



WHAT CONTRIBUTION CAN YOUTH WORK MAKE TO TACKLING SECTARIANISM?

THE STORY OF
LOOKING FORWARD
NOT BACK



LOOKING
FORWARD
NOT BACK

ENDORSEMENT

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The School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee is pleased to endorse the Year 2 final project report for Looking Forward Not Back. The School welcomed the opportunity to feed into the report during the drafting phase and to the Year 1 report. It is our view that the Looking Forward Not Back project makes a useful contribution to knowledge about addressing sectarianism through youth work.





ABOUT YOUTHLINK SCOTLAND

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector.

We have a vision of a youth work sector which offers sustainable, dynamic and accessible youth work opportunities that support young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where all young people are supported to achieve their potential.

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INTRODUCTION

The Looking Forward Not Back (LFNB) project was developed and delivered by YouthLink Scotland in partnership with young people and youth workers from five youth work organisations across Scotland. It was funded by the Scottish Government as part of the wider Tackling Sectarianism programme which aims to challenge and change attitudes to sectarianism in Scotland through local action. It afforded an opportunity for YouthLink Scotland to support the active participation of youth work organisations and young people in addressing sectarianism in their own communities and to examine and generate evidence of the contribution of a youth work approach in this context.

This report will explain what we did in LFNB, why we did it, how we did it and what we found.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT WE DID:

ABOUT LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK

What we did: About Looking Forward Not Back

Looking Forward Not Back (LFNB) was a 12 month national project co-ordinated by YouthLink Scotland. LFNB was one of 38 projects funded through the Scottish Government's Tackling Sectarianism programme in 2015/16. The project worked with five local youth groups each of which received funding to carry out youth work activities with young people designed to address sectarianism (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the youth groups).

Youth work activities

Each local youth group was supported by two youth workers. The youth workers were responsible for the delivery of a regular (weekly or fortnightly) youth work programme designed to enable young people to participate in youth-led research.

What is youth-led research?

We define youth-led research as a process by which young people identify and investigate issues that are important to or affect them (and their communities) with the aim of using that information to inform and drive change. Through this process young people learn how to research and take ownership of a research project. Working collaboratively in their community and sharing the findings is a fundamental and crucial part of the process.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT WE DID: ABOUT LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK

Youth work activities

The youth-led research projects were designed and conducted by the young people and focussed on a topic relating to sectarianism which had relevance for the local community. All of the young participants engaged voluntarily. In collaboration with youth workers each group agreed a contract setting out the terms of engagement with the project and a programme of learning.

Opportunities were provided for participants to work towards the completion of the SCQF Level 5 Participative Democracy Certificate (PDC). The award enables young people to develop research skills, group work skills, leadership skills and learn about decision-making approaches. The award is externally verified by YouthLink Scotland and provides a way of recognising the achievements of young people.

The youth groups presented the findings of the research to members of their community. The groups also had an opportunity to come together to share their respective experiences and learning.

The LFNB programme afforded young people the opportunity to explore their own experiences of sectarianism. This included critical reflection of their own beliefs and behaviours and the factors which affect these. This process ultimately shaped the research conducted by the young people, as it focused on the aspect of sectarianism which was most relevant to their lived experience. The young people involved in this project are known hereafter as young participants.

Support from YouthLink Scotland

A structured programme of support was provided to the youth workers involved in delivering the youth work activities described above. This included their participation in three practice development seminars where training was offered by a researcher and senior practice development officer. The sessions covered the following topics.

1. Planning and delivering youth-led research and an introduction to the PDC.
2. Training in reflective writing, analysis and presenting research findings to the community.
3. Reflective session on the nature of the contribution of youth work in tackling sectarianism.

Research support visits were also offered to each of the youth groups by a researcher from YouthLink Scotland. These visits were co-facilitated with youth workers and tailored around the needs of the young people.

YouthLink Scotland facilitated an end of project 'get-together' for all the young people and youth workers to share their experiences and learning.

A final component of LFNB was a National Symposium which was an opportunity to consider the contribution that youth work and young people can make in tackling sectarianism and to discuss the findings of their research.

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WHAT WE DID: ABOUT LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK

Research by YouthLink Scotland

In addition to the delivery of a youth work programme, LFNB seeks to contribute to the evidence of the impact of youth work in Scotland. A researcher from YouthLink Scotland examined the nature of the contribution youth work can make in tackling sectarianism. This qualitative research methods included focus groups, semi-structured interviews and reflective writing were conducted with each of the local youth groups.

A toolkit was produced by YouthLink Scotland to share the learning from the Looking Forward Not Back groups. It is presented as a guide for other organisations and practitioners who would like to work with young people to support youth action on sectarianism.

At each stage, the Toolkit gives an overview of the youth work process involved, examples from the Looking Forward Not Back groups, including top tips, and a series of reflective questions to consider.

A copy of the toolkit can be found here:

<https://www.actiononsectarianism.info/library-main/activities/looking-forward-not-back-toolkit-year-2>

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WHY WE DID IT:

YOUTH WORK AND SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND

Sectarianism in Scotland

In Scotland the term sectarianism largely describes a situation where people behave in a prejudicial or bigoted way towards each other based on (often inaccurate) associations with Catholicism or Protestantism (intra-Christian sectarianism).

Although there is an historical context to sectarianism in Scotland it is often the case that people who hold sectarian views are not sure why they do. Sectarian attitudes and beliefs are often “handed down” through families and communities and associated with support for specific football teams.

Sectarianism behaviour takes many forms including name calling, jokes and comments, chants and songs, graffiti, stereotyping, verbal abuse, bullying and physical violence¹.

The Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism (2015) in Scotland has developed a definition which uniquely represents what sectarianism looks and feels like in Scottish communities.

“Sectarianism in Scotland is a mixture of perceptions, attitudes, actions, and structures that involves overlooking, excluding, discriminating against or being abusive or violent towards others on the basis of their perceived Christian denominational background. This perception is always mixed with other factors such as, but not confined to, politics, football allegiance and national identity.”

¹ For more information on sectarianism in Scotland see Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland. (2015).

Young people and sectarianism

Like any other age group, young people can be both the perpetrators and the victims of sectarianism. Young people often experience (or express) sectarianism in relation to the school they attend, the community in which they live or the football team they support.

Here are some examples, from the youth workers involved in LFNB, of the way in which young people experience sectarianism in their communities:

“The view of many of the young people that we work with is that the divide in the local community is the norm and that sectarianism is an acceptable way of thinking and behaving. They also tell us that sectarian behaviour is mainly driven by football.”

“Young people are currently scared to be seen as individuals with thoughts and opinions that differ from others which can lead to them not being accepted as part of groups or standing out from the crowd. This can sadly then lead to being a victim of bullying.”

“Some of the young people we work with have been directly subjected to acts of violence and vandalism as a result of their perceived public allegiance to either certain religions or football teams. Also, more worryingly, some have been the perpetrators.”

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Youth work

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the contribution that youth work can make to addressing sectarianism.

What is youth work?

“Youth work is an educational practice contributing to young people’s learning and development. Youth work engages with young people within their communities; it acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture; it supports the young person to realise their potential and to address life’s challenges critically and creatively; it takes account of all strands of diversity”².

Characteristics of youth work

Youth work has three essential and definitive features^{3,4}.

1. Young people choose to participate.
2. Youth work builds from where young people are.
3. Youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in the learning process.

² <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/webs/245/documents/StatementnatureYW.pdf>

³ YouthLink Scotland (2005)

⁴ <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=20158>

Youth work values and principles

The youth work process is underpinned by the principles of social justice, promoting diversity and challenging inequality and injustice.

The National Occupational Standards for Youth Work⁵ describe how these principles are expressed in the youth work approach.

- Youth work “treats young people with respect, valuing each individual and their differences and promoting the acceptance and understanding of others whilst challenging oppressive behaviours and ideas”.
- Youth work “respects and values individual differences by supporting and strengthening young people’s belief in themselves, and their capacity to grow and to change through a supportive group environment”.

⁵ <http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National-Occupation-Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf>

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Youth work outcomes

YouthLink Scotland has developed, with the youth work sector, an outcomes model (see Appendix 2). The seven outcomes are outcomes for young people through youth work. They are a suite of outcomes that can be achieved in a range of youth work contexts and practices. They are not interdependent nor found in every context, but neither are they mutually exclusive. The youth work method recognises that outcomes for individual young people come as a result of a negotiated process between the young person and youth workers as partners in a learning process, and therefore the seven outcomes can and should be supplemented with learner-identified outcomes.

- **Young people are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future**
- **Young people manage personal, social and formal relationships**
- **Young people create, describe and apply their learnings and skills**
- **Young people participate safely and effectively in groups**
- **Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control**
- **Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment**
- **Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking**

The youth work process

In youth work there is no set curriculum and no prescribed methods. These are negotiated with the young people involved. The learning and development outcomes which youth work achieves (above) are dependent on two core processes:

- **Group work** – Youth workers use group work to support young people to learn from and with their peers, to develop and manage relationships with others, to tolerate and respect difference and value diversity.
- **The youth work relationship** - Youth workers develop relationships with young people based on acceptance, trust and respect and “use” this relationship to encourage and challenge young people to develop aspirations, reflect critically on their own and others’ behaviour and choices and to develop social skills and respect for others.

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Youth work and sectarianism

From this understanding of the nature of sectarianism and the nature and purpose of youth work, it is clear that youth work might contribute to addressing sectarianism in the following ways:

- by engaging young people in learning about an issue that affects them and their communities;
- by empowering young people to understand and critically question their own behaviours and attitudes and those of others;
- by providing a safe learning environment that is respectful of young people's family and social relationships;
- by encouraging and supporting young people to apply what they have learned and to act to address the impact that sectarianism has on them and their communities.

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National Research Study

Through exploring sectarianism in the community, LFNB aims to add to the evidence base about the contribution youth work can make to positive outcomes for young people.

The research study was designed to explore the impact of Looking Forward Not Back on young people who participated in the project and consider the effectiveness of youth work processes in addressing sectarianism.

Part 1 - How we did it : Methodology

The research study focussed on the experience and perceptions of the youth workers and young people who engaged in the LFNB project. Through a qualitative research design the lived experiences of the participants were captured.

Data was collected in the following ways:

- from focus groups with young participants;
- from semi-structured interviews with a youth work practitioner from each of the groups;
- from youth worker practitioners' reflective writings.

Focus groups

A focus group was conducted with the young participants in each of the projects. Visual props were used to stimulate discussion (see Appendix 3). Focus groups encourage participation and contributions from potentially reluctant participants, by providing a safe space for them to share their experiences. Participants can receive support from their peers, which can be both empowering and provide an opportunity for more honest and critical comments, with participants of all abilities being able to join in. However there are potential limitations using this method including participant reluctance to share opinions that differ from the rest of the group, confidentiality being compromised and the challenge for the researcher of analysing complex data⁶.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method with youth workers. This was thought to be the most appropriate method because it afforded a safe, confidential and reflective space for youth workers to share their views about the project. Semi-structured interviews can produce rich and detailed data. The one-to-one setting means that the needs of the interviewee can be respected and the privacy afforded can precipitate open and honest responses.

The purpose of these interviews was to explore in depth the perceived impact on young participants taking part in the project and the contribution youth workers considered they themselves had made. As with focus groups data can be complicated to analyse, and also a one-to-one setting can be uncomfortable for some interviewees⁷.

Reflective writing

In order to ensure that all youth workers involved in the projects had the opportunity to share their opinions, practice and contribute to the research, each was asked to produce a piece of reflective writing. Each youth worker was asked to keep a private reflective diary. This could be used to help them recall their thoughts and experiences during the project. The importance of self-reflection in youth work is recognised as a process that is used:

“to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge, understanding and emotions that we already possess”⁸.

Central to the notion of reflective writing therefore is learning from experience⁹ and is a form of thinking which supports processing of knowledge, understanding and emotions¹⁰.

Reflective writing can facilitate creativity and critical thinking. It is also a means of acquiring knowledge through lived experience and gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of the experience. However, drawbacks include potential for inaccurate recall, hindsight bias and poor memory¹¹.

⁷ See Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) for advantages/disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

⁸ Moon (2007)

⁹ Jasper (2005)

¹⁰ Moon (2007)

¹¹ See Jasper (2005) for advantages/disadvantages of reflective writing

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Part 2 - What we found

The research study was designed to explore the impact of LFNB on young people who participated in the project and consider the effectiveness of youth work processes in addressing sectarianism. For this purpose we specifically asked two questions:

1. What was the impact on the young people participating in Looking Forward Not Back that contributed to tackling sectarian beliefs?
2. How did the youth work process contribute to achieving this impact?

The following summary of findings addresses these two questions.

Summary of findings:

- All young participants stated they had increased their knowledge and awareness of sectarianism through participation in the LFNB project.
- Participation in the LFNB project generated critical questioning of sectarian norms, attitudes and behaviour.
- A minority of participants questioned family values and personal behaviour in relation to sectarianism.
- All participants have developed increased confidence to start community dialogue and actively challenge others about sectarian attitudes.
- The majority of participants reported that the opportunity to develop skills and gain accreditation were motivators to engage in the LFNB project.
- Group work methods to support learning and the informal learning partnership between young people and the youth worker (characteristics of youth work) were reported to contribute to the changes in knowledge, attitudes, critical awareness and confidence to challenge others.
- Relationships between youth workers and young people were reported as a crucial factor in the achievement of learning by young participants.
- Youth worker knowledge and experience impacted on the efficacy of methods used to engage young people in exploring the issue of sectarianism.

Youth work outcomes

The youth work outcomes are a model of what young people can achieve through a youth work process. The following three outcomes were identified in this study.

- Outcome 3** Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills
- Outcome 6** Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment
- Outcome 7** Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking

Key findings

This section will examine each of the key findings in relation to the two questions outlined above regarding the impact on the young people and the contribution of youth work to tackling sectarianism.

All young participants stated they had increased their knowledge and awareness of sectarianism through participation in the LFNB project.

At the project outset there was a range of experience and understanding of sectarianism amongst the 20 young participants who took part in the focus groups. The majority stated that though they had an awareness of sectarianism in their community and even amongst their family and friends, they had never personally held or expressed sectarian views.

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Participation in the LFNB project has generated critical questioning of sectarian norms, attitudes and behaviour.

All of the young participants reported having increased knowledge of sectarianism as a result of their participation in LFNB. This was most commonly expressed as, *“I know it’s not just about football”*. Many of the young participants discussed having an increased awareness of sectarianism in their community and how their research had helped provide them with a better understanding of its history and background. One young participant explained how her increased knowledge has helped her to better understand the effect of sectarianism on her family.

“My Dad was a protestant and my Mum was a Catholic, they told me how they had to flee from Ireland, I didn’t know a lot about it but this group has helped...I understand how it now works and how it can affect folk and that.”

This increased knowledge has been acquired from both direct learning from youth workers and from organisations such as Nil by Mouth¹², Sense over Sectarianism¹³, Police Scotland and from the research conducted in the communities. This is summarised in the following remark by a young participant.

“We got different points of views so we were more informed...I think it’s fuelled our information.”

¹² <http://nilbymouth.org/>

¹³ <https://www.actiononsectarianism.info/children/interactive-zone/other-videos/sense-over-sectarianism>

In the following extracts young participants explain their increased learning about sectarianism through the project. In the first extract reference is made to sectarian songs and in the second the meaning of sectarianism.

“Before you just used to think it was just a song but now you actually know what it is about and what the words mean.”

“At first I couldn’t say it or spell it and I didn’t know what it was, now I can say it, I can spell it, I feel I kind of understand what it is.”

A minority of participants questioned family values and personal behaviour in relation to sectarianism.

As a result of increasing their knowledge and awareness of sectarianism, a small number of the young participants began to question their family values in relation to the issue. This was a challenging process for the young participants and impacted on their behaviour in the youth work setting and sometimes led to conflicts between them. One of the youth workers reported having to address challenging behaviour precipitated by the conflicting messages a young participant was receiving from his family and from the project. The worker reported explaining to the young person that:

“maybe you’re having a wee tantrum because you’re in conflict, you’re being told this from us and yet your family are telling you that, you’re in the middle trying to make sense of it all and it might not make sense to you for 6 months, a year, until you have your own kids.”

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In this particular group, conflict did arise due to family values being questioned. Central to the youth work process was the provision of a safe space for the young participants in which they could challenge each other and still remain friendly. In this instance, the youth worker explained the long term implications of this project to the young participant and the potential to change ingrained family values.

Although the majority of young participants were not expressing sectarian views themselves, many discussed how, due to their learning, they feel they can now identify sectarianism and even challenge this behaviour in others. This would include other young people and family members.

“Before they didn’t see how they were doing anything wrong [when using sectarian language], whereas now they do...they couldn’t understand it, which is why we went into depth about it and now they can recognise it for themselves, if someone’s says something they say ‘you shouldn’t be saying that, you can get jailed for that, you shouldn’t be doing that, it’s disgusting.’”

(Youth worker interview)

“Yeah...at school people were saying some things...and you’re like ‘you really shouldn’t be saying that’, they say sectarian things about other [football] teams and you try and challenge them and make sure they don’t use those words.”

(Young participant)

There was a minority of young participants who stated that before their involvement in the project they had used sectarian language in the community. However, as a result of learning about sectarianism within the youth work setting all of these young people stated that they no longer expressed sectarian language or behaviour. The following two quotations demonstrate the nature of sectarian language and behaviour the young participants used before the project.

“I don’t say ‘F the queen’¹⁴ any more, now I know it’s wrong... you would get in trouble from the police...if you are arguing with someone don’t bring football or race into it, because I used to do that all the time.”

(Young participant)

“He’s talked about how he would have put the Sash¹⁵ on [music player] and up to the wall to annoy the neighbours and he wouldn’t do that now.”

(Youth worker interview)

The extracts above are examples of the impact of the project on changing sectarian behaviour amongst these young participants. Three youth workers from separate groups referred to more general behavioural changes in specific young people. The most powerful example of this related to a young person who had poor attendance at school and was viewed negatively by teachers, yet showed commitment to the project and had aspirations to become involved in youth opportunities.

¹⁴ This is offensive towards Protestantism

¹⁵ Refers to a ballad from the Northern Irish province of Ulster commemorating the victory of King William III in the Williamite War in Ireland in 1690–1691

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“By having a positive experience from this project he’s now offering himself up for other stuff, he’s asked to volunteer for the detached team in his area...he’s sourcing other things to get involved in, even when this finishes he will be doing other things.”

(Youth worker interview)

This example illustrates how being part of the project increased aspirations and a desire to be involved in further volunteering, not just on the issue of sectarianism.

All participants have developed increased confidence to start community dialogue and actively challenge others about sectarian attitudes.

Through engagement in LFNB all of the young participants have built confidence to start community dialogue on the issue of sectarianism. A minority of the young participants have also begun to change their own behaviour and many suggested they have begun to challenge sectarian behaviour in others.

Youth workers identified that the increase in knowledge amongst the young participants had been a confidence-building experience by giving the young participants the resources to support their discussions with community members when conducting the research.

“Their confidence in engaging with the community partly came from their personality but partly from having stats they could use to tell adults about.”

(Youth worker interview)

Having increased knowledge and capacity to apply the knowledge was discussed by one of the groups of young participants. Participants explained that their increased knowledge and understanding meant they were able to identify sectarianism and make informed decisions about how to respond to it.

“It’s opened our eyes to what sectarianism is, we can tell now if a song comes on, that’s not right we should tell somebody depending on the situation.”

(Young participant)

Though many of the young people discussed their increased confidence to challenge sectarian behaviour in others, there was a general sense that this may not change the beliefs or behaviour of others.

“I didn’t know any of the football chants, but my brother he does and he sings quite a lot of them and I say ‘stop, it’s not right to sing that’ I said it to him but he doesn’t care, he thinks it’s banter and thinks it’s fun.”

A minority of young participants stated that though they are aware of sectarianism they would not challenge it in others.

“I was going with my cousin to the Orange walks¹⁶ and they are singing sectarian songs...it’s made me understand it a bit more... it used to be a normal thing, I just thought it was nice music...I wouldn’t challenge it...If I was to say to any of my family that they’re sectarian they would go ‘no I’m not, coz they do this’... they wouldn’t take the blame.”

¹⁶ A series of parades held annually by members of the Orange Order on a regular basis during the summer in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and occasionally in England, and throughout the Commonwealth.

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“More aware of what sectarianism is and if I see it I know what it is, I see it quite a lot now...on one of the school buses the boys at the back start singing football songs... [she won’t challenge the sectarian behaviour] they don’t like me, they’d have a go at me... they just don’t care really, they don’t care what anybody thinks.”

Though there is a lack of confidence amongst these young participants to directly challenge this behaviour in others, they all explained that they would not join in with singing sectarian songs, whereas in the past they may have done.

The majority of participants reported that the opportunity to develop skills and gain accreditation were motivators to engage in the LFNB project.

Through LFNB, all the young participants followed the structure of the PDC to conduct their research in the community. As part of this process it was expected that they would develop research skills, group work skills, leadership skills, and decision-making approaches. All of these skills support the development of critical knowledge and understanding of their community.

None of the young participants had experience of conducting research before the project. Through this process they developed skills which were discussed by the young participants and youth workers predominantly in the categories outlined in the table on the next page.

Table 1 - Developing skills to build knowledge

Research methods	Organisational
Critical questions	Planning
Gathering data	Time management
Analysis	Teamwork
Communication	Presentation
Public speaking	Decision-making

Developing these skills helped the young participants engage with the community, ask questions and then critically analyse the responses they received.

“Like with the questionnaires and the focus groups, trying to figure out what’s the best way ... to get the most information from them, that’s a skill I’ve picked up.”

(Young participant)

“It’s good, I enjoy it, it’s good to get other people’s opinions and what’s happening in the community.”

(Young participant)

“It has thrown up a lot of questions...it’s making them question more which I think is good ultimately...in that way it’s pushed them a bit forward...they are going deeper into things...they are questioning things as opposed to taking things at face value.”

(Youth worker interview)

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Through developing the skills outlined on the previous page, the young participants were equipped to begin to challenge their own beliefs and behaviours as well as those of their family and friends.

Group work methods to support learning and the informal learning partnership between young people and the youth worker (characteristics of youth work) were reported to contribute to the changes in knowledge, attitudes, critical awareness and confidence to challenge others.

All of the groups reported having a stronger bond as a result of working together on the project. Through the group work process they were encouraged to accept each other's differences, share tasks and communicate effectively with each other. When asked about the skills the young participants had developed, three of the youth workers discussed learning to work together as a group as being a key skill.

“Definitely working with others they wouldn't normally choose to work with, I think accepting others who may be living in different situations or circumstances.”

“Working together as a group, dividing up tasks, who takes on responsibilities, who fills in the gaps...group dynamics and group decision making.”

“Teamwork and communication, taking the time to listen and speak so it’s not a free-for-all, speaking politely and not offending people and being more conscious of the way that they speak to people.”

One of the groups organised a two day residential experience at the beginning of the project as a means of team-building for a group which had only met two or three times before. This was viewed as successful by both the youth workers and the young participants. As part of the residential they introduced the concept of researching sectarianism and provided new experiences for the young participants by taking them to the theatre. This is described by a youth worker from the group.

“We did a lot of team building stuff at the outdoor centre...and they’d never done anything like that before... they’d only met two or three times so they didn’t really know each other, so that helped them to gel together quickly... we did *Beyond a Culture of Two Halves* and then we went to the Fringe and they had never been to the theatre before. Then we started to look at research and that fed into when we came back we started looking at the research, now they had the knowledge and history of what sectarianism is.”

These shared experiences provided a positive beginning to the project, with one of the young participants explaining *“It’s helped actually...we’ve been brought closer as a group”*.

¹⁷ This resource is a bank of materials designed to help stimulate and enable those tackling sectarianism to develop a programme they can deliver in their communities. Available at: <https://www.actiononsectarianism.info/library-main/activities/beyond-a-culture-of-two-halves>

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Relationships between youth workers and young people were reported as a crucial factor in the achievement of learning by young participants.

The relationship between the youth worker and young person was seen as crucial to the success of the project by all of the youth workers and was highlighted as being a unique relationship to many of the young participants. A distinction was made by many of the young participants between the relationships they have with their youth workers compared with other adults in their lives, such as teachers. This was commonly discussed as a more open and honest relationship, in which they felt more comfortable to share and discuss sensitive topics.

“It’s more like a friendly relationship, you trust them more... if you’re at school and you have a teacher who’s maybe strict, you won’t want to speak to them about more sensitive things but if you’re in here, [the youth workers] are more open to talk about different subjects even if it’s a bit sensitive and you know they’ll be able to help more.”

This was also discussed in relation to respect, with many of the young people explaining that they felt more respected by youth workers than they did other adults in their life: *“they treat us with more respect and freedom.”*. The development of this more open and respect-based partnership was centred on the youth workers treating the young participants as young people and not as children: *“they don’t treat us like weans¹⁸”*. (Young participant)

A crucial aspect of this partnership was the youth worker and young participant developing a relationship. In four of the groups the youth worker had established relationships with the young participants before LFNB began. For one of the groups, the youth workers had no prior relationship with the young participants and so they spent the first few weeks developing relationships and building trust. A part of this process was creating a relaxed approach: *“It was very, very relaxed, a slowly gently approach so hence cups of tea in the morning, loads of chocolate biscuits”* (Youth worker interview). It was seen as an important aspect of the youth work process and not something which could be rushed. One of the youth workers reflected on the benefits of taking the time to get to know the group.

“Taking time to get to know them as individuals and as a group undoubtedly paid dividends in the long term and when the work needed to be done they really knuckled down and applied themselves fully.”

(Youth worker, reflective writing)

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Youth worker knowledge and experience impacted on the efficacy of methods used to engage young people in exploring the issue of sectarianism.

The number of years' experience of the youth workers ranged between five months and twenty years. All the youth workers were confident in working directly with young people, however three of the groups had not worked on the issue of sectarianism before and only one had delivered youth-led research before. The range of experience amongst the youth workers directly affected the approaches used when engaging with young participants and the confidence of the youth workers in engaging young people in the issue of sectarianism through youth-led research.

Although all the youth workers expressed the importance of a learning partnership, for the least experienced youth workers this was very much the case as they were learning as the project went along and did not have past experience to draw upon. This is explained by one youth worker.

"I'm only [young] myself, half this stuff I'm like I never knew that, I did the book [PDC workbook] along with them to see what it's like, in a way I've learned a lot."

This quote highlights how experience and the age of the youth worker can impact on the methods used to engage young people and the learning journey some of the youth workers went on.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the young participants have increased in their knowledge and understanding of sectarianism. Subsequent to this learning they have begun to critically question sectarian norms, attitudes and behaviour, with a minority questioning their family values and changing their own behaviour. Participating in the research activities appears to have helped young participants to develop the confidence to engage in community dialogue and many have begun to actively challenge others on the issue.

The findings also highlighted that the use of groupwork, the informal learning partnership and relationship between young people and youth workers were crucial to achieving the impact on the young people. This section discusses the role of the youth work process in achieving the impact outlined in the findings. The analysis will be structured around the characteristics of youth work:

- Young people choose to participate;
- The work must build from where young people are;
- Youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process.

This research offers a snapshot of five youth group projects and explores the effectiveness of a youth work approach for tackling sectarianism.

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Young people choose to participate

A crucial element of LFNB was that young people chose to participate in the project. Youth workers were asked to demonstrate that sectarianism was an issue that affected, or was of interest to, the young people and that they were choosing to take part. As part of this process, youth workers provided young people with a youth work offer, where young people would choose to take part and the project would be delivered in a group work model. The young people were made aware that they could leave the group at any time and some young people did choose to leave the project for various reasons, the main one being other commitments. A key part of the young people choosing to remain in the project other than their interest in researching sectarianism was a dedication to their peers in the group; this existed regardless of the length of time they had known each other.

Group Work

Group work is a common characteristic of youth work delivery, all of the LFNB groups operated in a group work model. The groups varied in length of time the young participants had known each other. All of the young participants were actively engaged in youth work and they volunteered to progress to LFNB.

One of the groups was newly formed just before LFNB began; the young participants were in the early stages of forming relationships with each other, with the females and males initially taking part in activities separately, because there was a perception that the group did not want to mix together. Through the

project they developed their group work skills and their relationships with each other have improved. The young participants have also identified role models in their groups which have helped improve confidence levels.

“The group...has brought some of the young people out of their shells by observing other group members who are more confident, they have tried to emulate it. They were finding what they had in common and learning about each other, now they are friendly with each other.”

(Youth worker interview)

The reason for these improved relationships was commonly described as them having a shared goal that they were all working towards, which led to the young participants supporting each other and working together.

There was also an option for additional one-to-one support time between the young participant and youth worker for completing the PDC. Having this dedicated support from the youth worker was identified as important, however much of the learning appeared to come from working as a group. Two particular methods were used by the youth workers to form the group, these included a residential experience and working in sub-groups.

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Residential experience

Residential experiences are common practice in a youth work environment. They are seen to help develop young people's personal and social skills, broaden horizons and can help deepen their awareness of their own and other abilities and needs. Broadening the young people's perspective through new experiences and thinking is a youth work outcome.

Working in sub-groups

To ensure that the needs of the young participants were met and that every young participant felt supported and had an opportunity to share their views and experiences, smaller groups were sometimes used. The groups ranged in size between four and ten young participants. For the smaller groups the young participants would work all together when they met, for the larger groups they would be split into smaller groups to encourage deeper discussions, as explained by the young participants from one of the groups.

“We normally split up....we normally work in pairs....it's a lot more laid back...it's better when we work in pairs or threes because then you can work together to make sure everyone understands it, we get more work done because we get lots of different answers.”

Working in smaller groups was also described as providing a more comfortable sharing environment, especially for the groups where there were potentially conflicting opinions.

¹⁹ Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Service (2014)

²⁰ YouthLink Scotland (2016)

The work must build from where young people are

Creating a safe space for young participants to discuss sectarianism, given the sensitivity of the subject area and the young participant's connection to the issue, meant it was crucial to provide a safe space. All of the young participants identified that sectarianism was an issue in their community, for some it was an issue which affected them personally within the home or amongst their peers, for the majority it was something they were aware of existing within their community (e.g. hearing football chants, seeing the parades). This youth work process began with an understanding of the young people's current knowledge, attitudes and experiences. Youth work offers:

“young people safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop interpersonal skills and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for young people²¹.”

²¹ The National Youth Agency (2014)

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Providing a safe space

Part of creating a safe space is ensuring the physical space where the group meets is suitable, in LFNB this was in a youth club or school setting. One of the groups in particular discussed the physical space they had occupied. They began the project in a space where there were no breakout rooms which affected not only the discussions of sectarianism but also meant it was more difficult for each young person to learn at their own pace and to utilise some of the group work techniques discussed. Consequently, they changed buildings to ensure a more effective informal learning environment.

“If we’d tried to do the sectarian project in the...hall it wouldn’t have worked, they would have felt confined to one room, with no room to break away...so if you’ve finished your research you don’t have to sit and wait for everyone else, you can go do something else.”

(Youth worker interview)

All but one of the groups took place in a youth club, with one group meeting at a school. The youth workers from this project discussed the measures they put in place to create an informal learning environment.

“Once you’re in that classroom and it’s the same classroom every time, which I think is important as well, it’s continuity and everybody feels comfortable, there’s a kettle there etc, as soon as that door closes you don’t feel you’re in the school any more, it’s just you and the group, you could be in a café, or a community centre anywhere, the only thing that reminds you it’s a school is the bell, the bell rings at a certain time and off they go and that’s really the only difference.”

As identified by this youth worker it was considered important to create an informal and comfortable environment for the young participants to learn, discuss and share experiences of sectarianism. This informal, safe space was also described by many of the young participants as aiding their learning process, as summarised by one young participant.

“It feels a bit different, it’s more relaxed in a sense but you still know you’ve got to work ... we are all still getting work done, because they’re not pressurising us too much we are actually working better, it’s an easy environment to work in.”

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Setting ground rules

As part of creating a safe space, all of the youth workers discussed the importance of co-creating group rules with the young participants at the beginning of the project, to ensure a safe environment for engagement in the topic. The importance of these rules is explained by one youth worker.

“It was in their group agreements, not to offend people and not to hurt people’s feelings...it was a safe environment, we do always say ‘you’re okay to have opinions but it’s the way that you voice them’.”

Creating the group rules in partnership with the youth workers was part of the young participants feeling respected. This is outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child)

“When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account²².”

As part of co-creating the group rules, consequences were put in place if the rules were broken such as a loss of privileges or being asked to leave a room. However, no young participants were permanently excluded from the groups.

Setting the pace

Youth work recognises the need to *“communicate in a manner, and at a pace, appropriate to the individual”*²³. A part of this is allowing the young participant the chance to set the pace for their learning. Although a structure was provided through following the PDC, an important aspect identified by all of the groups was allowing the young participants to set the pace. This was described in different ways which included splitting the sessions to ensure there was a mix of working on LFNB and playing games and providing plenty of breaks.

“They’re [youth workers] more relaxed and they know the way we work, because we need breaks and stuff, we have short attention spans...but when other folk come in they just sit and talk for ages and we get a bit distracted.”

(Young Participant)

A flexible approach was also explained as being crucial by each of the groups. This included the young participants having the option to meet the youth worker out with the weekly or fortnightly session for additional support. One youth worker described the flexibility they were willing to provide but the mutual respect required for this to work in practice.

²³ National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (date unknown)

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“I think being flexible worked better, if you’re timetabling things and saying you must be here, you’re almost turning it back to being like I’m the head teacher...I always made plans with them, so it was always led by them and the only thing I needed to know was if I needed to change my working hours to work in the evenings, so it was that mutual flexibility because I’m more office based, so it was about them being appreciative of that and the other way round...so they doing it for me and I was doing it for them.”

As described by the youth worker above, a part of providing flexibility was differentiating informal learning in a youth work environment from a school setting. This was appreciated by all of the young participants who described appreciating the flexibility of the youth work setting. This was also described as an “*empowering*” experience, as both having flexibility and the young participants setting the pace meant that they had more control of the process.

“Because it has been done in this setting, it’s been more empowering for them because they’ve been in control of it and I said ‘If you don’t want to do it, you just have to say, I’m not forcing you’.”

(Youth worker interview)

Conducting research on sectarianism in their communities was a voluntary commitment for the young participants and them choosing to participate was crucial to the successful completion of the research. One of the youth workers provides a succinct summary of the importance of the research being young person-led, flexible and their choice.

“[It] is education through fun and it’s taking that step away from being school-like and structured and very much putting it in the hands of the young people and being led by them and that was the empowerment and self-confidence element, to be honest sometimes it threw me because I felt ‘oh my god, I have timescales and stuff’ but it’s their research, it was reversing it round and making it person-led and needs-led and led by them, and...that’s an opportunity you don’t really get in another setting. Always flexible and adaptable, not pushing and forcing things on young people and making it about their choice.”

Youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process

The third component of the nature and purpose of youth work is that *“youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process”*²⁴. This was an important aspect identified by all of the youth workers. According to one youth worker they believed young participants felt more reassured due to this partnership.

“We were getting across to them, this is the first time we’ve done this as well, we’re all in this together, we’re learning along with you guys and that reassured them.”

Working in partnership

The PDC played a part in the learning partnership between the youth workers and young participants and was used to create structure for the research process while providing young participants with recognition and accreditation for their contribution. It was not a requirement of the project, however all of the groups used the PDC as a structure for the research process. Only one of the groups did not achieve the PDC due to the project being given to a less experienced youth worker without access to sufficient training. The young participants still engaged in the research process and were supported to work towards the Dynamic Youth Award by a senior youth worker who joined towards the end of the project. The young participants still reported increased knowledge, group work skills and behavioural change.

They also explained the relationship they have with their youth workers helped them to learn more than they felt they would have in a more formal learning environment:

“They treat us like proper adults...they give us responsibility, they give us a bit of leeway...it’s not like school where you get treated like a wean.”

(Young participant)

Recognition and accreditation

Another key aspect of developing this partnership with their youth workers was recognising the contribution of the young participants who had volunteered and committed to the project. As described above young researchers had the option to follow the structure of the PDC during the course of their project, with the purpose of providing structure and recognition for conducting research in their community. All of the young participants worked towards the PDC during the course of their research, but only four of the groups achieved the award, as discussed above. Having the added element of an award was described by the youth workers as a positive, motivating factor for young participants.

“The PDC award [is] really important to them and played a major role in encouraging them to attend.”

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For many of the young participants the PDC was seen as supplementing their formal education and being “good for our CV” (young participant). However, for one of the groups, the young participants had disengaged from school; this meant the PDC was one of the first qualifications they would achieve. This was discussed by the youth worker, who explains how they integrated working towards the PDC as part of LFNB into Links to Life, which is an alternative programme to formal education.

“They weren’t going to school and we got the opportunity to have them three days a week through Links to Life...at least two hours a week would be spent on the PDC.”

Skills for learning, life or work

Being part of LFNB held particular significance for one of the groups as explained above, as the young participants had disengaged from formal education. Being part of this project and being supported in a youth work environment helped them to achieve accreditation through the PDC and to develop skills for learning, life and work.

However, all of the young participants discussed the key skills they felt they had developed through learning in an informal, supportive environment. The following table is a summary of the skills that many of the young participants felt they had developed which would aid their employability in the future. This, in the main, was discussed by the young participants who were 16 and over and who were beginning to think about their next steps after formal education or for those who had disengaged from formal education.

Table 2 - Skills for learning, life or work

Effective communication	Organisational
Time management	CV development
Commitment	Listening
Self-reliance	Decision-making
Planning	Confidence in talking to community members
Managing conflict situations	Working as a team

One of the young participants explained how they felt the skills they have developed would help with their future career prospects.

“I want to be an electrical engineer, but I want to be high up, I will be working as part of a group, as part of a team...we will need to decide what is the most important thing to do and the least important, that is something I can take from this I can use it as a transferable skill...which means I can take it into any job I go into....decision-making was another transferable skill, each one of us took a certain part and done it, it was a good way so people weren’t arguing about who is leading it, we all got our own bit to do.”

This young participant identified the long term benefits of being part of the project and how he believes the skills he has developed will aid his career prospects.

Part 3 - Conclusions : A summary of what we found

What we found was that when youth workers supported young people to conduct research in their community on sectarianism, all young people increased their knowledge and awareness of sectarianism. This appeared to be related to the direct learning with youth workers, hearing from expert speakers and conducting their own research. It seems that as a consequence of this learning the young participants developed the confidence to begin to challenge others on the issue; in the main this included their family and friends. They were also beginning to critically question their own sectarian norms, attitudes and behaviour. Having the opportunity to develop skills and accreditation were reported by the majority of young participants as motivating factors for remaining part of the project.

There was evidence that the characteristics of youth work, particularly the use of group work methods to support learning, and the informal learning partnership between the young participant and youth worker contributed to the changes in knowledge, critical awareness and confidence to challenge others.

We also found that the youth workers had differing levels of experience which impacted on their methods of engagement with young participants. The contributions youth work made was in developing relationships and a partnership with the young participants, where the young people set the pace of their learning and led the research. Given the subject area was personal, emotive and culturally significant, it was identified as being crucial to provide a safe environment to have discussions. All of the young participants discussed

the distinction they made between their relationship with their youth workers compared with other adults in the lives, with trust and respect being central to this relationship. Youth work was seen by the participants in the research as being a unique environment in which to learn and support young people to conduct research on sectarianism.

Impact of youth work practices

The findings from this research are consistent with our experience of using youth work approaches in other subject areas. Based on our understanding of sectarianism and youth work, it was anticipated that youth work might contribute to addressing sectarianism by:

- engaging young people in issues that affect them;
- empowering young people to understand and critically question behaviours and attitudes;
- providing a safe learning environment;
- encouraging and supporting young people to apply what they have learned and take action.

It seems from the findings of this study that youth work has contributed to addressing sectarianism in the ways described above. However, as previously indicated though lessons can be learned we must remain cautious about the wider relevance of our findings.

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A reflection point for the study is that an assumption was made that the youth workers involved would have enough experience to find the necessary information to increase their own understanding of sectarianism. Consequently, the focus of the practice development seminars conducted by YouthLink Scotland was on supporting young people to conduct youth-led research. If the project was to run again, support would be provided to the youth workers in increasing their own knowledge and understanding of sectarianism before working with young people.

We also found that part of building from where young people are in this project was accepting that the issue of sectarianism for some of the young people was not their main motivating factor for taking part. For the majority developing skills and gaining accreditation were contributing factors to increasing their knowledge and understanding of sectarianism. This was, in part, due to the age of many of the young people, who were thinking about their future education and employment opportunities.

One of the most important learning points in the study was the significance of the relationship between youth workers and the young participants. For the young participants a distinction was made between this relationship and their relationship with other adults in their lives. This relationship was built on trust, patience and mutual respect, which all contributed to the young participants increasing their knowledge, understanding and confidence in tackling sectarian beliefs.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1:

OVERVIEW OF THE YOUTH GROUPS

The youth groups were selected by a panel including representatives from YouthLink Scotland, Scottish Government and the Voluntary Action Fund. Applications were invited from the YouthLink Scotland members in the first instance and then the wider youth work sector.

Each group was asked to demonstrate how they met the following criteria:

- evidence of existing interest, commitment and involvement from a group of young people in the overall Looking Forward Not Back project;
- evidence of existing community need and interest in addressing intra-Christian sectarianism;
- evidence of senior level organisational commitment to the project and the use of research findings locally and within the work of their organisation.

When making the selection the panel also considered the location of applicants to ensure a geographical spread across Scotland's communities. Additional priority was given to groups working with young people aged between 15-25. Finally, it was essential that each group demonstrated that their organisation subscribed to the nature and purpose of youth work²⁵.

The selection panel chose five youth groups to take part in LFNB: two based in different areas of Glasgow, and one each in Falkirk, South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway local authority areas. Each group is described below.

APPENDIX 1:

OVERVIEW OF THE YOUTH GROUPS

Youth Learning Services – South Lanarkshire

Two youth workers supported six young people aged 15-17 to conduct research in their community on sectarianism. The majority of the young participants had disengaged from school and were engaging in the Links to Life programme at the youth centre. The group met at Hamilton Universal Connections three times a week, where LFNB was integrated into their Links to Life programme.

Tollcross YMCA – Glasgow

Tollcross YMCA worked with five young people aged 11-14 in Garthamlock, in the greater Easterhouse area of Glasgow. Due to the age of the young participants and a number of staff changes, the young participants worked towards the Youth Achievement Award to recognise their contribution to the project, rather than the PDC.

Govan Youth Information Project – Glasgow

GYIP supported four young people aged between 15-18 years to become young participants. All of the young participants had established relationships with each other and had been attending and volunteering at GYIP for many years. GYIP is a voluntary organisation which offers free support for children and young people aged five+ including youth clubs, drop-ins and holiday programmes.

APPENDIX 1:

OVERVIEW OF THE YOUTH GROUPS

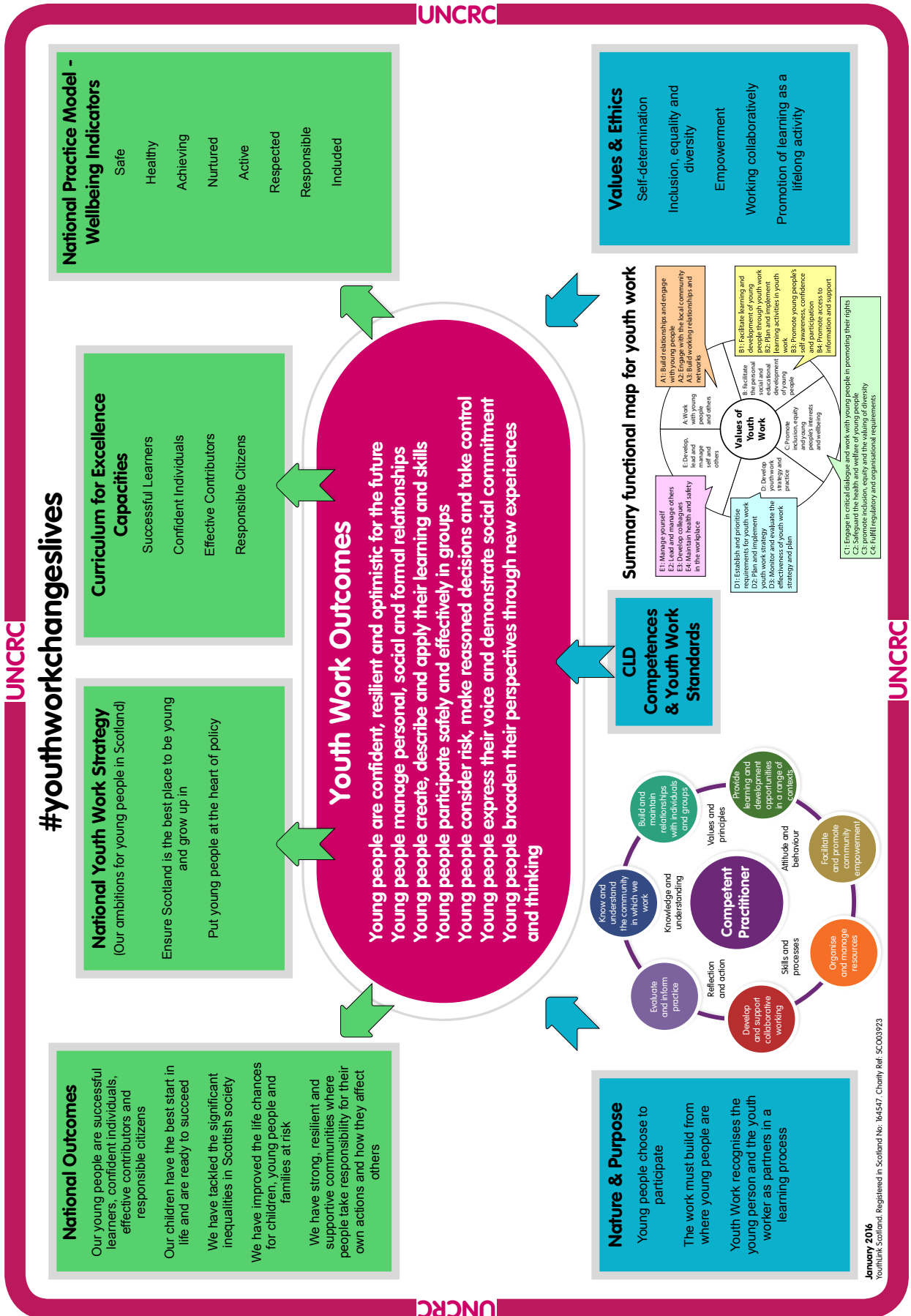
Falkirk Council Community Learning and Development – Falkirk

A group of seven young people aged between 14 and 16 years were brought together for LFNB. The young participants did not know each other prior to their involvement in the project but had all had various levels of engagement with the Community Learning and Development Team. Time was invested in the beginning to ensure the group developed as a team.

Stewartry Council for Voluntary Service – Dumfries and Galloway

A group of eight S6 pupils aged 16-17 from Douglas Ewart High School were supported by two youth workers. The young participants volunteered to be part of the project during free periods in school time. The youth workers had no prior relationship with the young participants and so spent the first couple of months building relationships and creating a youth work setting in a school environment.

APPENDIX 2: YOUTH WORK OUTCOMES



APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Where do you feel you were on the tree at the beginning of the project and why? Where do you feel you are on the tree now and why? What do you see in the person you coloured in?

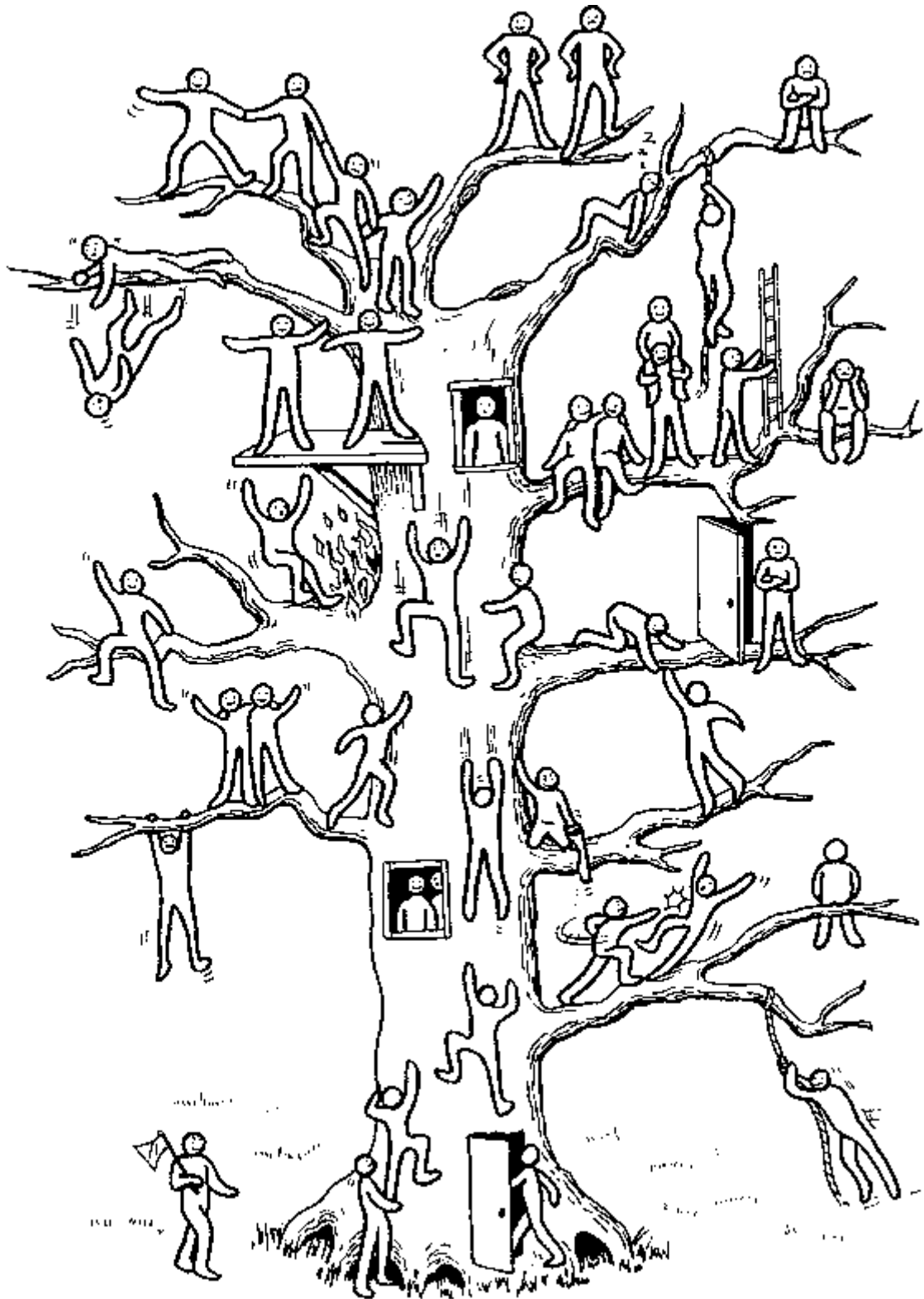
Discussion: What led you to get from one point to another on the tree?

1. What have you been doing as part of the project?

2. What have you got out of being part of the project?

- What skills have you developed?
- Has it changed your beliefs?
- Has it changed your behaviour? Do you notice the behaviour of others?
- Do you know more about sectarianism now?

APPENDIX 4: JELLY BABY TREE



Provided by Loft Youth Project, Keith

APPENDIX 5:

YOUTH WORKER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How did you get to where you are in youth work? (previous jobs, length of time being a youth worker, any links to sectarianism?)
2. What have you been doing with the project?
3. How did you do it?
4. What impact did the project have on the young participants? (skills, beliefs, knowledge)
5. What contribution do you think youth work had in achieving these impacts?
6. What methods have you used to support young participants in this subject?
7. Did it change the young participants' views of sectarianism? If so, how?

Each youth worker was provided with the following information about submitting their piece of reflective writing.

“We would like each youth worker who has been involved in LFNB to submit a reflective piece of writing in early January 2016. This should be:

- *Approx. 2 sides of A4. If however, you would prefer not to write, you could record yourself either voice or video, or let me know if you have another preferred method.*
- *When writing or recording your reflections please keep in mind 2 questions:*
 1. *What impact did the project have on the young people?*
 2. *What contribution did your youth work practice make to these impacts?*
- *We would encourage you to keep a diary as you go along on your project as a reminder to yourself (something you probably do anyway). But, what we are looking for at the end is a reflective piece of writing based on the above two questions.”*



Further Information

For further information on the Looking Forward Not Back groups and more support resources please visit the Looking Forward Not Back page on the "Action on Sectarianism" website.

www.actiononsectarianism.info



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