

National Youth Health Programme

Physical Activity in Youth Work

A Rapid Needs Assessment

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1. Introduction

The National Youth Health Programme (NYHP) is a partnership between the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Health Service Executive and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. One of the programme's core functions is to increase the health promoting capacity of the youth sector through the provision of evidence based training and resources using both a settings and topic based approach.

In 2016/2017 the NYHP conducted a rapid needs assessment on physical activity with the youth work sector. The purpose of this research was to inform the NYHP about gaps in knowledge, capacity and training in relation to the provision of physical activity programmes and the promotion of physical activity across the youth sector. The results of this assessment will inform the work direction of the NYHP going forward to best meet the needs of the youth work sector.

2. Rationale

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue. Current physical activity guidelines recommend that children and young people engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day. Those aged 18 and over are recommended to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity five times per week.¹

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA) published in 2010 reported that, only 19% of primary and 12% of post-primary school children met the physical activity recommendations².

Current national research also shows that 1 in 4 children in Ireland are overweight or obese. Being overweight or obese in childhood increases the likelihood of being overweight or obese in adulthood. Overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for a range of non-communicable diseases e.g. heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Those that

¹ Get Ireland Active: The National Physical Activity Plan (2016)

² Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (2010)

are at greater risk of being overweight or obese are young people living in disadvantaged circumstances, certain ethnic/cultural minority groups and people with a disability³. Being physically active improves the likelihood of weight maintenance and prevents weight gain. It also promotes physical and mental health, “improves quality of life and has economic, social, and cultural benefits”⁴. However, participation in physical activity falls as young people get older⁵.

Youth organisations have a key role to play in supporting young people’s participation in physical activity. “Recreation, sport and indoor/outdoor pursuits are used”⁶ to support the core business of youth work, enhancing the personal and social development of young people. The NYHP has the capacity to promote greater engagement in physical activity amongst a significant proportion of the 10 – 25 year old population as the National Youth Council of Ireland’s (NYCI’s) member organisations represent over 380,000 young people.

A range of current national policies and strategies recognise the importance of physical activity in young people’s lives and support actions that increase activity levels.

- Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020
- Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025
- Get Ireland Active: The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland
- National Youth Strategy 2015-2020
- A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025

³ A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 - 2025

⁴ Get Ireland Active: The National Physical Activity Plan (2016)

⁵ Health Behaviours in School Children (2016)

⁶ www.youth.ie

3. Methodology

Two surveys were conducted with the youth sector:

- An online survey (Appendix 1) was distributed to the NYCI database. 40 respondents completed this.
- In-depth interviews (Appendix 2) took place with 10 individual organisations

3.1 Survey 1

The online survey gave an overview of the frequency and type of opportunities young people have to be physically active in youth organisations. In this survey:

- 80% of respondents delivered a specific physical activity programme or included physical activity in its weekly schedule
- 85% of organisations did not have a dedicated physical activity coordinator or physical activity policy
- Youth worker's knowledge and confidence to deliver physical activity programmes varied within and across organisations:
 - 20% of respondents reported that youth workers in their organisation had an excellent level of knowledge about the benefits of physical activity on health and wellbeing
 - 10% of respondents reported that their level of knowledge was poor
 - 27.5% of respondents reported that youth workers in their organisation were very confident in their ability to deliver physical activity programmes
 - 12.5% of respondents reported that they weren't confident in their ability
- 60% said there were barriers to delivering physical activity programmes. The most prevalent barrier identified was lack of space.

- Figure 3.1 (a) below outlines the Survey Monkey summary of responses to this question

Facilities_{Run} Physical Activity_{Events}
Space_{Money} Halls_{Programmes} Venues

- Almost 60% reported that certain groups were more difficult to engage in physical activity than others, e.g. teenage girls and vulnerable young people.
- 90% felt there was a need for more resources and/or programmes to support youth workers to increase young people's participation in physical activity. The most common examples of resources identified were:
 - Training for staff
 - Funding
 - Resource pack with a list of activities they could lead

Figure 3.1 (b) below outlines the Survey Monkey summary of responses to this question

Pack_{Rates} Healthy_{Engage} Funding_{Motivate}
Resources_{Space} Activities_{Youth}
Training_{Fun} Games Ideas

3.2 Survey 2

In-depth interviews were undertaken with 10 youth organisations to explore the findings of survey 1 in more detail. The organisations chosen to participate reflect the diversity of youth organisations in NYCI's membership and included urban, rural and disability groups. Using feedback from Survey 1 a questionnaire was developed that looked at 5 emerging themes:

1. Knowledge and understanding of physical activity
2. Current capacity and capacity building opportunities
3. Barriers and enablers
4. Participation and engagement
5. Policy and examples of best practice

4. Results

4.1 Knowledge and understanding of physical activity

Interviewees were asked to describe the term 'physical activity' to see if a common understanding existed amongst youth organisations. Most responses referred to physical activity as 'any movement of the body'. This mirrors the definition of physical activity from the World Health Organisation:

"Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles which causes energy expenditure greater than at rest and which is health enhancing"⁷.

Many organisations also described physical activity as a "tool" they use to support the development of skills in young people. These skills include team working, relationship development, and problem-solving, as well as developing respect, trust and confidence.

⁷ WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (2004)

Interviewees identified that the language used to describe physical activity can be significant. The terms 'physical activity' and 'exercise' may discourage participation because of the negative associations young people make with these terms, e.g. the costs involved in joining a gym or club and/or their experience of P.E. in school.

4.2 Current capacity and capacity building opportunities

An organisation's capacity to engage young people in physical activity is heavily reliant on the skillset and interests of its workers. However, training does not appear to be provided or accessed in a consistent manner across the sector to develop these skills. The need for training was identified and the most common themes for training were:

- Giving young people life skills through engagement in physical activity
- Motivating young people to participate
- Outdoor education

Many organisations filled gaps in their capacity by linking with other local services for information, access to facilities and equipment, access to trainers and to run physical activity events e.g. local sports partnerships.

Youth workers called for greater funding and resources to increase their current capacity. Interviewees also sought greater government support for and recognition of the contribution youth work makes to increasing physical activity levels among young people.

4.3 Barriers and enablers

Barriers

Interviewees identified a number of barriers that prevented young people from participating in physical activity:

- Costs associated with club membership and sports gear
- Cost and availability of transport, particularly in rural areas
- Lack of funding to deliver physical activity programmes
- Lack of human resources to deliver programmes
- Lack of space to run activities
- Lack of family support to have young people involved in activities
- Insurance issues around some activities

Enablers

Interviewees identified a number of enablers that support young people to participate in physical activity:

- Staff are the biggest enabler of young people's participation in physical activity
- Funding
- Supportive working relationships with other organisations
- Equipment on site for young people to use

4.4 Participation and engagement

Interviewees reported that boys and younger children are more likely to participate in physical activities compared to girls. The most common reasons interviewees felt young people, and particularly young girls didn't participate in physical activity were:

- Lack of confidence
- Being self-conscious of body image
- Low self-efficacy
- The costs involved in joining a club or purchasing gear
- Lack of motivation and interest

Young people's participation increases if the activity is fun, interesting and their peers are involved. Some young people's participation is motivated by their focus on body image.

Organisations increase engagement and participation by:

- Offering a variety of activities to young people
- Identifying what activities they would like to participate in
- Emphasising participation over competition
- Having separate gender groups rather than mixed gender groups for activities
- Building a young person's self-esteem and confidence
- Encouraging the young person's family to support their participation

4.5 Physical activity policy and examples of best practice

One interviewee reported that their organisation had a P.E. strategy. Three interviewees reported references to physical activity in their health promotion policy and/or participation and inclusion policies.

The research highlighted a dearth of best practice examples that have been evaluated. When asked to give examples of best practice in their own organisation interviewees gave examples of:

- Offering girls only programmes e.g. Girls Active
- Offering programmes in non-mainstream sports
- Developing relationships with other organisations to support their activities
- Securing organisational commitment to physical activity
- Having an organisational structure and models that support all abilities to participate

5. Recommendations

This research has identified that staff are the greatest enablers of young people's engagement in physical activity, however there is a gap in training provision to the youth sector. The research also highlights that the costs associated with club membership, gear, transport to activities and accessing sporting facilities are the biggest barriers to young people who wish to participate in physical activity. The recommendations of this research are to explore opportunities to:

- Provide specific training to the youth sector in the area of physical activity
- Examine the potential for a grant programme or subsidy scheme for cheaper club membership, access to local sporting facilities and sports gear with a specific focus on disadvantaged communities
- Share examples of best practice with organisations across the youth sector.

Report compiled by Colleen Fahey

Appendix 1: NYHP Physical Activity Research Questions

1. Do you think it is important for youth work organisations to provide young people with opportunities to engage in physical activity? YES / NO
2. Does your youth organisation currently run any physical activity programmes or include physical activity in your activities with young people? YES / NO
3. If you answered YES to the previous question can you tell us how regularly you run physical activity programmes or include physical activity in your activities with young people? Every Day / Once a Week / Once a Month / A few times a month / Other (Please specify)
4. If you run physical activity programmes or include physical activity in your activities with young people can you tell us what kind of programmes/activities you run?
5. Does your organisation have a dedicated Physical Activity Coordinator? YES / NO
6. Does your organisation have a Physical Activity Policy? YES / NO
7. What level of knowledge do the youth workers/volunteers in your organisation have about the benefits of physical activity and the types of activities they can include in their activities with young people? Poor / Fair / Good / Very Good / Excellent / It varies from person to person
8. How confident are the youth workers/volunteers in your organisation in their ability to deliver physical activity programmes to young people? Not Confident / Fairly Confident / Confident / Very Confident / It varies from person to person
9. Are there any barriers that prevent your organisation from including physical activity in your programmes with young people? YES / NO
10. If you answered YES to the previous question could you tell us what these barriers are?
11. Are there any barriers that prevent young people from engaging in physical activity programmes that your organisation runs? YES / NO
12. If you answered YES to the previous question could you tell us what these barriers are?
13. Are there any particular groups of young people that don't engage with physical activities run by your organisation? YES / NO
14. If you answered YES to the previous question could you specify what groups?
15. Do you feel there is a need for more physical activity resources and/or programmes in the youth work sector? YES / NO
16. If you answered YES to the previous question can you tell us what would be most useful to you in a physical activity resource?
17. Any further comments or recommendations?

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for further consultation on physical activity with youth organisations

Purpose: To identify gaps in knowledge, capacity, and training amongst youth workers in relation to the provision of physical activity programmes and the promotion of physical activity within their organisation. This information will support us to develop relevant training/resources to build the capacity of the sector in this area.

1. **Physical activity V's Exercise:** What do you understand physical activity to be? What do you understand it to be/mean in your organisation? Do you think there's a difference between physical activity and exercise?
2. **Capacity:** What resources do you have within your organisation to deliver physical activity programmes? E.g. time, equipment, people. What are the enablers and the barriers to delivering physical activity programmes in your organisation? If you've taken actions to address barriers can you tell us what these actions were?
3. **Participation/engagement:** What activities are you currently delivering? Who attends and who doesn't? Why? Have you tried to address the barriers that prevent certain people from attending? Who decides what activities are run? How are they organised?
4. **Knowledge and skillset:** What training have you received? What resource materials do you use? Do you draw on particular skills of team members in this area? What specific training, resources and/or support is needed?
5. **Policy:** Does your service/organisation have a physical activity policy/strategy/procedure/guidelines?
6. **Best Practice examples:** Please identify any good practice guidelines/policy which has been developed by your service/project to support your work in this area.
7. **Young People:** Identify why they do/don't participate? What motivates them to engage? (If the opportunity presents itself when out with an organisation.)

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