

**Report
on**

**Personal Safety and
Child Protection
in the Youth Service**

Inspected: 1999-2000



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Throughout the report a number of quantitative terms are used which may be interpreted as indicated below:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 Young people today face many challenges; they need to acquire a broad range of abilities and skills to cope with, and manage, existing and future problems and opportunities. In particular, they need to know how to keep safe and protect themselves from situations of risk. In working with children and young people the protection and welfare of the child or young person must always be the first priority; taking health and safety seriously is a fundamental part of building a safer environment for children and young people in the Youth Service and elsewhere. As a first step in creating a safe environment, staff in youth centres need to identify health and safety regulations which are mandatory and ensure that procedures are in place to enforce them.
- 1.2 In addition, young people need help to develop an awareness of personal safety issues in relation to bullying, risks associated with misuse of illegal substances, and abuse in all its forms. They also need to be able to identify possible dangers and become aware of strategies they can use to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations, such as those that could lead to abuse of the young person. Youth centres provide opportunities for young people to develop this awareness and these strategies in a safe and secure atmosphere. The staff in these settings must work to ensure that there are arrangements in place which protect children and young people from physical, social, emotional and intellectual harm. They must also ensure that appropriate support is available for young people in situations where they are at risk. Young people need to grow in their self-esteem, confidence and independence of thought; they need to develop understanding, of, and become sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of others; they need to develop the necessary skills to cope with possible threats to their personal safety, and as they mature, to meet with confidence the demands and challenges of adult and working life. The Children Order (1995) recognises the role of education and youth services in the care and protection of children and young people; it places upon such agencies a statutory responsibility to develop policies and practices which safeguard the young people, to implement procedures to keep them from harm and provide appropriate support for those in need.
- 1.3 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) carried out a survey in 1999-2000 to ascertain the extent and effectiveness of provision for personal safety and child protection in the Youth Service. Visits were made to 17 youth centres and seven Voluntary Head Quarter Organisations (VHQO). Interviews also took

place with more than 160 young people and 60 of their leaders. The visits and discussions took place between September 1999 and June 2000.

- 1.4 This report presents the findings of the survey on the effectiveness of the arrangements for personal safety and child protection in terms of policy and practice, procedures for staff training, and monitoring and evaluating.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- 2.1 In most of the youth centres visited, the quality of pastoral care for the young people was good. Most youth group leaders know their members well, can relate to their circumstances and are able to offer advice, guidance and support. Most members feel that they can talk with confidence to a leader in the youth setting about issues concerned with personal safety. Some young people report that they would have difficulty discussing issues of child protection with youth tutors, because of the tutors' links with schools. (3.1)
- 2.2 In almost all of the youth groups there is strict observance of health and safety rules and regulations; the procedures for emergency evacuation are understood clearly by the members. (3.5)
- 2.3 All of the youth groups have written policies on personal safety and child protection, but in almost all cases these do not meet the needs of the particular youth club. (3.8)
- 2.4 In a majority of the youth clubs there is insufficient discussion among the leaders about issues of child protection; in a significant minority, there is insufficient guidance to help leaders understand the procedures they should follow in the event of an incident of alleged or suspected abuse. In addition, in most youth groups the young people, and in particular the senior members, are not involved in the development of the policies. (3.8)
- 2.5 Almost all of the youth groups which are affiliated to individual schools and led by a youth tutor, use the school's child protection policy and guidelines. A minority of the youth tutors have little knowledge of what the young people have experienced within the school's personal and social education (PSE) programme which might inform the youth centre provision. (3.4)

- 2.6 All VHQOs visited have recognised the need for a written policy and clear procedures. In the best practice VHQOs have developed a clear and comprehensive code of practice for working with young people which provides specific guidance for staff dealing with child protection issues. (3.6)
- 2.7 There is significant diversity in terms of the quality and availability of personal safety programmes in the youth service. Only a minority of the groups provide well planned and supportive programmes which cover effectively topics such as bullying, drug education, self-defence, personal safety and general skills for everyday life. (3.2)
- 2.8 A significant minority of the youth group leaders are not sufficiently aware of the procedures for vetting part-time staff and do not know whether part-time staff have been through the vetting procedure. (3.10)
- 2.9 In most of the youth groups, training in child protection is restricted to the full time youth worker or leader-in-charge. Some leaders report that a lack of staff cover prevents part-time workers from attending relevant training courses. In a significant minority of youth groups, where leaders had participated in child protection training, the absence of recent review and updating of the training has left the leaders insufficiently clear about recent developments, policies and practices. (3.12)
- 2.10 Recurring features of poor programmes include inadequate levels of staffing and leaders with insufficient training. (3.7 and 3.12)
- 2.11 There are insufficient resources to support an effective personal safety programme in a majority of the youth groups; a significant minority of the leaders are not sufficiently aware of the materials which are available in this area. (3.2)
- 2.12 There are examples of good practice in the development of clear policies and comprehensive guidance on the planning and co-ordination of an effective personal safety programme in a minority of the youth groups. (3.3)
- 2.13 The monitoring and evaluation of personal safety and child protection policies and procedures are poorly developed. There is little evidence that groups monitor or review the programmes to gather information to influence future practice or disseminate successful practice. (3.13)

- 2.14 The most effective practice was observed when the youth group had well developed policies and procedures and adequate numbers of trained staff who had confidence in their own ability to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all the programmes offered in their centres. Those agencies who worked in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Development Agency (NIVDA) benefited from the high quality of staff training provided through this initiative. (3.6 and 3.12)

3. CURRENT PRACTICE

- 3.1 In most of the youth centres visited, the quality of pastoral care for the young people is good. Most of the young people find their leaders to be approachable should they wish to report an incident or confide in them. However, a significant minority of members reported that they would be reluctant to approach their leaders; one group was inclined to resolve problems independently whilst another reported that it would be difficult to confide in a youth tutor who was also a teacher in their school. It is essential that leaders create an ethos and develop procedures which ensure that members can choose to report to, and confide in, at least one member of staff.
- 3.2 There is significant variation in the degree to which planned programmes which address personal safety and child protection matters are provided for members. For example, in one youth group, sexual health and relationships are popular topics with young people and staff plan and use these opportunities constructively to introduce child protection in the context of feeling safe and comfortable in particular situations and circumstances. However, it is common practice for staff to rely on a spontaneous, but often reactive approach to child protection issues: if members raise a related topic it is discussed. Such an approach is entirely appropriate in terms of responding to urgent and important needs of the young people, but is inadequate to ensure that all members know enough about these issues. With the exception of posters on health-related issues, there are insufficient information leaflets and teaching materials in a majority of youth centres. A significant minority of leaders are not sufficiently aware of materials which are available to support the personal safety and child protection programmes.
- 3.3 A majority of centres base their personal safety programmes around sporting activities which often include coaching programmes and integrate effectively education relating to health, fitness and personal well-being. In around half of these centres, these activities are planned methodically to provide a well balanced programme offering progression for males and females of all ages.

A small number of youth groups have adopted systematic and innovative approaches to the design and implementation of a comprehensive personal safety and child protection curriculum. In one youth group, for example, eleven year old children take part in an activity programme which explores the topic of bullying, through a programme of outdoor activities. In another, members of the youth group are involved in a disciplinary committee which deals with bullying incidents within the centre. These young people are well aware of their responsibilities both to their peers and to the management committee.

- 3.4 A minority of the youth tutors have little knowledge of what the young people have encountered within the school's PSE programme. In around a quarter of the centres affiliated to a school the PSE component of the youth programme is designed appropriately to reflect and complement the school programme. In these instances effective links have been established between the school's PSE co-ordinator and the youth tutor, who, together, ensure that the work carried out in both the school and youth contexts is relevant and complementary.

In one example of good practice, a school visit by a drugs counsellor to speak to young people in years 11-14 was followed up by evening sessions for senior club members with the counsellor providing a peer-education programme which successfully generated frank and open discussion on drug-related issues.

- 3.5 In most of the centres surveyed, there was strict observance of health and safety rules and regulations with regard to residentials, centre-based and outdoor activities. There is a good understanding of fire and emergency procedures, although in a minority of youth centres attached to schools there is an inappropriate reliance on the staff of the schools to disseminate this information.
- 3.6 All of the centres have in place policies relating to personal safety and child protection; however, there is an over reliance on ELB policies which do not reflect adequately the circumstances or context of the youth sector. In the vast majority of groups, these policies are well supported by procedures which are understood and accepted by staff, members and volunteers.

One uniformed VHQA provides excellent support for its youth groups through the provision of a child protection package which incorporates clear policies on record-keeping, and on the recruitment, management and supervision of staff and volunteers who have significant contact with children and young people. In addition, the organisation has developed a code of good practice for adults working with young people. The code sets out clear guidelines which provide good advice on how to recognise signs of abuse and how to respond to disclosures. This practical advice is welcomed by the leaders of the youth groups who have a clear understanding of the arrangements for the management of child protection and the procedures to be followed in the event of an incident or any allegation. The organisation has also ensured that appropriate training in the area of child protection has been made available for all staff who have substantial access to children.

- 3.7 Staffing levels in at least a quarter of the youth groups are inadequate. At least half of the youth centres have difficulty in maintaining appropriate staffing levels when, for unforeseen reasons, staff are unable to fulfil their duties, for example, owing to illness; on these occasions it is common practice to declare certain facilities out of bounds and to limit the range of activities on offer to the young people. The layout of many buildings used as youth centres frequently exacerbates problems of supervision, for example, the use of mobile accommodation and where young people can only access the facilities or undertake the activity at some distance from the main halls. Planning for contingency arrangements for staff cover is not sufficiently thorough.
- 3.8 Only in a small minority of groups are management committees, parents, teachers and the young people all involved in contributing to policies devised for the centre. The young people generally are not given sufficient opportunities to contribute to the development of policies related to personal safety and child protection. The content and implications of policies are not shared sufficiently with the young people and their parents.

A small number of youth groups has made good progress in involving young people in the formulation of policies in respect of personal safety and child protection. In one youth group affiliated to a school, for example, the young people have contributed to the development of a number of policies on various aspects of health and safety. The policies are well developed and understood fully by both the team of leaders and senior members of the club. The policies are complementary to those established as part of the normal school procedures and have been approved by the senior management of the school. The well-being and healthy development of its members are clearly enshrined in the explicit aims of this youth club and are reinforced by the rules and policies adopted by the club in all its activities. There are specific policies on alcohol, drugs, smoking, along-side those for child protection, discipline and health and safety, as well as a policy for 'out-of-centre activities'.

- 3.9 In the main, parents of children attending a youth centre affiliated to a school are aware of the content of personal safety and child protection policies. However, parents of children attending a different school are not consistently made aware of such policies; there is an urgent need for all centres to ensure that all parents and young people are made aware of all policies and procedures relating to personal safety and child protection.
- 3.10 In a majority of centres, selection and recruitment procedures adopted by the ELBs are relied upon to determine the suitability of staff; the procedures are effective for full-time workers. In a minority of centres, vetting procedures are inadequate, invariably relying upon a leader's personal knowledge of an individual in another capacity, for example, as a former pupil or personal acquaintance. In these centres, leaders do not always know whether part-time staff have been through the vetting procedure.
- 3.11 The quality of the accommodation of youth centres is variable, ranging from modern, bright, well furnished and well maintained buildings to buildings in poor structural and decorative order. There is evidence to suggest that in poorly maintained, unattractive centres some members are less likely to respect the facilities or to have strong feelings of loyalty to their centre.
- 3.12 The majority of leaders have undertaken child-protection training, which has largely been provided through the ELBs and VHQOs. The main influence of the

training has been in making leaders aware of their roles and responsibilities including matters that should be referred to the agencies with designated responsibility. A significant minority of leaders report that they are unable to attend training courses, as staff-cover is not provided. Not all leaders have appropriate qualifications or experience; nor have they had recent child protection training; there is a need for staff-development policies and practice to identify and meet staff-training needs. Those agencies which worked in collaboration with the NIVDA benefited from the high quality of staff training provided.

All of the full-time youth workers and the leaders in charge in the youth groups have received training in child protection. A number of youth groups report favourably on the particular value of the 'Keeping Safe' training package produced by the NIVDA. This pack was produced as a result of work undertaken by NIVDA's Our Duty to Care, and Away from Home and Safe projects, and was a collaborative project undertaken in conjunction with a number of staff from VHQOs. This pack provides materials of a high quality which cover training in:

- awareness of child protection issues;
- policy and procedure for reporting suspected or disclosed abuses;
- recruitment and selection;
- supervision, support and training;
- a code of behaviour for youth leaders; and
- awareness of issues that might arise on residential.

- 3.13 The monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of personal safety and child protection policies and procedures is at an early stage of development. Advisory groups and management committees focus largely on financial and staffing matters. There is little evidence that groups monitor programmes to gather information to influence future practice or disseminate successful practice.

4. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The survey of the arrangements for personal safety and child protection in youth centres has identified a number of strengths, such as the good relationships between youth workers and the young people, and the instances of innovative practice in a number of youth groups.

4.2 The following recommendations refer to specific issues which, if acted upon, have the potential to enhance further the quality of the child protection arrangements and personal safety provision in youth groups:

- the development of personal safety and child protection policies and procedures which are customised to each centre and its membership, and which involve young people in the design process;
- the implementation of effective strategies to ensure that all concerned, including staff, volunteers, members, parents, management committees and advisory bodies, understand and accept these policies and procedures;
- the application of rigorous selection, recruitment and vetting procedures in respect of all staff whether paid or unpaid, irrespective of time, commitment to the centre, or prior knowledge of the individual in another capacity;
- the implementation of comprehensive, centre-based induction programmes which inform all new staff and volunteers of group policies and procedures;
- the development of an ethos and procedures which enable members to report their concerns to at least one member of staff;
- the provision of training for staff in:
 - i. strategies which involve young people in the decision-making process;
 - ii. the review and evaluation of policy and practice; and
 - iii. refresher training in child protection issues;

- the development of an organised approach to the planning and implementation of effective personal safety programmes that complement provision in schools;
- the introduction of a coherent approach to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of personal safety and child protection policies across the sector by the ELBs and VHQOs; in addition, the introduction of a more systematic approach to training to support the development of effective personal safety programmes;
- ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of staff to ensure that fundamental principles of personal safety can be observed, particularly in centres where young people are required to move between buildings.

It is acknowledged that there are constraints in the youth sector, due to the strong reliance on part-time staff who act in an unpaid capacity. However, ELBS and VHQOs need to ensure that risk-assessments have been undertaken to identify those centres in which young people are exposed to an unacceptable degree of risk because of an inadequate staffing complement.

- the development of a strategy to identify and extend good practice across the sector.

This survey has identified the good progress made by many youth centres in the development and implementation of policies and procedures which keep children and young people safe and free from harm. The report has highlighted examples of good practice in approaches to policy formulation, development of a personal safety and child protection curriculum and staff training. The practical examples, coupled with the above recommendations, provide youth organisations and centres with benchmarks against which they can measure their performance and develop further their personal safety and child protection provision.

APPENDIX 1

YOUTH CENTRES VISITED - 1999 to 2000

Ballykeel Youth Centre

Claudy Youth Centre

Finaghy Youth Centre, Belfast

Larne Youth Centre, Co Antrim

Limavady Grammar School Youth Club

Ogras Youth Centre

Omagh Boys and Girls Club

Omagh Youth Centre

Priory College Youth Centre, Holywood

Rathcoole Youth Centre, Newtownabbey

Shantallow Youth Centre, Londonderry

St Agnes Youth Centre, Belfast

St Aloysius Youth Club, Cushendall

St Colman's High School Youth Centre, Strabane

Underground Young Adults' Centre, Lisburn

Waterside Youth Centre, Londonderry

YMCA, Portadown

APPENDIX 2

VOLUNTARY HEADQUARTERS VISITED - September 1999 to July 2000

Boys Brigade

Catholic Guides

Catholic Scouts

Girl's Brigade

Ulster Guides

Ulster Scouts

Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster

APPENDIX 3

PERSONAL SAFETY/CHILD PROTECTION SURVEY AIDE MEMOIRE

Name of Group: _____

Type of Group (Stat; Vol; F/T; P/T): _____

Attendance During Visit: Male: _____ Female: _____ Total: _____

Membership Age Range: Male: 4-10 yrs _____ 11-16 yrs _____ 17+ yrs _____

Female: 4-10 yrs _____ 11-16 yrs _____ 17+ yrs _____

Inspector: _____

1. ETHOS

Features

- Quality of relationships at all levels.
- Quality and nature of interaction between workers/young people and young people/peers.
- General behaviour of young people.
- Appropriateness of approaches to bullying and procedures for dealing with incidents.
- Suitability of dress of workers and young people.

Comments

2. PROVISION/EXPERIENCES/OUTCOMES

Features

- Programme provision in relation to child protection matters (drug education programme, relationships and sexuality education and personal safety).
- Evidence of central theme and core principles (PSD, acceptance and understanding of others/values and beliefs/participation).
- Awareness-raising on matters concerning personal safety/child protection.
- Display of information posters, for example, drugs, relationships, personal safety.
- Suitability of activities (indoor and outdoor) in relation to age and ability of the children/young people.
- The group's handling of dangerous activities such as abseiling and canoeing in terms of instructions/clothing/safety wear and procedures.

Comment on:

- a. the nature, range and quality of the programme provision for PSD/child protection matters:

- b. the number of young people involved in these activities:

- c. the quality of the supervision of:
 - i. mainstream programme activities:
 - ii. afternoon activities:
 - iii. out-of-centre visits:
 - iv. residential activities:
- d. appropriateness of activities in relation to the age and ability of the young participants:
- e. the outcomes in terms of:
 - i. the young people's reported feelings of safety and security in the unit:
 - ii. the young people's knowledge and understanding of child protection/safety procedures:
 - iii. the quality of the programme provision in matters relating to personal safety/child protection:

- f. the effectiveness of the workers with particular responsibility for child protection:

- g. evident self-esteem/confidence/co-operativeness of the young people; behaviour of the young people both within the youth club and in the immediate environment; vandalism/drug/alcohol abuse/attacks on staff/other members?

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Features

- Existence and implementation of ELB/VHQO/group's policies.
- Involvement of young people, parents, management committee, ELB, VHQA in child protection issues.
- Effectiveness of planning.
- Provision of staff development/training.
- Staffing.
- Implementation of appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Range and effectiveness of use of resources.
- Safety of young people.

Comment on:

a. **Policy**

- i. degree of involvement of young people, workers, parents, management group, ELB, VHQO in contributing to development of personal safety/child protection policy:
- ii. the appropriateness and implementation of the group's pastoral care/child protection policy:
- iii. understanding of roles and responsibilities with regard to personal safety/child protection matters by workers/young people/parents:
- iv. understanding of procedures/practices with regard to personal safety/child protection in the context of residential and dangerous outdoor activities:
 - workers
 - young people
 - parents

b. **Planning**

quality of the planning of activities, including centre-based activities, visits, residential in the context of personal safety and child protection/level of involvement of the young people in planning

c. **Staff Development**

provision and nature of:

- i. centre-based personal safety/child protection training:
- ii. personal safety/child protection training provided by ELB/VHQO/other:
- iii. personal safety/child protection courses taken by workers/young leaders:
- iv. impact of the above training:

d. **Staffing**

- i. number, nature, deployment and adequacy of staffing - male/female activities; residential; elements of the programme; afternoon club etc:

- ii. nature and effectiveness of the vetting procedures for f/t, p/t and voluntary workers:

e. **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- i. the range, nature and effectiveness of the group's approach to monitoring and evaluation of personal safety/child protection matters/activities:
- ii. outcomes of previous monitoring and evaluation of personal safety/child protection matters/issues:

f. **Links**

links with parents, statutory/non-statutory groups, community groups:

g. **Accommodation and Resources**

- i. appropriateness of the accommodation (indoor/outdoor) in terms of safety:
- ii. the availability and effectiveness of use of:
 - a. centre-based resources for personal safety/child protection matters/activities:

- b. community-based resources for personal safety/child protection matters/activities:

- h. **Incidents**

- i. effectiveness of procedures for dealing with personal safety/child protection incidents:
- ii. effectiveness of recording procedures in relation to personal safety/child protection incidents:

- i. **Emergency Procedures**

knowledge and understanding of the fire and emergency procedures by the:

- a. workers:
- b. the young people:

COVERAGE

1. Number of workers interviewed: _____
2. Number of young people interviewed: _____
3. Number of sessions observed: _____

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