

**Research-based  
analysis of European  
youth programmes**

# **RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE ROLE OF DIGITALISATION IN YOUTH WORK AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-DIGI)**

## **REPORTING TEMPLATE**

24TH JAN 2024

GUIDANCE FOR NATIONAL PARTNERS  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MODULE 4

Case studies exploring successful digital youth work  
approaches, formats, methodologies and settings  
within the context of the European youth programmes and beyond



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# 1. REPORTING GUIDELINES

## 1.1. A QUICK RECAP: TASK DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

Your task was to conduct case studies of approaches to digital work with young people, including in the context of the European youth programmes, but also from outside the youth sector, to explore successful approaches, formats, methodologies and settings of digital youth work. A case study is based on two focus group interviews: one with the project team and one with the participants, that is young people. In the following, we kindly ask you to report your research findings.

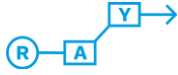
For more details about the research project see the *case study implementation guidelines*.

## 1.2. HOW-TO

- First things first: Since there are different levels of experience working with RAY in our network, this template is rather detailed. It is supposed to help and not to limit you. Please feel free to change the template according to your needs!
- Your reporting will consist of two parts: **several case reports** (based on two focus groups) and **one analytic summary** that aims at identifying patterns, differences, blind spots, highlights etc. across the various case studies you conducted.
- Within the reporting of your case studies the main task is to summarize your interviews. However, this is already an important and sensitive step: your emphasis on certain aspects and your rephrasing is a first interpretation of the material. Don't be afraid taking decisions, focus on the important things, leave things out etc. But try to stay true to the interview you conducted. In the analytic parts (comparative analysis within each case study + analytic summary) however, your interpretation is warmly welcome.
- The reporting templates resemble the structure of the interview guidelines you received earlier. However, you don't have to cover all aspects in your report if, based on the interview you conducted, it doesn't make sense to you.
- Illustrative and concise quotes from your interviewees are highly appreciated.
- Taking secondary literature in account is appreciated but not a requirement.
- If you conducted more than three case studies, please kindly insert the amount of additional reporting schemes you need. **We kindly ask you to only submit one document that contains all your case reports.**
- The *light blue, italic passages* are explanations/ guidelines. Please kindly delete those parts before submitting your report.
- Updating the table of contents of this document before submitting your report is highly appreciated.
- Please submit your national reports both as .doc/ .docx **and** .pdf.
- Changing the name of the document (for example like this: RAY DIGI National Report Ireland) before submitting is highly appreciated.
- **Please submit your report latest by end of February 2023.**

## 1.3. RESEARCH ETHICS AND DATA PROTECTION

The RAY Network uses the *Code of Ethics* of the *International Sociological Association (ISA)* as a guiding ethics framework, which is available online at [www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org) in English, French and Spanish. National research partners may choose to use a non-conflicting code



of ethics as a reference, for example the code of ethics of their national association of sociology.

National research partners are responsible to ensure compliance with the national implementation of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) during their work on the national research components, whereas the transnational research team will ensure compliance during its work on the transnational research components.



## 2. REPORTING TEMPLATE

### 2.1. KEY INFORMATION

**Country:** *Ireland*

**National Contact/ Coordinator:** *Celine Martin, Léargas*

**National researcher/ researchers:** *Jen Hesnan*

### 2.2. CASE REPORT 1

#### 2.2.1. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT

**Project name:** *SPICE – Social Cohesion, Participation and Inclusion through Cultural Engagement* ( <https://spice-h2020.eu/>)  
*Deep Viewpoints developed with the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Open University Knowledge Initiative – <https://spice.kmi.open.ac.uk>*

**European Organisations involved:**

*The SPICE project is supported by the European Commission Horizon 2020 Programme.*

**European Partners:**

- *University of Bologna*
- *University of Aalto*
- *Design Museum Helsinki*
- *University of Aalborg*
- *Irish Museum of Modern Art*
- *GVAM Interactive Guides S.L.*
- *PadaOne Games*
- *Complutense University of Madrid*
- *University of Turin*
- *Fondazione Torino Musei*
- *CELI Language Technology*
- *University of Haifa and Hecht Museum*

*In Ireland, facilitators from the Irish Museum of Modern Arts ran youth development workshops with a wide range of youth development organisations and representative organisations working with young people who were marginalised from accessing cultural citizenship.*

*These organisations include but are not limited to – Helium Arts, Oberstown Detention Centre, Black and Irish, Open University Knowledge Media Institute, Youth Reach, and other national youth work participants such as young people in Direct Provision, Young people from the Travelling Community, young people with health issues.*

- *Links: <https://helium.ie/> – Helium Arts – response to Deep*



Viewpoint interactions available here - <https://spice.kmi.op>

- [en.ac.uk/demos/imma-slow-looking/home](https://en.ac.uk/demos/imma-slow-looking/home)
- <https://www.oberstown.com/> - Oberstown Children Detention Campus
- <https://blackandirish.com/> - Black and Irish
- <https://kmi.open.ac.uk/news/19830> - Open University Knowledge Media Outputs - Developers and designers of Deep Viewpoints.
- Apollo Youth Panel response on Deep Viewpoint here - <https://spice.kmi.open.ac.uk/demos/imma-slow-looking/home>

**Funding number:** N/A

**Overall budget:** <https://spice-h2020.eu/deliverables/> - Budget N/A

**Project description:***Social cohesion, Participation, and Inclusion through Cultural Engagement*

The aim of the SPICE project is to develop new technologies and methods that enable groups at risk of exclusion to actively participate in culture through a process termed citizen curation.

Citizens, engaging in the project are supported in taking part in curatorially-inspired activities such as collecting, storytelling and exhibition design. The technology entitled “Deep Viewpoint” developed within the project enabled citizen groups to share their own collective view on life through culture and heritage, as well as understand and appreciate the alternative cultural viewpoints of other groups.

The process of citizen curation was co-designed and evaluated through case studies in five countries: Finland, Ireland, Spain, Italy and Israel. In each case study a museum serves as a hub to support citizen curation with specific target groups including older people, asylum seekers, young people living with illness, Deaf people and children from different religious and secular communities.

The SPICE project was coordinated by The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) at a National Context in Ireland. It leveraged digital tools developed in collaboration with the Open University Knowledge Media Institute to engage audiences in IMMA’s art collection. Enabling them to interpret and respond to artworks digitally. Without direct reference to within the project literature of the SPICE Project, it was through this process that SPICE delivered a non-formal engagement process with youth development organisations in Ireland. Leveraging the digital dimensions of youth work and addressing needs between non-formal education and formal education processes to engage young people in cultural citizenship. This highlighted the gap between young people's needs and the realities of youth work. Emphasising values underpinned such as cultural democracy, citizen curation and the evolving meanings of art within a digital space.

**2.2.2. SUMMARY PROJECT TEAMS**

### 2.2.2.1. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

National Researcher, Jen Hesnan, from Léargas National Agency for Erasmus+ in Ireland interviewed representatives from the Irish Museum of Modern Art Project Team for SPICE. This gained closer insight into the Digital Youth Work and developed a case study for the RAY DIGI research project, (<https://www.researchyouth.net/projects/digi/>). This included both the Project Team within Spice at an Irish National Level, and the experience of one of the groups of young people that took part in the project. The project team who took part in the interview consisted of - Adam Stoneman, The Spice Project researcher from 2021 - 2023 and Mark Maguire, The Assistant Curator, Schools and Families with the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)

The project Team in IMMA aimed to diversify museum audiences and make art more relevant to a broader public. Initially they wanted to find new research avenues, secure funding to engage with a wider audience, and develop stronger links with academic and museum partners across Europe. The project leveraged a digital tool called “Deep Viewpoint” that was developed by their partners in the Open University Knowledge Institute. This tool enabled IMMA to engage youth participants, supported by youth workers or adult mentors from key youth organisations across Ireland. The project team developed a hybrid approach to their digital engagement points with youth groups. Working online and in person to select, interpret, reflect, and respond to artworks within IMMA’s collection. This led to a youth curated exhibition that could be showcased both online and within the museum context.

This hybrid approach ensured that the project team could include young people who had physical access barriers such as lifelong health conditions. Whilst also adapting project delivery to include young people that were in situations where access to online environments became a barrier, such as young participants in Ireland’s only detention centre campus for young people under 18.

*“After the lockdowns, it was felt strongly by us that there was digital fatigue setting in and we were all recognising the value of being together physically, we were recognising the encounter with Art in the museum space. We had a very hybrid approach that allowed us maximum flexibility” (Mark Maguire, Assistant Curator, Schools and Families with IMMA - The Irish Museum of Modern Art.)*

Engagement in the digital tool was developed using 3 modes - Onsite within the museum, directly within a youth organisation context using digital tools in person, and online for young people who preferred to meet online.

*“These 3 approaches allowed us to work with communities where they were at - for example with a group of Irish Travellers we did one offsite and we then agreed to meet online. We had been going into the project and we had thought a lot about how we might communicate with these groups at the start of the SPICE project” (Adam Stoneman, The Spice Project Researcher from 2021 - 2023)*





The pedagogical approach encompassed elements of cultural democracy, aiming to widen participation in cultural activities and make museums more relevant to the public at large. The project emphasised the value of *slow looking* and visual thinking strategies, using open-ended questions and supplementary information to stimulate responses and engagement with artworks. Offline and online modes were combined, employing a hybrid approach to maximise flexibility and adapt to participants' needs.

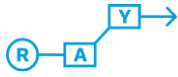
This project operated in a diverse range of educational settings, such as youth organisations and detention centres, catering to specific groups facing physical and social barriers to museum access. The pedagogical approach encompassed elements of cultural democracy, aiming to widen participation in cultural activities and give opportunity to explore how modern artworks are relevant to the public at large. The project emphasised the value of slow looking and visual thinking strategies, using open-ended questions and supplementary information to stimulate responses and engagement with artworks. When successful offline and online modes of engagement were combined - employing a hybrid approach to maximise flexibility and adapt to participants' needs became inherently key to the success factors of the project aims.

*“This was about working with people and the carers; it was to slow down the process of engaging with an artwork - asking open-ended questions people to respond to and then from that what moved beyond just a visual thinking strategy was moving it into the area of supplementary information from the tour guide. Something else that maybe stimulates their response. Bring together what the person looking at the artwork has experienced or responded to.” (Mark Maguire, Assistant Curator, Schools and Families with IMMA - The Irish Museum of Modern Art.)*

The digital dimension of the project played a significant role. Initially, the intention was to create an interactive software platform that would enable people to interpret and respond to artworks. The web app "Deep Viewpoint" allowed participants to add their perspectives and responses to the artworks. The digital aspect served as a tool for selecting, interpreting, and sharing artworks. It facilitated interaction, connectivity, and interactivity among participants, allowing for a diverse range of responses. The project leveraged an inherent digital fluency of young people, particularly those that were facing natural barriers to access a public space. This made it an effective medium for engaging and collaborating with young people. However, it did not solely rely on digital. The project considered the needs of the marginalised social groups it was working with, responding to their requests, and creating connection opportunities that were easy for them.

*“The digital element of this project was used as a tool in the project. It was a very efficient way of selecting and interpreting Artworks, engaging with young people. I was always thinking. Could I do this non-digitally first, if there is a better way of doing it non digitally, we should always consider that as well.” (Adam Stoneman The Spice Project Researcher from 2021 - 2023)*

The project's success can be attributed to several key factors. Strong relationships with communities and youth organisations formed the foundation of the project. The institutional support and emphasis on IMMA as a radically public space played a crucial role in driving the project forward. The collaborative nature of the project, with



a focused team of partners working closely together, allowed for quicker decision-making and more targeted design. The project benefited from the support of the EU Horizon 2020 funding, which provided resources, including workforce, equipment, knowledge, skills, spaces, and funding. Overcoming challenges associated with digital youth work, such as digital fatigue, was made possible by the project's adaptability and hybrid approach. The success of the project was also measured by the enriching experiences of the young participants and their ability to actively contribute to the digital dimension of the project.

“Overall, the European Commission-funded projects that by their nature have an EU spread. Which allowed us to connect with other organisations and see how they were working with young people and the kind of facilities that they have. The support mechanism for peer collaboration expands your development - the international dimension is major in that way. The success of the project hinged on the relationships.” (*Mark Maguire, Assistant Curator, Schools and Families with IMMA - The Irish Museum of Modern Art.*)

The project team thought seriously about how education happens and how young people learn when designing the project. Developing stronger relationships with existing youth organisation partners and creating enduring relationships with newer youth organisations to the project. For digital efficiency - The Irish project team in the Museum of Modern Art and the UK partner at the Open University Knowledge Centre worked closely on the development of the main digital platform “Deep Viewpoints”. It was noted that when developing a platform within a digital youth work context - it is key to have a tighter team of max 4 participants with both knowledge in developing software and knowledge in youth development priorities. To ensure a responsive e-design team.

### 2.2.2.2. EXPLORING DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

When reflecting on Digital Youth Work in a wider context. The project team reviewed the potential conflicts of moving youth work online, whilst continuing to preserve non-formal education's unique characteristics. They addressed digital citizenship and how ensuring access to digital tools are important considerations for European development projects that focus on engaging young people. Successful approaches noted by the project team involve capturing young people's viewpoints and responses to artworks over time. Reflecting on the evolving meaning of creativity, art and the digital world.

#### **Exploring Digital Youth Work: Exploring the Potential Conflict between Non-Formal Education and Digital Youth Work:**

Project team members highlighted the importance of maintaining the principles and values of non-formal education while integrating digital tools and approaches. They emphasised that digital interfaces should not only lean towards replicating formal education structures but should also allow for open-ended, process-oriented engagement - like that of in-person youth work.

*"I think there can be a tendency in which digital interfaces can reinforce formal ways of learning." (Adam Stoneman The Spice Project researcher from 2021 - 2023)*



Project team members noted the challenge that lies in balancing the structured nature of digital tools with the creative and exploratory aspects of non-formal education. The importance of having a solid foundation in traditional youth work before venturing into digital youth work was highlighted.

There is a need to maintain relationships with youth groups locally and to listen to the youth participants and expert youth workers within these local contexts. Find appropriate points to integrate digital tools and approaches based on the needs of the young people. Whilst digital engagement can enhance non-formal education, the project team reflected on the need to be cautious about insisting on a purely digital approach. The role of the facilitator remains crucial within the Digital Youth Work context, especially when working with marginalised or underserved youth, they require support, guidance, and human interaction to build confidence and navigate the digital space.

"We have to maintain the relationships with the spread of youth groups that we have engaged with, and then we have to find the correct points in which the digital area will be appropriate." (*Mark Maguire, Assistant Curator, Schools and Families with IMMA - The Irish Museum of Modern Art.*)

### **Exploring the Potential Gap between Young People's Digital Needs and Youth Work Realities:**

Young people have specific expectations and preferences when it comes to digital engagement. However, youth work practices may not always meet these needs due to limited resources, infrastructure, or digital skills. It was suggested by the project team that youth work practitioners should continuously assess and address these gaps by upskilling themselves, ensuring access to necessary digital resources, and adapting their practices to align with young people's digital needs.

"There are a lot of basic tools and infrastructural needs for teachers' staff and youth workers needed" (Adam Stoneman the Spice Project researcher from 2021 - 2023)

Recognising that there can be a gap between young people's digital needs, and the current realities of youth work was one of the outcomes for the project team on their Digital Youth Work project. They noted the importance of assessing the digital needs of young people and ensuring access to necessary resources and infrastructure. A potential gap identified was the lack of digital citizenship education, where young people may not fully understand concepts such as privacy, data protection, and ownership of personal information. It was suggested that youth organisations should address this gap by incorporating digital citizenship education into their programs.

### **Exploring Successful Approaches to Digital Youth Work:**

The interviewees shared insights into successful approaches to digital youth work. They emphasised the importance of recognising the role of digital tools as a means to achieve specific goals rather than an end in themselves.

Co-designing digital activities and platforms with young people, allowing for self-expression, collaboration, and empowerment, emerged as effective strategies. The interviewees also highlighted the significance of human facilitation and the value of



maintaining the core principles of youth work in the digital realm. They emphasised the need to consider digital citizenship and educate young people about the responsible use of digital platforms. Highlighting the need to involve young people in shaping digital youth work initiatives. They emphasised the importance of capturing the voice and viewpoints of young people and creating mechanisms for their inputs. Successful approaches included co-designing digital activities with young people, providing open-ended and process-oriented engagement, and integrating arts and culture into digital youth work.

Ultimately the project team considered digital tools to achieve specific goals that do not overshadow the core principles of youth work. They stressed the value of creativity, imagination, and the involvement of cultural organisations in digital youth work.

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### 2.2.3. Summary Participants

#### 2.2.2.3. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

For this RAY DIGI research case study, the Irish National Researcher, Jen Hesnan from, Léargas National Agency for Ireland Erasmus+ interviewed a young person from the Youth Advisory Group at Helium Arts ([www.helium.ie](http://www.helium.ie)) and Youth Mentors that supported young people during the workshop that took place with the Irish Museum of Modern Art. This focus group also included the Helium Arts Online Programme Co-ordinator to add voice to future thinking for Helium Arts about digital transformation and youth engagement. Helium Arts are an organisation whose mission is to generate creative encounters for children with lifelong health conditions to improve wellbeing and creativity.

The Youth Advisory Group (YAG) for Helium Arts was created so young people could help influence decision making about their own creative wellbeing, within and beyond participation in Helium's programmes.

Further information on the impact of the Youth Advisory Group- and case studies from some of the youth participants is available on Helium Arts Website - <https://helium.ie/about/YAG/>.

Participants engaged in online activities facilitated by Adam Stoneman, The Spice Project Researcher from 2021 - 2023 at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. During these online engagements they examined various pieces of art, discussed them and shared descriptive terms. Curating them into online collections as a group. These young people participating were engaged in an online youth development activity that connected them to art and to each other, allowing them to discuss and collectively reflect on artworks within the Irish Museum of Modern Art collection that felt poignant or relevant to them. This was carried out in a collaborative manner, facilitated and supported by the YAG Youth Worker support at Helium Arts, and the SPICE project Researcher.



“We were on an online call and talking with Adam - he oversees the project there and we had access to a digital Google-style scan of the exhibit - we were told to go around and look at the ones that spoke to us and what they were saying to us as people. Everyone had a different opinion on it which was great - we sort of started sending out descriptive terms. I still have it written down - it was - “Uncomfortably Beautiful” for a lot of the works there because the one that stood out to me was like a hospital ward. Because it had a projection. It was fascinating to look at how different people look at it and how I was looking at it. After that we had a discussion as a group where we picked out our favourite piece and everyone had different pieces and we discussed it on a call - we were filling in a document as well as speaking online, looking at the platform and messaging each other on WhatsApp in our own social group chat.” (Young Participant in the SPICE Project from YAG with Helium Arts)

The online programme for the Youth Advisory Group at Helium arts is a new extension of the rising response from online interactions during Covid-19. Helium was working digitally because lots of young people joined the programme and young people, they work with in different situations really enjoy meeting peers, but in many cases cannot meet in person. The things that happen at Helium’s YAG group are that you meet people, you get talking and then about different topics, and then friendships begin to form outside of the group for young people who would otherwise face social isolation.

“We have a group chat with all of us from YAG - we message each other to check in on each other - it's one of those things that you form a friendship through this sort.” (Young Participant, Youth Advisory group at Helium Art)

The motivation for this group of young participants to be involved in this opportunity was presented by the Youth Advisory Group’s youth Facilitator - Monica. The engagement with Adam, the SPICE Project Researcher was an enriching experience for them. The young participants noted the value of being invited to engage with an institution such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and to feel heard. The expert facilitation online, was noted by their project leader to lead to deep discussions within groups and that the fascination with specific art pieces fostered the young people participating in the project to have unique perspectives and discussions about the artwork and their own lives.

“There was another (photo) with the hearts of some animal wrapped around a person's neck - we were all fascinated by that one piece. Everyone mentioned it in their little list that they had. No one knew how to feel about it, but it was amazing to look at. We all kind of had a similar idea coming out of it from our perspectives. It’s interesting that that occurred when we saw the hospital in the room with a bed - We always say that we don't let our conditions define us in YAG - it was interesting the fact that we all saw one piece and thought ‘oh that makes me feel that way” (Youth Participant, Youth Advisory Board at Helium Arts)

Digital Access to a platform played a crucial role in making the project inclusive. Utilising the Irish museum of modern arts online platform ‘Deep Viewpoints’ for sharing thoughts and discussions means that the digital technology facilitated Helium Arts as a youth organisation to document their ideas and responses to artworks. Participants in the workshops with IMMA’s SPICE project Researcher noted that the



key link to having a human element to the project within the digital space was vital for success.

“I was impressed with the discussion that broke out, it was a deep viewpoint that was being brought up - in some ways I would like it to have been longer - we did return to it later that April after the project, but I wish we could have had more time to revisit it. - The stuff that was mentioned, documented, the website, zoom, group chat - we had been using all of this for the delivery. It was the most important bit because it was digital - and not everyone would have made it otherwise. It would have been worse if we didn't go digital as it would have made it not inclusive. “(Youth Advisory group Facilitator, Helium Arts)

The key factors of success within this project interaction were that participation was derived from human relationships, interactions and positive attitudes. There was an established sense of trust, inclusivity and a sense of belonging within the group. This was partly due to the groundwork initiated by the youth worker before any interaction with the SPICE project researcher. The digital access ensured inclusivity and engagement for all participants. But the attention the groups needs and expert facilitation from the SPICE project team all greatly contributed to the project's success.

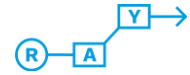
“It was meaningful because of Human Relationships and Interactions

- The relationship with Monica (YAG Coordinator)
- That Adam is a good guy
- It's nice and meaningful when nice people are having good conversations - it's key to anything.
- Everyone in the group are friends
- We are all happy to be there
- We want to be there
- We want to help each other
- The digital dimension is key to inclusion “(Youth Participant, Youth Advisory Group, Helium Arts)

#### 2.2.2.4. EXPLORING DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Participants described enjoyable online activities, including online Dungeon and Dragon groups and socialising with their friends through virtual reality. Online interactions helped maintain connections during lockdown situations during Covid-19 and for many of these young people still do. The Youth Advisory Group provides an essential safe and vetted space that provides young people with the opportunity to maintain social connections, interact and connect with peers. A focus on consistency of building relationships over time, with regular facilitated meetings and growing membership of the youth advisory group was key.

“Group settings like YAG are the safest way to meet people. Online is a bit like the wild west sometimes. When YAG (Our youth group online) comes along and YAG is



vetted you know that it is safe, and you can meet people that are like minded.” (Young Participant, Youth Advisory Group, Helium Arts)

The importance of regular meetings and building a group up from a strong foundation is key. Before their online group, this online youth setting had been developing their Charter together both in person and directly. This is ever evolving and responding to the needs of the various participants within the group. The group also noted the need for a successful digital youth work project to balance the need for structure and unstructured time within a session. There is a fluctuation between formal and non-formal approaches. Active participation for young people in the programme design and decision-making is essential to respond to young people’s needs.

“From a programme perspective as a programme coordinator - I feel it is key that we are consistent and persistent. Regular meetings, there is a ground that people build from. It is important that something is in place that it doesn't stop-start - relationships build.”

(Helium Arts Online Programme Co-ordinator)

From the perspective of the project participants, successful approaches to Digital Youth Work require voluntary participation, consent and the development of a safe space. The importance of structured discussions points, a flexible approach to the needs of the young people, and consistent engagement were all mentioned by project participants. The role of technology was highlighted by the youth participants and by the youth workers as a key element in fostering emotional connections for those who struggle from regular in-person meetings for various reasons.

A key element of successful approaches in youth work is the consideration of young people's needs, and regardless of the medium this is echoed where digital technologies are being utilised as a tool, content or an activity within a youth development project such as this. A sense of collective youth voice seemed so important to the young people, and the ability to adapt their programme delivery contributed to the successful inclusion of most of the young people.

“A sense of consent - If someone doesn't want to talk about a topic, we will say Right ok - Safe Space - YAG are working on a charter together - We have been doing the Charter for years and we are constantly updating it. It was the first thing we did. This is the old way - how can we make it better” (Young Participant, Youth Advisory Group, Helium Arts)

### 2.2.3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both focus group interviews of this case study took place within the National Irish context of a broader European funded project that focused on a key priority of cultural citizenship and citizen curation. This case study was a deeper snapshot of a wide-ranging impact project SPICE within a local and national context in Ireland. Both focus group interviews showcase the importance of careful consideration and planning for each interaction online in a youth work context. In both interviews with project team, and project participants - there was a significant element of consideration for trust



building, inclusivity and the human connections that arise in a successful digital youth work project.

It was evident from interviewing the project team that the emphasis on inclusivity in the project design had reached the project participants. The young project participants appreciated the opportunity to express their unique opinions on the artworks, to be seen, and to be heard. This was the intention of the Project Team's original design, and clearly influenced the development of a digital tool for use within the project. On a wider European and national scale project teams noted the influence of relationships on contributing to the successful factors in engaging marginalised young people within a digital youth work context. Trusting and learning from expert youth development workers to contribute to this relationship building in a digital context. The project team's focus is on programme structure and learning, which can sometimes lean itself to be different to the focus for young people on simply enjoying human interaction and online experiences. The young project participants noted the positive effect that developing digitally accessible points of interaction had on providing safe opportunities for them to build relationships.

“I was moved by the conversations - that that doesn't change when you do it digitally”  
(Young Participant, Youth Advisory Group, Helium Arts SPICE Project)

#### 2.2.4. CONCLUSION

The entire Erasmus+ programme focuses on four key priorities: inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environment and fight against climate change, and participation in democratic life. Organisations and participants with fewer opportunities are at the heart of Erasmus+. ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_1507](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1507))

Based on feedback from two focus groups interviewed during this case study - the delivery of the SPICE project within an Irish context was inspired by human relationships and it created meaningful interactions for young people through partnership. The critical role of the Museum and the Open University in the digital transformation of public arts space ensured the inclusivity and participation in this process for marginalised groups. These concepts of trust, inclusivity and programme consistency contributed to a pedagogy of slow looking, reflective practice, structured and unstructured dialogue around public artworks. This leads the researcher to a conclusion whereby within this context, digital youth work practice can be recognised as having a future significance in engaging young people in cultural life and civic society. Taking the time to understand young people's digital habits and their needs, translates into youth work practise a priority for young people's safety, social consistency and active participation within democratic life.





## 1.1. CASE REPORT 2

### 1.1.1. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT

**Project name:** *Foróige Go*

**Organisations involved:** *Foróige*

**Funding number:** *n/a*

**Overall budget:** *n/a*

**Erasmus+ result platform:** *n/a*

**Links:**

<https://www.foroige.ie/our-work/go-digital-youth-work>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/departments/education-practice-and-society/stem-participation-social-justice-research/science-capital-teaching-approach>

<https://www.spatial.io/s/Foroige-Thamarai-Gallery-6448f5cbb5e2d9f8e8074b63?share=6577166151775066914>

**Project description:** *Please briefly describe the project.*

### 1.1.2. SUMMARY PROJECT TEAMS

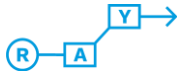
#### 1.1.2.1. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

The Researcher interviewed five representatives from the Foróige Go National Project Team as part of this Case Study for Ray DIGI. Foróige is the leading youth organisation in Ireland and has been working with young people since 1952. Their purpose is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their development and in the development of society.

Interviewees - (Please not as their roles are fast developing these may now have evolved, within the new project Foróige Go)

Aoife - Level UP 3 involves - Smartphone, Film Making Green Screen Movies, Level Up Artificial Intelligence, Creating Makerspaces in Libraries. Digital Programme Coordinator.

Ruairi - Digital Programmes Coordinator - Programme Development Level Up, Library Spaces, International Project with an NGO in India - creating a global mindset for young people/



Megan - Youth Officer with the Thomar Digital Youth Work Programme - Setting up Digital Youth Hubs across several Counties in Ireland, supporting youth workers to upskill, supporting with grants and pop-ups, working with reel life science competition, supporting local partnerships.

Niamh - Training Officer - within the Connect Safety Programme - Programme for 12 - 18-year-olds to promote a safe environment, being positive digital citizen cover topics for Cyber Bullying, Exploring Online relationships, researching for a parent's programmes for 8 to 11-year-olds.

Eoin - Training Officer - Looking at developing the Podcasting aspect of Sound surfers, Music and Songwriting based, the foundation of Sound surfers, listening to young people, developing - storytelling using creative audio projects, what role empathy plays on that. Implementing Digital Strategy - Video editing with using smartphones to create and edit videos. VR project with Music Generation Galway City

Digital youth work has been part of Foróige for over 20 years. Foróige's digital youth work takes many forms under the umbrella brand of Foróige Go - digital skills for what's now and next.

All their digital youth work programmes are designed to facilitate young people to grow their empathy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship. These skills are essential not just to young people's engagement with digital technologies, but also in their day-to-day lives and relationships, supporting their personal and social development, their values, and their ability to connect with others positively.

"We aim to see where this can go and to draw a road map to where we are now. We are advocating and meeting Ministers. Bringing people into VR Spaces, creating Music, development projects and creating awareness. Creating a network of peer-to-peer learning for youth workers where they can learn from each other. Constantly adding to our suite of digital tools and programmes. and linking these new tools back to the needs of young people. IT has to be addressing a need or else we are just playing around with technology. Showing how we can address those in a real way. The idea of playing youth work with them, digital youth workers don't play pool, they put on a VR headset." (Project Team member, Foróige Go)

The newly established Foróige Go project has five main areas of Digital Youth Work

Go Build - GoBuild are a practical tech skills programmes such as coding, robotics, and engineering, supporting young people to get into the nuts and bolts of digital creation.



Go Level Up - GoLevelUp is a creative digital skills and innovation programme, explores animation, digital storyboarding, and design, and introduces young people to digital literacy and digital citizenship.

Go Sonic - GoSonic captures programmes focused on digital audio production, music creation, and podcasting, through the lens of empathy education.

Go Virtual - GoVirtual engages young people in youth work in immersive online spaces, alongside digital engagement of young people in online clubs and e-mentoring.

Go Safely - GoSafely helps young people to navigate online spaces in a safe manner, as well as social media good practice and safety guidelines.

This Digital Youth Work Project by Foróige aims to empower young people with digital skills, safety awareness, and empathy through a variety of activities and partnerships. The project includes elements like creating virtual reality (VR) spaces, music production, and awareness campaigns. It focuses on peer-to-peer learning for youth workers and constantly evolves its digital tools to meet the changing needs of young people.

The project is guided by a digital youth work strategy with a focus on making digital youth work accessible to all, including those facing barriers like disabilities or geographical isolation. It seeks to bridge the digital divide and provide opportunities for young people in rural areas across Ireland. The project collaborates with international partners, Foróige staff and volunteers. The project team are also working to advocate for digital youth work with policymakers and emphasise how to best address real needs rather than just using technology for its sake.

The Foróige Go project team carefully considered the pedagogical impact of the digital dimension. It values interactive and game-based learning, allowing young people to explore and learn by doing. The initiative connects offline and online spaces, providing flexibility and choice to participants. Young people and youth workers are actively involved in the design and delivery of digital programs.

“As a Project Team working in the training and learning department of Foróige we are underpinned by a digital youth work strategy. To support the wider population, we work with in Foróige and to understand what Digital Youth Work is, we work on developing our individual programmes digital skills, connect safely, empathy, outside projects like working in partnership with international organisations. This is also to show stakeholders what can be done.” (Project Team, Foróige Go)

The project's inspiration stemmed from the growing need to engage with young people through online platforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Access and inclusion are essential aspects, ensuring that all young people, including those with barriers to in-person engagement, have pathways to services. The Foróige Go project addresses emerging needs like cyberbullying and digital leadership, driven by the feedback from staff and volunteers.



“As an organisation, Foróige wants to make sure that all young people are included and that they have pathways to engage with the services that are there. So, access was a real interesting and key focus of the Digital Youth Work Strategy that we have in Foróige. The idea of looking at young people that would traditionally have barriers to accessing in person digital youth work. Whatever the piece we are working on as a national team - it can be done in the local youth centre as well, but we also need to look at those.” (Project Teams, Foróige Go)

The digital dimension of the project serves various purposes, such as developing a tool to facilitate activities related to health, empathy, and creative expression. It opens new avenues for storytelling and self-narration among young people, allowing them to explore skills and engage in activities they might not have in traditional settings. The project leverages tools like VR, AI, and storyboarding to enhance youth work and access young people and youth workers in rural locations across Ireland.

The project carefully considers the pedagogical impact of the digital dimension, focusing on interactive and game-based learning. It emphasises the importance of allowing young people to explore, learn by doing, and express themselves creatively. The Foróige Go Project team supports youth workers and young people both in offline and online spaces, offering flexibility and choice to participants. The approach values the input of young people and youth workers in the design and delivery of digital programs.

“All of us on this call are from counties in the West coast of Ireland, (rural location on the West of Ireland). There is no reason for us in the West of Ireland to not be at the centre of things now. This is the fourth industrial revolution in terms of technology for creative opportunities, employment opportunities. and education opportunities. There is no reason we can't enhance the opportunities for young people to be able to stay in these rural places such as the West of Ireland and if we give them a good basis of digital youth work and we can address that balance in terms of isolation geographically.” (Project Team, Foróige Go)

The success of the project can be attributed to its ability to engage young people effectively, fostering creativity and skills development. It relies on available resources, workforce expertise, and the willingness to adapt to new digital tools. Challenges include balancing fears around technology and change management. The Project Team highlighted the importance of communication and feedback loops with young people and youth workers to continuously improve and meet evolving needs.

“There are young people out there that are using the tools 100% better than I could, and we are giving them the opportunities to figure things out for themselves. The way it is structured is that we are asking young people and youth workers who carry out the work we pass on, and it creates a feedback loop.” (Project Team, Foróige Go)

### 1.1.2.2. EXPLORING DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Successful digital youth work involves gradual introduction of digitalization, starting with small, accessible steps. Gamification plays a crucial role in engaging young people, and there is a strong emphasis on breaking down barriers and addressing the fear of technology. Sharing information and resources with communities, including 3rd level institutions, is vital. The project sees itself as a support system for both



young people and staff, focusing on building confidence and providing a safe space for learning.

“One of the most popular things of Digital Youth Work is the storytelling aspects. In essence is allowing young people to tell their story and realise their story and from that the digital side of things is a tool or a hardware that they use, it is a mode of expression that wasn't available to young people before. It opens up a whole new way of expression and telling a story... allowing that creativity to be expressed.” (Project Team, Foróige Go)

The Project Team, reflected on the need to balance change management with consideration for an innate sense of fear that youth workers experience in their newly developing roles as digitally transformed youth workers.

“There is a lot of equipment left in projects. We have never gone out there and told people we are the experts. We often get people coming to our training and they don't have a clue about Digital Youth Work. We ask people about how they feel now. Feeling more confident is key. People are more willing if they feel supported. If someone approaches you and they are not techy or they are trying things out. The fear of standing in front of young people and not knowing what you are doing is daunting. The greatest thing you can say is "I don't know". I am going to show you the basics. They will hopefully start to run off and start engaging themselves. It's about breaking down the barriers and the fear around technology. If we suddenly figure out some small thing that we thought we couldn't do, it sparks the creative connection.” (Project Team, Foróige Go)

Members of the Foróige Go project team members are rapidly upskilling and reflecting on ever changing knowledge and digital systems such as artificial Intelligence, online radicalisation and big data.

“The radicalisation of people can be attributed to algorithms, for people to realise that there is an algorithm. Chat GBT will give you an answer. Is it the right one though? I did a course on AI, and part of it was all about how AI is portrayed in the media. Google it and see what comes up... it's all mad brains, terminator. What images are we putting out there for young people to understand AI? The media puts out scary things. Nobody is talking about using AI in predicting renal failure for example, and they are now working towards image-based diagnosis with AI... unless it's something major and there are so many good applications. Digital Capital understanding and knowledge of digital such as the Science capital idea.” (Project Teams, Foróige Go)

### 1.1.3. SUMMARY PARTICIPANTS

#### 1.1.3.1. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

The researcher travelled to a local youth project in the West of Ireland to interview a focus group who were taking part in the Foróige Go programmes within their local Foróige youth cafe. A group of ten young people, with varying needs, interests and backgrounds took part in the focus group.

Participants engaged in various project activities, including building robots, creating digital posters, and exploring topics like climate change and the environment. They



also took part in podcasting and storytelling, reflecting on their own experiences and the experience of peers in relation to being in foster care, and editing podcasts. Building robots was a central focus for some of the project participants, with a gradual progression from simple to complex objectives.

“It is interesting, and I love the way you use bricks and techniques to build robots Lego Technic is bricks - what you use to build the Lego league robots you can move and manipulate - more complicated.” (Project Participants, Foróige Go, Mayo)

Participants were motivated by their youth workers within their weekly club to engage techniques to build robots in the LEGO Technic style. They found this approach more engaging and complex. Personal inspiration included the desire to achieve an 8-week Lego build and make for a project challenge. Adding motors, incorporating coding and developing

“Adding the DC motors to the robot - you need an iPad and specific app to programme it - you put down some of the programme for it, how for it to move and where to go. We need it because without it the robot wouldn't interact with the programming, we put on it - using Bluetooth - Lego spike 0 like Scratch.” (Project Participants, Foróige Go)

Other projects enabled them to learn and experiment with cameras, microphones, and soundtracks to create music tracks and podcasts. Some joined the project because they were bored initially, but during the project reflected on who they found fulfilling. The digital dimension played a critical role in engaging them, particularly in coding with Scratch and LEGO Spike.

Digital technology allowed participants to create beats, manipulate sound, and use microphones for clear audio. Participants encountered initial challenges, such as powering microphones, but eventually overcame them.

Meaningful participation and success of these local projects was driven by the sense of individual achievement so greatly received by all the youth participants in the group. For example, when they managed to get their robots working after overcoming challenges. The LEGO League involved eight weeks of building, culminating in showcasing their creations. Participants found it satisfying and inspiring to see other people interested in the projects they were working on. Completing projects like the Gaisce Presidents Award online with support from their local youth project leader and gaining community leadership skills.

“On the day that we were supposed to showcase how the Roboto does it's stressful, but I love it. Getting to show the robot to other people because of all the hard work I put into that.” (Project Participants, Foróige Go)

#### 1.1.3.2. Exploring Digital Youth Work

Participants experienced digital youth work as a unique blend of learning, creating, and social interaction. They appreciated the absence of distractions and valued building meaningful relationships with peers and mentors. The project enabled them to showcase their work to a wider audience and to engage in local youth work initiatives.



“Coding Skills, Editing Skills, Building Skills, Lego, Lego DC Motors, Lego Technic, Diverse understanding of a lot of things - being open minded” (Project Participants, Foróige Go)

Online, participants primarily used digital tools for homework, research, learning, and entertainment. The project provided a structured and focused environment, which differed from their usual online experiences, where distractions were more common.

Participants found that online schooling during COVID-19 was challenging and less enjoyable than the youth project. They highlighted differences in engagement, distractions, and communication between the two settings. Non-formal education, as experienced in the project, allowed for more interaction and focus.

School would be a lot more enjoyable if it was online, during Covid-19 I hated online school. For the youth project, I think it might be a little more different hanging out with friends building Lego stuff.” (Project Participant, Foróige Go)

In participants' perspectives, successful digital youth work involved taking the work seriously while maintaining a fun and engaging atmosphere. Encouraging perseverance, pursuing dreams, staying confident, and being open to learning were key elements. Motivation, minimal distractions, and creating a supportive environment were also crucial for success.

They closed the session with some key mantras they had developed as a youth group.

“Be yourself and be confident - don't care what other people say about you. If at first, you don't succeed, try and try again. I have not failed, I just found 10,000 possibilities that won't work. The person who made electricity, never gave up. You need to stay motivated and make sure you don't get distracted by anything.” (Project Participants, Foróige Go)

#### 1.1.4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The support and training perspectives offered by the Foróige Go Project Team, was echoed within the diversity of needs presented by youth workers and young people as project participants. Young people within this weekly Digital Youth Work group, met every week and in many cases worked on individual projects supported by their youth workers for different reasons. Two young people were working on a Podcast about Foster Care. The other worked on a project with his youth worker about a project more personal to him, a song, a rap recording, and then a supported project through an online platform such as the GAISCE President's awards to gain online certification. The National Project Team at Foróige Go had a wide range of skills, but most of all, a sense of Creative Confidence to develop their skills, listen to the young participants, and to grow with the programme they were presenting. Some of the young people's interest in Lego, coding and robot building surpassed that of the knowledge and expertise of their local youth workers and the project team. The attitudinal approach of “I don't know, let's find out together” rang out within both interviews from all respondents. This could be seen in the diverse range of projects that were being developed as a group, the diverse range of needs that were being supported within the project participant group and the diverse range of skill sets that the local youth workers had national support to develop. A sense of human support and camaraderie was evident throughout both interviews,



### 1.1.5. CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of digital youth work amongst a national youth organisation requires a national specialised expert team that has experience in youth work as well as a passion for creative and digital technologies. In turn, local youth workers that are developing needs-based supports for young people need to feel supported to implement and try creative innovative projects with young people in the knowledge that they have someone they can look to for further support. As such, young people who are struggling with formal education structures, who are marginalised for any reason, are supported to engage with peers, develop their passions to create with technology, within a supportive peer group. This setting has the potential to continuously develop and grow based on a feedback loop of youth-led support.

### 2.2.5. ANYTHING ELSE?

Due to time pressure, these case studies do not represent most of the Digital Youth Work activity across the Island of Ireland. A great deal of development has happened in Ireland over the last ten years influenced by training development programmes of leading national organisations. This has been mapped as part of the Strategic National Agency Cooperation on Digital Youth Work - In particular Work Package 2 - Digital Competencies in Youth Work and Work Package 4 - Exploring new, appealing, inclusive and engaging practices for online services in digital youth work.

#### **SNAC Digital Youth Work -**

Work Pack 2 Digital Competencies - <https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/report-digital-competences-and-capacities-youth-work>

Work Package 4 - European Transnational Report: Exploring new, appealing, inclusive and engaging practices for online services in digital youth work

<https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/report-exploring-new-appealing-inclusive-and-engaging>

Work Package 4 - Irish National Report - 11 interviews with Project Teams completed. Desk research was also completed and mapped examples of Digital Youth Work. Currently Unpublished. Attached within email.

#### **Further Resources:**

Creative Confidence - <https://www.creativeconfidence.com/>

Lifelong Kindergarten - <https://www.media.mit.edu/groups/lifelong-kindergarten/overview/>

Creators not Consumers - <https://infed.org/mobi/mark-smith-creators-not-consumers-rediscovering-social-education/>





Adobe Youth Voices - <https://www.adobe.com/ie/corporate-responsibility/education/adobe-youth-voices.html>

Computer Clubhouse Model - [https://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/Comp\\_club/Clubhouse.html](https://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/Comp_club/Clubhouse.html)

Screenagers National Report Republic of Ireland - [https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Screenagers-Report-Republic-of-Ireland\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Screenagers-Report-Republic-of-Ireland_FINAL.pdf)

Creative Ireland National Creative Technology Needs Analysis - <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/06/Creative-Technology-Needs-Analysis-for-Irelands-Youth-Settings.pdf>

CDYSB Digital Needs Analysis Inner City Dublin - <https://kinia.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/7.-CDYSB-Digital-Needs-Analysis-Report-2020-Updated-0803.pdf>

The Warwick Report - <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/>

Kinia Educator Tech Fest - <https://kinia.ie/creative-educator-techfest-2/>

Kinia publications - <https://kinia.ie/reports-publications/>

[www.digitalyouthwork.eu](http://www.digitalyouthwork.eu)

[www.digiways.io](http://www.digiways.io)



## 1.2. CASE REPORT 3 - *FINGLAS YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE*

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### 1.3. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT

*Please note that this information will not be published in the transnational research report and should not be published elsewhere, as it would very likely allow deductive disclosure of (some) interviewees' identities. It will only be used for the transnational analysis.*

**Project name:** Finglas Youth Resource Centre

**Organisations involved:** Finglas Youth Resource Centre, is kindly supported by the Children Youth Services Board Dublin, UBU. It works in partnership with national organisations such as Léargas, Kinia, Food Cloud and the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth in Ireland.

**Funding number:** *N/A*

**Overall budget:** *N/A*

**Erasmus+ result platform:** *N/A*

**Links:**

<https://fyrc.ie/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@fyrcmedia1215>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox04luxh7qw&ab\\_channel=KiniaCommunity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox04luxh7qw&ab_channel=KiniaCommunity)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzuTlOzmH8&ab\\_channel=KiniaCommunity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzuTlOzmH8&ab_channel=KiniaCommunity)

**Project description:**

Vision of Finglas Youth Resource Centre:

A Community where Young People are Safe, Recognised, Empowered, and Supported to reach their full potential.

The mission of Finglas Youth Resource Centre:

To meet the needs of Young People by providing them with a variety of response-based supports, fun activities, and opportunities to enable them to learn, grow and be safe in their community.

The Finglas Youth Resource Centre CLG has been providing youth work programmes, informal education and opportunities for young people since 2004. The youth centre itself is purpose-built and its staff have been providing a place of welcoming and belonging, a place for the young people to come and be themselves, and a safe space to learn, develop and grow in confidence at a time in their lives of uncertainty and rapid growth. They are governed by a Voluntary Board who are enthusiastic, dedicated and young person focused. The Finglas Youth Resource Centre is a registered charity compliant with the charity regulator's "Governance Code". Their main source of funding is through DCEDIY's UBU "Your Place Your Space", born from an area-based needs assessment. Guided by their service requirement, the FYRC's objective is to deliver outcomes for young people focusing on specific UBU target groups. Funding from Léargas and other agencies helps us deliver youth exchanges, residential and other targeted-based programmes. Our team are very passionate about youth work, working with young people from the ages of 10 to 25 years from all diverse backgrounds providing varying supports and activities.

The Youth Worker interviewed as part of this case study has been working in partnership with national agencies such as Kinia.ie to develop the youth work practice and provide Digital Youth Work services to work towards the vision and mission of the Finglas Youth Resource Centre for Participants.



### 1.3.1. SUMMARY PROJECT TEAMS

#### 1.3.1.1. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

- EXPLORING THE PROJECT

The youth worker interviewed develops programmes for young people to engage in digital youth work activities throughout many aspects of youth development practice at the Finglas Youth Resource Centre in Dublin, supported by a targeted UBU-funded youth service.

“UBU Your Place Your Space aligns with the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework, the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making, and the LGBTI+ and National Youth Strategies.

Mission: To provide out-of-school supports to young people in their local communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential by improving their personal and social development outcomes.

Vision: All young people are enabled to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood.

Values:

Young people are free to participate in a wide range of quality activities

Provision is rights-based and young person-centred

Empowering young people to reach their full potential

Relationship building

There is clarity of purpose

Projects are maximised by promoting efficiency and effectiveness”

(<https://ubu.gov.ie/about> )

At Finglas Youth Resource Centre - Digital Youth Work is incorporated into youth work activities to support four main target groups - Mainstream Universal Youth Work and Drop Ins, LGBTQI young people, young people from the Travelling Community and young people in IPAS (International Protection Accommodation Services).

There is a high risk of early school leaving, a risk of influence from local gangs, and a risk of drug use at a young age in the local area. The community has experienced gang-related violence in the Finglas area of Dublin and staff at the resource centre work to provide a safe space for young people to be able to express themselves and engage with their peers in a positive environment. There is a high population of young people engaging in the Resource Centre that are NEETS - Not in Education or Employment.

Digital Youth Work in the centre, happens at different times and varies every year. The digital element of the youth service develops based on the needs and interests of the young people. Youth workers in the centre have supported young people to engage in activities such as podcasting, scratch computer programming, basic circuitry and mechanics. They have purpose-built a recording studio in the youth service and supported young people to develop songs or music videos to express themselves around issues arising. Creative sustainability projects such as creating a wind-powered generator, or



sensor-based interactive Halloween decorations, and even building electric go-carts have been a focus of engagement for the youth groups within the centre guided by youth workers.

#### Exploring Motives and Inspiration:

Motives for developing these digital youth work projects are about building confidence for young people at its most basic. The youth worker that was interviewed gave an example of a recent music video project that young people were engaged in. “Over 50% of the group of 7 engaged were not attending schools for various reasons, but they managed to sit down, focus, and write a song that explored their lives, put it on a video, and deliver on a final project.” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)

Reflection within the interview noted that providing young people with a platform whereby they can experience a willingness to try and learn new skills is a key inspiration to developing digital skills within youth work practice. It helped by the fact that the youth worker interviewed has developed a keen interest in improving his practice to learn and try to understand how things work. So, if a young person says they want to do work on a new digital project, even if the youth worker has not done it before, they develop an approach together.

#### Exploring the digital dimension of the project

At Finglas Youth Resource Centre digital technologies such as computer programming, circuitry, video editing and recording software are used as a tool. Projects such as a stop motion animation can be used to support young people to see an immediate result. It is seen as another tool in the youth work tool belt because digital technologies are important to young people. Social media content is also important to young people, and the role of the youth worker is poignant to guide and support young people through this.

“It is our role to support young people to challenge how they think about their lived environment, this includes social media as well, however, sometimes (Digital Youth Work) can just be about having fun as well” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)

#### Exploring educational settings, features and values of digital youth work

*“We would rarely deliver online youth work - the pandemic aside - it's that face-to-face work that is important now - the community we are in you are not going to get that hybridisation for us because digital poverty is a block for many young people. We have a music studio that is peer-led, they take the time, they go in, and they work on their own, I will stick my head in to support them or give them advice - but it is their safe space to be creative”* (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)

Without realising, young people are gaining skill by following a step-by-step process to achieve a youth-led goal, such as a music video. Finglas Youth Resource Centre developed a Competencies Certificate based around the sometimes-hidden skills gained through participation in activities carried out within the centre, this was after they realised that a lot of young people were carrying out successful projects within the centre, but had nothing to show for it on their C.V.'s. The resource centre would tap into national organisations credential systems recognition such as Kinia's Youth Pass, as well as having localised supports in place to recognise skills gained.



## Exploring Key Factors of Success

Key factors of success for the Digital Youth Work activity that happened in the youth resource centre was noted by the youth worker as being able to provide a resourced space for young people. The successful projects were ones where the youth worker had managed to support young people to have autonomy and take the responsibility to finish activities they were working on.

Challenges noted include “Gremlins” which refers to those technology difficulties you run into when you have planned a project so well, but for some reason, you just cannot get something to work, and it needs time to figure out a solution. The youth worker interviewed spoke about how it can be time-consuming to address a tech issue when you are trying to deliver a youth group. You might only have the young people for an hour in some cases, it can be difficult to be the one facilitating a project and not know how to progress.

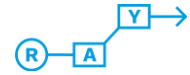
*“Young people get easily bored if something just doesn’t work on Scratch, and you don’t have a clue of how you can resolve it, there is a level of time for some things that is needed that not all youth projects are going to have - for example Arduinos - Micro bits all that kind of side of things - do I have the time to work all of that out?” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

Funding was mentioned as a challenge for digital youth work activities to progress in the Finglas Youth Resource Centre. The ability to implement training available for youth workers, after having taken part in training can be challenging also. For example, having the necessary BBC Micro bits available to deliver to young people in the centre, and then taking the time to work out how to use them within a group setting after completing training, with so many other more immediate priorities arising for young people and the funding. “I remember the first time I was trying to sit with a group, I can’t find the button, losing 20 minutes of ten young people looking at you” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)

The Youth Worker interviewed opted to run projects and activities that were reusable and cheap to run, for example building a Go-Cart with inexpensive parts and motors. This ensured that young people’s attention span was maintained, and the project was affordable to develop. An IT group was set up in the centre originally, and it had a lot of young people on the Autistic Spectrum attending. This group supported them to have a weekly space that was based on their interests. Challenges around learning styles and the rate at which each young person learns, arose during projects, and the Youth worker reflected on how best to support young people to engage at all levels of interest.

*“Everybody learns differently and managing that brings its own challenges - but it also brings a lot of opportunities” ( Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

In the Resource Centre, there is a 3D printer, youth workers at the Centre don’t necessarily have the expertise to use this piece of equipment now. Young people who have attended the centre have completed self-directed learning in this context. 3D Software such as Blender, engaged a young participant to enter the space and use the software through the computers available, he was encouraged to develop his 3D design practice and make use of other resources such as the 3D printer in the space. This experience of a young person’s inquiry-based learning supported the youth worker to learn alongside them, learning together. Ongoing consideration for the Youth Worker in the field of digital youth work is how to support young people who have a particular special interest, such as using a



complicated software like Blender, and then how bring it to a wider group to support collaboration with peers.

### Exploring Digital Youth Work

Young people who attend the Finglas Resource Centre face a local housing issue. Marginalisation has an impact on the engagement of young people within a formal education setting. Providing creative Digital Youth Work opportunities at their local Resource Centre gives them the freedom to design and develop a programme outside of a set curriculum.

*“I have never had to stick to a book or a booklet, the majority of the projects we complete come out of a collaboration piece” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

The benefits that were outlined within the interview in the non-formal education setting were the emphasis on collaboration and communication. A youth group developing tangible outcomes based on a shared goal was realised by the young participants upon reflection and added to a C.V., once a project was completed.

### Exploring the potential gap between young people’s digital needs and youth work realities

As a central location, Finglas Youth Resource Centre has a lot of physical and human resources to offer young people. It was recognised by members of the project team that not all youth services in the Dublin area or across Ireland would have as many resources to implement such projects. There is often a presumption that young people have access to laptops or phones at home, but this is not always the case.

*“We need to support young people to become creators and not just consumers of technology. Kinia’s recent Educator Festival mentioned the four C’s - Communication, Collaboration, Critical and Creative Thinking. If we break it down to that then that is manageable. We are doing that; it is all part in parcel. So rather than thinking about machine learning and my understanding of it, I can teach them the skills side of the four C’s and when they have finished a project, they can have some awareness of these.” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

### Exploring successful approaches to digital youth work

There is a level of engagement that is sometimes a challenge. What we are looking at is not necessarily the full understanding of the outcomes of the project. Self-awareness of your expectations is key. Participation and engagement in the project can sometimes be the main achievement for young people attending. The certification process and giving young people the ability to document their achievements so they can see and talk through what they have completed is a key consideration for any youth work project, this shouldn’t differ for Digital Youth Work projects.

As a Youth Worker, it is important not to feel too bad about not having all the knowledge, people can always specialise in particular areas of interest. Facilitators of a programme should give themselves time to develop, plan and troubleshoot.

*“Prepare to learn, understand the project you are going to do with young people. As soon as the “Gremlin” arrives it will throw everything, but that is all part of the work. When something doesn’t work be prepared to know that no matter how prepared you are sometimes things will go wrong.” (Youth Worker Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*



Be prepared to look at the things that you didn't know were going to happen. What your perspective as a worker is and what the young participants are getting from a project it isn't always the same.

## 1.3.2. SUMMARY PARTICIPANTS

### 1.3.2.1. EXPLORING THE PROJECT

Young project participants interviewed as part of this case study into Digital Youth Work Activities at Finglas Youth Resource Centre explained the various activities they were engaged with. This included writing raps about personal experiences, recording music in the studio, achieving success with a music video on YouTube, and even releasing their music on iTunes. One young participant described being involved in a documentary that explored their journey around mental health and they participated in events like the Kinia Award Festival Creative Tech Fest at the Google Foundry. Young people also mentioned developing projects such as working with motors to build a Wind Turbine through an IT group run by youth workers at the centre,

Prompted to join the youth project through an IT group, one young person initially joined the youth centre by working on a small wind turbine building project within a group setting, he had the opportunity to work on computer-based programmes such as Scratch and Rasberry Pi. This young person then transitioned into music production after learning about the studio through a friend, supported by his youth worker to write songs about his experience of his local community and his life.

During some music production projects, young people made use of software such as Logic Pro for music production and Final Cut for video editing. They learned various digital skills, including using microphones and MIDI keyboards. Participants in the focus group highlighted the positive role of digital technology, crediting their youth worker for his openness and support in digital skills. All agreed that participation was meaningful, providing a comfortable space to express their thoughts through music.

*“Linking in with the music here is great, if I go home and record something, it’s not the same. I learn a lot in the youth work centre that at home I don’t. I can learn more here, and I can bring it home and use it I do more recording and listen do what we do here practising it and listening” (Young Participant, Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

Young people spoke about the idea that the successful factors of the youth workers' approach to Digital Youth Work Projects in the Resource centre were that participants felt they were in a supportive environment with a patient, communicated with their youth worker, a sense of comfort, and a conducive learning environment.

### 1.3.2.2. EXPLORING DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Young people described the Finglas Youth Resource Centre as a place to record music, express their emotions, and communicate differently from school. They emphasised their understanding of their digital needs by citing examples of engaging in social media, gaming and working on promotional material for their music releases, and mobile phones' social media. Young people described going live on social media platforms and performing rap songs, and singer-songwriter songs, using digital platforms to promote their music as far as possible.

*“I sometimes send up to 30 e-mails a night trying to promote stuff (music projects) - posting on Instagram and Facebook” (Young Participant Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*





Online activities that were described as digital habits include gaming, social media engagement, and working on music promotion. When compared to digital habits in their youth work setting, they highlighted the learning, collaboration experience and adult guidance they received from their youth worker.

Potential conflicts that were outlined by the focus group between non-formal education and Digital Youth Work included the experience of working in competitive creative settings such as school talent shows in juxtaposition with a non-formal education setting such as working with peers to co-create a project. Young people appeared to perceive a school environment as more judgmental, whereas the youth work centre offered a more comfortable and open setting for creative expression.

*“Doing the talent show is about performing for a bit of craic - it's nothing serious - coming here to do it is much more enjoyable - when I'm doing a talent show I don't perform me raps. I'm more comfortable here.” (Young Participant Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

Overall, there was a sense from young people that they are more content if their interests are listened to and incorporated into activities. Successful digital youth work involves creating an enjoyable space without judgment, allowing participants to express themselves freely.

*“Listen to the young people. If you go off and do stuff that the young people are interested in doing. It should be a place that they can enjoy. Just do - don't listen to judgement.” (Young Participant Finglas Youth Resource Centre)*

### 1.3.3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

There is a shared motivation among the young people attending Finglas Youth Services to have a safe place to go that provides a space for creative expression and skill development through digital projects guided by professional youth workers. The youth workers are motivated by a desire to provide a safe and supportive space, while also focusing on their own confidence-building as practitioners, and transferring that sense of confidence-building to the young people they are working with. For young people, however, the type of safe space that was being created - was more about the importance of the youth workers' willingness to listen to them - something that upon reflection the youth worker hadn't noted as a key motivation for involvement.

To successfully tackle digitalisation youth work would need to...listen to the young people”  
(Young Participant, Finglas Youth Resource Centre)

Both groups interviewed - participants and project team, in the youth resource centre, acknowledged the shift in teaching methods between non-formal and formal education, focusing on interactive and engaging approaches through digital mediums in their youth setting. The potential drawbacks or challenges related to digital pedagogies, especially concerning access issues were not extensively discussed by young participants, and the concept of digital poverty was noted by the project team only but could be further explored with young people. Success factors mentioned included a supportive environment, autonomy, and the completion of creative digital activities. Challenges like "Gremlins" (tech issues) were noted. Both groups demonstrated the importance of supporting young people as creators of technology,

acknowledging digital poverty challenges, and the importance of having a locally resourced community space for young people to engage in creative technology projects. Current State and Future of Digital Youth Work: Showcased positive outcomes in terms of music production, wind turbine projects, and skill development.

Young people spoke about the importance of recognition of their work through digital means and focussed mainly on recognition from peers through activities such as launching their digital creations live on social media platforms or through digital marketing practice. The youth workers' focus is to recognise the young people's digital creations to support the understanding of the soft skills gained by participating. This could be seen in the description from young people on the positive impact gained when learning from these projects. They emphasised practical skills and creativity through digital tools like Logic Pro, Final Cut, and programming.

Challenges like, time, resources, tech issues and funding limitations were acknowledged within the case study for the project team interview. Limitations include the participant group size for this case study and the limited exploration time to understand the level of challenges or considerations needed for the future of digital youth work, potential areas for improvement for the creative work being carried out and how to develop projects based on emerging trends in the digital field.

#### 1.3.4. CONCLUSION

The Finglas Youth Resource Centre's Digital Youth Work project activity demonstrates the successful integration of digital tools into a marginalised community setting - true to traditional forms of youth work - it is based on forming friendships and positive adult relationships in a non-formal education setting. By providing a supportive environment for young people to explore their creativity youth workers in the centre are allowing young people who often face barriers to engage in other areas of civic society to access key skills building. Motivations centred around personal development and confidence building, with specific reference to 21st-century skills - The 4 C's. -

“If we want to actively participate in our community, both at a personal and professional level, we need to be able to:

- Carry out constructive reasoning through Critical Thinking;
- Find solutions through Creativity;
- Express ourselves through Communication;
- Improve the opportunities to reach common goals through Collaboration.

Even more so, if we oversee an **educational community**, in these 4Cs we can find great chances to facilitate children, youngsters, and adults in their **learning processes.**” (<https://www.teacheracademy.eu/blog/4-cs-education/>)



## 2.2. CASE REPORT 4 – Youth Information Chat (YI Chat)

2.

**Project name:** Youth Information Chat

**Organisations involved:** SpunOut.ie, Youth Information Services at Youth Work Ireland, Cross care and YMCA Ireland.

**Project Number:** N/A

**Overall budget:** N/A

**Erasmus+ result platform:** N/A

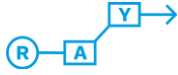
3. Key Characteristics of the Project

### **Project description:**

Youth Information Chat (YI Chat) offers information, advice and guidance about the issues that matter to young people in Ireland. It is a free, non-judgemental, one-to-one, online chat and e-mail service for young people to have access to Youth Information Officers 5-days a week. The service is available to all young people aged 16 – 25 years old in Ireland, as well as parents, guardians, friends, family and those working with young people. Youth Information Officer staff that deliver the service are employed by leading youth work organisations Cross care, YMCA, and Youth Work Ireland.

YI Chat addresses rural or physical isolation, providing a nationwide service through collaboration with partner organisations. The service is characterised by a flexible, accessible approach, as well as collaboration with peers. Outside of the live response hours, young people can leave a message at any time, day or night, and Youth Information Officers will reply by email during opening hours. This service supports young people to access verified information, advice, and guidance about issues that matter to them. It supports young people to contact Youth Information Officers who might be local to them, by linking them to a digitally connected national network of colleagues and peers working together, through an online specialised platform. Youth Information Officers in the service are trained on utilising this national communications, e-mail platform, and instant chat service with training and support provided by Community Creations CLG a digital youth work specialist organisation, that hosts the platform and develops online youth work service SPUNOUT.ie.

The Youth Officers aim to enable young people to make their own informed choices to



become independent and active citizens through accessible information sharing. The service is open Monday to Friday from 4:00 PM – to 8:00 PM (excluding Bank Holidays). Delivery of the service is provided by up to 17 Youth Information Officers with a national reach. These YI Officers work in pairs, managing emails, and offering support to young people between the hours of 4 p.m. and 8 p.m., five days a week.

### What is a Youth Information Centre?

Youth Information Centres and Services offer free and confidential information on issues that matter to young people (up to 25 years) and those acting on their behalf.

Some of the common things young people ask about are

- College courses, apprenticeships and other types of education
- Grants, bursaries, scholarships and financial support for education
- Writing a CV, getting a job and starting a career
- Finding somewhere to live
- Your rights and entitlements
- Sport and leisure activities
- European opportunities to work, study and volunteer for young people
- Drug and alcohol awareness
- Health, wellbeing and healthy relationships

Youth Information Centres are open to all young people, as well as people who work with young people. They are run by [Crosscare](#), [YMCA Ireland](#), and [Youth Work Ireland](#), and are funded by the [Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth](#) through local Education and Training Boards. [spunout](#) is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people.

[\(https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth-family-relationships/services-and-supports-for-children/youth-information-centres/\)](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth-family-relationships/services-and-supports-for-children/youth-information-centres/)

### 3.1. Summary Project Teams

Exploring the project

#### **Exploring the project**

For this case study three members of the Steering Group for the Youth Information Chat Service in Ireland were interviewed. This included John; a Youth Information Officer from County Cork and a representative of the Youth Information Office with the youth organisation YMCA Ireland. Gareth; is a Youth Officer from Youth Work Ireland - Donegal Youth Service. Gareth, supports the Youth Information Chat Service, involved from the early concept, whilst also working on digital literacy education topics in schools and youth settings across Donegal. The project team members were also joined in the interview focus group by Ross; Digital Service Manager with SpunOut.ie, an online Youth Information website managed by the organisation Community Creations CLG.



Ross supports the YI Chat steering group and Youth Officers to market, develop, and improve the delivery of this online Youth Information service. He is responsible for training newcomers, and working towards further evidence-based support for the programme.

### **Exploring Motives and Inspiration:**

Youth Information Centres (YICs) provide a free, confidential information service to young people and those who work with them on a wide range of subjects including careers, education, employment matters, rights and entitlements, leisure, sport, travel and European opportunities.

Located around the country, they are the first point of contact for a young person seeking information on any subject of interest or concern. The information is provided in specially designed premises where the atmosphere is warm and informal. Many YICs offer additional services such as a low-cost CV preparation service, internet access, European Youth Cards, hostelling cards and much more.

Trained and friendly staff are always available to help find or interpret the information required. These staff work in close co-operation with other relevant voluntary and statutory agencies and will refer young people to them when further information or specialist help is required.

The Youth Information online chat service builds on a long-standing partnership of professional Youth Information providers in Ireland and relies on the development of commitment to unified working on communications, safeguarding data protection, and youth information practice. The service is staffed by professional Youth Information Workers.

(Source: <https://www.youthworkireland.ie/what-we-do/youth-information/>)

Youth Information Chat Service (YI Chat) is the development of Youth Information Centres to a digital context. It is a powerful example of a simple digital communications tool that has been adapted to empower young people from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to reach a digitally enhanced local youth service. It creates a system of youth advocacy for youth crisis intervention and a pathway for youth work development both online and offline, it ensures that the quality of supportive human interaction for young people is not lost through digital transformation. This is done through an accessible and simple access point, that connects specialised youth information officers to young people who are seeking information and support. It facilitates young people to access a trusted and verified question-based chat service. It supports Youth Information Officers to collaborate remotely, whilst responding to young people's questions and enquiries.

“I think it’s a fantastic toolbox - there are so many dimensions to it that allow us to share the sessions and to partner with colleagues. We can refer young people out of the system and give the young people the best response we can give them. In essence, we were all



doing our youth work in isolation, but this digital tool is connecting us” (*Youth Information Officer, YI Chat, Ireland*)

The concept for this digital tool was developed between 2013 and 2014 through a cross-organisational partnership between YMCA Ireland, Crosscare, Youth Work Ireland and Community Creations CLG. The initial concept was to start to digitally track common questions that were arising for young people and to be able to respond to these common questions via the Community Creations CLG online youth information website - SpunOut.ie.

Rapid prototyping of the YI Chat service was delivered quickly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and young people living in isolation. The move to support Youth Officers to access an online chat service hosted on SpunOut.ie’s website was established and launched without hesitation. A body of national Youth organisation partners came together to ensure that vital Youth Information Services would remain open for young people to access - [https://direct.lc.chat/10341532/?utm\\_source=spunout\\_main](https://direct.lc.chat/10341532/?utm_source=spunout_main).

“It came about a lot faster than any of us expected, that was down to the impact of Covid-19. It allowed us to reach young people outside of normal office hours, and it gave us access to the voice of a professional colleague. It also addressed the rural isolation problem that was happening on the ground in terms of youth information. You’ll see in the impact report the specific numbers we had and the geographical spread. Now if somebody logs on to the system outside of our hours then the young people can get a ticket and on the next available shift the Youth Officers will see that. During hours the wait time is about 20 seconds. Because it’s a digital service it means that youth information for the first time is provided nationwide.” (Digital Service Manager, Community Creations CLG)

“Before 2020, in youth work, we were always having ongoing conversations about where our young people were going for information. They were getting sometimes the right answer, and quite often not the right answer. As youth Info Officers, we are aware of that even now, how young people interact with online platforms and misinformation.” (Youth Information Officer, Donegal Youth Service),

### **Exploring the digital dimension of the project**

It was clear from interviewing the project team that although there were new benefits to using this digital Tech Stack service, there was initial scepticism from some Youth Information Officers around using a digital tool or replacing the human element of the service. However, through the development of a Youth work Steering group, and a partnership with an expert National Digital Youth Work organisation such as Community Creation CLG, adequate support and training were provided, as well as a space for listening to the concerns of youth workers and young people. The Steering Group demonstrated a commitment to working in partnership to develop a platform that could respond to young people’s digital literacy and misinformation needs.

“I inherited the Chat Online Service element of my work, so I started my role with 18-19 Youth Info Officers who were already onboarded and trained on the platform. As part of our MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the partners, the only requirement for anyone to start on the YI Chat services is that they have 6 months of experience. This process is peer support based. We don’t tell people (staff) what it is they need to do, and how they need to do it, that’s one of the great things about Youth Info because there is flexibility, everything is evidence-based” (Youth Information Officer, YI Chat)



## Exploring educational settings, features and values of digital youth work

The YI Chat online system was designed to minimise onerous technologies, with a simple user design (UX) for youth workers and young people. “You click a button to open a chat, and you click a button to respond.” (Youth Information Officer, YI Chat)

The pedagogical approach to this digitally transformed youth service, emphasises digital creativity, flexibility, and collaborative values across a national youth work organisation network. It maintains a human approach to a digitally transformed youth work service that is available locally. At the core of youth work values in Ireland, is the Irish Youth Work Act - “In this Act “youth work” means a planned programme of education designed to aid and enhance the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is— (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.”

(<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/42/section/3/enacted/en/html#sec3>)

The steering group and team at Youth Information Chat, work to ensure that access to a service that embodies the Youth Work Act is truly provided nationwide. They are ever mindful of the young people who may not be able to reach the service despite its accessibility due to socio-economic barriers or otherwise. Ensuring that the hours are relevant to young people is a key priority for the Steering Group, as well as outreach and marketing efforts for young people who may not have ready access to services that promote the online YI Chat locally.

“We look at digital marketing trends, for example, what time should we advertise? We ask ourselves what we need to do to reach out to young people in Direct Provision Centres or to young Travellers.” (Digital Service Manager, Community Creations CLG)

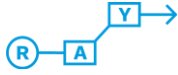
Considerations such as child protection are at the forefront of the Youth Information Chat. It is noted on the front of the service website under the headline “The most important thing is your safety” (<https://spunout.ie/news/youth-information-chat/>). The steering group meet regularly to ensure policies such as the General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) are in place and up to date.

These core values shine through in the adaptation of this digital transformation of the nationwide Youth Information Service. The Youth Officers remain mindful of the need for voluntary participation and appropriate the personalised human-based support required for each young service user's social and personal development.

“Behind the curtain, it’s a digital service but it’s got a heart” (Youth Officer, YI Chat)

## Exploring Key Factors of Success

Youth Information Chat has been successful in addressing rural isolation and providing a nationwide service that stands out for young people. The move to enhance a youth service to digitise its expertise originated from the local Youth Information needs of young people and adapting to the isolation of COVID-19 pandemic challenges. This learning has now developed into a permanent factor of the Youth Information Service provision in Ireland, despite ongoing funding challenges. Last year the online Youth Information Service programme supported over 2,500 conversations with young people enquiring about anything from ‘What time will my bus be at’ to ‘I may be having a teen pregnancy scare, what do I do?’



A nationwide multidisciplinary team have trained to collaborate remotely, broadening the youth service's ability to respond appropriately and immediately to the needs of young people, without losing a human approach to youth work. The Steering Group members that were interviewed recognise technology as a resource to be utilised to enhance youth work, not as a replacement. There is a commitment to continuous professional development from the team despite funding challenges.

“Last year was a financially difficult year for funding we still managed to get about 2.5 thousand conversations - some were minor things, and some were big deals - in the big or small conversation, there needs to be somebody at the end of the phones. it's about opening the doors that know about.” (Digital Service Manager, Community Creations CLG)

### **Exploring Digital Youth Work**

Exploring digital and technology-based transformation within their targeted youth services has been a key focus for many educators and youth workers with little or no targeted funding to develop their practice. Although there are still youth workers and formal educators who do not yet incorporate digitalisation into their work so readily, a key priority for most national youth organisations in Ireland is to recognise the benefits that digital tools can bring to youth work priorities.

In the area of youth advocacy, empowerment and voice, digital tools have supported youth organisations to reach young people, who otherwise face barriers in having their voices heard or accessing youth work services.

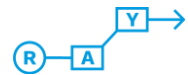
“A tool is valid if it gives young people voices and it includes young people. We have a bias in youth work sometimes that the most articulate young person gets most heard. Some digital tools give voice to young people who might not be otherwise heard. It gives more avenues for expression for young people. It is an advocacy piece; it can support the Lundy Model of participation. Audiences are important. The critical factor is giving more voice to young people who might not have their voice to start with. I think those questions are very important and we are in a constant review of this.” (Youth Information Officer, YI Chat, Ireland)

Reference: The Lundy Model of Participation - This model was developed by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of International Children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the British Educational Journal, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order: space, voice, audience, and influence. The Lundy Model of Participation was prominently featured and endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020).

([https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/lundy\\_model\\_of\\_participation.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf))

Technology within the Youth Information sphere in Ireland has been used as a tool to enhance information and messages to reach a wider audience. For example, the use of





animated or youth-led video-making to explore issues such as drug and alcohol-related misuse. Whilst it is seen as a resource, there is a constant reflection on ensuring that it doesn't replace the importance of having the opportunity to strengthen peer-based relationships and human interactions with positive role models. Recognising technology as a useful resource but not as a complete replacement for traditional youth work.

“A lot of YI Officers have gone into methods of using animation or video. Whatever it is, you will usually find most youth Info staff are quite willing to embrace it, we don't want to have a future that is bot driven. We need human interaction, and young people do still want to have a face have interaction somewhere along the line. Young people do appreciate that. They realise that on some chat services, a few comments in, that it is actually - wow you are talking to me right now.” (Youth Information Officer, YI Chat, Ireland)

### **Exploring the potential gap between young people's digital needs and youth work realities**

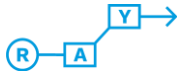
A wide range of youth organisations across Ireland have embraced the need to respond to the reality of young people's digital lives. Youth Workers interviewed recognised the challenges in understanding the digital needs of young people. Understanding their limitations and referencing the concern they had for the risks young people face, such as digital influence and disinformation. However, in recognising these concerns, they stressed the need for their roles to support young people to navigate the digital challenges that they are faced with, despite the natural discomfort and lack of confidence that some youth workers have in the use of new software or hardware.

“There is so much in the digital world that is concerning, but we can address this disinformation, especially on our live Youth Information Chat. There are people out there trying to influence ideas about politics and beliefs online, as Youth Information Officers we must be there (online) we have no choice. Young people are using tools like TikTok, I think it's a disaster, I never want to see it again, but I must be aware of it.” (Youth Officer YI Chat, Ireland)

There is often an assumption that young people are “Digital natives” making them automatically digitally literate, with the ability to navigate complex software and online systems, possessing the critical faculties to decipher truths from misinformation online. Although many young people experience greater digital agility than adults, it is the experience of many Youth Information Officers that young people are not as digitally transformed as society presumes. Those who are marginalised or vulnerable.

“From my experience, it is being reflected that the youth position in the digital world is not as far advanced as we think it is. Society tends to think that young people are phenomenal digital citizens - but they don't know as much as we think they do. We often assume that a young person knows the security or privacy settings that a device has on offer.” (Youth Information Officer, Donegal Youth Service)

Youth Officers interviewed noted the vital role they had to play in supporting young people to navigate the digital realm responsibly. With consideration for their own choices and practices, each new platform chosen for use in a youth work setting needs to be



reviewed for age appropriateness, privacy settings and a risk assessment. When working with young people who have experienced trauma, Youth Officers noted that the reality is many young people feel the urge to share their story with the world, once recovery has begun. In the past Youth Advocacy Workers have been able to support young people to consider the risks platform they are using and the readiness they feel before sharing personal stories across the globe.

“We have a responsibility to support young people on the concept of boundaries, and sharing, and appropriate sharing. Some young people might want to tell their story. They are free to do so, I can’t stop them. But one example of a young person who has been through a traumatic time that I worked with was I would sit down with them to reflect on motivation and risk... I am not telling them what to do, but they want to so badly share their care story of recovery. It’s about asking the young people, do you want to expose yourself to that, or is it meeting a need you don’t have in your personal life? Suggesting maybe in 6 months doing a video about it would be better - wait for a while - before you share...” (Youth Information Officer, YMCA Ireland)

### **Exploring successful approaches to digital youth work**

“Look at YI Chat as a success - it is one of the biggest most positive outcomes and a success for us from the Covid-19 years. Going forward for youth workers to be involved in this area of work there are so many great tools out there that can now bring opportunities - we can reach new audiences - we must do it with the duty of care and responsibility head, however. We are in a world where there are massive amounts of misinformation. 60% of info online is unreliable or maybe not even true.” (Digital Service Manager, Community Creations CLG)

Challenges for the service’s ongoing implementation include lack of core funding, gaining government and widespread recognition of the programme’s value, as well as the consistent adaptability and responsibility required to navigate the digital space to respond to the needs of young people appropriately.

There were key principles summarised by the case study focus group, members of the Youth Information Chat Service project team in Ireland noted successful factors in approaching Digital Youth Work, summarised as follows:

- A national cross organisational and collaborative approach to an online Youth Information Centre widens access for young people who are rurally isolated and provides nationwide services.
- Working with an expert digital youth work project team such as Community Creations CLG, ensures that the programme has implementation, delivery and development support.
- Enhancing a successful youth service digitally can improve operations such as peer support, marketing and project management within an organisation.
- The Youth Information Officer approach, in this case, emphasises the need for flexibility, collaborative efforts, and maintaining a human touch whilst implementing successful approaches to Youth Information Services.
- The Youth Officers and Digital Service Manager interviewed spoke about strength in collaboration, having experienced Youth Officer Staff, and



incorporating an element of adaptability to change as crucial factors in the successes of Digital transformation in Youth Work overall.

Youth Information Chat exemplifies the successes of the approaches to digital youth work that were rapidly put in place during the response to domestication in a pandemic. Before this, we were in an era where Digital Youth Work was merely emerging as a topic across Ireland. The service created a platform to replace digital resistance with necessity to respond to young people. There is now an opportunity for professional experienced youth workers to listen and respond to the digital needs of young people in regard to the European priority on the digital transformation of society. Acting appropriately through self-direction, collaborative peer support and developing a sense of digital creativity and curiosity within their youth work practice are key drivers of future success.

### **3.2. Summary Participants - Unable to reach participant interview on time.**

#### **3.2.1. Exploring the Project**

#### **3.2.2. Exploring Digital Youth Work**

### **3.3. Comparative analysis**

### **3.4. Conclusion**