



kcetb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
Chill Chainnigh agus Cheatharlach
Kilkenny and Carlow
Education and Training Board



'I FEEL LIKE I AM HEARD'

An exploration of good youth work practice with young people who are not in employment, education or training



Carlow County Development Partnership
Carlow County Development Partnership

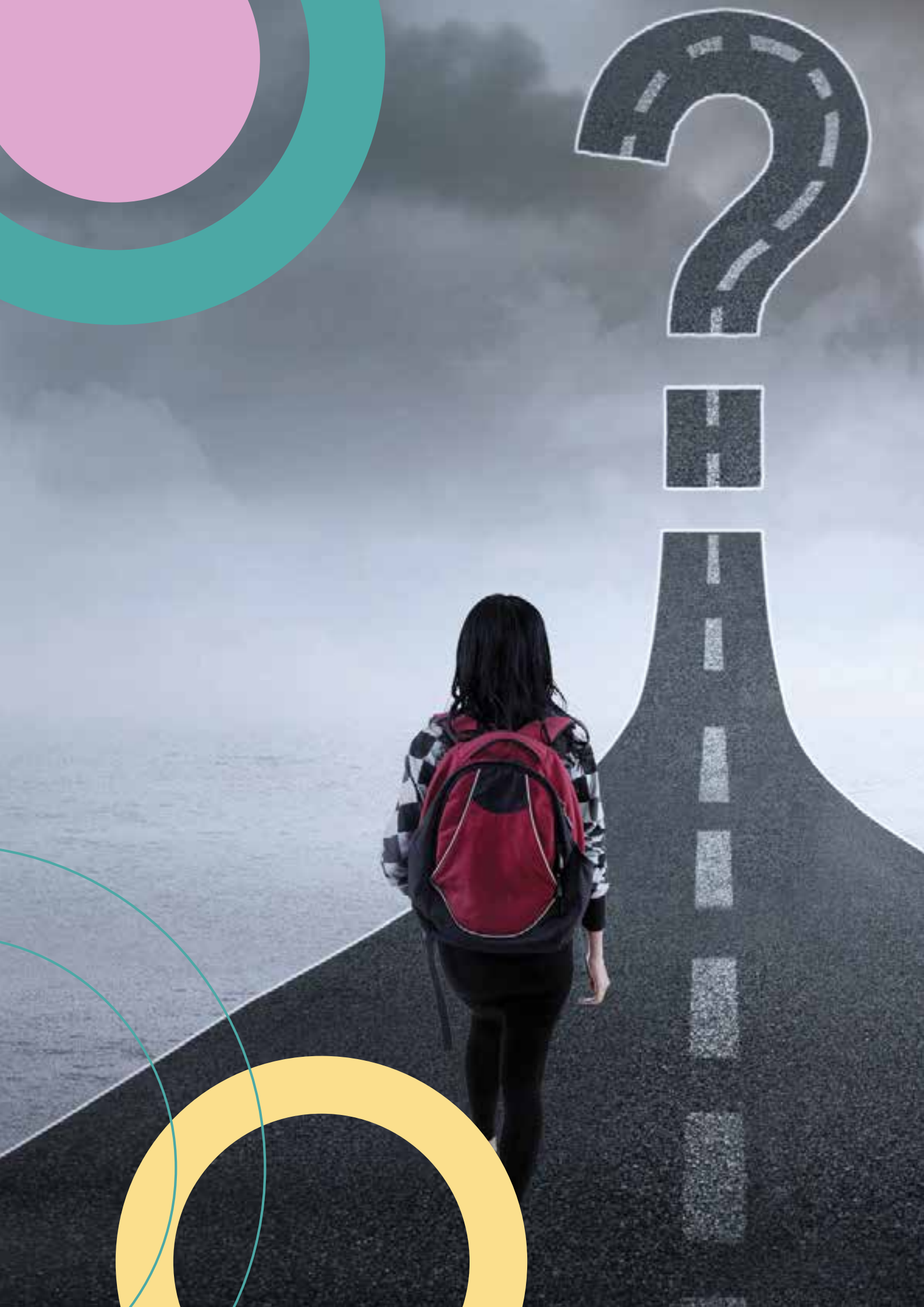


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List of Abbreviations

CCDP	Carlow County Development Partnership
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
ESF	European Social Fund
KCETB	Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
KLP	Kilkenny Leader Partnership
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
RSE	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
SETU	South East Technological University
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
TYESI	Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative
YSP	Youth Skills Programme (Foróige programme funded by TYESI)



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report documents the results of a study undertaken by researchers at South East Technological University (SETU) which explored models of good youth work practice with young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET). The research was conducted between December 2021 and November 2023 and was commissioned and funded by Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB), with additional funding support from Kilkenny Leader Partnership (KLP), Carlow County Development Partnership (CCDP) and SETU.

The research addressed the following objectives:

- undertake a systematic review of international literature on the experience of NEET young people and on effective approaches for engaging with them
- carry out a survey of youth workers in Ireland with experience of working with NEET young people
- undertake an in-depth case study of the Foróige Targeted Youth Employment Support Initiative programme based in Kilkenny using the following methods:
 - qualitative interviews with young people on the programme to ensure that recommendations for good practice were led by the experiences of young people themselves
 - an analysis of pre-and post-programme evaluations conducted by Foróige staff
 - an analysis of participants' identified needs and progression pathways
 - an interview with the Foróige youth worker leading the programme along with fieldnotes from conversations with him
- compare and contrast evidence from the international literature with that from local data sources to develop a series of recommendations for youth workers and other professionals on good practice approaches to working with NEET young people
- develop a toolkit for youth workers and other professionals to guide them in engaging with NEET young people

Who are NEET young people?

The phrase 'NEET young people' is used throughout this report to refer to young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not engaged in employment, education or training. Since the 1990s, the phrase has become widely used in social policy, and it is typically used to evince a form of social exclusion that is not adequately captured in terms like 'youth unemployment'. The concept is somewhat ambiguous for it is used to describe a heterogeneous group. In response, Mascherini and Ledermaier (Eurofound, 2016) have sought to categorise this group as follows:

- Re-entrants (i.e. those who will soon rejoin education or the labour market)
- Short-term unemployed
- Long-term unemployed
- Unavailable due to illness or disability
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities
- Discouraged workers (i.e. those who do not seek work because they believe no work is available)
- Other (those who do not fit into any of the above categories)

It is difficult to precisely determine how many NEET young people there are in Ireland. An analysis of youth unemployment in 2021 put the rate of unemployment among 15 to 24 year olds at 13.4% (Lawlor, 2021). The population of individuals in Ireland between the ages of 15 and 24 is 12.8%, giving an overall number of 659,090 individuals. Using this number and taking the 13.4% estimate from Lawlor (2021), a total of 88,318 individuals could be classified as NEET in Ireland.

Approaches to working with NEET young people evidence from International literature

It has been consistently shown across the literature that NEET young people face a range of psychosocial challenges that derive from experiences in the 'microsystem' of their personal, familial and community relationships as well as from the effects of their broader institutional, policy and economic contexts (Buchanan and Tuckerman, 2016; Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Robertson, 2018; Barry et al, 2019; Lorinc et al, 2020). Mental health issues, social isolation, and poor life skills are especially notable, and very relevant for youth work with this cohort.

Effective approaches to addressing the needs of NEET young people within youth work and other fields of education emphasise relationally focused interventions, involving individualised person, social, vocational and professional development and strong collaboration between youth organisations, statutory and other relevant agencies (Williamson, 2010; de Avila and Rose, 2019; Almeida et al, 2020). There is no one standardised model; rather research stresses the significance of slow-paced, flexible, and needs-led responses, that focus on trust and dialogue as well as building confidence, self-esteem, motivation and other soft skills (Düker and Ley, 2014; Miller et al, 2015; Beck, 2015; Liszka and Walawender, 2021).

Methodology

In addition to a systematic review of international literature (results for which are summarised above), the research team undertook

- (i) a survey of Irish youth workers with experience of working with NEET young people and
- (ii) an in-depth, mixed-method case study of the Youth Skills Programme (YSP) delivered by Foróige in Kilkenny, that was funded by DCEDIY through KCETB

Ethical approval for the study was secured via SETU's Ethics Committee in 2021. Particular care was taken in conducting research with the young participants on the YSP.

For the survey, youth workers with experience of working with NEET young people were purposively sampled. The aim of the survey was to examine respondents' perspectives on the effectiveness of general youth work programmes in catering for the needs of NEET young people, as well as their experiences (if any) of NEET-specific programmes. Two iterations of the questionnaire were disseminated and 30 people responded in total.

The case study was created using the following methods:

- (i) interviews with 10 young participants on the YSP
- (ii) an analysis of participants' identified needs and progression pathways
- (iii) an analysis of results from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) administered by Foróige staff with YSP participants (n= 19)
- (iv) an interview with the Foróige youth worker leading the programme along with field notes from conversations with him

Findings

Survey findings

All respondents had been involved in programmes in which NEET young people had taken part. These programmes, not designed exclusively for NEET young people, included personal and social development activities like wellbeing, sexual health, online job-seeking training, life skills, leadership, and entrepreneurship. Of the respondents, 43% found these programmes helpful, 26% saw benefits only in certain aspects, and 7% (2 respondents) found them unhelpful. Challenges faced by NEET young people in these programmes included personal difficulties (like mental health and motivation issues), programme-related challenges (such as duration, funding, and resource limitations), and external factors like the impact of COVID-19 and lack of family support.

To better serve NEET young people, 60% of respondents adapted these programmes, including adjusting time scales, focusing on soft skills, and providing more individualised support. Additionally, half of the respondents created specific interventions for NEET young people, covering areas like emotional regulation, vocational training, and well-being.

Respondents highlighted the need for tailored, individualised, and holistic support, acknowledging the difficulty in engaging NEET young people and the importance of coordinated services. They also pointed out the lack of opportunities for NEET young people under the age of 16, and the need for evidence from International literature for long-term funding and resources to address these issues effectively.

Case study findings

Overview of Foróige's Youth Skills Programme

The Youth Service Programme YSP aims to develop both 'soft' and 'hard' skills in young people. The YSP is structured into six broad phases, but is very flexible in its delivery and ethos. These phases are:

Needs Assessment: A YSP youth worker builds a trusting relationship with the participant, obtains their consent, and uses assessment tools to help evaluate their needs and strengths. This process is transparent and tailored to the individual young person.

Co-Design and Planning: Based upon the needs and strengths identified during phase 1 and on the young person's personal goals, the youth worker and young person collaboratively create a personalised development plan. This typically starts with small goals before gradually incorporating more ambitious objectives. This plan is regularly reviewed and adapted as the young person develops.

Implementation: Activities and strategies are implemented to develop both 'soft' skills (like emotional regulation and self-esteem) and 'hard' skills (such as IT skills or interview preparation). This involves a combination of one-to-one and group activities.

Review: The effectiveness of the plan in supporting the young person's progress and their engagement with the goals is evaluated.

Progression Pathways: The final phase focuses on guiding the young person towards employment, further education or training opportunities and preparing them to exit the programme successfully.

Profile of YSP participants

Between April 2022 and April 2023, the YSP had 27 referrals, with 19 young people engaging in the programme. All of the young people had very significant psychosocial difficulties. As of April 2023, 14 participants were participating in the programme, split evenly between those aged 15-17 and those over 18. The YSP doesn't have fixed start or end dates, allowing for flexible entry and exit. Some participants transitioned to work or education within months, but most required over 12 months of intensive support. Notably, six participants from the initial cohort under the TYESI funding in 2022 continued in the programme into the latter half of 2023 under the Further Education and Training Solas Innovation Fund, that was provided via KCETB.

Perspectives of young people

Interviews with participants of (YSP) revealed valuable insights into their experiences and the perceived impact on their personal and social development. A key theme was the qualities and skills they valued in a youth worker, such as the ability to build strong, safe, empathetic, and non-judgmental relationships. Participants appreciated youth workers who were approachable, communicative, knowledgeable, and good at planning and guiding.

The programme helped build participants' confidence, including in group settings, and supported them in identifying and achieving their goals, understanding available pathways in further education or training, and in securing employment. Two participants expressed a desire for more time in the programme. Transportation from rural areas was noted as a possible barrier, though Foróige provides support in

this regard. Participants also discussed the challenges they face daily, like anxiety and difficulty in group settings. While their views on the YSP were positive, they noted external misconceptions about youth work settings and concerns about the stigma associated with being part of a 'NEET' programme.

When asked for advice on encouraging others to join the YSP, participants suggested personalised approaches, sharing personal experiences, emphasising how much young people enjoy the programme, and highlighting its role in job readiness and self-discovery.

Young people's progression pathways

The young people on the YSP have had demonstrable success in transitioning to employment, education or training. As of September 2023, 12 young people from the YSP had progressed. Progression routes included Youthreach, KCETB further education programmes at NFQ Level 5, the National Learning Network, as well as employment in retail and services industries.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) results.

The results indicated significant reductions in four categories of the SDQ among NEET young people participating in the YSP. These categories were (1) emotional symptoms, (2) perceived conduct problems, (3) perceived hyperactivity or inattention, and (4) peer relationship problems. This suggests that involvement in the YSP may have helped reduce negative issues in these areas. Correspondingly, there was an increase in self-esteem among these individuals, as measured by the RSE. The intensive personal and professional work done with a youth worker likely contributed to improved self-esteem, greater self-awareness of mental health, and development of adaptive coping strategies, which may have reduced SDQ scores.

There was no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour category (5) of the SDQ. This could be partly due to the data collection period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have limited social interactions.

More generally, it is important to note that the SDQ and RSE are validated screening tools and their primary use in the YSP is to help to determine the young person's needs for the purposes of developing individualised planning. They are not, therefore, diagnostic. Scores can fluctuate based on various everyday factors affecting the young person, like emotional or physical stress. Additionally, the participants were involved in other support services alongside the YSP, complicating attribution. The sample was also small.

Perspectives of youth worker

The perspectives of the YSP youth worker reinforce the other data and yielded several important insights on what makes for effective youth work with NEET young people. He stressed that supporting young people with complex needs requires 'long-term, consistent and continuous' engagement and that the pace of progress should be determined by the needs and readiness of the young person. He regarded these factors, along with the youth-friendly space; a transparent, goal-oriented process; and the additional support he provided to young people and their families outside of the youth work setting, as central to the changes he observed among participants.

Discussion of findings

The key messages from the survey and case studies findings were:

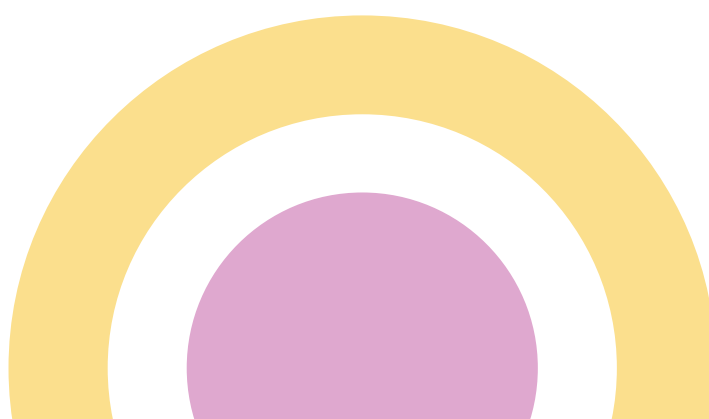
- General youth work programmes may need to be adapted to cater for NEET young people's needs
- There are NEET young people in communities without adequate services to support them
- An unhurried, relationally skilled, and emotionally supportive approach is vital in addressing the needs of NEET young people
- Short-term or prescriptive programmes are unlikely to be successful in meeting NEET young people's needs
- Young people appreciate respect; dialogue; clear, co-created goals; and transparency about the process
- Youth workers may need to 'go the extra mile' to address barriers like lack of access to transport, low motivation and other personal and family issues which routinely arise
- There is a need to address and challenge the stigma around NEET young people
- Collaborative, inter-agency work is a key feature of effective youth work with NEET young people
- Young people recommended personalised promotion and recruitment strategies that emphasise the programme's role in both professional/vocational development and overall wellbeing

Conclusions

There is a remarkable degree of consistency across the literature and the empirical data collected for this report in relation to effective youth work with NEET young people. In particular, it has been stressed that these young people's needs cannot be met by short-term, standardised or prescriptive interventions. Instead, both Irish and international evidence analysed for the report suggest that a framework for effective youth work with NEET young people, especially with those who have significant psychosocial difficulties, should contain the following features:

- caring, empathetic, trusting relationships between youth worker and young person
- a flexible, individualised, needs-led approach
- an unhurried approach that respects the pace of the young person
- principles of transparency, ownership, respect and non-compulsion
- clear, cumulative, achievable goals that are co-created with the young person
- a process that young people can understand, recognise and follow
- a combination of 'soft' and 'hard' skill development
- collaboration with other agencies that support young people

The research highlights that supporting NEET young people is skilled and complex work. This underscores the need for ongoing investment in the education, training and mentoring of youth workers, and for positive working conditions so that workers on NEET-related programmes can sustain the work. Our conclusions also suggest that 'employability' is too narrow a lens to capture what NEET young people need or are capable of, or to encapsulate the impact of what good youth work services actually do. Youth work can contribute to the development of a whole range of capabilities that have a value that is independent of their role in promoting job readiness. Finally, we have highlighted that while psychometric tools are useful for screening, opening discussion and giving some indication of progress, their interpretation requires caution, especially with small sample sizes.





Introduction



1. Introduction

This report documents the results of a study undertaken by researchers at South East Technological University (SETU) which explored models of good youth work practice with young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET). The research was conducted between December 2021 and November 2023 and was commissioned by the KCETB Youth Office, with support from KLP, CCDP and SETU.

Helping ‘NEET’ young people was named as a priority under Outcome 2 (Achieving Full Potential in all Areas of Learning and Development) and Outcome 4 (Economic Security and Opportunity) of KCETB’s Youth Work Plan 2018-2022 (KCETB, 2018).¹ In line with this commitment, supporting youth organisations to respond to the needs of NEET young people through targeted funding initiatives has been a key part of KCETB’s work for several years. Since 2016, KCETB has administered two programmes on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) that specifically targeted this cohort of young people. These programmes were the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative (TYESI).² The YEI ran twice, once from 2016-2017 when it was delivered by Carlow Regional Youth Service, and again from 2019-2020, when it was delivered by Foróige in Kilkenny. TYESI ran from December 2021 to December 2022 and was also delivered by Foróige. When the TYESI ended, KCETB provided funding to continue the YSP for a further six months up to June 2023. Following this, the programme was further supported by KCETB through the Further Education and Training (FET) Solas Innovation Fund so that Foróige could continue its work in this area until June 2024.

Working on the YEI, and carrying out its youth work functions more generally, provided KCETB staff with valuable insights into the lived realities of NEET young people. In particular, it illuminated the vulnerabilities they face and the corresponding requirement for skilful responses to their needs.

With this understanding, the organisation wanted to ensure that its future work in this area was informed by a strong evidence base, one that synthesised findings from the latest international literature with the experience and expertise of local partners and young people. KCETB also believed that such research could help inform future iterations of national funding programmes targeting NEET young people.

These goals were shared by KLP and CCDP, who regarded them as consistent with their own strategic commitment to supporting the social and economic inclusion of NEET young people across the two counties (KLP, 2014; Gardner et al, 2017).³ Accordingly, in 2021, before embarking on the TYESI, KCETB with the support of KLP and CCDP, commissioned SETU to undertake the research that is set out in this report. SETU was also tasked with distilling the results of the research into a practical toolkit, so as to maximise the study’s impact on day-to-day practice in youth work and allied fields.

The research addressed the following objectives:

- undertake a systematic review of international literature on the experience of NEET young people and on effective approaches for engaging with them
- carry out a survey of youth workers in Ireland with experience of working with NEET young people
- undertake an in-depth case study of the Foróige Targeted Youth Employment Support Initiative programme based in Kilkenny using the following methods:
 - qualitative interviews with young people in Foróige’s TYESI to ensure that recommendations for good practice were led by the experiences of young people themselves
 - an analysis of pre- and post-programme evaluations conducted by Foróige staff
 - an analysis of participants’ identified needs and progression pathways
 - an interview with the Foróige youth worker leading the programme along with fieldnotes from conversations with him

¹ The outcomes around which KCETB’s Youth Work Plan is structured reflect the outcomes named in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014).

² In October 2020, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was renamed the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The YEI programme was funded when it was DCYA

³ KLP and CCDP support NEET-related work primarily via their role in managing the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). SICAP is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the European Social Fund under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 -2027. KLP and CCDP have established projects to work directly with NEET young people, but much of its NEETs-related work is delivered by partner organisations such as youth services, Family Resource Centres, Traveller organisations and other local groups.

- compare and contrast evidence from the international literature with that from local data sources to develop a series of recommendations for youth workers and other professionals on good practice approaches to working with NEET young people
- develop a toolkit for youth workers and other professionals to guide them in engaging with NEET young people

As these objectives indicate, the research focuses primarily on the role of youth work. That said, the literature review, details of which are provided in section 3, was not confined to youth work literature. Rather, it examined a broad evidence base on approaches to working with NEET young people on the grounds that literature from different contexts and fields offered potentially valuable insights for youth work practice. Conversely, our conclusions and recommendations are principally designed for youth workers but contain guidance that may be useful to professionals in cognate sectors such as community development and adult education.

The report proceeds as follows. To begin we provide a brief overview of the emergence of the ‘NEET’ concept, its place in Irish and EU policy along with statistical data on the make-up and prevalence of people in this category. This is followed by an analysis of data from the systematic review and related literature. We then detail the methodology for the data collection phase, before presenting and discussing its findings. In the final section, we draw from all the evidence presented to set out several recommendations for effective youth work with NEET young people, and to offer some concluding reflections.

1.1 A note on terminology

The phrase ‘NEET young people’ is used throughout this report to refer to young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not engaged in employment, education or training. The concept is somewhat ambiguous for it is used to describe a heterogeneous group. We nonetheless employ the term given its familiarity to youth workers and its widespread use in social policy, where it has come to evince a form of social exclusion that is not adequately captured in terms like ‘youth unemployment’.

The Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative (TYESI) 2021-2022 DCEDIY funded programme dedicated to supporting NEET young people. The Youth Skills Programme (YSP) is the title that Foróige gave to its TYESI-funded programme. When we refer to the YSP, we are referring specifically to the Foróige programme.





Who are NEET young people?



2. Who are NEET young people?

The acronym 'NEET' first came to prominence in the UK during the 1990s as a novel classification for young people not engaged in paid employment but who were no longer categorised as unemployed due to changes in the benefits system. These changes, which occurred in 1988, removed unemployment benefit to those under 18 and limited such entitlements to those under 25 (Furlong, 2006). The term was popularised following the publication of a watershed report by a group of researchers in Glamorgan, Wales who were concerned that many young people hit hard by profound economic dislocation in mining communities were hidden from official statistics and neglected by youth policy at that time (Istance, et al, 1994; Williamson, 1997; 2010).

Although the Glamorgan report was a 'political hot potato' upon its publication, drawing attention as it did to failures within the British Government's Youth Training Scheme (Williamson, 1997: np), in the decade that followed, the 'NEET' category became firmly embedded within policy debates across the EU as concerns about these young people grew, and as prevailing policy with respect to unemployment continued its shift towards an 'activation' paradigm. In April 2010, the European Commission established a formal definition of 'NEETS' for the purposes of gathering data. This definition encompasses people aged between 15 and 24 who are unemployed according to International Labour Organisation criteria, and those who are not engaged in any form of education or training (Boland and Griffin, 2023). The metric adopted by the OECD is broader, extending to 29 years of age (Gardner et al, 2017).

The most important EU policy instrument relating to NEET young people is the Youth Guarantee (2013) which aims to ensure that all young people receive an offer of employment, further education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed (Eurofound, 2016). This commitment is supported by funding from the European Social Fund's (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (2014-2020) which funded the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), a scheme specifically for NEET young people.

In Ireland, the definition of 'NEET' is relatively inclusive, particularly in the context of eligibility for participation in the YEI, in which participants were permitted to have some earned income (Gardner et al, 2017). Other policies relevant to NEET young people in Ireland over the last decade have been the Action Plan for Jobs, first developed in 2012, the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan for Ireland (2013) and the Youth Employment Support Scheme, launched in 2018. 'NEET' young people have also been named as a priority in Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2023-2028, while the Youth Justice Strategy, 2021-2027 also aims to support young people to develop skills to help them engage in education, training or employment. Other strategies not specifically focused on 'NEET' young people, such as the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making, 2015-2020 (currently being updated), are of course also relevant to any intervention with 'NEET' young people.

It is difficult to precisely determine how many NEET young people there are in Ireland. An analysis of youth unemployment in 2021 put the rate of unemployment among those 15 and 24 year olds at 13.4% (Lawlor, 2021). The population of individuals in Ireland between the ages of 15 and 24 is 12.8%; giving an overall number of 659,090 individuals. Using this number and taking the 13.4% estimate from Lawlor (2021), a total of 88,318 individuals could be classified as NEET in Ireland. Under the same mathematical logic for Carlow and Kilkenny, table 4 indicates the population, followed by age category, and then the number of possible NEET young people:

	Carlow	Kilkenny
Population	61,968	104,160
Age Cohort	7,932	13,332
NEET	1,063	1,786

Table 1 NEET young people in Carlow and Kilkenny



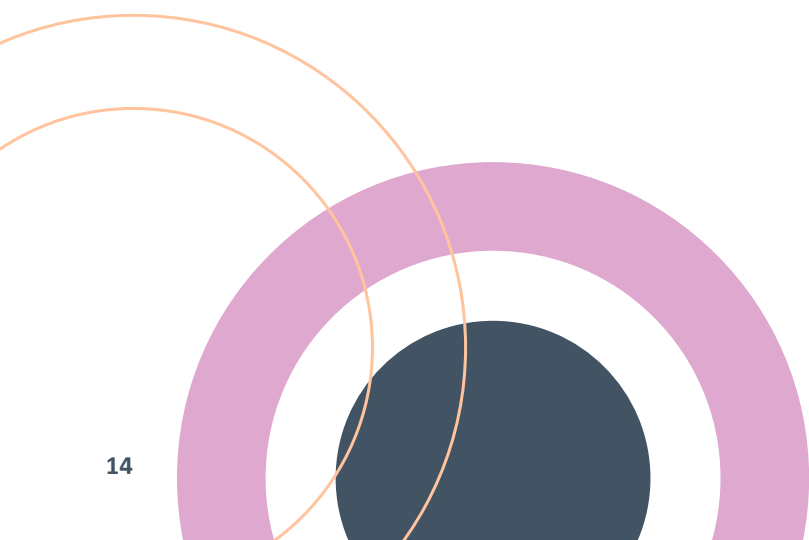
Despite its prominence across national and EU policy, the 'NEET' category is somewhat ambiguous for it attempts to capture the experiences of a very diverse group. For example, one EU report distinguished between 'vulnerable' and 'non-vulnerable' NEET young people with the former regarded as being at high risk of social marginalisation (Eurofound, 2012, cited in Eurofound, 2016). A further attempt to delineate the different 'types' of NEET young people was developed by Mascherini and Ledermaier (Eurofound, 2016) who categorised them as follows:

- Re-entrants (i.e. those who will soon rejoin education or the labour market)
- Short-term unemployed
- Long-term unemployed
- Unavailable due to illness or disability
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities
- Discouraged workers (i.e. those who do not seek work because they believe no work is available)
- Other (those who do not fit into any of the above categories)

While such typologies are very helpful for guiding policy, concerns continue to be raised that the 'NEET' category flattens complexity and defines young people in terms of what they are *not*, thereby minimising their agency and strengths (Williamson, 2010; Serracant, 2014; Boland and Griffin, 2023).

NEET discourse has also been charged with obscuring some of the structural determinants of young people's exclusion (e.g. precarious labour markets or insecure housing) and with stigmatising young people's behaviour and choices (Williamson, 2010; Maguire, 2015; Boland and Griffin, 2023).

With these critiques in mind, it may be helpful to note that a member of the Welsh research team whose work helped catalyse the rise of 'NEET'-related policy in the late 1990s was also a youth worker. This youth worker was Howard Williamson, now a professor of European Youth Policy at the University of South Wales. Since the publication of his report, he has grappled with the complexities of 'NEETs' as a field of policy, and with youth work's role in NEET-related interventions. Notably, he has written that '[t]he human condition that lies behind the numbers and the policy debate needs to be propelled to the front' (Williamson, 2010: 8). We highlight this observation here because it chimes with much of the literature we review in the next section, because it is consistent with our empirical findings, and because it has served as a touchstone for the conclusions and recommendations that we offer in the final section of the report.





**Approaches to working
with NEET young people**

3. Approaches to working with NEET young people: evidence from international literature

In this section, we detail the results of the systematic review of literature relating to NEET young people that was undertaken between 2021 and 2023. For further details on the systematic review process and search criteria, please see appendix A. This section also includes findings from literature which did not appear in the systematic review because the latter filtered out books, as well as reports that did not appear in peer-review journals. We include these reports because they are methodologically sound and because they contain valuable insights for youth work.

3.1 Challenges facing NEET young people

It has been consistently shown across the literature that NEET young people face a range of psychosocial challenges that derive from experiences in the 'microsystem' of their personal, familial and community relationships as well as from the effects of the broader institutional policy context (Lorinc et al., 2020). Among the challenges that are most relevant to youth work interventions are those relating to mental health, social isolation and poor life skills.

Research has shown that NEETs young people are at significant risk of mental health problems, often experiencing isolation, depression or anxiety, in addition to being at increased risk of substance abuse (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Robertson, 2018; Berry et al, 2019). Such studies suggest that NEET young people do strive to find employment or participate in further education, but ongoing challenges they face significantly impact their mental health, and hence their capacity to engage. Their own self-perceptions and level of self-efficacy likely mediates their motivation and participation which can impact their motivation and engagement in programmes.

By way of example the difficulties and challenges faced by NEET young people are heavily detailed by Buchanan and Tuckerman (2016), who carried out a series of observations, interviews, and focus groups in three locations based in Scotland. A number of instances were detailed where young people requested the support of a community or youth worker in completing applications for apprenticeships or writing cover letters for a job. While this in itself may be a common task for individuals working with NEET young people, Buchanan and Tuckerman highlight that the young people would often appear withdrawn, be reluctant to engage in conversation, or consistently forget details, such as passwords, previous qualifications, or employment history, that may be necessary during a particular interaction.

3.2 Approaches to meeting NEET young people's needs

Given the vulnerabilities detailed in the previous section, it is unsurprising that evidence from across the literature strongly emphasises relationally focused interventions that go beyond 'just' training and professional development. Research by de Almeida et al. (2020: 13), for instance, found that 'person-centred professional development', in addition to collaboration between communities and consistent involvement of local youth organisations and non-government organisations, may be one of the only ways of supporting NEET young people to reach their potential. Berry et al (2019) suggest that providing greater access to social interventions that target engagement in structured activities may support the wellbeing of NEETs.

In a youth-work specific study, Miller et al (2015) found that youth work had the capacity to help young people build social capital (understood here in the sense of access to meaningful social networks) and enhance their prospects of securing employment. In a small study with 12 young people in Scotland, they found that youth work, ‘acted as a glue between the young people and their communities, creating opportunities where the two could be bound together and relationships created’ (p.468). Given that these young people reported feeling marginalised in their communities, this is a very significant finding. What is also notable here is that no particular standardised programme or intervention was pursued. Rather it seems that investing time in NEET young people and empowering them by listening to their perspectives was felt to remove barriers and provide them with realistic opportunities. Tangible opportunities like helping them access lifeguard training, and opening up ‘previously closed spaces’ also played a role.

Another study by Avila and Rose (2019) also emphasised the value placed on the relational dimension of working with NEET young people. This research interviewed 25 professionals involved in training provision for NEET young people. Though not youth-work specific, interviewees reported distaste for enforced long-term work experience placement and defined their own role in terms of providing a ‘safe space’ for ‘holistic growth’ and ‘healing’. This relational emphasis emerged also in Beck’s (2015: 487) work which found that while some activation providers ‘can form part of the problem and merely “churn” young people through their provision without individual engagement’, professionals can make meaningful contributions by providing confidentiality, control, reciprocity and empathy’ in ‘safe’ and ‘mentor-rich’ settings.

The significance of slow-paced, flexible and needs-led responses has also been emphasised. Some research has found that streetwork is necessary before some NEET youth work will engage (Bilfulco et al, 2015). Reflecting on youth work with highly disengaged youth people in the UK, Williamson (2011: 201) has written that:

Youth work has to look both ways – towards the politics and policy that recognises and funds it, and towards the young people it serves. Some young people are ‘ready’ for programmes and projects, with accompanying structures, goals and outcomes. But others are not. Without open space provision ... there can be no starting point for a significant minority of young people, notably those from more vulnerable, disadvantaged and sceptical backgrounds. Without that access point, they cannot get on to the ladder of participation and engagement because the first rung of the ladder has been removed and the second is too high to reach.

Against prescriptive, time-bound activation measures, Williamson (2010: 18, emphasis in original) advocates for approaches that emphasise ‘contact, engagement, dialogue and judgement about the *range* of vocational, educational and cultural possibilities and opportunities that might be made available’ before concluding that policy ‘need[s] to be constructed so that ... [it] represent[s] ladders and stepping stones towards eventual economic autonomy and labour market participation, even though that journey may be, and at times should be accepted as, a long one.’

Finally, an illuminating study involving 35 Polish youth workers demonstrated the importance of a youth worker's ability to accommodate the unique needs and preferences of each young person. Trust-building emerged as a key factor, particularly through discussions on confidentiality during the first meeting. Motivational techniques were identified as essential for overcoming the initial resistance and building lasting engagement. The research findings also underscored the significance of experienced youth workers in navigating the complexities of individual and group activities with NEET young people. It concluded that 'there is a need to develop new standards of reaching NEETs'. This, they suggest, involves 'implement[ing] an individual approach to the client, in accordance with their expectations, and not the expectations of a given organization' (Liszka and Walawender, 2021: 53).



Methodology



4. Methodology

A key objective of the research was to consider the evidence analysed in the previous section in relation to ongoing work by youth organisations in Ireland. To achieve this, we drew on two sources of empirical data: (i) a survey of Irish youth workers with experience of working with NEET young people and (ii) an in-depth, mixed-method case study of the Youth Skills Programme delivered by Foróige in Kilkenny that was funded by DCEDIY through KCETB. In this section, we provide an overview of the methodology for this phase of the project.

4.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this project was secured from the Ethics Committee of South East Technological University in 2021. All participants, namely survey respondents, young people and a Foróige youth worker, gave consent to take part in the research. For young people under the age of 18, consent was also secured from a parent or guardian. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Survey responses were completely anonymous. No Foróige staff are named in the report, though we recognise that naming the organisation and its location heightens the prospect that its staff could be identified. However, Foróige was happy for the organisation to be named as it represented an opportunity to share learning from their programme.

One of the most pressing ethical issues on the project was to ensure that young YSP participants had their voice heard without incurring any harm. The lead researcher, who is a qualified social care worker, worked closely with a highly experienced Foróige youth worker at all stages of the project to ensure that the needs of the young people remained front and centre. Further oversight was provided by a Foróige area manager and by the research supervisors, one of whom is a qualified youth worker.

No young person is named in this report and any potentially identifying information has been omitted. Interviews were planned and conducted with a great deal of care. An accessible, visually appealing booklet called 'Let Us Hear Your Voice'

was created to enhance participants' understanding of the interview questions and facilitate their active involvement. This booklet was provided to participants in advance of the interviews (please see appendix B).

4.2 Survey with youth workers engaging with NEET young people

The first method of data collection was a survey in which youth workers with experience of working with NEET young people were purposively sampled. The aim of the survey was to examine respondents' perspectives on the effectiveness of general youth work programmes in catering for the needs of NEET young people, as well as their experiences (if any) of NEET-specific programmes. The online questionnaire was distributed by KCETB on behalf of the research team to youth organisations throughout Ireland. The questionnaire comprised a mix of open- and closed-ended questions. There were two iterations of the survey. The first iteration, which was disseminated in March 2022, secured five responses from NEET-engaged youth workers. After analysing the data from round one, it was apparent that youth workers from certain regions or sectors were underrepresented. In response, a second survey round was introduced. This was disseminated in June 2022, and yielded 25 responses, giving a total sample size of 30.

Youth workers who participated in the survey were employed across 11 locations in Ireland. The highest concentration of respondents (n=6) were working in Dublin, though there was a reasonable spread across 11 counties.⁴ 60% of respondents (n=18) indicated that they worked for Foróige. Eight worked for organisations affiliated with Youth Work Ireland and two worked for independent youth organisations. Two respondents indicated that they worked for Garda Youth Diversion Programmes, but it was not clear which organisations operated these programmes. We cannot determine why most respondents were from Foróige. It may simply be that the questionnaire was shared more widely within Foróige, or that more Foróige workers opted to respond. Alternatively, it may be that Foróige works with NEET young people to a greater extent than do other youth services.

⁴ One respondent indicated that they were based in Longford/Westmeath. This presumably reflected their location within the Longford/Westmeath ETB catchment area. It was not clear if the worker in question worked across the two counties or in one of them.

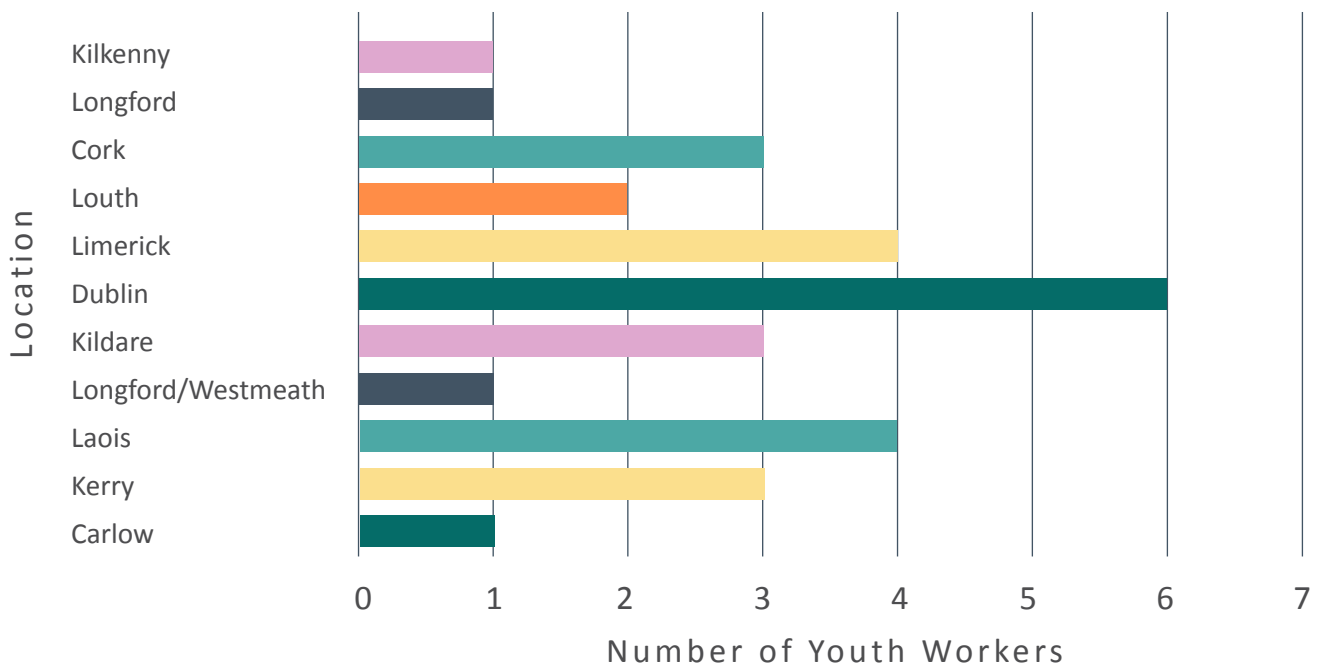


Figure 1: Youth Worker Location

Given the complexity of NEET young people's needs, the survey sought to capture respondents' qualifications and the length of time they had been employed as a youth worker. The survey data revealed that all respondents had a higher-level degree in youth work, or in fields such as social care; youth justice; or child, youth and family studies. 20% had a NFQ Level 7 degree, 44% had a NFQ Level 8 (honours) degree, while 36% had a NFQ Level 9 (Master's) degree. 28% of respondents were engaging in further study at higher education at the time of the survey. The length of time that respondents had been employed as a youth worker ranged from 3 to 22 years. On average, the participants had approximately 12.15 years of experience. This data indicates that overall respondents had a significant degree of experience in the field.

4.3 Case Study: Foróige Youth Skills Programme

While the survey provided a broad overview of youth worker perspectives, developing a case study of Foróige's YSP offered the opportunity for an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of youth work practice with NEET young people. In particular,

we wanted to understand how the organisation approached its work in this area, and what sorts of impact it had on the young people concerned.

The case study was created using the following methods:

- interviews with 10 young participants on the YSP
- an analysis of participants' identified needs and progression pathways
- an analysis of results from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) administered by Foróige staff with YSP participants (n= 19)
- an interview with the Foróige youth worker leading the programme along with fieldnotes from conversations with him

4.3.1 Interviews with YSP participants

The first method used to develop the case study was semi-structured interviews with 10 young participants on the YSP. Of these, 6 were males and 4 were females. They were aged between 16 and 24 (see Table 2). Five of the young people were from Kilkenny city while the remaining participants came from five different locations across the county.

Initially focus groups were planned, but we later discerned that one-to-one interviews better suited the young people’s needs and preferences. This was in keeping with the needs-led, individualised approach of the YSP itself. Six interviews were conducted in person, while four took place on zoom in line with the young person’s preference and availability. As previously mentioned, a special booklet was created for the young people and provided to them in advance of the interview. The interview questions sought to gather young people’s perspectives on such themes as the role of the youth worker on a skills programme, what they liked about the programme and what, if anything, they would change. They were also asked for their advice on how to promote the programme to other participants in the future.

Gender	Age
M	16
M	17
M	17
F	18
M	18
F	18
F	21
F	22
M	22
M	24

Table 2 Age and gender of interviewees

4.3.2 Participants’ identified needs and progression pathways

The second method that informed the case study was an analysis of secondary data relating to young people’s identified needs and progression pathways. Anonymous data from the YSP needs assessment phase and on participants’ success in engaging in work or education was shared by Foróige with the SETU research team. The sorts of needs addressed on the programme were also discussed during the interview with the YSP youth worker.

4.3.3 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

The third case study method was an analysis of the results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE) tools that are used with the young people on the YSP. These tools form part of a suite of instruments employed by Foróige to help assess needs, design appropriate responses, and help determine the impact of participation on aspects of participants’ behaviour and wellbeing.

The SDQ is designed to measure individuals’ perceptions of emotion, conduct problems, hyperactivity or inattention, peer relationships, and prosocial behaviour (Goodman, 1997; Goodman et al, 1998). It contains five questions for each of these emotional/behavioural categories. The RSE consists of a 10-item self-report screening measure of an individuals’ perceived level of self-esteem (Monteiro et al, 2022). Both the SDQ and the RSE were administered by the youth worker near the outset of the YSP and again at the end or after a major event in the young person’s life. The results of these measures for 19 young people were shared by Foróige with the research team.

4.3.4 Interview with youth worker and fieldnotes

The fourth source of case study data was drawn from an interview and conversations with the lead youth worker on the YSP. As the lynchpin of the programme, it was important to gain his perspectives on the approaches adopted on the YSP, the principles underpinning it and his perceptions of its effectiveness. The lead SETU researcher kept fieldnotes from some of the conversations she had with him throughout the period of data collection. These helped to inform the data presented in section 5.2.1 on the structure and process of the YSP. In addition, a semi-structured interview with the youth worker was undertaken at the end of the research process in November 2023 in order to dig a little deeper into themes that had emerged during the data analysis period.





Findings



5. Findings

In this section we present in turn the findings from the survey and the case study of the research. The key implications from both sets of findings are then discussed together in section 5.2.7.

5.1 Survey findings

As previously indicated, all survey respondents (n=30) had worked with NEET young people in some capacity. Respondents were asked to indicate what sorts of standardised programmes NEET young people had been involved in. By standardised programmes here, we are referring to programmes that are open to NEET young people but are not designed exclusively for them. A total of 19 programmes relating to young people's personal and social development were mentioned by participants. These included wellbeing programmes like 'Be Healthy Be Happy', sexual health programmes like 'Squashy Couch', online job-seeking training, as well as programmes in life skills, leadership and entrepreneurship.

When asked how helpful these programmes were for meeting the needs of NEET young people, 43% of participants (n=13) indicated that they found them helpful, while 26% of participants (n=8) noted that only certain aspects were beneficial, and two people reported finding them unhelpful. When probed further on setbacks encountered by NEET young people in engaging with the programmes, 48% of the youth workers cited personal difficulties including mental health issues, motivational difficulties, establishing rapport with the youth worker, and the commitment level of the young person. Another 35% cited challenges associated with the programme itself, including its duration, limited funding, insufficient youth worker training and resources, and difficulties associated with addressing individualised needs. Furthermore, 17% pointed to external factors as the cause, such as the impact of COVID-19, lack of internet connectivity, and inadequate support from parents or family members.

Significantly, 60% (n=18) of respondents indicated that they adapted these programmes to accommodate NEET young people's needs. A range of changes were made including:

- adjusting the time scale and age eligibility of the programme

- providing greater support for 'soft' skill development
- shifting from group-based approaches to one-to-one interventions
- spending more time completing tasks
- simplifying language and using more visual materials
- liaising with external programme facilitators so that they were made aware of the young people's specific issues

Another important finding was that half of the respondents (n=15) had developed programmes or activities that specifically catered for NEET young people. These interventions covered personal development, vocational training, and wellbeing. Examples include emotional regulation, anxiety management, communication skills, dyslexia support, numeracy development, barista training and driver theory preparation.

Finally, respondents were offered the opportunity to provide any further comments or suggestions regarding effective youth work with NEET young people. These responses illuminate extremely important issues and are worth setting out in detail:

- **Tailored, individualised, holistic support**

'There is no singular manualised programme for NEETs young people, in my opinion it is the responsibility of staff to work with the young person by meeting them where they are at in life, to create a plan and bespoke programme that reflects their individual needs and provide a scope of support that extends into non educational, training related needs.'

'It is very difficult to engage this group of young people in our projects - the numbers are present in our communities and yet they do not engage. It is important that agencies/organisations working with these young people work together to provide a wrap-around service to ensure they are fully aware of the opportunities available to them.'

- **Age eligibility and the needs of under 16s**

‘There are very little NEETs opportunities for young people under 16, and it can take a long time to access them, e.g. iScoil or home tuition. This needs to be looked at further to prevent [young people] from falling behind at such an early stage.’

‘This service works with young people who have missed a lot of primary school and this has also occurred in 1st and 2nd year thus showing low levels of educational achievement and attachment and there are no alternative educational placements for young people in the 12-15 age bracket in this area. The young people do not meet the criteria for homeschooling and are too young for Youthreach.’

- **Programme duration and resourcing**

‘I would suggest that in order to ensure the most support ... and best possible outcomes that the time period for funding should be realistic and long-term, short-term interventions with young people provide limited opportunities to levy change. Additional funding and capacity for staff would address issues such as waiting lists which were an issue at a number of points.’

For a visual overview of the survey findings, please see appendix C.

5.2 Case study findings

5.2.1 Overview of the YSP programme

The YSP is designed to offer a structured process through which young people build both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills. The programme is administered from the Foróige Drum Youth Centre in Kilkenny, but is delivered in a variety of spaces throughout the county to ensure that it is accessible to participants. The YSP is led by one youth worker, but part of the aim of the programme is to build young people’s confidence to take part in activities delivered by other Foróige youth workers, if they are of interest to them. The programme is co-located with other Foróige projects to enable easy access to additional support, a smooth referral process, information sharing and the identification of progression pathways.

The YSP consists of six broad phases that are outlined in Figure 2 and explained in more detail on page 26 -27. Although this outline is presented in ‘phases’, it is important to note that it is not an entirely linear process and flexibility is a core feature of the programme.

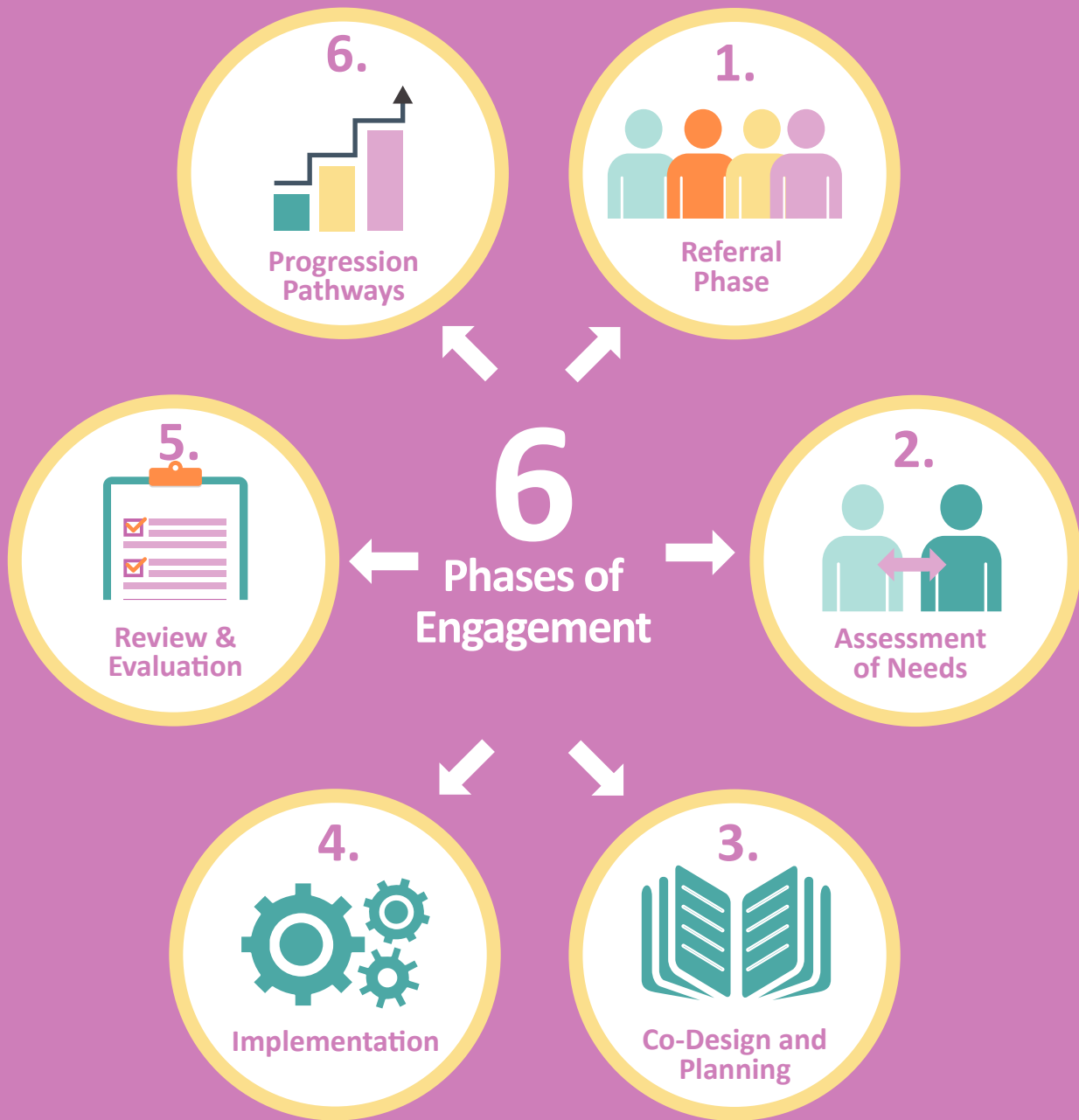


Figure 2: Overview of YSP process

1 Referral

Young people who have difficulty in engaging with work or education access the YSP in a number of ways. These include self- or parental referral or referral from any agency with which they may have contact. Agencies that referred young people to the YSP over 2022-2023 included other youth services, Youthreach, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), adult mental health services, as well as Tusla's Education Support Service, Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support Service and Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare team.

2 Needs assessment

During this phase, the YSP youth worker begins the process of building an open, trusting relationship with the young person. Having secured the young person's consent to participate, assessment tools are used to help evaluate the needs and strengths of the young person in question. Ideally, these tools are administered within the first three weeks, but only at a time when the young person is ready and willing to engage with them. Transparency with the young person is prioritised so that they know what to expect throughout the programme. Interactions progress at the pace comfortable for the young person.

3 Co-design and planning

Based upon the needs and strengths identified during phase one, and on other personal goals which the young person may have, the youth worker and young person co-create an individualised development plan. This may begin with 'micro' goals such as becoming comfortable in a group setting, before moving to 'bigger' or more ambitious goals that enhance confidence and capacity to access work or education. Goals and strategies identified in phase three are regularly reviewed during the implementation stage and may change as the young person grows and their capacities evolve.

4 Implementation

The focus in this phase is on implementing the activities and strategies required to build the young person's skills. Examples here include one-to-one interventions to develop 'soft' skills like emotional regulation, self-esteem, or personal motivation. When the young person is ready, it also extends to 'hard' skill development like music tuition, IT skills, leadership skills, interview preparation or gym and fitness work. A mixture of one-to-one and group-based activities are used.

5 Review

This phase assesses how well the agreed plan has supported the young person to make progress, and how well the young person has been engaging towards identified goals.

6 Progression Pathways

The final phase centres around guiding the young person towards identifying progression pathways, supporting them to enter employment or further education or training and preparing them to disengage from the programme.

5.2.2 Profile of YSP Participants

Between April 2022 and April 2023, 27 young people were referred to the YSP. Of these 19 engaged with the programme. Following a needs assessment, three of these young people were directed to other services as the level of need they presented with exceeded the organisation's capacity to work safely with them. As of April 2023, there were 14 young people on the programme. Seven of these were between 15 and 17 years old, the remaining seven were over 18. The programme has no specific 'start' or 'end' date in the sense that young people can join and leave at different times. Some young people may transition to work or education after a few months, but over the lifetime of the YSP to date, most young people have needed more than 12 months intensive support in order to progress to further training, education or employment. Notably, six young people from the cohort of participants that first engaged with the YSP when it was funded under TYESI (2022) were still involved in the programme when it was funded via the FET Solas Innovation Fund via KCETB (July - December 2023).

The psychosocial challenges facing participants on the YSP are significant. Data gathered by Foróige and shared with the SETU research team provides a telling overview of these difficulties. According to the YSP youth worker, some of these difficulties were exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic. These challenges included:

- mental illness and difficulties in accessing mental health supports
- an extended period of disengagement from education or employment
- homelessness
- social isolation
- lack of motivation
- poor knowledge of support services
- difficulties accessing support services due to living in a remote location
- difficulties with emotional regulation
- poor literacy skills
- substance misuse
- lack of social networks and supports
- child protection and welfare concerns

5.2.3 Young people's perspectives on the YSP

Interviews with young people yielded rich insights into their experiences of the YSP and their perceptions of its impact on their personal and social development. A hugely important theme to emerge related to their views on what qualities and skills they valued in a youth worker. Unsurprisingly, responses emphasised qualities and skills associated with building strong, safe, empathetic and non-judgemental relationships. One young person also emphasised the importance of a youth worker being aware of neuro-diversity. The value placed on the relational skills of the youth worker is typified by the following response:

I feel like they're kind of just a friend. Like to me, I just like, I know if I'm sad or if I'm in a bad mood, I can just talk to [the youth worker]. Like I know he's always there just to talk to.

A fellow participant felt that 'everyone in here listens ... like if a young person is struggling with attitude, like everyone's there to listen and you don't feel judged', while another young person noted that:

Having someone to understand you and like if you're having a hard day and you feel you have no one to talk to, you actually do. And that they're always near and that they're always just a text away or you can call in ... and there's always young people you can make friends with.

But in addition, participants appreciated the youth worker's intellectual and organisational abilities and his capacity to guide them in the right direction. One stated that he liked a youth worker who could 'help me get through things, you know, to get me a job.' Two others stated:

They should be easy to talk to, and always know what to say. There's lots of planning [needed] on what they have to do, how to get it done with the young people. They need good communication skills, have good knowledge of the areas in which they work, and the ability to be a good researcher.

Like they'd have to be understanding of a lot of things. Like they'd have to be like also kind of like a good thinker because I think like a lot of the youth are very confused. So you'd kind of have to like be a very good thinker to be able to like, you know in a way kind of counter that.

The young people also commented on the programme's role in helping to build their confidence, including confidence to participate in a group setting. When asked about their fondest memories of the programme, participants also emphasised the knowledge and opportunity it gave them to identify and meet their goals, understand what pathways were available to them, and the direct assistance they received in securing employment. One young person had the following reflection:

I needed actually a plan and I found that school didn't give me a plan. It just told me what to do and told me that I needed to do it, but I didn't know the end goal, or what [I] was actually doing or what I was doing it for. ... [T]he first time it was just me and him [the youth worker] and we sat down and we talked about what I wanted to do.

He continued:

And again after that, it gave me a lot of faith within [the youth worker] because everything happened. Everything's still happening, but it's happened from what I originally wanted to do from that first meeting. Him doing what he says he is going to do, but definitely drawing up like a life plan and then doing that plan.

The findings also illustrate how young people's interests formed the basis of activities, and that the relationship with, and support of, the youth worker was so central to their engagement and sense of personal development:

So one of my guitar lessons, this just involves me and the guitar teacher. So for the first time, we were doing rhythm practice, right? ... It wasn't like anything, you know, extreme, [it] wasn't like on the drums. It was just like a fun, 'boom-boom' kind of thing. I was doing the same on the guitar just like 'dun-dun', and it was just that experience of getting to play with someone, I never got to do it. It's just a connection through like the music and how it worked ... I genuinely just came out of it and ... I guess it was like, 'wow, is that what it is [to] feel like to be satisfied with and like really happy about what you've just done?'

The same young person noted that it was the youth worker who helped them to stay motivated:

You know, I feel genuinely supported ... Just with the guitar every week ... I feel genuinely motivated and pushed to do it because I feel every week, every week [the youth worker] asks 'how is the guitar going?' Every week is the same. It's hard, but you know you got to keep doing it. But it's the fact that he asks, that's why I feel like the support's there. It's extremely helpful to someone like me just hearing that. I don't feel like I exist or feel like someone cares about me. Yeah ... So it's nice.

Another participant noted that because the activities were linked to her interests and helped her to concentrate:

I love every single Tuesday. I love when we have our lash course. It's, it's like my favourite, like I book off my calendar for it, like it's my favourite day of the week because I just love sitting down. It's like ... just so relaxing, like, it's so therapeutic, just sitting there doing it while I, like, I can't concentrate on things, but while I'm there, I will sit there, and I'll finish all the lashes. Like, I, I never do that, like ever. And I love it. Um, other than the ... headsets, the VR. I think that's really cool. Like I really enjoyed that (young person).

Another important theme was the programme duration and age eligibility. For instance, one person noted that they would like more time on the programme:

I think more time would be helpful. Like the time you have is grand, but it's like you only have a certain amount of time to like, say, achieve, you know, several things. And then once the time runs out you're thinking, 'oh God, like now what do I do?' Do you know what I mean? Like ... I wish I had more time to, you know, achieve the stuff that I wanted to do rather than, you know, try and rush things. I think you get more stressed when there's a time limit. Then I think you'd feel more comfortable and more able to breathe if you were told, 'oh, you know, take ... not as long as you want, but ... there's no like rush on things. And there's no stress. So you can, you know, breathe, but you know, you can do this programme at the same time.

In a related point, another participant said:

It'd be great if more people like me could have access to this kind of thing ... Time wise, I'm, I'm very slow with these kind of processes and you know, you're only consider[ed] for the programme until you're 25, you know, I'd do this for the rest of my life if I could ... It's just so good having the support. But yeah, I say it just depends on the person. I don't think they should ever like be a definitive time thing at all.

When asked about possible barriers to their or other young people's participation, respondents named transportation as a key challenge (though notably Foróige provide support to young people in this regard):

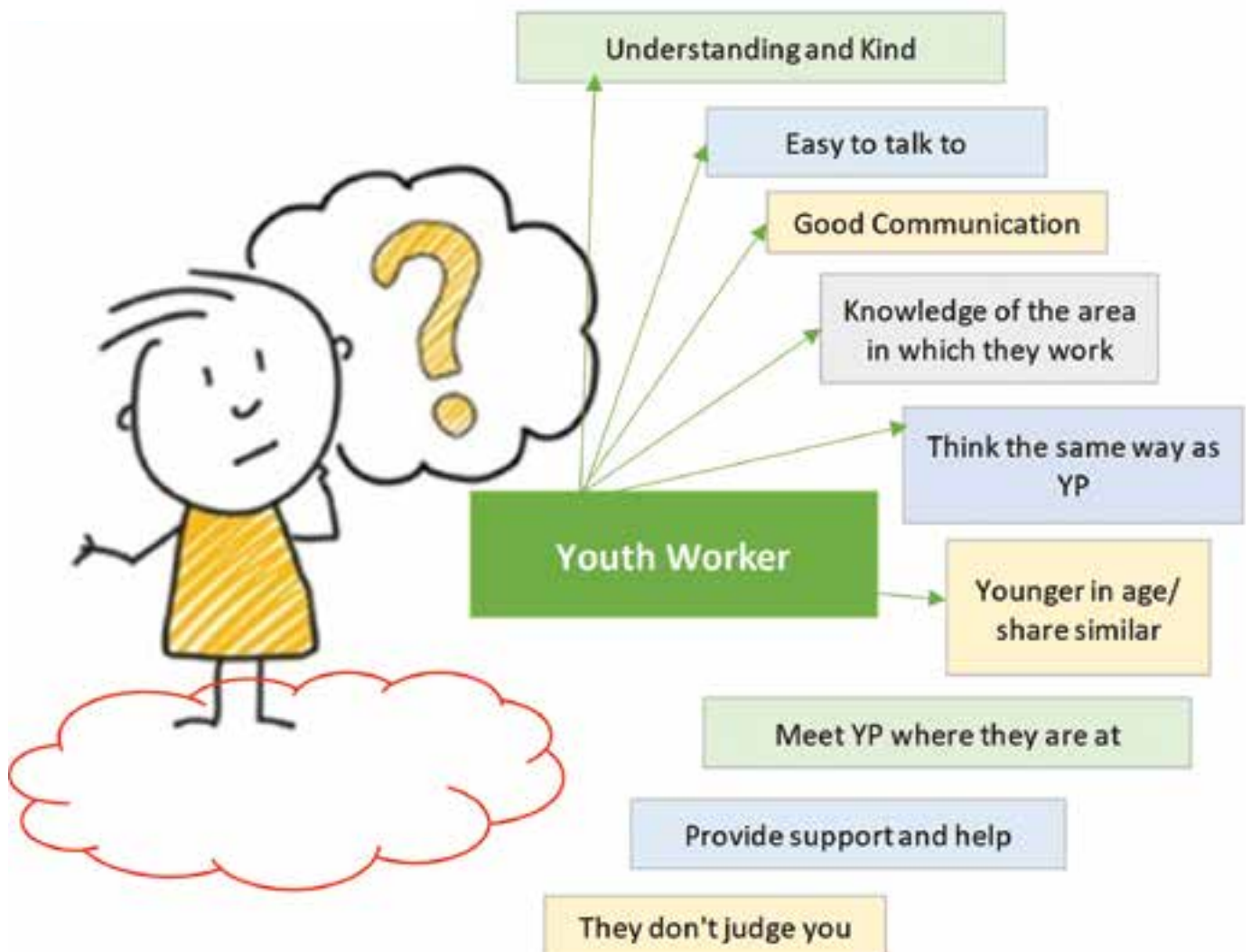
I do think maybe like transport could be hard for some people. Where I'm from, transport here is kind of hard. I have to get a lift because the public transport is just not the greatest and it can be a little bit inconsistent ... Like sometimes the buses just don't arrive on time and stuff and you could be late, then it has to be cut a bit short.

Timeliness was also raised as a factor influencing engagement. One participant stated that promptness in the programme’s activities instils confidence in their youth worker. However, they also demonstrated understanding when disruptions occur due to the youth worker’s commitments.

Young people’s responses also underline the daily challenges that they face and how this can impact on their participation. One noted that ‘[s]ome days I just have a hard day’, while another stated ‘I suffer with anxiety and could get worried in group settings’.

The quicker things happen; I think the more faith the person has in their youth worker. If something’s delayed till Friday or when it was meant to be on Wednesday. That’s just how it is. I’m not the only person that [the youth worker] tries to help.

Figure 3: Young people’s perspectives on youth worker qualities



While respondents were all positive about the YSP programme, some believed that externally, people may have negative or inaccurate perceptions of youth work settings. One person highlighted the perception that ‘the building is only for children and that adults don’t go in there’. However, another found that any misunderstanding they had about a programme like YSP was quickly cleared up through the relationship created with the youth worker:

I think it’s about impression. I think people have the wrong impression on what a youth worker actually is. I had the wrong impression on what a youth worker was. I think [the youth worker] has to think the way I think to understand where I’m coming from ... especially for me, when I came in, I didn’t know what I was coming into, but I guess it ... was very clear what the story was after just the first meeting with [the youth worker] what the plan was about.

Moreover, the potential impact of participation on the perceptions and awareness of people outside the programme was noted, with one participant expressing that their ‘friend thinks it sounds amazing that there are other options’.

One concerning theme to emerge was the stigma some participants feared arising from their association with a programme for NEET young people. One noted that:

If I’m in this programme, then everybody knows that I don’t study, I don’t work, and I do nothing. So it’s ... helpful, but at the same time, others know that you do nothing, and you have problems or something.

Similarly, another participant feared that:

Someone might think you, like, oh, you’re, you’re not in school or whatever, and they might think like, you’re lazy or you’re only half ass and stuff.

Finally, when asked for advice on how to encourage other people to take part in the programme in the future, participants gave a range of suggestions that emphasised personalised approaches. For example, one person stated:

Most people they think, ‘oh, I don’t want to do that ...’. And I’m like, ‘you’re going to want to do it in two years’ time’. I definitely feel like I’m progressing a lot faster. So I think it’d be a lot easier for me to advertise it [than someone else] ... [and] like say [to them], ‘oh, there’s this thing you’d like ... cause you’re like me’ ... So we’d have shared similar experiences.

Further suggestions, that also speak to what sorts of things the young people valued about the programme, are summarised below.

Table 3: Young people’s suggestions for promoting the programme

Be open and honest, share personal experiences, ‘how it happened for me’. Avoid posters and buzzwords.
Stress the importance of in-person communication, as it’s more impactful.
Highlight that the programme is free and accelerates personal progress.
Show how the programme reopens the window to education and other opportunities.
Recommend trying the programme to explore one’s interests.
Emphasise showing the programme’s value rather than just talking about it.
Share how the programme aided personal development and recommend it for anyone struggling.
Convey that the programme is enjoyable, well-structured, and has supportive people.
Highlight the availability of counselling and courses for free.
Express that the programme offers courses, supportive people, and is great fun.
Emphasise the programme’s role in job readiness and self-discovery.

5.2.4 Young people's progression pathways

The young people on the YSP have had demonstrable success in transitioning to employment, education or training. As of September 2023, 12 young people from the YSP had progressed. Progression routes included Youthreach, KCETB further education programmes at NFQ Level 5 in such areas as music and film making, the National Learning Network, as well as employment in retail and services industries.

5.2.5 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale Results

The results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) with 19 young people on the YSP indicate significant differences across four of the five subscales. A paired-samples t-test showed that the level of perceived emotional symptoms experienced by the NEET young people decreased from pre-programme (M = 5.55, SD = 2.72) to post-programme (M = 4.77, SD = 2.55; $t(17) = 1.77$, $p = .047$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

A paired-samples t-test showed that the level of perceived conduct problems experienced by participants decreased from pre-programme (M = 2.57, SD = 1.12) to post-programme (M = 1.94, SD = 1.02; $t(18) = 2.88$, $p = .005$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

A paired-samples t-test showed that the level of perceived hyperactivity or inattention among participants decreased from pre-programme (M = 5.63, SD = 2.45) to post-programme (M = 5.0, SD = 2.05; $t(18) = 1.79$, $p = .045$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

A paired-samples t-test showed that the level of perceived peer relationship problems experienced by the NEET young people decreased from pre-programme (M = 4.61, SD = 2.11) to post-programme (M = 3.27, SD = 1.74; $t(17) = 3.01$, $p = .004$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

A paired-samples t-test showed that the level of prosocial behaviour experienced by the participants increased from pre-programme (M = 7.0, SD = 2.22) to post-programme (M = 7.77, SD = 3.29; $t(17) = -1.279$, $p = .109$). While there is a difference in scores, there is no statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

With respect to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), a paired-samples t-test showed that the level of perceived self-esteem experienced by the NEET young people increased from pre-programme (M = 23.21, SD = 4.39) to post-programme (M = 25.63, SD = 5.3; $t(18) = -2.97$, $p = .004$). This indicates a statistically significant difference between time one and time two.

According to the results, there were significant reductions in the perceptions of four categories of the SDQ - (1) emotional symptoms, (2) perceived conduct problems, (3) perceived hyperactivity or inattention, and (4) peer relationship problems - across the sample of NEET young people. This finding suggests that involvement in the YSP may have contributed in some way to the NEET young people experiencing lowered negative issues. This finding also corresponds well to the increased level of perceived self-esteem of this group of NEET young people, as measured by the RSE. It is likely that participation in a programme marked by intensive personal and professional reflective work completed alongside a youth worker contributed to the self-esteem of the NEETs young people and, in turn, supported a greater self-awareness of their own mental health and provided them with adaptive coping strategies that further reduced the scores on the SDQ.

Although there was no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour category (5) of the SDQ, it is important to consider that the data collection period occurred around the time of the Covid 19 pandemic, during which time participants may have been restricting their social interactions. It is also important to note that, although the SDQ and RSE are psychometrically validated screening tools, they are not diagnostic tools. Such tools can support discussion and reflection within a psycho-educational sphere like youth work, but scores are just as likely to increase or decrease depending on everyday influences that the young person may experience, such as being late for a session, worrying about peers or family, or not getting enough sleep. Moreover, young people involved in the data collection were participating in other support services in addition to attending the YSP which makes it more difficult to attribute any improvements outlined to the Foróige intervention alone. Finally, it should also be noted that the sample size was small.

5.2.6 Perspectives of the YSP youth worker

The perspectives of the YSP youth worker reinforce some of the data presented to-date and yield several important insights on what makes for effective youth work with NEET young people. During the interview, the youth worker stressed that supporting young people with complex needs of the sort outlined in section 5.2.2 above requires 'long-term, consistent and continuous' engagement. He stressed that at all times, the pace of progress is determined by the needs and readiness of the young person. In this regard, he characterised his role as follows:

I have the space whereby I can give young people that time ... I'm not running to close [a case] ... I can give them that space, just because of the nature of my job. I can afford to have a couple of sessions where we might do nothing but have chocolates and a chat ... That might be a chat with a purpose. But it's my job to create the purpose of the conversation.

He argued that intensive support was especially important during the post-Covid period:

So once the world reopened, and people started linking in with myself ... it was a case of meeting [the situation] where it was at ... I was ... bringing young people to appointments, arranging appointments for them, supporting parents in getting young people to appointments, supporting parents with their own self-care to look after their young people. [They] might [for example] have come to the country from Eastern Europe early in Covid.

He noted that on their own, each of these actions may not have made a difference but cumulatively and when layered with other supports and activities, they contributed to the changes he witnessed among young people on the programme, and to their progression to work or education.

This interviewee's responses also illustrated that the practice of building positive relations and providing emotional support infuses every stage of the YSP process. In the initial stages, a great deal of effort is devoted to the young person 'get[ting] a sense of who I am' and allowing them to 'air any worries or concerns' so as to get as comfortable as possible with the process. This relational orientation also informs the use of the organisation's measurement tools. The youth worker noted that they help to 'inform and open the discussion' during the needs assessment phase and offer a way for the youth worker to encourage the young person by illuminating the progress they may have made.

Finally, his comments highlighted the flexibility of the spaces and methods used, a flexibility which may not be available to other professionals with whom the young people engage:

It's a different environment. We are playing pool. In a coffee shop. We're going for a spin... We're doing VR [virtual reality].

5.3 Discussion of survey and case study findings

The findings from our survey suggest that the general social and personal development programmes offered by youth services can be of help to some NEET young people. However, it is notable that adaptations were made, and in many cases, additional or alternative supports were necessary. This finding is significant because it highlights the case for individualised approaches to youth work with this cohort. It is also notable that youth workers spoke of unmet needs of young people in their communities, which speaks to the need for more outreach, tailored services and adequate resourcing. Difficulties noted in supporting young people under 16 who have disengaged from education seems like a very significant gap in provision.

The case study findings support many of the perspectives shared by survey respondents and paint a very positive picture of effective youth work with NEET young people. A number of elements with respect to the YSP are worth emphasising. First, the young people on the programme experience very significant psychosocial difficulties, and the importance of an unhurried, relationally skilled and emotionally supportive approach to addressing their needs cannot be overstated. Such an approach provides the bedrock for young people's successful transition, but also for helping them to secure greater wellbeing overall. Second,

while the programme is structured - a structure that is transparent and valued by participants - it is also flexible and built around individual needs. The fact that young people only transition when they are ready, often after 12-18 months of intensive support, is hugely significant. It implies that highly prescribed, short-term programmes are likely to fail. Third, youth workers need to 'go the extra mile' in terms of circumventing transport barriers, engaging with families, or following up with young people on days they do not feel motivated to participate.

A fourth implication of the case study is that youth organisations may need to play a role in challenging stigma around NEET young people. This stigma could also be internalised, which links back to the importance of empathy, and measures for promoting self-esteem. A fifth important point illustrated by the case study is that Foróige staff must interact with other agencies on a regular basis. This is true at the referral and 'progression pathway' phases but it is also required if young people need additional support along the way in such areas as mental health, disability or addiction. This suggests that collaborative, interdisciplinary working is an important feature of effective youth work with NEET young people. Finally, young people recommended promotion and recruitment approaches that are personalised and that emphasise a programme's value in widening educational and work opportunities as well as its role in wellbeing and personal development.

For a visual overview of the data collected, please see appendix E.



Conclusions and recommendations



6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 A Framework for youth work practice with NEET young people

Developing a replicable model of good practice with NEET young people is arguably impossible. This is because young people can disengage from education or employment for many reasons, because they vary in their cultural, geographical, educational and familial backgrounds, and because they differ so much in their interests and aspirations. Success in working with NEET young people is also heavily reliant upon the particular skills and qualities of the youth worker(s) in question, on the resources available to them, and on the policy and institutional ecosystem in which the youth organisation operates.

Nevertheless, our research indicates that it is certainly feasible to develop a broad framework of good practice for helping NEET young people, one that is informed by principles of youth work pedagogy and by insights from across the disciplines of education, psychology, social policy, sociology, and labour market studies. The process adopted by the Youth Skills Programme offers a valuable template here. The programme's individualised, needs-led approach was among the measures advocated by our survey participants and is comprehensively supported by international literature (e.g. Miller et al, 2015; Beck, 2015; Liszka and Walawender, 2021). In addition, YSP's emphasis on small, cumulative, achievable goals and on a combination of 'soft' and 'hard' skills was endorsed by participants and is also supported in the literature (Almeida and Simões, 2020).

It is also very important that youth work practice with NEET young people embrace principles of transparency, ownership, respect and non-compulsion as these were valued by participants across a host of studies (Miller et al, 2015; Beck, 2015) and were seen as key to the YSP's success. Given the diverse needs of these young people, cooperation with other agencies throughout the process is also a key part of any successful intervention (Liszka and Walawender, 2021)

The research emphatically shows that there is no 'quick fix' to NEET young people's difficulties, and programmes must work at the pace of young people (Williamson, 2010; Sirovatk and Spies, 2017; Liszka

and Walawender, 2021). While some young people re-engage relatively quickly (e.g. in a period of 2-3 months), intensive support over long periods may be required before the individual feels equipped to move on. Indeed, ending support prematurely could actually be harmful, undermining young people's confidence in services and in themselves (Williamson, 2011).

Related to the previous point, any framework for NEET young people is built upon the quality of the relationship with the youth worker (Beck, 2015; Miller et al, 2015; Liszka and Walawender, 2021). This is complex, subtle and skilled work. Williamson (2011: 200) has likened the youth worker role with vulnerable young people to that of "advanced skill practitioners": like advanced car drivers, through experience and training, they are swifter and smarter about knowing when to apply the brake (backing off a bit) and knowing when to press on the accelerator (cajoling and encouraging).⁷ This underscores the need for ongoing investment in the education, training and mentoring of youth workers, and for positive working conditions so that workers on such programmes can sustain this delicate work.

One final point to make with respect to a flexible framework for NEET-focused youth work is the question of age. Although the TYESI scheme is focused on young people between 16 and 24, there is some evidence from our survey participants that youth workers and professionals in other sectors must also attune to the needs of NEET young people who are younger than this but who are falling through gaps in service provision. One YSP participant also felt that people older than 24 should be eligible to participate.

6.2 Capability or Employability?

Our research lends support to those who contend that 'employability' is too narrow a frame to capture what NEET young people need or are capable of, or to capture the impact of what good youth work services actually do. Instead, scholars have argued that we should widen the policy and practice lens from employability to capability (Ziegler et al, 2015; Sirovátka and Spies, 2018), understood here in the specific sense of substantive freedoms that

are necessary for people to live a dignified and flourishing life (Nussbaum, 2011).⁵ The Capability Approach (CA) recognises that the capability to work or learn is heavily intertwined with other capabilities like being able to connect with others, being able to develop emotionally, having access to a secure home or being able to acquire dignified work. It also implies that each of these capabilities have an intrinsic value that is separate to their role in employability.

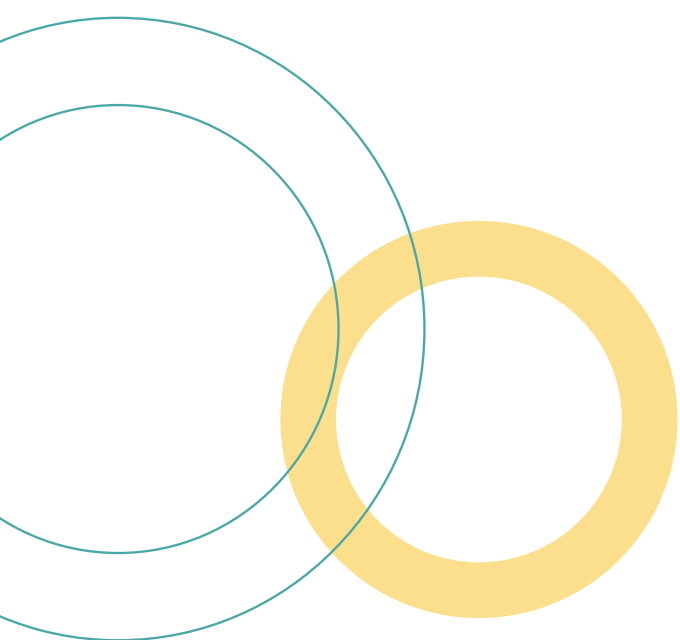
The findings presented in this report indicate that, if adequately resourced, youth work could contribute to capability development, evident, for example, in how the YSP helped young people to build self-esteem, reflect on their goals, make friends, or re-engage with education. However, a CA framing also points to the limits of what youth work can achieve because fully realising capabilities also means addressing systemic inequalities (Nussbaum, 2011) over which youth workers have limited influence.

6.3 The Question of Measurement

Our research has shown that staff on the YSP have made effective use of psychometric tools as a way to help screen young people, open discussion and encourage participants. Data from these tools has also provided some indication of how well

young people are progressing with respect to certain emotional and behavioural indicators. We have already discussed how the interpretation of results derived from these tools require some care, especially in contexts with small sample sizes and a fluid population.

More generally it is worth noting that the use of outcome-focused measurement tools within youth work and related fields has generated considerable debate. Advocates of measurement in youth work argue that it represents one way of demonstrating the impact that youth work can have (Ryan Culleton and Robbins, 2022). Critics of such approaches argue that they undermine the open-ended, co-created developmental process regarded as core to youth work and, in so doing, delimit youth work's pedagogical and democratic promise. Concerns have also been raised about the additional bureaucracy associated with measurement tools and the manner in which this can detract from, rather than support, the youth work process (Williamson, 2011; de St Croix, 2018; Kiely and Meade, 2018). These concerns did not emerge in our empirical findings but any future iterations of funding programmes for NEET young people may wish to bear such risks in mind, and continue to support youth workers in capturing the impact of their work in a variety of appropriate ways (de St Croix and Doherty, 2022).



⁵ The Capability Approach is most closely associated with philosophers Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. It has been very influential across a range of academic domains especially in social policy analysis and development studies. For an overview, see Robeyns (2017).

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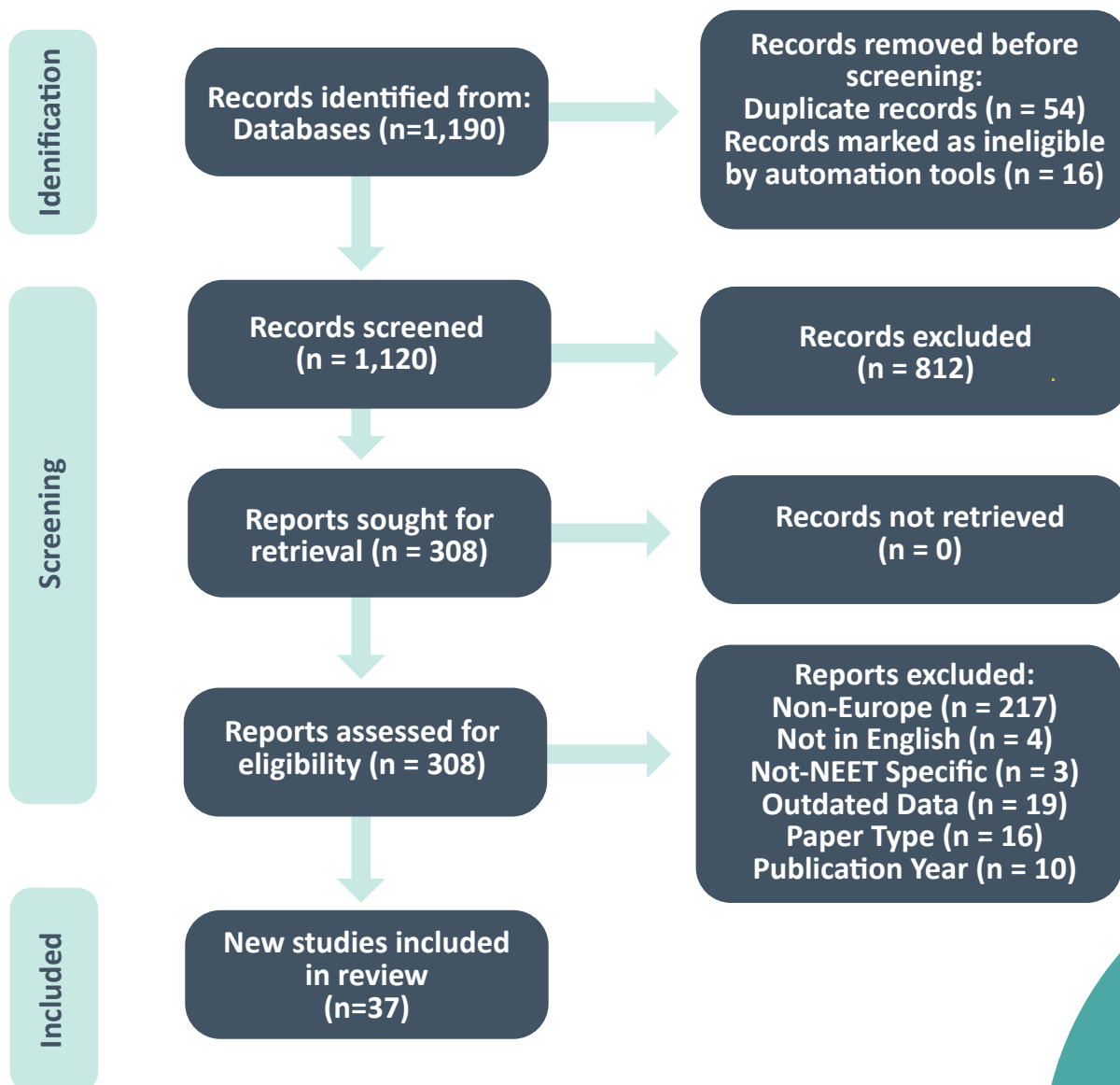
Appendix



Appendix A: Systematic Review Process and Prisma Chart

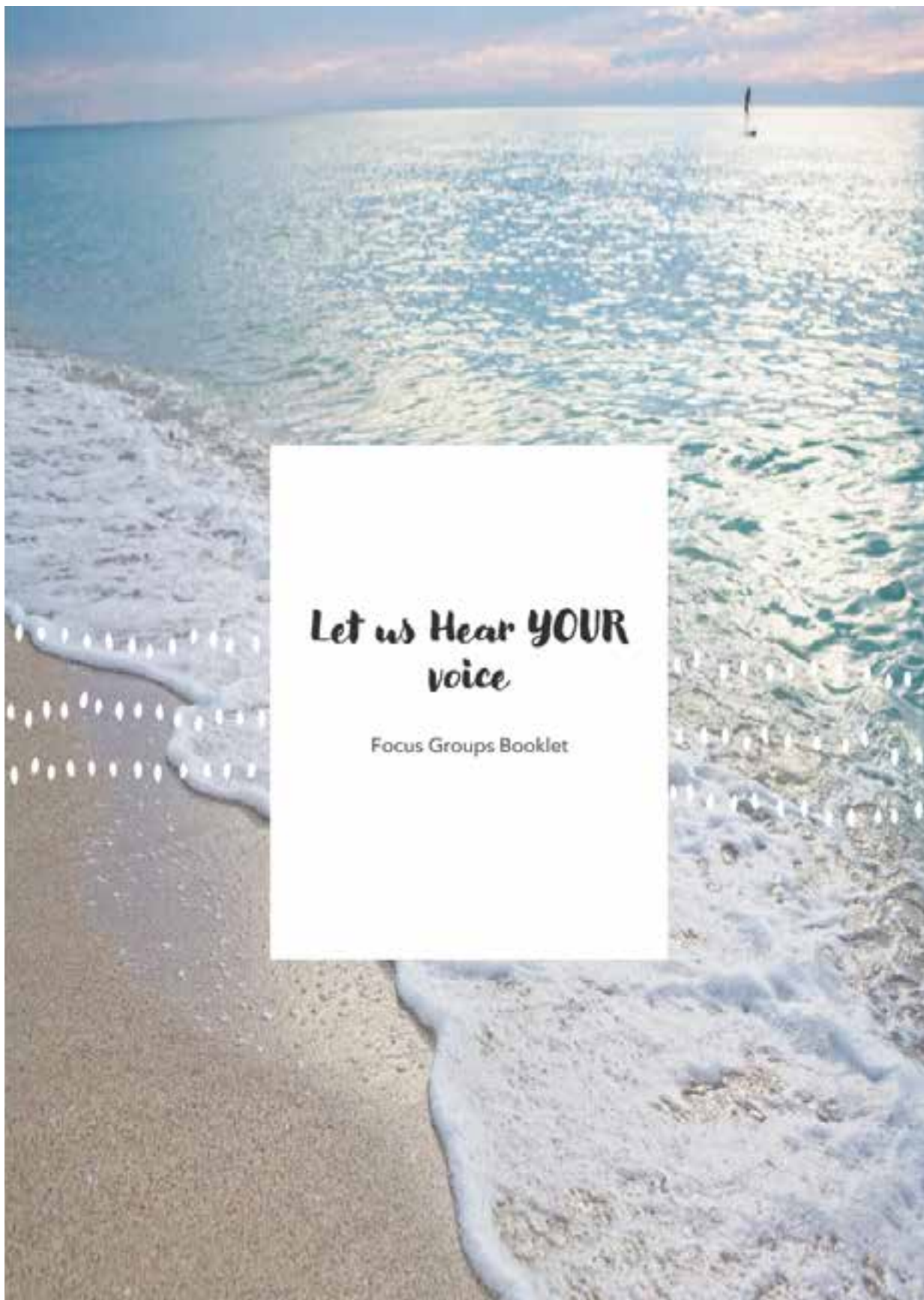
The purpose of the systematic review was to explore published works centred around NEET young people in Europe. Using broad search criteria, three electronic databases were searched (PsyInfo, Science Direct and Web of Science) using a search strategy that included key terms relating to “NEETs” OR “Employment” AND “Education” AND “Training”, with additional filters being peer-reviewed articles between 2013 and 2023. Exclusion criteria largely removed papers outside of the geographical area of Europe, papers not in English, or studies using a dataset outside a 2-year cut-off point to allow for papers published within the 10-year inclusion, to report their findings. As seen in the PRISMA chart below 1,190 articles were initially found, with a final number of 54 being included for full review. Based on the included studies (n=54), two distinct article types were identified and categorised: (i) papers adopting participant recruitment (n=12) and (ii) papers using secondary data analysis (n=42). Upon full review, however, a number of studies were excluded as the type of paper publication was more of a literature review without empirical data, leaving a total of 37 papers.

Identification of new studies via databases and registers



Appendix B: YSP Participant Information Booklet

'Let Us Hear Your Voice' Information Booklet for Young People



Hello and Welcome

Hi Everyone, and welcome to our session.

Thank you very much for taking the time to join me to talk about YOUR experiences during your Youth Skills journey.

My name is Chloe, and my purpose here today is to capture all your thoughts, ideas, and advice on how Youth Workers can better interact and engage with Young People.

I am doing a research project called “Developing Good Practice for Working with Young People” to create a toolkit for the Youth Worker to better engage with Young people who are not in work or education. I want to know what you like, what you don’t like about employment and educational programmes, and how might you change them to make it better for you, and other young people.



Things to Remember

1. There are no wrong answers; everyone has their own opinions and points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what other people have said.
2. Keep in mind we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments; negative comments can even be the most helpful.
3. You've probably noticed the microphone. I am recording this session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and unfortunately, I can't write fast enough to get them all down.
4. We will be using our first names to talk to each other today, but we won't use any of your names in my reports. Everything you say will be kept confidential and I ask you not to share what we talk about outside of this session.
5. The information collected today will go towards a report on how to develop better practices when working alongside Young People.
6. You can leave at any time if you no longer want to take part in this focus group.

Does everything make sense so far?

Does anyone have any questions?



Focus Group Participation Consent Form

My name is Chloe and I am running a focus group as part of my research project and I would like to invite you to participate. If you decide to participate.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to attend a group discussion, to talk about your experience in the Youth Skills Programme, and as a young person who is not in work or education at this current time.

Study location and timing

The discussions will take place at Foróige, Kilkenny and should last approximately 3 to 4 hours, with a 30-minute break in between.

Possible Challenges and Discomforts

Some questions may be harder to answer than others and so the questions will be asked at your pace.

Additional Information

You are free to leave the study at any time without providing an explanation. Participation is private; no link will be made between participants' identities and the data collected. The session will be recorded. Study information will be kept in a safe location.

I agree to take part in the Focus Group:

Name: _____

Date: _____



Activities

Let's make sure your voice is heard!!

AGENDA

Activity 1- Role of the Youth Worker

Activity 2- Decision Making

Activity 3- You're in Charge

Activity 4- Challenges YOU may face

Activity 5- Are these Programmes Helpful?

Activity 6- Disappointments

Activity 7- Invite a Friend

Activity 8- How to Reach Others

Activity 9- Changes in YOU

Activity 10- How can WE do Better?

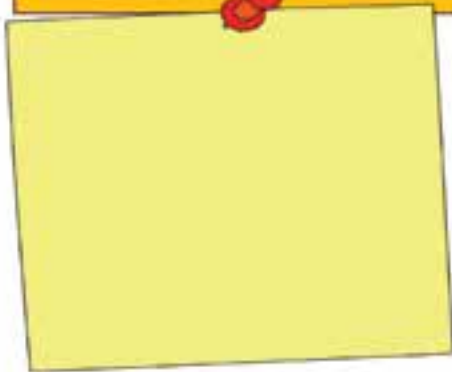
Activity 11- Best Memories

Activity 12- Most Important to YOU



How did YOU hear about this YOUTH Skills Programme?

Did you know the leading Youth Worker before you started this Programme?

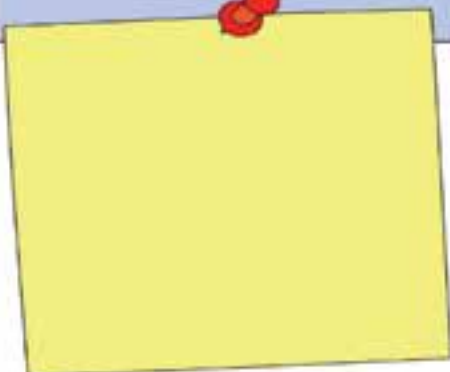


A yellow sticky note with a red pushpin at the top center, intended for handwritten responses to the question above.

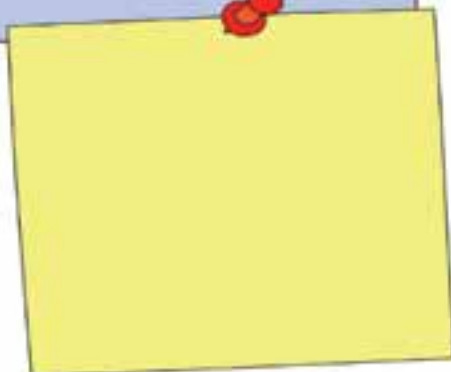


A yellow sticky note with a red pushpin at the top center, intended for handwritten responses to the question above.

Had you heard about Foróige before you started this programme?



A yellow sticky note with a red pushpin at the top center, intended for handwritten responses to the question above.



A yellow sticky note with a red pushpin at the top center, intended for handwritten responses to the question above.

Youth Worker in this Youth Skills Programme?

Name:

Age:

What does this Youth Worker **THINK** about?

What type of **SKILLS** does this Youth Work have? (Good listening skills...)

What does this Youth Worker **DO**?



What does the Youth Worker **ENJOY** doing (interests)?

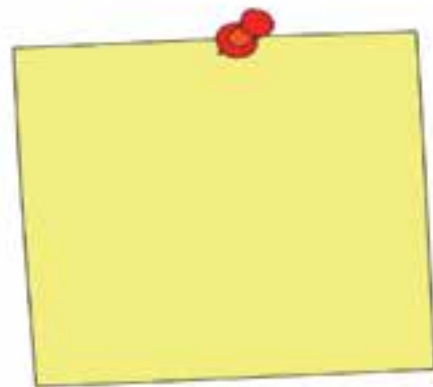
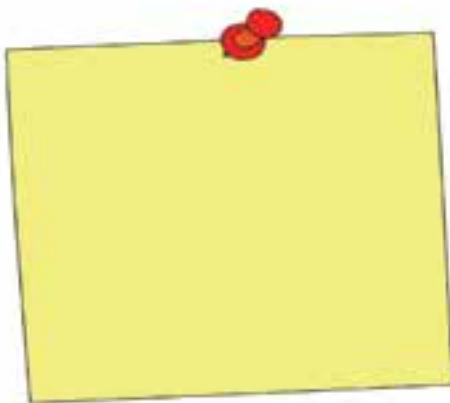
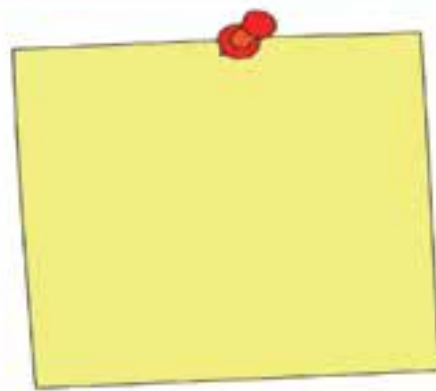
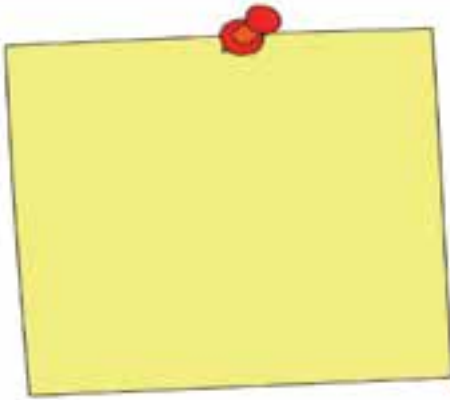
How does this Youth Worker **FEEL**?

What does the Youth Worker find **DIFFICULT**? (challenges)

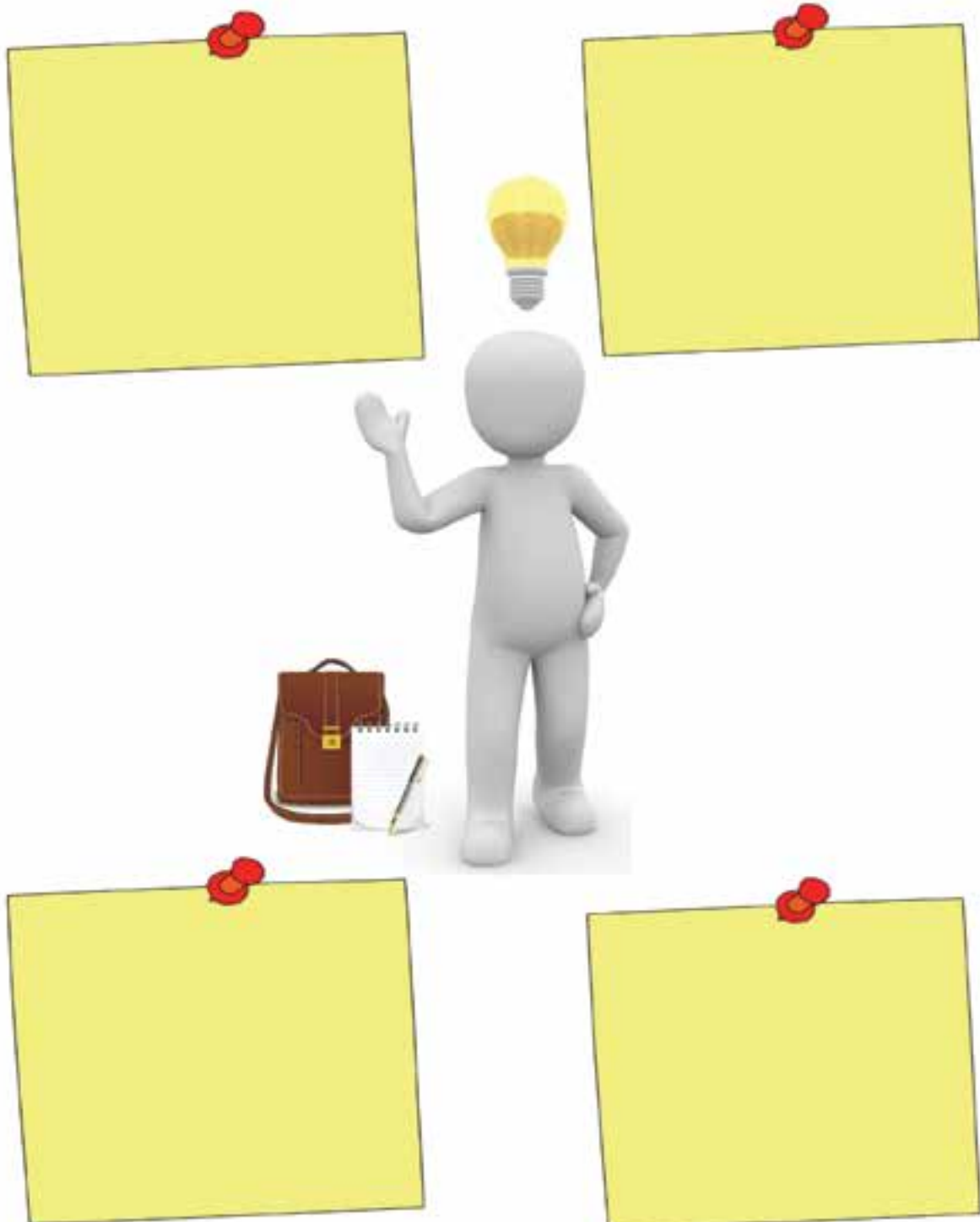
Do you feel that you have a say in the Decision-Making in this Programme?

YES

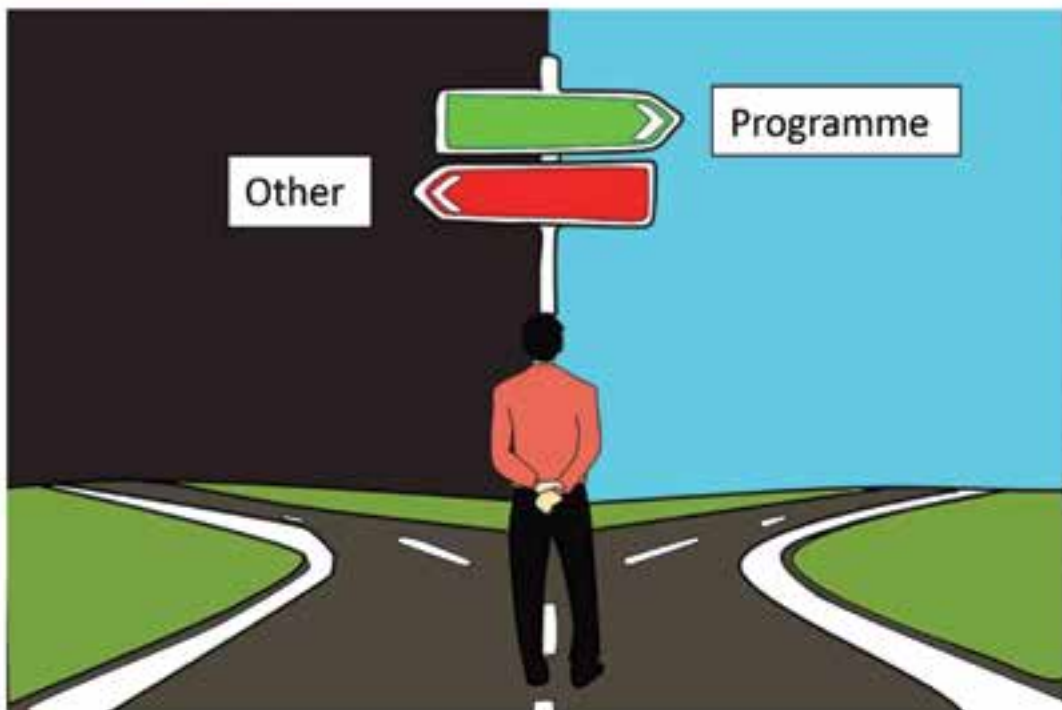
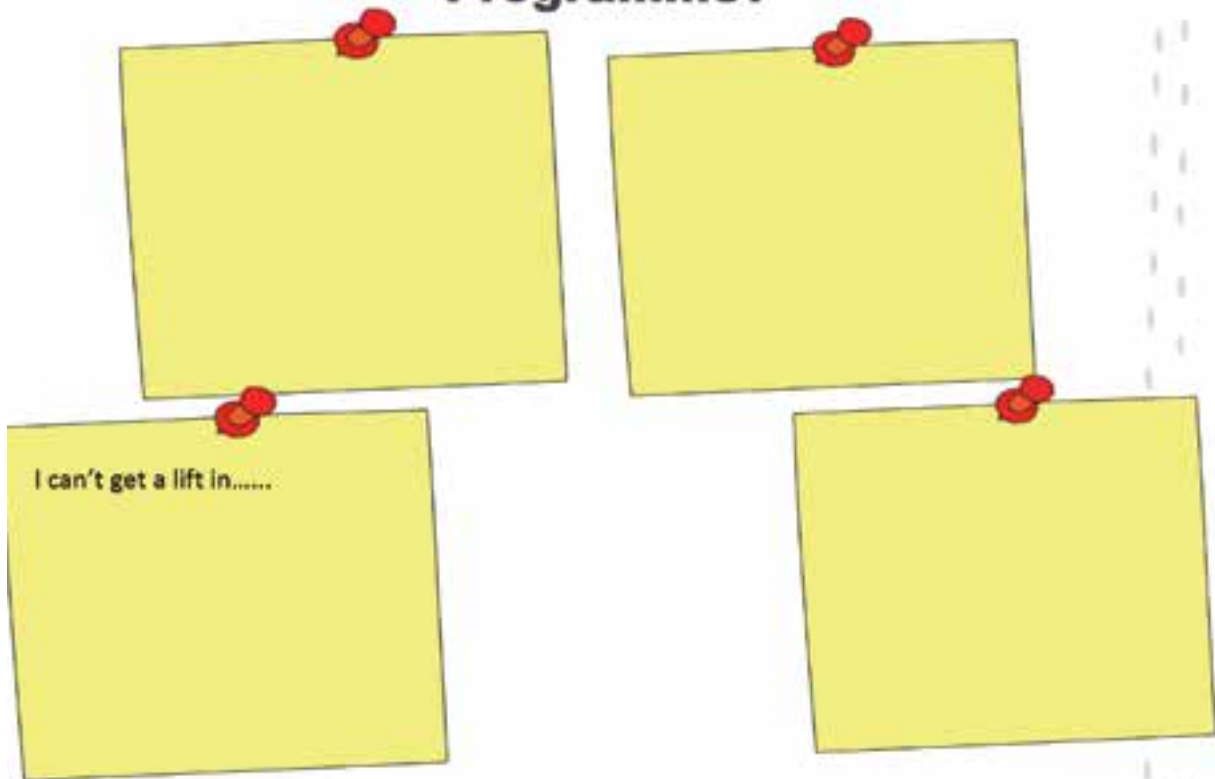
NO



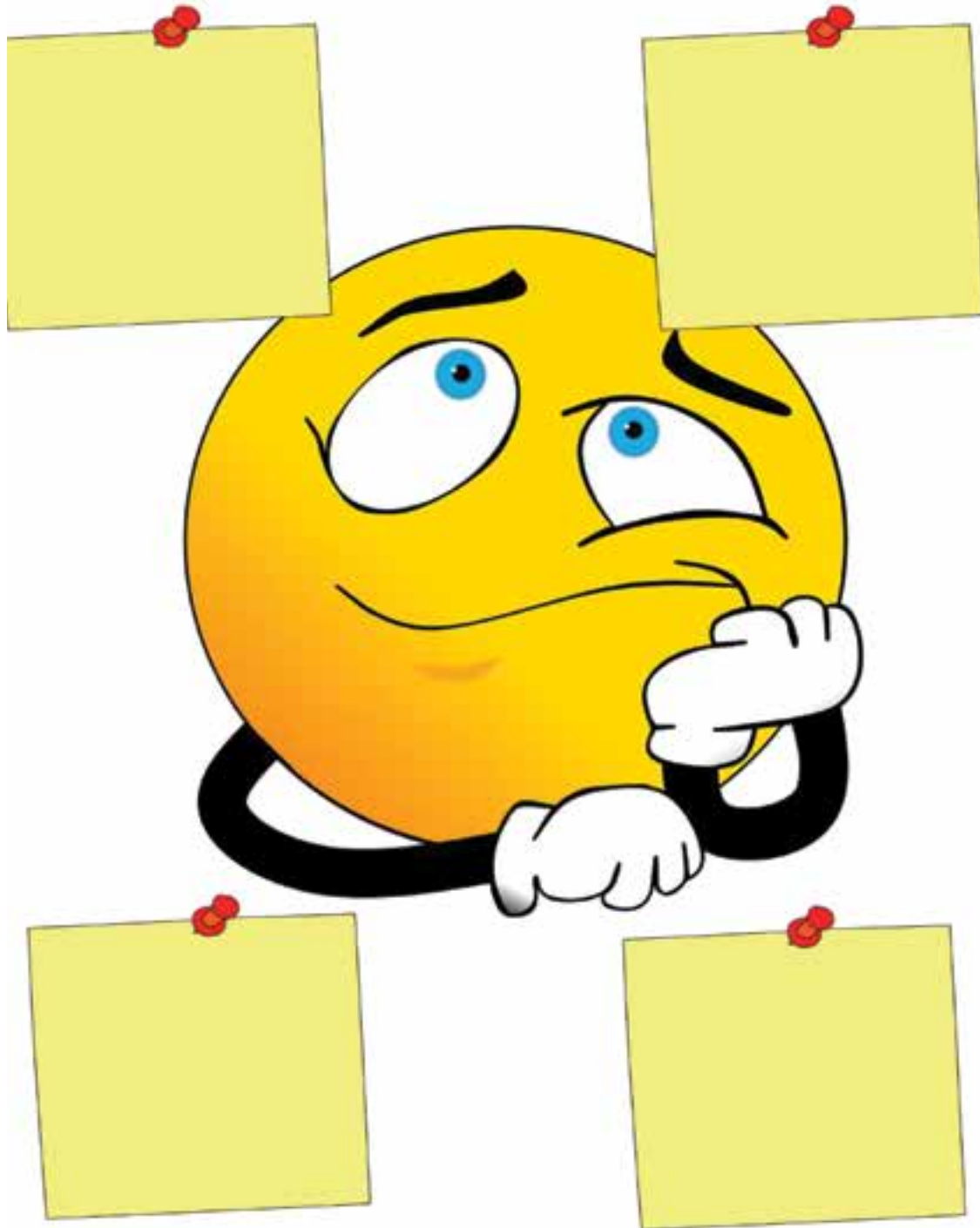
Imagine that you were in charge and could make ONE change that would make the programme better. What would you do?



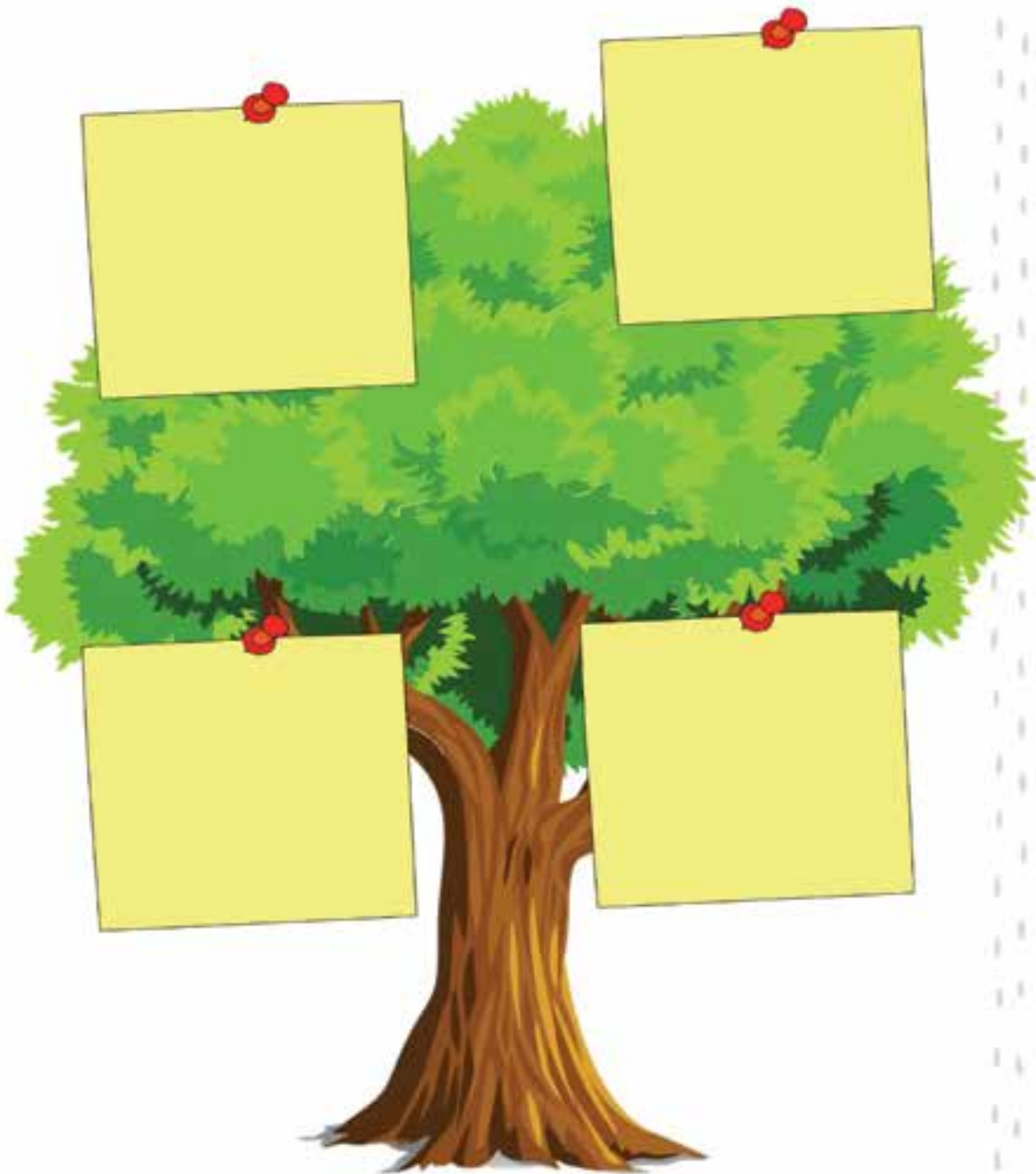
What might be some of the reasons you can't show up to the Programme?



What would you say is most HELPFUL about Programmes like The Youth Skills Programme?



**Tell me About some of the
DISSAPPOINTMENTS you have had
with this Programme?**



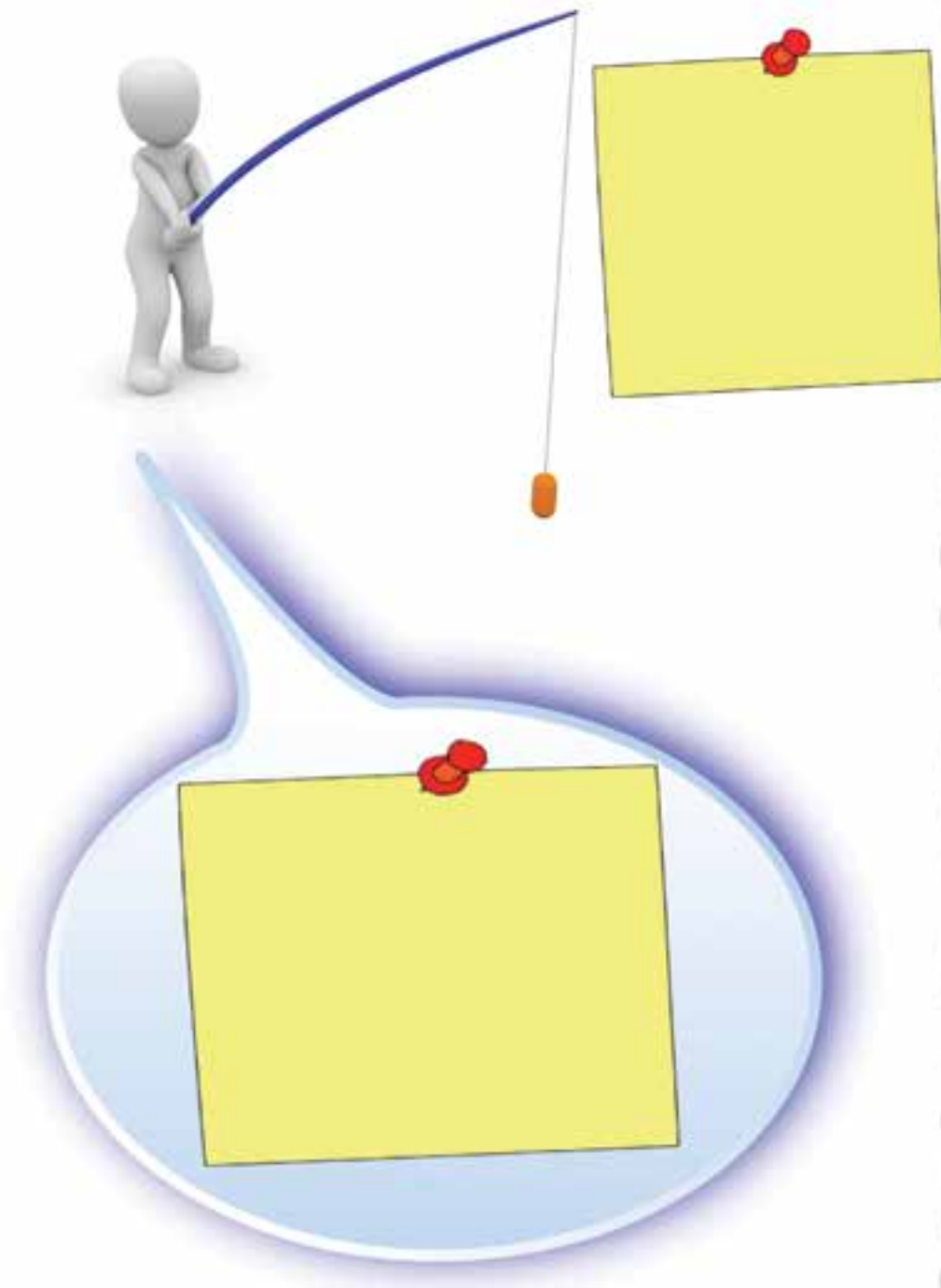
If you were inviting a friend to participate in this Programme, what would you say to them?



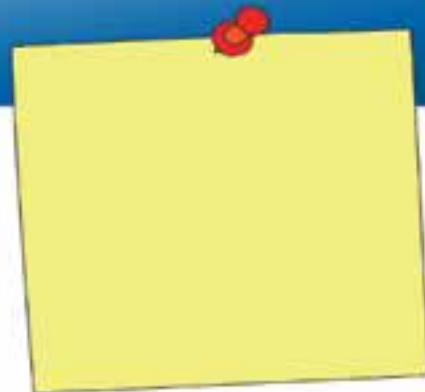
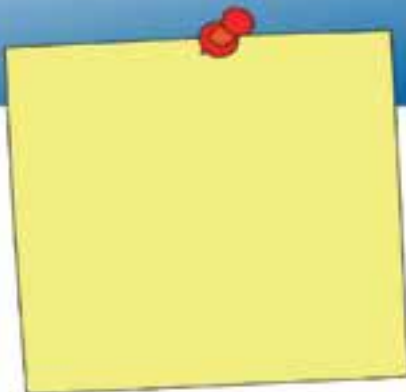
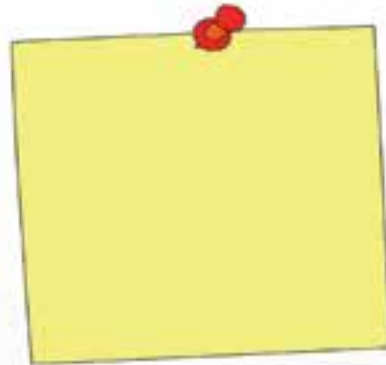
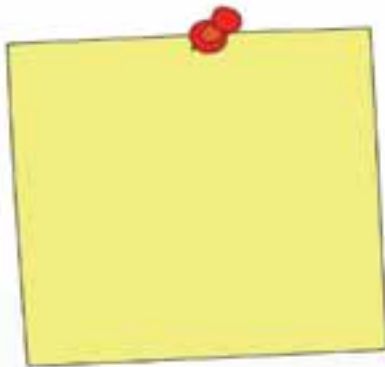
Youth Skills



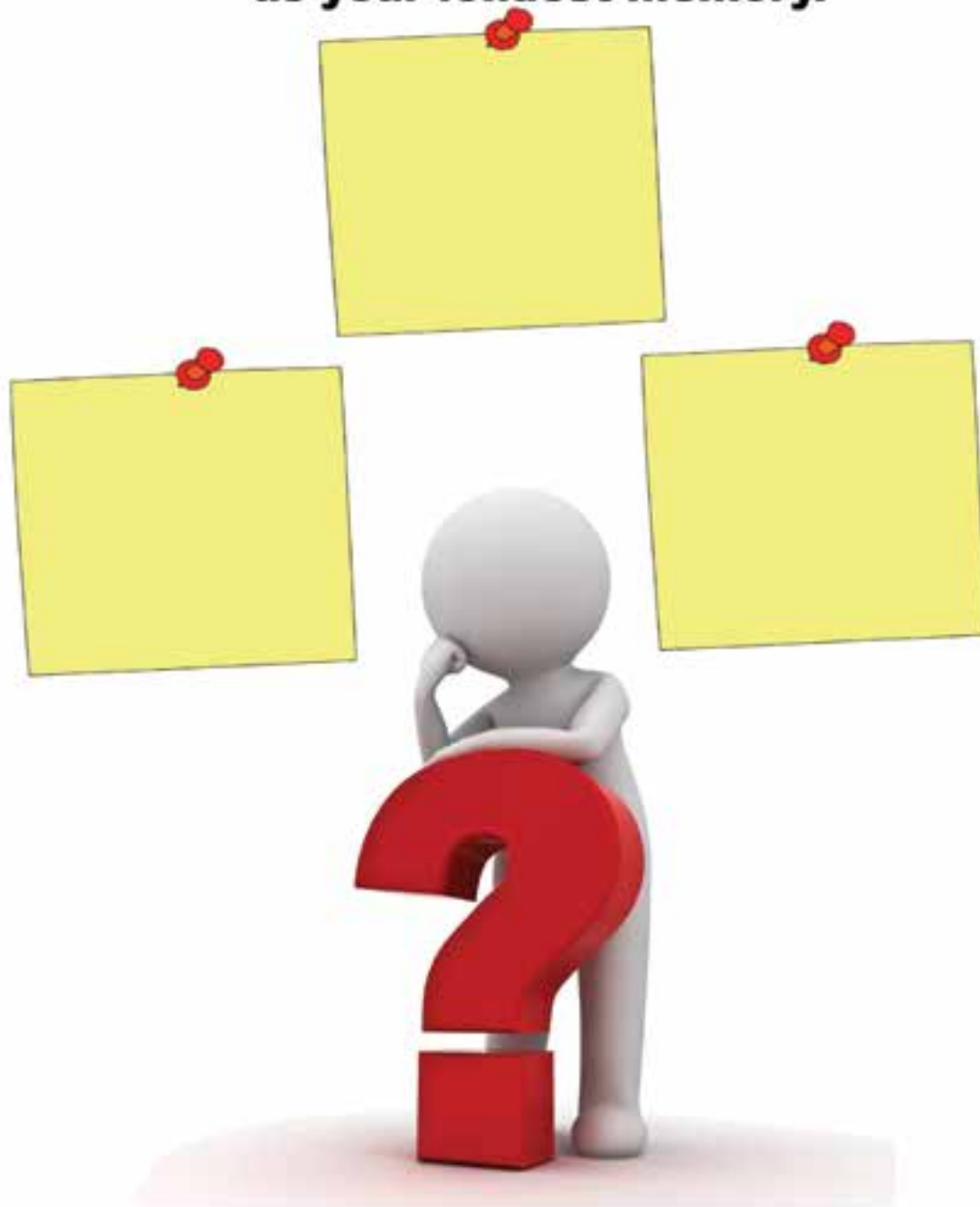
What do young people who are not in the programme think of it? How could we reach these YP to give them support also?



Do you see any changes in yourself as a result of being involved in Programmes XYZ

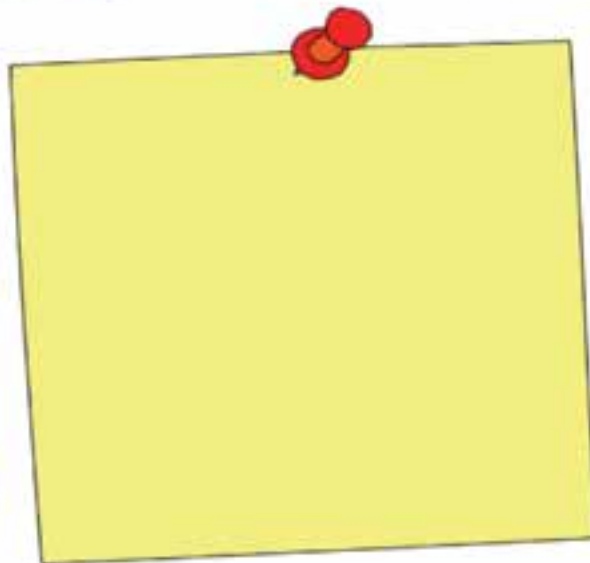
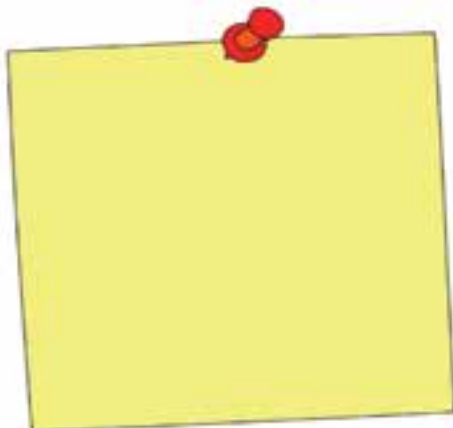
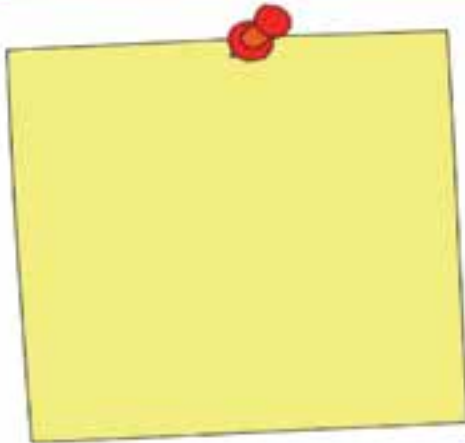
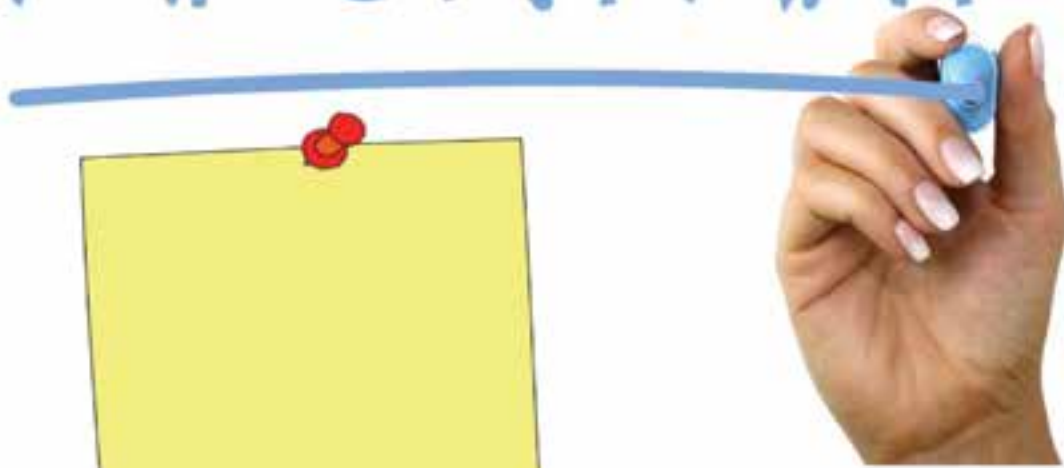


Think back over the times that you've participated in this programme and tell us your fondest memory.



**Of all the things we've talked about,
what is most important to you?**

IMPORTANT



Appendix C: Survey Findings Overview

Experiences of NEETs Practice: A Survey of Practitioners in Ireland

Q1 Current County of Work

- Kerry - 2
- Laois - 4
- Kildare- 4
- Dublin- 6
- Limerick- 2
- Louth- 2
- Cork - 2
- Longford- 2
- Carlow- 1



Q4 What is your highest qualification to date?

YW Highest Qualification



Q2 Have you always worked in this County?

YW always worked in this county



Q5 Currently studying in higher education outside of work



Q3 Other Counties:

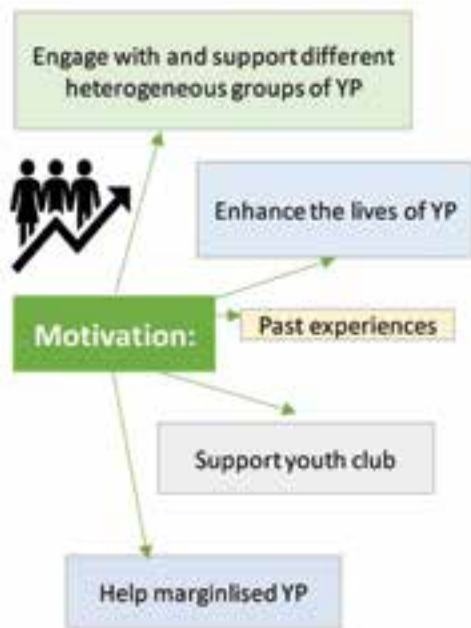
- Listowel
- Tralee
- Castleisland
- Killarney
- Kilkenny
- Edinburgh
- Tipperary
- Offaly
- Portlaoise
- Portarlington
- Mountmellick

- Newbridge
- Lexlip
- Tallagt
- Dublin Laois
- Wicklow
- Laois
- Cork
- Wexford
- Balbriggan

Q6 & Q7 Average Experience



Q8 What attracted you to this role?



Q9 Programmes & Activities to Support NEET YP

Understanding Offending Behaviour
 Creative Activities Confidence building activities
 Driver Theory Group Work Manual Handling Healthstart
 Decision Making Emotional Regulation Sailing
 Mock interviews Drugs and Alcohol information manualized programmes
 Knowing your Emotions Barista Career Guidance Skill Interview Skills
 First aid Work Experiences Anger management Collaboration projects
 Awareness Online Programmes Competencies QQI Level 4
 Barbering Personal Skills Numeracy Evidence based programmes
 Communication Programmes CV Skills Apprenticeship Preparation
 Stress Management Junior Leadership Dyslexia Workshops Youth Cafe Kayaking
 Social Skills Social Outings Weekly Group Meetings
 1:1 Supports QQI Level 5 Responsible Online Workshops
 Managing Anxiety Workshops

Q10 & Q11 Programmes & Activities to Support NEET YP

Decider Programme
Broadening Horizons
 Copping on Programme Be Healthy Be Happy
 Next step school transition Online Safety Programme
Putting the Pieces Together TYESI REAL U
 Early school leavers programme Life of Choices
 Skills 2 Succeed Squashy Couch Skills Summary
 Young Entrepreneur Programme Leadership for Life
 Wellbeing Programme Work to Learn **CHART**
Brief Interventions Programme
 Youth Engineering Solution

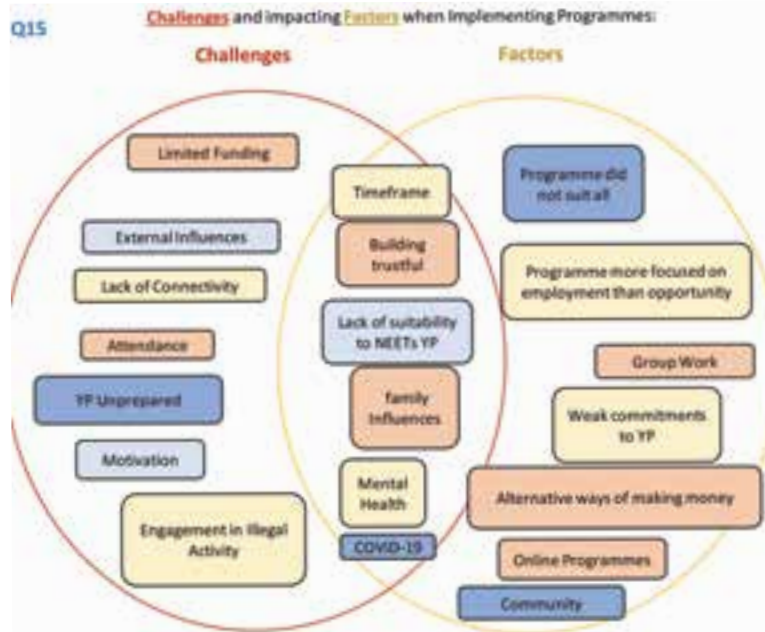
Q12 Success of Programmes



Q13 & 14 Reason for Failure

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) YP not prepared 2) External Challenges & Influences 3) Affects of COVID-19 4) Opening a bank account 5) Timeframe is too short 6) Lack of Connectivity 7) Hard to reach YP 8) Building trusting Relationships 9) Limited Funding 10) Programme failed to address Individual Needs- Needed to be Adjusted 11) Group Activities/ Work 12) Commitment of YP 13) Literacy Issues 14) Seeking Employers 15) Motivation Levels | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16) Support from Family/ Parents 17) Avoiding formal Engagement 18) Influence of Drugs 19) Mental Health Influences 20) Lack of confidence 21) Poor Concentration 22) Levels of Stress & Anxiety 23) Inability to Control Emotions 24) Community influence/ Conflicts 25) Influence of Easy Money 26) Need for Additional Supports 27) Digital Engagement 28) Lack of Youth Work Training & Resources 29) Formulaic Programmes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Experiences of NEETs Practice: A Survey of Practitioners in Ireland



17 Adaptions Made to Programmes

- Increase Timeline
- PCP implemented at the beginning of Programme
- Adapted to better suit individual YP
- Oral Exams instead of written
- 1:1 Support

- Using interacting & creative approaches
- Eliminating worksheets
- Changing time of certain sessions
- Switching group sessions for individual interventions

- Less structure
- More breaks
- Preparation with trainers to understand target group
- Pre-agreement with YP that community conflicts remain outside
- Use of more Images

- Expand Age Range
- Access more funding
- Better suited used of language for age
- Make things more basic
- Meet YP in their community
- Make things more basic
- Pre-programme assessment tool

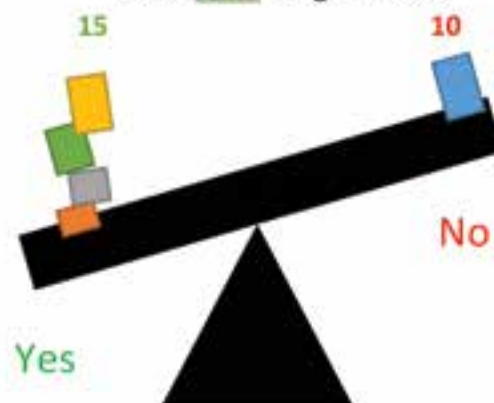
Q16

Were programs **adapted** to suit required **needs** of NEETS YP?

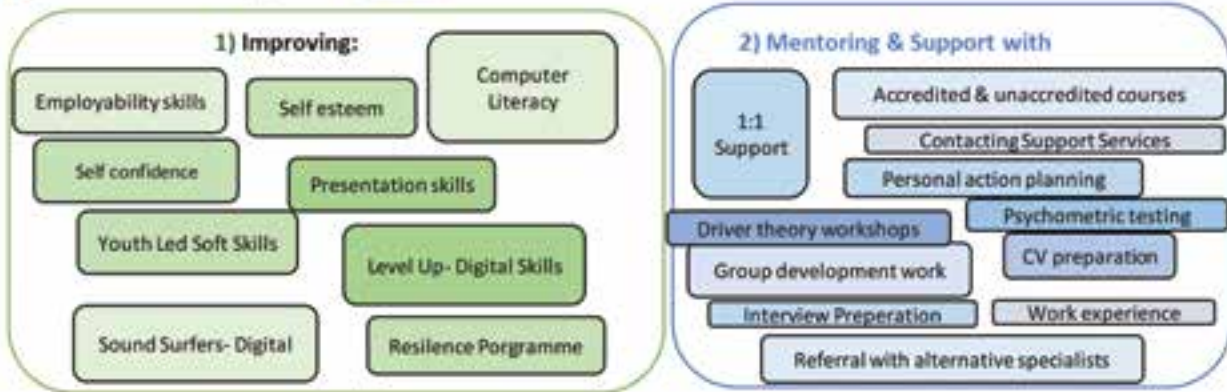


Q18

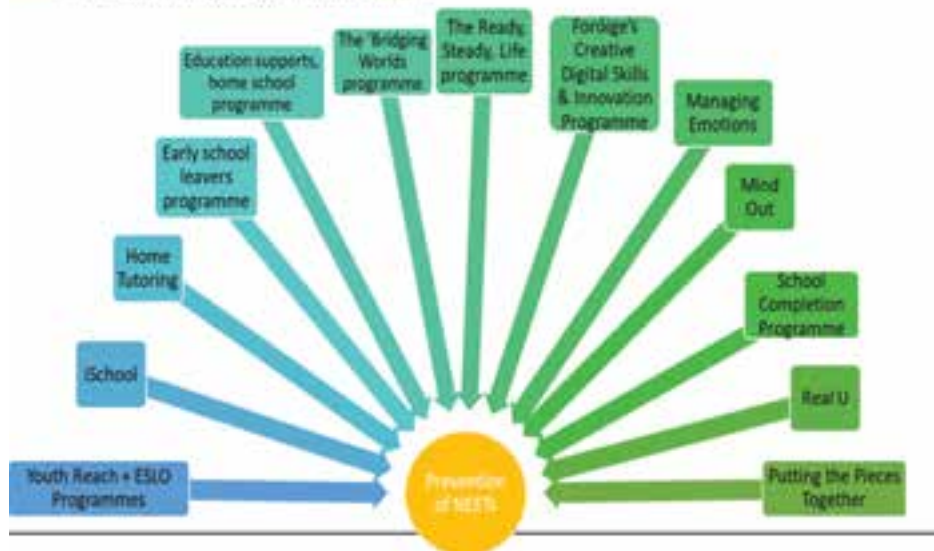
Are Settings Developing Their **Own** Programmes



Q19 These Programmes **Include:**



Q21 Name of Prevention Programmes for **NEET** YP



Q20

Are you aware of any **Prevention Programmes** to support NEET YP at risk?



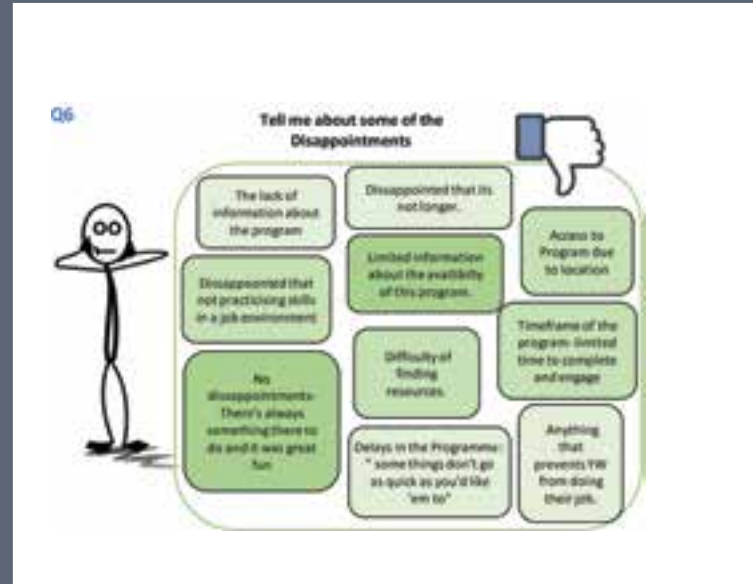
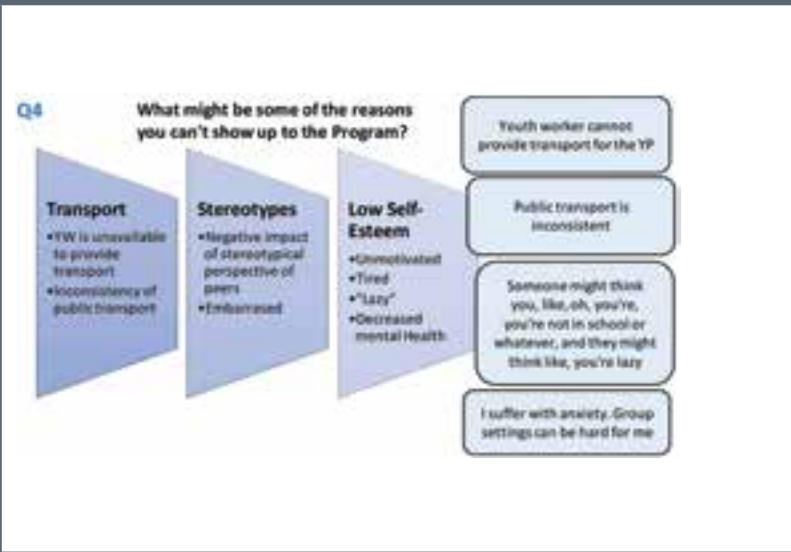
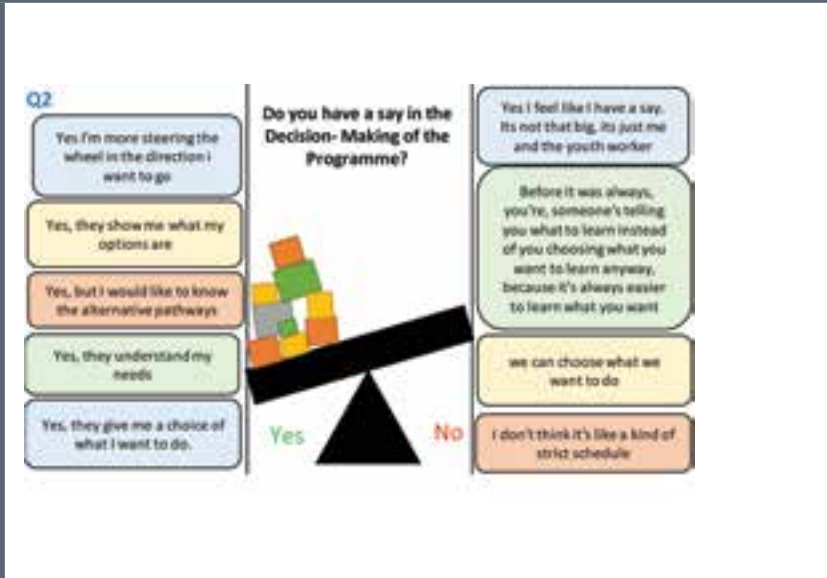
Q22

Follow-Up Opportunities Post Programme

It appears to be very much the **Responsibility of the YW and the YP** to continue to check-in after the programme has concluded. This is implemented through Phone Calls and Drop-Ins to the Centre, 4 weeks & 6 months post-programme.

Appendix D: Overview of young people's views

Let Us Hear Your Voice: Connecting with NEETs YP in Ireland



Q7 Invitation to a friend- What to say/ do/ show?

Q9 Do you see any changes in yourself as a result of being involved in this programme?

Q10 Think back over the times that you've participated in this programme and tell me your fondest memory

Q8 What do YP who are not in the Program think of the Program?

- Negative stereotypical perspective of the role of a YW
- Negative stereotypical perspective of the aim of the programme
- A lot of YP don't know about the programme
- Depends on what the YP involved in the programme share with
- That adult don't go to these programs; its only for children
- That it's the same as the school setting
- My friend thinks it sounds amazing

How do we BEST engage those YP not involved?

- Talking to the YP is most effective way, rather than posting online
- Need to promote programme more to better engage YP
- Promote programme on social media- Instagram/ Tiktok
- Social media ads set to specific locations
- Have more open events inviting the public
- Avoid posters. People just walk past posters. Bring YP with YW to talk in schools

Q11 Of all the things we've talked about, what is the most important to you?

Appendix E: Summary of Data Collected



Developing Good Practice for Working with Young People Disengaged for Education, Employment, and Training

Chloe Johnstone

Supervised by: Dr. Dean McDonnell & Majella Finnegan

