

YouthAction

NORTHERN IRELAND

Young people leading change
for a fair and inclusive world.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Silver

Challenging Inequalities | Promoting Inclusion | Improving Life Chances | Inspiring Youth Activism

Through youth work and youth art methodologies, young people have benefited from:

1. Improved Health and Well-Being.
2. Creative Expression.
3. Life and Work Skills and Leadership.
4. Activism and Peace Building.

A defining feature of our work in 2025 was its commitment to empowering young people as changemakers. Across all programme areas, young people were supported not only to develop personally but to influence policy, raise awareness of key social issues, and take action on matters affecting their lives. Examples included the launch of local and regional **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Manifestos** and the introduction of the **SHINE Project** to improve access to arts participation for young people with disabilities.

Improving young people's health and well-being

In 2025, 4,761 young people from diverse backgrounds benefitted from youth work and youth arts programming that has improved their health and well-being. This included:

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Launched in February 2025, the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Programme, engaged more than 200+ young people to explore gender equality, consent, healthy relationships and shared responsibility for preventing violence. Young people co-produced podcasts, films and a series of youth-led manifestos advocating for safer communities, while participants reported increased awareness, understanding and confidence to challenge harmful behaviours and seek support.

"Ending violence against women and girls is everyone's responsibility. As a young man, I can stand up to help girls. I know what I can do to make girls feel safe at night. I know violence is wrong in any way and that you can deal with things differently."



OUR GENERATION

The Our Generation Programme further strengthened wellbeing outcomes, with **378** young people participating in LIFEMAPS and PALS wellbeing training and achieving **406** accredited outcomes. Leadership opportunities and residential experiences, including a Tall Ships voyage around Northern Ireland, helped participants develop confidence, build positive relationships and strengthen emotional resilience.

"Helped me be able to speak and be aware of my leadership skills. I feel more confident in myself. If I can meet these lads and get on so well with them, I can get on with anyone."

Independent research by Dr Tara O'Neill, Queen's University Belfast (2026) recognised the programme's success in supporting young people as mental health ambassadors, advocates and leaders. *"Young people are being supported through leadership pathways, peer support roles, advocacy training, public engagement opportunities, youth-led research and campaigning activity... these are enabling participants to take on visible and meaningful leadership roles within their communities."*



Increasing young people's creative expression

The Rainbow School of Performing Arts

YouthAction NI continued to utilise the arts as a vehicle for inclusion, personal growth and connection, enabling young people to develop their talents, express their identities and strengthen their sense of belonging within their communities.

550 young people participated weekly in drama, dance, musical theatre and technical theatre programmes, building confidence, developing skills and fostering a strong sense of belonging.

Young performers showcased their talents through productions including *Gold Medal Mary*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Chicago*, and the annual Christmas pantomime, *Snow White and the Black Forest Gateau*. Feedback from participants and parents highlighted the transformative impact of the arts on confidence, wellbeing and social connection. For many young people, Rainbow Factory provided a safe and supportive environment where they felt accepted, valued and able to be themselves.

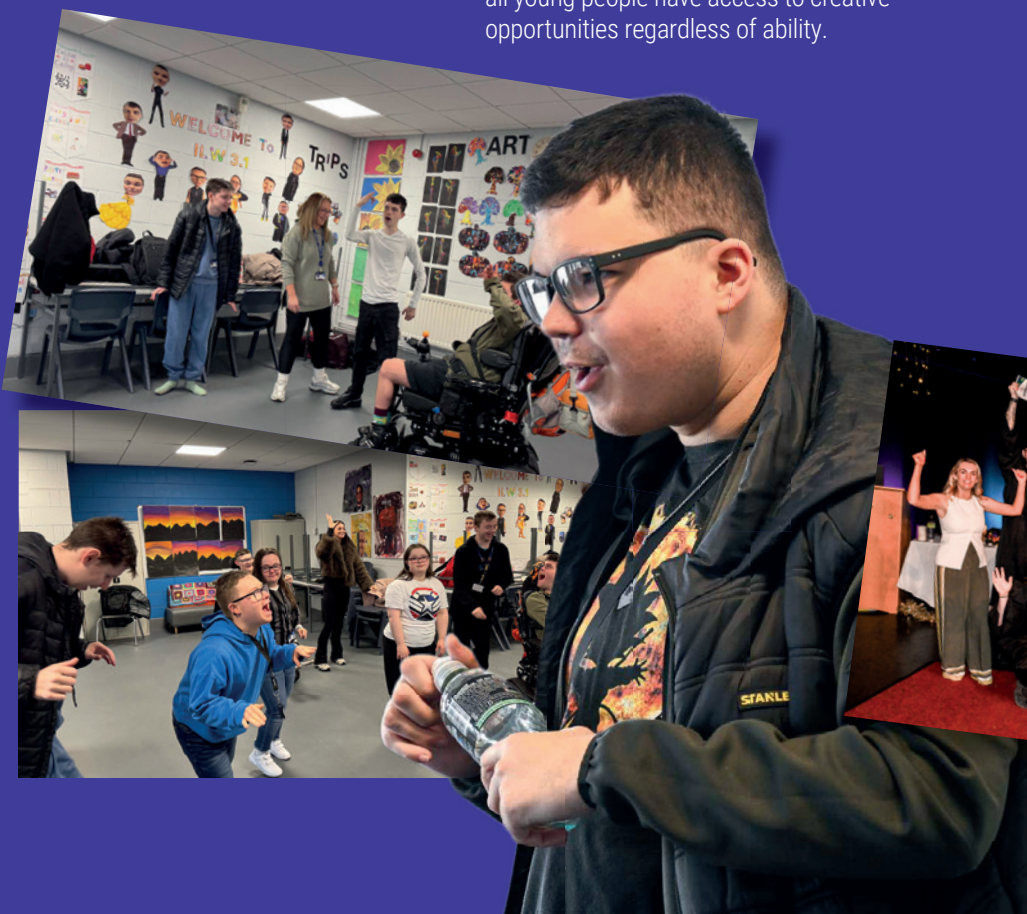
"Rainbow has been his saving grace. He moved schools and has been finding it really hard to fit in. In Rainbow he has found a second family." (Rainbow Factory parent)

Youth Arts: Celebrating Inclusion and Diversity

YouthAction NI continued to widen access to arts participation, including through a satellite programme in Ballymena that supports engagement from young people from ethnic minority communities.

"YouthAction has provided a welcoming environment for our ethnic minority groups—most notably the Romanian community—offering a safe haven where equality and artistic development flourish." (Youth Arts Co-ordinator, Simona Boriceanu)

A significant milestone was the launch of the **SHINE** Project in October 2025, delivered in partnership with USEL, Cedar Foundation, Belfast Met, Sense and YouthAction NI. SHINE was established to increase opportunities for young people aged 10-25 with moderate to severe disabilities to participate in high-quality performing arts experiences. Through accessible workshops led by professional tutors, participants developed creativity, confidence, communication and teamwork skills in inclusive and supportive settings. During its first year, the project engaged more than 30 young people, demonstrating the value of ensuring that all young people have access to creative opportunities regardless of ability.



Building young people's life and work skills

Pathways Programme

In June 2025 YouthAction NI launched its Pathways Programme, offering young people a pathway to training and employment opportunities no matter what age or stage of their journey. From the Youth Achievement Awards scheme to OCNNI Levels 1, 2 and 3 training and the Ulster University Level 4 Certificate in Youth Studies.

Youth Achievement Awards

In 2025 we relaunched the Youth Achievement Awards scheme, endorsed by OCNNI. **110 young people** registered for the revamped scheme which recognises young people participation in youth work programmes. From **Bronze and Silver Levels** which recognise and inspire leadership amongst young people to **Gold and Platinum Levels** awarding young people for being changemakers in their communities.



Accredited youth work training

418 young people, young leaders and volunteers engaged in quality training provision.

- **220 young people registered for an OCNNI Level 1 qualification** in Youth Work Practice, Barista Skills, Progression to Employment, Peer Mentoring and Diversity and Good Relations.
- **109 young people registered for an OCNNI Level 2 qualification** in Youth Work Practice, Animation, Event Management and Community Relations, Equality and Diversity.
- **66 leaders from across 44 local communities achieved an OCNNI Level 3 qualification in Youth Work** through a partnership with Youth Link and BYTES.
- **23 students from across 18 local communities graduated from our Ulster University Level 4 Certificate in Youth Studies course.**

"The Certificate in Community Youth Studies is strongly rooted in youth work values, creating a supportive learning environment that effectively connects theory and practice. The quality of teaching, assessment and student achievement was of a very high standard, comparable to, and in some cases exceeding, similar programmes at this level." (Dr Sasha Noonan External Examiner)

YouthStart

The YouthStart Consortium of 7 leading youth work charities continued to support economically inactive young people furthest from the labour market. This included care experienced young people, young homeless people, young mothers, young refugees and asylum seekers, young people with disabilities.

In 2025, Year 2 of YouthStart, the consortium **supported 1071 young people, progressing 788 into work, education or training.**

"This group has helped me so much. I was lost after my son was born. Joining the group helped me see I'm not on my own. My life isn't over just because I'm a young mum."

"When I moved to this country, I was no one. Thanks to YouthStart I feel I am someone."



Leadership, Activism and Peace Building

AMPLIFY, Let's Talk Peace and **Shared Agenda for Peace** programmes engaged hundreds of young people from different backgrounds to address the legacy of conflict, sectarianism and racism in Northern Ireland. This was done through groupwork and connector events to meet young people from different backgrounds.

Participants reported significant personal growth through these experiences:

"I learnt to love thy neighbour as thyself, even if we have differences."

"This project has increased my knowledge of different cultures."

"Amplify lets us express ourselves without hiding who we are."

Youth-led activism

One of the year's most powerful examples of youth-led activism was a campaign by a young participant that resulted in Strabane's first PRIDE sign being installed after two years of advocacy work.

"Persistence makes change happen."

Young people led social action projects, participated in peacebuilding programmes and contributed to government consultations. In November, the AMPLIFY team led a consultation on behalf of Department of Environment and Rural Affairs on their new Draft Climate Action Plan. 90 young people took part across 3 locations, Belfast, Derry/L'Derry and

Enniskillen. The majority agreed that climate change is an issue that affects their lives and communities. They also agreed that they care deeply about climate change and want to play an active role in shaping solutions. However, they identified barriers to participation, including inaccessible language, lack of awareness, and limited confidence in government engagement with youth voices.

Young people's ASKS:

- **Practical, community-based solutions** (tree planting, active travel, affordable renewable energy).
- **Systemic change** (greater corporate accountability, reduced reliance on fossil fuels, investment in sustainable infrastructure).
- **Independent oversight** through the creation of an Environmental Protection Agency.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs remarked *"Youth voices provide valuable insight into the urgency, creativity, and fairness that should underpin Northern Ireland's Climate Action Plan."*

Investing in our membership

Peace-building

- We invested in **296 communities** to embed quality youth work/youth arts to support young people's development.
- **184 local members** have been supported with Quality Assurance and Reporting, Safeguarding, HR support, Finance support, Small grant support, Workforce/Volunteer training, Curriculum and Programme support, Good Governance, Insurance services, Representation and Advocacy, Communication and Connection and Networking.
- A Good Governance Toolkit for local and regional groups/organisations was rolled out through the National Lottery Community Fund 'Access to Resilience' initiative.
- Our **membership conference** (and AGM) was held on 6th November 2025 focussing on Human Rights approaches through youth work.



Building and growing strategic partnership

We built and nurtured various local and strategic partnerships including:

- CROSS-NATIONS strategy: YouthAction, UK Youth, Youth CYMRU, Youth Scotland and Youth Work Ireland and a cross nations leadership retreat with senior and middle leaders/managers and young people (October 2025) resulting in clear calls to action. We were actively involved in the Regional Impact and National Impact Network Leaders and Standing Together in Solidarity to address racism.
- Youth Employability YOUTHSTART: Consortium of 7 youth work charities: YouthAction, Include Youth, Springboard Opps, Start 360, Bytes, King's Trust and NI Youth Forum.
- Peace partnerships including Hume Foundation, Action Mental Health, Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, Patrician YC, NI Youth Forum, King's Trust, Community Sports Network. Corrymeela Community, Bytes, Integrated Education Fund, Youth Link, YMCA Ireland, Fighting Words Ireland, Community Dialogue, YouthBank International and Peace Players.
- Business/Corporate sponsors including Ulster Bank Ltd, Institute of Directors, Rotary Club (Belfast), JCI, Coca Cola HBC, Graham Construction Citi group, PWC, Belfast Harbour, Diageo, BIBA NI Young Brokers and Valero.

Finances

Raising Funds

We raised **£2,163,584** to achieve high quality youth work/youth arts and value for money outcomes.

We received investment from UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£6m over 2 years), PEACEPLUS 3.2 Youth Call (£8.1m over 4 years), EA Regional Strategic (£150,000 per year), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Reconciliation Fund (£97,000 per year) and Peace Plus: 3.1 Shared Learning Together (£3.4m over 4 years).

Donate

To enable us to meet the needs of young people and communities we need your support. Your donation helps young people to realise their potential and improve their futures.

Donate here: www.youthaction.org

Other ways to support

Visit our website for information on fundraising events and donations of time, skills or gifts in kind.

Governance

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Charitable Income:

£2,155,664

Charitable Expenditure:

£2,155,038