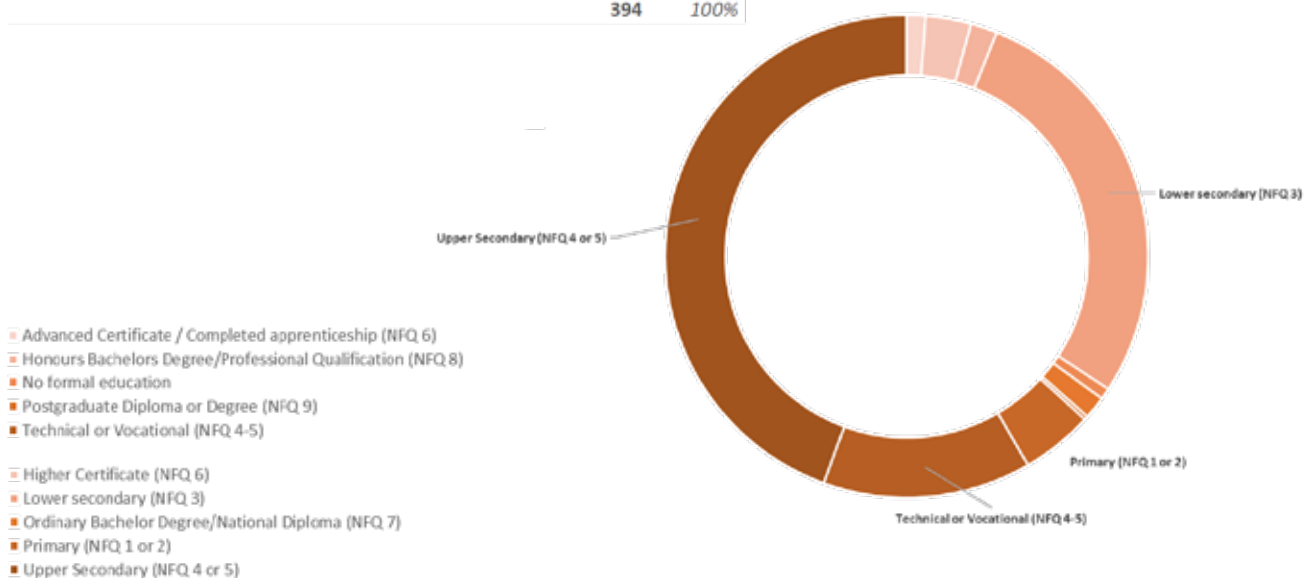
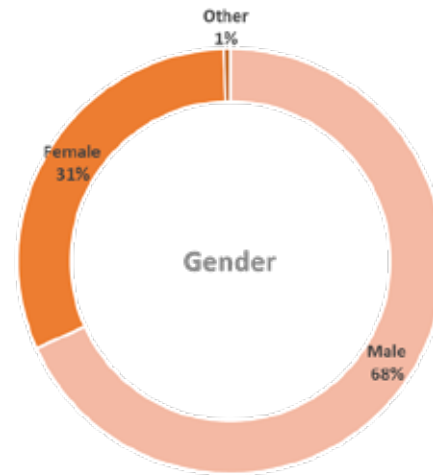


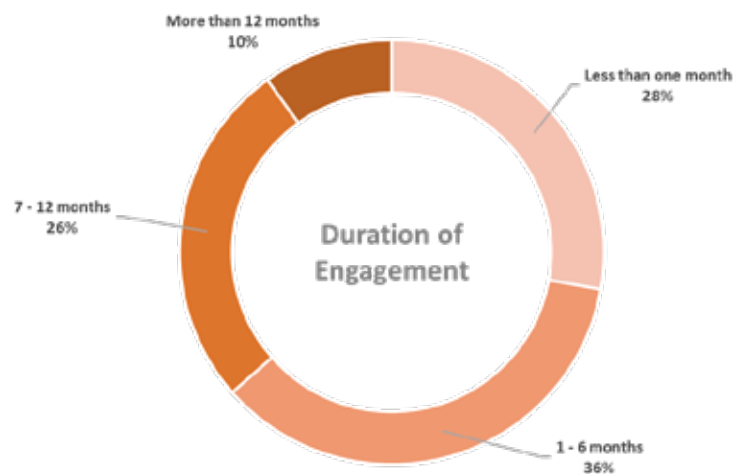


Figure 4: Gender, Duration of Engagement and Number of Interventions

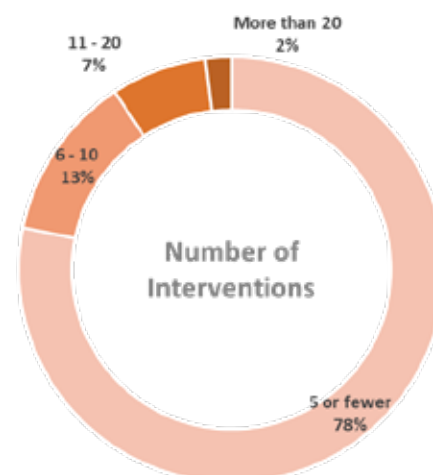
Gender		
Male	269	68%
Female	123	31%
Other	2	1%
	394	100%



Duration (AVG=5 months)		
Less than one month	109	28%
1 - 6 months	140	36%
7 - 12 months	104	27%
More than 12 month	39	10%
	392	100%



Interventions (AVG=5)		
5 or fewer	279	78%
6 - 10	45	13%
11 - 20	26	7%
More than 20	7	2%
	357	100%





Feedback from Stakeholder Consultation Process

Thirteen stakeholders from across the following ten organisations in the Kildare region took part in this consultation process;



N=13

- Obair
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP)
- County Kildare Leader Partnership
- Kildare Youth Services
- Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)
- Tusla (Educational Welfare and School Completion)
- Youthreach
- Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board
- Health Service Executive (Mental Health Services)
- Willow Counselling Service

These stakeholders provide a variety of employment; education and mental health services to young people within Kildare, and for most the Youth Employment Service (YES) is a service which they refer their clients to as and when required.

The following section outlines the key findings from the stakeholder process. Overall, there was considerable consistency in terms of the stakeholder-feedback. Stakeholders are overwhelmingly positive about the YES, particularly in relation to the programmes ability to significantly engage clients who are considered by all stakeholders as amongst the hardest to reach and hardest to meaningfully engage within the community.

Whether the stakeholder is operating within the employment activation space; providing education and training; or mental health supports – across the board they feel that the YES has a positive impact on the collective service provision for young people within Kildare. For many stakeholders YES bridges the gap for their clients between where they currently find themselves and moving into full-time education or employment.

All stakeholders believe that the YES provides real value to the overall service provision for young people in the area, and would like to see the programme expanded, and provided with the resources it needs in order to provide consistent support to a wider cohort of young people across Kildare.

There was consistent feedback regarding the role of the Youth Worker, and specifically highlighting the excellent work which the current Youth Worker does in going above and beyond to meet the needs of clients. There was also consistency in the feedback regarding the case load, and how it is more than one person can be expected to handle. The volume of clients is seen as a particular risk-factor for the YES, and there is a strong recommendation from the stakeholder group that attention is put on strategic prioritisation of clients; and on reviewing and deciding on which clients the YES should aim to focus on.



I. Large and often complex case-load - successfully engaging the hardest to reach clients

“It’s a unique service – nobody’s really working with these kids.”

The YES has a large and often complex case-load. In terms of the client-base which the programme serves, it includes clients at various ends of the continuum in terms of readiness-to-work. This includes young people who may need short-term practical support with interview and CV preparation, and also those who require longer-term support in building their confidence and social skills. That the YES can serve the needs of this breadth of client base is seen as a unique selling proposition (USP) of the programme. However, this breadth of client-base also comes with its own issues in terms of case-load management. One full-time resource is not seen as anywhere near sufficient to continue to meet the needs of the client-base.

“The numbers Laura engages with are huge and the level of engagement is amazing... we probably need more workers, more resources there, because Laura is fantastic and her level of engagement is amazing... particularly with this cohort, they are not an easy group, they come with very complex needs at times, but it’s working, their approach has a really good reputation and most of it is word of mouth, young people are not getting paid to go to it, they’re not getting any incentive...there’s no financial incentive so their approach is really working. It’s individual, a lot of times the young person is not ready to work in a group setting and that’s worked with and recognised, and they are met with in a setting that’s suitable for them, whether it’s a café... a lot are not ready to engage in mainstream training straight away.”



Driving lessons at Leinster Driving Academy



Consistent funding through SICAP has meant that a staffing can be expanded and the recruitment process for an additional Youth Worker is in progress.

In terms of the presenting factors of the young people who are engaged with the YES – they include clients who have had challenging experiences within post-primary education, and while many may have completed their Leaving Certificate, they often have literacy difficulties, or have not attained sufficient points to access the courses they desire. Clients can also present with learning difficulties; mental health issues; be engaged in substance misuse; have challenging family circumstances – including economic and social disadvantage; and long-term inter-generational unemployment. As one stakeholder outlines, the young people which she refers to the YES can have;

“Huge anxiety, issues at home which shatters their confidence – depression, anxiety. Drugs, prison – any number of issues.”

For many stakeholders, the YES provides a unique bridge, or stepping-stone, between where their clients are and where they would like to go. For stakeholders involved in providing training and education, or employment activation – the services which the YES provides bridges the gap for their clients between the demands of the workplace or education and where many of them currently are in terms of both practical and emotional skills. Stakeholders highlight the confidence and social-skills gaps as particularly key for the young people which they refer to the YES, and the YES is seen as doing a very good job in helping young people bridge what is often a significant emotional and developmental gap. As one stakeholder puts it;

“We recognise that these young people, if they were able to just access [a course] from our brochure of programmes they would do it, so there’s other issues there and other needs and that’s why the YES is so beneficial because it takes into account some of the other barriers that young people can face with interfacing with education and training....they might [for example] have addiction issues”



Dragon boat trip Youth Career Skills Athy



Team building activities on Youth Career Skills, Athy

Stakeholders consistently highlight the YES's success is engaging amongst the hardest-to-reach young people. As another stakeholder says;

"The model seems to be really able to engage those young people who face the biggest barriers, and to hold them and help them progress."

The key to the YES's success in this regard is put down to a number of factors, these include

- ✓ The Youth Work approach which is person-focused, flexible and which meets the client where they are.
- ✓ The personalities and approaches of the three Youth Workers who have led the YES service-provision since its inception. All are seen as being extremely dedicated and passionate about meeting the needs of young people, in a responsive and highly-professional manner.

"The skills, experience, personal qualities and value-system of the Youth Worker is key. If that person isn't the right fit then none of the other pieces happen. The three we've had have all fulfilled the role to a really high quality."

The current Youth Worker managing the programme is highlighted by stakeholders as a key factor in the continued success of the YES

"Laura has been phenomenal in terms of building and leading out the programme. She brings an energy to it, she has a good rapport with the young people, and she's brought on a lot of specific training that is great – previously they may have engaged but they may not have had anything specific to add to their CV at the end."

"Laura's approach is so non-judgemental, she's so open and that's so important for this client base"



- ✓ The relationship aspect that the Youth Work approach focuses on is seen as key by stakeholders across the board;
"I know that they do the practical work with them, but the relationship work and emotional support and building their confidence has to come first...young people are often feeling very bad about themselves because they're not doing anything"
- ✓ The voluntary and non-statutory nature of the service – in contrast to other services which can be viewed as authoritarian or controlling by young people, the YES is seen as providing agenda-free, flexible and informal support which is responsive to young people's needs. Stakeholders from the statutory employment services value having this option to offer clients;
"...they're not being called into the Department, into the dole office. So that's a positive, they're not fighting that straight away...they don't see the people from YES as authority figures so it's non-threatening for them. It's more of a support system, and that seems to work very well...Laura's able to build up a rapport with them that the [DEASP] case officer or the Job Path person can't. They don't feel like YES is out to get them, to cut their money, so it's removed from that piece of it, and we find that's very good."
- ✓ Evolution of the programme – the programme development has evolved to meet the presenting needs of clients, and aims to provide young people with what they need, when they need it, and in a format which is accessible to them (i.e. in group format, or in flexible one-to-one meetings as and when suits the client).
- ✓ Meets the needs of young people who often face significant mental health; self-esteem and confidence challenges – the YES goes at their pace, and 'meets them where they are'.
- ✓ The YES also provides practical courses and skills-development, again at a level, pace and in a setting which young people with complex needs can access. The gentle pace is seen as key in terms of building self-esteem and allowing young people to build confidence by making small progress.
- ✓ This focus on unpressurised work-exploration is seen a vital for many young people who are far from employment. For stakeholders working within the mental health areas, not throwing people with mental health difficulties 'in at the deep end' is seen as key. For young people recovering from mental health challenges, including addiction, having somewhere to go, to build routine is seen as particularly beneficial. It provides young people with an opportunity to set small, achievable goals – to become more independent and enables them to make significant changes.

Overall, the YES is seen by stakeholders as providing an invaluable service for young people who have 'slipped through the cracks', providing them with a second chance and the support they need to progress to further education or employment. Stakeholders often describe this particularly client-base as being 'stuck', a word which the young people who took part in this consultation process also frequently use to describe the emotional and practical states in which they have found themselves. Both stakeholders and young people agree that the YES provides a significant support for young people in getting 'un-stuck'. As one stakeholder describes it, the YES can help clients to break out of an often-vicious cycle by gaining confidence;

"I find it helps a person to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities to take the next step, be it employment or further education...for my clients it's vital, I can work with them on the mental health front, but then we need to get them into some kind of training course so that they can realise that they are able to do it, to build their own confidence. Without that support it can be difficult to stick in employment or training and that compounds the sense of failure and further damages their confidence."



2. Holistic nature of successful outcomes

In keeping with the nature of the client-base that the YES engages, many stakeholders highlight the need to recognise and capture appropriately what ‘success’ looks like with regard to the programmes’ outcome-measures. Rather than be measured by often blunt quantitative factors such as returning to training or employment, a more holistic approach to capturing the client’s journey is seen as required.

“It would be great to capture the person’s starting point, so for one person getting a job might be easy and that ticks the progression box, but for another getting out of bed and turning up to a course once or twice a week would be a far more significant journey in terms of my starting point.”

Outcome measures for those farthest from employment are not seen as being captured well, for example there can be reductions in criminal activity; moving into addiction services; a building of confidence and self-esteem.

“There are huge progresses, phenomenal life changes that these young people made that are not documented anywhere”

In terms of the successful outcomes which they have witnessed with regard to clients whom they have referred on to YES, several stakeholders give examples of the real and often-life-changing impact engaging with the YES has had for their clients. For example, one stakeholder describes the following way the YES worked with and significantly impacted one of her clients. This particular young person had left school without completing his Leaving Certificate, was not leaving his house or engaging with any services. For this particular young person, the stakeholder believes that without the support of the YES there would have been nothing to bridge the gap between leaving school and continuing on to further education;

“I rang his mam and I sent her out information on the ETB and Carlow IT, that there was courses at night time and different things but I knew that it was unrealistic that he was going to take the leap and go from being in his house all of the time to having the confidence to go on and do another course, but through the YES they brought him along and got him to that point...really holding his hand, going step by step and really slowly and that was a fantastic outcome because otherwise I wouldn’t have seen that he would have been able to go on [to further education] by himself without somebody going through the whole thing with him and offering him loads of support”



Beer goggles show the influences of alcohol while driving



Another stakeholder gives an example of how the YES assisted with one of her clients in terms of helping him to remain drug-free while waiting to enter a rehabilitation facility;

“...someone who’s drug-free but has to wait months to get into rehab, they need something to keep them busy otherwise they may end up using again...he worked with Laura, did a manual handling course and it worked, it kept him busy until we were able to get him into rehab, and afterwards we’ll work to re-engage him further. Through working with myself and Laura he was able to identify that he’d like to do a plumbing apprenticeship so it’s trying to make that next step easier.”

Stakeholders also highlight that for some young people accessing support via the YES is often the first time that a young person has the space and support to acknowledge and get help for mental health, substance misuse, or family difficulties. The YES is seen as gateway for young people who need extra support, and which helps them to progress to other services that can help them with specific difficulties. Being part of the wider Partnership allows young people engaged with the YES to access additional programmes more easily - such as the DARA, Head-Up and Tus programmes, enabling an ease of cross-referral.

Many stakeholders consider the fact that the YES manages to engage this particular group of hard-to-reach young people as a very important success factor in and of itself which needs to be understood and recognised;

“...these are the hardest to reach young people, they’re over 18, they don’t have to engage, and yet they are. So, I think that’s a success. That the project seems to be able to find these young people and engage them and hold them at all is a success...it’s hard to hold teens in youth services once they turn 18...and it’s hard to engage them for the first time after 18...I think that’s one of the huge successes, they can find them, they can engage them and they can hold them....for me they are the huge outcomes, because once you can do that then things begin to change because you’re not stuck thinking I can’t do anything, I’m not interested in anything. So, at a very basic level I think those are huge successes.”



Dragon boat trip Youth Career Skills Athy



Stakeholders also highlight the practical courses that the YES assist young people in accessing, and how success for some of the clients that they work with can be to complete a short course, or to receive support in the practical skills of applying for a job or a training course. As one stakeholder describes it;

“Really for the sort of young people we’re working with and the sort of young people the YES are working with ...getting them to even do a little course, or to do a safe-pass, or to do their driver theory test. These are all huge achievements and movements in the right direction but they’re not measured...the first success is talking to someone other than me. Success can be getting a bus to somewhere outside of their own locality, to get them to engage with a service – to do something they think is beyond them. To be applying for jobs is a huge success, applying for traineeships – that’s a big success.”

While not all stakeholders may be aware of them, the YES does use a mix of outcome measures which aim to capture these holistic outcome progressions. In particular the SICAP Distance Travelled Tool aims measure soft skills relevant to employment, education and training, and personal development. The YES team also use Cantril’s Self-Anchoring Ladder of Life Satisfaction, and the Adult Hope Scale to track progression of clients through the programme.

3. Flexibility of approach

A key factor in the success of the YES for stakeholders is the flexibility provided by the team. There is an openness to maintaining contact with clients and supporting them via a variety of one-to-one contact points even when they have moved on to other training or employment programmes; or when they have moved on to other services within the mental health and addiction area. Stakeholders consistently highlight the importance of this person-centred approach as a key success factor in the YES, and that the Youth Worker goes over and above to support clients. As one stakeholder describes it;

“I found it such a huge support that I could ring the YES and they were always there to pick up the young person that was leaving us, and I have to say, I found them brilliant. It was a great stepping stone. No matter what stage the young people were at when they left us, they [YES] always put something in place to meet their needs. There was never a problem making an appointment with the young person, there was always the opportunity there.”

Stakeholders believe that the flexibility that the YES offers is relatively unique – many services provided for young people seeking employment or training are appointment-based, and office-based. The flexibility to do outreach work is valued by other services and is seen as very much filling a gap within the overall service provision.

Many stakeholders consider the YES response to COVID19 as an example of this person-centred flexibility, with clients still being supported via online classes. The YES is recognised as still engaging this hard to reach group – and being flexible with offering new and different approaches for clients to engage with.

4. Collaboration and impact on other services

When we examine the referral figures from the YES client database IRIS, we can see that the majority of referrals to the YES come via the DEASP and other service providers within the youth education, employment and health sector. Word of mouth is also a large referral path and is seen by stakeholders as an indication of the value placed on the service by young people within the area.

“I think the word has got out that it’s a good programme so we’re seeing young people bringing along their friends, and we’re seeing the agencies getting more involved with it and there’s more of an awareness of it so that’s a positive.”



In terms of how the YES integrates and supports other service providers within the youth training and employment space, stakeholders across the board believe the YES is a very valuable complimentary service to the supports which they themselves are aiming to offer to young people. For example, the following four stakeholders describe their experience of how the YES integrates with and impacts on their ability to support clients;

“I’m so glad that it’s a service that’s available in my area. It’s a really excellent programme – making a real and clear impact with a group of young people who are hard to reach and hard to engage.”

“Lack of suitable alternatives has always been an issue – this is local, it’s really on the ground. The contact with the families, the person-centred approach...”

“For any service that is working with young people, this is an opportunity to get some specific support around the goal-setting, the future-planning which you might be touching on if you’re working in an addiction service or a family support project, but it wouldn’t be your full piece, when it gets more into that activation and employment piece. So, I think it’s definitely meeting a gap in what would hopefully be a wrap-around support for a young person”

“It’s not necessarily about getting a job...it’s about opening up options to them and that supports my work because they come back to me and maybe their excited about something.”

By working closely together with other service providers – whether in the area of employment-activation; training; education; or mental health services – the YES is seen by stakeholders as being a key support in ensuring that there is a holistic plan in place for the young people it is working with. Many comment on being able to just ‘pick up the phone’ to the YES to coordinate a plan for a specific young person, or to collaborate on providing training courses and so forth for a select cohort of clients. Many stakeholders comment on the ease of communication and collaboration between themselves and the team at the YES.

“They are supportive of what we do and I know that I can call them if I have any need to refer or run something by them, they are extremely approachable, Laura’s extremely good at what she does”

Being integrated within the Partnership is also seen as positive in terms of the YES’s ability to easily access other supports for young people, with the Partnership for example supporting speedy access to counselling for YES clients. The Partnership is seen as a very helpful umbrella organisation which allows for an integration and holistic support structure for young people.



Presentation of certificates at Athy Social Inclusion Event



St. Patrick's Day Parade

5. Programme Development

Another key success factor of the programme highlighted by stakeholders is the fact that it has evolved and continuously developed in line with the needs of the young people who engage with the service. The flexible approach to programme development has meant that the YES has been able to offer a mixture of one-to-one and group programmes, it has also been able to offer a range of short-courses tailored specifically for particular cohorts of young people. For example, the YES was able to develop one programme in close conjunction with the local School Completion Programme co-ordinator, to provide a specific intervention for a group of early school leavers.

“A lot wanted to tailor their skills towards apprenticeships so we designed a course for them – offering safe-pass; manual handling; first aid; driving-theory; QQI level 4 in home repair maintenance – intro to electrical; plumbing; health and safety.”

The overall YES has developed to offer a variety of career preparation services; group work which focuses on team-building, and social skills; practical skills courses such as driver-theory; safe-pass; manual-handling and so forth which are seen by stakeholders as providing a broad range of both practical and social skills offerings for young people to bridge the gaps that they may have.

While some stakeholders expressed some reservations regarding what they perceive as a movement away from a pure Youth Work group approach due to the requirement to offer more one-to-one support due to case-load demands, overall stakeholders believe that the organic model of programme development is a key factor in the programmes' success;

“It has retained the original principles but has evolved based on the learnings at the different stages... It has developed and evolved, because we've done the regular check-ins [with young people], it might not be how I thought it was going to evolve necessarily, or some of the other [stakeholders] but the path it has taken has always been based on the foundation of having checked-in [with young people] and I trust the process on that”



Feedback from Client Consultation Process



N=13

- Thirteen young people (nine female/four male) who have taken part in the YES, either via one-to-one engagement and/or in group courses participated in this consultation process.
- Two online focus-groups were conducted via Zoom.

9 ♀

4 ♂

Many of the young people who participated in this consultation process describe how they were motivated to access the YES because they felt lost, not knowing what they wanted to do, or if they did know what they wanted to do, not knowing clearly how to access the career paths that they were aiming for.

Many of the group also spoke of not enjoying school and finding it challenging for a variety of both practical and emotional reasons. This left many with a legacy of unfinished post-primary education, or a Leaving Certificate which was not at the level required to access their desired career-path.

In terms of the key benefits of participating in the YES services, the young people identified both the social and the practical aspects of the programmes as being very helpful in supporting them to move on with their lives. Several use the word 'stuck' to describe how they felt before they accessed the YES, and talk of 'blooming', having an increased sense of confidence, and feeling like they have many more opportunities available to them now having had the support of the YES.

The following section outlines the young people's feedback in their own words. Allied to the focus group discussion, participants were invited to submit photographs and an accompanying narrative to describe their experience of the YES. Three participants submitted photographs in addition to taking part in the group discussion, and their photographs are also included within this section.

In terms of the focus group discussion, the groups identified three key areas which the YES has helped them – firstly in terms of building confidence and social skills; secondly in providing them with access to very useful practical skill-sets; and thirdly with access to pathways to progression – to both further education and to employment.



I. Building confidence and social skills

"It's made me more confident, I'm really shy and I can be myself around them"

"Laura helped us to get to know each other in an easy way, a way that wasn't stressful...it was way more comfortable"

"What I've found useful is the support she's given to help me reach my goal. I did a Level 4 retail skills course through Laura and passed all my exams, we've done four different modules – we've done basic first aid, manual handling, barista and we've done work experience. From work experience, and the Level 4 course I've gotten a lot of confidence because I'm a very shy person....what I like about it is the YES are there to help support me to reach my goals and get to where I want to get to"

"At the start of the YES I was very shy and I didn't really talk much, as I didn't know much about it...but what I'm like now is I'm very good with it, I talk more. It took me a while because I'm shy, but now I talk more and enjoy working with them."

"I'm a better person, a better me. After the course I felt good that I had done something after the Leaving Cert....I'm a different me – I communicate with people I never met before."

"I reached a goal, I finished it out"

"I have dyslexia and learning difficulties, so I find lots things hard, I struggle with most daily things in life like, this gave me confidence" –
"I need more confidence to stand up for myself and to be 'me' more"



2. Building practical skills

“...we got to do lots of things, like even basic first aid. Courses that are good for your CV...the manual handling course is very useful, again good for your CV”

“I’m still doing my driver theory test and it’s really helped me with that...I think it’s all really good”

“I like all of it, just getting away and learning a new skill” ...especially in lockdown “People are probably just watching TV or whatever, but when we go on the call with Laura we’re actually learning stuff for an hour or more... we’re doing cookery one day and driving theory another day”

“We didn’t expect to get so much done in the one course, cover so many things – the driver theory is great because I haven’t heard of any other courses that do that with young people”

“It was really helpful, they did the safe-pass with me on the programme and I actually got work because of that. I enjoyed it all”



3. Identifying pathways and points of progression

"I thought it was helpful, Laura found a PLC for me to do which I'm doing at the moment"

"I've been trying to find a job for nearly a year and still no luck, and I've been applying and applying and still nothing, so this has been a real boost"

"I knew I wanted to study psychology, but I didn't know how to get there – I didn't have the Leaving Cert points so I didn't know what options I had. The course helped as a starting step – and then I progressed onto the PLC course. So it was good to build up confidence, meeting people, getting out of the house."

"Laura was amazing and now I'm where I want to be, in the army"

"Laura helped to get me a place on another programme...it was fantastic, she was so helpful. Everything is moving, everything is going well."

"I was basically doing nothing and that's why I wanted to try to get linked into something, to see where I could go from there, and from there I got a course out of it. I did the Level 4 applied retail course and now I'm looking to move on in September to a Level 5 child care assistant course"

"I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have this"

"I was just stuck, I wasn't really sure where to find out information... I've always been interested in art and film production but had no idea of how to get into it"



4. Photovoice

Participant 1



“This is a picture this picture shows a good day with all different groups - a social inclusion day. This was a really fun day - I had a lot of confidence that day and I also received my manual handling certificate so this brings me back to a happy day”

Participant 2



“These pictures describe my experience with YES because the first picture shows one tulip not bloomed which for me is me after leaving school. I found it very difficult to find a job and I wasn’t sure what career I wanted to go into. I didn’t have any guide in what direction I wanted to go, the second picture shows what the YES course done for me it shows a lot of tulips bloomed which is the opportunities I was given. It helped guide me in the direction I needed to go. It helped me get into the proper head space to look into what I wanted for my future and my career.

I wasn’t too sure how to feel when I first started the course because I didn’t know what I was going to learn or find, but now I am very glad that I joined. It has helped me a lot and thanks to Laura she has given me various opportunities and I am very grateful. I feel more confident with what direction I am going in and I have more confidence in myself as well.”



Participant 3



“This picture reminds me of when I finished secondary school, and I was about to take another step in my educational career. I really do not know where to start and what to study. It took me a couple of years to put myself together in order to be somebody in life.”

Take The Ladder Of Success

“This ladder indicates my movement in education. I was happy that at last I made up my mind to pursue my career in education. My first ambition as a mother with children was to enrol in adult education classes. So that I can get QQI Level Five. This would enable me to go into higher education.”





Recommendations

While there is consistency amongst both stakeholders and clients that the YES is a valuable and effective programme, there are several recommendations in terms of areas for expansion and improvement for the service. These can be summarised into six key areas

1. Extra resources required to both maintain and expand the YES:

- The key area which needs attention is the issue of resources – the case-load is described by stakeholders as ‘overwhelming’ and ‘crazy’ and there is concern that the volume of work is unsustainable for one Youth Worker.
- If extra resources can be put in place, stakeholders recommend that the service be expanded to provide the YES to other areas of the county, but not at the expense of the current programme in Athy. It is also seen as important that any expansion is done in a co-ordinated way that ensures any new locations have access to the extra support services that young people using the YES may need.
- SICAP 2020 funding has ensured the commitment to provide an additional staff member and the recruitment process is in progress.
- Investigate consistent line of funding to work with under-18s.

2. Youth employment strategy in Kildare:

- It is important for that the YES strategy aligns with and leverages the wider strategy for youth employment within the Kildare region. As the YES moves from a local to county-based approach, it would be beneficial to have a wider stakeholder engagement and consultation process to develop an integrated regional strategy for youth employment.
- This wider strategy development will then clarify and drive the development of the strategic planning process for the YES.

3. Client-strategy:

- Allied to the overall strategy development, it would be helpful to give some consideration to how best the YES should focus its resources in terms of its client-base. As the programme has evolved and gained in popularity, there is concern that some of the hardest-to-reach and most complex cases may get lost in the system without proactive recruitment to the YES.
- The YES could benefit from deciding which clients are most important for the service to proactively target going forward (i.e. those closest to being job-ready or those farthest from it; specific age-groups – role of YES for under-18s etc.).
- Given the fall-out from the COVID19 restrictions on employment opportunities for young people in the region, there is concern that with more young people on the live register, those who are long-term unemployed, most at risk, and farthest from engagement may slip through the cracks, if not prioritised.
- With regard to clients, stakeholders also felt that stricter progression points and boundaries around those may be needed in order to manage the large case-load. While the flexibility and person-centred nature of the Youth Work approach is valued, there may need to be a greater balance struck, or at least some consideration could be given to this as part of the overall strategy development.



4. Programme development:

- Continued focus on responsive, needs-based programme development.
- Online/blended learning – potential opportunity to expand the online service offerings and reach more clients, particularly those in rural areas with poor transportation access.

5. Capturing impact:

- It would be useful to consider a consistent, formalised process for tracking and reporting client progression – combining quantitative and qualitative measures.
- Distance-travelled and other outcome measures leveraged further, and results highlighted to the wider stakeholder group.

6. Collaboration and integration:

- As the YES continues to develop and evolve it would be useful to use this review as the basis of conducting a wider stakeholder engagement process where the role, and future development of the YES can be workshopped with all of the relevant services providers in the region.
- More consistent and formalised process for feeding back to other agencies on progress made with specific clients (subject to GDPR considerations)
- More information on what the YES offers and opportunities for the Youth Worker to visit some of the service providers to highlight the programme to staff within these agencies.



Presentation of certificates at Athy Social Inclusion Event



Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank the twenty-six people who so generously shared their thoughts and experiences with me as part of this consultation process. I would also like to thank Laura Kelly for all of her invaluable support in organising the data-collection process, and for facilitating this review with such open-ness, enthusiasm, and professionalism.

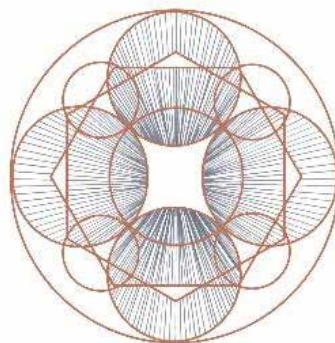
About the Researcher

Dr Maria Quinlan is a research and strategy consultant with over twenty years' experience working with organisations across the public, non-profit and private sectors. She is a former Human Capital consultant at Deloitte has lectured in Organisational Behaviour and Human Capital at University College Dublin (UCD), and Queens University Belfast (QUB).

Maria is a collaborating research fellow at UCD, where she was formerly research lead at the centre for Applied Research in Connected Health. She is also Head of Research at the Institute for Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (IICP) where she lectures on the Sociology of Equality, and the Sociology of Mental Health and Illness.

She has worked with a variety of organisations to review their services, consult with their clients and provide strategic analysis and planning. Her work in this area combines an innovative and creative mixed methodological approach which is rooted in best-practice research. She specialises in creative, person-centred techniques which lead to deeply-nuanced, actionable strategic-insight for both service providers and service users.

Maria is the founder of Pink Flower Research, a research consultancy which focuses on using innovative methods to create actionable insight related to equality and inclusion.



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Appendix A

Services Provided

The YES provides a variety of ways for young people to engage. This can be on an individual or group basis.

All young people are initially met individually and registered under SICAP. A Personal Action Plan is created and depending on the needs of the individual they may continue to work individually with the Youth Employment Support Worker or they might benefit from engaging in group work. The group work Youth Employment Programme (YEP) is tailored to meet the needs of each group. It generally runs two mornings a week for 12-14 weeks. A typical YES group includes the following:

Work Related Training

- Safe Pass
- Manual Handling
- First Aid

Career Preparation

- CV Writing
- Interview Skills
- Job Searching

Practical Skills

- QQI Level 4 Home Repair & Maintenance
- Driver Theory & Practical Driving Lesson
- Healthy Food Made Easy & QQI Level 4 HACCP Training

Youth Work

- Team Building
- Personal Development
- 1-1 Mentoring & Coaching

Youth Employment Programme groups are tailored to meet the needs of the specific needs of the young people who present at a given time. In 2019, two group programmes were held, one in Athy and one in Kildare town.

Kildare Youth Employment Programme 2019

The Kildare programme was developed to meet the needs of a group of young people who had completed a Leaving Certificate but who had not gone on to further education or employment. This programme engaged young people from Kildare/Curragh areas. This programme was tailored for the group of young people to include QQI level four minor award in Home Repair and Safety to provide the young people with a basic introduction to the skills required for an apprenticeship. Young people from this programme gained apprentices, employment in other areas and returned to further education.

- First Aid
- Manual Handling
- Home Repair & Maintenance QQI Level 4
- Safe Pass
- Interview Skills
- Driver Theory Programme including Leinster Driving Academy Driving Experience



Athy Youth Employment Programme 2019

The Athy Programme was a more generic programme aimed at meeting a variety of needs. It included the following training. From this group young people progressed into employment in areas such as retail, further education at QQI level four and five, and third level; and went onto Employment Schemes such as Tus.

- Manual Handling
- Youth Career Skills QQI Level3
- Interview Skills Workshop
- CV Workshop
- First Aid
- Safe Pass
- Healthy Food Made Easy
- Driver Theory Programme including Leinster Driving Academy Driving Experience

Online Youth Employment Programme 2020

The 2020 programme outlined below was originally planned to be provided as two YES group's (one in Newbridge and one in Kildare town) aimed at targeting young people from Newbridge/Kildare and the Curragh, and Athy/Castledermot. As a result of the Covid 19 restrictions these groups were adapted and delivered online.

- Cookery Programme & online HACCP training
- Couch to 5k Fitness Programme
- Employment Workshops
- CV & Interview Skills
- Driver Theory Programme
- Online Manual Handling

Training courses

In addition to the group programmes offered as part of the YES there is an ongoing list of training which young people can avail of – as outlined below. Young people can engage individually and attend this training where appropriate for their personal plan. Additional training courses include the following;

- Barista Training
- HACCP Training
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Home Repair & Maintenance QQI Level 4
- Home Care and Repair
- Manual Handling
- Safe Pass
- First Aid



County Kildare
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