



Developing an
Agenda
for Peace through
Youth Work

Dr Martin McMullan
2025



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



The Northern Ireland context: Separation to Sharing

Years of conflict and communal division across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland has deeply affected the psyche of people living in the region. Fear and anger, coupled with antagonism, violence and murder have aided both a physical and psychological separation between many communities. Territorialism, sectarianism and organised hatred such as racism and violence towards girls and women have all been part of the backdrop within Northern Ireland.



This backdrop of division, separation and sectarianism alongside other prejudice and discrimination prompted the formation of the Northern Ireland Shared Education Act 2016 established a policy framework to support educational opportunities that unite young people across the divide in Northern Ireland. The 2016 Act specifically states the Shared Education helps to promote good relations to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

The Shared Education Act 2016 defines Shared Education Together as:

- (a) *those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and*
- (b) *those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.*

This resource has been developed specifically to support Shared Learning through Youth Work by enabling collective efforts to build peace and support young people's role within this. It has been supported through the PEACEPLUS 3.1 Shared Learning Education Together (non-formal) call that aims *"to provide direct, sustained contact between children from all backgrounds through collaboration between and within schools, early years settings and youth organisations, to promote good relations and enhance children's skills to contribute to a cohesive society."*

Peacebuilding through Youth Work

Moving from a divisive and separated society requires a concerted effort by all parts of society. Much of this effort has been driven by grass roots groups, communities and voluntary organisations. Youth work and voluntary youth work organisations, in particular, have played a significant role in engaging young people at local level during some of the

most difficult times amid the conflict in Northern Ireland. McMullan (2010) notes for the most part that youth work has been flexible, adaptable and innovative; it has made significant interventions within the lives of young people. Youth work practices can provide safe spaces for experiential learning among young people. In this way, young people can have new experiences in which they might not otherwise have, especially with those from the 'other' community (Wylie, 2016).

Youth work has the potential to call out the realities of a society deeply affected by separation and sectarian attitudes and behaviours to create a shared, different and peaceful future. This includes wider hate and organised hatred, based on race, ethnicity, sexual identity and sex/gender. Youth work can proactively address hatred and in turn support diversity, integration, inclusion and inter-culturalism while supporting young people to prepare for a shared, different, stable, fair and peaceful future. This can be known as 'inclusive peace youth work'.

The resource

The 'Developing an AGENDA for Peace through Youth Work' model provides a Quality Assurance Framework for building relations, promoting inclusion and contributing to peacebuilding through youth work.

For many years, youth workers and other commentators have cited that peace was either 'never on the agenda', or indeed had 'fallen off' it', with many stating that initiatives addressing deep-rooted sectarianism, racism and other inequalities need to remain at the 'top of the agenda.' The AGENDA for peace model maintains peace development as a priority within youth work that supports interventions that engage and sustain young people as peacebuilders. As the UN Security Council 2250 notes: *"Young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security."*

The AGENDA for peace model provides steps and questions that stimulate reflection, thinking and action among local youth and community groups, youth work organisations and those with a vested interest in nurturing reconciliation, building relationships across communities and peace-building. The process involves young people, volunteers and youth workers and committees/boards from a community group/organisation to co-design and review a specific action plan for peace. The framework is a planning tool that enables intentional commitments to practical actions at local and regional level to build peace. The framework enables young people to have their insights and contribution heard and actioned.

The **'Developing an AGENDA for Peace through Youth Work'** has been established using the 'AGENDA' acronym which follows a process to understand need and to initiate key actions as part of an action plan for peace. It is specifically a 'shared agenda' as it is not the sole responsibility of young people to build and improve good relations but rather a full society approach. Within the youth work context this involves involve young people, volunteers, youth workers, managers and management committees.

The acronym and the components of the AGENDA model are described below.



Process/ Method

The group/organisation identifies 6-8 representatives involving young people, volunteers/youth workers and committee members (or equivalent) to form a **steering group**. This group will oversee the review, to identify need and to develop the action plan for peace including how this is communicated. Nurture and celebrate the role of young people and adults working together in the steering group throughout the process.

The AGENDA for peace process is intended to be simple, using probe questions to help local groups consider their bespoke context. Follow the 8-step process below which will result in a realistic plan (2 key actions) that will help to improve good relations and to build reconciliation and peace.

'Youth workers can create possibilities for transformation, such as in breaking down borders between young people in Northern Ireland.'
(Batsleer and Davies, 2010)



STEP 1:

Developing a Statement of Intent (a rationale for why you might be embarking on or extending this peace journey. This helps you to have a focus).

NB this statement will be reviewed following the 8 step process.

Some questions to guide your thinking

1. Is peace-building a priority for your group/organisation?
2. What do you understand by 'peace-building' and is this important in your local community?
3. Is it a priority for you to build good relations within your community and between communities?
4. How might a youth work approach support reconciliation and peace-building?
5. Once you develop a clear statement of intent how will you communicate your vision and statement of intent and to whom?

Group/Organisation:

Date:

Venue:

In attendance:

Initial Statement of Intent (AGENDA for peace):

A

STEP 2:

Assessment of need

Some questions to guide your thinking

1. Has violence and conflict impacted on young people and the wider community in your area?
2. Do adults and young people have similar perspectives and recognise the impact of conflict on everyday lives?
3. What would help to build a stronger community that has a wider inclusive and global agenda?
4. Have you an appetite to create and inspire change for a more peaceful society?
5. What resources might this require? Will you require additional support?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.

G

STEP 3:

Getting buy in (young people, communities, organisation)

Some questions to guide your thinking

1. What is the hook to engage young people in a peace related project? What is the offer or pitch?
2. How will young people design, co-shape and inspire others to become involved? What do they want from a peace-related programme?
3. How might other community members perceive your plan and get involved?
4. Have you considered both opportunities and challenges within your project / activities?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.

E

STEP 4:

Exploration of issues (depth)

Some questions to guide your thinking

1. How will you create an inclusive safe space where young people can have a healthy exchange of difference where dialogue and curiosity are welcomed and celebrated?
2. How will you ensure that the approach is relevant, meaningful and engaging for young people? What mix of learning methods can you incorporate?
3. Are there particular issues that may be emotive, especially in acknowledging and dealing with the past?
4. What content might be embedded in your youth work programme that helps to address prejudice, division and conflict (curriculum)?
5. How comfortable do you feel in facilitating and what resources might you need to support the process?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.



N

STEP 5:

New relationships and contacts across the divide



Some questions to guide your thinking

1. What other groups/communities do you intend to meet and why?
2. What are your expectations from this contact? Will it be meaningful and sustained?
3. Where will the contact take place and how do you best prepare young people for this so that learning can take place without the fear of threat?
4. How will you support young people to manage any negative feelings, prejudices or anxieties towards 'the other'/out-group?
5. How can you support young people to have an encounter which is well-spirited and that celebrates difference?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.

D

STEP 6:

Documenting the learning and impact

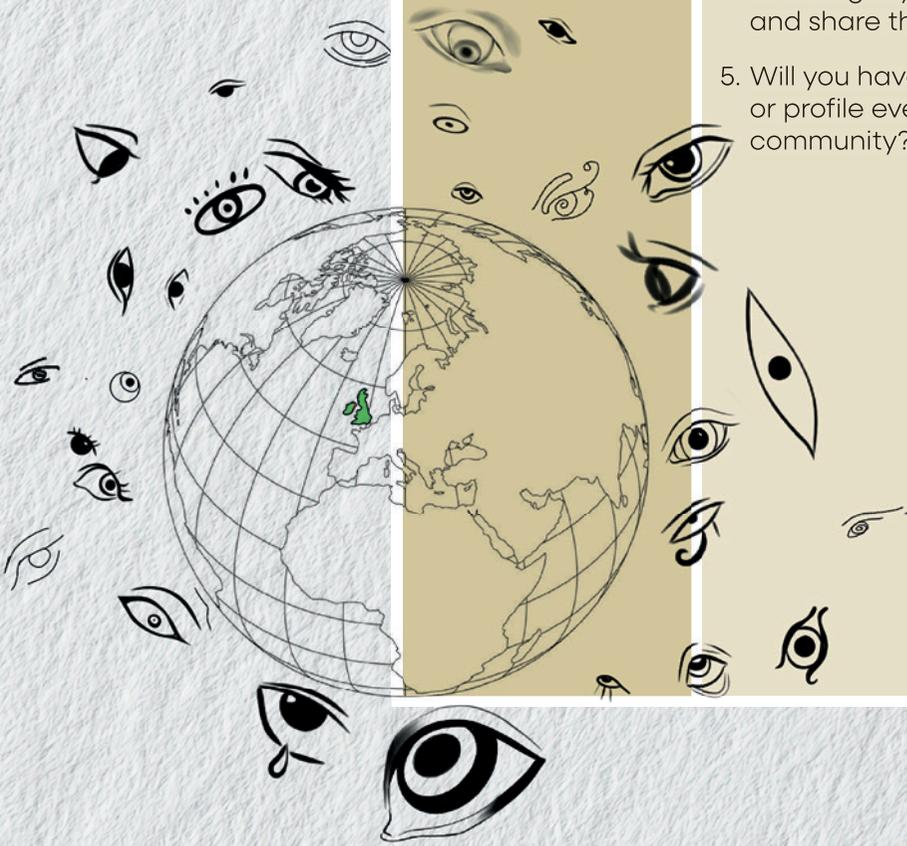
Some questions to guide your thinking

1. Thinking about your project purpose and outcomes what do you hope to achieve? What could be the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes?
2. How will you have made a difference to the lives of young people, the community, and other communities?
3. How will you review and document the learning and impact of the project?
4. How might you and young people promote and share the learning from your project?
5. Will you have local or regional celebration or profile events which engage the wider community?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.



A

STEP 7:

Action

NB this focusses on possible follow up actions where young people join with others in building a new generation for peace and reconciliation transformation

Some questions to guide your thinking

1. How can you nurture young people's ongoing engagement, social action and activism?
2. How can young people work with community leaders and representatives to support ongoing commitments to building positive relations and reconciliation?
3. How can young people be part of something bigger, beyond that of their local community?
4. Can the project and young people further connect with other young people at a regional, European or global level?

What 2 KEY priorities have emerged from your reflections?

1.

2.



Name of Group/Organisation: **Our Action Plan (agenda) for peace**

STEP 8:

ACTION PLAN for PEACE (Agenda)

Having completed steps 1-7 you will now have a clearer vision and approach to building peace through youth work. Make a short note of your key reflections from steps 1-7

Step 8 requires you to reflect on your original Statement of Intent and to make any necessary adjustments following your reflections.

Identify 1 or 2 key actions that you commit to within a realistic timescale.

Schedule a date with the **steering group** to review progress and don't forget to celebrate success!!

What are the standout priorities from your discussions in the steps above?

Statement of Intent (AGENDA for Peace):

Action 1 (with timeframe):

Action 2 (with timeframe):

Date to review progress:

Example of Practice: Shared Agenda for Peace involving Shared Learning Partnerships of two community/youth work groups

Shared Learning through Youth Work involves **two or more groups**/organisations, working together to provide opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to be educated together through youth work methodology. It is also a 'shared agenda' as it requires two or more youth work organisations working in a planned and coordinated way over a one-year period.

Having a 'shared agenda' means that two or more youth groups work together to improve community relations, enabling young people to meet and build relationships with other different and diverse young people. This concept aligns with the Shared Education Act 2016 in Northern Ireland.

Preparation

As part of a **Shared AGENDA for Peace**, two local groups from different backgrounds unite in their commitment to improve contact and build good relations across their communities. The Shared Learning programme should include young people, volunteers/youth workers and management committees/boards.

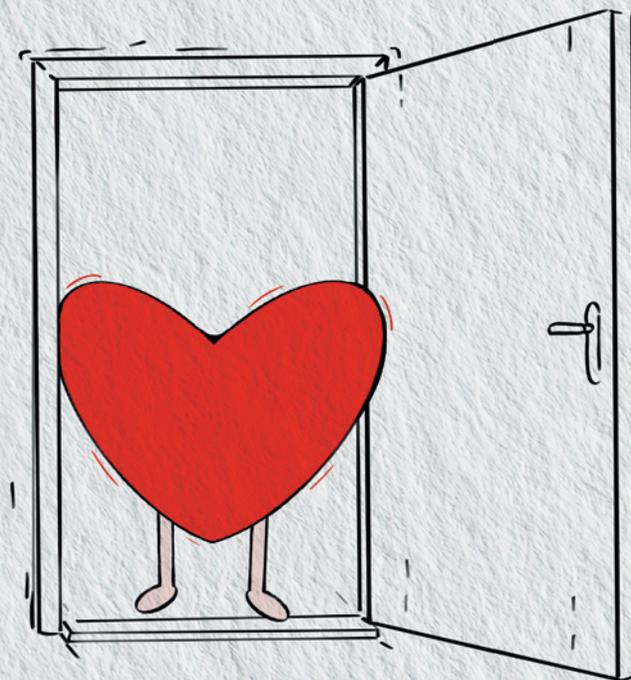
Each group will follow a process tailored to their context, requiring **courageous leadership** that aspires to building peace. The timeline for this joined initiative will be set by the groups together.

Each group will identify 6-8 representatives involving young people, volunteers/youth workers and committee members (or equivalent) to form a **steering group**. This steering group will oversee the Agenda for Peace framework, to identify need and to develop the action plan for peace including how this is communicated and implemented within each of their organisations.

If possible, an external **facilitator** may be used to guide the process, manage discussions, and support the action plan. The facilitator should have some understanding of the local community.

On completing their specific action plans, each group shares this with one another to support **transparency** in purpose, expectation and outcomes. Each group can then identify future opportunities for shared contact and shared learning together aligned to their action plans. This also helps groups to develop an agreement or informal contract.

On completion of the Shared Learning programme with the two local groups, it is important to **share success and document key learning and outcomes. Building in a celebration and consider potential momentum for further collaboration.**

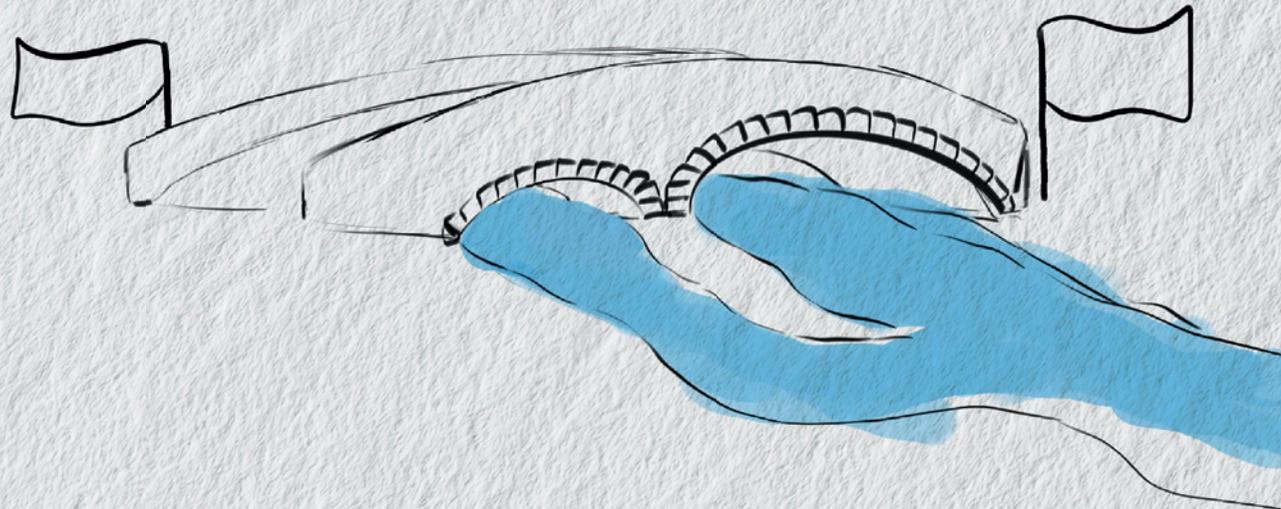


YouthAction

NORTHERN IRELAND

YouthAction Northern Ireland,
14 College Square North,
Belfast, BT1 6AS
Telephone: 02890240551

Charity Number NIC106365
Company limited by guarantee NI035317



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Support with editorial from Sarah Kane and Sheila Morris
Illustrations by El Schaezle and Mark Revels
Printing by Three Creative