



Supporting
Young People
To Take Action
On Sectarianism

A Toolkit

LOOKING
FORWARD
NOT BACK



FOREWORD

The Looking Forward Not Back project was developed and delivered by YouthLink Scotland in partnership with young people and youth workers from across Scotland. It was funded by the Scottish Government as part of the wider “Tackling Sectarianism” programme which supported community-based action to challenge and change attitudes to sectarianism.

Looking Forward Not Back was an opportunity for YouthLink Scotland to support youth work organisations and young people to address sectarianism in their communities and to illustrate the important contribution youth work and young people can make to tackling issues of this nature.

We know that youth work can change young people’s lives, but it also makes a positive contribution to communities by supporting the collective participation and action of young people as illustrated by the work of the six projects involved in Looking Forward Not Back.

I’d like to say a massive thank you to the young people and the youth workers that were involved in these projects. We hope that sharing your experiences and learning will encourage others to get involved.

Chief Executive, YouthLink
Scotland



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LOOKING
FORWARD
NOT BACK



The Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

YouthLink
Scotland
The national agency for youth work

PART 1
BACKGROUND



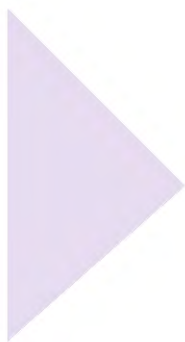


1 USING THE TOOLKIT

This Toolkit was created to share learning from the Looking Forward Not Back projects. It is presented as a “how to” guide for other organisations and practitioners who would like to work with young people to support youth action on sectarianism. It is based on the experiences of the six Looking Forward Not Back projects and the theory and practice of issue-based youth work.

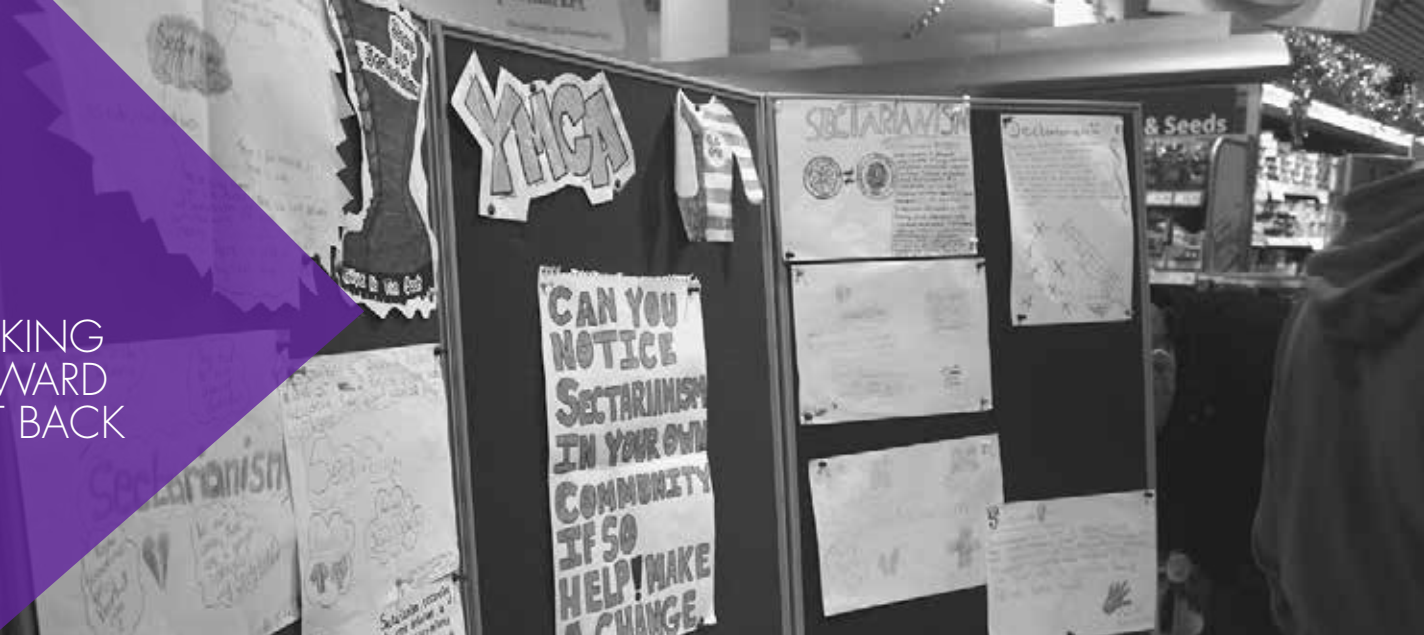
The Toolkit starts with an overview of the Looking Forward Not Back project and a consideration of the contribution that a youth work approach can make to addressing sectarianism. This is followed by a series of key steps that should be considered when working to support youth action on sectarianism.

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



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LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK



The Looking Forward Not Back project involved six groups of young people and youth workers from different areas of Scotland that had identified sectarianism as an issue for them and their communities. Each of the projects developed a youth work programme that involved learning about sectarianism and taking action in their communities to help highlight or address the issue of sectarianism. The projects also worked with YouthLink Scotland 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 from YouthLink Scotland.

Together, the young people involved in the projects engaged approximately 1360 community members in dialogue about sectarianism. The majority of people they spoke to felt it was very positive to hear about sectarianism from the perspective of young people and that they had learned something they would discuss with others.

“This action-based research project has enabled the young people, both within the project and those engaging with the project, to explore and have a greater understanding of intra-Christian sectarianism and how it relates to them within their communities. The wider communities have responded extremely well to hearing messages on this subject from young people and it has sparked communication between families and peers.”

(Lisa Holland, Youth Services Worker, Stirling Council)

“I strongly believe that communities need to be at the heart of all of our work to tackle sectarianism. That is why the Scottish Government’s investment of £9 million over three years to tackle this insidious problem has had a strong focus on community-based projects which will both address people’s day-to-day experiences of sectarianism and improve our knowledge and understanding of the true nature and extent of sectarianism in modern Scotland. I am delighted that the Scottish Government has been able to support YouthLink Scotland’s ‘Looking Forward Not Back Project’, which has examined youth work’s effectiveness in tackling sectarianism.”

(Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Minister for Community Safety)

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SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND



In a recent report the Scottish Government Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland described sectarianism as:

“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 showed that 88% of those surveyed believed sectarianism was still a problem in Scotland.

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.



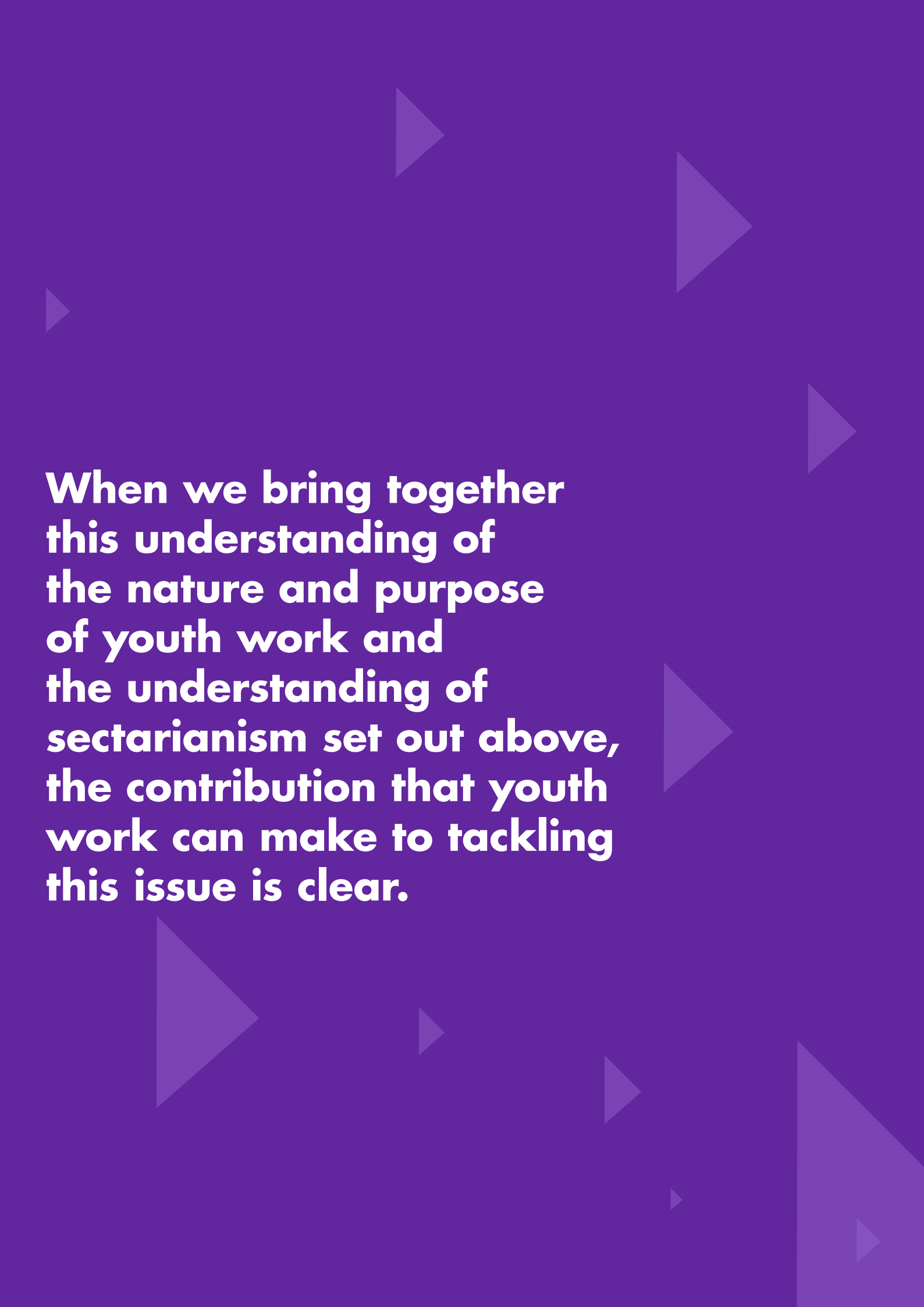
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YOUTH WORK AND SECTARIANISM

The core purpose of youth work is to support the personal and social development of young people through informal education. In youth work, 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.

When we bring together this understanding of the nature and purpose of youth work and the understanding of sectarianism set out above, the contribution that youth work can make to tackling this issue is clear.

- 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.



When we bring together this understanding of the nature and purpose of youth work and the understanding of sectarianism set out above, the contribution that youth work can make to tackling this issue is clear.

PART 2

SUPPORTING YOUTH ACTION ON SECTARIANISM

5 GROUNDWORK

Before you embark on a project to support youth action on sectarianism it's important that you're prepared at a personal and organisational level.

Your own understanding of sectarianism

To effectively support young people's learning you should be well informed about the nature and history of sectarianism. You should also be aware of your own views and beliefs and consider how these may impact on your practice. It is essential, when working to support young people to examine their values and beliefs, that you have done the same and continue to do so throughout the process. Reflective practice involves a conscious consideration of how you will work with young people in a way that is empowering and that promotes equality and acceptance of others.

- How much do I know about sectarianism?
- What are my personal views and experiences of sectarianism?
- Is it appropriate to share them?
- Is there a possibility that my personal views will influence my practice?
- How can I ensure I model and promote tolerance and respect for others?



Organisational culture

As with individual practice, it is important that your staff team has a collective understanding of the issue of sectarianism and of the purpose of the work.

It is important that you are communicating messages that are congruent with the work that you are preparing to do. For example, if sectarian language is perceived to be tolerated within any of the wider youth work groups and programmes you run, it will be difficult to communicate a different position in the context of your work on sectarianism. Sectarian language and behaviour may be an issue (and can be a good starting point for this kind of project) but you should have a clear policy and procedure for addressing it that is applied consistently.

- Is sectarian language and behaviour an issue within the youth work services you provide?
- Do you have an agreed organisational approach to dealing with sectarianism?
- What is our organisational position in relation to the use of sectarian language?
- Do we have a policy and procedure for dealing with it?
- Are staff members confident about putting this into practice?

The youth work setting

Working with young people on an issue like sectarianism requires a youth work setting that is conducive to the challenging and powerful conversations that are an integral part of this kind of issue-based work. You should ensure that the space you use supports the work you're doing.

- Do you have access to a quiet space that is free from distractions?
- What images and messages are being displayed?
- Are these congruent with the work you will be doing with the young people?

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INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE



It is fundamental to a youth work approach, and to achieving youth work outcomes, that young people take part in any project or programme of learning on a voluntary basis and as equal partners. Your work on sectarianism should be developed in partnership with the young people you're working with. Here are some key questions that it is important to consider if you want to work with young people in a way that will inspire learning and action for change.

Relevance

It is important that any programme of learning developed with the young people you're working with is one that is relevant to their lived experience. Good youth work responds to the experiences and environment of young people. Learning that is embedded in young people's reality can foster the kind of critical understanding that leads young people to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviours and the factors that influence these.

- Is sectarianism an issue in your community?
- Is it an issue for the young people you work with?

Engaging young people on the topic of sectarianism

Engaging young people's interest in the issue of sectarianism can happen in a variety of ways. These include opportunistic discussions about the use of sectarian language in the youth work setting, discussions about news articles or sectarian incidents in the community, or putting the idea to an already established group of young people you work with.

- Is this a topic that the young people you work with have already expressed an interest in?
- Is sectarian language and behaviour an issue in your youth work services?
- How will you engage young people in a dialogue about sectarianism?
- How will you establish interest, amongst the young people, in a project on sectarianism?
- Is there a group of young people that would particularly benefit from being involved in this work?



Agreeing a programme

The nature and purpose of the work the group will carry out should be developed and agreed with the young people involved. A co-production approach ensures that the work is relevant to, and directly relates to, the young people's own experience of sectarianism. This is important if you want to support active learning by young people and foster commitment to the project.

- How will you support the young people you're working with to develop a programme for learning and action on sectarianism that is relevant and meaningful to them?
- What will your role be in that process?
- What initial information about sectarianism can you provide that will support the young people involved to make informed decisions about the focus of the programme?
- What options can you share with the group of young people to guide their thinking about what can be achieved?
- Is there a need for the group to carry out some initial research on the topic of sectarianism to inform the programme of learning and action?

LEARNING FROM THE LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK PROJECTS

All of the youth workers and young people involved in Looking Forward Not Back had identified sectarianism as an issue for young people and in their community prior to developing their project. One youth work organisation told us: "There are various indicators that tell us there is a need to tackle the issue of sectarianism in our local community, these are:

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF SECTARIANISM

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 allegiances.

PEER PRESSURE TO CONFORM

Young people are currently scared to be seen as an individual with thoughts and opinions that differ from others and are therefore not accepted as part of groups with these set views and opinions (the 'in crowd'). If they do stand out from the crowd this can sadly then lead to being a victim of bullying.

FAMILY TIES

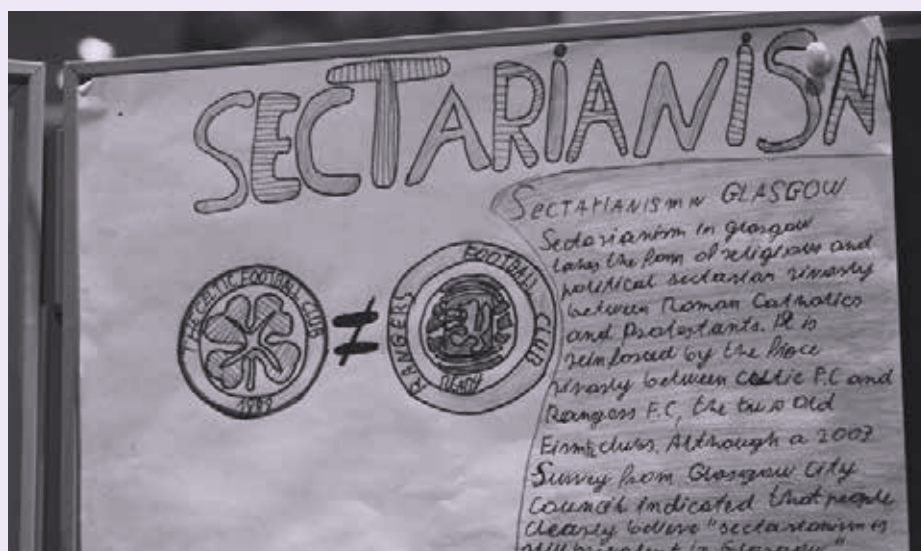
Some young people we work with have family ties with local organisations e.g. Orange Lodges and Republican Organisations. These connections have been passed on from generation to generation and are viewed as something that can't be changed or challenged. They are also fearful of being seen to let their family down if they do not follow in their footsteps."

TERRITORIAL ISSUES

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.

FEAR/BULLYING

Some of the young people we work with have been subject to sectarian abuse and also, more worryingly, have also been the perpetrators.





The ways in which the youth workers engaged young people's interest in the issue of sectarianism varied. For some, the use of sectarian language by young people and the expression of sectarian views in a youth work setting provided an opportunity for dialogue. In some cases, the young people involved had an existing interest as a result of their own experiences of sectarianism. For others, an awareness of the impact of sectarianism on their wider community was the starting point for discussion. One project told us that the group involved in the project was formed as a response to the articulation of sectarian views by a young person.

A youth worker encouraged the young person, through constructive challenging and dialogue, to reflect on these views and consequently to help start a group which brought together young people from different schools (denominational and non-denominational) with the aim of challenging sectarian attitudes and beliefs.

In all the projects the programme for learning about and taking action on sectarianism was developed in partnership with the young people involved. Some of the young people were already trained as peer educators and wanted to work in this way with other young people to raise awareness of sectarianism and the impact that it can have on community life.

In this case, the learning programme was developed to support the young people to understand more about sectarianism but tailored to ensure that they developed the skills to work with other young people on this issue. In other projects the young people wanted to explore their own values and beliefs and understand more about the views of the wider community. In these cases, the learning programme was structured to support more reflective learning and the research that the young people wanted to carry out in the community.

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LEARNING ABOUT SECTARIANISM



Supporting young people to develop an understanding of sectarianism and how it affects them and the communities they live in is a crucial step in supporting young people to take informed action. It is also one of the ways in which youth work can contribute to addressing sectarianism. It should be a process of not only learning about the facts and the history of sectarianism but one which supports young people to reflect on their own experiences, values, attitudes and behaviours through dialogue with their peers in an environment that promotes respect and values diversity.



GROUP WORK – A LEARNING TOOL

Group work is an important tool and process within youth work. When purposefully facilitated, group-based learning is a social process which can help young people to form, understand and assess their own views in dialogue with others. On the topic of sectarianism, group-based learning can provide a safe environment for young people to question where sectarian views and beliefs come from, what purpose they serve and to understand and perhaps assimilate different perspectives.

The role of the youth worker is to ensure a safe environment, to guide the learning and dialogue, to prompt active reflection and to model respectful and inclusive interaction.

- What is your experience of group work? Are you confident that you can effectively facilitate this kind of learning?
- How will you ensure that you create a safe environment for young people to enter into meaningful questioning and reflection? How confident are you that you can guide the focus of the group and support active learning and reflection?
- How will you develop and agree ground rules with the young people you are working with? For example, what do the group think about the use of sectarian terms?
- Have you identified appropriate resources that will support the process of learning and reflection?



REFLECTION – A LEARNING TOOL

In step one, the importance of reflecting on your own views and beliefs and how these might impact on your practice was highlighted. Purposeful reflection is also an essential part of the learning process for the young people you are working with. Developing critical awareness and understanding (rather than just acquiring knowledge) involves processing information, relating this to previous knowledge, working through the attitudes and emotions that might impact on understanding and making sense of new ideas. You can support reflection in a number of ways.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Ensure that as well as supporting the young people to acquire new knowledge about the history and nature of sectarianism you are also engaging the group in discussion about what this new information means to them. What has it made them think about? How does it make them feel? What do they think about other people's views?

INTERVIEWS

You could interview the young people or encourage them to interview each other to explore what they have learned and draw out their personal reactions to new information and understanding.

“Without critical reflection, teaching will remain at best uninformed, and at worst ineffective, prejudiced and constraining.”

Crawley 2005

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

Encourage the young people to keep a reflective diary in which they reflect on their own learning and feelings throughout the project.

To effectively support young people to reflect on their learning and to develop their own understanding and views on complex social issues like sectarianism requires that you to continually reflect on your practice and assess the impartiality of your support. You may want to keep your own reflective diary and discuss any issues or challenges that arise with colleagues or your supervisor. The STAR model is a useful framework for supporting reflection and can be used to support young people to reflect or to support your own reflection on practice.

SITUATION: Describe a situation that went well or that didn't go well in your session this week.

TASK: Include an account of the task that your group had been requested to do at this time.

ACTION: Describe the action that you took regarding this situation.

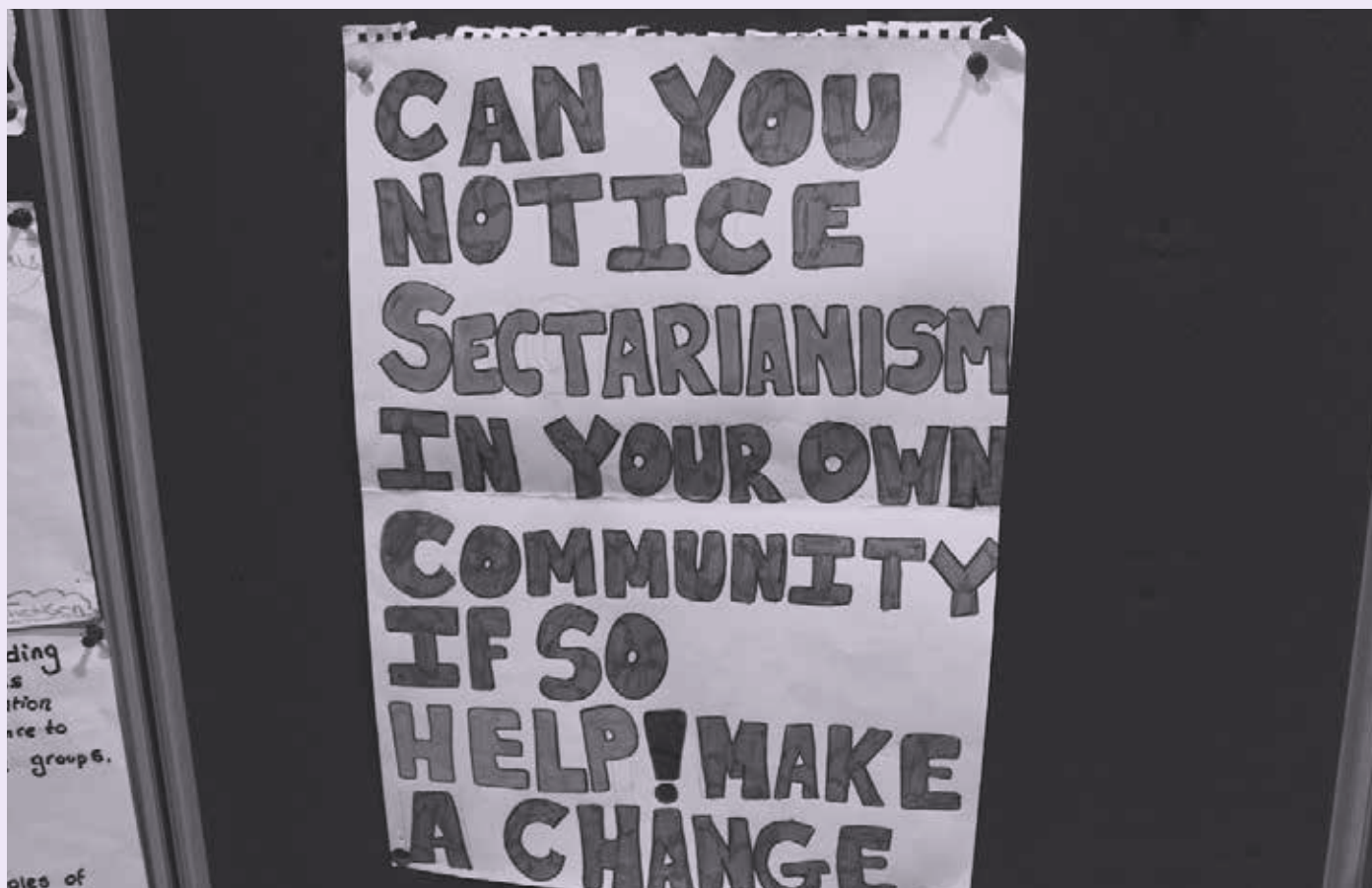
i.e. Did you go ahead with the task as planned? Did you stop and make changes to the task?

RESULT: Describe the result of your actions. Did the group respond well? Why or why not?

LEARNING FROM THE LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK PROJECTS

- All of the youth workers involved in the Looking Forward Not Back projects found that it was essential to take the time to build relationships with the young people they were working with and between the young people in the group. Building an environment and atmosphere of trust and respect and the confidence to ask and explore challenging questions and to undertake critical thinking.
- Some Looking Forward Not Back projects chose to have a residential learning experience as a way of quickly building relationships, fostering a purposeful approach to learning, and ensuring that there was substantial amount of dedicated time for group work.
- In one group this involved bringing together young people from three different areas, all of whom had experience of sectarianism and, in many cases, held strong sectarian views and opinions. The young people developed and participated in a residential learning programme to explore sectarianism and build relationships. They learned about the history of sectarianism, explored the links with football, the meaning behind sectarian language, songs and chants and reflected on their own experiences through discussions and activities. The projects used a variety of resources to support the young people's learning and reflection including films, newspaper articles, reports on sectarianism and visits to museums.
- The youth workers and the young people involved in Looking Forward Not Back were asked, as part of the process of evaluating the impact of their work, to purposefully and critically reflect on their decisions, interventions and actions throughout the project. They used the following methods.





REFLECTIVE METHODS USED BY YOUTH WORKERS

- Keeping a written or video diary to explore practice and work through challenges.
- Discussion-based reflection following learning sessions, either with colleagues or, where appropriate, with the young people involved in the session.

REFLECTIVE METHODS USED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Time lines


Young people in the East Renfrewshire project created a project timeline which mapped key milestones of the project. It provided a visual representation of their learning journey and was used to support reflection on the group's progress, learning and achievement.

Graffiti walls

Some of the groups used graffiti walls to support reflection. This involved young people writing their thoughts on the wall after each learning session or activity.

Written and video diaries

Most of the young people involved in the projects kept written reflective diaries to document and support reflection on their learning. Some groups chose to keep video diaries. This involved the young people interviewing each other on camera about what they had learned and what impact this had on them personally. The video diaries were included in a documentary about the making of their Looking Forward Not Back project.



This is a toolkit for organisations working with young people to support youth action on sectarianism. However, it is important to note that in youth work, youth action is not an end in itself. The desire to take action emerges organically, with encouragement and support, from the young people's learning and the critical awareness they have developed. For some groups this may not occur. For other groups it may involve simply sharing that learning with others. For others it may result in a community campaign or a funding application for a major project. The youth work process is about encouraging reflection on learning and identifying any action that the group might want to take. Your group will come up with their own ideas based on their own experience and learning. The case studies in the next section set out how the Looking Forward Not Back projects did this.

Encouraging young people to take action on sectarianism

Encouraging young people to take action on sectarianism can be achieved in a number of ways and at various points in the learning process. Here are some of the ways you might support action-orientated learning.

- Develop a learning programme that is grounded in young people's own experience of sectarianism or the impact it has on their community. This builds in the idea of the need for change and the potential for action from the start.
- Encourage the young people you are working with to take a "questioning" or "problematizing" approach to their learning on sectarianism. Encourage them to ask thought-provoking questions and to question answers as well as answer questions. For example, as well as encouraging young people to understand "how" sectarianism is passed on from generation to generation, encourage them to consider "why".
- Develop a learning programme that involves identifying ideas for solutions rather than just identifying problems or a better understanding of sectarianism.
- Incorporate an awareness of young people's rights, roles and responsibilities as active citizens into the learning programme you develop to explore sectarianism.
- Explore and identify young people's aims and aspirations regarding their involvement with the wider community, promoting and responding enthusiastically to ways of becoming involved.

ACTION PLANNING

Supporting young people to take action on sectarianism should be a process of supporting the involvement of young people in their community, supporting young people to develop the skills and confidence required to participate and supporting young people to learn from the experience. It is important to support the group you are working with to develop an action plan that will achieve these objectives.

Action planning should involve consideration of the following.

Outcomes

What do the group want to achieve in relation to sectarianism?
What change do they want to affect through the action they take?

Activity

What concrete action can they take that will achieve the desired outcomes?

Learning

What skills do the young people in the group need to develop to effectively carry out that activity? For example, if the group want to research other people's experiences of sectarianism they will need to understand basic research processes. If the group want to share what they have learned with their peers, they will need to understand a peer education approach and develop presentation skills.

How will this be achieved?

Resources

What equipment will the group require to carry out the activity they have planned?
What support might they need from other people? Is there a budget for the project? How will the budget be managed by the young people involved?

Barriers and risks

It is important to guide the young people through a process of considering the feasibility of their action plan, identifying any risks associated with potential actions, balancing the risks against the benefits that are likely to arise and identifying any barriers that may need to be addressed.

You should also consider the following in relation to your own practice.

- Does the group's action plan meet legal, regulatory and ethical requirements?
- How will you create opportunities for young people to reflect upon and learn from their experiences?
- How will you support access to local stakeholders, organisations and decision-making structures?



IT'S ONLY WORDS... USING SECTARIAN LANGUAGE OR NOT?

Sectarian language can be bold, aggressive, offensive, and emotive.

The Looking Forward Not Back projects took very different approaches to the use of sectarian language in their community-based activities.

One project decided not to use sectarian language because they wanted to expose the absurdity of sectarianism by removing the recognisable and emotive terms used and to ensure that the workshop they developed was accessible to younger people and appropriate for a school setting.

In contrast, one of the projects created a powerful performance piece that incorporated strong sectarian language. This was well received by the audience members because it was realistic and challenging.

Reflective questions:

- What will work best in your setting?
- Is the target audience for your community-based activity likely to be offended by the use of sectarian language or will they appreciate the realism that it brings?
- Does removing the words remove the meaning?
- Does creating an understanding of the words make young people more likely to use them?

CASE STUDIES

Each of the groups of young people involved in Looking Forward Not Back Projects developed and participated in a programme of learning about sectarianism and went on to devise and deliver a programme of community-based action as set out in the case studies below.



DRAMA AND DEMOCRACY

Dumfries and Galloway Council

The young people from this project used what they had learned about sectarianism to develop a drama based workshop which they delivered to their peers as part of a local summer festival for young people and in local schools.

The workshop was designed to raise awareness of the impact sectarianism can have on family relationships and the divisions it can cause between young people.

The workshop incorporated a hard-hitting play which tells the story of a young couple struggling to overcome the sectarian attitudes of their families and community. The performance was interactive, allowing the audience to engage with and challenge the responses of the characters. The play was followed by a debrief workshop in which participants discussed the key themes explored in the drama.

The group took a very democratic approach to evaluating their workshops, asking the young people who had participated to vote, using real polling booths, on whether they believed sectarianism was an issue for young people in Dumfries and Galloway prior to watching the drama and then again after it.





FILM MAKING

Youth Action Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (YACK)

The young people involved in this group created a short film about sporting rivalry between young people which descends into verbal and physical fighting and begins to impact on school and community life. The film was a central feature of the schools-based workshops run by the group. The workshops involved discussion with other young people about their understanding and experience of sectarianism.

After much debate, the YACK group decided not use sectarian language in the DVD and instead to talk about “eagles” and “snakes”. This was to ensure the schools would allow them to deliver the workshop in an educational setting. Removing the language created the opportunity to see the absurdity of sectarianism and bigotry and highlighted division, violence, bullying and safety as the real issues to be explored. It also allowed participants to explore the subject without the distraction of offensive or emotive sectarian terms.





REACH OUT THROUGH RADIO

Young Persons Services, East Renfrewshire Council

The young people involved in this group came from two schools, one non-denominational and the other denominational. They co-produced and participated in a learning programme to explore and develop their understanding of sectarianism beyond their original perception of sectarianism as a football-related issue.

The group then designed a peer education programme based on their own learning to take to feeder schools and first-year groups in high schools.

They used digital recorders to record the stories of the children and young people who took part in the school-based workshops and created a podcast which was played on local radio at various times over a week, ensuring that different age groups and audiences heard about their work. The radio station also hosted an open day, inviting community members to meet and chat with the peer educators.





POSTER CAMPAIGN

Bellshill and Mossend YMCA, North Lanarkshire

The young people involved in this project created a series of posters to explore what sectarianism means to them and the impact that it has on community life. They wanted to know what other people in their community thought about the issue of sectarianism so they created a pop-up gallery to display their posters in a local supermarket, using the images to engage shoppers in discussions about sectarianism in the community.

The neutral setting of the supermarket was important in a community where deep-seated sectarianism is prevalent. The group effectively engaged people in discussion on a potentially sensitive topic. Feedback from the people they spoke to was very positive and, in general, people seemed to welcome the issue being highlighted and were particularly positive about the efforts of young people to do so.

One community member commented that: "It's very inspiring that the new generation are taking it into their own hands to change people's attitudes towards sectarianism."

Following the engagement with the community the young people redesigned their posters to incorporate wider community views and experiences. They then created a set of canvases with the support of a community artist and displayed these to the public.





"THE THIN GREY LINE" - A HUMAN BOARD GAME

Stirling Council Youth Services

The young people involved in the Stirling project were an established peer-assisted learning group supported by local youth services. They designed and delivered workshops to inform their peers and the wider community about the nature and impact of sectarianism. The key message of the workshop was that sectarianism is perpetuated through myths and misinterpretations as truth. They devised an interactive life-size board game (called The Thin Grey Line) in which participants become the game "pieces" and moved around the board by answering "truth" or "myth" to questions related to sectarianism.

The group delivered their workshops at a local summer youth event, in local high schools, at a coffee morning and in the local shopping centre. They engaged 300 community members in discussion about sectarianism.





CREATIVE CONNECTIONS AT UNIVERSAL CONNECTIONS

South Lanarkshire Council Youth Learning Services

This project involved young people from three different areas and different religious backgrounds. The group developed and participated in a challenging learning programme designed to challenge their understanding of, and attitudes to, sectarianism. They focused on the history of sectarianism, the link between football and sectarianism, and the meaning behind sectarian language.

The young people designed a mural with a professional artist to reflect what they had learned about sectarianism and to share their vision of, and hope for, an integrated community.

They also created a hard-hitting short film on sectarianism which they showed at a series of community events. The film was used to raise awareness of sectarianism and to facilitate discussion with 47 community members.



LEARNING FROM THE LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK PROJECTS

Having supported the group of young people you are working with to take action on sectarianism in the community, it is important to consider what comes next. You should support the group to reflect on and celebrate what they have achieved. This should involve a consideration of any further action on sectarianism and any new areas of interest that have emerged as part of the learning journey the young people have been on.

If this was a time limited project it is still important to support the young people to identify what they have learned, how they will use that learning in other situations, what they have achieved through their action and their aspirations in relation to ongoing participation in the community and wider society. It is also important that you take the time to reflect on what you have learned from the process of supporting the group and how this will inform your practice in the future.

Timescales are great until young people's lives get in the way

Looking Forward Not Back activity had to compete for a place in the lives of busy young people. Issues such as child care disasters, family problems, bereavements and sporting commitments had to be worked around. As a result, project plans had to be revised and supervision and training programmes changed to meet the needs of young people and young volunteer leaders. None of this is unusual, but for some of the projects it meant developing a less ambitious action plan.



Top tip - Be prepared for life to get in the way. It might be necessary to consider the balance that should be found between implementing the group's action plan and the more general support that members of the group may need. It may be necessary to renegotiate and revise the action plan with the young people you're working with.

Practice makes perfect

Several of the youth workers involved in supporting the Looking Forward Not Back groups found that the young people's confidence dipped in advance of the delivery of their community engagement workshops. This happened regardless of whether they were delivering to adults, children or young people. A practice run with a friendly but critical audience proved to be an effective way of encouraging and bolstering their confidence.



Top tip - Give the young people opportunity to practice their engagement activity and remind them that making mistakes is part of learning. If they need help to deliver on the day, staff can support.



Don't underestimate the potential of young people.

The Looking Forward Not Back groups found that the community members they engaged with welcomed the discussion with young people and were impressed by the fact that they were willing to tackle and explore a challenging subject like sectarianism. They also felt that because young people were leading the discussion on sectarianism it felt less "taboo" and intimidating.



Top tip - It's important to find a balance between encouraging and empowering young people as active citizens and supporting them to be realistic about what they want to achieve through their involvement in the project.

Ensuring support for volunteers

A youth worker from one of the projects reflected on the need to ensure that volunteer and trainee youth workers are supported by a qualified and experienced member of staff. Issue-based youth work can be very challenging at a professional and personal level and requires a level of competence that less experienced members of staff weren't able to bring.



Top tip – Ensure the staff team supporting the project has the right mix of experience and enthusiasm.



One of the youth workers involved in the Looking Forward Not Back project shared this reflective piece with us at the end of the project.

“There are two secondary schools (one denominational and one non-denominational) in the town of Barrhead. Relationships between the schools are very good and there have been many instances of positive collaboration on a number of projects.

When we first raised the topic of sectarianism, the chat among our young people tended to focus on issues of racism and other forms of prejudice. After we had watched some relevant video clips and a TV documentary, the focus moved towards an exploration of some of the words that we associate with sectarianism. The young people started to engage with the topic, perhaps because they had heard (and used) some of these words before. They had never given much thought to the words or their meanings, but soon started to show some curiosity about their origins. Generally speaking, the pupils, at this stage, viewed sectarianism as something that was mostly to do with football. Accordingly, we felt that it was important to make them aware that sectarianism had historical roots and that religion had been (and, to some extent, still was) a huge influence on people’s lives. We visited St. Mungo’s Museum of Religion, which turned out to be a significant landmark on our learning journey; this was the point at which some of the pupils started to form their own opinions on some the topics we had been discussing.

Our plan was to deliver a workshop which would explain some of the historical reasons why Scotland had issues with intra-Christian sectarianism. We worked on this during and after our team-building and planning residential. Upon reflection, we realised that we had been too ambitious in the scope of the workshop we had designed. The tight timescale to deliver our sessions in the primary schools meant that we had to reconsider our approach. It became clear to us that, while our young people understood the workshop content and could remember all of the key elements, they were not yet ready to deliver the sessions on their own. We settled on a formula which involved a member of staff leading each workshop and being assisted by three or four pupils, who would each have specific roles to play at certain points in the session.



“The adoption of a youth work approach encouraged young people from the two secondary schools to be relaxed and creative in each other’s company.”

The feedback from the participating primaries was very positive and raised a number of interesting topics. Some of the primary schools produced their own podcasts, which were played on our local radio station. It was interesting to note in that, in several of these recordings, the young pupils acknowledged that they knew very little about the social and economic forces which had shaped their country. The opportunity to get ‘on the radio’ had really appealed to them and the recording process had encouraged them to reflect quite deeply on some of the issues that had been raised in the workshops.

The adoption of a youth work approach encouraged young people from the two secondary schools to be relaxed and creative in each other’s company. We found it encouraging that they were focused on the things they had in common, as opposed to any perceived ‘differences’ between the two secondary schools. One thing that both groups believed was that sectarianism was well past its sell-by date; in that sense, our pupils considered the attitudes of ‘adult’ Scotland to be quite old-fashioned. This was to become a recurring theme in our discussions: sectarianism, while still an issue in some parts of Scotland, was nothing like as powerful a force as it had been thirty or forty years ago. Whenever they were given examples from staff (or from their own family members) about some of the attitudes and values which used to prevail, the young people expressed the view that these stories seemed to belong to another world. This is one of the reasons why using young people to deliver the anti-sectarian message might be effective; many of them appear to have a fresh perspective on the issues and see no sense whatsoever in intra-Christian conflict. “

CAN YOUTH WORK TACKLE SECTARIANISM? REFLECTIONS FROM THE LOOKING FORWARD NOT BACK NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Looking Forward Not Back Project culminated in a national conference where the six local projects showcased their work on sectarianism and the discussed the impact that this had in their communities with other youth work practitioners and policy makers. At the end of the conference we asked delegates whether, based on what they had seen and heard, they thought youth work can help tackle sectarianism. Here are some of the responses.


"Yes, young people are open-minded and, with support, can be empowered to stand up to and challenge all injustices in Scotland."

"Yes, youth work as an approach works - with young people, for young people. Let's make a difference."

"Yes, young people can and do provide interesting and innovative solutions to community challenges. Youth work is the key to unlock their potential to do so."

"Yes, anywhere that creates a safe space to tackle this issue is fundamental to increasing knowledge and skills to tackle sectarianism."

"Absolutely, the youth of today are the parents and community of tomorrow."



"Yes, young people have fun and creative ways of getting messages across. They should be far more involved in planning and delivering projects and developing resources and activities."

"Yes, definitely, young people can make a connection that adults can't and can bring a refreshing view on the subject."

"Yes, but 'community' will have the answer. We're better together!"

"Aye, particularly when approaches are devised by the young people themselves."

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

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