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Research

An Evaluation of the Work To Learn Programme

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Executive Summary

About this report

This report details the findings of an evaluation of the Work to Learn Programme. The Work to Learn Programme is a Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) based work experience initiative for young people.

Evaluation methodology

The research methodology used for the evaluation included one-to-one interviews, focus groups and telephone interviews with key stakeholders involved in the programme. Those consulted for the evaluation included Youth Work Ireland, Irish Youth Justice Service, Work to Learn Programme Coordinators, Youth Justice Workers, young people who engaged with the programme, parents of young people who engaged with the programme and employers.

Work to Learn Programme Key Statistics

A total of 20 projects ran the Work to Learn Programme in 2017 and 15 in 2019. In 2018, 56 young people started the programme. Of these, 69.6% were males and 30.4% were females. In total, two thirds (66%) of young people completed the Work to Learn programme. The majority of young people involved in the programme were 15 years of age and in school.

Key issues affecting young people

Key issues affecting young people who participated in the programme included offending behaviour, behavioural issues, mental health issues, learning difficulties, early school leaving, reduced timetables, substance misuse issues, intergenerational unemployment, social welfare dependency and poverty.

Key findings of consultations with adult stakeholders

Recruitment of employers

Some projects found it more difficult than others to recruit employers for the programme. The first year of the programme was considered to be the most challenging in terms of recruiting employers.

What works well about the programme:

Aspects of the programme that worked well identified in the evaluation included interviews and interest based work placements.

Key benefits and outcomes of the programme

Key benefits and outcomes of the programme included work placement, education and training and employment benefits and outcomes. All stakeholders agreed the programme increased young people's self-confidence and self-esteem. Community benefits and outcomes of the programme were also highlighted.

Key challenges related to the programme

Key challenges identified by stakeholders included setting up bank accounts, setting up Revenue accounts, programme administration and insurance. The programme workbook was also highlighted as a challenge as it was considered time-consuming to complete, not youth friendly and in some cases off-putting for young people.

Key Findings of Consultations with Employers

Key issues highlighted by employers included apprehensions prior to engaging with the programme the importance of young people's attitude in terms of the success of the programme, employer's engagement, relationship and mentoring of young people. Positive benefits and outcomes for employers included increase in workers and a sense of helping others. Benefits and outcomes for young people included increased self-confidence, communication skills, work experience and references, Benefits and outcomes for young people's families and communities included creating positive role models.

Key Findings of Consultations with Young People

What works well about the programme

Overall, young people felt the programme worked very well. They felt being paid was an important aspect of the programme. Young people learned work related skills, gained qualifications and training and experience of a real work environment.

Benefits and outcomes

All young people agreed the programme helped increase their self-confidence and self-esteem as well as their social and communication skills. Young people build relationships with employers and co-workers and some broadened their friendship groups. All of the young people said it helped them focus on the future in terms of careers. Young people with mental health issues reported reduced anxiety. The programme also had a positive impact on family and friends.

What young people would change about the programme

According to young people, aspects of the programme they would change included making the programme workbook more youth friendly, increasing the programme hours and providing a wider variety of types of employment.

Key recommendations

Preparation for the programme

- Young people should be ready to participate in the programme.
- There should be a good level of trust between youth workers and young people participating in the programme.

Setting up bank accounts

- The programme should develop a partnership with a specific bank to make the process of setting up bank accounts easier.
- State Street would could potentially negotiate such a banking partnership.

Types of employment

- There should be more variety in the types of employment offered to young people as part of the programme.
- Young people should be placed in types of employment they are interested in where possible.

Recruitment of employers

- Youth workers should have a clear understanding of the programme when communicating with potential employers.
- The positive nature of the programme should be clearly communicated to employers.
- Promotion of the programme in local media may help recruit employers.

Young Travellers

- The programme should provide extra support to young Travellers participating in the programme.

Programme workbook

- The language used in the programme workbook should be more youth friendly.
- The programme should consider adapting or changing the psychometric scales in the workbook.
- The programme should consider employing a psychologist to explain the results of psychometric scales to young people face-to-face.
- The programme should consider reduced the volume of data collected in the workbook.

- A revised version of the workbook should be developed in partnership with young people and youth workers involved with the programme.

Programme administration

- More funding should be provided for the administrative side of the programme.
- The programme should examine the possibility the programme being administered centrally, e.g. by Youth Work Ireland.
- The programme should explore the possibility of running the programme over a longer period of time, e.g. eight rather than six months.

Programme supports

- Youth services should be made aware of all the programme supports available to them.
- The programme should consider developing a step by step timeline for youth services.
- The programme should consider setting up a mentoring system linking new projects with established projects.

Programme insurance

- A list of insurance providers who have provided insurance for the programme in the past should be developed.

Extra hours

- The programme should consider increasing the number of hours that young people work each week, e.g. increasing from four to eight hours.

Introduction

About this report

This report details the findings of an evaluation of the Work to Learn Programme.

Work to Learn Programme

The Work to Learn Programme is a Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) based work experience initiative for young people, which was originally developed by 'Ossory Youth' in Kilkenny in 2015 and is supported by 'State Street'. The programme has two target groups, GYDP participants and the wider community, specifically the business community, often the target of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. The programme exposes participants to the world of work and the skills required to operate effectively in it, through a structured and supported process involving preparation, placement and reflection.

The programme challenges the young person involved to undertake a paid part-time job with all the responsibilities this entails. The programme sensitises the business community generally to youth crime prevention, but specifically the host employers by actively engaging them in providing a learning environment for young people who are at risk of involvement in offending behaviour. The programme supports employers to become actively involved in the young person's learning, development and progression through the placement itself and by way of a series of structured assessments of the participating young person's skills.

Key outcomes of the Work to Learn programme

For young people:

- Learned and practiced a core set of basic work skills
- A clearer understanding of a real work environment
- Increased self-esteem and confidence in relation to work
- Improved attitude towards positive endeavours and effort in their lives
- Improved engagement with the GYDP workers

For Employers:

- Benefit from additional workers
- Demonstrated their civic responsibility in their involvement in the programme
- Participated as active agents in learning
- Established an interface with young people that is positive, supportive and affirming

For Youth Services:

- Established bank of employers to work with into the future.

Evaluation Methodology

One-to one interviews and focus groups were the main research methods used as part of the evaluation. A Work to Learn Evaluation Steering Committee was also established and consulted in relation to the evaluation methodology and review of the programme. The Work to Learn Evaluation Steering Committee included:

- The Manager of the Work to Learn Programme in Youth Work Ireland
- The CEO of Youth Work Ireland
- Representatives from the Irish Youth Justice Service
- Coordinators from two Work to Learn Programme projects

Consultations with key adult stakeholders included:

- A focus group with the Work to Learn Evaluation Steering Committee
- One-to-one interview with the CEO of Ossory Youth
- A focus group with 11 programme coordinators and youth workers from nine different projects
- One-to-one interviews with programme coordinators from eight different projects
- Telephone interviews with three employers from three different projects
- Focus group with four parents from one project

Consultations with young people included:

- A focus group with four young people from one project
- Eight one-to one interviews with young people from four other projects
- Feedback from young people at the Work to Learn Programme Launch event in Youth Work Ireland in Dublin was also recorded and used in this report.

Ethical considerations

All due consideration was given to ethical issues arising at every stage of the evaluation process. However, the main ethical issues which were addressed in this research were:

- child protection and well-being;
- informed consent;
- confidentiality and anonymity; and
- record keeping including data protection and security.

The research was conducted in accordance with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011). In terms of consent, informed written parental/guardian consent was sought for young people under 18 years of age participating in the research. Informed written assent was also sought from young people themselves.

No personal information was collected on the young people involved in the research and data was stored in a safe and secure manner. Data used in the report was anonymised to protect the identity of young people involved in the programme.

Report Structure

The report takes the following structure:

- **Chapter 1:** provides an overview of the key statistics related to the Work to Learn Programme
- **Chapter 2:** details the findings of consultations with key adult stakeholders
- **Chapter 3:** outlines the findings of consultations with employers
- **Chapter 4:** reports the findings of consultations with young people who have engaged with the programme
- **Chapter 5:** provides conclusions and recommendations based on the evaluation findings

Chapter 1: Work to Learn Programme Key Statistics

Projects running the Work to Learn Programme

A total of 20 projects ran the Work to Learn Programme in 2019. This was an increase of five projects since 2018 when there were 15 projects involved with the programme.

Number of young people in the programme

In 2018, 56 young people started the programme. Of these, 39 (69.6%) were males and 17 (30.4%) were females.

Retention rate

In total, 37 out of 56 or 66% of young people completed the Work to Learn programme.

Reasons for not completing the programme

Overall, 15 young people did not finish the programme. Reasons given for not completing the programme included:

- 2 young people left for work
- 1 young person left for an apprenticeship
- 3 young people left for personal health reasons
- 1 young person left because the employer was unable to continue
- 1 young person was terminated by the site
- 7 young people left for a variety of reasons including boredom

Age of young people

The majority of young people involved in the programme were 15 years of age.

Education

With regard to education, the majority of young people involved in the programme were in school and doing their Junior Certificate. In terms of absenteeism, 22% of participants missed over six days of school a month. Almost 60% of participants believe that it is likely or very likely that they will go to college or university after they leave school.

Young people's background

Almost one third (32%) of young people involved in the programme were from unemployed households. The majority of young people (64%) were from one parent households. In relation to housing, 59% of young people were living in social housing.

Number of employers involved in the programme

A total of 47 employers were involved in the programme in 2018. In relation to types of employers, 70% of all employers are from the retail and wholesale sector.

Work placement arrangements

The vast majority of work placements for the programme were on Saturdays.

[1]One site (4) data was only used in the initial profile

Chapter 2: Findings of Consultations with Key Adult Stakeholders

Introduction

This chapter of the report outlines the findings from consultations with key adult stakeholders associated with the Work to Learn Programme.

Key issues affecting young people

According to stakeholders, the key issues affecting young people who have engaged with the programme included offending behaviour, behavioural issues, mental health issues, learning difficulties, Neurodiversity e.g. Asperger's, ADHD, early school leaving, reduced timetables, substance misuse issues, intergenerational unemployment, social welfare dependency and poverty.

- *"Some of the young people in the programme would have a reading age of five or six years of age."* [Youth worker]
- *"A lot of the young people are frustrated because they are on reduced timetables in schools."* [Youth worker]
- *"A lot of them [young people] wouldn't have work ethos in their families and they wouldn't be working."* [Youth Worker]

Selecting young people for the programme

It was recommended that young people are selected for the programme based on their readiness to engage with it. A number of respondents talked about how important it was for youth workers to have a strong level of trust between them and the young people before selecting them to participate in the programme. Youth workers were conscious that they didn't want to "set young people up to fail" in terms of their work placement and advised having a strong starting point with young people.

- *"Young people only got on to the programme if we trusted them and there were engaged for a certain period of time. Young people had to demonstrate that we could trust them."* [Youth Service]

- *“Young people have to be at a certain point to engage in the programme. We don’t want to set up young people to fail. Young people and youth workers had to have a solid trust.” [Youth Worker]*
- *“You have to make sure you know the young people and that they are able for it. Things can unexpectedly go wrong but that can make sure things go well because you’re starting from a strong place with them.” [Youth Worker]*

Recruitment of employers

Youth workers had mixed experiences in terms of recruiting employers to participate in the programme. Some youth workers found it relatively easy to engage local employers and built up a bank of employers for the programme over a short number of years. In some cases, employers contacted youth workers to participate with the programme on a yearly basis and other employers made contact about the programme due to coverage in local media.

- *“What’s working well is the employers. We have managed to get employers very easily, local employers, local businesses.” [Youth Service]*
- *“We have been doing the programme for the last three years and it has been very successful. We have built up very good relationships with employers and they are ringing up to see are we doing it each year. They said other people who are employers were in touch with them to see how to get involved when they saw coverage of it in the local media.” [Youth Worker]*

However, other youth workers experienced more difficulties in recruiting employers. Youth workers found the recruitment of employers the most challenging and time consuming aspect of the programme. It was acknowledged that once employers were recruited to the programme they were likely to stay involved.

- *“Talking to employers and getting them on board was the most difficult part.” [Youth worker]*
- *“We spent a long time chasing employers but the ones that came on board it works very well.” [Youth worker]*

One youth service experienced difficulties in recruiting employers to take young Travellers on work placements. They did not experience the same difficulties recruiting placements for other ethnic minorities such as young African people.

- *“It was remarkably difficult to get Travellers placements. A gym and a hotel did take young Travellers in the end...Young African people had no problem. It’s harder for young Travellers to get work placements.”* [Youth Service]

Some respondents suggested that self-employed employers who were empathetic were the most willing to take on young people. It was also suggested that youth workers need strong communication skills to communicate to employers in relation to recruitment to the programme.

- *“We had to find empathetic employers that were willing to give young people a leg up. The pool of employers wasn’t difficult to build up. For example, we had butchers, shops, hotels, gyms. They were mostly self-employed people, some that had suffered adversity themselves or their children had. Placements were not easy to come but you had to mind them.”* [Youth Service]

What works well about the programme:

Interviews

Overall, key stakeholders considered the interview aspect of the programme to work very well. Having a teacher from the young person’s school on the interview panel works well as young people are familiar with them and having their Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) means they can see the young person in a different and more positive light. According to youth workers, young people are often very nervous doing interviews and the preparation work done with them prior to interviews is very important.

- *“We have a good interview panel and we get good feedback from the young people and the employers.”* [Youth Service]
- *“They are terrified by the interview and we always have the JLO and they see them in another capacity. We have a teacher from their school as well and we have a question like what would their teacher in their school say about them so it makes them be honest.”* [Youth Worker]

Interest based employment

According to some respondents, the programme works best when the youth worker know the young person well and places them in a type of employment that is based on their interests.

- *“A lot of it is knowing the young people and knowing where to them is the key to success.”*
[Youth worker]
- *“You need to identify the right employers for the right young person so you need to go find out about them and what they like.”* [Youth service]
- *“One of the lads was interested in bikes and we got him into a bike shop and that’s going well.”*
[Youth worker]

Key benefits and outcomes of the programme:

Work placement benefits and outcomes

According to respondents, there are a number of benefits and outcomes associated with young people completing work placement. These include young people getting work experience in a real work environment, getting a reference from employers and the youth service and enhancing their work CV.

- *“It can be helpful for young people to get a reference and experience. Sometimes young people have a blank CV.”* [Youth worker]

Educational benefits and outcomes

The educational benefits and outcomes related to the programme identified in the evaluation included young people refocusing on their education, young people realising how important education is to getting qualifications and employment, young people who were out of education going back to school/Youthreach and young people going on to third level education.

- *“At the start there is a question, ‘do you want to go to college or get a full time job?’, and at the start he (young person) wanted to go into a full time job and in the end he ticked going to college so I think that was amazing.”* [Youth Worker]

- *“They (young people) are figuring out what they don’t want to do as well. One guy was working in a hotel and he said, ‘no I want to go on to college.’ One guy was fitting tyres and it refocused him to go back to school so that works well.”* [Youth worker]

Training and employment benefits and outcomes

A number of young people have gone on to training and employment as a direct result of their engagement with the programme. This included young people getting apprenticeships with employers and getting summer jobs, part-time jobs and full-time employment.

- *“One of the lads was determined to go and become a mechanic. He is flying out there now and has an apprenticeship and now the owner says he is the best fella he ever had.”* [Youth worker]
- *“We had a guy that was working in a shop and then he got a full time job there.”* [Youth worker]
- *“Some lads went straight from the programme to getting a full time job for the summer.”* [Youth worker]

Increased self-confidence and self-esteem

All of the stakeholders agreed that the programme increases young people’s self-confidence and self-esteem. This can have knock-on effects for young people such as having increased confidence in other areas of their lives such as school and pursuing further education.

- *“One of the guys on the programme was very quiet but it gave him a new found confidence and he ended up going on to college.”* [Youth worker]
- *“Another guy really blossomed in the programme as it gave him an affirmation of the good things about him.”* [Youth worker]
- *“I think it has helped his (young person) confidence brilliantly. He is a totally different child and he would chat away to you now. The two of them in the shop would communicate with each by text and it is brilliant.”* [Parent]

- *“She (young person) has realised her own self-worth as well that she can actually do something and be good at it. Sitting down and writing isn't for her and anything that looks like school work isn't for her.”* [Parent]

Community benefits and outcomes

A number of community benefits and outcomes related to the programme were identified in the research. These included young people building positive relationships with employers who may have been impacted by their or other young people's offending behaviour, young people engaging with people in the wider community and breaking down of prejudices against young people involved in offending activity.

- *“Going out into the community works well. The programme introduces young people to businesses who might be afraid of them. Young people also get to engage with the wider community that they might not otherwise engage with. It's a real community project.”* [Youth worker]
- *“The programme builds on the community aspect of it. There is a prejudice that builds up on young people and this programme helps with that. It is the unique selling point of it.”* [Youth worker]

Benefits and outcomes of young people earning money

A number of parents highlighted the positive benefits and outcomes of young people earning their own money which included young people valuing saving money more.

- *“I could be dishing out money and he would be spending it but now he is earning his own money he is valuing it more and saving it and I think it has been the best thing ever for him.”* [Parent]
- *“He saved all his money to buy a quad and he worked on it all summer and then he sold it and made some money. He is now saving to buy the next quad.”* [Parent]

Relationships with employers

Some youth workers talked about young people building up relationships with employers in the programme. The result of these relationships included employers and young people seeing each other in a different light as well as employers mentoring and supporting young people.

- *“Young people build a relationship with the employers and from the employers they see these so called ‘gurriers’ and they see the goodness there that we know is there.” [Youth service]*
- *“A lot of the lads said they wouldn't work for that guy (employer) but him (young person) and another guy, it didn't put them off, and he can see he is a really nice guy now.” [Youth worker]*

Parents consulted also commented on the positive relationships their children built with employers and co-workers. One parent whose child suffers with anxiety said the project helped her by providing work experience in the youth service.

- *“The people she (young person) is working with are brilliant with her. They are very good to her and if she doesn't show up they are checking is everything OK and why she didn't show up. She is comfortable around them and there is great trust between them.” [Parent]*
- *“The project helped her with getting work because she would have anxieties around people. She really enjoys it here.” [Parent]*

Value for money

All of the respondents agreed the programme was very good value for money. The programme was considered to be low cost in terms of its returns for young people.

- *“The programme is very good value for money. To have four young people on the programme costs €2,000 to look for time for the youth worker. It has worked well.” [Youth Service]*
- *“The programme represents good value for money for us. It's good for young people, it's very low cost.” [Youth Worker]*

Key challenges related to the programme:

Setting up bank accounts

The majority of youth workers identified setting up bank accounts as a challenge. Youth workers stated that many parents might not be able to support their child in setting up a bank account. Key challenges identified by youth workers in terms of setting up a bank account for young people included lack of documentation such as birth certificates and passports. Youth workers reported setting up bank accounts as very time consuming.

- *“A lot of our young people, their parents are on welfare and they might not be able to help them set up a bank account and we have to help them with that.” [Youth worker]*
- *“It gives you an insight into the family situations because they might be week trying to find a birth cert and getting the documentation needed to open a bank account, They might not have a bill in their name for their house.” [Youth worker]*

One youth worker stated it was sometimes difficult to open a bank account for young people from the Traveller community.

- *“It is difficult to open bank accounts for young Travellers. Addresses and birth certs are often not up to date.” [Youth worker]*

A number of respondents suggested the programme should develop a partnership with a specific bank and all bank accounts could then be opened in any branch of this bank to make the process easier. It was suggested that State Street would be in a good position to negotiate such a partnership with a bank due to the nature of its industry.

- *“If it's (programme) going to be national, there needs to be support in setting up bank accounts, like that you can go into any branch of a particular bank. The programme should have sponsorship from a bank.” [Youth Worker]*

Setting up a Revenue ‘my Account’

Setting up a Revenue ‘my Account’ for young people was also identified as a challenge. Similar, to setting up a bank account, setting up a Revenue account was considered to be time consuming for youth workers and involved significant paperwork and identification documentation.

- *“Setting up ‘My account’ in Revenue is very tricky as well.” [Youth Worker]*
- *“For Revenue, you had to go online and most the time it wouldn’t accept the information. I had to talk to them on the phone a few times. It was very difficult.” [Youth Worker]*

Programme workbook

There were mixed views among the key stakeholders in relation to the programme workbook. Some thought the workbook worked well as young people had a sense of ownership of it and could use it as a record of their work experience to look back on in the future.

- *“It (workbook) works very well. It always sticks with them and they have it for life.” [Youth worker]*
- *“Young people should own the workbook and have a sense of ownership and be able to look back at it. It’s a good thing to have in the future.” [Youth worker]*

However, the majority of respondents agreed that the language used in the workbook, particularly in the psychometric scales, was not youth friendly. Many youth workers said that young people often don’t understand the language used which can be off-putting. In some cases, youth workers said young people reacted badly to the wording used in the psychometric scales.

- *“Some language in the workbook is very adult and young people don’t understand the phrases and if that could be changed it would be great so the young people could understand what they are filling out.” [Youth worker]*
- *“It can be intimidating for young people to do psychometric testing. Young people can be sick of being told they are useless.” [Youth worker]*
- *“One guy got really annoyed at the questions in the scales around feeling useless and just got up and walked out.” [Youth worker]*

It was suggested that the workbook and psychometric scales could be rewritten to make them more youth friendly and easier to understand with the help of young people and youth workers.

- *“It would be great to see the workbook rewritten with the help of young people helping develop the questions.”* [Youth worker]
- *“The programme could develop a test like that alongside youth workers.”* [Youth Worker]

Youth Work Ireland were also open to adopting different measures for the programme and changing the workbook to make it easier for young people to complete.

- *“We could adopt different measures depending on what the main stakeholders want which would make it easier for young people on the ground. We need to look at what we need to measure from now on like the process and milestones rather than asking every young person each scale and test.”* [Manager of the WTL Programme]

A number of respondents also felt the amount of information in the workbook and data collected was excessive.

- *“I know they need to collect data but maybe they could look at changing it. The amount of information in the workbook puts young people off.”* [Youth worker]

One respondent suggested having a psychologist explain the results of psychometric scales to young people face to face so they can understand it and not get upset by it.

- *It could be done differently like with a professional and tell the young person you have scored high in certain areas.”* [Youth worker]

Programme administration

The majority of youth workers felt there was a lot of paperwork involved with the programme which they found time-consuming and challenging. Respondents agreed the first year of the programme was the most challenging in terms of paperwork.

- *“Don't underestimate the amount of time paperwork takes as a new project. Having a large number at the start is difficult.”* [Youth worker]

It was also suggested that more funding should be provided for the administrative side of the programme and, if possible, paperwork should be done centrally for the programme, e.g. by Youth Work Ireland. It was also suggested that the programme could run over eight rather than six months to allow for the large volume of paperwork.

- *“More funding is needed to cover admin on paperwork for the programme. After the first year the work is less.”* [Youth worker]
- *“If the paperwork side of things could be done centrally it would be a huge relief for projects.”* [Youth worker]

Programme supports

Current programme supports were identified in the consultations, for example, induction days, learning days, site visits, programme calendar and a WhatsApp group.

- *“We have an induction day, at least two learning days and site visits with all the new sites to see all is going well and we do spot visits if there are concerns if there is no data coming in.”* [Programme Manager]
- *“We have also developed a calendar for coordinators to help them to see where they are at.”* [Programme Manager]

However, programme coordinators felt some additional supports were needed, particularly for youth services in the first year of the programme. It was suggested that a timeline with a step by step structure in terms of what stage the programme should be at would be beneficial to youth services. A mentoring system for new projects by established projects was also put forward as a suggestion.

- *“Everything is clearly told to people at the induction day but when they go off on their own they might have problems.”* [Youth Worker]
- *“Maybe to have tips for new projects before the programme rolls out. The same question keeps getting asked in the WhatsApp group so maybe a timeline would work well and a step by step structure for projects.”* [Youth Worker]

- *“There should be a mentoring part to the programme for new projects.”* [Youth Worker]

Programme insurance

One youth service found it difficult to get insurance for young people to participate in the programme and suggested assistance should be provided in relation to this issue. For example, a list of insurance providers who have provided insurance for the programme in the past could be developed.

- *“Last year we found it difficult to get programme insurance.”* [Youth Worker]

Chapter 3: Findings of Consultations with Employers

Introduction

Three employers from three different projects were consulted as part of the evaluation.

Employers experiences

In general, employers were very positive about the programme. Some employers had very positive experiences with the young people placed working with them but others had mixed experiences. Employers felt that the attitude of the young person was very important in terms of the success or otherwise of the programme.

- *“When she (young person) came here first she was at a level equivalent to someone with two or three years in college she was that good. In her we have a top class employee.”* [Employer]
- *“Some people would work out but the last guy was just dog lazy. I had the other ones were fine and the fellas worked out fine after.”* [Employer]
- *“I really think it depends on the attitude of the young person if they want to work it will work and if they don’t it won’t.”* [Employer]

Employer’s feelings prior to the work placement

All of the employers said they felt slightly apprehensive about the work placements before it began because of young people's previous offending behaviour. One of the employers said they wanted to make sure the young person had not been involved in serious criminality.

- *“I was a little apprehensive beforehand. It depends on what these boys did and I would normally ask staff if there anything criminal involved. I was careful it was nothing too serious.”* [Employer]
- *“I was apperceive about getting involved with the programme first but it has been a huge success.”* [Employer]

However, all of the employers were willing to give young people a chance and wanted to help make a difference for them if possible.

- *"I took it on with the view of giving people a chance and if I can make a difference great."*
[Employer]
- *"I took that attitude that if I can help I'll help."* [Employer]

Benefits for employers

While some employers considered the young people to be a huge asset to their business, others said it created more work for them. However, employers felt it was worthwhile helping young people improve their skill sets and better themselves.

- *"She (young person) has been a huge resource for us here. To have an extra pair of hands in the office is invaluable."* [Employer]
- *"Despite what people think about free labour they would be more of a hassle than a benefit but I didn't mind a small bit of hassle and showing them what to do and add to their skill set."*
[Employer]

Engagement with young people

All of the employers said they actively engaged with the young people working for them. This included training them, talking to them and offering them advice.

- *"Basically you get them to do things and find out what they are interested in and chatting to them and see if you could steer them in the right direction. I think they were interested in working hard and I presume they were trying to better themselves and get off the road they were going and down the right road."* [Employer]

Mentoring of young people

One employers talked about mentoring relationships developing between young people and other employees.

- *"The girl she (young person) came to work under had her own office and she has given up her officer to share it with her, that is how much she thinks of her and how important she is to us. She was her mentor and was a trainer."* [Employer]

Building relationships with young people

All of the employers stated they had built up positive relationships with the young people by the end of the programme.

- *“They would thank you and buy you a box of sweets at the end and we would give them a few shillings at the end, like we would give them €50 at the end to show we appreciated them.”*
[Employer]

Programme benefits for young people:

Work experience

Benefits for young people identified by employers included gaining six months work experience and having a reference to put on their CV.

- *“If they (young person) go for an interview for a job they can say I have worked here for six months and they would ask you for a reference.”* [Employer]

Increased self-confidence and social skills

Employers also highlighted other benefits of the programme including increase self-confidence and social skills among young people.

- *“A lot of young people came in very shy and would barely open their mouth and if you can get them to come out of themselves it is great and they were quite chatty at the end.”* [Employer]

Community and family benefits

According to one employer, there are huge benefits for families and communities seeing young people they know in employment and being successful. Such benefits include siblings and friends wanting to emulate the young people.

- *“For her (young person) coming from the background she was from, it is really phenomenal the things she was able to achieve. It's more than just for her, it is having a big impact on her community and family as well to see someone coming from a background like that and to be doing so well.”* [Employer]

Increased opportunities

One employer talked about a young person gaining huge opportunities through the programme. The young person has continued working with the company since their work placement and is currently studying to gain their professional qualifications in that area.

- *“The huge thing about someone like her (young person) would never get the opportunity without this programme. The programme is allowing her to get qualifications she can use in her work here and go on to be fully qualified and have a career.”* [Employer]

Outcomes for young people

The employers generally reported positive outcomes for young people who had worked with them.

- *“One guy I met him afterwards and he seemed to have worked out quite well but what he was in for was arson and I was willing to give him a chance, he seemed to have worked out reasonably well.”* [Employer]

Recommendations from employers

In terms of recommendations for improving employer’s experiences of the programme, one employer suggested they should be provided with feedback on the outcomes of young people to see if the experience has been beneficial or not.

- *“My experience would be reasonably good. It would be a help to see where young people end up and then you could gauge if you are doing anything right or wrong and whether you are making a difference.”* [Employer]

Finally, one employer suggested developing a structured training template for employers employing young people through the programme.

- *“If this was something that could be copied and pasted like a more structured training template for the programme that would work well. We have developed something like this with the youth project so it could be replicated in other projects and other areas.”* [Employer]

Chapter 4: Findings of Consultations with Young People

Introduction

This chapter details the findings of consultations with young people who have participated in the Work to Learn Programme.

Young people's awareness of the programme

The majority of young people were not aware of the programme prior to their engagement in it and first heard about it from their Youth Justice Worker. Some young people said their youth workers asked them to engage in the programme for various reasons such as not doing well in school and in order to gain more independence.

- *"I didn't know anyone that did it. My youth worker just got the job for me. I was just told to go to the shop when I said yes to the job."*
- *"My youth worker asked me to get involved in the programme as things weren't going great in school."*
- *"My youth worker asked me about getting involved in the programme to get some independence."*

While most young people were not aware of the programme, some had heard about the programme from friends, family or their youth workers. A number of young people had siblings who had participated in the programme previously. Some young people also had friends who engaged in the programme in the past. There were a number of young people who had to wait to get on the programme as places weren't available at the time. Positive feedback on the programme from family and friends had a positive impact on young people wanting to participate in the programme.

- *"When I came here first I heard about the Work to Learn programme but it was full so I had to wait a year to get in to it. The lads were all telling me it was good craic and a good experience."*

Types of employment

Young people consulted had engaged in various different types of employment as part of the programme. This included working in shops, supermarkets, garages, cafes, restaurants, hotels, gyms, landscaping, hairdressers and in youth services.

- *“I was stacking shelves, helping managers, sweeping the car park, working in the stockroom. I didn’t really like sweeping the car park on a bad day. There isn’t really anything interesting about stacking shelves.”*

The types of employment open to young people was sometimes based on their interests and the types of employment they would like to pursue in the future, however, in many instances it was dependent on the types of employment that were available to the youth service. For example, some youth workers built up a relationship with certain employers and send young people on work placements to the same workplace every year.

- *“It gives you a chance to try something you want to do.”*
- *“I wanted to try hairdressing and my youth worker had a contact there.”*

Interviews

As part of the Work to Learn Programme, young people have an interview with employers before they begin their work experience. The majority of young people had a formal interview with an interview panel which included employers, a teacher from their school and their Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO). While many young people felt nervous doing their interviews, overall, they considered it to be a positive experience from which they gained experience and learned interview skills. Young people were prepared for the interviews by their youth workers which was very helpful and increased their confidence. For example, young people did mock interviews with youth workers and were given questions beforehand to prepare.

- *“I think I went very red and I was nervous but it went well.”*
- *“He (youth worker) just told me to be myself and go into detail and answer the questions truthfully.”*
- *“The interview was alright but I was sweating. We had questions they might ask and answers to the questions and it helped build my confidence to know what they might ask and what I might say.”*

While some young people found it reassuring to have people they were familiar with on the interview panel such as teachers, other young people found it difficult to have people such as their Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) on the panel. One young person said they had not seen their JLO since they had been in trouble with the Gardai.

- *"It helped I knew one of the teacher that was there for the interview."*
- *"The interview was hard with seeing the JLO again."*

A number of young people considered the feedback from their interview to be very useful and thought it might help them in the future in terms of improving their interview skills.

- *"It was good because I made a few mistakes but they told me what the mistakes were so now I know for the future and the next job I'm going for."*

Gaining experience in interviewing through the programme was also identified as helpful for future interviews. Many young people felt they would be less nervous and more confident for future interviews. A small number of young people had done another interview after the programme interview and felt it helped them.

- *"It will definitely help you with the next interview. Everyone would be nervous the first time but obviously it will be easier to do a good interview in the future."*
- *"I was nervous in the interviews but it has helped me. I had to do a few interviews for LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied) and it really helped me."*

Setting up bank accounts

Some young people found it difficult setting up bank accounts for the programme as they didn't have the right documentation such as passports. Young people talked about the paperwork and administration associated with setting up a bank account as slow and boring. Young people under sixteen years of age also faced more obstacles setting up bank accounts. However, young people felt it was a good idea to set up a bank account to get paid as it would be useful for them in the future.

- *"My passport was expired and they wouldn't take it and I had to go get photo ID."*

- *“You had to make up a load of passwords.”*
- *“I struggled with the bank account. I asked for a student account but I had to be 16 and my birthday was a few weeks after that.”*
- *“It's good for the future because we have them bank accounts now for the future.”*

What works well about the programme:

Learning work related skills

All of the young people consulted said they learned work related skills on their work placement. Work related skills young people learned included timekeeping, attendance, budgeting, organisational skills and communication skills.

- *“My time keeping really improved, and communication, and I was better organised going into work.”*
- *“I did learn about time keeping and to be better at it.”*
- *“The programme has been a great opportunity for me. I have learned how to budget and stand on my own two feet.”*

Qualifications and training

Some young people also gained qualifications and participated in training as part of their work placements. This included health and safety qualifications, Safe Pass, food hygiene and management training.

- *“I got all the Health and Safety qualifications and a lot of good training and experience there. They also have a big push on the management side of things.”*

Real work environment

Young people also learned what it was like to be in a real work environment. This included young people learning about work related responsibility, persistence and not letting employers or other employees down.

- *“I learned to stick to the job and do what you are asked and don’t complain.”*
- *“I learned about responsibility and that you have to turn up and not let other people down.”*
- *“Yes, I know what things are expected of me. I learned about time, tax, pay, to be responsible.”*

Many young people said they learned that working can be hard, for example, having to get up early and travel long distances to their workplace.

- *“I’ve learned it’s hard work. It was hard enough, getting up early in the morning. I have to wake up at a quarter to seven and walk over to the other side of the town. I sometimes stay at a friend’s house that is closer. It takes around an hour to walk over.”*

One young person who did not complete the programme due to an incident in their work placement talked about learning from the consequences of their actions.

- *“I learned I have to think about things before I do something and I am better off not doing some things and think about the consequences before I do something and I was the one that lost out the most.”*

Increased communication skills

Many young people felt the programme helped improve their communication skills. This was primarily as a result of dealing with customers on a regular basis as well as interacting with employers and fellow employees.

- *“Communication is a big one. I learned a lot. I talk to more people now than before. Customers come in throughout the day and you obviously have to chat to them.”*
- *“You meet people from everywhere. People are coming in renting cars and we have to communicate with people from different countries.”*
- *“I have learned to be more patient and I have a habit of interrupting people and I am working on that as well.”*

A number of young people said the communication skills they learned in work have transferred to help them in school. For example, young people said they were able to communicate better with their teachers and to concentrate and listen more in school.

- *“Work has helped me in school to communicate better and it has taught me to listen more in school. I sometimes zone out and daydream in school and only hear half what they say and now I am listening more and doing more things in school.”*

Increased social skills

All of the young people consulted agreed the programme had helped improve their social skills. Many young people felt they didn't have good social skills before engaging in the programme and were shy or nervous talking to new people. Working in jobs such as shops where they had to engage with new people all the time was very effective in relation to increasing young people's social skills.

- *“I have learned social skills. I have learned to be better around people. I was very shy beforehand.”*
- *“I am usually too shy to talk to new people but in the garage new people are coming in all the time and I am more social.”*

Increased self-confidence and self-esteem

According to all of the young people consulted, the programme helped increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. Young people said the programme increased their confidence through conducting interviews, employers believing in them and trusting them, dealing with customers and learning new skills.

- *“It has increased my confidence talking to customers.”*
- *‘So many people close to me have told me how much more confident I am in myself, including my youth worker.’*
- *“It has helped me believe in myself.”*

- *“He [employer] gave me the job so he gave me a chance to show myself. He is spot on and it has built up my confidence that he has believed in me to do all that.”*

Relationships with employers and co-workers

Many young people spoke about developing positive relationships with their employers and co-workers. Some young people were surprised they developed friendships with co-workers.

- *“I didn’t realise that people you work with would become your friends as well.”*
- *“I’m really good friends with some of them [co-workers]...The staff are lovely and I would chat with them all.’*
- *“Walking into a job you think they aren’t going to talk to you and the first day I didn’t know what I was doing but the guy who trained me had a great laugh together and we still do.”*

Many young people also spoke about employers or co-workers mentoring them or looking out for them at work.

- *“The boss, the first few weeks I didn’t talk to him much because I was nervous but now we would talk for days and it’s the same with other people from the garage.”*
- *“There is this girl who helps me with everything, like she shows me how to do deliveries and she looks out for me and it is very important because without her I would be lost. She is really nice.”*
- *“Some of the people I was working there with said, ‘find something else to do with your life because you don’t want to be stacking shelves for the rest of your life’.”*

Broadening friendship groups

Many of the young people said the work placements had helped them broaden their friendship groups. Young people made friends with co-workers from different backgrounds or groups than they normally would have been friends with as a result of working together. One young person said he had become friends with another co-worker who he never thought he would be friends with as their two families did not get on with each other.

- *“There is one guy we work with he is very good to us and he drops us into town for lunch and we go to his house and we are after building up a good friendship. Like I never thought I would be friends with him because our families don't get on but ever since we worked in the garage together we are close.”*
- *“I am friends with different groups of people that I wouldn't have been before because I talk more and hanging around with new people is good.”*

Reduced anxiety

A small number of young people who stated they suffer from anxiety and other mental health issues said the programme helped them in relation to reducing their anxiety. Dealing with customers on a regular basis helped young people to be less anxious about talking to new people. The young people also said the work placement brought them “out of their comfort zone” which also helped them in terms of dealing with new situations. The help of youth workers was very important to this group of young people in the work placement as they accompanied them to their first meeting with their employers and were available to talk to employers if there was a problem.

- *“I was really anxious starting the programme. I refused the first placement and found my own one. This is not something I would have done before.”*
- *“It makes you feel less anxious when there is someone [youth worker] there you know like on the first meeting with the work. It is good to have someone there to help to talk to your work if you are a less social person.”*

Work experience

According to the young people, one of the main benefits of participation in the programme is gaining work experience. This included experience for young people of what it is like to work but also work experience that they can put on their CV that might help them to gain employment in the future.

- *“I wanted a lot of experience in the working industry to see what it's like.”*
- *“Hopefully I will get another job because I have the experience.”*

- *“When I go for a proper job they will be able to see I was good at my job and give me a job.”*

Extra hours

Many young people involved in the programme got extra hours work with their employer. In some cases, employers asked the young people to work extra hours but in other cases young people initiated the extra hours of work by asking their employers. This had a positive effect on young people in terms of their self-confidence and self-esteem. For young people, gaining extra hours meant their employer liked them, trusted them and thought they were doing a good job.

- *“They liked me and gave me extra money and hours.”*
- *“I asked for extra hours and she came back to me and said I could. I felt delighted because I felt they thought I was good at what I was doing and I really enjoy the work as well.”*

Being paid

According to the majority of young people, being paid a wage was an important aspect of the programme. For some young people, being paid meant they were able to be more financially independent.

- *“Being paid was good because it gives you more independence and means you can stand on your own two feet.”*
- *‘It’s good for people my age to go out and see what the real world is like and get a job and get wages. It’s good you get paid because you wouldn’t be breaking your back otherwise.’*
- *“It was a new experience and the money was good too.”*

However, a number of young people felt being paid was not the most important aspect of the programme.

- *“The money is grand and all but for me it’s not all about the money, it’s about the experience, about meeting new people, the interview and figuring out what you are good at and what you’re bad at. That was more important for me.”*

Being paid also had positive financial impacts on the families of young people participating in the programme. A small number of young people said they gave some of their wages to their mothers every week.

- *“My mum is delighted I am doing it. I give her money as well. It has to be done.”*

Work versus school

Many of the young people made comparisons between their work placement and school. While young people acknowledged work could be hard, the majority said they found work easier than school as they considered it to be less pressured and less stressful. This was because they were not under pressure in relation to exams and schoolwork in work placements. However, the main difference between school and work identified by the young people was the way they were treated by employers compared to their teachers in school. Young people felt they were treated with much more respect by employers compared with their teachers in school. For example, if the young people made a mistake in work they felt their employers were more understanding and patient than their teachers would be.

- *“I have learned that school is nothing like work. Work can be hard at times and its OK if you make mistakes because you have managers to speak to and they will understand you. It's easier to work sometimes.”*
- *“Everyone says work is harder than school but I think that work is easier. People aren't down your throats. They help you to learn from mistakes and do better the next time. They treat you more like a grown up in work.”*
- *“They [employers] treat you like an adult and they don't really pressurise you.”*
- *“They [employers] kind of treat you more like an adult, like if you can't make your shift.”*

Focus on the future

Almost all the young people said the programme helped them think about their future and what they would like to work at. For some young people, the programme helped motivate them to focus more on their education so they could achieve these goals.

- *"I learned about education and how to get a job you would like to be working in. It's all about thinking about your future really."*
- *"It makes you think about the future and the responsibilities you have."*

In some cases, being placed in employment that young people disliked or found boring had a positive effect in terms of motivating young people to find a type of employment or career they would like. Many young people said the work experience helped them figure out what types of employment they would like to do in the future as well as what they wouldn't like to do.

- *"Stacking shelves was really boring so I don't want to be doing that for the rest of my life."*
- *"I know I liked working with my hands and that is why I am working in carpentry now. I figured it out. I knew after a while I didn't want to work in a shop."*
- *"I wouldn't like to be a waitress as a full time job. I'm not really set on it. I'd like it as a part time job. You are kind of doing the same thing all the time. There is not really much new about it. I'd like to work in an old folks home."*
- *"I worked in my youth service but I see youth work very differently than when I was at the other side. The experience has made me realise it's not for me directly."*

Family and friends opinions of the programme

All of the young people said their families were proud of them and happy they participated in the programme.

- *"My ma said, 'I am so proud of you,' and I was scarlet!"*
- *"My family and friends said fair play to you."*

Some young people talked about their siblings showing an interest in the programme due to their involvement and setting an example.

- *“As well as my family being proud I am proud of myself...I hope my brother will be able to do it as well. He wants to do it now as well. He looks at me and says he wants to do it. He is a reliable person as well.”*

According to some young people, their friends were surprised they were involved with the programme. All of the young people said their friends thought it was a good idea they were working as part of the programme, particularly as they were being paid.

- *“My friends were surprised, they said you don't even like school.”*
- *“My friends thought it was good because they didn't have jobs at the time.”*

What young people would change about the programme:

Workbooks

As part of the programme, young people complete a workbook on their work placement with the help of their youth worker. There were mixed views on the workbook among young people. Some young people enjoyed completing the workbook and thought it was a good idea to keep a record of their work experience and to have document to look back on in the future.

- *“I didn't mind doing it. It keeps it on record and if anyone wanted proof you were working there or what you were good at it is there.”*
- *“Every week you had to say what you did and what you would change. It was a learning experience.”*

However, many young people thought there was too much paperwork and filling out forms associated with the programme. Some young people described completing the workbook as “boring” and repetitive.

- *“There should be less paper and filling out forms.”*

The majority of young people also thought the language used in the workbook was not youth friendly, was difficult to understand and in some cases was off-putting. Some young people described the questions used in the scales in the workbook as “weird” and “a bit iffy.” The questions in the workbook

appeared to evoke a strong emotional response in some young people. For example, one young person said they “hated the questions.”

- *“There was mad fancy writing [in the workbook] so my youth worker has it read it out to me.”*
- *“At the end of every two weeks I had to come in and fill in a book. It was OK but some of the questions were a bit weird, a bit iffy.”*
- *“They should probably improve the questions in the workbook.”*

More hours

The majority of young people felt there should be more hours in the programme and thought four hours was not long enough. It was suggested that eight hours, e.g. one day’s work a week would work well. As was mentioned previously, many young people secured more hours from their employers.

- *“I would like if there were more hours for the programme.”*
- *“They should add more hours and have one day instead of four hours. I got more hours. I got six and a half hours. The first time I went in I stayed until closing time and then the boss asked could I do that again.”*

More variety of types of employment

Some young people suggested there should be more variety in terms of the types of employment they could engage in. In some cases, young people had no interest in the area of employment they were placed in. This resulted in some young people being bored but also in some young people realising they do not want to work in a type of employment that is not stimulating for them.

- *“I was working with fish. It got better as I went on. It was very difficult at first with the smell, and working with fish, it slips out of your hands easily.”*

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation found that the Work to Learn Programme was very effective in meeting its aims and objectives in relation to young people, employers and youth services.

In terms of meeting outcomes for young people, the evaluation established that young people acquired various work related skills, gained experience and understanding of a real work environment and increased their self-confidence and self-esteem in relation to work and other areas of their lives. The programme also helped young people improve their social and communication skills.

The programme helped young people figure out what they would like to work at in the future and gave some young people a determination and focus to return to education and training to achieve their goals. The relationship between young people and programme coordinators was very important in terms of supporting young people to prepare for interviews, work placements and providing ongoing assistance.

The evaluation established that key objectives of the programme for employers were met including benefitting from additional workers, the civic responsibility associated with engaging in the programme, employers helping young people in terms of learning and training and creating interactions with young people that are positive, supportive and affirming. The programme also helped youth services establish a bank of employers to work with in the future.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the evaluation findings:

Preparation for the programme

- Young people should be ready to participate in the programme.
- There should be a good level of trust between youth workers and young people participating in the programme.

Setting up bank accounts

- The programme should develop a partnership with a specific bank to make the process of setting up bank accounts easier.

- State Street would could potentially negotiate such a banking partnership.

Types of employment

- There should be more variety in the types of employment offered to young people as part of the programme.
- Young people should be placed in types of employment they are interested in where possible.

Recruitment of employers

- Youth workers should have a clear understanding of the programme when communicating with potential employers.
- The positive nature of the programme should be clearly communicated to employers.
- Promotion of the programme in local media may help recruit employers.

Young Travellers

- The programme should provide extra support to young Travellers participating in the programme.

Programme workbook

- The language used in the programme workbook should be more youth friendly.
- The programme should consider adapting or changing the psychometric scales in the workbook.
- The programme should consider employing a psychologist to explain the results of psychometric scales to young people face-to-face.
- The programme should consider reduced the volume of data collected in the workbook.
- A revised version of the workbook should be developed in partnership with young people and youth workers involved with the programme.

Programme administration

- More funding should be provided for the administrative side of the programme.
- The programme should examine the possibility the programme being administered centrally, e.g. by Youth Work Ireland.
- The programme should explore the possibility of running the programme over a longer period of time, e.g. eight rather than six months.

Programme supports

- Youth services should be made aware of all the programme supports available to them.
- The programme should consider developing a step-by-step timeline for youth services.
- The programme should consider setting up a mentoring system linking new projects with established projects.

Programme insurance

- A list of insurance providers who have provided insurance for the programme in the past should be developed.

Extra hours

- The programme should consider increasing the number of hours that young people work each week, e.g. increasing from four to eight hours.