



Report of the annual evaluation of Youthforia

(The North West Youth Forum)

April 2018

Introduction

This is a report of the annual evaluation of Youthforia, the North West Youth Forum. As an ongoing project that has no specific funder we do not report back against agreed targets but rather use information collected to reflect on achievements of young people individually and collectively. This information is then used to improve the running and operation of Youthforia and to set the theme and direction of the forthcoming year.

Youthforia is a group of representatives of all 23 North West local authority Youth Councils,¹ run by a group of thirteen young people, elected by their peers, in partnership with youth workers. Youthforia is a Youth Focus NW project supported by local authority members. The British Youth Council and UKYP are partners.

Methodology

We use a range of methods to monitor and evaluate the work of Youthforia:

- At each meeting young people are asked to complete an evaluation form (on average 100 young people per meeting).
- The 13 steering group members use this information to assist in planning the forthcoming meeting
- Youth workers have regular meetings where they are given an opportunity to evaluate the meetings and actions between meetings. Through discussion we identify areas for improvement (on average 20 people per meeting)
- Annually young people are asked to reflect on what they feel they have achieved both personally and collectively. This takes place with 100 young people as a substantive agenda item at the March meeting.
- Young people are asked for ideas for improvement and to identify the themes they wish to explore for the next 12 months.
- Peer led one to one interviews with 8 young people

Youthforia

Youthforia is a young people led project, with a constitution and young people's steering group and we focus on the issues and concerns raised by young people. The work we do and the projects we get involved in are all planned, guided and set by young people. Each young person represents their local youth group and must be part of a local project to get involved. The role of a young person who participates in Youthforia is to enable the voice of these groups to be heard regionally. Our aim is to

¹ Appendix one – membership list of youth councils run by local authorities and VCSE organisations in the North West

enable young people from across the region to work together to improve the life experiences of young people and have a collective voice across the region.

This is done by:

- Engaging with and supporting a wide range of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds
- Campaigning for positive change around issues affecting the lives of young people
- Acting to represent the voices of young people across the region

How Does It Work?

Youthforia meetings are the most important part of our project. We run up to 6 meetings per year (one being a residential) at various locations around the North West, usually taking place on a weekend and last all day (with lunch provided). Meetings can include:

- **Training for young people** - To help build up young peoples' skills to be activists we offer training on issues such as "How to talk to the press" , or "How to campaign"
- **Consultation work** - We invite influential decision makers and organisations, such as senior civil servants or police to consult with the group on current issues. Because Youthforia represents the entire region we have access to decision makers that young people cannot get to a local level.
- **Campaigns** - Youthforia runs campaigns which are chosen by the Yofo-members based on issues that are common across the North West. We provide support and co-ordination to help Yofo-members and their local groups campaign on these issues
- **MYP support** - We run an MYP support section for Members of Youth Parliament
- **Staff support** - The staff and volunteers who bring Yofo-members to meetings are an active part of running them, helping facilitate workshops and run the day. Youthforia also provides a great opportunity to meet other youth participation workers from across the region and share ideas.

What have we done this year?

- **Responded to the arena attack – cohesion and unity work**
Following the Manchester Arena attack in May 2017, young people explored the theme of unity and social and community cohesion in the June Youthforia meeting.
- **Make Your Mark (MYM) national ballot/consultation**
MYM is a national ballot that sees 11-18 year olds choose the issue most important to them, from a list of ten topics. Young people came together across several meetings to plan, share and learn about what works best in terms of

engaging as many people as possible in their local authorities. The North received the highest turnout for the fourth year running with 203,614 votes.

- **Elected new Steering Group members**

At the Annual General Meeting, young people voted to create a new position 'Devolution Representative' and elected 13 new members to 11 roles on the Steering Group. Their roles comprise; Area Representatives for; Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester North, Greater Manchester South, Lancashire and Cumbria², Secretary, Inclusivity, Campaigns and Media and Communications Representatives. In addition to this, there is also a Procedures Group Representative who supports the MYPs.

- **Run consultations**

Ofsted came to consult young people on a) the care inspection process, b) young people's involvement in the inspection of colleges.

Curious Minds consulted young people on the meaning of heritage.

A Curriculum to prepare us for life

In response to the UK Youth Parliament's House of Commons debate where a Curriculum for Life was again voted on by Members of Youth Parliament to become the national campaign, young people have been debating and discussing its direction, including who should deliver it, where and how.

- **Votes at 16**

In the lead up to the Private Member's Bill in Parliament in December 2017, tabled by Jim McMahon MP for Oldham, young people mobilised and lobbied their MPs to vote in favour. Youthforia served as a platform to promote the bill and discuss ways to achieve smaller, local wins. Such as lobbying councils to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections.

- **Campaign training**

In the January meeting, young people took part in campaign training and heard from guest speakers who had been or are involved in successful national campaigns.

- **NHS Youth Forum consultation**

In January, young people gave their views on Peer Support, their experiences and how they think it should be shaped. The meeting was attended by a young Trustee from the NHS Youth Forum, who travelled from London to facilitate and support the session, alongside members of the Steering Group.

- **MYP Induction**

January – MYPs reflected on their highs and lows during their term of office and passed on learning and tips for new MYPs.

April – MYP induction at the residential for new (and some returning) MYPs.

- **Social Model of Disability workshop**

At this year's residential, young people explored the social and medical models of disability. Via deliberately 'disabling' activities, young people debated the barriers faced by those with protected characteristics in society and how to remove them.

² We are currently exploring ways of the Cumbria representative participating remotely

- **Environmental and water issues**

Following a successful sponsorship agreement with United Utilities, their representatives came to meet with steering group. United Utilities wanted to engage with young people in the North West, to get their ideas on campaigns and environmental issues.

Building on this initial meeting, UU visited the September Youthforia meeting to hear which topics were important in which areas. Young people discussed; flooding, climate change, reservoir safety, affordability and water efficiency. The young people are now designing and developing the Reservoir Safety campaign, to be launched later this year, and are also tying together Water Affordability with their Curriculum for Life campaign.

- **Boundaries workshop**

At the March Youthforia meeting, young people took part in a number of Boundaries themed workshops, activities and team building games. Amongst the issues explored in relation to boundaries were; gender, sexuality, disability (with a particular focus on autism spectrum conditions) and mental health. Young people created a 'Pledge' outlining how they would respect one another's boundaries.

Who has taken part?

Over the last year, we have hosted 6 Youthforia meetings and a weekend residential. 200 young people have attended, and around 50 workers as well as 4 young volunteers from the 23 North West local authorities. The average attendance at a Youthforia meeting is 100 young people and 20 workers.

Young people are aged 11-18 (or up to 25 with a disability additional need)

Of the young people who have attended:

- 61% of participants were female and 39% of participants were male
- 83% of participants defined themselves as heterosexual, 9% defined themselves as being from an LGBT or non-binary background and 8% did not disclose
- 52% defined themselves as Christian, 12% as Muslim, and 36 % as either atheist, agnostic or no religion
- 21% of young people defined themselves as being from BME groups,
- 6% defined themselves as having a disability
- 36% of young people were from the top 20% most deprived super output areas in England as defined by the indices of multiple deprivation 2011
- 10% defined themselves as being in or having being in care
- 4% of young people defined themselves were young carers
- 2% were or had been an asylum seeker or refugee
- 2% or young people were Not in Education Employment or Training
- 4% were or had been homeless

We anticipate a similar breakdown although we notice a slight increase in the number of young men attending our events and a subsequent reduction in young

women. We are aware a significant minority, approximately 25%, report mental health problems. A number are on the autistic spectrum.

What do young people and youth workers say?

From the evaluations conducted at Youthforia meetings, events and the annual reflection there are 4 distinct themes drawn from the feedback received.

1. Meeting new young people from different areas and backgrounds

Young people enjoy meeting new people from a range of different areas
Young people regularly tell us they would never had had the opportunity to meet young people from such a far and wide range of places.

"I love how close we have gotten as a region"

"I loved making new and amazing friends"

"I loved how friendly people were"

"I met other young people that I couldn't meet anywhere else"

2. Grown in confidence/developed

a number of young people reported feeling they had grown in confidence, and/or developed as a person, because of the opportunities Youthforia has afforded them. Activities at Youthforia regularly involve; team building and games, speaking in front of peers, debating and group work.

"Changed how I express myself"

"I gained confidence and so many new friends"

"Being more open about who I am, coming out as trans"

"it has helped me become more confident and more aware of the struggles people face. I also want to take my interest in politics further because of this"

"has helped me to become more confident in public speaking, as well as be more confident in my freelance lighting career"

"changed how I express myself/views, positively"

"it has calmed me down and turned me from bad behaviour and drugs"

3. Broadened interests and understanding

Young people described feeling better able to accept and hear new views and opinions, saying it has influenced and informed their life choices as it has developed their understanding.

"given me an interest in politics"

"interested me in my choice for A Levels and career paths (e.g. Politics)"

"it has made me more interested in the public health area of medicine and the systems behind the NHS"

“it has balance me/my view as I’ve heard valid/various views”

“it changed my way of thinking as I have been exposed to lots of different ideas”

4. Empowered/Optimistic about the future

Young people attributed Youthforia to feeling better able to help other young people and impact change. A number told us they were hopeful for the future as a result.

“I feel I can make a change in my local area”

“being able to have more of an insight into the problems of my community and the strategies I can use to help”

“it has made me more opinionated on certain subjects and how to help young people”

“I can’t wait to see what the future holds”

“every organisation was wonderful and kind and I look forward to working with them”

Youth worker feedback

Feedback received from Youth Workers largely echoes the comments made by young people.

“It allowed the people to not only get to know one another better as this is crucial to them working as a team, but also to understand the different areas and districts in the region and understand what each of the areas are like for young people. They are also able to meet other young people from different areas who they would not usually get to see and make new friends.”

“He benefitted from finding out about new developments in the project and being able to network with his Youthforia Peers”

“young people feel like they are doing something important”

“She is thinking about going to University now she has met young people who are planning to go and now she realises she can get on with them and hold her own”

Workers also note that co-production is a key area, and not only do they see the benefit of young people meeting and sharing ideas, but they enjoy sharing best practice and networking with one another.

“the enthusiasm and co-production of staff and young people was great.”

“important networking contacts and opportunities for joint working”

“Feeling inspired by other LAs for new projects and ideas for best practice”

Youth Workers highlight to us that having clear outcomes for campaigns and workshops is key, so that these can be meaningfully continued back in their respective youth councils.

“we need a plan with outcomes that we can take back to our youth councils and other young people locally”

“staff need to know the outcomes of workshops”

What have we learnt?

The evaluation of every meeting and the annual reflection has enabled us to draw out a number of learning points which will inform recommendations for the future operation of Youthforia.

- Some topics need to be explored in more detail. While we might not be able to do this in meeting we could agree actions for workers to go into more detail back in their LAs so that topics can be dealt with in more depth
- Young people enjoy guest speakers, but only when there is the opportunity to open up a meaningful, 2-way conversation/Q&A. Given the wide range of ability within the group formal presentations / lectures do not engage them.
- Although though young people enjoy the conversations they want to see more action from decision makers – more execution and tangible/measurable outcomes. They want to know what impact their work has had.
- Young people want stronger links with London/BYC so the local and regional issues are recognised and to counter what is sometimes perceived to be a London centric approach.

Recommendations

These recommendations build on what young people and youth workers have told us they value, gain from and enjoy about Youthforia. It is important that young people continue to inform and improve the way the project works.

- Youthforia should continue to build in time to allow young people from different parts of the region develop relationships with their peers and through that their understanding and acceptance of difference.
- Youthforia should explore the possibility of developing on-going longer-term projects that support local action and use the regional collaboration to build and strengthen those projects.
- Youthforia should explore ways to feedback to young people on the action that has been taken by decision makers following engagement with the group and Steering Group.
- Youthforia should continue to explore creative methods through which to address issues.
- Youthforia should develop a robust communications strategy through which it can seek to influence local, regional and national agendas.

Appendix one

Membership of Youthforia

Blackpool Youth Voice

Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum

Bolton Youth Council

Bury Youth Cabinet

Cheshire East Youth Council

Cheshire West and Chester Youth Senate

Cumbria Youth Council

Halton Youth Council

Knowsley Youth Council

Lancashire Youth Council

Liverpool School's Parliament

The Hive – Manchester Youth Council

Oldham Youth Council

Rochdale Youth Council

Salford Youth Council

Sefton Youth Voice

St Helens Youth Council

Stockport Youth Partnership

Tameside Youth Council

Trafford Youth Cabinet

Warrington Impact Group

Wigan Youth Council

Wirral Youth Council