

Report of a Youth Inspection  
Holywood Youth Centre

November 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Hollywood Youth Centre is a project managed by Hollywood Family Trust and is based in the town centre of Hollywood, County Down. The centre is a voluntary youth centre, which receives significant funding from the Education Authority (EA) and additional funding from a range of other funders. There are ten staff working at the centre, including two full-time, eight part-time staff, and ten junior volunteer leaders.

At the time of the inspection the centre had 274 young people registered, with consistently high numbers of young people registered in the senior section. There was a significant reduction in overall membership last year, which the management attribute to the closure of the Saturday night youth provision because of reduced funding.

The youth workers provide a range of local and regional programmes, including weekly drop-in provision; outreach street-based youth work; programmes in local schools; international exchanges; and youth leadership programmes. A key priority for the youth workers and management is working with young people who are considered 'hard to reach' and involved in risk-taking behaviours, and their families.

The key areas identified by the youth workers in respect of the young people's needs include: education and underachievement; support for young people with neurodiverse and additional needs; and food poverty.

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

The young people reported that they feel safe and secure and know who they can talk to if they have any concerns. In discussions with the inspectors, the young people talked of how they enjoy coming to the youth club to meet their friends and foster new friendships. They also spoke of: how they develop skills in leadership; communication and problem-solving; enjoy the broad range of activities, including cookery and arts and crafts; and how they benefit from residential and group work, on topics such learning about different cultures.

The small number of parents who spoke to the inspectors talked about the care and support shown by the staff to their children, even when their children are beyond the age range for attendance. The parents also talked of how important it is, when their child may not want to discuss an issue with them, that their child feels comfortable talking to a youth worker, and highlighted the important contribution the youth centre staff have made to their family lives. One parent spoke of the staff seeing potential in their child, the leadership skills they developed and that the youth centre had "played a huge role" in their child's successful progression in education. In addition, they spoke of the sense of belonging that their child had to the centre, the safe environment and the confidence their child developed through their youth work experiences.

In discussions with the staff, they highlighted their enjoyment of working with the young people and how most of them had progressed through the centre as young members. They spoke of: the connections across the Hollywood Family Trust projects and how this benefits the young people; the difference youth work in the centre and outreach youth work makes in the lives of the young people; and reflected on how the young people trying new experiences impacts positively on their personal and social development.

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

The ETI worked alongside Hollywood Youth Centre to consider how well the provision:

- 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 vision and core aims of Hollywood Youth Centre are well embedded in the youth work practice, and are making a meaningful difference in the lives of the young people and their families.
- The young people benefit from the inclusive ethos, which is well embedded, welcoming and values each young person.
- The young people develop important life skills which empower them to progress and engage in education, training and employment, and to engage positively with their families and the community.
- The skilful, experienced and caring staff provide a safe place where the young people can listen to, challenge and develop their understanding of one another's views and values.
- The well-planned youth work curriculum is relevant, engaging and promotes effectively the holistic development of the young people.
- The staff encourage the young people to reflect on and celebrate their experiences in the youth provision and record appropriately the young people's views, reflections and evaluations.

- The well-established, strategic partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, support and complement the work of the centre and give the young people access to a comprehensive range of programmes and experiences.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the youth centre demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for consideration:

- the staff have identified appropriately that going forward, they want to capture and celebrate more fully the impact of their work with the young people in their Annual Report.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

Hollywood Youth Centre contributes actively to the achievement of Hollywood Family Trust's vision to "help equip individuals and families through some of the issues in their lives and contribute towards an inclusive community" by "providing a safe and welcoming space where young people can spend time with friends, be themselves, and learn new skills to help them to thrive and increase their sense of belonging and community".

The youth workers and management are strategic, compassionate and care deeply for the young people and the community within which they work. Through their shared understanding of the core aims and priorities for their work with young people, and their thoughtful collaborative actions, they are making a meaningful difference in the lives of their young people and their families. They have fostered an inclusive environment across the provision that is accepting of all young people, which supports them in their personal and social development. The staff and management have realistic aspirations for the young people, understand the challenges they face, and are working with the young people 'where they are at' in their personal journey.

The youth workers, through regular and effective self-evaluation processes, inform and contribute to this vision. The views of the young people are listened to and prioritised in all of the youth work practice; for example, at a recent review night the young people discussed how the youth centre rules could be improved.

The organisation's priorities for its work are informed at all levels by the views and needs of the young people. The youth workers are young person-centred; and offer a varied, needs-informed programme which nurtures the potential of each young person. As well as providing emotional support, including counselling for the young people, they also give practical support such as providing food hampers and a hygiene bank.

The youth workers create effective conditions for enjoyable youth work and there is a welcoming culture of openness, reflection and care for each individual young person. The management are committed to the vision, and that every project within the organisation plays its role in achieving it.

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

The youth work curriculum is well-designed, relevant and impactful, and based on a detailed analysis of the needs of the young people. Each session, operating four nights per week, offers appropriate generic activities that provide safe spaces where young people meet friends and build new friendships. The sessions also include appropriate targeted activities, such as, group work, sports, and arts and crafts, which are planned effectively to engage and inspire the young people. There is a high level of participation from the young people, and the positive feedback, combined with very detailed staff briefings and end of session debriefs, collectively contributes to the continuous improvement of programmes.

The youth workers are highly skilled and are supported effectively by leadership through regular staff meetings and training. The centre collaborates appropriately with local and regional youth work organisations to deliver effective programmes. When the youth workers identify the need to build further their skills, a collaborative approach with the appropriate youth work partners provides the necessary training to support the staff's continuous professional development.

The youth workers use their reflections, as well as monitoring, tracking and evaluation processes, to assess effectively the progress of the young people and the impact of the programmes on their personal and social development. The centre staff's success at progressing the young people is demonstrated through the positive outcomes and high levels of satisfaction reported by the young people. Ensuring that the young people's needs and preferences shape the centre's programmes is a cornerstone of the youth work team's success and has resulted in a sense of ownership and belonging by the young people.

The youth workers are dedicated to enhancing the young people's emotional health and wellbeing through a variety of targeted programmes designed to meet their individual needs. These programmes include initiatives focused on antibullying, inclusion and diversity, and positive mental health, such as the 'Working Things Out' programme. The young people with the youth workers, plan and design annual celebration events to promote positive mental health, and incorporate activities, such as art and sport to engage existing and new young people.

There are opportunities, which the young people avail of, to be mentored on a one-to-one basis by trained staff. The young people set personal goals through baseline assessments and through the mentoring process develop further their personal and social skills. The centre also prioritises the wellbeing of all of its staff, with management providing effective support and external assistance when required.

The youth workers' and management's approach to safeguarding fosters a supportive and safe environment, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the centre's programmes.

## C. BUILDING EQUITY

Hollywood Youth Centre is contributing effectively towards an inclusive community, welcoming young people from all backgrounds and experiences. The young people embrace diversity and are accepting of their peers, listening to and valuing one another's opinions. They have developed their self-awareness and their understanding of others through their participation in programmes within the youth centre. The young people have also met with peers in other areas of Northern Ireland and Germany, which has developed further their understanding of other views and cultures. In addition, through the centre-based 'SPACE' group, the youth workers support young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and allies, in building their confidence and establishing a sense of belonging.

The youth workers are acutely aware of the issues faced by the young people who attend. They gain insight and understanding of the needs of the young people by listening attentively to them, carrying out detailed surveys, engaging with parents and other stakeholders. There is an appropriate range of intervention programmes which helps the young people overcome the barriers they are facing, including a summer intervention programme, which develops the young people's confidence in decision-making around issues they find challenging.

The young people have many opportunities to cook and eat together in the youth work sessions. Furthermore, the centre provides both food and hygiene banks which are easily available for young people to access. The highly skilled youth workers facilitate the young people to discuss and learn about relevant and sensitive issues in a safe space, discussing issues such as online safety, grooming, unhealthy relationships and criminality, building their capacity to resist risk-taking behaviours. The young people also benefit from 'intervention nights' organised by the staff at the centre during times of heightened tension in the local area.

The Young People Leading Change initiative enables young leaders to participate in international exchanges with young people from other regions such as the Basque region and Berlin. Through these international exchanges the young people discuss, reflect on and challenge their own values and beliefs and those held by others. The testimonies provided by participants demonstrate the powerful impact of their learning experiences and are reflected in their personal stories. Following this work, a small number of the participants progressed to volunteering within the youth centre, assisting the youth workers to deliver 'Good Relations' workshops in schools. In discussions with the young people, they spoke of how they improved their leadership skills through planning and delivering a youth work session to a cross-cultural group.

The youth workers give a high level of consideration to how the young people develop the necessary skills to enable them to progress both in their learning and into employment and have created an in-house 'progression pyramid' which identifies young people's participation levels. The youth workers monitor the young people's personal and social development and their acquisition of knowledge using thorough baseline and endline tracking. There are detailed individual development plans identifying needs and bespoke support and progression routes, which are helping individual young people achieve their goals. In addition, the positive impact of the youth work and additional interventions are demonstrated clearly through comprehensive case studies outlining the young person's progression.

Across the provision, young people who are neurodiverse, or have additional needs, are nurtured and supported to engage in and benefit from youth work experiences. The youth workers are building mutually trusting relationships which enable the young people to settle well and socialise with their peers. With the support of an experienced and appropriately qualified member of the board, the youth workers have received training in trauma informed practice. The centre has developed a sensory space where young people can access a quiet space to regulate their emotions.

#### **D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The youth workers are well informed about the needs and backgrounds of the young people and define success as the progression of the young people in their personal and social development “underpinned with equity”. They monitor the progress of the young people through a range of processes, including nightly recordings and reflections, which show empathy, compassion and concern. The youth workers encourage the young people to reflect on and articulate their experiences in the youth provision and record at every opportunity the young people’s views, reflections and evaluations. In discussions with the youth workers, they stated how they are keen for the young people to try new experiences and “step out of their comfort zones”. One example, which the young people state they enjoy immensely, is the use of residential experiences to build new friendships and develop a better understanding of others from differing backgrounds.

The youth workers’ constructive and positive feedback to the young people is immediate in situations; and conversations were sensitive and non-judgemental. Where necessary, the staff are challenging of the young people and are patient and kind in all of their interactions and conversations. They are swift to address harmful comments, attitudes, or actions and are using their recent training on restorative practices. In all of the sessions, the young people have positive relationships with one another and with the youth workers. When situations do not go as planned, the staff support the young people, and on many occasions also provide extensive support to their parents.

The youth workers celebrate one another’s achievements and are keen to share and promote best practice with one another. For example, one member of staff created an excellent reflective piece of work to illustrate how ‘Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice’ is embedded into the work of the centre.

The achievements of all of the members are celebrated regularly and the ‘start-of-summer’ celebration event was a themed fun day which promoted positive mental health. The Engage Girls Group established a formal committee and are working well together planning for an event in the new year. Through the bespoke mentoring programme facilitated by the staff, the young people set goals and use podcasts to reflect on and share their achievements. These podcasts are preparing effectively the young people for the next stage of their learning, which is to develop and enhance further their digital skills.

The staff use a wide variety of methods to affirm and celebrate the success of the young people, for example, through celebration ceremonies, affirmation cards, individual and thoughtfully written Christmas cards and social media.



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

Hollywood Youth Centre has an ethos of learning for young people that is well embedded in its culture and in the planning and delivery of its youth work programmes. The youth workers and management have established strategic partnerships with a wide range of other youth providers, support agencies, community organisations, businesses and other relevant stakeholders which support and complement the work of the centre. Through these important links and collaborative partnerships, the young people have access to a wider range of programmes and experiences, enabling them to gain a broader perspective on their lives and to build new relationships with one another. The young people develop important life skills which empower them to progress and engage in education, training and employment, and to engage positively with their community. The partnerships are also used to promote good community relations among the young people locally and further afield. Furthermore, the staff use these partnerships to share resources and to attract additional funding for programmes which benefit the young people. For example, the partnership with the Shared Town's Conservation summer club provides the young people with valuable practical experience of working in gardens, a better understanding of the natural environment and they learn the importance of conservation and sustainable development.

The centre staff have long established partnerships with schools in the Hollywood and wider Belfast areas which connect well the young people's formal and informal education experiences. Over time, these relationships have strengthened, and further programmes have been designed and delivered to meet the young people's needs. These include lunchtime outreach provision in the playground, school-based mentoring of young people facing mental health challenges, and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) focusing on, for example, workshops which develop young people's understanding of consent, identity and leadership skills. The staff in one school reported to the inspectors that the partnership with the youth centre is crucial in providing a first step intervention for those young people 'hardest to reach', helping the young people to overcome barriers to learning or challenges in their lives and providing emotional and wellbeing support. Another school principal highlighted the valuable and beneficial sessions which are interactive, collaborative and enjoyable for the pupils.

The youth workers, through their street outreach youth work, are building and maintaining relationships with young people, including those experiencing a range of issues. Community partners commended the youth workers for their highly skilled engagement with the young people, citing how they build their trust, listen to them and help them openly talk about their concerns. Furthermore, during the outreach session, the youth workers demonstrated an extensive knowledge of their community and the issues which impact the young people's wellbeing. The youth workers use these engagements with young people to talk to them about the youth centre activities, and where appropriate, they support the young people to reduce their risk-taking behaviours.

The staff are highly trained through an extensive range of professional learning opportunities delivered by both external organisations and internally by the youth leadership team. The training is informed by and matched well to the needs of the young people. For example, the staff have been trained in: LGBTQIA+ training to

inform the facilitation of the weekly meetings of the SPACE inclusion group. Trauma informed practice, undertaken by all the staff, supports them well to deliver needs-based programmes; and the outreach and detached training provides the staff with strategies to effectively reach out to young people in the community. The training in Restorative Justice, provided to all staff, focuses appropriately on implementing a consistent approach to dealing with challenging situations and helps the staff use restorative approaches in their interactions with the young people.

## **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 the young people, they report that they feel safe in the youth centre and know who to talk to if they have any concerns.

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

Hollywood Youth Centre is making an important contribution to the vision of Hollywood Family Trust, helping young people and their families through the issues they face and is having a positive impact on the personal and social development of the young people. The inclusive youth work practice embraces and empowers the young people to engage positively with one another and the wide range of experiences is broadening their perspectives and aspirations.

ETI will continue to work with Hollywood Youth Centre, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn.

The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the strategic and collaborative partnerships which support and enhance the work with the young people; and
- the youth workers' robust planning, monitoring and recording of the progress being made by the young people individually and collectively.

## 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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