

Report of a Youth Inspection  
Glen Parent Youth Group

February 2025

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Glen Parent Youth Group is a voluntary community-based provision within the Glen Parent Complex on the Suffolk Road in West Belfast. The youth group was established in 1985 and moved into the current purpose-built community facility in 2014. The youth group is an integral part of Glen Community Parent and Youth Group, which also provides counselling, housing, education and training, and childcare services.

At the time of the inspection, there were 268 young people registered, 76 in the junior section and 192 in the senior section. The youth group is open five evenings each week for young people and there is also a daily afterschool programme. Two mornings each week young people from a local special school attend the youth provision and are jointly supported and facilitated by youth workers and classroom assistants.

The management employ six full-time and six part-time youth work staff. A majority of the staff progressed through the provision from attending as members and most of the full-time staff have completed their professional youth work qualifications at university.

Programme highlights throughout the year include, the Youth Achievement Awards, the Halloween Fair and the eight-week summer scheme. The Education Authority (EA) funds six youth work sessions each week; the additional youth programmes are funded by the management through their existing social economy model. In the recent assessment of needs process completed by the staff for the Lenadoon area, key issues identified include addiction, mental health and the cost-of-living crisis.

## **B. VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND STAFF**

The young people were highly positive about their relationships with the youth workers who they said, “respect us and we respect them back”. According to the young people, the youth group is a setting where the staff help them feel comfortable to be themselves and to talk openly about issues they are facing. They also highlighted the practical care and support provided by the staff.

In discussions with a small number of parents, they expressed their appreciation of the staff’s sensitive support for their children, especially for those who have special educational needs, or who face issues related to their emotional health and well-being. They also commended the staff for their practical help when families face adverse circumstances and stated strongly that the group provides much-needed stability and security for their children.

The staff recognise that their well-being is a priority within the youth group, and they talk of how they are supported through the respectful, ‘family like’ relationships which they have with one another. They are proud of their work with, and on behalf of, the young people and engage in charitable programmes such as the annual toy appeal, which demonstrates their compassion for the young people and their families. Through this work, the staff also connected with local groups and businesses, providing much needed Christmas gifts for families within the local community.

## **C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION**

The ETI worked alongside the organisation to consider how well the organisation:

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

## **2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

- The shared vision and core values of Glen Parent Youth Group are supporting the holistic development of the young people and informing the youth work practice across all of the provision.
- The well-planned youth work curriculum is responsive to, and meets effectively, the personal and social developmental needs of the young people.
- The staff are reflective practitioners who evaluate regularly the quality of their youth work practice and use this to inform the future programmes with the young people.
- The holistic development of the young people is given a high priority by the staff and the programmes have an appropriate focus on the young people's emotional health and well-being.
- The young people have purposeful and respectful relationships with the staff and their peers, which is enhancing their confidence and communication skills.
- The relatively lower number of young people attending in the over 16 age range is limiting the development of programme opportunities for this age group.
- The staff consistently praise and affirm the young people and celebrate their successes through monthly newsletters and social media.
- The strategically planned staff training is appropriate and responsive to the needs of the young people and is informed by thorough self-evaluation.
- There is a well-established culture of learning across the youth provision, where staff and young people learn together.

- The effective community development approach to youth work and the community partnerships which deliver 'wraparound' services are supporting the young people effectively.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for action identified by the organisation:

- to increase the number of young people attending in the over 16 age range.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

Glen Parent Youth Group's guiding vision of 'empowering youth, building community' enables the young people to be supported not only by their youth workers but also by other stakeholders from within their community. The young people know they are valued and encouraged to 'aspire to be themselves'. The core values of the organisation: respect, equality, empowerment, community, inclusion and relationships are evident in all the interactions between the youth work staff, the management and the young people. The staff and management are proud of the grassroots nature of their organisation and how it is placed at the heart of the community. Their holistic approach to supporting young people is very effective and is facilitated through 'wraparound services' such as day care, after-school and evening youth provision. By fostering strong connections with the local Community Forum, and collaborating closely with community-based family workers, the management provide a responsive, integrated and supportive environment which addresses well the multifaceted needs of the young people.

The youth workers engage regularly in reflective self-evaluation processes which inform and enhance the quality of the youth work experiences for the young people. They listen to the views of young people in all aspects of youth work, for example, through programme evaluations, staff meetings and non-formal discussions with the young people. Their detailed reporting through newsletters, quarterly, and annual reports demonstrates their commitment to informing young people and other stakeholders of the success of their programmes and the benefits to young people and the wider community. These reports help to share the youth groups priorities and send very positive messages into the local community about the contribution of young people to community development. The management committee's substantial investment and confidence in the youth group's work, reinforces and affirms the delivery of their vision and is having a positive impact on the lives of their young people.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The staff are well informed about the young people's needs and the challenges they face. Through their inclusive youth work approaches and by understanding the young people's needs, the staff are contributing positively to the personal and social development of the young people. The young people enjoy a broad range of

sporting, issue-based and well-being programmes, through which they are developing new skills, gaining confidence and building friendships. The youth workers facilitate engaging programmes that are well matched to the ages, abilities and interests of the young people. The staff listen carefully to the young people and are flexible within the programmes to change direction and programme content if it is in the young people's interests. For example, staff facilitated a six-week keeping safe programme addressing violence against girls and young women where the young people explored online safety issues and developed strategies to decrease the time they spend online.

The staff make effective use of the Quality Assurance Framework and Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice to plan, guide and evaluate their work with the young people. They are reflective practitioners who listen to and use the views and feedback from the young people to inform and design the curriculum. The youth work curriculum aligns with the organisation's vision and is well planned, taking careful consideration of the needs of the young people.

The staff are strong advocates for the young people, listening to them and empowering them to have their voice heard. Of particular concern to the staff at the time of the inspection was the reduction in attendance of young people aged over 16 years. The staff are exploring innovative approaches to re-engage with these young people, including detached and outreach youth work, to involve them in programmes within the centre.

The holistic development of the young people is given a high priority by the staff and the programmes have an appropriate focus on the young people's emotional health and well-being. The staff team consistently responds to issues impacting on the young people, their families and the local community; for example, a key concern is the extent of vaping by young people. In response, the staff used the expertise of external agencies to better inform themselves and the young people of the risks associated with vaping behaviours. The feedback from the young people who engaged in the programme on vaping has helped inform future programme planning, design and content.

The staff are sensitive and skilful in all their interactions with the young people and understand the importance of developing and maintaining effective relationships with the young people. They are excellent role models who know the young people, their families and the local community well. Across the provision, the staff and young people enjoy a welcoming, safe and fun environment, where everyone is accepted and valued.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The youth group prioritises its support for, and inclusion of, young people with special educational needs. The young people who attend the daytime inclusion programme are enhancing their social skills and have a clear sense of belonging to the youth group. The afternoon sessions are well structured and flexible, responding appropriately to the emerging needs and the energy levels of the young people. In discussions with inspectors, parents reported that their children who have special educational or emotional needs are supported well to overcome barriers to learning, build friendships and develop their confidence, for example, to volunteer as junior leaders in the summer scheme.

Across the various programmes, the young people spoke maturely about the development of their social skills through meeting and building relationships with young people from other youth groups and different backgrounds. In the young women's group, they talked about their learning from a restorative justice facilitator and how they enjoyed feeling confident about making presentations to their peers. These are transformative skills which enable the young people to make better decisions and improve their life chances.

To identify and monitor the evolving needs of young people, evening debriefs are used effectively, enabling timely and appropriate responses to the needs identified. The youth workers, who enjoy good-humoured relationships with the young people, gain insight and understanding of their needs by listening to them in their conversations. They have also recently completed a detailed local survey, engaging with young people, parents and other stakeholders. To support those young people with additional needs, management have identified and facilitated specific training and workshops with expert external providers.

Underpinning all of the youth work practice is an effective community development approach emphasising empowerment and fostering stronger community and social cohesion. Recognising the level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, the staff provide food at all evening sessions, ensuring that young people receive practical support to engage fully in the youth programmes. Furthermore, the organisation's commitment to fostering a sense of community unity and belonging is evident through events, such as, the intergenerational Halloween themed celebration, which brings people of all ages together, strengthening community bonds and showing the positive role young people play as members of their community.

#### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The staff consider the participation of succeeding generations of young people and the involvement of their families, over extended periods of time, as indicators of the youth group's impact on the community, and the realisation of its vision to empower the young people.

In discussions with the inspectors, the young people articulated their increased sense of responsibility within the youth group and more widely in the local community, particularly through their participation in bespoke programmes. As a result of their engagement in groups such as the Young Men's programme, the young people are maturely discussing a range of issues which impact on them and their peers. The young people were central to the design and setting up of this group that focuses on making positive choices, taking greater responsibility within their community, and reducing risk taking behaviour. The young men in this group were honest when exploring stereotypes and reflected on the impact of anti-social behaviour on themselves and their community.

The staff are consistently aware of the young people's participation, behaviour and progress. Reflecting the positive ethos of the youth group, the staff are intentional in their verbal praise and affirmation of the young people, enhancing the development of their self-esteem. Working with others in the Lenadoon Youth Providers, the

youth group has a leading role in the Lenadoon Neighbourhood Youth Achievement Awards. The awards ceremony plays a significant role in recognising and celebrating the achievements of young people in the Suffolk and Lenadoon communities. The awards celebrate and recognise the achievements of individuals and groups in areas such as sport, participation, volunteering and social action.

The projects and programmes end with a celebration event decided by the young people. In addition, the active participation and successes of the members and staff, both within and beyond the Glen youth group, are celebrated consistently through informative and attractive monthly newsletters, which feature many photographs of the young people immersed in their programmes. The youth group's regular and pro-active use of social media is an effective way to share the young people's achievements with a wider audience. The development of the artistic, sporting and life skills of young people with additional needs are celebrated prominently in both the newsletters and through social media.

## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

The staff model a strong commitment to learning, encouraging the young people to learn alongside them in informative group sessions on issues such as substance misuse and vaping. A high number of the staff have progressed through the youth group as members and having completed university education are now employed full-time in the youth and community sector. They have a strong sense of belonging to their community and their willingness to 'give back' is demonstrated through their passion for working with the young people of the area.

The staff training is informed by thorough self-evaluation and is strategically planned to be appropriate and responsive to the needs of the young people. The staff bring a range of skills to their work and also draw on the expertise of others, for example, in the area of Restorative Justice. Where appropriate, training such as that on the dangers of vaping has also been made available to parents, helping to inform them of the dangers faced by young people and enabling them to support their children. In addition, the staff have planned appropriately autism awareness training to support them deliver inclusive programmes and helping young people to overcome barriers.

The young people benefit from the well-established partnerships with community groups, local schools, sports clubs and businesses which contribute to the 'wraparound' services provided. A key partnership for the staff is their work with a local special school, where parents identified the challenge for their children in accessing social activities beyond school. Through effective collaboration, pupils now benefit from a bespoke programme of activities and because of this intervention some are now able to attend and engage in youth provision in their local area.

Successful links with local primary schools enable the youth group to support the children including collecting and bringing them to the after-school provision where they engage in the youth programmes and are helped with their homework. In addition, the youth group has effective links with two local post-primary schools enabling pupils to benefit from work experience in childcare at the after-school club.



The staff are innovative in collaborating with others to address the issues faced by the young people as well as issues which impact on the wider community. By inviting the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to engage in youth work activities, the young people are developing a greater knowledge and understanding of an essential emergency service. Members of the youth group have also been involved in providing the script for infomercials which have been televised, including one to inform young people across Northern Ireland of the dangers of wildfires. In addition, links with local businesses supported the summer intervention programmes which benefitted significant numbers of the young people and their families.

## **F. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION**

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current statutory guidance. In discussions with inspectors, all of the young people reported that the youth group is a safe space, that they know who to speak to if they have any concerns about their well-being and that the leaders respond promptly to any issues. The parents who met with inspectors agreed strongly that they trust the staff to care for their children and put their safety, health and well-being first.

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

Glen Parent Youth Group is implementing and achieving its vision through the empowering and inclusive youth work environment which the staff and management have established. The collaborative partnerships within the Glen Parent Complex and with other youth and community organisations across West Belfast are having a positive impact on the personal and social development of the young people.

ETI will continue to work with Glen Parent Youth Group, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely include:

- the promotion of inclusion and equity in response to the needs, abilities and interests of the young people; and
- the development of the community of learning within the provision, where collaboration, communication and continuous learning are valued and promoted.

Glen Parent Youth Group is well placed to take forward the area for action detailed in this report.

## 5. APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

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

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

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