Foróige Neighbourhood Youth Projects

Enhancing Support For Young People

*Summary Research Report
Commissioned by Foróige and
the Health Service Executive*

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empowering youth
enriching communities

foróige

Foreword

I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce this important and timely research study on the working of the Foróige / Health Service Executive (HSE) Neighbourhood Youth Projects in the West of Ireland. The study will add significantly to the body of knowledge on what works well for young people dealing with adversity in their lives.

The partnership between Foróige and the HSE (initially the Western Health Board) started over ten years ago. It grew out of the belief that by combining our expertise we could develop a service that would be community based, accessible to young people from the area and could also target those young people who were most in need. It aimed to improve the life chances of young people by enabling them and their families to overcome personal, social, educational or health problems they encountered in their lives.

It is a model of early intervention that aims to prevent the development of serious problems for the young people referred to it. The success of the model is reflected in the findings of the study and it provides a road-map for further development of the Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP) model.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Foróige NYP staff, not just for their work on this study, but for their ongoing dedication and professionalism. I want to thank the HSE for their continued support and faith in Foróige. I want to particularly thank Dr. Pat Nolan and the Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway for undertaking the study on our behalf.

The NYP model of adolescent and family support is one we, in Foróige, are very proud of and we hope that this report will provide impetus for further development throughout the country.

Séan Campbell
Chief Executive Officer of Foróige

Introduction

This report summarises a study, which explores, over time, the profile, support needs and mental health of young people attending Foróige/HSE Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYP) in Counties Mayo and Roscommon. The report describes the functions of NYPs including the HSE/Foróige joint management service model. In addition some considerations are provided in respect of the literature on community based interventions in working with at risk youth generally, and the existing body of research on NYPs in the west of Ireland, more specifically. A brief summary of the methodology used in the study is outlined while key results are presented across six sections. Finally, some implications for future Foróige NYP policy and practice are considered in light of the results of the study.

Objectives and methodology

Specifically, the research is interested in profiling the young people attending the programme; establishing why they attend the NYP programme, whom they see as offering them support, the amount and types of support on offer, as well as their mental health status and life events they experience. In addition, the study wishes to look at the relationship, if any, between these factors and a young person's attendance at the NYP. A final but important intention in completing the research was to avoid a 'once-off' point in time study, but to gain a fuller picture by assessing these matters through a tracking and longitudinal study.

The Specific objectives of the study were six-fold:

1. To establish a profile of all young people attending Neighbourhood Youth Projects in Mayo and Roscommon.

2. To identify and measure the sources, types and levels of perceived social support among all young people attending Neighbourhood Youth Projects in Mayo and Roscommon across a nine month period and annually there after.

3. To compare over this time period changes in perceived support of all young people attending the identified adolescent support services.

4. To correlate over this time period the young people's perceived level of social support with their self-rated general mental wellbeing.

5. To plot perceived support in light of self-reported life events among those young people who reported best and least levels of social support at the first point of data collection.

6. To consider messages for Foróige NYPs in light of the results of the study.

The study, which commenced in 2002 and is still ongoing, took place in three NYPs which are community based adolescent support projects for young people experiencing adversity, funded by the Health Service Executive and conjointly operated with Foróige, the national youth development organisation.

All fieldwork for the study occurred over distinct time points, comprising the collection of sets of data at all three project locations as follows:

- Baseline collection of data
- Follow up bimonthly collection of data in respect of two sub-groups
- Follow up collection of data after nine months
- Follow up collection annually thereafter for three years

Each adolescent respondent was requested to complete a set of reliable and validated measures in order to establish the required information as follows:

1. Social Network Questionnaire (Russell and Cutrona1980) - to identify from whom do young people receive support.

2. Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona and Dolan in paper) - to gauge the levels and types of support young people see as available to them.

3. The Adolescent Wellbeing Scale (Birleson, 1980) and the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg and Williams 1991) - to establish respondents' perceived sense of wellbeing and general mental health.

4. The Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (Compas et al, 1993)- to identify the serious major life events experienced by young people and to what extent do they see these events as affecting them.

Evidence for community based approaches for working with adolescents

There is emerging evidence that school based programmes (Dryfoos, 2005; Canavan 1998; Boldt, 1997) and community based programmes (Connell and Gambone, 1999; Benson, 1996; Dolan and McGrath 2006) effectively bolster adolescents. (McKeown, 2001). Similarly, in Northern Ireland, McAuley's (1999) evaluation report on the Home-Start Programme found evidence that community based services can help families.

In terms of the nature of interventions to be used in working with young people, there is evidence that those which concentrate on a three-pronged helping approach are most effective. Those that help a young person enlist social support (Cutrona, 2000); enable his / her resilience (Howard et al 2001) while focusing on dealing with life events retrospectively and prospectively (Dryfoos et al 2005) are most crucial. There is also growing consensus that working with children and adolescents is about working with need (Little and Mount, 1999; Pinkerton et al 2003; Brady et al, 2004). In this regard, Hardiker's four levels of need model is being utilised as a way of catagorising service provision to adolescents. The model advocates more intervention as a young person's need increases. For NYP service users who are in most need of support, this implies most efficient use of resources and may have particular resonance for designing programmatic interventions within the NYP work programme.

> *In Ireland, some emerging initiatives, such as the Springboard Family Support Programme, are proving successful in supporting children and adolescents, their families and communities*

Research to date on NYPs in the west of Ireland

Over the last 13 years there has been a range of studies which have built up a knowledge base in respect of NYPs. These evaluations have varied in size and intensity, and have generally been qualitative in their nature.

In the main, these studies have focused on the perception of service users, parents and/or professionals. Furthermore they tended to establish satisfaction levels with the programme and/or the perceived effectiveness of interventions. Canavan's (1993) original study of the Westside NYP, then a pilot project, found positive outcomes in terms of a perceived satisfaction rating among service users, parents and referrers, alike. Similarly, Gavigan's (2002) larger study which used a series of repeated quantitative and qualitative questionnaires and semi structured interviews found high satisfaction with the NYP programme. Whereas to date, NYPs have been perceived as positive the only negative criticism by adolescents and parents alike has been that they were sometimes unsatisfied (wanting more of the intervention) rather than dissatisfied (not finding the intervention helpful) with the service. Specifically, they wanted projects open longer with more weekend activities. Generally, in terms of the nature of the programme, intensive discussion group work models although helpful, were seen as less preferable than diversion or activity groups.

Apart from studies which have focused directly on adolescents, there has also been research on parents of NYP service users. An earlier study by Dolan (1997) found an important relationship between the perceived mental health of parents, their self-rated levels of social support and satisfaction with the parenting support programme offered by NYP staff. The style of the NYP worker was also found to be a very important factor. Ensuring that young people have a voice on the NYP has been highlighted in two studies (Gavigan 2003 and Morrison 2003). From her qualitative study, Morrison advocates a clear model of consultation with young people both in terms of their safety while attending the programme and in respect of the nature of the intervention they receive. Not all young people cope well in groups and this can be more evident among young people who experience relationship difficulty. Forde (2002) focused her research on individual work and she found the need for a more distinct, definite and discrete model of one-to-one work that is need-driven and time limited in its format.

Key Messages

- Resilient young people are those who can overcome difficulties in their lives and enabling coping during adolescence is a key function of helping professionals. Social support enablement contributes to resiliency building in young people

- There is a body of evidence that community based and school based programmes that are needs led can be effective in working with troubled and troublesome adolescents

- To date, research on NYPs in the west indicate that the programme is seen as helpful by service users, their families and referring professionals. While young people like coming to the NYP, they want more in terms of amount and timing of service intervention

About the NYP model

Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYPs) are community based preventative adolescent projects for young people experiencing adversity, offering packages of individual and group work support and development programmes. The service works with targeted populations of young people with varying degrees of difficulty. Although in existence in the mid 1970's, NYPs were first established in the west of Ireland by the Health Services Executive (HSE) fourteen years ago with an initial pilot Project based on the Westside of Galway city. Over time, this programme has grown with nine NYPs now operating throughout the region.

In addition to the Westside Project, Galway City has two further projects in Ballybane and Ballinfoyle. The Ballybane NYP, like its counterpart in Westside, is directly funded and managed by the HSE, whereas Ballinfoyle NYP is jointly managed by Foróige and the HSE and is part of the National Springboard Initiative.

In Roscommon there are two NYPs located in Castlerea and Boyle, while in Mayo there are three Projects located in Castlebar, Ballina and Westport. Additionally, new projects have been established in Carrick on Shannon, Leitrim, Dungloe and Ballyshannon, County Donegal, and in County Monaghan. All of the Projects in Mayo, Roscommon and Leitrim are joint ventures between Foróige and the HSE Western Region. Whereas there are obvious differences between NYPs such as the geographical context in which they operate, overall, the NYP programme operates as a 'collective' within a region and it is from within this cluster of projects that this research occurred.

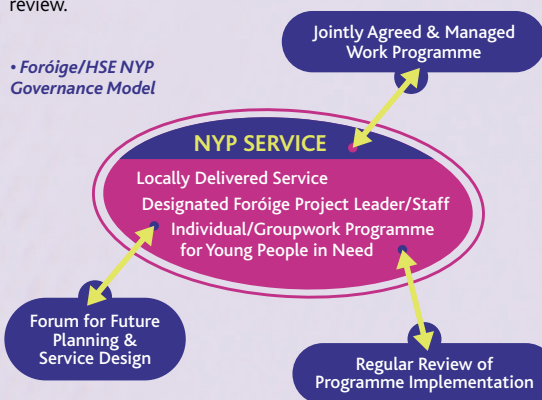**The objectives of the NYP are:**

1. To provide practical care with a preventive slant, and appropriate to their needs, to identify young people with personal, family or social problems, in the community setting (thus avoiding admissions to full-time residential care), in such a way as to gain a high profile and acceptance and to avoid possible stigmatisation.

2. To provide ongoing assistance for the healthy development of identified young people who lack the necessary level of family support.

3. To act as a resource to the community, in so far as it is practical to do so, as it attempts to solve the problems within it and develop itself.

4. To act as a guideline to social workers and other health and education professionals who work with similar young people.

5. To achieve HSE aims with respect to its responsibilities under the terms of the Child Care Act 1991.

Foróige/HSE joint management of the NYP - A unique model of governance

One unique and important aspect of the NYPs who participated in this study is that they are conjointly managed by the HSE and Foróige as statutory and voluntary partners. This partnership, which operates at strategic and operational levels, is underpinned by three core 'lynchpins of management' which go far beyond a simple purchaser/provider arrangement. Firstly, the local HSE Family Support Manager (at county level) works with the local Area Foróige Manager (at regional level) in agreeing the specific work programme for the NYP. This comprises agreement on the quantum and type of individual and group work programmes on offer and the number and nature (in terms of level of need) of services users which the project targets on an ongoing basis.

> "The original study of the Westside NYP found positive outcomes in terms of a perceived satisfaction rating among service users, parents & referrers alike"

Secondly, both parties meet regularly (usually bimonthly) and with project leaders/staff to review the work programme in detail. This includes troubleshooting any emergent issues in respect of interventions spanning individual work with young people to intensive group work with young people and parents, and across the stages of design, intervention, completion and review.

• **Foróige/HSE NYP Governance Model**

Jointly Agreed & Managed Work Programme

NYP SERVICE
Locally Delivered Service
Designated Foróige Project Leader/Staff
Individual/Groupwork Programme
for Young People in Need

Forum for Future Planning & Service Design

Regular Review of Programme Implementation

Thirdly, at a very basic level the conjoint management arrangement enables an informal forum for future programme planning and service design between partner agencies.

Perhaps most importantly, this way of working evokes and maintains a culture of true partnership between a statutory and voluntary agency based on equality and mutual interest in the young people and families who need and use the NYP. This results in a minimisation of potential misunderstandings by either party in respect of the other, for example where the statutory body are unsure if they are getting value from the voluntary agency for the cost of the service provided. Similarly, it circumvents the voluntary agency's belief that the statutory body is acting solely as a 'financial controller' with no interest in or engagement with the actual service being provided.

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Profile of the young people attending the NYP

There is a wide range of reasons why young people attend NYPs (Canavan and Dolan, 2000) and in this study over half of the respondents (n=172) were referred because of behavioural difficulties as identified by the referrer. Such behaviours typically included young people acting out in school and/or community settings, truancy or complete non-attendance at school, risk taking behaviours or propensity towards addiction. Other young people were referred primarily for more somatic behaviours such as low self-esteem and self-efficacy, estranged relationships at home and poor capacity to make and keep friends. Slightly more girls than boys were attending the projects at the time of the study with a mean age of thirteen years. While just over one third of respondents were from one-parent families, one in five were also living within reconstituted households. The characteristics of the sample of young people attending the NYP who also participated in the study are summarized as follows:

- 172 respondents participated in the study spread evenly across three Neighbourhood Youth Projects

- Slightly more girls than boys participated in the study

- The mean age of respondents was thirteen years

- One in five respondents were from an ethnic minority

- Just over one third of respondents were from one parent families, while one in five proportion were living within reconstituted households

- Over half of the respondents were referred to the projects primarily because of behavioural difficulties as identified by the referrer

- Most respondents were at school or workshop programmes although school attendance was an ongoing issue for many respondents

- Schools were the highest source of referrals to the projects with an equal rate of Parent-referrals and referrals from the Social Work Department

- The mean score for length of time attending the NYP at the commencement of the study was just over two years

The fact that over half of those who attend the programme were identified as having noticeable behavioural problems, i.e. either already engaged with other social services or requiring referral, can be viewed as a positive result for NYPs. In itself, this demonstrates that projects are targeting young people with a serious need for support. In addition, given that the mean attendance rate for those who use NYPs is just over two years, there is evidence that not alone are such young people being engaged successfully, but more importantly, their involvement in the project is maintained over time.
Also, when one considers the profile of who attends Foróige NYPS, it is noteworthy that one in five young people come from an ethnic minority. This intervention reflects the NYP's capacity to meet the needs of the changing demographic population in Ireland.

Who young people see as offering them support

Multiple sources of social support seen as available

Young people were asked to nominate up to a maximum of 15 sources of support in their social network. Overall young people attending the NYPs saw themselves as having access to plentiful sources of social support with the average social network containing 11 members. Whereas very few had less than five people in their network, it was noticeable that many identified a full set of 15 people as sources of help. In sum, young people on NYPs were able to identify multiple sources of social support.

Family

Nuclear Family members (parents, brothers and sisters) constituted by far the main sources of support for young people. As one would expect parents were frequently nominated, but it is noteworthy that just over 25% of young people did not nominate their father. In some cases young people had no access to or relationship with fathers but in some cases relationships had become so difficult for young people that they chose to deselect their fathers. Extended family were consistently identified by young people with at least one extended family member (usually a grandparent, uncle or aunt) nominated in over two thirds of cases.

Friends

The concept of casual and close friendships was explored among young people particularly as friends can be a key ally during adolescence. Whereas four out of five respondents could identify at least one close friend, 18% of young people did not have any near friend whom they could rely on. It is also noteworthy that, for some, young friends were either 'all or nothing' in that almost half of respondents (49%) did not nominate a casual friend (friends other than close friends). These results show that during adolescence the presence of close friendships cannot be assumed and some young people don't identify with casual friendships.

Professionals

All young people who participated in the study were known to at least one professional agency (the NYP) and in some cases many more such as Home School Community Liaison Teachers, Juvenile Liaison Garda officers and Social Workers. Nevertheless, professionals did not feature strongly with less than one in five respondents nominating a professional person as part of their social network. However, this should not necessarily be seen as a negative result as one could argue that rather than be dependent on formal help young people should access support from natural sources such as family friends and neighbours.

Amounts and types of support available

Overall support

Young people had a perception of accessing high levels of social support with most scoring support in the higher range. Apart from a high score for overall total support, in general, ratings were high across all four sub-types of support (practical, emotional, advice and esteem support) and across all sources (parents, friends, professionals and other adults). Whereas there was little difference across types of support, practical support was seen as most available while esteem support (from others) was seen as weakest. However, a small minority of young people saw themselves as having low levels of social support across all sources and types.
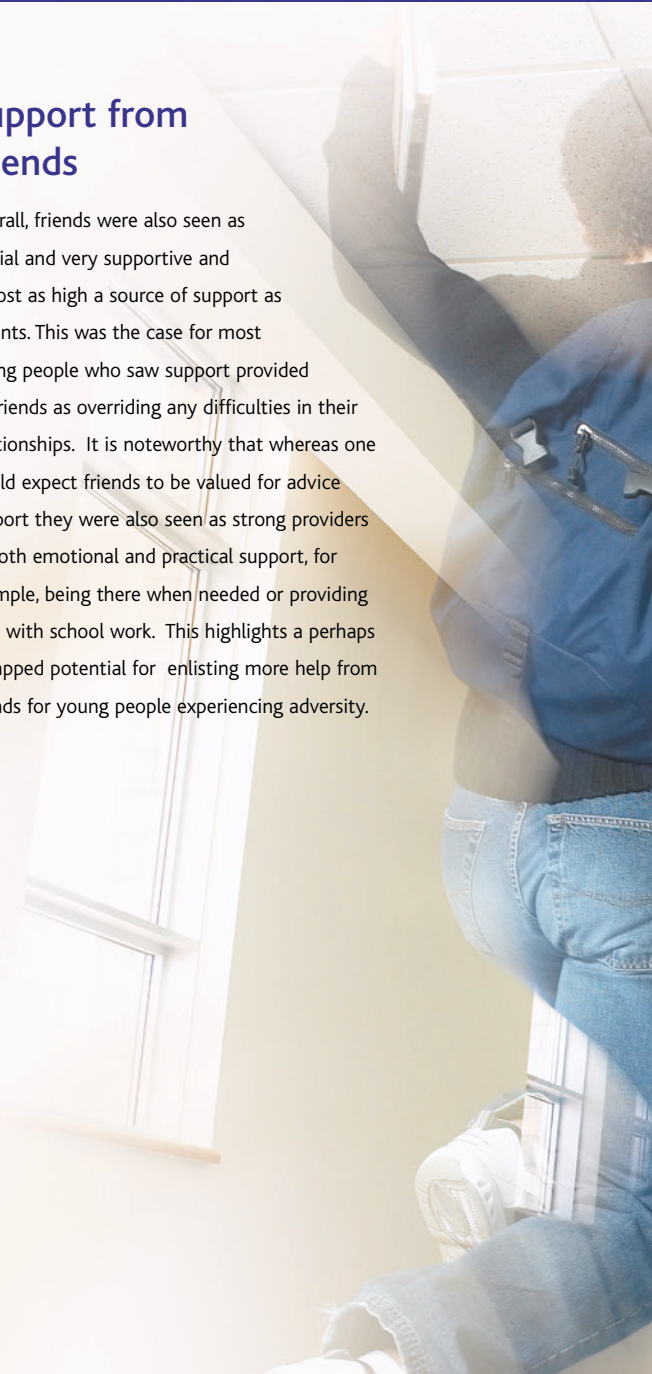
Support from parents

Despite the fact that for many young people relationships with their parents were strained, which in part resulted in their attendance on the NYP programme, parents were still seen as consistently high supporters across all types of support.

They were also seen ahead of all other sources including friends as the greatest source of support. This result is important in that it shows, not only the centrality of the relationship between parents and their teenage offspring, but it also demonstrates the positive potential of working on the parent-adolescent emotional bond, despite difficulties in this relationship.

Support from friends

Overall, friends were also seen as crucial and very supportive and almost as high a source of support as parents. This was the case for most young people who saw support provided by friends as overriding any difficulties in their relationships. It is noteworthy that whereas one would expect friends to be valued for advice support they were also seen as strong providers of both emotional and practical support, for example, being there when needed or providing help with school work. This highlights a perhaps untapped potential for enlisting more help from friends for young people experiencing adversity.

Self-rated mental health

Support from professionals including NYP staff

It is noteworthy that although few Professionals, such as NYP staff and teachers, were included in the social networks of young people (which is not necessarily a bad result), where nominated, professionals were always seen as highly supportive and appreciated as being responsive to need. For young people on the NYP programme, where staff were seen to be part of their networks, their advice support on dealing with issues was valued and emotional support in terms of staff 'being there' for the young person was also rated very highly.

> *There is evidence that young people are being engaged successfully and, more importantly, their involvement in the project is maintained over time*

Two standardised similar measures were used to establish young people's self-reported mental health status, namely the Adolescent Wellbeing Scale (AWS), which measures overall 'coping' and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), which identifies one's sense of physical and mental healthiness. While young people had a good perception of their wellbeing, few had the preferred score of zero (preferred) and 13% (n = 21) of young people scored above the threshold score for concern in relation to their wellness. In terms of results for the GHQ it was established that while a third of young people had the optimum preferred score of zero for their perceived general mental health, a third of respondents scored above the recognised threshold score for perceived distress.

Importantly, when taken together, this indicates that there was a noticeable population of young people attending the NYP who were in urgent need of support and that the programme was targeting and working with an 'at risk' population within a wider universal set of young people.

Results in respect of life events

All young people reported many general and typical positive and negative life events, while fewer reported major negative events. Typically, respondents reported negative daily hassles such as arguments with parents over matters relating to home, e.g. doing the dishes or keeping their bedroom tidy. Additionally, they self-reported issues such as squabbling with friends or minor altercations with teachers in school.

Conversely, positive events were reported by young people such as being more settled in school or passing a state exam, forming new friends or achievement in sport. In terms of major negative life events, a number of young people reported incidents which would be a cause for concern, such issues included:

- Parents in the process of getting divorced
- Being expelled from school
- Arrest by the Gardai of a family member
- The death of a close relative

- A parent moving out of the house
- Events of drug misuse by a young person
- Violent attack between friends

Relationship between social support, mental health and life events

Overall, the study found an association between young people's perceived social support and mental health, and self-reported life events. More specifically the study found that in terms of positive relationships, there is a modest correlation between those young people who perceived themselves as sharing an overall good relationship with their network members and their sense of wellbeing. Importantly, the study found that where relations with and support from either parents or friends were strong, there was an associated level of positive mental health.

No association was found between network size and mental health. Young people reporting highest support and accompanying 'robust' sense of wellbeing reported less negative life events. This was the case both in respect of minor negative life events or 'daily hassles' and more serious negative life experiences. In sum, the study found that young people with the greatest sense of availability of support had a better rate of self-reported wellbeing.

> *For those young people who originally reported a positive sense of mental health, this remained the case over time*
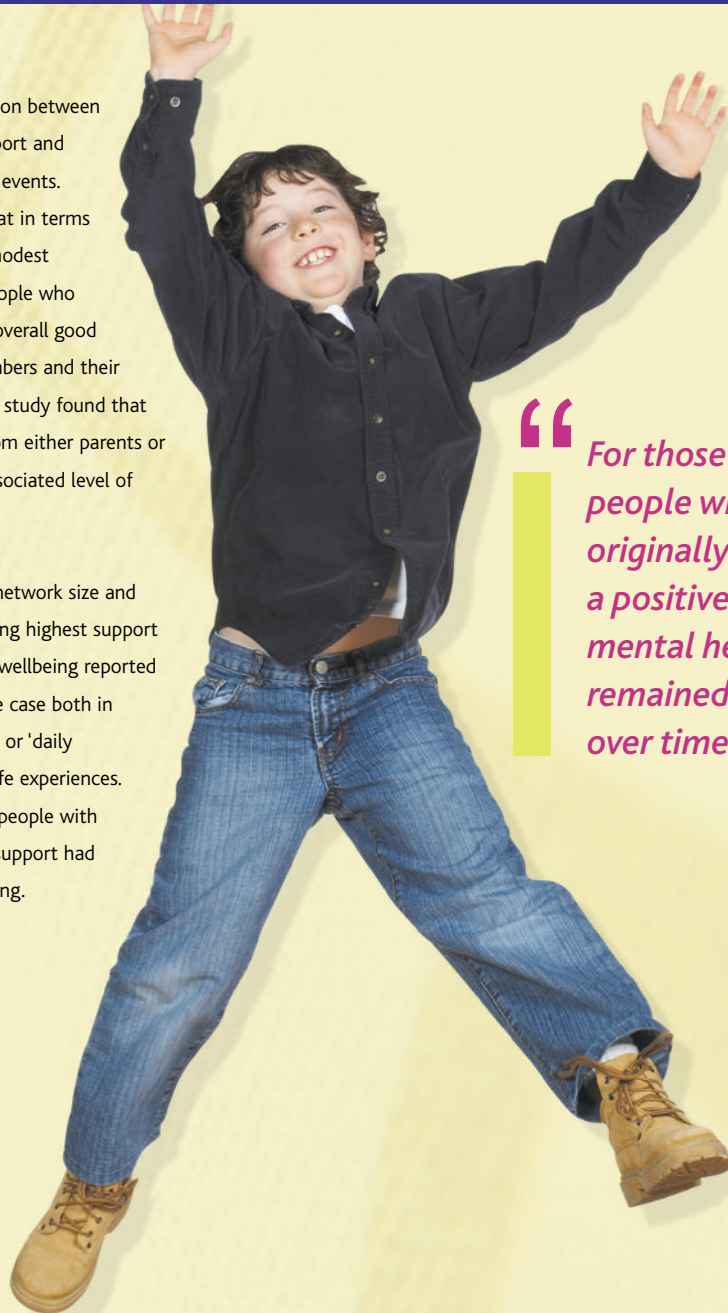
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Change over time

Over time and across all six follow up collections of data (over 21 months) there was little change in how young people viewed their social networks with very slight new selection or de-selection of members. However, while parental and sibling nominations remained unchanged, there was a slight improvement in the nomination rate for close friendships. The amount of support perceived as available by young people remained high and in some cases improved with an increase in the mean score for amounts of support form both parents and friends. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that for those reporting least support, their rates were improving over time. In terms of support from professionals, support rates remained consistently strong. With regard to specific types of support there was a noticeable improvement in the availability of 'Esteem Support' or how young people perceive other people view them.

For those young people who originally reported a positive sense of mental health, this remained the case over time. Importantly there was noticeable improvement among those reporting poorest wellbeing and this was consistently getting better across all time points. Similarly, not alone was there no increase in reported major negative life events among young people, among those who originally reported serious negative incidents or problems there was a noticeable and consistent decrease in their reporting rate (desired improvement). The extent to which these improvements may be directly or indirectly related to attendance on the NYP programme are discussed later.

Summary of key findings

What these results tell us about the NYP as a model of intervention

This study could not or did not seek to show whether improvement in a young person's levels of support, mental wellbeing and coping is 'caused' by attendance at the NYP. However, it does establish an association between being on the programme and improvement in these factors. Overall, this result is very positive for the HSE/Foroige NYP model. This is even more important that albeit still tentative, the findings show that NYPs are successful in targeting, engaging and improving the plight of very vulnerable youth requiring help, whilst still caring for those with a lower level of need. Specifically, the results show that young people who attend the programme can retain or improve positive sources and levels of social support. Whereas there is a noticeable population of NYP attendees who have self-rated poor wellbeing, there is a strong indication that there perceived mental health improves over time and while attending the project. Into the future this suggests two benefits for NYP attendees. Firstly, for young people with a perception of robust social supports and positive mental health attendance on the NYP will help maintain their coping capacity.

This highlights the potential of the programme in terms of it having a 'preventive function'.   Second, and equally if not more important, the fact that the study found that those young people who had weakest perceived social support and poorest self-rated mental wellbeing were consistently improving over their time on the project, indicates the NYP has a 'remedial function' in helping young people.

Finally, this suggests that greater focus within the programme on matters such as active enlistment of support for NYP service users, and more programmatic work towards improving mental health is worthwhile and will be accompanied by an associated improvement.

Future implications for NYP policy and practice

Thus far, this longitudinal study found that over time, attending the NYP is associated with plentiful support for young people. There was a significant improvement in the mental health of young people as well as positive changes in relation to sources, levels and types of support perceived by young people as being available to them. Conversely, the study uncovered some limitations. These included the low rate of close friends among respondents, with a suggestion that NYPs should work to enhance young people's ability to make and maintain friendships. Albeit very tentative and provisional, the overall results from the study thus far, indicate that being on the NYP programme can be correlated to positive outcomes for young people.

There also accrues, as a result of the study, certain messages for NYPs in terms of policy and practice which need some consideration. From a policy perspective it suggests that, as has been shown both from this research and earlier empirical studies on NYPs in the west (Canavan, 1993, Dolan, 1997, Gavigan, 2003), there is a body of knowledge which now overwhelmingly show clear benefits for young people in attending the NYP. Thus, greater investment in the programme in terms of programme expansion may be well worthwhile. Having said this, in the future, consideration needs to be given in terms of 'best fit' for the programme across new sites and in new contexts, for example NYPs based in rural areas operating on a peripatetic or mobile model, or NYP programmes for adolescents from other countries now residing in Ireland.

Certainly in light of limited resources and cost benefit efficiency, the 'policy case' for continuing and advancing the joint management model can be made strongly and particularly so in the light of the need for greater distillation and more focus on programme content across statutory and voluntary organisation contexts. Finally, whereas the NYP operates a targeted model of service provision, housed within a universal youth work service, and this should remain the case, more precision is needed in terms of who needs to be most worked with, when and where? Overall a five to ten year national programmatic strategy based on robust policy is needed both for NYPs and wider youth work services. Such policy should be based on matching service need to service provision at both prevention and intervention levels based on partnership between and among providers.

In terms of practice, there are some clear, emergent messages for NYPs. The study focusses strongly on the internal world and perception of young people who use the programme and issues concerning their affect. At a broader level the study implies how young people engage and cope with their external world (family, school and community) as the essential playing pitch of life. This should be of most central concern to the NYP as a service. So whereas ongoing attention to mental health and the social networks of support of young people is important, equally attention is necessary to practical issues such as physical health care, coping and academic capacities in school, engaged in community and within wider civic society.

Young people's social network memberships were consistent and high over time, with a variety of sources of support. Importantly, parents emerged as a primary source of support. Apart from highlighting for NYP management and staff the importance of the parent-adolescent bond, it highlights clearly the centrality of working with parents and, in particular, the need to work with fathers. If NYPs wish to strive towards models of best practice working more effectively with parents (despite strains in their relationships with their offspring) needs to be upheld as one of the clear foci of projects. Furthermore, NYP staff need to consider developing individual and group work models which optimize young people's relationships with extended family supporters through programmes such as mentoring and 'asset building'.

Despite the fact that one in five respondents did not have a close friend, in the first instance this finding may not be unique to this study, but because of the lack of research among universal adolescent populations, its implications are unclear. More importantly young people attending the NYP received high levels of support from nominated friendships and tended to have a perceived positive relationship with their friends initially and over time. The potential positive influence of close friends should be noted by NYP managers and staff. In this regard a model known as 'friendships groups' should be piloted and developed. In short, this model suggests that rather than trying to move a young person away from peers particularly when they encourage negative or acting out behaviours, the project should work on friends as a group in its own right with the central service user as pivotal to the group. There is evidence that this is a robust intervention model which has been successful particularly in the USA (Weiss, 2001).

The low nomination rate for professionals in many ways could be deemed to be a good result, as it suggests a lack of dependency on the part of NYP service users. This view is further reinforced in that when nominated, NYP staff were seen as supportive and responsive. The implication for practice of this is that workers need to continue to foster independence on the part of the young person and deter over-reliance while ensuring a response awareness of need within a genuine and true 'caring persona'. One of more negative findings in the study relates to siblings who were rated as offering weakest support and respondents saw their relationship with brothers and sisters as poorest compared to other sources and consistently so over time. However, this may be because just as some NYP service users were having difficulties in their lives, so also to some extent their siblings were also experiencing adversity, which limited their capacity to offer support. It is noteworthy that unlike other areas of social service provision, for example residential care, the importance of working with siblings in community based services tends not to happen, so where necessary, NYPs should target improving poor relationships between service users and siblings as part and parcel of the menu of interventions provided.

Overall, there is very positive news for NYPs in that the study found that over time service users viewed their relationships with their network memberships positively, despite having certain relationships which were deemed as poor. This suggests that young people can maintain close relationships with specific network memberships. So, for NYP managers and staff, the importance of encouraging service users to enlist more support from positive relationships is worthwhile in that it will hold over time and is possible even among young people coping with various forms of stress.

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1 Preventing a difficulty from arising for a young person
2 Enabling improvement in the young person despite the existence of adversity

About Foróige

Foróige is a leading national voluntary youth organisation engaged in youth development and education. The purpose of Foróige is to enable youmg people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. Citizenship is a key component of this purpose and is at the very core of what happens every day in Foróige. The organisation empowers young people, enhances their human development and enriches communities across Ireland.

Foróige provides a comprehensive range of youth work services through the operation of Foróige Clubs, Local Youth Services, Local Youth Development Projects, Youth Information Centres and the Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programme. This multi-pronged approach enables the organisation to meet the developmental needs of well over 40,000 young people annually. In reality though, Foróige reaches a much wider audience through the kind of positive community activities engaged in by young people, volunteers and staff.

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