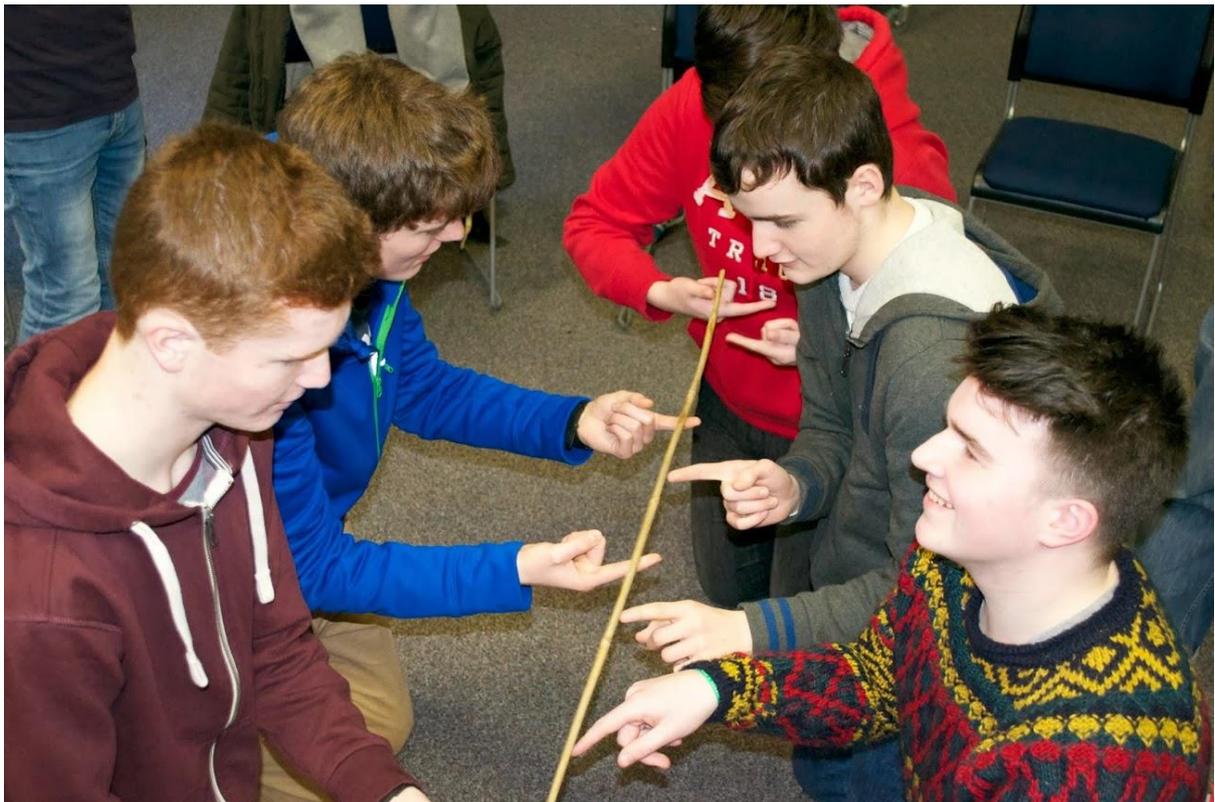




Exploring the impact of YMCA Connect in East Belfast Schools



May 2014

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Foreword

Belfast YMCA youth programmes have been a part of Belfast life for over 150 years. We work with young people throughout our city on a range of programmes that engage and connect them. Programmes like Youth in Government, cross community projects and the Duke of Edinburgh award.

Young people are the here and the now. They are the past, the present and the future. The YMCA Connect programme epitomises the principles which have guided our work over many years. We recognise the value and worth of all young people - growing the opportunities that young people present in three ways:

- Firstly, listening to the needs of young people - acting with their best interests at heart.
- Secondly, sharing our experiences, knowledge and skills in an enjoyable and focused way.
- Thirdly, encouraging and acknowledging young people's participation in their own learning enabling them to determine their own responsibilities and life choices.

Connect is a new programme for the YMCA but it reflects everything the YMCA stands for supporting young people in a world where they value themselves and others confidently and with integrity.

We are just at the beginning of our journey the YMCA Connect programme, and we hope that this report will be of interest to others who share our aspiration of creating positive change in our community.

Geraldine Stinton
Youth Programmes Director
Belfast YMCA

Background

Belfast YMCA is part of the worldwide YMCA family with a mission to put Christian principles into practice through programmes that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all. Our impact is felt when an individual makes a healthy choice, when a mentor inspires a child and when a community comes together for the common good.

We know that lasting personal and social change comes about when we all work together, so in this generation we work within schools side-by-side with teachers to make sure that everyone, regardless of age or background has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive. We believe we are bridging a gap in community need with the YMCA Connect programme and we believe it has the potential to affect lasting meaningful change in our city.

The YMCA Connect programme builds on the previous work of the Change Makers project which was a partnership between Belfast YMCA, Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise (NICE) and Community Relations in Schools (CRIS). This highly rated project worked for 3 years in 10 schools along the Belfast to Lisburn corridor. YMCA has been working in Belfast schools for over 25 years with support from the Department of Education.

The delivery of this programme today has been made possible by the generosity of a previous generation of YMCA Members in East Belfast. With this programme they are passing a baton of social responsibility to strengthen our community. The findings of this report suggest it is making a difference.

Howard Davey
General Secretary
Belfast YMCA

Summary

The Belfast YMCA Connect programme engaged with around 300 young people (average age = 13 – 14 years) from two East Belfast schools during autumn 2013. YMCA Connect is an education programme, which uses dialogue and interactive learning methods to tackle issues of diversity, the religious divide in Northern Ireland and associated issues. The young people participated in their class groups, in their classrooms with the YMCA Connect staff visiting them. There were 10 sessions delivered to each class over approximately three months during Autumn 2013. Research was conducted at both the beginning and end of the YMCA Connect project in the form of questionnaires. Young people were asked to comment on the quality of the course delivery, their attitudes towards those from other religious backgrounds and towards those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Course delivery

Findings about the course delivery suggest that the young people who participated had very positive experiences of the project. They identified the YMCA staff to be helpful, to have made an effort with all of their class and to have been good listeners. Comments from teachers suggest that the YMCA Connect project had significant educational benefits as well as being an opportunity for their pupils to openly discuss sectarianism and racism in a safe and supportive environment.

Attitudes towards those from other religious backgrounds

Young people who participated on the YMCA Connect project had significantly less positive perceptions of the health of community relations in Northern Ireland, they were much less likely to support a relative marrying someone of another religion, and much more likely to state a preference for own religion housing areas. There was evidence that involvement in the YMCA Connect project coincided with respondents feeling more optimistic about community relations and being more likely to see religious diversity as being a good thing.

Attitudes towards those from minority ethnic backgrounds

Although young people who participated on this project were more likely than the NI average to socialise with someone from another ethnic background, their attitudes towards those from other ethnic backgrounds were broadly in line with the Northern Ireland average. The YMCA Connect project seems to have had less of an impact in changing attitudes on this issue compared to attitudes on religious difference.

Impact of pupil programmes

YMCA Connect delivered a programme comprising 10 hours of facilitated delivery (usually in one hour sessions over 10 weeks) and class sizes ranged between 12-30 pupils.

When exploring topics, YMCA Connect facilitators use a variety of dynamic and participative techniques that encourage pupils to share their experience and thoughts with each other and to develop their inter-personal and group work skills.

The sessions were developed to support the Local and Global Citizenship component of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stages 3 and 4. The sessions covered;

- An introduction session
- Personal identity
- Stereotyping
- Differences in society
- Conflict
- Flags and emblems
- Sectarianism and discrimination
- Upstanding and bystanding
- Leadership
- A reviewing session

In our initial meetings with senior staff and teachers in our partner schools, we agreed to cover topics that were traditionally seen as being “more contentious” and relating to the Northern Ireland conflict. All sessions were designed and resourced by YMCA Connect staff. The “Upstanding and bystanding” session uses a DVD resource of the same name developed by the Facing History and Ourselves project within Corrymeela. Agreement for its use was sought and gained before using it within the YMCA course.

Our sessions were not designed to replace teachers’ lessons on these issues, but rather to complement and enhance this teaching by using non-formal and discussion based learning methods.

Theory of change

To help guide the collection of information on the potential range of impacts courses had with participants a simple theory of change was formed:

“By delivering *high quality* Community Relations education, in a *stimulating* and *enjoyable way*, YMCA Connect can positively impact on young people’s *knowledge, understanding* and *attitudes towards difference* and enhance their *personal, social* and *skill* development”.

Therefore, the questions that the evaluation sought to answer by using survey (quantitative) data were:

- Was the course delivery of high quality?
- Did the course positively impact on young people’s understanding and knowledge of issues around diversity? and,
- Did the course positively impact on young people’s attitudes towards difference?

Methodology

Every pupil who began the YMCA Connect course was asked to complete an attitudinal survey. When the course had finished pupils were asked to complete the same survey again. On both occasions those involved in the YMCA Connect programme were briefed on what the survey involved, how the data would be used and how their involvement in it was wholly voluntary. Pupils were asked to read and sign a detailed consent sheet before taking part and were informed as to how to retract their consent from the study, should they change their mind about it later on.

The idea was that if there were any major changes in how pupils rated their attitudes between the beginning of the YMCA Connect project and its end, we might reasonably be able to claim that this change was, in part, due to the effect of being involved in this project.

Questionnaires included items on: attitudes towards minority ethnic groups; mixing and socialising with minority ethnic groups and other religions; relationships between Protestants and Catholics; how pupils felt about attending school; and, key demographical information on respondents.

As far as possible, questions replicated those used in attitudinal surveys at a national level (i.e. many of the questions were duplicates of those appearing in the Young Life and Times Survey) so that emerging data could be compared to attitudes of the general population of young people in Northern Ireland.

Pupils were briefed before taking part in the survey. The briefing stressed the importance of them being as open and honest as possible and reiterated the confidential nature of the survey.

Some of the more complicated terms used in the questionnaire were defined on the evaluation form, and facilitators were on hand to help overcome any language difficulties with the questionnaire. The questionnaires, on average, took about 10-15 minutes to complete.

The questionnaires were then entered onto computer to allow for statistical analysis.

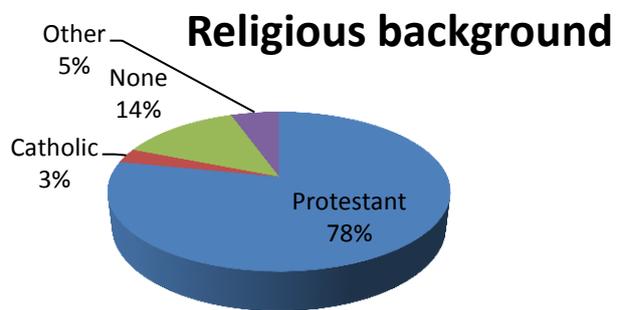
Demographics

A total of 275 participants completed the survey before beginning the YMCA Connect course. 271 participants completed the survey upon its completion.

	Before survey	After survey
School A	91 (33%)	94 (35%)
School B	184 (67%)	177 (65%)

52% of respondents were male, and 48% female. The oldest respondent was born in October 1997 and the youngest in September 2001. Most participants were born between 1999 and 2000 making them between age 13 or 14 at the time of their participation in the survey.

In terms of religious background, the overwhelming majority of those taking part were from Protestant backgrounds. Given the communities in which these two schools are located, this result is not unexpected.



When asked if they considered themselves to be from an Ethnic Minority background, only 22 (8%) of respondents responded yes, with most of those stating Eastern European, Romanian and Chinese backgrounds.

Given the YMCA Connect project's remit to work with young people from East Belfast (and particularly with those from Inner East Belfast), we asked respondents to tell us their postcode. YMCA Connect worked with young people from BT4 all the way up to BT24. 12% of those asked responded "Not known" when asked for their postcode. The most popular responses were as shown.

BT4	9 (3%)
BT5	62 (23%)
BT6	57 (21%)
BT7	8 (3%)
BT8	25 (9%)
BT16	34 (12%)
BT23	36 (13%)
Not known	33 (12%)

Changing Attitudes

To get a sense of whether the young people involved had altered their attitudes through engagement with the YMCA Connect programme, the evaluation methodology used attitudinal surveys containing multiple items about attitudes towards others.

i. Towards people from different religions

Relations between Protestants and Catholics

Evaluation forms replicated a number of items from the Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS) about relationships between Catholics and Protestants. Where available, the most recent data from YLTS was used.

What about relations between Protestants and Catholics? Would you say they are better than they were 5 years ago, worse, or about the same now as then?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2012
Relations are better	24%	32%	53%
Relations are worse	25%	24%	6%
Relations are about the same	24%	25%	33%
I don't know	27%	20%	8%

The numbers of pupils who felt that relations between Protestants and Catholics were better now, than 5 years ago, increased from 24% at the start of the course to 32% by the end of the course. The comparable figure from the 2012 YLTS (the most recent data available) is 53%. This would indicate that the young people involved in this project are significantly less positive about relations between Protestants and Catholics than the Northern Ireland average.

It does seem that involvement in the YMCA Connect course has had some role in increasing the perception of improving relations by 8% over the course of their time with the YMCA.

Whilst only 6% of the YLTS group believed that relations had gotten worse, there is between 24% and 25% in the YMCA Connect group who share this view. This is significantly higher and indicates a much more pessimistic view of the state of relationships. There could be many factors behind this higher than expected result, but it may have something to do with the shared geographical area or shared community experiences which have led them to view relations to have deteriorated more than their peers elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The following question asked respondents whether they thought relations between Protestants and Catholics would improve in the next 5 years.

In 5 years' time, do you think relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better than now, worse than now, or about the same as now?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2012
Relations will be better	17%	26%	45%
Relations will be worse	24%	20%	9%
Relations will be about the same	35%	34%	37%
I don't know	24%	20%	9%

These results echo that the young people engaged in YMCA Connect have significantly less positive views on the state of relations between Protestants and Catholics in the coming years than the Northern Ireland average.

The YMCA Connect course seems to have played some role in increasing positivity in those involved. Those thinking that relations will improve in 5 years increased by 9% over the course of the project. Similarly, those thinking that relationships will get worse decreased by 4%.

The next item on the survey asked respondents about their preference for schooling in terms of mixed-religion or single-religion schools.

Slightly more respondents stated a preference for own religion schooling having completed the course than at its beginning. Similarly, slightly fewer young people gave a preference for mixed religion schooling having completed the YMCA Connect course. Overall though, the results obtained were very close to those obtained by the YLTS 2012.

If you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed-religion school?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2012
Own religion only	27%	32%	35%
Mixed religion school	52%	49%	50%
I don't know	21%	18%	16%

Participants were then asked for their housing preferences in terms of community background.

If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2012
Own religion only	32%	32%	26%
Mixed religion neighbourhood	45%	47%	56%
I don't know	23%	21%	18%

This question saw very little difference between the start of the course and its completion. There was a significant difference, however, between the attitudes of the YMCA Connect participants and the wider Northern Ireland average. The young people who participated in the course were much more likely to state a preference for own religion housing areas, and much less likely to prefer mixed religion areas.

Young people were then asked if they would mind if a close relative were to marry someone of a different religion.

Would you mind if a close relative were to marry someone of a different religion?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2006
I would mind a lot	9%	5%	6%
I would mind a little	20%	26%	18%
I would not mind	60%	61%	69%
I don't know	11%	8%	8%

The young people involved in this survey were more likely to mind (a lot and a little) if a relative were to marry someone of a different religion than the Northern Ireland average. They were also significantly less likely to say that they didn't mind at all. Again, this finding is consistent with other items in showing measurably less favourable attitudes towards those of different religious backgrounds than the Northern Ireland average.

Respondents were then asked to rate how strongly they agreed (or disagreed) with the following statement;

“There's a lot to be learned from other religions. It's interesting, not a bad thing”

Although this question has never been asked on any Young Life and Times Survey, we believed it was worth asking as it relates closely to a similar item on attitudes towards ethnic minority groups. There is a clear swing towards young people feeling more positive about other religions from 54% agreeing or strongly agreeing before taking part, to 60% upon completion of the course. This trend is echoed when looking at those who disagree or strongly disagree falling from 9% to 6% at the end of the course.

There is a lot to be learned from other religions. It's interesting, not a bad thing	Before course	After course
Strongly agree	13%	18%
Agree	41%	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	26%	21%
Disagree	8%	3%
Strongly disagree	1%	3%
I don't know	11%	12%

2. Towards Minority Ethnic Groups

Evaluation forms asked the young people to rate how favourable (or unfavourable) they felt towards people from minority ethnic groups. A different message emerged in this section compared to respondents' attitudes towards religious difference. When asked before the course started about their attitudes towards minority ethnic groups, a large proportion of respondents chose the "I don't know" option. The proportion of respondents choosing this option consistently and dramatically decreased when the same questions were posed at the end of the YMCA Connect programme. This suggests that the programme has had the effect of better informing young people about those from other ethnic backgrounds, and making the participants more willing and able to express their views on these groups.

Before taking part in the course, 40% felt "favourable" or "very favourable" towards people from minority ethnic groups – by the end of the course this figure rose to 43%. The 2012 Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS) found that 46% of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland felt "favourable" or "very favourable" towards ethnic minorities.

How favourable do you feel about people from minority ethnic groups?	Survey		
	Before Course	After Course	YLTS 2012
Very favourable	21%	17%	17%
Favourable	19%	26%	29%
Neither favourable nor unfavourable	33%	37%	44%
Unfavourable	2%	5%	3%
Very unfavourable	1%	3%	1%
I don't know	24%	12%	8%

Interestingly the largest shift in responses from before taking part in the YMCA Connect project and finishing it was in the "I don't know" category. It could be that the shift from 24% to 12% was caused by the young people involved feeling more informed to have an opinion towards those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

How often do you socialise or play sport with people from a different ethnic background to yourself?	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2011*
Very often	28%	29%	19%
Sometimes	34%	40%	36%
Rarely	18%	14%	26%
Never	10%	10%	16%
I don't know	9%	7%	3%

The survey then asked young people to rate how often they socialised (or played sport) with people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The results suggest that young people who have taken part in YMCA Connect are more likely to have had the opportunity to socialise with someone from a different ethnic background to themselves than the Northern Ireland average. The percentage of young people saying that they socialised “sometimes” or “very often” with people from minority ethnic groups rose from 62% at the start of the course to 69%.

The next item of the survey asked young people how they would feel if a close relative were to marry someone from a minority ethnic background. There were some shifts in overall attitudes on this question before and after taking part in this course.

Would you mind if a close relative were to marry someone from a minority ethnic group?	Survey	
	Before course	After course
I would mind a lot	6%	3%
I would mind a little	9%	21%
I would not mind	71%	66%
I don't know	13%	10%

In the 2008 YLTS, some 69% of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland responded that they would not mind if a close relative were to marry someone from a different ethnic group. This figure is comparable to both before and after figures of the YMCA Connect participants of 71% and 66% respectively.

The YMCA Connect surveys also asked respondents to rate how strongly they agreed (or disagreed) with the following statement;

“In relation to colour and ethnicity, I prefer to stick with people of my own kind”

Thinking about minority ethnic groups, I prefer to stick with people of my own kind	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2012
Strongly agree	4%	4%	3%
Agree	8%	12%	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	31%	39%	24%
Disagree	25%	26%	26%
Strongly disagree	22%	13%	33%
I don't know	10%	5%	2%

The percentage of young people agreeing with this statement is broadly in line with the Northern Ireland average as measured by the YLTS 2012. At the start of the course some 47% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, decreasing to 39% by the end of the course. This compares to 59% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing

in the wider YLTS sample. This would seem to indicate that those participating in this project are significantly more cautious of mixing with “others” than the average 16 year old in Northern Ireland.

The survey then asked young people to rate how strongly they agreed (or disagreed) with the following statement;

“There is a lot to be learned from minority ethnic groups coming here. It’s interesting, not a bad thing”

There is a lot to be learned from minority ethnic groups coming here. It’s interesting, not a bad thing	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2008
Strongly agree	18%	20%	17%
Agree	34%	38%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	26%	23%	28%
Disagree	4%	9%	9%
Strongly disagree	3%	0%	3%
I don’t know	15%	10%	4%

Respondents to the YMCA Connect questionnaire had broadly comparable responses to the Northern Ireland average as measured by the Young Life and Times Survey 2008. It is noteworthy that those who agreed and strongly agreed that there is much to learn from minority ethnic groups increased from 52% before participating on the YMCA Connect programme, to 58% upon completion of the course.

In line with previous questions, significantly fewer respondents chose the “I don’t know” response after completing the YMCA Connect course. This may be an indication that young people are better informed and feel more confident in expressing an opinion on these issues after going through the YMCA Connect course.

The final item in the section on minority ethnic groups asked young people to respond to the following statement;

“A lot of local jobs are being taken by minority ethnic groups, which is unfair to locals”

A lot of local jobs are being taken by minority ethnic groups, which is unfair to locals	Survey		
	Before course	After course	YLTS 2008
Strongly agree	23%	18%	17%
Agree	27%	29%	30%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	28%	24%
Disagree	8%	10%	21%
Strongly disagree	8%	6%	7%
I don't know	9%	10%	1%

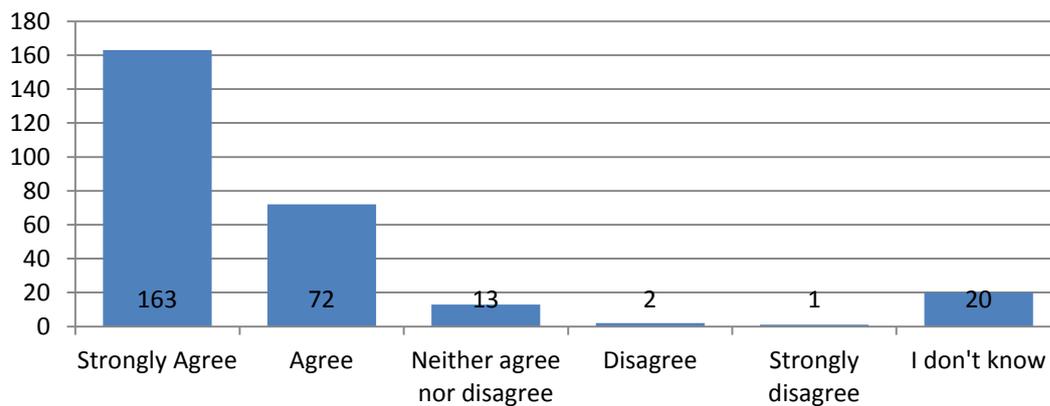
Although slightly fewer YMCA Connect participants disagreed or strongly disagreed when compared to the NI average, the results from this item are broadly in line with the YLTS 2008.

There was a 3% decrease in those who agreed or strongly agreed throughout the course of the YMCA project. It could be that the course content had a slight moderating effect on attitudes to this issue.

Quality of course delivery

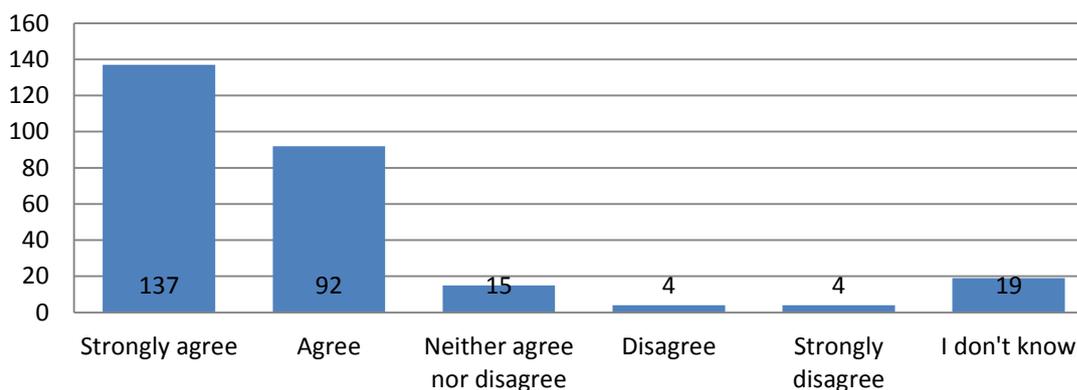
To understand what participants thought about the quality of the course delivery, a series of questions were included in the post-course survey (ie the one completed by young people upon finishing their time with YMCA Connect). The results are as follows;

Would you say that your facilitators were well prepared for their sessions with you?



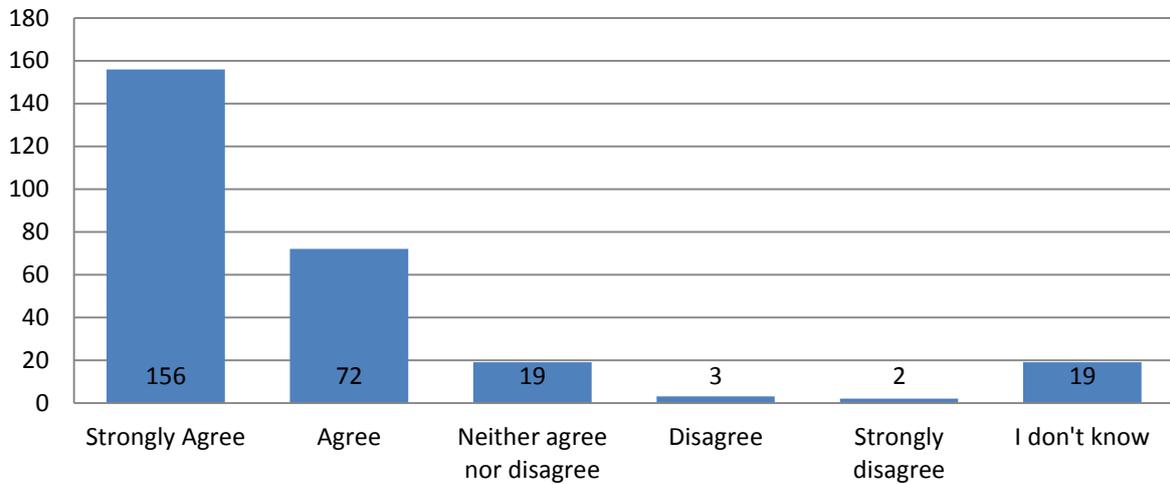
With regard to facilitators' preparedness, 87% of respondents agreed / strongly agreed that they were prepared. Only 1% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their facilitators were prepared.

Would you say that your facilitators encouraged everyone to take part?



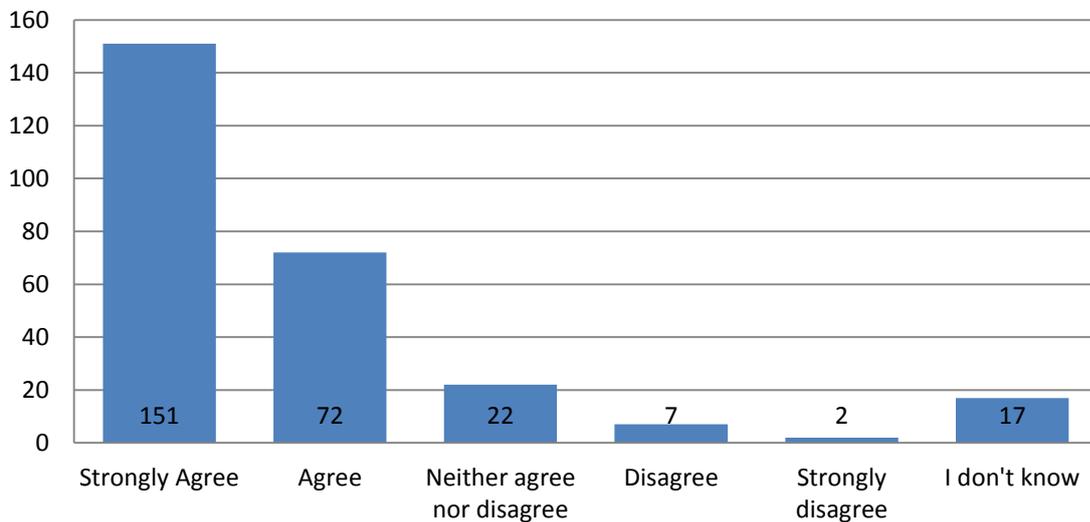
A total of 229 young people out of 271 felt that their facilitators encouraged everyone to take part (cumulative total of Strongly agree and agree responses). This represents 85% of all respondents.

Would you say that your facilitators were good listeners?



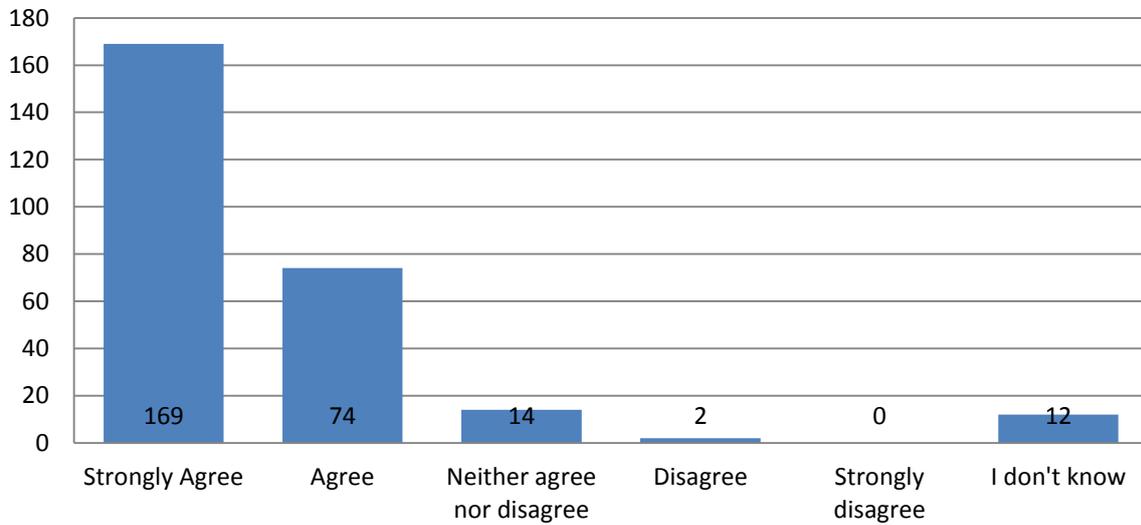
As with previous questions, respondents awarded their facilitators with 85% of responses being Strongly agree / agree when asked if they believed the facilitators to be good listeners.

Would you say that your facilitators made learning fun?



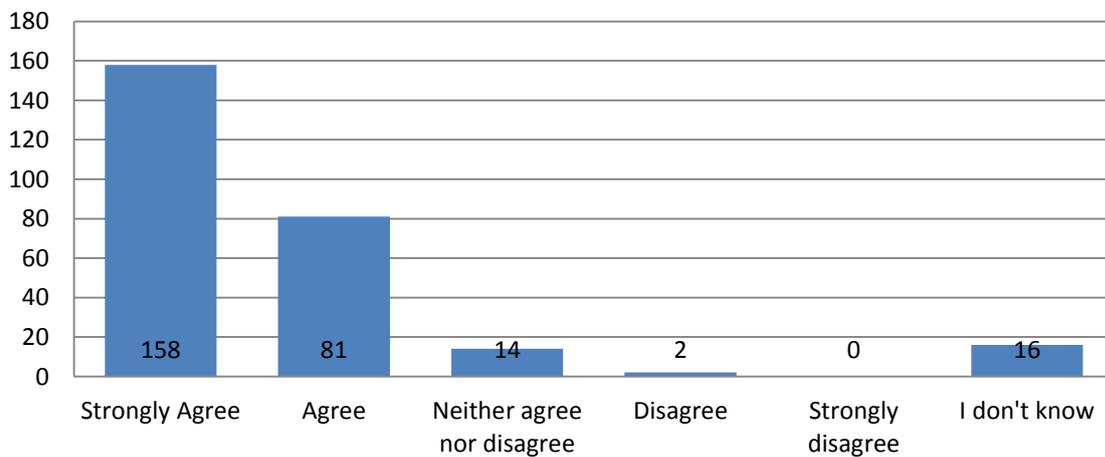
When asked whether or not they believed their facilitators “made learning fun” a total of 223 participants out of 271, or 83%, either Strongly agreed or agreed.

Would you say that your facilitators showed you respect?



243 respondents out of 271, or 89%, Strongly agreed or agreed that their facilitators showed them respect.

Would you say that your facilitators made an effort to help everyone?



88% of respondents stated that they Strongly agreed or agreed that their facilitators made an effort to help everyone [in their class].

Overall, there is consistent evidence of high quality delivery by YMCA Connect staff. The statistics are backed up by qualitative comments left by the young people on their surveys;

Everything they did was nice and they were very helpful with everyone

They were loads of fun and I'm annoyed to see them leave

Although the overwhelming majority of responses were very positive about relationships with the facilitators, a number of young people did comment on the short-term nature of the project;

Stay with us for the whole year

Make the experience longer for the kids

A number of young people also suggested possible changes and additions to the course. Many commented that they enjoyed the games and would like to have done more. Others had suggestions of activities, which might augment the learning;

More moving activities instead of talking

They [YMCA Connect staff] could bring in someone to talk about their own religion

Go on outings to places that are interesting

Teachers' comments

In addition to the feedback gained through surveys completed by pupils, we asked the young people's teachers similar questions in order to better understand how they perceived the experience and how they regarded it in terms of education and the wider curriculum:

1 Would you say that the YMCA staff were well prepared for their sessions with your class?

Strongly Agree 100%

2 Would you say that the YMCA staff encouraged everyone to take part?

Strongly Agree 100%

3 Would you say that the YMCA staff were good listeners?

Strongly Agree 100%

4 Would you say that the YMCA staff made learning fun?

Strongly Agree 85.7%

Agree 14.3%

5 Would you say that the YMCA staff showed respect to you, your class and your school?

Strongly Agree 100%

6 Would you say that the YMCA staff made an effort to help everyone in your class?

Strongly Agree 100%

7 Would you say that the YMCA staff helped to cover aspects of the LLW/Citizenship/Wider Key Skills curriculum?

Strongly Agree 100%

The consistently positive feedback from teachers was backed up by comments about how the learning gained by pupils was nurtured by the YMCA Connect staff. Every teacher asked commented on the high quality and richness of the educational experience gained by the pupils in their classes;

A wonderful programme which the students enjoyed. [YMCA Connect staff members] encouraged all students to think about local and national issues in an engaging manner. I have learnt great information and activities which I can use with future LLW classes.

The input from YMCA was genuinely a significant support to my programme. The pupils were learning without even recognising that they were. Each lesson was a set of interactive and engaging tasks which created a desire to understand. Staff were HIGHLY SKILLED to carry this!

Well thought out and prepared. Clear objective and focus for each lesson. Insightful and emotive content for the students.

Many teachers commented on the relationships built up between YMCA facilitators and the young people in their class, even with young people who are labelled as “hard to work with”;

Very impressed by the relationship which the facilitators built with some of our core challenging pupils.

[Name of YMCA Connect staff member] was a brilliant teacher and we will all really miss his presence in LLW. We were delighted to have the opportunity to take part in their workshops. Sincere thanks.

Overall, teachers reported very positive experiences of working with YMCA Connect staff. Common themes in their responses include a positive perception of the programme relating to core elements of the school curriculum (in particular Learning for Life and Work);

The aspects of conflict, racism, morals, values and beliefs all fit into the curriculum within LLW, Specifically within ‘Personal Development’ and Citizenship.

The resources were up to date and very relevant to issues the students see today.

Very relevant indeed. The course was directed to the needs of my Wider Key Skills unit – without the support of the YMCA; I couldn’t expect the same coursework output from my class.

Another key theme arising from teachers' comments was that the young people in their classes "opened up" to others' ideas and opinions.

That we all stereotype people – often negatively. The pupils learned that it is worthwhile to look at their prejudices and question these.

The fact that they have begun thinking about the other person's perspective (ethnic groups / different religions / sexual orientation)

Very relevant – although it was a challenging series of discussion and resulted in our pupils facing up to questions which they had not previously considered.

Learning to accept other people's views and really listen to their stories.

Understanding of different people (religions) and changes in their attitudes and though processes towards people who are 'different' to them. Over all a better understanding of NI issues from discussions which otherwise would not have taken place.

It is noteworthy that many teachers commented that having the opportunity to observe the YMCA Connect project workers increased their knowledge of tackling these issues and enhanced their teaching. Some took the evaluation opportunity to request further training and support.

100% worthwhile – I learned so much about developing engagement through my observations of the YMCA staff – very enlightening.

Training in the future for our staff involved in citizenship or aspects of diversity / discrimination.

Impact on knowledge and understanding

The YMCA Connect course aims to help young people gain a greater understanding about diversity in society and become more knowledgeable on what influences our attitudes towards diversity.

Learners must be able to demonstrate that they have achieved specified learning outcomes (below) in their completed logbooks.

Session title	Learning outcomes	Curriculum Links	Assessment criteria
1. Introduction session	<i>Learners will clarify what they want to learn from this programme, they will share their feelings about participating.</i> <i>YMCA staff will build relationships with young people</i>		1.1 Identify concerns that may be held about participating in this project 1.2 Identify hopes of taking part in this programme 1.3 List three items from the group's contract
2. Personal Identity	<i>Participants will share aspects of their personal identity in a group setting.</i>	LLW: Local and Global Citizenship Strand. Key concept: Diversity and Inclusion; Investigate factors including religious and political that influence individual and group identity	2.1 Identify factors which influence individual and group identity 2.2 Learner's will show reflection on their own identities
3. Stereotyping	<i>The usefulness and accuracy of stereotypes will be explored.</i> <i>Participants will explore the process of stereotypes leading to prejudices, to discrimination.</i>	LLW: Local and Global Citizenship Strand. Key concept: Diversity and Inclusion; Investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community. Investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations, reconciliation.	3.1 Explain how stereotypes may be useful or not 3.2 Explain how stereotypes can lead to discrimination
4. Differences in society	<i>Discuss differing groups in NI society and how these groups have expressed their collective identity.</i> <i>Reflect on current affairs stories in which individuals and groups have been in conflict due to their identities.</i>	LLW: Local and Global Citizenship Strand. Key concept: Diversity and Inclusion; Investigate ways in which individuals and groups express their identity	4.1 List at least 3 diverse groups of people living in NI 4.2 Explain how these groups show, share or express their identity and/or values 4.3 Provide examples of conflict resulting from differing or competing group

			identities
5. Conflict	<i>Experience and reflect on how easily conflict can manifest. Discuss the various stages and forms of conflict on personal, group and international levels. Discuss a range of strategies to deal with conflict.</i>	LLW: Local and Global Citizenship Strand. Key concept: Diversity and Inclusion; Investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community. Investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations, reconciliation.	5.1 Using examples, learners will list differing levels on which conflict can occur 5.2 Learners will explain different styles of dealing with conflict
6. Flags and emblems	<i>Explore the symbology and history of various well-known flags and emblems seen in NI. Participants will share experiences and feelings about these symbols.</i>		6.1 Learners will draw and explain the symbology of two flags 6.2 Explain how flags can be contentious in a local context
7. Sectarianism and discrimination	<i>Definitions of Sectarianism, racism, homophobia, ageism, sexism, and disability discrimination will be clarified using examples. Young people will discuss the effect of these forms of discrimination on the individuals involved. Special attention will be paid to sectarianism within a local context.</i>	LLW: Local and Global Citizenship Strand. Key concept: Equality and Social Justice; Explore how inequalities can arise in society including how and why some people may experience inequality or discrimination on the basis of their group identity	7.1 Give examples of how “sectarianism” may escalate from small actions to more serious incidents 7.2 Give examples of groups which face exclusion 7.3 Suggest strategies for including those of other religious, social or race backgrounds
8. Upstanding and bystanding	<i>Young people will explore these terms by considering the stories of those who have “Upstood” or “Stood-by” in NI. Young people will consider these concepts in situations in their own lives and areas.</i>		8.1 List factors which may lead an individual to “Upstand” 8.2 List factors which may lead an individual to “Bystand”

9. Leadership	<p><i>Young people will consider attributes of leaders in their schools, families or communities. Attention will focus on how the young people themselves might show leadership qualities in their interactions with others.</i></p>		<p>9.1 Identify the skills required for an effective leader</p> <p>9.2 Give examples of opportunities for young people to be leaders</p>
10. Review and evaluation	<p><i>Young people will recap their learning from previous sessions. In depth feedback on project delivery, content and methods will be confidentially collect from young people. Any loose ends from previous sessions will be tied up.</i></p>		<p>10.1 Review learning gained from previous sessions</p> <p>10.2 Provide feedback to YMCA on programme content, methods and style of programme</p>

Recommendations

This section includes general observations about the delivery of services and feedback from participants.

Activities used

Relatively few pupils took the opportunity to recommend improvements to the YMCA Connect project. Most used the opportunity to say “Nothing” or to restate how fun and worthwhile their sessions were. The most frequent suggestions as to how YMCA Connect could improve their delivery were:

- add more games
- longer sessions
- longer project length (ie increase from 10 weeks of contact)
- less writing / less “work”

Teachers had even fewer recommendations for the project than their pupils did. Those who did put forward suggestions mentioned that it would be beneficial for the project workers to ensure that the participative and interactive activities have a place in every session.

Recommendation 1:

YMCA Connect should make small adjustments to the session plans for the project to ensure there is a range of interesting activities used.

Topics discussed

Young people reported that the topics that were discussed were fun, interesting and “important to talk about”. Teachers echoed these descriptions, adding that they were educationally useful as they helped young people to directly address topics on the LLW curriculum. Many teachers commented that the way that young people were learning about these issues through group discussion was very valuable.

Statistics from the questionnaires show that, in general, those who took part in this project have more cautious attitudes towards diversity (ie other religions and minority ethnic groups) than the wider population of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland. This could be interpreted as showing that the project is working in the “right” area. Whilst there was strong evidence that the YMCA Connect project had a role in improving attitudes in terms of religious difference, there seems to have been less of a change in attitudes towards minority ethnic groups.

Recommendation 2:

YMCA Connect should consider devoting more time and resources to address negative attitudes towards minority ethnic groups.

Sustainability of change

Whilst it is very encouraging that the YMCA Connect project has positively influenced so many young people in a relatively short space of time, there should be some thought given to how support and resource teachers and other youth workers to go forward and deliver this area of work after the life of the project.

Recommendation 3:

YMCA Connect should consider how best to engage and support teachers and youth workers to build skills to deliver similar projects and workshops in the future.

Project reach

The YMCA Connect project is aimed at young people from East Belfast, with particular focus on those from the Inner East. The most popular postcodes given by young people involved were BT4, BT5 and BT6 – all of which make up East Belfast. There was a sizeable proportion of young people engaged in the programme who were from Outer East Belfast (BT16 Dundonald and Ballybeen) and even further out of Belfast itself (namely Comber, Newtownards, Saintfield and Ballygowan).

Recommendation 4:

YMCA Connect should try to engage with other schools to attempt to work with more young people from Inner East Belfast.

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you would like to discuss any element of this report and what we do.

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