

| Ref Code | Organisation Name |
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| 2023-05-YO24 | St Mary's Youth Club |
| Visit Date | Visited By |
| 25 th September 2023 | Victoria Southwell |

Overall aim of the funding

This grant will be used to employ a part time Youth Worker who will work with 10 young people who have a criminal conviction annually and have the potential to re-offend. The main aim of the programme is to give these young people an alternative to formal education with the goal of obtaining the skills needed to gain employment and refrain from re-offending through achieving sports qualifications and taking part in activities that promote growth and personal development.

Background to Organisation and governance

St Mary's Youth Club (SMYC) has been a key community resource in Creggan in Derry since 1972. It provides a vital space for young people in a Catholic and predominantly nationalist community that ranks as one of the most deprived and under resourced in the city. SMYC became a registered charity in 2016 and operates under the umbrella of North West Youth Services (NWYS), an organisation that was set up to coordinate the services of 9 youth clubs across the city. The main aim of this was to rationalise the operations of each club to cut down costs by sharing core operational services. SMYC has its own Trustees, two of whom sit on the Trustee Board of each of the 9 youth clubs (all of which are charities) and are on the board of NWYS.

SMYC employs 28 people and is run by a Manager who is also a senior Youth Worker. 8 Trustees support the team and bring a wide range of skills to the organisation including education, finance, social care and community-based projects, work with paramilitary groups and the local community. Two young people also attend Trustee meetings as shadow members. Trustees meet every two months and there are sub-groups who meet outside of full meetings linked to safeguarding and finance.

SMYC has a basic strategic plan that outlines key objectives and priorities. It is little more really than a statement of intent but probably reflects the lack of investment in organisations such as SMYC and the lack of infrastructure in Derry to develop these kinds of charities. There is very little capacity within SMYC to do much more than deliver services and the current stalemate in Stormont exacerbates this situation. The support of the Cranfield Trust through the Spark Programme would definitely benefit SMYC, but any work done with them would need to realistically reflect the limited capacity they would have to take this on.

Leadership and expertise

At the assessment I met with Peter Nixon (St Mary's Youth Club Manager), Ronan Flanagan (Senior Youth Worker), Sean Thornton (Senior Youth Worker) and John McLaughlin (Trustee and Treasurer).

Peter is from Creggan, where the Youth Club is based, and has worked at the Centre for over 15 years. He is a skilled youth worker who has come up through the ranks and understands well the challenges of working with complex young people. Ronan works for NWYS and provides support to SMYC alongside running his own street-based youth work team. Sean is also from Derry and has significant youth work

experience. John has been Treasurer for over 15 years and is a former accountant and Business Studies teacher.

All are well known in the local and wider Derry community and hold strong links across different community, political and religious groups. They have a deep understanding of the specific issues that Derry grapples with and how they affect the lives of the young people that they work with.

Aims and Activities

SMYC aims to ensure opportunities for children, young people, and young adults to gain for themselves knowledge, skills, and experiences in order to respect and love themselves, their families, and their community and so to reach their full potential.

St Mary's Youth Club provides a safe place for young people to explore their identities, experience decision making, increase their confidence, develop interpersonal skills, and think through the consequences of their actions, which will lead to better informed choices, change in activity and improved outcomes.

The youth work provided by SMYC takes place in a variety of settings including centres, schools, parks, and other areas where young people gather. Youth workers offer a wide range of activities to young people aged 5-25 with particular focus on fun, social and personal development, participation, testing values and beliefs and promoting acceptance and understanding of others.

Main activities include generalist youth work, health and wellbeing projects, summer camps, accredited training programmes, inclusion projects and youth led events. Over 1,000 children and young people actively engaged with the organisation in 2021-22.

Safeguarding

SMYC has a safeguarding policy that has been developed with NWYC and has been adopted by all of the local youth clubs that operate under the NWYC umbrella. There is significant expertise both within SMYC and NWYC and this was evident in the explanation of the approach and training that is provided to staff members. The Designated Safeguarding Officer for the organisation is called a Champion and they are named in the policy, as is the Deputy DSO. The Safeguarding Lead and Deputy for NWYC are also named in the policy. At board level there is also expertise and Safeguarding is discussed at each Trustee meeting as an agenda item.

The parts of Derry SMYC and LTYC work in are challenging communities but one of the strengths of both organisations is how embedded in the community the staff are. This makes them hyper aware of issues affecting the children and young people they work with and enable them to take a variety of approaches to address concerns when they arise. This includes going down both informal and formal routes and there are appropriate clear pathways in place to raise concerns externally with relevant bodies.

All staff receive autism training as this is seen as being a key factor in understanding many of the issues linked to the young people they work with, much of which can have a safeguarding link. Issues around paramilitary grooming are also viewed through a safeguarding lens and the team is skilled at being able to identify and address this when they witness or hear about this happening.

Finances

Audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2022 show income of £755,131 against expenditure of £761,864 resulting in a small deficit of £6,733. Net current assets amount to £106,796 and a reserves figure of £2,901,241, of which £87,564 is

unrestricted. The bulk of the restricted reserves is made up of a fixed asset which is the newly built community youth centre SMYC is based in. SMYC does not have a formal reserve policy due to the majority of the funding they receive being restricted. There is a good understanding that they need to build up unrestricted reserves to ensure that they have a buffer but currently they are finding that they need to dip into unrestricted reserves to meet cuts in restricted funding.

Budgets and funding predictions for the future are difficult to predict due to the breakdown of the power sharing arrangement at Stormont. This has meant that budgets have not been agreed for the voluntary sector and funding is released on a six-monthly basis. Whilst this doesn't provide any financial stability for SMYC the work that they do is clearly valued by the Northern Irish Assembly and they continue to work on the assumption that they will be funded to similar levels as the past financial year. Beyond this they don't have any absolute certainty but in terms of their own financial planning they do not expect to see any huge changes to income or expenditure from 22-23 figures. Main funders include Education Authority, Department of Education and Derry Pathways.

Good financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the shared Finance Manager who is employed by NWYC who works with an external book keeper. They work alongside the Treasurer who was formally an accountant and who is a very hands-on Trustee. There is also a Finance Committee who scrutinise the cash flow and budgets. During this period of uncertainty with Stormont not functioning the Finance Committee are actively involved in ensuring that current and future budgets are manageable and realistic.

Current Situation and need

In recent years crime and anti-social behaviour has risen in the Creggan and Longtower areas of Derry, alongside a significant rise in paramilitary activity. Paramilitaries have actively targeted young people, leading to a rise in young people becoming involved in criminal activity. This has led to an increase in young people receiving convictions for participating in riotous behaviour and other criminal activities which often leads deeper into paramilitary activity. This is recognised as being very deliberate coercion by paramilitary groups who use the convictions that young people get as a way of isolating them from their wider community and opportunities.

Added to this the tolerance levels of PSNI officers are anecdotally seen as being at an all-time low, meaning that many incidences that in the past would have been ignored or tolerated are now being acted upon and ending up going down a legal route. Alongside this, Derry has seen a large number of long-term police officers retire so many of the established relationships that the local community and youth workers had with the police no longer exist.

To address this trend St Mary's Youth Club wants to employ a Youth Worker to work across the Creggan and Longtower areas of Derry to deliver a programme that will target young people who have already faced charges for committing an offence and have the potential of reoffending. The programme will address individual needs and be tailored accordingly to each participant whilst following a structured programme of activities. This will enable the Youth Worker to understand the unique circumstances of each participant and develop support systems to address their underlying issues effectively. In addition to addressing the root causes of offending behaviour, the programme will also place a strong emphasis on equipping participants with practical skills and qualifications. The focus on education and vocational training aims to broaden the participant's opportunities for future employment and create a pathway towards a more stable and productive life. By acquiring new skills participants gain a

sense of accomplishment, boost their self-confidence, and develop a positive outlook for their future.

Over the course of 12 months participants will be given opportunities to foster their personal growth, enhance their physical and mental wellbeing and develop vital life skills through sports and related activities. Participants will expand their skills through accredited training enabling them to build their CV's and enhance their overall chances of employment.

After an initial period of relationship building, orienting the young person about the programme and goal setting, the focus shifts to skill building and team sports. This is intended to support the young person to improve their skills around team work and sportsmanship and links into workshops that are delivered on conflict resolution, communication, and leadership. As participants reach the fifth month of the programme individual sports are focused on as a means of promoting personal growth and developing discipline and self-motivation. Mentoring sessions encourage self-reflection and personal development. The focus of the programme then turns to activities that include kayaking, hiking, camping and rock climbing to promote team work, problem solving and resilience. Participants are encouraged to support and motivate each other during these activities and have the chance to gain a Level 1 qualification in outdoor sports.

Community engagement and volunteering is the focus of the build-up to the end of the programme with participants collaborating with local organisations and community projects to give back to the community. These activities focus on promoting empathy, social responsibility and social engagement but applying the new skills they have developed and qualifications they have achieved to make a difference locally. The final two months of the programme focus on career exploration and transition and through mentoring, workshops and networking events connect with local employers and education providers to help participants progress on their chosen paths.

SMYC wishes to employ a part time Youth Worker to lead this programme and work with 10 young people annually (6 from Creggan and 4 from Longtower), embedding the programme in the current work that both St Mary's Youth Club and Longtower Youth Club do.

Expected changes in Year 1

Social Impact Area 1

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| Individual Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved self-efficacy • Improved self-esteem • Improved resilience |
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Social Impact Area 2

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| Health and Wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mental well being • Reduced substance misuse • Improved daily routines |
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Request and Budget

SMYC is requesting **£79,994** over 2 years for the salary costs of a part time Youth Worker (25 hours per week) and project costs.

£39,997 in year 1 - £16,535 (salary), £10,010 (coaching), £7,452 (equipment), £6,000 (project costs and admin).

£39,997 in year 2 - £16,535 (salary), £10,010 (coaching), £7,452 (equipment), £6,000 (project costs and admin).

Conclusion

This is an interesting and unusual application from a part of the UK with a unique set of challenges. Trustees will remember two identical applications were received from two youth clubs operating in Derry. They were however working in two quite distinct areas and the clubs had very separate identities and worked with different groups of young people. After discussion it was established both applications had been written by the same worker, who worked for NWYS. It was agreed St Mary’s would be the lead applicant for the proposal and the two applications be merged to cover both areas.

Derry experiences many disadvantages. Economically it is in decline and opportunities for young people are limited. Large number of young people leave Derry for better wages, increased employment options and the chance to live elsewhere, and most do not return. The young people who stay often have low aspiration levels and are trapped in life styles that are not leading to positive outcomes. The Troubles still hang heavily over the city and whilst driving through it the number of murals in dedication to murdered residents and the sheer amount of current paramilitary graffiti is striking. Despite young people in Derry never having directly lived through these difficult times they are still significantly impacted by them in multiple ways. The workers I met talked at length about the persistent efforts by paramilitary groups to groom and entice young people, often targeting those on the fringes of low-level criminal activity. Once engaged in this world it is incredibly hard to resist the pull of getting deeper into activities that will often lead to significant involvement in the criminal justice system. The other key way young people are still impacted by The Troubles is through deep distrust of the police. Young people are often drawn into conflict with the police who have very low tolerance to low level crimes. This leads to regular arrests and prosecutions for things that might ordinarily be dealt with through a warning. Several police officers who were known to St Mary’s staff and young people have recently retired so many of the positive relationships that were in place have been replaced by suspicion and uncertainty. Whereas previously informal out of court disposals would have been used to deal with low level incidents these are now considered via Community Resolution Orders which come with a formal caution that sits on a young person’s record and can be a huge barrier to both future job opportunities but also stigmatises them locally. So, on top of the challenges that the young people in Derry face that are similar to those experienced in other projects across the UK, the particular context of Derry causes additional difficulties. That is why the need for this project is so stark.

This isn’t an application from a sport 4 development organisation, but there is good knowledge about this approach – one of the Senior Youth Workers had written their degree dissertation on the benefits of sport on young men. The way this project is structured and how sport will be used will certainly act as a hook to engage young people and help them develop skills that will divert them from reoffending.

This is a project where the likelihood of success is high. It has the potential to make a huge difference to the young people who will be supported, and the targets are realistic. It is likely that the beneficiaries will be young men, but I also feel that should any young women be identified as being suitable for the programme that they will be well supported. I especially liked the concept that an element of the programme is about giving back to the community and creating a group of role models who will both benefit and influence future generations. Overall, this is a strong and interesting application, and I would strongly recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating

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| Risk = Low | Difference to organisation = High | Priority = High |
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