



Exploring The
Contribution Of A
Youth Work Approach
To Tackling Sectarianism

LOOKING
FORWARD
NOT BACK



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1 INTRODUCTION

The **Looking Forward Not Back** project was developed and delivered by YouthLink Scotland in partnership with young people and youth workers from six 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 efficacy of a youth work approach in this context.

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SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND



In its recent report, the Scottish Government Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland¹ described sectarianism as follows.

“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.”

Findings from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014 and the Community Experiences of Sectarianism² include: 88% of those surveyed believe sectarianism is a problem in Scotland, but most (69%) believe it is only a problem in certain areas. On the other hand, reporting of religiously aggravated offending has decreased in 2014-2015³ by:

- **4% from 2013-2014**
- **17% from 2012-2013**
- **37% since 2011-2012**

This highlights a potential discrepancy between the perception of sectarianism in Scottish communities and the reality.

¹ Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland. (2015). Tackling Sectarianism and its Consequences in Scotland. Final Report of the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland – April 2015. Available at www.actiononsectarianism.info/library-main/reports/independent-advisory-group-final-report

² Hinchliffe, S, Marcinkiewicz, A, Curtice, J and Ormston, R. (2015). Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014: Public Attitudes to Sectarianism in Scotland. *The Scottish Government*. Available at www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/02/5330/downloads#res471791

³ Davidson, N. (2015). Religiously Aggravated Offending in Scotland 2014-15. *The Scottish Government*. Available at www.actiononsectarianism.info/library-main/reports/religiously-aggravated-offending-14-15

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YOUTH WORK



“Let’s work together to support and empower our young people to make positive choices, to put them in charge of what they want to do and learn, and give them every opportunity to contribute to their communities, our wider society and beyond.” (National Youth Work Strategy⁴)

In a youth work context, personal and social learning and development are inter-related. Youth work supports young people to learn from their lived experience, to develop the motivation and capacity to examine their values, actions and identities and to develop the skills and confidence to act for positive change in their own lives and in their wider communities.

This developmental work with young people is underpinned by the principles of social justice, promoting understanding of and valuing diversity and challenging inequality and injustice.

The National Occupational Standards for Youth Work⁵ describe “equity, diversity and inclusion” as core values of youth work and describe how these values are expressed in youth work processes as follows.

- It treats young people with respect, valuing each individual and their differences, and promoting the acceptance and understanding of others, whilst challenging oppressive behaviour and ideas.
- It 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.
- It is underpinned by the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence.

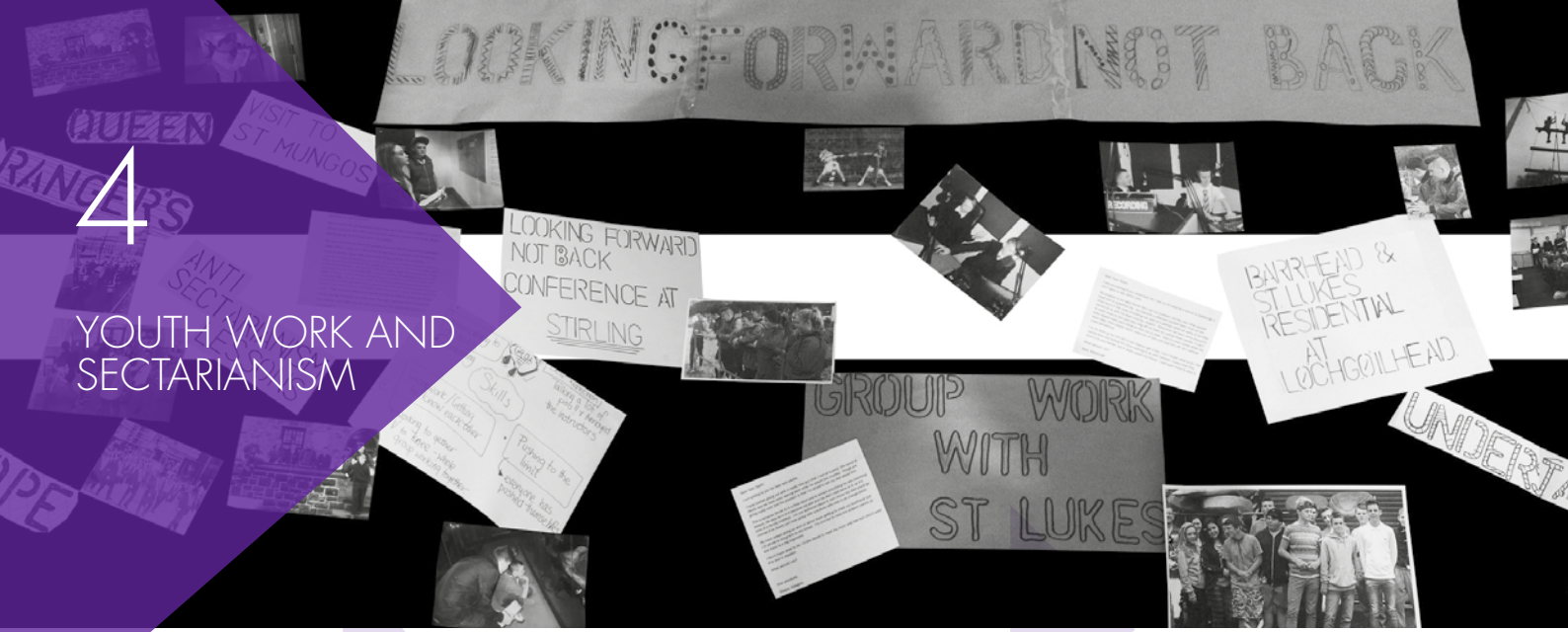
⁴ National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019. Our Ambitions for Improving the Life Chances of Young People in Scotland. Available at www.youthlinksotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=19180

⁵ National Occupational Standards (2012). Youth Work National Occupational Standards. Available at www.youthlinksotland.org/Index.asp?MainID=13420

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YOUTH WORK AND SECTARIANISM

LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK



There is an historical context to sectarianism in Scotland but, like other prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours, sectarianism is best understood and addressed as a social norm, embedded in and “transmitted” by family and community beliefs and narratives. The “adoption” of social norms can serve a valuable social purpose for people, providing a sense of belonging and acceptance. It is important that action to address sectarianism is informed by this understanding.

- A youth work process which empowers young people to understand and critically question received norms can contribute to addressing this “transmission” of attitudes and behaviours from generation to generation.
- A youth work process which supports young people to learn in dialogue with others and is responsive to and respectful of the wider social environments of young people can provide the “safe” learning environment and experience that is critical to this kind of learning and development.
- A youth work process which empowers young people to apply what they have learned and encourages and supports the participation of young people in their own communities and wider society can bring about the community based dialogue and community driven action required to address sectarianism.

From this perspective and the understanding of the nature and purpose of youth work set out above, the potential contribution that youth work can make to tackling the issue of sectarianism is clear.

While there is a robust evidence base in relation to the value of youth work both in terms of outcomes for young people^{6&7} and its wider contribution to addressing social issues and improving community cohesion⁸, there is limited evidence of the contribution that youth work can make to addressing the specific issue of sectarianism. The purpose of the Looking Forward Not Back project was to establish an evidence base in relation to this contribution.

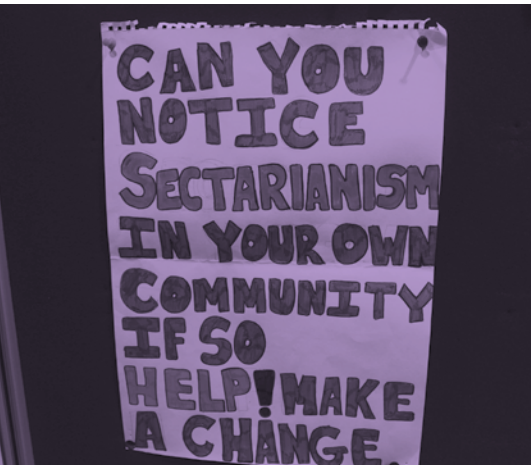
6 Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium and University of Edinburgh. (2015). Universal Youth Work: A Critical Review of the Literature. Available at www.layc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Youth-work-literature-report-final-May-2015.pdf

7 Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2013). Youth Work: A Systematic Map of the Research Literature. Department of Children and Youth Affairs: Dublin. Available at www.effectiveservices.org/images/uploads/YouthWorkFinal260613.pdf.pdf

8 McKee, V, Oldfield, C and Poultney, J. (2010). The Benefits of Youth Work. Unite the Union and Lifelong Learning UK. Available at www.cywu.org.uk/assets/content_pages/187799973_Benefits_Of_Youth_Work.pdf

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WHAT DID WE DO?



We invited YouthLink Scotland member organisations to apply to participate in the Looking Forward Not Back programme. Six projects were selected by a panel including representatives from YouthLink Scotland and the Voluntary Action Fund. Each of the six groups of young people and youth workers involved had identified sectarianism as an issue for them and their communities and wanted to develop a project that would help highlight and/or address this issue in the community using a youth work approach.



As part of their involvement in the programme they were asked to undertake a piece of action research to evaluate the impact of their work as they went along.

Each project received a small grant to support their work and had access to a programme of support in relation to carrying out action research in a youth work setting from a senior practice development officer and a researcher at YouthLink Scotland.

The range and nature of the evidence generated by the projects varied but it is possible to draw some conclusions about the impact of youth work in relation to addressing sectarianism. The reflections of the young people and youth workers involved in the projects and their individual evaluation of impact inform this report. Our findings are discussed under two key themes.

a) Supporting young people to develop a critical understanding of sectarianism and of their own beliefs and attitudes

b) Supporting young people to affect change in relation to the issue of sectarianism in their communities

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP A CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SECTARIANISM AND OF THEIR OWN BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Knowledge and understanding of sectarianism

All of the young people involved in the project appeared to develop a broader understanding of sectarianism. Before the projects began the young people involved reported a basic knowledge of sectarianism linked to football and religion however, by the end of the project, most were able to demonstrate an increased knowledge and understanding of the history of sectarianism and related legislation. At the beginning of the projects, most young people thought that sectarianism was primarily football related. However, by the end of the project, when reflecting on what they had learned, more than half of the young people were able to demonstrate an understanding of the historical origins of sectarianism and the different ways in which it manifests itself.

They were also able to identify football as a vehicle for the expression of sectarian attitudes and behaviours rather than the cause of, or reason for, sectarianism. The young people involved were also able to describe how sectarianism manifests itself in their community beyond the association with football. Most notably there was an increase in the number of young people that were able to identify the way in which sectarianism affects the school environment.

Attitudinal change

Evidence from the projects in relation to attitudinal change varied and was not measured by all of the projects. However, from the reflections of the youth workers involved, dialogue and group work appeared to be influential in facilitating attitudinal change. One youth worker working with young people who had expressed sectarian views reflected on a discussion with young people about the meaning and impact of sectarian song lyrics.



“It became apparent after basic researching of different songs that the young people didn’t really comprehend that they were actually sectarian. By the end of the night though they were more than aware of this.”

(Youth Worker Diary Extract).

For this particular group, the youth worker describes how, as the project progressed, the young people in the group began to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours and expressed the intention to change these.

b SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO AFFECT CHANGE IN RELATION TO THE ISSUE OF SECTARIANISM IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Skills and confidence

As a result of their participation in the project all of the young people developed skills in project planning, time management, team working, evaluation, and resource development. Participant reflective writing suggested confidence levels fluctuated during the course of the projects, dipping just before delivering community inputs but rising afterwards. Young people reported slightly more confidence in developing sessions than in the delivery of sessions.

Impact on the community

A range of creative approaches to community engagement were employed and these generated data which varied in quantity and quality across the projects. Evaluation by participants indicates a range of positive impacts on the local community however it is not possible to verify these. Each of the projects engaged in different ways with members of the public from their local communities. Projects reported that sectarianism was considered to be an issue by members of the public in East Renfrewshire, Stirling, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, Bellshill and Mossend, South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway where the projects were located. Feedback suggested that a significant proportion of members of the public who engaged with the projects reported having either been subject to or witness to sectarianism. A significant minority admitted holding or having held sectarian views.

All projects reported positive impact on members of the public with whom they engaged. Reported outcomes included an increased level of understanding about sectarianism, receptiveness to the projects’ aims and objectives and increased readiness to inform others about sectarianism.

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CONCLUSION



The purpose of the Looking Forward Not Back project was to establish and evidence the contribution of youth work in tackling intra-Christian sectarianism. The first year of the Looking Forward Not Back project successfully supported creative local action by young people to address sectarianism in their communities and generated some evidence of the efficacy of a youth work approach in relation to addressing sectarianism. It was found that all young people developed a broader understanding of sectarianism.

All young people developed skills in project planning, time management, working as a team, evaluation and resource development. Through a youth work process, youth workers supported young people to develop a critical understanding of sectarianism and their own beliefs and attitudes. Youth workers supported young people to act for change in relation to the issue of sectarianism in their communities. Year two of the project will build on this, and on the learning from year one to improve the robustness of this evidence base.



8. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the Looking Forward Not Back project please visit the Looking Forward Not Back page on the "Action on Sectarianism" website.

www.actiononsectarianism.info

The Looking Forward Not Back page includes a toolkit and resources designed to support youth action on sectarianism.

9. ENDORSEMENT

The University of Dundee is pleased to endorse the Year 1 Final Project Report for Looking Forward Not Back and welcomed the opportunity to feed into this during the drafting phase.

We feel that the Looking Forward Not Back project makes a useful contribution to knowledge about addressing sectarianism through youth work and look forward to continuing to work with Youth Link in supporting the development of the second phase of the project.



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