



The Science of Sexuality Education and Youth Work

Czech Republic

from Paper to Practice Report



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The Document

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Consortium



P1 CENTRE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LTD- CARDET - CYPRUS



P2 KYPRIAKOS SYNDESMOS OIKOGENEIAKOU PROGRAMMATISMOU -CFPA- CYPRUS



P3 KENTRO MERIMNAS OIKOGENEIAS KAI PAIDIOU-KMOP- GREECE



P4 EUROPESE CONFEDERATIE VAN ORGANISATIES VOOR JEUGDCENTRA ECYC VERENIGING- BELGIUM



P5 The Rural Hub CLG- IRELAND



P6 Motion Digital s.r.o.- CZECH REPUBLIC



Project Information



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Questions for the target groups

In case the participants have not come in contact with the SAFE YOUTH Project, a brief update should be made.

1. Policy makers

- What is the current situation regarding sexuality education in your country?
- What would they like to change in the current situation and if this could be combined with the project?
- Difficulties they face and if there is anything to suggest, good practices?

2. Youth workers - Young people

- How do they face the current situation regarding sexuality education and if they think there are gaps, If so, what are they?
- What do they believe are the most important difficulties regarding sexuality education?
- What would they change about sexuality education and if they know any good practices?

Introduction

European Policy Practice Report- Rural Hub- Ireland

1. Introduction and description of the European Policy Practice Report

This document aims to provide information on the fourth Intellectual Output (I.O.) of the project “The Science of Sexuality Education and Youth Work” - SAFE YOUTH.

2. Introduction of each partner and how it connects with the project

The Rural Hub was set up as an association by a group of education, training, and rural development professionals as a response to the impact of the economic crisis on small rural villages and towns in Ireland. Since it was first established in 2012, The Rural Hub has been providing a wide range of training and capacity development programmes to local residents and community groups. This organisation specialises in the area of community development and have developed a number of local initiatives to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged rural youth, migrant communities, and isolated senior residents. They work with these groups, using creative approaches and the testing of digital media resources to support greater social cohesion among local communities in County Cavan, Ireland. The Rural Hub has a developed network of county-wide stakeholders who support their work on a thematic basis. Through their community-based office, they deliver informal adult and youth education programmes, such as the SAFE YOUTH project. The Rural Hub has considerable experience in supporting youth and adult learners with diverse needs through The Social Mornings Programme and Educational Afternoons Programme that they deliver through their community outreach office in Virginia, County Cavan. The Rural Hub is a flexible and versatile community development organisation capable of responding to a wide range of needs due to the diverse skills of the volunteers who support its actions. The team have a vast range of skills and expertise in the areas of community development, adult education, youth work, project management, financial management, instructional design, and e-learning. The SAFE YOUTH project was implemented in local schools and youth organisations throughout Cavan to address the needs of youth workers and young people in relation to sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing.

3. Project’s overview and good examples from each partner country

As part of the SAFE YOUTH project, the Rural Hub conducted a focus group with youth workers, young people, and policy makers to collect relevant information about the current status of sexuality education in Ireland. This focus group took place in the Rural Hub Office, Virginia, Cavan on July 22nd, 2022. In total 9 participants attended, comprising; 3 young people, 3 youth workers and 3 policy makers. Each participant

came from varying backgrounds of work and location. The aim of this focus group was to gather ideas directly from participants, regarding sexual education, mental health, and wellbeing in Ireland. It also served to discuss best practice examples already in place, nationally. This will provide the project qualitative data from the project beneficiaries' perspective.

In addition to this, since focus groups encourage interaction among participants and are moderated by at least one person, conducting this focus group was an effective method to reach out to the different categories of participants, especially young people, and policy makers.

Participants in attendance were given an outline of the project including the following:

- Description of project and project partners
- Aims and objectives
- Learning resources
- Target group's expected involvement
- Website and Facebook page

Participants were then given the opportunity to give feedback on the project aims and outputs and ask questions. The following paragraphs comprise a summary of responses from each cohort in attendance:

Policy Makers:

○ What is the current situation regarding sexuality education in your country?

-It was noted and agreed by all policy makers that in Ireland, the sexual education curriculum needs to be vastly improved. Currently there is a small section of topics taught through Relationships and Sexuality Education known as the *RSE Programme* in Ireland. RSE is taught in primary schools to children between the ages of 5-12. Although it is considered a mandatory programme, it is not taught in all schools. This is due to the influence of Catholicism in education, whereby sex education was not on the school curriculum. For 12-18 year olds in Ireland, the SPHE- Social, Personal and Health Education course is delivered to young people at secondary level. This course delivers materials on relationships and sexuality. However the course lacks information on important topics such as; consent, contraception, sexual expression, STI's, etc. The Irish government has announced a full revision of this education material to include more information for young people, however this is still a work in progress.

- **What would they like to change in the current situation and if this could be combined with the project?**

One of the participants stated that there is a severe lack of resources available in youth work that discusses the topics of sexuality education. It was noted that having these educational materials are important, as young people are reluctant to come forward to discuss important topics such as contraception and STI's. These topics are still often stigmatised in Ireland and therefore are seldom discussed with young people. All participants agreed that the current situation needs to change and that a project like SAFE YOUTH will encourage young people to engage in those conversations earlier and learn more information that could positively impact their own sexual and mental health. It was also noted that the mental health materials in the SAFE YOUTH project are extremely relevant, topical, and supportive to young people.

Difficulties they face and if there is anything to suggest?

The biggest difficulties faced in Ireland regarding sexuality education is the slow process of policy reform and government decision making. Although there are current talks to reform this education policy, it will more than likely take longer than planned. Another difficulty will be that some teachers in the older generation of teaching, are not open to engaging with or discussing topics proposed in the reformed curriculum. This is still the case in some schools in Ireland, whereby the religious mentalities continues to stigmatise these topics. Overtime society is slowly accepting the importance of sexual education in Ireland, but at present, curriculum intervention is essential.

Youth/Youth Workers:

How do they face the current situation regarding sexuality education and if they think there are gaps, if so, what are they?

The youth workers participating in the focus group agreed that there is an extreme gap in sexuality education for young people in Ireland. One mentioned how even though young people receive a level of sex education in school, that it does still not cover enough in relation to contraception, safe sex, STI's and unplanned pregnancies. She stated that these are the topics that young people need to be aware about the most and in Ireland, these are minimalised and shied away from. One young person agreed that when he was in school, his teacher skirted around the subject of sex education and refused to teach it as per the curriculum guidelines. Youth workers commented that there is an apparent lack of training for teachers in Ireland on how to approach young people on sensitive subject and support them to understand real life situations that young people can experience. One young person mentioned how the topic of consent is not fully addressed in the current school curriculum and noted that this hugely important for young people.

- **What do they believe are the most important difficulties regarding sexuality education?**

It was mentioned by youth workers that young people are consistently facing exceptional pressures from peer groups and social media in today's digital world. Young people are faced with trends and the constant need to be liked online for beauty and image. They all agreed that the social media world has not helped with the sexualisation of young people and the increased pressure they feel. One youth worker mentioned that training young people from primary school age around topics such as social media consent and self-awareness/ self-love is imperative to support their mental well-being. They also mentioned that overcoming the generational influence of teachers that are ill-informed of the best practices method for sex education, will still be a difficulty for young people.

What would they change about sexuality education and if they know any good practices?

All participants agreed that the Irish educational curriculum needs a review on sexual education, to try move forward from past teachings. Currently some youth organisations are working hard to try to alleviate this deficit. A national organisation known as "Foróige" has developed a programme to support young people with their relationships and sexuality. This programme is called the "REAL U Programme" and covers a range of relevant topics including boundaries, puberty, body image, reproduction, gender, sexuality, consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and mental health. This is a best practice example of youth work moving forward with the changing needs of Irish young people. It was noted by the participating youth workers that these topics need to be discussed further with young people and from a younger age if possible. This would help them to develop the confidence to be safe and know how to make an informed decisions when it comes to sexual activity and relationships.

Policy recommendations, good examples, evidence, photos



Successes and challenges in the field of youth work

From the results of the focus group, we can gather that in Ireland there is a great need for a greater focus on sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing for young people. In order to do so, it is important for youth workers and educators to receive adequate training and have a multitude of resources to enable this transition within the curriculum. The current system impedes personal development for young people and instead makes them resort to finding information on the internet, which can often be unreliable and unhelpful. It is vital to open conversations about the topics of sexuality education to help young people to make safe and informed decisions in their personal lives.

Lesson Learned

From the conducted focus group, the following recommendations have been made:

- Revising the RSE, and SPHE curriculums to include topics such as; consent, contraception, STI's, etc. With this, young people can have access to reliable sources of information that can help them to make safe and informed decisions.

- Offering training to educators so that they feel fully equipped to navigate the sensitive topics of sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing with young people.
- Offer relevant advice that applies to young people and can help them in real-life situations.
- Empower young people to discuss and question sensitive topics such as; contraception, pregnancy, STI's, consent, etc.

Conclusions

From this focus group, it is clear that Ireland's current system is in need of reform in relation to the current sexuality education curriculum status. In order to successfully achieve this, it is imperative to provide youth workers and educators with training so that they feel equipped to support young people with information on sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing. In doing so, Irish youth can feel empowered to discuss these topics openly and make informed decisions that positively affects their wellbeing.