



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

Young People at Risk: YPAR Case Study



The Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes, and Practice (REPPP) Project

As a strategic research partnership between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the School of Law at the University of Limerick, the REPPP project extends and improves the evidence-base for policy, programmes, and practice reform in relation to youth crime in Ireland. To this end, the project implements practically focused research studies which link to the policy priorities identified by Irish Youth Justice Service, is informed by multiple evidence sources, and focuses on better outcomes for children. While REPPP emphasises the policy relevance of research evidence, it is cognisant of the relevant issues of programmes and practice and recognises that reform in human programmes requires change across all three areas to achieve substantial traction.

The authors of this case study are John Reddy (REPPP), Dr Johnny Connolly (REPPP), and Dr John Bamber (Independent Consultant). The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of views expressed in this report and for the opinions expressed herein.

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For further information about or the case study, please contact:

Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) Project, School of Law, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

Tel: 0035361234829 Email: REPPP@ul.ie
Web: <https://ulsites.ul.ie/law/reppp> TW: @REPPP4

For further information about YPAR, please contact:

Patrick Gates
YPAR Coordinator
Ballybough Community Centre
Ballybough Road
Dublin 3
DO3 C995

Tel: 01-8194779
Mob: 0861263086
E-Mail pgates@ypar.info
Web: www.ypar.ie

YPAR | Young People at Risk Dublin North Inner City

*To live in a place of hope, equality, and opportunity,
where young people and their family's dreams are realised.*

*'YPAR was aided by a strong set
of people; a team who believed in and stuck
with the process, and got the buy-in.'*
(Interviewee 1)

*'YPAR gets its mandate from
the ground up. It started as a voluntary
network when agencies recognised the need
to coordinate services, to prevent overlap,
and to stop children slipping through
the gaps.'*
(Interviewee 2)

*'YPAR is not an agency.
It is not a project. It is very much about
multiple and mutual engagement by
services, by agencies, and by staff.'*
(Interviewee 3)

*'YPAR's role is to provide
a clear process to link existing and new services
and initiatives, and to manage how this all fits
together for the benefit of services and agencies
working in the areas and for communities.'*
(Interviewee 4)

*'When participants feel
the support of the network, they are more
likely to feel the personal and professional
benefit of engagement.'*
(Interviewee 5)

*'YPAR is appreciated because
it creates a safe space for genuine dialogue
about issues. There is no hierarchy, as joint
authority for the work is shared
between participants.'*
(Interviewee 6)

Contents

1. Introduction to the Case Study	1
Overview.....	1
Methodology.....	1
2. YPAR Background and Approach	2
Introduction.....	2
Aims and Purpose.....	2
The Operational Context.....	2
Origins and Development.....	3
The YPAR Protocol.....	4
The Mulvey Report and the NEIC Initiative.....	5
Current Approach and Structure.....	6
Resources and Support.....	9
3. The YPAR Model	10
Embeddedness, Practicality, and Trust.....	10
Active Participation.....	11
‘Ownership’ of the Work.....	12
Local Leadership.....	13
Emphasis on Making a Difference.....	13
Evidence of effectiveness.....	14
Challenges and Opportunities.....	14
Theory of Change.....	15
4. Lessons from the Case Study	17
Action Statements.....	17
Conclusion.....	19
References.....	20
Citations and Notes.....	21

List of Figures

Figure 1: Dublin’s North East Inner City.....	3
Figure 2: YPAR Organisational Structure.....	7
Figure 3: Overarching Logic Model 2020.....	16

List of Tables

Table 1: Elements in the YPAR Protocol.....	5
Table 2: YPAR Partners in 2020.....	7
Table 3: YPAR Working Groups and Focus in 2020.....	8
Table 4: Five Conditions of Collective Impact.....	18

1. Introduction to the Case Study

This report presents a case study of the community-based, interagency network, Young People at Risk (YPAR), which is situated in Dublin's North East Inner City. It outlines the origins of YPAR, and how it has evolved over time in terms of key milestones and major changes. Information about YPAR's purpose, objectives, structures, and resources, provides the backdrop to YPAR's current role in supporting and promoting interagency coordination, integration, and leadership for local initiatives. In addressing what is unique or distinctive about YPAR, the case study also sets out the theory of change that underpins the model. It concludes with a brief account of important issues and challenges facing YPAR today, before presenting the lessons and key messages that should be of interest to others supporting and promoting interagency working.

Overview

In many ways, the case study is a story of resilience, adaptability, and durability. While much is related to the efficient use of scarce resources, effective organisation, and appropriate processes, perhaps more is due to things less tangible such as values and ethos. These include a strong affinity with the purpose of YPAR amongst network participants and the importance of YPAR being deeply embedded in the community it serves. The whole endeavour is underpinned by reflective practice, which requires qualities such as genuineness and humility in participants who must put aside any tendency to defensiveness. It means trusting in the problem-solving process, while simultaneously having confidence in those involved in the wider network. The strong sense of solidarity that comes from being 'in it' together, is based on understanding each other's struggles, and therefore being better able to support one another. If none of these intangibles can be guaranteed or demanded, they are more likely to occur when staff consistently uphold the underpinning values while modelling the requisite attitudes and behaviours.

Methodology

The case study methodology was designed to capture the essence of why and how YPAR operates. While limited in scope when compared to a thoroughgoing review or external evaluation, it is rigorous in collecting

and analysing information from various credible and authoritative sources. The methodology consisted of four elements:

1. Analysis of a limited number of selected documents (see Reference List).
2. Interviews with six experienced YPAR stakeholders.
3. Articulation of a YPAR Theory of Change.
4. Discussion and confirmation of the case study with YPAR representatives.

2. YPAR Background and Approach

Introduction

This section covers the origins of YPAR, how it has developed, and some of the key factors that have influenced its development. It introduces the YPAR Protocol, which is instrumental in the way that YPAR involves service agencies and coordinates the activities of a wide range of professionals that make up the network. It describes how the Mulvey Report (2016), and the advent of the North-East Inner-City Initiative (2017-2020), have validated YPAR's role and bolstered its work. YPAR's current approach to exercising its role is outlined concerning the Steering Committee and Working Groups that make up its structure. The section begins with YPAR's aims and purpose.

Aims and Purpose

Young People at Risk (YPAR) is an interagency network in Dublin's North Inner City.² The network's purpose is to improve the lives of children, young people, and their families living in the area by facilitating the integration of service provision. YPAR coordinates service partnerships for children and young people across three

age categories: 0 to 5, 5 to 12, and 13 to 25 years. It identifies needs and service gaps regarding child and family support, youth work, youth justice, youth mental health, social inclusion, and homelessness.³ Through facilitating effective local partnerships, YPAR aims to protect the safety and welfare of children, young people, and families.⁴ Its mission is:

*To promote and develop an inclusive approach through integration and partnership of services and agencies working with children, young people, and families that serve their needs and enables them to realise their potential.*⁵

The Operational Context

YPAR's primary catchment area is Dublin's North East Inner City (hereafter NEIC).⁶ As the map below details (Figure 1), the NEIC extends from Dublin Bay to the east and Drumcondra Road/Dorset Street/Bolton Street to O'Connell St on the west, comprising Dublin 1 and parts of Dublin 3.⁷ In 2016, the NEIC had a total population of 20,012.⁸ The area has been described as a collection of

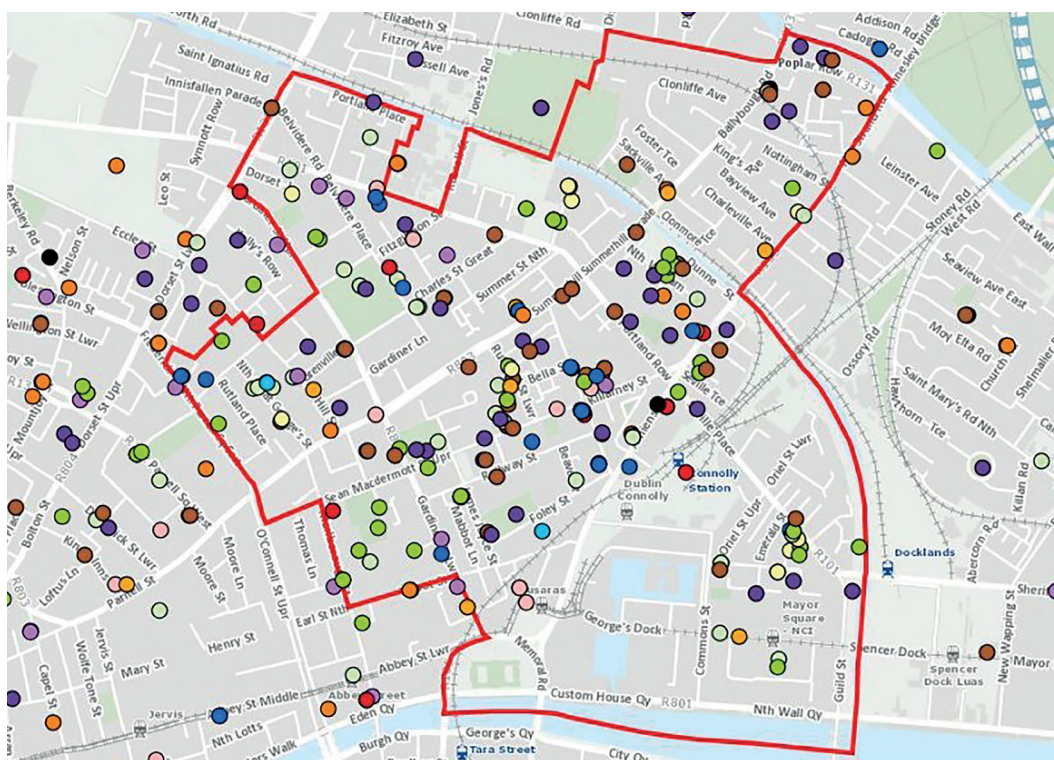


Figure 1: Dublin's North East Inner City
The green markers represent schools and other education providers. <http://www.neic.ie/map>

'vibrant communities' in a part of Dublin City with deep historical and literary connections.⁹

The NEIC is noted for having a culture of community development and solidarity around local issues.¹⁰ There are extensive supports and programmes under a range of local initiatives.¹¹ These include a strong statutory presence providing a wide range of educational services for pupils and students, which is complemented by a multi-faceted community and voluntary sector. Community development initiatives take place alongside services providing family support, youth work, drug, and youth justice supports. Culturally, the area has a tradition and history that encompasses Sports, Arts, and Heritage activities. Dublin City Council owns a considerable land bank in the area which is available for development, recreation, business, and housing purposes. New housing units have been completed in recent years and further significant developments are planned for the Docklands Strategic Development Zone.¹²

Notwithstanding its many positive characteristics, for many years Dublin's North Inner City has been impacted by social and economic challenges, problems which have been described as being 'complex, wide-ranging, and multi-generational'.¹³ YPAR research,¹⁴ for example, found that some areas of the NEIC experience significant deprivation and disadvantage when compared with national averages.¹⁵ In 2016, for example, 44 percent of NEIC households were lone-parent families compared to a national average of 18 percent, 28 percent lived in local authority housing compared to a national figure of seven percent, female unemployment at 19 percent compared to 12 percent nationwide, and male unemployment at 24 percent was almost twice the national figure (13.7%). According to YPAR, over one third (26) of the NEIC Small Areas, as defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), were classified in 2016 as disadvantaged or very disadvantaged.¹⁶

Origins and Development

YPAR traces its origins to Dublin's Inner-City Organisations Network (ICON). In the 1990s, ICON highlighted that 'significant gaps' existed in how children's and youth services are provided in the inner city.¹⁷ In 2000, ICON and representatives of state agencies with responsibility for children and families came together in a bid to strengthen existing service

partnerships in the NEIC.¹⁸ YPAR was established to help this process and to address the needs of at-risk young people in the area, primarily, by working to coordinate a more integrated approach to delivering child and family services.¹⁹

From the outset, YPAR sought to establish an interagency structure to coordinate the delivery of quality services to at-risk children and youth, along with mechanisms to effectively integrate service provision.²⁰ In the 2000s, under YPAR, local service providers and statutory agencies began developing models of practice and service delivery that could lead to well-planned and integrated child and youth supports in the NEIC.²¹ In 2003, a multi-agency YPAR Steering Committee led by ICON and including statutory agencies was formally established. The Committee began by commissioning research (Weafer, 2005) to map child and youth needs and available services and resources in the NEIC. In 2006, based on this analysis, YPAR launched its first three-year Strategic Plan.

Significant influencing factors

Early examination of YPAR (McKeown, 2007) identified two core objectives: (1) to develop a 'common protocol' among service providers to facilitate service integration, and (2) to document and disseminate evidence of best practice in interagency collaboration and positive examples of YPAR's work.²² Consultations with YPAR stakeholders provided an opportunity for service providers to 'air' their views about the effectiveness of service provision in the NEIC and how best to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.²³ McKeown's analysis suggested that interagency cooperation was central in developing local services. He noted, however, that while service cooperation could be considered 'well developed' in the NEIC, the engagement of statutory agencies in YPAR up to that point, had been minimal. He recommended using the network's structures to expand the scope of collaboration and service integration in the area. He argues that the 'full support' of the statutory sector was essential if YPAR's interagency goals were to be progressed.²⁴

The economic crash of 2008 significantly impacted service integration in the NEIC.²⁵ According to YPAR, funding cuts in the years following had led to a 'hollowing out' of important community programmes. 'The loss of programmes aimed at developing community

capacity and leadership', for example, are described as having weakened the capacities of local communities to challenge 'harmful and destructive behaviours from within the community'.²⁶ Cuts to public services and programmes had, YPAR maintains, exacerbated the challenges already being faced by many families and NEIC communities. Retrenchment also confirmed the importance of YPAR's support of service providers/practitioners endeavouring to deliver vital services.²⁷

The YPAR Protocol

YPAR has described its work as collaborative, preventive, and operating with an early intervention strategy. In 2009, the network began promoting an interagency case management approach (the YPAR Protocol) to support local children and young people at particular risk. The YPAR Protocol provides an agreed structure for cooperation between projects, agencies, and services to ensure a coordinated service for young people at risk and their families. Under the Protocol, a service agency can seek the assistance of any other relevant agency(ies) to help address the needs of a young person and his/her family by calling 'a protocol meeting' to which relevant agencies are invited.²⁸ The protocol is designed to support and strengthen the implementation of Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, whose procedures for child protection always apply. It is not intended that the protocol replaces existing informal or formal contacts between agencies.

The Protocol has been defined as 'a safe and confidential way of interagency working that enables multi-agency supports to address the service needs of vulnerable children and young people.'²⁹ Important elements of the approach have been described as the capacity to (1) increase practitioner/service provider understanding of the adversities faced by young people as well as their needs, and (2) to provide ways of empowering young people and their families so that they could work with service providers to improve their lives.³⁰ Important elements in the Protocol are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements in the YPAR Protocol

Any agency can seek the assistance of any other agency(ies) to address the needs of a young person and his/her family by calling a protocol meeting to which all relevant agencies are invited. At the meeting, each agency identifies the role that it can play in responding to those needs and commits to

actions that it can carry out. An agreed plan for the young person is then drawn up based on these commitments and the implementation of the plan is monitored by the overall group at the follow-up protocol meetings. Consent to use the protocol is sought from the parent/guardian and the parent/guardian and the young person (depending on the age) can attend the protocol meeting.

The YPAR Protocol has been described as a 'useful and important mechanism' facilitating interagency collaboration and knowledge sharing among service providers.³¹ From 2009 to 2014, 100 practitioners from over fifty service agencies and organisations completed training in the delivery of the YPAR Protocol.³² According to YPAR, by 2020, over 300 children in the NEIC had been supported by its use.³³

In addition to providing a voice for young people and their families, the Protocol is cited by YPAR as demonstrating the value of service environments where purposeful interagency collaboration is standard, and where progressive practice models can be widely and coherently implemented.³⁴ The Protocol's role in informing the development of the Tusla Meitheal (the national practice and prevention model for supporting children's welfare) is highlighted by YPAR. Today, Meitheal is reported to be providing support to 25 young people annually in the NEIC.³⁵

On a national level, the YPAR Protocol has influenced government policy on interagency work and is one of the models that were used to inform the Tusla strategy for working with families, the Meitheal Practice Model.³⁶

The Mulvey Report and the NEIC Initiative

More recently, YPAR has contributed to the development, planning, and delivery of programmes under the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative (2017-2020).³⁷ This Government initiative followed a series of murders in 2015/2016 in the NEIC that were linked to a feud between criminal gangs largely related to drug crime. Its three-year action plan to oversee the social and economic regeneration of Dublin's North Inner City was informed by Kieran Mulvey's (2016) *Dublin North East Inner City: Creating a Brighter Future* report. The Government pledged €1.6 million to the Initiative and created the North East Inner City Implementation

Programme to oversee its implementation.³⁸

The Mulvey report provides a useful context for understanding the work of YPAR today. Mulvey describes the NEIC as an area of high deprivation and disadvantage.³⁹ For example, some housing estates and complexes in the area contain over 80 percent lone parent households, up to half of the population have attained primary education only, and less than five percent had third-level education.⁴⁰ Substance misuse and addiction, drug dealing, crime and associated intimidation are significant and longstanding problems in the NEIC and, as Mulvey reminds, ‘can interfere and put children at risk of not reaching their potential.’⁴¹ Mulvey also cites Trutz Haase’s *The Changing Face of Dublin’s Inner City* (2009) to demonstrate the variance in social class in the NEIC, ranging from highly educated professionals living in gated apartment blocks to unskilled, unemployed, or underemployed people in local authority housing and ethnic minorities and transient non-national groups, living in rented accommodation.⁴²

The report found that the extensive community supports and programmes in the area,⁴³ could be poorly coordinated. He suggested that ‘a comprehensive and cohesive plan to respond to the specific needs of the area’ was required.⁴⁴ In line with this, the report recommended the integration of approaches to at-risk young people, to ‘consolidate and align targeted and universal services.’⁴⁵ Community-based projects, he argued, required increased interagency coordination to ‘ensure targeted outcomes to their programmes’ and, particularly, to facilitate an integrated approach to developing local youth capacity.⁴⁶

The NEIC Initiative (2017-2020) has had a significant impact on YPAR’s overall output. The Early Years Programme funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has, for example, involved the strategic development of an after-school’s strategy. YPAR conducted a needs assessment, which ultimately led to the After-Schools Report (2020). The need for increased supports was identified by Mulvey, and the NEIC Initiative has provided opportunities to respond to long-standing and emerging needs.

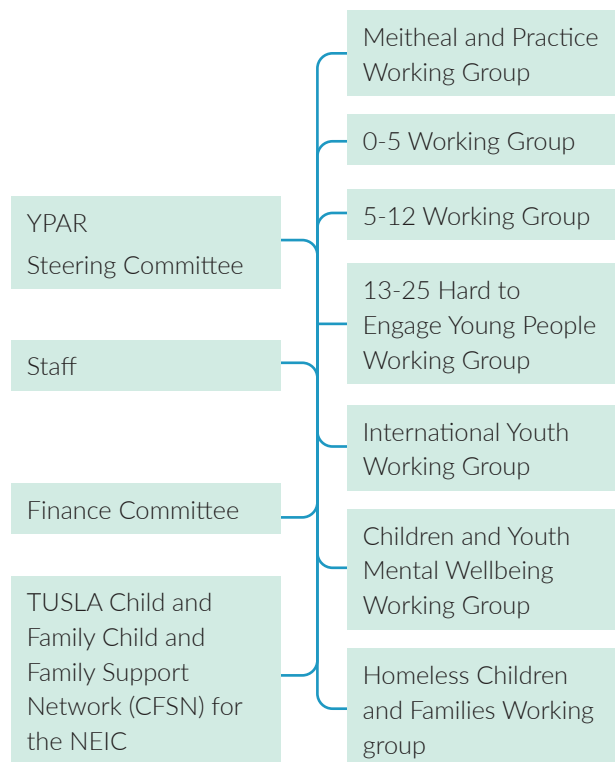
Today, YPAR facilitates the Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) and the Safe and Protected from Harm Sub-Group in the NEIC and has been closely involved in

the local implementation of the Tusla Meitheal.⁴⁷ Under the NEIC Initiative (2017-2020), YPAR has supported the NEIC Taskforce’s and Programme Implementation Board’s (PIB) plans to coordinate the social and economic regeneration of the area.⁴⁸ YPAR has either led and/or supported numerous NEIC initiatives including youth leadership training programmes, youth mental health initiatives, outreach youth work, youth practitioner support and training workshops, afterschool support and childcare initiatives, local research, restorative practice, and interagency working.⁴⁹ In many ways, the Initiative has provided ‘authority and credibility’ to YPAR’s work, enabling greater access to policymakers, decision-makers, and senior officials.

Current Approach and Structure

YPAR characterises itself as an ‘interagency structure which enables the collaboration of frontline children’s services to pool resources and deliver more efficient and effective services’ in the NEIC.⁵⁰ Achieving these objectives involves facilitating the YPAR Steering Committee and seven theme related multi-agency working groups (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: YPAR Organisational Structure



In 2020, as described in Table 2, the YPAR Steering Committee comprised an Independent Chairperson, a representative from each of the seven Working Groups, two representatives from ICON, and senior representatives from relevant State agencies.⁵¹

Table 2: YPAR Partners in 2020

Community and Voluntary Sector	State Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Inner City Organisations Network (ICON) – includes 65 community groups and youth services ▶ Local young people ▶ Neighbourhood Youth Projects ▶ The Wexford Centre Project ▶ Lourdes Youth and Community Service ▶ St. Vincent de Paul ▶ Irish Youth Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ HSE (Northern Region) ▶ Tusla, Child and Family agency ▶ Department of Education and Skills ▶ City of Dublin Youth Services Board ▶ City of Dublin Education and Training Board ▶ National Education Welfare Service ▶ An Garda Síochána ▶ The Probation Service/ The Irish Youth Justice Service ▶ Dublin City Council

The seven YPAR Working Groups, described in Table 3 below, work to coordinate and integrate services in the NEIC.⁵² Membership can vary, but generally, there are between 10 and 15 members in each group.


Table 3: YPAR Working Groups and Focus in 2020

Working Groups	Area of Focus
1. Meitheal and Practice Working Group	Promotes multi-agency collaboration in services for children, youth, and families. In particular, the Working Group monitors gaps and blockages in children's services and practice in the NEIC.
2. 0-5 Working Group	Supports childcare and early years services in the NEIC, particularly relating to access to childcare for children from vulnerable families.

3. 5-12 Working Group	Supports the physical, mental, and emotional development of primary school children. A particular focus is increasing after-school supports and activities for children in the NEIC.
4. 13-25 Hard to Engage Young People Working Group	Aligns youth services to target and engage hard to reach young people in the North Inner City to support their personal, social, and economic development. Building youth leadership with young people is a current focus.
5. International Youth Working Group	Coordinates supports minority ethnic young people.
6. Children and Youth Mental Wellbeing Working Group	Coordinates support services to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing. Since 2018, YPAR has supported a Fast-track Counselling and Therapeutic service for young people and their families experiencing mental health problems.
7. Homeless Children and Families Working Group	Coordinates support services for children and families affected by homelessness.

The Working Groups provide forums where the representatives of state agencies (including schools) and community and voluntary organisations can discuss local concerns. Groups provide opportunities to promote and improve practice standards, necessary to better address the needs of at-risk children, young people, and their families in the NEIC.⁵³

In 2020, for example, the Hard to Engage Young People Working Group acted on research funded by the NEIC Initiative concerning the needs of at-risk young people in the 14-24 age group. This research indicated that some young people were vulnerable to multiple risks and harms, were not engaging with available supports, or did so only at times of crisis or through the youth justice system (YPAR, 2020c). The research concluded that their 'developmental, learning, and emotional needs' were not being met either at home or by schools



and local services (YPAR, 2020c: 80). In response, the Working Group saw the need for 'diverse and flexible' provision before the point where young people and their families needed 'targeted, crisis, or specialised interventions' (YPAR, 2020c: 117). It produced a plan for a preventive way of working based on 'formal coordination and communication' among relevant state and community/voluntary service providers, which also stipulated that services must work in partnership with families to identify their needs and to design appropriate interventions. The voice of children was also to be included so that interventions would lead to practical and realistic outcomes that are relevant to young people's lives.

Resources and Support

YPAR's primary funders are Tusla, Child & Family Agency, the Department of Justice and Equality (via Youth Probation and the Irish Youth Justice Service), and the City of Dublin Youth Services Board.⁵⁴ The network's primary operational expenses include maintaining a YPAR Coordinator⁵⁵ and a part-time YPAR Meitheal and a Services Support Coordinator. There are also general sundry costs including room hire, furniture, telephone charges, and information technology, and staff training.⁵⁶

3. The YPAR Model

Introduction

Having provided information about the history of YPAR, its structure, and its place today in the NEIC, the case study now turns to the network's way of working, i.e., the YPAR model. Information is drawn from interviews with six key stakeholders (past and present) to highlight important factors in the way that YPAR operates, including its value-base and ethos. The findings are then summarised in a Theory of Change which links YPAR's purpose, the needs it addresses, its objectives, inputs, activities, to the outcomes that YPAR seeks. The theory of change is expressed in the form of a logic model.⁵⁷ The section concludes with a summary of the challenges and opportunities facing YPAR.

Embeddedness, Practicality, and Trust

As outlined previously, YPAR began as a response to an array of sometimes competing service agencies, seeking to address the complex needs of children, young people, and families in NEIC. A lack of coordination among service agencies, and the sheer number of service providers, was identified as sometimes overwhelming families (see Weafer, 2005, McKeown, 2007). YPAR's remit took its cue from the need to coordinate service provision so that children and families, often with complex and multifaceted needs, could be appropriately supported by the most relevant agencies. For example:

Agencies came to the realisation that they had to work together for the benefit of the young people and their families. Therefore, resources had to be put to good use. (Interviewee 1)

An important aspect of YPAR's approach to interagency working is its 'ground-up' and 'grassroots' character. The network is described as 'embedded' in the communities it serves and guided by a deep-rooted community development ethos that is shared by members.

According to one interviewee, from the outset 'YPAR has been bringing people together, sharing our resources, sharing our knowledge, our wisdom, our insights, and our focus' to provide better services and, ultimately, better outcomes for children, young people, and their families (Interviewee 3). Another interviewee explained that:

YPAR gets its mandate from the ground up. It started as a voluntary network when agencies recognised a need to coordinate services, to prevent overlap and children slipping through the gaps. (Interviewee 2)

YPAR's 'simplicity' and 'practicality' were identified by interviewees as important. One stated: 'It is not an agency. It is not a project. It's very much about multiple and mutual engagement by service's, by agencies, and by staff' (Interviewee 3). YPAR being viewed by service agencies and practitioners as a 'welcoming and safe forum', is also considered important and integral to its perceived success. This means that YPAR provides a space in which professionals can 'meet, connect, communicate, reflect and identify gaps in local services, and agree collectively how to respond and provide appropriate solutions' (Interviewee 4). Another stated that:

YPAR is appreciated because it creates a safe space for genuine dialogue about issues. There is no hierarchy, as joint authority for the work is shared between participants. (Interviewee 6)

YPAR brings a local structure to interagency cooperation, and so 'formalises' the collaborations already underway in the community. According to one interviewee, the Network has provided the capacity to capture and utilise the underlying knowledge in the community and voluntary sector in efforts to implement effective responses to problems (Interviewee 3). For another, YPAR is best described as:

A facilitator for community development and innovations, for joined-up working. It is developmental and responsive to community needs. (Interviewee 2)

A culture of trust and inclusiveness underpins YPAR's interagency work. According to the interviewees, the network is 'well-known' and 'respected' in the community and is 'practitioner-led'. One highlighted that: 'Engagement is high because the participants are in tune with YPAR's core values' (Interviewee 6). Evidence for this claim can be seen in the wide and high-level representation from the community/voluntary and statutory sectors on YPAR's Steering Committee

and working groups. Interviewees felt the level and breadth of agency participation had increased as the YPAR approach had evolved. The network was judged by services in the community as effective because the interagency work it facilitated led to better service delivery and in turn positive outcomes for those living in the area.

YPAR's encouragement of continuous conversation and dialogue around issues and problems was emphasised by the interviewees. According to one, the trust to engage has 'come from [YPAR] advocacy, from each team member, each agency, each organisation. It is through the sharing of the stories, and the achievement of outcomes, that people have become involved' (Interviewee 3). Another stressed the importance of the 'protocol' [YPARs interagency case management approach], in bringing about high levels of engagement:

You had to get buy-in and there were a lot of consultations and negotiations, and presentations as to what was sought and what YPAR was trying to do. (Interviewee 1)

Active Participation

The 'active' participation of representatives from state agencies and community and voluntary organisations is deemed to be integral to the effectiveness of YPAR. The Network was 'different from the start' according to Interviewee 1: 'It was actually asking agency members to be actively involved instead of just having a say in things.' The energy of members and their commitment to work on identified issues and problems is highlighted, as is YPAR's ability to bring together the 'key agencies'. For example:

It is about that commitment to a new way of doing things. If there is a new gap identified, it is about brainstorming, it is about sharing information and ideas, and being creative about how best we can react, and who best can come on-board' (Interviewee 6)

The commitment of state agencies and community organisations to engage meaningfully, which is generally considered not to have been the case before YPAR, is seen as leading to more structured responses to issues and problems in the NEIC. One interviewee described how: 'Wide engagement helped the [working] groups develop a Terms of Reference [e.g., plan], name the key agencies, and then focus on two or three key actions'

(Interviewee 4). According to Interviewee 5, in addition to producing 'very practical solutions', YPAR became a way of assuring the quality of local service provision. Being part of YPAR demonstrated, for example, that 'you were not "siloing" yourself away' and now 'many [service agencies] use it as part of their funding process' (Interviewee 3).

Also deemed to be key to active engagement, is service representatives having 'sufficient authority within the organisation they were representing to be able to make a decision' (Interviewee 1). Service agencies can be 'challenged' on agreed commitments, for example, if a practitioner sought an intervention/interagency plan for a young person then that practitioner and agency had 'primary responsibility' for that process (Interviewee 1). According to interviewees, engagement on these terms in the Steering Committee and Working Groups has helped to secure and maintain commitment and progress on issues agreed by partners. For example:

The service agencies see the benefits for themselves and how it complements their own work, but they also see the wider benefits of what the initiative is doing. (Interviewee 3)

'Ownership' of the Work

The work of YPAR staff is acknowledged as central in generating a sense of ownership of the network among service agencies and the community. One interviewee pointed out that the staff do not simply coordinate YPAR activities; they also motivate participant involvement and ensure that people on the frontlines are "owners" of YPAR (Interviewee 6). Another stated that:

YPAR was from its establishment aided by a team who believed in and stuck with the process and got the buy-in from service agencies working in the NEIC. (Interviewee 1)

YPAR has introduced to the community practitioners who are new to the area, involving organised tours of community organisations and local supports (and more recently through virtual video tours). In addition, during the Covid-19 Pandemic Public Health Restrictions, YPAR has facilitated communication channels for services including online Steering Committee meetings and community network meetings. It also acts as a repository in which community experience, interagency expertise, and practice wisdom can be stored and

retrieved when necessary, as this understanding is often lost in individual agencies when staff leave.

Local Leadership

Interviewees spoke of how promoting and supporting local leadership based on professional knowledge and experience is an important part of YPAR's role. YPAR is described as providing an important bridge between these leaders representing service agencies, and policymakers. In doing so, YPAR takes a 'broader focus' in terms of community needs and looks at the 'bigger picture', whereas service providers and practitioners tend to be focused on their remit and more immediate goals (Interviewee 2). According to interviewees, such understanding and experience ensures YPAR leads on issues affecting local people's lives while at the same time connecting with policymakers and funders about longer-term change in the NEIC. As one interviewee expressed it:

By sitting at this table, you are a leader in your organisation, and you are a leader in this community. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewees spoke of the vibrancy of the Network and its capacity to inspire commitment among contributors. One described YPAR as the 'go to' initiative for practitioners in the NEIC 'be they statutory, community, or voluntary' (Interviewee 3). An important and perhaps intangible element of the YPAR model was identified by several as being a sense of 'togetherness' and 'solidarity' among practitioners to collaborate to solve problems in the community.

The NEIC Initiative has resulted in significant involvement of the statutory sector in YPAR, particularly at the Steering Committee level. The NEIC was open to new and creative ways of working and taking advantage of this policy initiative was considered a good example of how YPAR operates. For example, the immediate response (by service agencies) to Mulvey's recommendations was to turn to YPAR. For one interviewee, as a respected and trusted interagency body, YPAR's Steering Committee was uniquely placed to coordinate appropriate responses. The Network's capacity to be adaptive and work creatively to address problems provided venues (e.g., existing, and new Working Groups) where coordinated responses to issues could be formulated and agreed upon (Interviewee 4).

Emphasis on Making a Difference

According to one interviewee, effective interagency work depends on how well groups 'share the experience of what's happening locally, identifying gaps, and working out and agreeing best approaches.' As they identified, the process is helped by members challenging each other to 'produce', as 'agents of our services, our statutory bodies, our community services' (Interviewee 3). Another argued that, when participants feel the support of the network, they are more likely to feel the personal and professional benefit of engagement. In turn, working groups are more active, and therefore more effective, in terms of better outcomes for children, young people, and their families (Interviewee 5). Alternatively:

If the participants were getting nothing from being in the Working Groups, and subsequently the young people they are supporting were getting nothing from it and coming away frustrated, then they would not engage in YPAR. (Interviewee 5)

Participants gain in other ways through membership, with one example being the capacity to make requests through the network for a wide range of different things. These range from practical issues, such as helping a family with a specific material need, through to advice about professional matters.

Evidence of effectiveness

High attendance at Steering Committee and Working Group meetings, and other events such as annual evaluations held through public meetings, were cited by interviewees as evidence of the value of YPAR. YPAR's 'connectedness' in local service networks is said to evidence the effectiveness of its interagency role. For example, YPAR acts as the Child and Family Support Network in the NEIC and coordinates supports through the Child and Young Persons Service Committees (CYPSCs), the national interagency model that brings together statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. As outlined, YPAR has greatly informed the NEIC Initiative (2017-2020), and how contributing statutory agencies and community/voluntary organisations coordinate and deliver services in the area.

YPAR strategic plans (typically renewed every 3-years) are informed by the activities of each Working Group and, typically, concern aims, objectives, and targets. To assess progress within the NEIC, general meetings,

seminars, and workshops are convened where YPAR actions can be assessed (and recorded) against experiences, views, and relevance to communities and groups in the area including practitioners, parents, children, and young people. In addition, research and practice reports have been commissioned and completed including the Afterschool Supports and Activities Report (2020), the 'Hard to Reach' Report (2020), and YPAR Annual Reports (2011, 2013, 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities

Notwithstanding its achievements, like every other service and organization, YPAR also faces significant challenges. According to interviewees, the quality and quantity of information available, and the lack of resources for data collection, collation, and analysis, inhibits more robust or formal evaluation and systematic reporting processes. While all interviewees highlighted YPAR's longstanding role in campaigning for effective services and supports in the NEIC, and how the NEIC Initiative had expanded the scope of interagency work in the area, they also identified the challenge of remaining independent, relevant, and integral to local interagency structures (and not to be by-passed). As one interviewee stated:

There is a constant danger of losing momentum, of keeping those relationships going, being relevant, and connecting into the [service] infrastructure. (Interviewee 3)

While the NEIC has created positive and productive working relationships among state agencies and community and voluntary organisations (particularly at the Steering Committee level), issues are said to remain. Vigilance is required concerning the functionality of new and emerging structures. According to one interviewee:

A lot of the problems arise from the dysfunctionality of structures, not services, to review the effectiveness of services we need to look at those structures and change those structures. (Interviewee 3)

After Mulvey and the NEIC Initiative, a 'space' had been created, and agencies and key practitioners now had greater access 'to senior managers, decision-makers'. It was pointed out, however, that new initiatives and collaborations have added 'another layer of interagency structures' to existing arrangements. If YPAR needs is not to become detached from emerging initiatives

and structures, as several recommended, the Network needs to increase capacity to input into local service coordination and implementation. For interviewees, YPAR's continuing capacity to advocate on behalf of young people in the NEIC is connected to consolidating and expanding its interagency role.

The consensus was that 'community engagement' must be an integral part of the identification of issues and problems and any subsequent responses in the NEIC. One interviewee felt that it was YPAR's role to provide 'a clear process to do this', to link existing and new services and initiatives, and to manage how this 'all fits together' for the benefit of service agencies working in the areas and for communities (Interviewee 4). A consequence of success, however, is to be constantly asked to take on more work, in other words to continue reaching out to new groups and be part of or instigate new developments. This presents issues of sustainability when there is no corresponding rise in resources.

Similarly, community organisations or voluntary groups are expected and should be a part of these interagency processes, but also may not have the resources to do so when their focus is on direct service delivery. It is a challenge for YPAR to engage those smaller services which may be struggling.

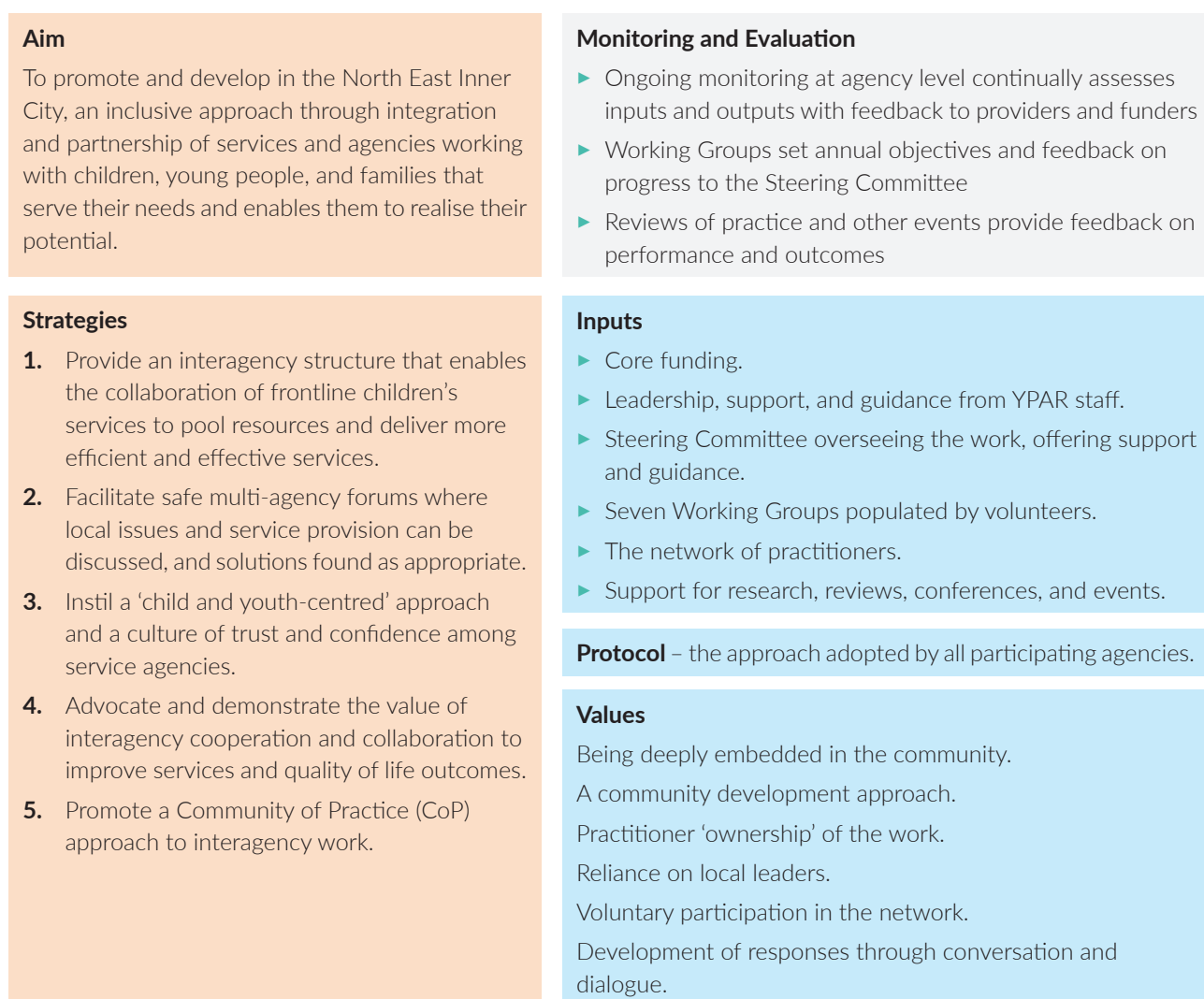
Those contributing to this case study spoke in positive terms about the opportunities to maintain and, indeed, expand YPAR's role in strengthening service partnerships in the NEIC. It was acknowledged that the Mulvey Report and subsequent Initiative has affirmed YPAR as effective in coordinating interagency work in the area. YPAR's Steering Committee and Working Groups 'work' because they can quickly coordinate and effect short term change. Involvement in the NEIC Initiative was described as having demonstrated the value of focused interagency working where genuine commitment from partners is expected and forthcoming, whether participants are from the State or community/voluntary sectors. Enhancing service and agency access to key decision-makers and policymakers, afforded by Mulvey, was identified as an important future direction for YPAR, and seen as key in effecting long-term policy responses that will improve the lives of children and young people in the NEIC.

Theory of Change

The main points from this section are summarised in Figure 3. The figure sets out an overall theory of change, which shows the links between the Network's aim, the strategies intended to achieve this aim, the resources available to deliver the strategies, the activities that are enabled by the resources, and the outcomes that

YPAR seeks to achieve. The underpinning values are shown as these are said by key stakeholders to be the foundation of YPAR's success. By the same token, the YPAR Protocol is also shown as central to operations. The figure indicates the evidence of needs in the NEIC as identified by YPAR, and the evidence that informs its response. Arrangements for monitoring and review of performance, in terms of carrying out the work and assessing its outcomes, are also described.

Figure 3: Overarching Logic Model 2020



Activities

- ▶ Monitoring gaps and addressing blockages in children's services and practice.
- ▶ Supporting and coordinating childcare and early years' services.
- ▶ Coordinating support services for children and families affected by homelessness.
- ▶ Aligning youth services to target and engage hard to reach young people.
- ▶ Building youth leadership with young people.
- ▶ Coordinating supports for minority ethnic young people.
- ▶ Coordinating support services to improve young people's mental health and well-being and managing the Fast-track Counselling and Therapeutic service.
- ▶ Facilitating information, expertise, and knowledge sharing in CoP events.
- ▶ Encouraging best practice development, and a problem-solving approach.

Outcomes

- ▶ A better understanding of needs and gaps, and better targeted responses.
- ▶ Better aligned services.
- ▶ Increased access to childcare and activities for children from vulnerable families.
- ▶ Enhanced service capacity to engage young people on the periphery of services.
- ▶ Increased take-up of supports by minority ethnic young people.
- ▶ Enhanced mental health and wellbeing, and therapeutic supports for young people.
- ▶ Better informed practitioners.
- ▶ Enhanced problem-solving capacities amongst practitioners.

Evidence Mulvey (2016) Dublin North East Inner City: Creating a Brighter Future report, emphasised the need for joined-up services. YPAR's (2020) own research found that in 2016, 44 % of NEIC households were lone-parent families compared to the national average of 18%, 28% lived in local authority housing compared to a national figure of 7%, female unemployment at 19% compared to 12% nationwide, and male unemployment at 24% was almost twice the national figure (13.7%). Over one third (26) of the NEIC Small Areas, as defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), were classified in 2016 as disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. YPAR's work aligns with Workstream 6 – Alignment of Services, in The Social and Economic Regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) 2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan. It is also in line with the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, 2019

4. Lessons from the Case Study

Action Statements

The case study now concludes by presenting a set of key messages that will be of interest to agencies and decision-makers in different settings. These messages can be usefully expressed in the form of action statements with which to challenge and stimulate thinking about supporting and promoting interagency working. While some, such as conducting or commissioning focussed research, are obvious and concrete, others are less tangible but vitally important. Trust in the process, and the openness of participants, are examples of these critical intangibles. While by no means definitive or exhaustive, taken together the following fifteen statements describe some of the necessary commitments and activities involved in effective interagency working at a local level.

- ▶ Sustained staff commitment to purpose while upholding values, and modelling the associated attitudes and behaviours, is motivating and provides a sense of direction for all participants.
- ▶ Being deeply embedded in a locality, and in the constellation of agencies in that area, enables intimate knowledge of the issues affecting services and people in the community.
- ▶ A community development approach ensures 'bottom-up' identification of needs and issues, and the involvement in the planning of interventions by those most affected by those issues.
- ▶ Developing realistic responses to identified needs, is far more effective for professionals when undertaken in safe spaces that enable reflective practice based on open and honest dialogue.
- ▶ A focus on significant problems and issues, together with realistic responses that are carried through, engenders the all-important quality of trust in interagency working.
- ▶ Effective interagency working is heavily reliant on the expertise and knowledge that can be drawn from a vibrant network of local professionals committed to the area.
- ▶ Support for and promoting best practices, entailing problem-solving approaches, pays dividends in terms of benefits for people and communities.
- ▶ Voluntary participation in the network, a sense of responsibility, and 'ownership' of the work, are vital to success.
- ▶ Those responsible for areas of work should be the ones speaking directly to decision-makers and to policymakers, in terms of advocacy, seeking financial or other forms of support, or explaining the work.
- ▶ Responses, and advocacy around issues, can benefit immensely from well-chosen and focussed pieces of research.
- ▶ Optimising the potential of a sizeable network requires dedicated staffing and resources, which can be compromised if resources do not increase with rising demand.
- ▶ Creative and innovative uses of interagency networks, for example, facilitating online engagement and introducing new practitioners to communities, existing committees, and service agencies, supports and helps to build local service capacities.
- ▶ Interagency working is enhanced considerably when backed by high-level statutory engagement, is required by policy directives, and the work is integral to significant social and economic initiatives driving change in localities.
- ▶ Interagency working is enhanced when training is provided to participants in the use of protocols and other strategies for collaboration.
- ▶ When expectations of the community and voluntary rise in terms of delivering interagency working, there needs to be a reciprocal obligation on the part of the statutory sector to respond appropriately.

In their paper on interagency working, Kania and Kramer (2013), set out five conditions that must be met to achieve collective impact. The conditions can be seen below in Table 4.

Table 4: Five Conditions of Collective Impact

Condition	Explanation
Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions.
Shared Measurement	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
Continuous Communication	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
Backbone Support	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

While the processes involved in shared measurement are still being developed by YPAR, it is clear from the messages and lessons described in this concluding section, that YPAR has developed valuable experience and expertise regarding the five conditions set out in Table 4. It is worth emphasising the crucial role of the 'backbone' support in achieving collective impact. The reference to the specific set of skills highlights the key role played by staff in that support. While it is not possible to transfer or replicate those staff in other areas, the skills, behaviours, and attitudes can be emulated. As we have seen, these include a commitment to a set of core values, a belief in the power of open and honest dialogue, an ability to move between members of the community, professionals, and decision-makers, as well as the technical wherewithal to support committees and working groups.

Conclusion

In describing why and how YPAR operates, outlining its features, and discussing the factors affecting its emergence and influencing its continued development, this case study has not attempted to evaluate or judge YPAR's work. In presenting a description of YPAR and what it does, the sole aim was to provide learning and understanding of interagency working in the NEIC that is of use to YPAR, other agencies, and decision-makers. REPPP would once again like to thank all who contributed to this research.

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