

2024

Annual Report



Prepared by

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Youth Work Manager

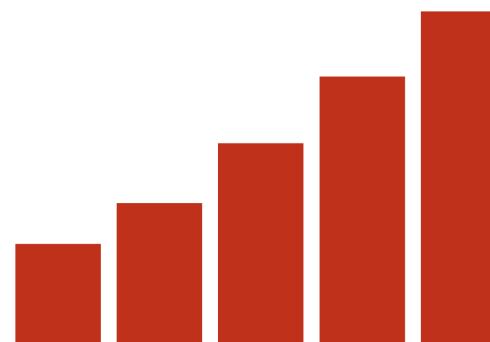
YMCA Newcastle





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VISION, MISSION & VALUES



OUR VISION

"a world where young people, their families and communities flourish in body, mind and spirit."

OUR MISSION

As a faith-based, all-island organisation, our mission is:

To create inclusive communities where everyone feels welcomed, accepted and inspired by social justice and peace for all. To provide life-enriching opportunities for young people, their families and communities.

OUR VALUES



Welcome

We believe that every YMCA should be a place of welcome.



Opportunity

We place that every YMCA should be a place of opportunity.



Wellbeing

We believe that every YMCA should be a place of wellbeing.



Justice

Creating inclusive communities where everyone feels welcomed, accepted and inspired by social justice and peace for all.

ABOUT YMCA NEWCASTLE



YMCA Newcastle is part of the wider YMCA movement in Ireland which was established in 1849

The YMCA has been active in the Newcastle area for over 100 years and has a rich and diverse history of providing quality opportunities for the personal development of children and young people. Our current base in the Belfry on the main street has been our home for the last 2 years and provides services for children and young people in the Newcastle, Mourne, Shimna, Dundrum and Tullymore areas.

Our programmes range from evening drop-in sessions to specific needs-based interventions for young people with a particular focus on health & well being, youth development, International work, and Inclusion.

YMCA Newcastle is managed by a local standing committee of the National Council of YMCAs of Ireland Ltd.

What do We do?

- ✔ Health & Wellbeing
- ✔ Peace Building
- ✔ Youth Work & Youth Spaces
- ✔ Vocational Training
- ✔ Global Youth Work / International Work
- ✔ Venue Rental

OUR WORK



OUR VISION

At Newcastle YMCA, we are committed to providing young people with the support, opportunities, and safe spaces they need to thrive. Located in the heart of Newcastle, we offer a wide range of programmes and activities designed to build confidence, develop essential life skills, and inspire positive change. Our services go beyond traditional youth work — we create an inclusive environment where young people can explore their interests, access mentorship, and gain the tools they need to succeed in all areas of life.

This year, Newcastle YMCA has continued to empower young people by fostering a sense of belonging, encouraging personal growth, and equipping them with the skills and resilience they need to create positive futures.

OUR VALUE BASE



WELCOME

We are dedicated to creating a warm, inclusive, and supportive environment where every young person feels valued and respected. From the moment they walk through our doors, we want them to feel a strong sense of belonging — a space where they can be themselves, explore their passions, and build positive relationships.



OPPORTUNITY

We empower young people by providing diverse opportunities to grow, learn, and succeed. Through skills development, leadership training, and mentorship, we help them build confidence and resilience. Our programmes equip young people with the tools they need to shape their futures and achieve lasting success.



WELLBEING

We prioritize young people's wellbeing by fostering a supportive, inclusive environment where they feel safe and valued. Through mental health support, physical activities, and creative programs, we equip them with tools to manage challenges, build resilience, and develop positive habits for a healthier future.



PEACE AND JUSTICE

We promote peace and justice by fostering a culture of respect, inclusion, and understanding. Through education, dialogue, and community engagement, we empower young people to challenge inequality, embrace diversity, and advocate for positive change. We equip them with the skills to build a fairer, more peaceful society.

WHAT WE DO

YMCA Newcastle provides opportunities with a variety of services four nights a week for a community of 113 registered members of which young people aged 9 to 18 of which 48% are male and 52% are female with 68% of service users are under the age of 13. However this number does not reflect the additional engagements which are made regularly through street based and detached interventions which tend to be with those aged 13 and over. Our curriculum is wide ranging and covers topics such as Health and Well-being, Resilience, Physical Development, Active Citizenship, Living in Safety and Stability, Leadership Development, EDI (Equity, Diversity & Interdependence), Inclusion, Good Relations, Detached Work, Youth Volunteering, and Social Action. We offer both accredited OCN and non-accredited programmes.

On average, 30 - 40 young people attend each general session, while thematic and personal development programmes attract about 16 participants. The services and programs are scheduled as follows:

- Tuesday Evening: 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM (Drop-in & Thematic Programs) for P5 - P7
- Wednesday Daytime: 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM (Participative Structures) for Year 11+
- Wednesday Evening: 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM (Drop-in & Thematic Programs) for P7 - Year 10
- Thursday Daytime: 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM (Inclusion Support) for Year 11+
- Thursday Evening: 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM (Drop-in & Thematic Programs) for Year 11+
- Friday Evening: 9:00 PM to 11:00 PM (Drop-in & Thematic Programs) for Year 11+

The membership reflects local demographics, with young Catholics being the majority. Many members walk to our centrally located youth centre as we serve many communities in the local area including Newcastle, Murlough, Shimna, Mourne, Dundrum and Tullymore. We currently have a small percentage of members from BAME backgrounds, a figure that grows as the community becomes more diverse.

A Youth Work manager is supported by a dedicated and skilled team of eight part time staff and two full time staff. We also have a fantastic team of over 20 volunteers who ensure that members are welcomed and encouraged to take part in all of the activities that we have on offer.



2024 STATISTICS

118 Active Members

48% Male

52% Female

68% Aged 9-12

32% Aged 13-18

8% of Members with SEN

846 EA Funded Session Hours

640 Additional Hours

3178 Volunteer Hours

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Some highlights of the youth projects over the course of the delivery year

Drugs and Alcohol awareness programme for young people aged 14 to 18 years supporting awareness through personal and social development programming and implementation and key thematic activities supporting awareness & risk aversion.

Mind matters - Anti Bullying programme for young people aged 9 to 13 years supporting and empowering young people to address bullying through personal and social development programming

Refugee and Asylum Seeker support for families placed in the area we provided a safe space for community lunches, cultural awareness training and life skill support as well as homework clubs to support young people who did not have English as their first language.

LGBT+ support Programme for young people aged 14 to 18 years this year took part in the Belfast Pride event. This group works in partnership including Cara Friend to ensure best practice.

Winter Warmers Programme providing a warm space to study every week which included hot drinks and snacks to support young people on cold winter nights, this was in partnership with a local charity called UNIT-T.

Fitness/ boxing programme for young people aged 14 to 18 in support of diversion from risk taking behaviors and seeking guidance and support around healthier making healthier choices.

Festival of Life Event a week of events and workshops focusing on mental health and suicide prevention in partnership with Papyrus and CDRCN

Resilience building programme for young people aged 9 to 13 years Our programme equips young people with essential coping skills, confidence, and emotional strength to overcome challenges. Through mentorship, workshops, and peer support, we empower them to thrive in adversity.



CASE STUDY

"The YMCA has been a beacon of joy in my life, shaping me into the person i am today through its unwavering support and sense of community"

Emily's journey with YMCA Newcastle began in 2019 when her school youth worker introduced her to the centre. A passionate aspiring actress, she initially joined the YMCA drama program and soon became involved in other activities, including the 'Starts with the Heart' LGBTQ+ group, Dungeons & Dragons, and the Youth Council.



Emily faced significant challenges in school, struggling with attendance due to persistent bullying related to her identity and feeling like she didn't fit in. At YMCA Newcastle, she found a safe space where she was fully accepted and supported. Her natural ability to connect with and support other young people quickly caught the attention of her Youth Leaders. Recognizing her potential, they invited her to volunteer with the LGBTQ+ group and enroll in an OCN Level 1 course in Youth Work Practice.

Her dedication and success in the program fueled her growth in youth work. Emily became a trusted peer mentor, often sought out by other young people who faced social isolation or bullying. Her strength, empathy, and kindness made a lasting impact on those around her. Through hard work and commitment, Emily earned a paid position as a Youth Support Worker at YMCA Newcastle.

Today, Emily continues to inspire others through her work at the centre while pursuing her studies to become a special education teacher. Her journey is a testament to resilience, community support, and the transformative power of youth services.

THE VOICE OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

At Newcastle YMCA, we believe young people's voices are vital in shaping the programs, policies, and services that affect them. When young people are heard, they gain confidence, develop leadership skills, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. By listening to their perspectives, we ensure our support is relevant, impactful, and empowering.

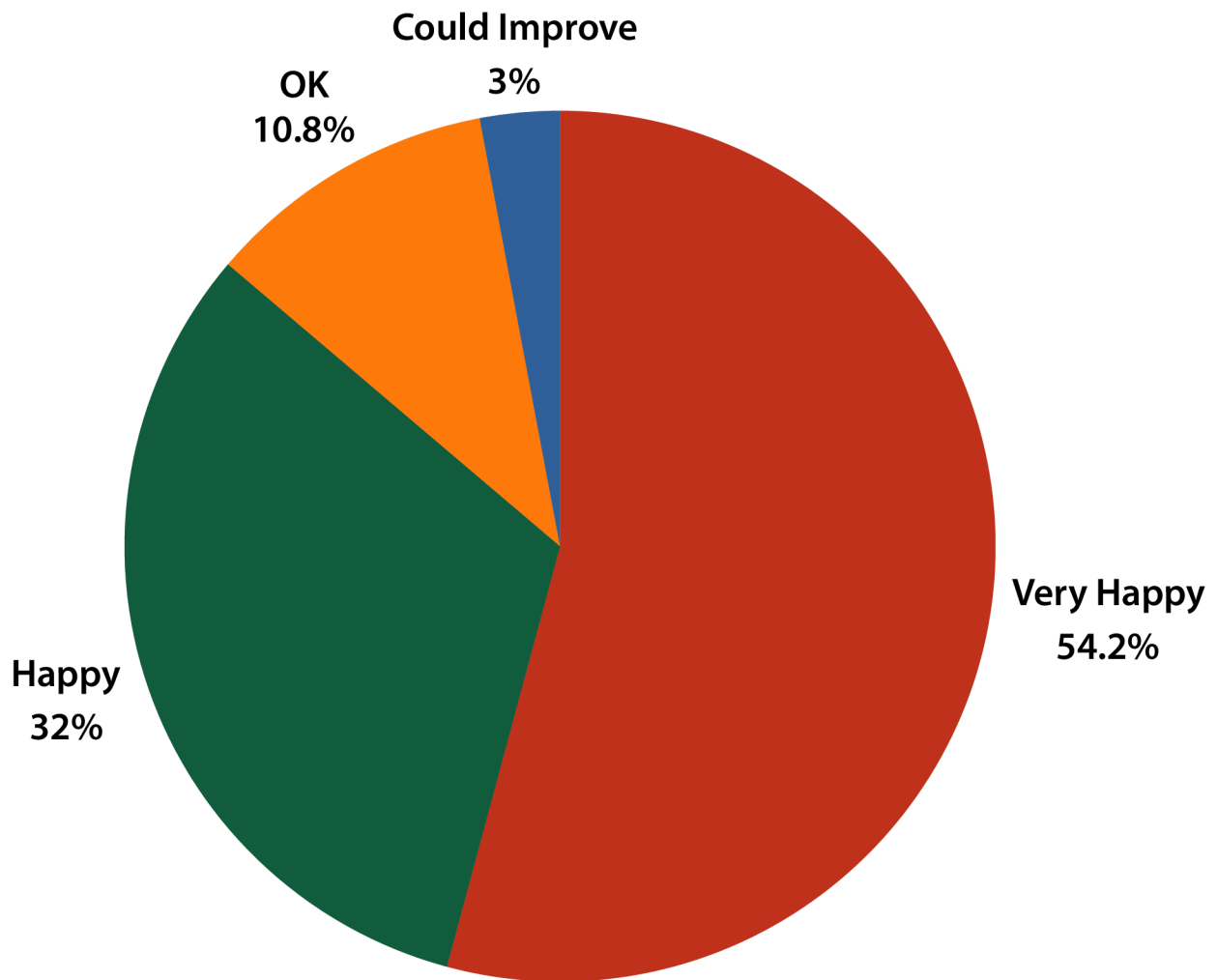
Advocacy and Campaigning: Members of our Youth Council group met with a number of local MLAs and local councillors including Willie Clark from Sinn Fein, Laura Devlin from SDLP and Jill Trusedale from Alliance to discuss issues such as homelessness, housing, racism in Ireland and the planned Mourne Gondola project.

Creative Expression: Through performance, visual arts, media and film we encourage self-expression through various creative outlets, helping young people find their voice and gain confidence in sharing their perspectives. By providing these creative opportunities, Newcastle YMCA ensures that every young person has a voice, no matter how they choose to express it.

Surveys and Feedback: We actively involve young people in shaping our services and ensuring their voices are heard. All our staff have been trained in informal monitoring and evaluation techniques to ensure that regular feedback from participants is gathered and tools like google forms, upshot and Kahoot are used to support this.



USER SATISFACTION RATES



Our feedback indicates that over 86% of service users are either Happy or Very Happy with the services we offer.

EMBEDDING KEY POLICIES - CRED

We are committed to fostering an inclusive, fair, and accessible environment where all young people feel valued and supported. Newcastle YMCA ensures that our programmes, services, and culture reflect our commitment to Community Relations, Equality and Diversity through:

Inclusive Programme Design: Ensuring all activities are accessible and tailored to diverse needs, including young people with disabilities and those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Equal Opportunities & Representation: Actively involving young people in decision-making, ensuring diverse voices shape our services and policies.

Training & Awareness: Providing staff and volunteers with regular training on equality, diversity, and unconscious bias to foster a respectful and inclusive environment.

Accessible Facilities & Communication: Ensuring physical and digital spaces are inclusive, with accessible buildings, materials, and resources available in multiple formats.

A Zero-Tolerance Approach to Discrimination: Implementing clear policies and procedures to address discrimination, ensuring a safe space for all young people.

By embedding these principles into every aspect of our organisation, Newcastle YMCA upholds a culture of fairness, dignity, and equal opportunity for all.



EMBEDDING KEY POLICIES - EHWF

We are committed to promoting the emotional health and wellbeing of young people by embedding a supportive framework into not only our programs, policies but our culture. Our approach ensures that wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do through:

Taking a Whole-Organisation Approach: Wellbeing is integrated into all areas, from programme design to staff training and youth engagement.

Providing a Safe & Supportive Environment: Creating a space where young people feel heard, valued, and supported, reducing stigma around mental health.

Early Intervention & Open Conversations: Encouraging discussions about emotional wellbeing through group sessions, peer mentoring, and one-to-one support.

Training & Development: Equipping staff and volunteers with the knowledge and tools to support young people's mental health effectively.

Offering Wellbeing Focused Programmes: Activities like mindfulness, creative expression, physical activity, and resilience-building workshops.

Partnerships & Signposting: Working with mental health professionals and local services to ensure young people have access to specialist support when needed.

Newcastle YMCA empowers young people to build resilience, develop coping strategies, and thrive emotionally and mentally.



QUALITY ASSURANCE

YMCA Newcastle is committed to robust quality assurance standards across all areas of work using the Quality Assurance Framework and Clear standards.

Developing People

YMCA Newcastle is a membership movement, in which members ARE the YMCA. Having the voice of children and young people included in decision-making and programme design is paramount to the delivery of provision at the YMCA. Our participative structures such as our established youth forums provided young people with a voice in decision-making and programme design and supported them in their leadership development. This was backed up by regular feedback from young people through membership surveys and focus groups as well as engaging with other stakeholders such as parents, community representatives and statutory bodies i.e. PSNI, local council and politicians.



Developing the Organisation

YMCA Newcastle is governed by a Standing committee, which reports to the National Executive. It has a memorandum and articles of association, registered with the charity commission and companies house. Regular programme reports are provided to trustees.

The programmes' planning and development align with the Model for Effective Practice. Training is overseen by the YMCA Ireland Training coordinator and externally verified by OCN NI, currently ranking as a 'low risk' centre. YMCA Ireland provides expertise in workforce development and staff support & supervision through their Personnel and Policy Worker and registration with Peninsula which provides HR advice.

Developing Youth Work Practice

YMCA Newcastle uses various resources and tools to measure progress in youth work practice to inform programme development;

Programme Plans/Resources: A session planner & term planner was co-created alongside the staff team throughout the year and developed and reviewed during our Quarterly staff meetings. All plans and resources are captured through spreadsheets managed by the youth work manager.

Pathways for Progression: YMCA Newcastle provides a number of personal and professional development opportunities for young people. In the last 12 months we have provided training workshops on drugs and alcohol awareness, safeguarding and Autism & Disability Awareness. 11 of our young leaders successfully completed their OCN level 1 Leadership in Youth Work award and next year will be progressing to the level 2.

IMPROVEMENTS

Responding to the Feedback from our Local Needs Analysis

YMCA Newcastle delivered a Local Needs Analysis to direct the development and implementation of quality multifaceted youth work approaches and programmes. 85 respondents comprising of our membership as well as parents and local stakeholders provided feedback. 42% of respondents highlighted Mental health and well-being as their primary concern, followed by concerns about money (25%), challenges with school work (22%) bullying (20%) and self esteem & body image (20%).

This feedback has shaped our programme for the new year with greater flexibility and access to informal drop in and bespoke workshops to address the specific concerns of our members.

Access to Enhanced Pathways

YMCA Newcastle improved by enhancing the pathways for our young people with 8 accessing a personal development & employability programme.

YMCA Newcastle through the YMCA Ireland offered opportunities for training in the following areas: Safeguarding, First Aid, Managing Challenging Behaviour, disability autism, and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Increased detached provision

Over the summer months, we aim to increase our detached engagement with our membership as during this period often attendance is below the yearly average. Moving towards delivering detached programmes will maintain high levels of engagement and enable us to more appropriate services for children and families during this key period of time.

We will continue to strive to meet the needs of young people and to be adaptable and flexible as change is often required.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

We at YMCA Newcastle remain committed to empowering young people by providing opportunities that foster growth, resilience, and positive change. Through our inclusive programs and unwavering support, we continue to create a safe and inspiring environment where young people, like Emily in our case study, can thrive. With ongoing support from our funders and partners, we look forward to building an even brighter future for our community. Together, we are shaping confident, capable, and compassionate young leaders who are ready to make a lasting impact.

A quality youth service is vital to our the social cohesion of society and the Newcastle area is no different. Over the past number of months is an increase in membership with young people seeking to access services with a range of additional needs. Our staff are a vital cog in the machine, their tenacity, commitment and motivation to support the complex needs of young people with the best possible services is admirable and I am very proud of my team here.

It is essential that core youth provision continues as we continue to be presented by more and more young people with complex needs who need positive and meaningful engagement. Youth workers are already stretched and often go above and beyond to meet the needs of children and young people, more support is essential and should not depend on the goodwill of the voluntary youth sector.

We are thankful to the Education Authority for their continued support for core services here in Newcastle. Your impact and investment into our programme here in YMCA Newcastle has been incredibly beneficial in providing young people with life enriching opportunities and the ability to access a safe space to grow into the best versions of themselves with guidance and mentoring from our skilled staff.

We look forward to our continued partnership as we navigate into the future.

Signed: 

Name: Jim McDowell (Youth Work Manager)

Date: 31/03/2025



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