

Youth Work & the Impact It Has On Society from a Service Providers Point of View.

By: Niamh Smith

Student Number: 1596498

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree (Social Science Specialization) at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.

Supervisor: Annette Jorgensen

Head of Department: Bernadette Quinn

April 2013

Department of Social Science

DBS School of Arts

Table of Contents

<u>Contents</u>	2
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	3
<u>Title</u>	4
<u>Abstract</u>	5
<u>Introduction</u>	6
The development of youth work	
The relationship between the youth worker & the young person	
Youth related crime & deviance	
Youth participation	
Mental health in young people	
Informal learning as an approach to education	
Conclusion	
<u>Methodology</u>	15
Materials	
Participants	
Design	
Procedure	
Ethical considerations	
Data analysis	
<u>Results</u>	20
<u>Discussion</u>	30
Limitations	
Conclusion	
<u>References</u>	36
<u>Appendix-copy of consent form</u>	39

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to sincerely thank my assigned research supervisor, Annette Jorgensen who gave me continued support, guidance and advice throughout this research process, and I would also like to thank Vanessa Long for her assistance. A special thanks to all the participants who gave up their precious time and effort to assist me in this research. And finally to my family for their continued support.

Title:

Youth Work and the Impact It Has on Society From a Service Providers Point of View.

Abstract

This project sought to gain an insight into the area of youth work and establish the impact it has on society from a service provider's point of view. Data was collected using a method of semi structured interviews. The main aim of this report was to gain an insight into the youth work world and understand the value of youth work, the perceptions of young people, recognition of youth work and the impact it has on the society. This report finds that youth work has a substantial impact in the lives of young people and also the wider community. The report found that as a direct result of participation in a youth club or youth organisation young people gain valuable skills, build in confidence and become active agents in their own lives. It was also found that youth clubs and organisations struggle for recognition for the work they do and this view was mainly directed towards the Government and the lack of funds and support they receive. The Government needs to step up and begin to recognise the positive work these youth organisations are doing in the lives of young people and the local community.

This chapter will comprise of an in-depth study on Youth work and the impact it has on the community from a service provider's point of view by reviewing a number of published pieces of literature.

The Development of Youth Work

Jenkinson (2000) addressed the issue of Youth Work in Ireland and the struggle to find its own identity. In the past Youth Work was seen as a proactive approach to the growing problem of Youth unemployment in Ireland. In 1942, a call for youth facilities for unemployed individuals was demanded by the Department of Education, as the situation of idle youth was in "*grave danger*" of evolving, and immediate action was required before "*further deterioration of character and an increase in undisciplined conduct*" was seen as the norm in the youth of Irish Society (Lalor, de Roiste and Devlin. 2007: p.271).

The definition of youth work today has moved away from the notion of being a channel for the unemployed, today more emphasis is placed on the concept of "*non-formal education*" through a recreational approach. (Jenkinson 2000). Even though in the past the precise definition of Youth Work has being difficult to identify, the main principles has being clearly clarified within the study, Jenkinson (2000) recognises five main principles of the practice of Youth Work. She believes it is based on informal education, centres on the approach of collaboration between the facilitator and the young person, concentrates solely on the best interest of the young person, participation is based on ones on volition and learning is encouraged on an evidence based approach. Today according to the Youth Work Act (2001), Youth Work is described as '*a programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young person's through their voluntary participation, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or voluntary*

education and training". The National Youth Agency (2001-2013) supports this definition of Youth Work describing Youth Work as an outlet for "*enjoyment, challenge, learning and achievement*".

The Relationship between Youth Worker and the Young Person

In the following review, a Qualitative Research report by Harlan, Morgan and Muldoon (2005) in Northern Ireland, the aim is to address the issue of the purposes, contributions and nature of youth work in Northern Ireland. Two in-depth interviews were carried out in focus groups of 44 Youth Work Professions in the North of Ireland. This study stations particular weight upon the relationship between the Youth Worker and the young person. It was found that all of the participants placed a large emphasis on the relationship between the Youth worker and the young person, this relationship was considered to be "*the central plank of youth work*", which was then contrasted to the relationship between a professional educational figure, this relationship was not see as to be of "*paramount importance*". Another aspect of the relationship between the young person and the Youth professional was the "*importance of positively valuing young people*"

Evans, Korsmo, Krveger, and Wilder (2005) conducted a similar study where a number of Youth workers from a variety of programs met in focus groups to write and interpret their experiences of working with youths. They shared encounters of times when they were challenged or surprised by the young people they worked with, all in a hope to understand and appreciate what these young people go through. One account tells of an encounter a youth leader had with a young boy while playing basketball, the youth leader and the young person were playing a game of one on one basketball when the boy got rather upset with the youth leader because he was winning. In the past the young boy had experienced a life filled

with “*failure and rejection*”, he had being abused at the hand of his father. This innocent game of basketball had nothing to do with the fact that he had being abused by his father but elements of him being beaten played on his mind. When the leader realised the young boy was upset he decided to take it easy on the boy and let him win, however the young boy did not want to win out of pity but he did not want to lose to be beaten again. The leader empathised with the boy and realised he must respect the boy and to play to his full capacity and if he was to beat the boy at least he put up a fight (Evans, et al 2005)

According to the National Youth Agency (2004) one of the main principles of youth work is to ‘*recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life and be aware of the need to balance a caring and supportive relationship with young people with appropriate professional distance.*’ This relationship between the young person and the youth worker is based on mutual respect and trust; the current research will expand further on this relationship.

The issue of ethical considerations are also of the utmost importance when working with youths, according to Banks (2006: p.3) Youth work involves working with individuals “*who have fewer rights than adults, are often vulnerable and lack power*”, this view on young people emphasise the importance of working by the appropriate ethical principles in youth work as from time to time young people views and ideas can be dismissed. Banks (2006) recognises four main principles; the first of these principles is probably the most important, “*respect young people*”. Respect is the foundation of any successful relationship, recognition and appreciation of each young person’s ideas, consideration for their feelings and emotions and valuing they identity and character (Banks 2006: p.10). “*Respect and promote young people’s rights to make their own decisions and choices*”, guide young people in the right path and encourage them to thrive and make the correct decisions (Banks 2006: p.10). “*Promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people*”, at all times the best interest of

the young person is paramount. And “*contribute towards the promotion of social justice for young people and in society generally*”, encourage young people to be open active agents within their own lives and also within society. (Banks 2006: p.10)

Youth related Crime & Deviance

A recent study carried out by Olaleye (2010) in Nigeria investigates the concept of prevention of youth related crime by means of empowerment. This study mainly concentrates on one's socio economic background. Indicated by this piece of research the most vulnerable groups who are most likely to engage in criminal behaviour within a society are those who come from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds. According to Messner et al (1986), Curry and Spergel (1988), Bursik and Grasmik (1993)(as cited in Olaleye 2010), “*unmarried or divorced adults, teenagers, non-working adults, poor people, persons with criminal histories, especially males and single parents, have all being identified as the kind of people whose presence is associated with higher rates of violent crimes*”. The results of the research conducted supports the hypothesis that youth empowerment is imperative in the prevention of youth crime and delinquency. ‘*Access to adequate information on government's activities, provision of job's by the government, youths access to loan and vocational education, youth involvement in decision making and youth participation in community programme activities*’ where identified as areas which provide direction and empowerment to young people. The results supported further Messner et al (1986), Curry and Spergel (1988), Bursik and Grasmik (1993) (as cited in Olaleye 2010) theory, which stated that disadvantaged, uneducated and unmotivated individuals turn to criminal activity more so than those of a contrasting background.

Youth Participation

According to Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) Youth Participation “*is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives*”. In review of a recent study carried out by Lindstorm (2010), she investigates the view participation, recreation and all round citizenship have on the lives of young people. This study was conducted in Sweden with the involvement of ten local Government councils into the investigation of ten core texts from the perspectives of these Councils. From the studying of such documents it was found within this investigation that “*leisure influence and citizenship have a strong connection*”, it was found that young people whom attend youth clubs and partake in organised recreational activities in turn develop as positive citizens within a community. It was also discussed the impact such youth clubs have on a young person’s views on democracy, throughout this piece of research views on democracy of young people were seen as “*complicated*” in relation to how much of a say and power young people get in relation to decision making. Within a Youth club setting young people are encouraged to “*learn formal democratic procedures and practice democracy with their friends*” while actively developing themselves as involved citizens.

This view is supported by Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) who believe that youth participation “*is consistent with the view of youth as resources*” young people are seen as important, valued citizens within society, Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) contrasts this view with the image most familiar in today’s society “*of youth as problems that permeates the popular media, social science, and professional practice when referring to young people*”. Society has formulated a view of young people towards a negative perception; these two opposing views of young people in society will be investigated further within the current study.

Mental Health in Young People

Wasserman, Hoven, Wasserman, Carli, Sachiapone, and Al-Halabi et al. (2012) conducted a recent study on “*Suicide Prevention for Youths*”; the participants of eleven European Countries took part in this study which portrayed the importance of seeking help and recognising stresses in the lives of young people in relation to their mental health Wasserman et al. (2012) gives reasons for the importance of this study, explaining how the stigma attached to seeking help often hinders a youngster’s desire to avail of preventative services; and also the notable fact that young people will very rarely seek help from parents, peers or professionals, worryingly it is often bottled up inside until it is too late. This study targeted 14-16 year old individuals with the aim of addressing their mental health related needs, the SEYLE (Saving and Empowering Young lives in Europe) intervention was centred around role play and discussion sessions while adopting a “*cognitive and emotional approach*” Wasserman, D (2012). It was noted that the majority of participating countries recognised mental health related issues to be still “*uncommon, shameful and stigmatised*” Wasserman, (2012). Within this study peer support was encouraged with an emphasis on the fact that you are not alone, supporting each other is vital. Results within in the study showed significant changes in the views and understanding of mental health in young people. Whilst improved understanding was noted among participants one limitation to this study is the degree of equal understanding between participants and consequently if needs of participants were met. It was also highlighted that distinguishing between young people who are at risk of self harm or have suicidal tendencies is still very difficult; however this study has aimed to improve young people’s knowledge of mental health while outlining the importance of peer support and guidance with the hopes that this will lead to less young people turning to suicide as a permanent solution to what more often than not is a temporary problem Wasserman, (2012).

Informal Learning as an Approach to Education:

According to Bataleer (2002: p. 12) Informal learning “*is a method of offering support to the rising generation of young people, enabling them to take up the opportunities to become creators not consumers of their society and their world*”, it is a method of learning which is gained through interaction and activity while ensuring emotional and personal development, it also connects these young people with their social surroundings in a positive and proactive manner.

In the following review, a qualitative research article by Bradford and Byrne (2010) in Northern Ireland, the issue of an informal learning approach to education in schools was addressed. Twelve “*semi structured interviews*” were conducted with an equal number of teaching professions and youth work professional participating Bradford and Byrne (2010). The Northern Ireland Youth Work Strategy suggested that “*a key priority should be to develop youth work practice within the formal education sector*”. (Department of Education, 2005:p. 6)(as cited in Bradford and Byrne (2010).

A informal approach to education is one in which is usually conducted in a more relaxed environment in comparison to that of school surroundings. Informal learning is fundamentally based around voluntary contributions from individuals who wish to partake. It is a process of learning in which develops ones approach to making well informed decisions about their life course in an acceptable and accountable manner. As informal learning is usually in a laid-back, casual environment it is somewhere were young people can meet their friends, in a safe and secure setting with friendly and supportive youth workers (Bradford and Byrne 2010). Again in comparison to a school setting where a formal approach to education is the norm, it is run on a structured system of “*order and rational*” through a strict and intensive curriculum (Bradford and Byrne 2010).

The results of this study illustrated a somewhat sense of confusion within the participants in relation to their professionalism in relation to the teaching method of informal learning.

Teachers expressed concerns at the “understanding of the authority of their educational practices and their status” while the youth working participants expressed concerns as to how they would be regarded as “*real professionals by their teaching colleagues*” Bradford and Byrne (2010).

While it was not formally noted within this study that both teachers and youth workers could “*learn from one another*” however it was suggested that this may be the way forward Bradford and Byrne (2010).

Impact of youth work on the Community

The following review on an “*Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work in England*” by Bryan et al. (2004) aims to comprehend the “*impact the work has on young people and communities*”, Youth work in general concentrates mainly on active learning, voluntary participation and most importantly the well being of the young person, however this report looks at social inclusion and what youth work contributes to its local community. Many factors are taken into consideration “*depending upon the social situation of the individual*” when investigating social inclusion, for example a young person’s level of ambition and desire, social involvement and participation within society. Bryan et al (2004). The results of this survey illustrated that youth work had contributed largely to both the lives of young people personally while also impacting considerably on the community. It was revealed that “*two thirds of the survey reported that youth work had made a considerable difference to their lives*”, youth work gives young people a social confidence and awareness, it provides tools and lifelong skills and it also encourage young people to interact and make new friends. Also “*two out of five participants said they thought their prospects of finding a job had also*

being improved through their engagement in youth work activities”. This shows that youth work has an unlimited impact on the lives of young people while also contributing to their positive and proactive roles in society.

Conclusion to Literature Review

The review of literature surrounding the subject of the impact of youth work on society from a services provider point of view has shown how far youth work has come in terms of development, procedure and the weighting it has on the lives of young people involved. This study intends to look closely at the views of service providers in relation to how youth work affects society. The current study also aims to allow for relevant, up to date insights into the youth working world.

Methodology

The researcher's main aim in conducting this study was to gain an in-depth insight into the role of youth work in society from a service provider's viewpoint. The researcher chose a qualitative approach for this research project as '*qualitative research, as contrast with quantitative studies, places more emphasis on the study of the phenomena from the perspective of the insider*'. (Lapna, Quartaroli and Riemer 2012: p. 3) A qualitative research method was the appropriate approach for this research as it is data led and it is based around and '*inductive process*' which allows the researcher to gain an in-depth insight into the subject matter through the view's and understandings of participants involved. The researcher's main aim was to gain a superior understanding of youth work in today's society from the point of view of service providers. A quantitative approach to this research would not of being a suitable style of research as it is based on a very statistical form of analysis formulated through numerical data. (Muijs 2011: p.1)

Materials:

An interview schedule was constructed with eight semi structured questions, with scope to elaborate into other relevant areas. The main aim of the interview schedule was to gain an insight into the organisation, the impact of the organisation and also the perceptions of young people in today's society.

An Olympus VN-750 Digital Voice Recorder was used to record each interview. The transcription of each interview was done so on a Toshiba Equium Laptop and QSR Nivivo 10 was used to code and analyse data.

Participants

For the purpose of this research, six semi structured interviews were conducted using six participants on a one to one basis and each interview lasted within the time frame of 20 to 30 minutes. Each participant was drawn from a method called '*criterion based sampling*'; this sampling method was chosen as it enables '*particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study*'. (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: p. 78) Each participant took part in the research process of their own free will and was not compensated in any way for their time and cooperation.

The appropriate sample for this research were both men and women professionals in the youth work field, who had an in depth knowledge and understanding of both the youth work sector and the young people themselves. Participants A and B were both male youth development workers with many years experience who volunteer in a youth Cafe in their local area. Participant C is a woman who is a lecturer in a third level Institute teaching youth Work and other Social Care subjects who has a degree in Sociology and Psychology and also volunteers in a local youth club. Participant C is a young male student studying youth and Community Development who has two years volunteering experience in his community youth club. Participant D is a female who is heavily involved in training youth leaders and also volunteering in her local youth organisation. Participant E worked with the homeless for many years before coming involved in a youth development programme with eight years experience.

Design:

For the purpose of this research '*knowledge is developed inductively through the accumulation of verified facts*' form the accounts of the participants involved by '*interpretative*' means. (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: p. 6) An interview schedule was designed by the researcher with the aim of gathering information rich data. Interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach, allowing participants to speak freely within the interview situation.

Procedure:

Gaining access to the proposed samples was done so by detailed email and follow up telephone conversations. The initial email outlined the research project, contained both contact details of both myself and the college and also a blank consent form was attached to the email. And confidentiality was also assured throughout the process.

Each interview was conducted at the convenience of the participants at times and places fitting to them, as they were kindly giving up their free time to participate in the interviews. Participants were made to feel at ease and as comfortable as possible by engaging in conversation unrelated to the research upon first meeting. Once the participant was comfortable with the researcher and relaxed in the environment the research topic was briefly introduced. Participants were requested to sign a consent form (copy in appendix) before the interview. It was explained to participants that the interview would be recorded on a recording device which carries a destruction date, it was also made clear that verbatim transcription of the interview would be carried out which would then be saved on a password protected USB. The researcher also reiterated that the participants had the right to withdraw at any stage and ensured that participants confidentially would be upheld at all times. Permission was requested by the researcher to record the interview and then proceed.

The opening question to the interview was one in which would allow the researcher to learn more about who they were interviewing while also easing the interviewee into the process. During the interview the researcher held eye contact with the interviewee at all times, encouraging and engaging when appropriate. As the interviews were semi structured this allowed the course of the interview to flow with ease allowing the interviewee looseness and free expression in what they wanted to say. Each interview flowed according to the answers given however in some cases redirection was needed.

One limitation which was encountered during the interview process was the issue of nerves within the participants. An interview situation can be a very daunting experience; it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the comfort and ease of participants by making them feel as relaxed as possible. The participants were encouraged to forget about the recording device and to speak as freely as they wished.

Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration were also taken into account, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions at the beginning and end of the interview process. Confidentiality was guaranteed at all times and again the participants were given the right to withdraw at any stage. The researcher obtained a consent form from the college in which the participants were obliged to sign before the interview process began, this was to inform them of the purpose of the study, who the researcher was, how much time is required of the participant, and again confidentiality was guaranteed.

Data Analysis:

The chosen method of analysis for this research is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a *'method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data'* (Braun and Clarke, 2006: p.79). The thematic approach to analysis is used *'to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories'* (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: p. 262), QSR Nivivo 10 was used to code and analyse data.

Results:

The main focus of this research was to understand participant's views on youth work and the impact it has on the community and society in general. This was accomplished by conducting six in-depth interviews. A thematic analysis of data collected revealed six main themes, Youth Development, Relationship Dynamics, Listening to young people, Perceptions of young people, The impact on the community and The struggle for recognition in the youth work sector.

Youth Development:

The theme of development was one which was carried through the whole research process. The idea that Youth Clubs and youth organisations assist in the development of young people was evident throughout the interview course,

“it's just that kind of whole thing of developing their skills as well, like their social skills, just coming out of their shell really , and for the future hopefully whatever they will take out of it and as well like it is for their benefit, you put in what you get out”.

The development of young people is of the utmost importance to carry them through their life course and Participant E also believes that youth organisations give young people a solid footing for the future,

“We are hoping it will give them the tools they need to become successful members of society; we are hoping that it will help them become independent young people who want to give back to the community they came from or the community they are living in”.

A subtheme exposed from this was the importance of nurturing our young people; the majority expressed how important it is that we look after the younger population, two participants consider the future to be in the hands of the younger generation both stating,

“they are going to be the future of this country do you know what I mean they are our future. So I mean we really need to mind them”. (Participant C)

Participant E supports this statement that young people are our future and they must be looked after,

“especially now when things are so bad and so gloomy and there is nothing out there, especially now we need to be looking at the young people and gearing them up towards being the positive influence in the future because they are the future”.

To further support the opinion that young people are the future, Participant C makes suggestions that positive role models should be more accessible to young people in leading them in the right path towards the future,

“it’s kind of productive to get a message across to them, like the GAA have a massive scope, I mean they have a massive scope to really, really help and they are starting to do it, they are starting to do it they are trying to use positive role models with young people so they are starting to do it but we need to do a lot more”.

Relationship Dynamics:

The issue of relationship dynamics developed as a reoccurring theme throughout the area of concern. All six participants emphasised the importance of the relationship between the Youth worker and the young person,

“I suppose the relationship is the key part of doing youth work”.

Participant C stressed how important the relationship is with a young person and agreed that the relationship is key to understanding and relating to young people,

“I think if you have a good relationship with them I think there is more chance that we could maybe if there was a problem spot it and maybe do something about it”.

This concept was further supported by Participant D,

“They have got to trust us, there has got to be mutual respect eh you don’t just get respect because you are a leader you have got to earn it and it has got to be a two way thing, you earn respect from one another, you earn recognition from one another, you earn trust from one another, you have got to be that bridge between being their friend and their parents and teachers. So you have got to be an adult that they can go to with issues that they may not feel ready to go to their parents or teachers with”.

She also makes clear that the relationship between the young person and the youth worker must adhere to Child Protection Guidelines, to maintain an appropriate, supportive relationship.

“So you have got to be, obviously working within the Child Protection guidelines, but you have got to be someone that they feel safe going to and talking to”.

The issue of a support network arose as a substantial subtheme within the theme Relationship Dynamics. All of the Participants expressed the importance of an open network of communication with the young people. Participant B discussed the idea of being a confidant for young people,

“I know from experience here that I know that young people here will probably talk to me quicker than they will talk to their parents, just how they are feeling weather it’s ‘I was in trouble at school today’ that type of thing, and I find it’s a good way of giving advice if they do have a problem or something like that, so as minor as it might seem it’s not every young person’s going to want advice from a youth worker but I think it’s important that we are

there for them, one in the thousands that might come to you and say 'look I'm in a bit of trouble' so I think that's what's important".

Participant C also points out the importance of having an open line of communication with young people, young people may not feel comfortable talking to their parents about certain issues hence it is so important that a young person has someone they can confide in,

"I think it is absolutely vital because like I have teenagers myself and I would like to think if they couldn't talk to me that there is somebody there that they could talk to, like as long as they have somebody that they can trust and that they can open up to I think that's vital".

This view was also reinforced by Participant D, who again believes that it is very important for a young person to have an approachable, trusting person in which they can talk to,

"if they decide to come in and say '(John) can I talk to you about something' and I would be completely approachable in that sense, I would talk to them about whatever say family issues, school, bullying whatever that kind of a thing".

Listening to Young People:

The theme of listening to young people was one which was rather consistent within the coding and interview process. In each interview participants made it very clear that the young people had a voice and were encouraged to use it, and suggested that more people should be listening to what young people have to say,

"they have to decide what they want to do which is giving them some ownership as well and you are letting them make decisions for themselves and like they have a committee and they have to vote you know so I think it gives them a voice as well and there is a lot of other things

now there is youth councils and things like that that they can actually get involved in and have a say, because you keep a child like in the dark and at eighteen you ask them to vote on what's happening in the country, how can you do that you know?" (Participant C)

The idea of involving young people and giving them a say in what they want to do allows them to feel important and valued, Participant D explained how young people don't like being told what to do so it is up to the Youth leaders to become the facilitators and encourage them to be active in what they want to do,

"the kinda more or less the motto is "For them, by them" so they come in and we make it very clear that this is their club we are almost the facilitators to a certain extent, but it is for them to run so if it wasn't for them there would be no organisation".

One participant talks about a recent survey which was conducted within the Youth Club he is involved with, the study was a way of asking the young people what they would like to do, so again taking their ideas on board,

"We set up a survey recently with young people and we asked them what do they like to do in their spare time and the highlight of the survey was that they just wanted to hang out with their peers, that's it". (Participant D)

The problem in today's society is that young people are being seen and not heard, a number of participants were in harmony on this view,

"People tend to speak for young people rather than letting young people speak for themselves and that's the problem. And we have that problem ourselves at times when we try and organise things and we think it's a great idea it doesn't necessarily mean they all think it's a great idea".

Participant A believes the key is involving and empowering young people and giving them a say because *“they have a voice as well you know”*.

Perceptions of Young People

The matter of perceptions of young people in today’s society was of a resounding theme, young people were viewed in a relatively negative light. Participant C gave a practical example of negativity towards a young person,

“I think that there is a very negative perception of young people and I think there is actually a prejudice against young people you know like I remember being in a shop one day with a young person and an old lady wanted to get something on a shelf and nearly pushing him out of the way and being quite rude to him and I thought if that was the other way round you know somebody would of said something about it so you know I did say it to her”.

All six participants were in agreement in the matter of how young people are perceived in today’s society,

“I suppose a lot of people would see a group of youths hanging around together and they would have that image that they are up to no good but unfortunately that is societies fault”,

Society has formulated a very stereotypical view of young people, and as suggested by Participant C we need to change people’s attitudes towards young people before it is too late,

“I just think like in the press and on the television, films and in the media in general I just think that young people, there is a very negative perception of young people and I think we have to be very very careful about that and especially in this country because we have a very high rate of suicide with young people so I think we have to just be careful about how we view young people in society”.

However Participant B is not convinced if people's attitudes towards young people can be changed,

“a lot of the guys that come in here is that bit older and now they have the tattoos and the ear rings and the nose piercings and the whole lot but they are still nice lads you know and I think it's peoples own vision of what they have of young people and you know and if you can change that or not is a different story, so that's peoples own opinion”.

The theme of Boredom emerged as a sub theme of people's perceptions of young people, Participant D who is a young volunteer in this local youth clubs identified in most cases of children causing trouble or idly hanging around is because they are bored,

“I think there is a stereotype, you see a lot of the time they are bored”.

Participant E agreed that young people can sometimes get up to mischief when there are no other resources within a community to keep them occupied,

“Maybe those young people are sitting on the steps because there is nowhere for them to go, you know they are not actually doing any harm, they are not actually bothering anyone but they are bored and that's the only place they have to go”.

Young peoples energy needs to be focused and directed in a positive and proactive manner, if young people do not have an outlet where they can harness and focus their energy of course they are going to get bored and possibly occupy themselves with activities that may led to them being viewed in a negative light, Participant B believes that this is the case *“especially as well in rural communities where there is nothing in the area”* for young people to do.

Impact on the Community:

Throughout the interview process participants were asked what impact does youth clubs and youth organisations have on the local community. Participants shared the view that youth clubs and youth organisations generate a resounding positive influence within the community,

“I think they have a massive impact and I what I found is that people in the local community are very, very supportive of youth organisations and I think they actually see what they are doing”.

Participant D agreed that Youth Clubs and youth organisations have a massive impact on the local community, however he spoke of the constant struggle young people and youth organisations have to deal with in relation to stereotyping of youths within the community,

“Well absolutely, same again about the stereotypes but I hope that Youth organisations give the impression that something is being done about the whole stereotyping thing like I hope the youth organisations are doing as much as they can and I hope people realise that, hopefully society doesn’t think that oh there’s nothing being done about that, but there is and we are doing our absolute best and we can only do so much”.

Within the local community Youth Clubs and Organisations are seen as an outlet for children to keep them out of trouble and keep them from hanging around street corners, participant C reiterates this point saying,

“Something they could come and do on a Friday night, get them off the streets basically”.

Participant E agrees that Youth clubs are a positive outlet for keeping young people off the streets however she believes that there is a lot more to these organisations and finally the local community is recognising and acknowledging that,

“now finally in the last few years they have understood what youth organisations are about and why they are doing the things that they do and like we would of got an awful lot of support within the community but I think that youth organisations need to get more support”.

A number of participants emphasised the important role of youth clubs within the local community however two participants explained how some youth organisations are not recognised enough inside the local community due to improper leadership,

“Some of them are very visible in the community and some of them are nearly invisible in the community and I would like to see them all being out there, being visible. But it very much depends on where the leadership is coming from in each youth group”.

Struggle for Recognition:

The issue of recognition within the youth work sector was an extensive theme throughout this research. The lack of recognition from the Government in relation to funding was an overriding issue with many of the participants stressing that the Government need to step up and take more appropriate measures towards funding Youth programmes,

“Yeah you know the government says we value young people and I think especially at a time like now when people are struggling with money, to be cutting I think our grants have being cut somewhere in the region of 30% maybe 20% over the last couple of years even, that is just impossible at this when young people need you more than ever and premises like this are needed more than eve”. (Participant A)

One participant explained how the Government are very out of touch when it comes to the needs and requirements of young people, recommendations and proposals are brought to the table however implementation of these proposals are not carried out in the appropriate manner,

“Government will come up with plans of what it should be and those plans don’t relate to what is actually happening, there is a massive big gap, they are very disconnected. When you look at the Youth Work Act and the Development Plan all these things are suggestive and lot of money was spent on research, which is really, really good research like if you read those two pieces the research it is really, really good but there is no point in having that unless you are actually going to take it to the end of the road and say “right this is what we are going to do now”, you have to put the practice things in place”. (Participant C)

Also a number of participants highlighted the fact that due to cuts in Government funding recreational activities within youth organisations have had to be marginalised harshly; Participant C who is a lecturer in a local Institute teaching Youth Work and also volunteers in a local youth club speaks about having to let the young people down because of insignificant funding,

“I mean if you say to the young people, like if we say to them “what would you like to do?” I mean like there is lots of thing they would like to do but we can’t do it because of funding”.

Failing recognition in general to youth work was something that was echoed by participant A. Youth work plays a large part in the shaping and developing the lives of young people and it is an area which can be overlooked,

“It’s not valued enough and I know that from before being a youth worker, I think it’s always being very undervalued”.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain an in depth insight into the perceptions of youth work volunteers while investigating the impact youth work has in today's society. This was done with participants who had a certain degree of involvement within the sector and had substantial knowledge of working with young people. The interview process revealed that the subject matter was broad and extensive in relation to many aspects of youth work.

The worth that was placed on the development of young people as a direct result of their involvement in youth work was significant. As the research suggests, young people were directly affected by their involvement in a youth club or a youth organisation. The case of youth development is reiterated by participant D who explains the process of social development, skill development and confidence building as a direct result of positive involvement within a youth club setting. All six participants agreed that young people gain a great deal from association to a youth club or youth organisation with one participant stating that they are given the tools required to become responsible, lucrative members of society. Young people who attend youth clubs learn new and valuable life skills to guide them for the future. Another aspect of youth development which was discussed by many participants was the social development of youths. Young people gain access to an outlet of communication and involvement through activity based approaches, which allow the young people to converse and interact in a way in which they may not have done so before. This also in turn allows them to meet new people and create new friendships through learning and fun experiences. In chapter one of the current study the National Youth Agency (2001-2013) also emphasis the development of young people through experiences of fun, active experiences aiding them in their social and personal development.

The concept of the importance of the relationship between the young person and the youth worker was stressed in the Qualitative Research report by Harlan, Morgan and Muldoon (2005) featured in the literature review. This report put forward the notion that the relationship between these parties was of the utmost importance within a youth club setting even more so than the relationship dynamics of a teacher and student relationship. This concept was further supported by all six participants who were in unison in the view that this relationship was vital in creating a trusting, supportive and welcoming environment. Participant D believed that this relationship goes way beyond say the relationship of teacher pupil relations, this relationship is somewhat based on mutual respect and an almost equal bond whereas a teacher pupil relationship would be based on authority and strict rules. The National Youth Agency (2004) addresses the relationship between the young person and the youth worker insisting that it must be based around boundaries on both a professional and personal level, while providing support and guidance in an appropriate yet accommodating manner.

Participant E also explores the importance of the relationship dynamics between the young person and the youth worker however she highlights the importance of working within the Child Protection Guidelines. Referring to the Literature review in chapter one, ethical considerations regarding young people and their views and relationships within society were also discussed. Banks (2006) acknowledges the fact that young people can sometimes get dismissed by adults in terms of opinions, feelings and ideas. He recognises that young people must be valued, their feelings are important and must be recognised also the wellbeing of the young person is paramount at all times.

The matter relating to positive mental health among young people has been highlighted as a major crisis point in the youth of today. Wasserman et al. (2012) discusses this issue in the study of "*Suicide Prevention for Youths*" which established the importance of young people

seeking help and recognising stresses in their lives in relation to their mental health. In Wasserman et al (2012) study, attention is brought to the still stigmatised issue of youngsters seeking help with an issue or problem. It was revealed that the majority of participant's still view people who ask for help as weak or shameful. This is a sad and a very negative view to have when dealing with the mental health of the youth of today. Participant C put emphasis on the point of looking after our youth and encourages them to open up and talk about what is going on in their lives. She believes that an open line of communication is vital in combating problems and any other issues a young person may have.

In relation to youth participation and empowerment, Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) discussed the importance of empowering young people and encouraging them to be enthusiastic participants in all aspects of their lives. In Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) study it was determined that young people who attend youth clubs or youth organisations develop more positive citizenship within their local community, creating rounded active individuals. Participant D speaks about empowering young people and giving them a voice in decision making, it is very much encouraged that they become active agents in how their lives are shaped and developed. Participant A adds focus to the issue of young people being dismissed in society, he believes that it is up to the young people to speak up and be heard as their views and ideas are just as important as anybody else's, he stresses that young people has a voice and this must use it.

The idea of youth clubs as learning environments was a central issue in the overall views of all six participants and also within the body of literature. Bataleer (2002: p. 12) describes informal learning as a type of learning that is based around the physical, emotional and social development of young people, it is a proactive approach to learning that encourages involvement, participation and a collective enjoyment. Participant E believes informal learning is an approach which gives young people the tools to grow in confidence, learn

about themselves and others, encourages them to engage with others they would not usually come into contact with and to become positive, proactive members of society.

The matter relating to how the youth of today are viewed in society was suggested as relatively negative by the majority of participants. One participant expressed a deep concern for how young people are being perceived in today's society; she strongly believes that there is a prejudice towards young people which is unwarranted. She acknowledged that some young people can be more troublesome than others, like unruly children in school or some may take the wrong path in life and turn to crime or abuse drugs and alcohol, however that does not mean that every young person can be labelled a 'trouble maker'. Participant D discussed the issue of stereotyping youths, within society young people are often painted with the same brush because they dress the same, they speak the same and they act the same however young people like to copy their peers and look like them and dress like them to be cool, again that does not give pretence to regard all young people in a negative light.

The issue relating to crime and deviant behaviour among young people has being influenced by a number of contributing factors which Olaleye (2010) has investigated in her study, she also discusses the concept of youth empowerment as a solution to lowering levels of crime among youths . Olaleye (2010) associates criminal behaviour largely with social exclusion, results have shown that teenagers, people at risk of poverty, single parents and males especially are in the category of higher associations with crime. The results found that youth empowerment is a major factor in reducing crime rates among the younger generation. As stated earlier the value of empowering young people is something which will guide them in the right direction and give them the focus to be the best they can be.

The literature cited the report on the "*Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work*" Bryan et al. (2004) who expressed the importance of youth work for both the young people and also the

local community. This study investigates the impact youth work has on the local community by looking into elements of social inclusion. The results demonstrate the exact bearing youth work has on the community, it was revealed that the majority of the participants had grown and matured as young individuals, their confidence had grown immensely and they had had the opportunity to meet and make new friends. In regard to the impact on the local community the results had shown positive engagement within the local community and youth and also young people had felt that with their gained experience they now had a better chance of getting a job in the future. Participant C discussed the impact youth work has on the local community expressing that in the last few years youth clubs have become more aware of the local community and considerations in terms of youth recognition and also recognition within the community have been developing in leaps and bounds. The community recognises what youth clubs are doing and they support and encourage the work that they do.

The experiences young people have in a youth club setting is something which provides them with life skills, it boosts their confidence, it helps them grow as individuals, it matures them for the future and guides them on a path of positive and proactive living.

Limitations

It is important to appreciate the certain limitations of this study, the most significant limitation of this study was the fact that it gives a small and slight insight into the youth working world as a small sample size was used, this causes difficulty when trying to establish grounds for the importance of youth work in society as a whole.

Future recommendations for a study similar to this would be the usage of a larger sample size to gain more in depth results on a wider base of issues. Also throughout the interview process the issue of negative perceptions of young people developed as a reoccurring theme, however during the research process the relevant literature available on this topic was very elusive, I would recommend a greater study around this area with more emphasis on this topic.

Conclusion

The participants of this study showed an informed and suggestive view on this issue. The value of youth work in today's society is much more important than ever before, the majority of participants agreed to a certain extent that youth work is valued more so now, since recession had hit and the doom and gloom of the future economy does not hold much light for the future, we need to be encouraging our youth for the future and lead them in a positive path. The need for recognition for the work youth work does in the lives of young people and also within the community is vital however the Government needs to step up and appreciate how such works affects society. This report has signified a lack of support and assistance from the government which needs to be addressed.

References

- Banks, S. (2010). *Ethical Issues in Youth Work*. (2nd ed). Routledge. Retrieved April, 6, 2013, from [http://books.google.ie/books?hl=en&lr=&id=SK_US5po2MUC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Banks,+S.+\(2010\).+Ethical+Issues+in+Youth+Work.+&ots=OBJUn5uEol&sig=nUudwqTM8E0b4Yzydh81e4qMTGU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Banks%2C%20S.%20\(2010\).%20Ethical%20Issues%20in%20Youth%20Work.&f=false](http://books.google.ie/books?hl=en&lr=&id=SK_US5po2MUC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Banks,+S.+(2010).+Ethical+Issues+in+Youth+Work.+&ots=OBJUn5uEol&sig=nUudwqTM8E0b4Yzydh81e4qMTGU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Banks%2C%20S.%20(2010).%20Ethical%20Issues%20in%20Youth%20Work.&f=false)
- Batsleer, J. (2008). *Informal learning in Youth Work*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bradford, S., & Byrne, S. (2010). Beyond the Boundaries: resistance to school-based youth work in Northern Ireland. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 28(1), March 2010, pp. 19-31. Retrieved April, 8, 2013 from <http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=16edc888-1946-4c8f-a8fd-baeb4b854af6%40sessionmgr104&hid=5>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using *Thematic Analysis in Psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3:77-101.
- Checkoway, B., Guitierrez, L. (2006). *Youth Participation and Community Change: An Introduction*. The Haworth Press, Inc. Retrieved April, 1, 2013, from [http://books.google.ie/books?id=AMkm78aL8icC&pg=PA1&dq=Checkoway+and+Gutierrez+\(2006\)&hl=en&sa=X&ei=A49wUYiTDZCthQe33YHwCQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA](http://books.google.ie/books?id=AMkm78aL8icC&pg=PA1&dq=Checkoway+and+Gutierrez+(2006)&hl=en&sa=X&ei=A49wUYiTDZCthQe33YHwCQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA)
- Evans, A., Korsmo, J., Krverger, M., Wilder, Q. (2005). A Youth Work Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 11(3), 369-389. DOI: 10.1177/1077800405275058. SAGE Publications. Retrieved December, 12, 2012, from <http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&sid=659255b6-305b-486f-bb8e-dd905d51f176%40sessionmgr4&hid=105&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#d=b=a9h&AN=17104993>
- Harland, K., Morgan, T., Muldoon, O. (2005). *The Nature of Youth Work in Northern Ireland: Purpose, Contribution and Challenges*. Commissioned by the Department of Education. Retrieved April, 8, 2012, from http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6012/1/researchreport36_2005.pdf

Jenkinson, H. (2000). "Youth Work in Ireland: The Struggle for Identity", *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 2(2), Article 6. Retrieved April, 8, 2013, from http://cora.ucc.ie/bitstream/handle/10468/766/HJ_YouthPV2000.pdf?sequence=4

Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T. and Reimer, F. J. (2012). *Qualitative Research. An Introduction to Methods and Design*. Published by Jossey-Bass. A Wiley Imprint.

Lalor, K., deRoiste, A., & Devlin, M. (2007) *Young People in Contemporary Ireland*. Gill & Macmillan Ltd. Ireland.

Lindstorm, L., (2010). Citizenship and Empowering Processes: A study of Youth Experiences of Participation in Leisure Activities. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 9(3). Retrieved April, 8, 2013, from http://www.worlds.co.uk/pdf/validate.asp?j=csee&vol=9&issue=3&year=2010&article=6_Lindstrom_CSEE_9_3_web

Merton et al. (2004). *An Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work in England*. Department of Education and Skills. De Montfort Expertise Ltd.

Muijs, D. (2011). *Doing Quantitative Research in Education with SPSS*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publication Ltd. London.

Olaleye, Y. (2010). Youth Empowerment as a Strategy for Reducing Crime in the Society. *European Journal of Social Science*, 15(2). 104-111.

The National Youth Agency (2001-2013). Retrieved April, 9, 2013, from <http://www.nya.org.uk/about-nya/what-is-youth-work>

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. SAGE Publication Ltd. London.

Wasserman, C., Hoven, C., Wasserman, D., Carli, V., Sarchiapone, M., Al-Halabi, S., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Bobes, J., Cosman, D., Faras, L., Feldman, D., Fischer, G., Graber, N., Haring, C., Herta, D., Iosue, M., Kahn, J., Keeley, H., Klug, K., McCarthy, J., Tubiana-Potiez, A., Varnik, A., Varnik, P., Zibera, J., & Postuvan, V. (2012) *Suicide Prevention for Youth- a mental health awareness programme: lessons learned from the Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE) Intervention Study*. BMC Public Health. Retrieved April, 9, 2013, from <http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=7&sid=87bd0f11-276b-49bd-bdc9-86043383b576%40sessionmgr113&hid=8>

Youth Work Act (2001). Retrieved April, 9, 2013, from <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/pdf/2001/en.act.2001.0042.pdf>

Appendix



Youth work and the impact it has on the community from a service provider's point of view

My name is Niamh Smith and I am conducting research that explores Youth work and the impact it has on the Community from a service provider's point of view.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Niamh Smith (Niamh-ie@Hotmail.com)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

