

Supporting  
Young People  
To Take Action  
On Sectarianism  
**A Toolkit**

YEAR 2



LOOKING  
**FORWARD**  
NOT BACK



## FOREWORD

**The Looking Forward Not Back project was developed and delivered by YouthLink Scotland in partnership with young people and youth workers from across Scotland. It was funded by the Scottish Government as part of the wider “Tackling Sectarianism” programme which supported community-based action to challenge and change attitudes to sectarianism.**

Looking Forward Not Back was an opportunity for YouthLink Scotland to support youth work organisations and young people to address sectarianism in their communities and to illustrate the important contribution youth work and young people can make to tackling issues of this nature.

We know that youth work can change young people’s lives, but it also makes a positive contribution to communities by supporting the collective participation and action of young people as illustrated by the work of the groups involved in Looking Forward Not Back.

I’d like to say a massive thank you to the young people and the youth workers that were involved in these groups. We hope that sharing your experiences and learning will encourage others to get involved.

*Jim Sweeney*

Chief Executive,  
**YouthLink Scotland**



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## INTRODUCTION TO USING THE TOOLKIT

**Looking Forward Not Back was an opportunity for YouthLink Scotland to support youth workers and young people to address sectarianism in their communities and to generate evidence of the contribution youth work and young people can make to tackling this issue.**

This Toolkit was created to share the learning from the Looking Forward Not Back groups. It is presented as a guide for other organisations and practitioners who would like to work with young people to support youth action on sectarianism.

The Toolkit is split into two parts. Part 1 provides an overview of what we know about sectarianism and a consideration of the contribution of a youth work approach to help address the issue. Part 2 provides a series of key steps that should be considered when working to support youth action on sectarianism.

At each stage, the Toolkit gives an overview of the youth work process involved, examples from the Looking Forward Not Back groups, including top tips, and a series of reflective questions to consider.



**PART 1**  
BACKGROUND

**This section sets out the context for working with young people on the issue of sectarianism. It describes what we mean by sectarianism, the nature and purpose of youth work and the nature of the contribution that youth work might make to tackling sectarianism.**

## Sectarianism in Scotland

The Scottish Government Advisory Group report on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland (2015) describes sectarianism as:

**“A mixture of perceptions, attitudes, actions, and structures that involves overlooking, excluding, discriminating against or being abusive or violent towards others on the basis of their perceived Christian denominational background. This perception is always mixed with other factors such as, but not confined to, politics, football allegiance and national identity”**

Offensive sectarian language and attitudes are still commonplace in Scotland. Sectarianism still takes place in workplaces, schools, cultural organisations and politics (Advisory Group, 2015). Sectarian language and the expression of sectarian views are used to discriminate, cause offence, exclude and/or state allegiance to a particular group. It still has a major impact on life in Scottish communities.

There is an historical context to sectarianism in Scotland but, like other prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours, sectarianism is best understood and addressed as a social norm, embedded in, and “transmitted” by, family and community beliefs and narratives. The “adoption” of social norms can serve a valuable social purpose for people, providing a sense of belonging and acceptance. It is important that action to address sectarianism is informed by this understanding.

## Youth Work and Sectarianism

The core purpose of youth work is to support the personal and social development of young people through informal education. In youth work, personal and social learning and development are inter-related. Youth work supports young people to learn from their lived experience, to develop the motivation and capacity to examine their values, actions and identities and to develop the skills and confidence to act for positive change in their own lives and in their wider communities.

When we bring together this definition of sectarianism and of youth work the contribution that youth work can make to tackle this issue is clear.

- A youth work process which empowers young people to understand and critically question received norms can contribute to addressing this “transmission” of attitudes and behaviours from generation to generation.
- A youth work process which supports young people to learn in dialogue with others and is responsive to, and respectful of, their wider social environments can provide the “safe” learning environment and experience that is critical to this kind of learning and development.
- A youth work process which empowers young people to apply what they have learned and encourages and supports the participation of young people in their own communities and wider society can bring about the community-based dialogue and community-driven action required to address sectarianism.

## **PART 2**

SUPPORTING YOUTH  
ACTION ON SECTARIANISM

**Part 2 provides a series of key steps that should be considered when working to support youth action on sectarianism. At each step you'll find helpful tips and examples based on the experience of the Looking Forward Not Back groups.**

## GROUNDWORK

Before you embark on a project to support youth action on sectarianism it's important that you're prepared at a personal and organisational level.

### Your own understanding of sectarianism

To effectively support young people's learning you should be well informed about the nature and history of sectarianism. You should also be aware of your own views and beliefs and consider how these may impact on your practice. It is essential, when working to support young people to examine their values and beliefs, that you have done the same and continue to do so throughout the process. Reflective practice involves a conscious consideration of how you will work with young people in a way that is empowering and that promotes equality and acceptance of others.

- How much do I know about sectarianism?
- What are my personal views and experiences of sectarianism?
- Is it appropriate to share them?
- Is there a possibility that my personal views will influence my practice?
- How can I ensure I demonstrate and promote tolerance and respect for others?

### Why is this important?

For people growing up in Scotland (including youth workers) they may have seen or experienced sectarianism in their community, or even held sectarian views themselves. Although we may think we have left this behind us we are all subject to unconscious bias, of which we are not always aware, which affects how we behave. It is important to be aware of this and actively consider how to ensure that practice is not affected at this level.

### TOP TIP: How to build this into practice

As part of their involvement in Looking Forward Not Back youth workers kept reflective diaries and produced a reflective piece of writing at the end of the project. They also shared their practice and learned from each other's experiences at regular practice development seminars.

### Organisational culture

As with individual practice, it is important that your staff team has a collective understanding of the issue of sectarianism and of the purpose of the work.

It is important that you are communicating messages that are congruent with the work that you are preparing to do. For example, if sectarian language is perceived to be tolerated within any of the wider youth work groups and programmes you run, it will be difficult to communicate a different position in the context of your work on sectarianism. Sectarian language and behaviour may be an issue (and can be a good starting point for this kind of project) but you should have a clear policy and procedure for addressing it that is applied consistently.

- Is sectarian language and behaviour an issue within the youth work services you provide?
- Do you have an agreed organisational approach to dealing with sectarianism?
- What is your organisational position in relation to the use of sectarian language?
- Do you have a policy and procedure for dealing with it?
- Are staff members confident about putting this into practice?

### The youth work setting

Working with young people on an issue like sectarianism requires a youth work setting that is conducive to the challenging and powerful conversations that are an integral part of this kind of issue-based work. You should ensure that the space you use supports the work you're doing.

- Do you have access to a quiet space that is free from distractions?
- What images and messages are being displayed?
- Are these congruent with the work you will be doing with the young people?

#### Example:

One of the Looking Forward Not Back groups began their project in a space where there were no breakout rooms which affected not only the discussions of sectarianism due to a lack of quiet space but also meant it was more difficult for each young person to learn at their own pace and to use group work techniques effectively. Consequently, they changed buildings to ensure a more effective informal learning environment.

**“If we'd tried to do the sectarian project in the hall it wouldn't have worked, they would have felt confined to one room, with no room to break away... so if you've finished your research you don't have to sit and wait for everyone else, you can go do something else”**

Youth Worker



### Creating a youth work setting in a school environment

One of the Looking Forward Not Back groups met weekly in a school. To create a youth work environment in which they could build trust, set a more informal tone and have challenging conversations, they adopted a number of methods such as running icebreaker exercises and providing tea and biscuits. They also made sure that the room was not set up as a classroom, by ensuring that everyone sat together around one table. These may seem like small things but for the young people they made a huge difference to them feeling like they are equal partners in the learning experience.

***“It was very, very relaxed, a slowly gently approach so hence cups of tea in the morning, loads of chocolate biscuits... as soon as that door closes you don’t feel you’re in the school any more, it’s just you and the group, you could be in a café, or a community centre anywhere, the only thing that reminds you it’s a school is the bell, the bell rings at a certain time and off they go and that’s really the only difference”***

Youth Worker

### **Involving young people**

It is fundamental to a youth work approach, and to achieving youth work outcomes, that young people take part in any project or programme of learning on a voluntary basis and as equal partners. Your work on sectarianism should be developed in partnership with the young people you're working with. Here are some key questions that it is important to consider if you want to work with young people in a way that will inspire learning and action for change.

#### **Relevance**

It is important that any programme of learning developed with young people is relevant to their lived experience. Good youth work responds to the experiences and environments of young people. Learning that is embedded in young people's reality can foster the kind of critical understanding that leads young people to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviours and the factors that influence these.

- Is sectarianism an issue in the community?
- Is it an issue for the young people you work with?

#### **Example:**

All of the youth workers and young people involved in Looking Forward Not Back had identified sectarianism as an issue for young people and in their community prior to developing their project. Here are some of the things they told us:



### **Young people's perception of sectarianism**

The view of many of the young people that we work with is that the divide in the local community is "the norm" and that sectarianism is an acceptable way of thinking and behaving. They also tell us that sectarian behaviour is mainly driven by football allegiances.

### **Territorial issues**

Some of the young people we work with have been directly subjected to acts of violence and vandalism as a result of their perceived public allegiance to either certain religions or football teams.

### **Fear/bullying**

Some of the young people we work with have been subject to sectarian abuse and also, more worryingly, have also been the perpetrators.

### **Peer pressure to conform**

Young people are currently scared to be seen as an individual with thoughts and opinions that differ from others and are therefore not accepted as part of groups with these set views and opinions (the 'in crowd'). If they do stand out from the crowd this can sadly then lead to being a victim of bullying.

### **Family ties**

Some young people we work with have family ties with local organisations e.g. Orange Lodges and Republican Organisations. These connections have been passed on from generation to generation and are viewed as something that can't be changed or challenged. They are also fearful of being seen to let their family down if they do not follow in their footsteps.



### Engaging young people on the topic of sectarianism

Engaging young people's interest in the issue of sectarianism can happen in a variety of ways. These include opportunistic discussions about the use of sectarian language in the youth work setting, discussions about news articles or sectarian incidents in the community, or putting the idea to an already established group of young people you work with.

- Is this a topic that the young people you work with have already expressed an interest in?
- Is sectarian language and behaviour an issue in your youth work services?
- How will you engage young people in a dialogue about sectarianism?
- How will you establish interest, amongst the young people, in a project on sectarianism?
- Is there a group of young people that would particularly benefit from being involved in this work?

### Example:

The ways in which the youth workers engaged young people's interest in the issue of sectarianism varied. For example:

- The use of sectarian language by young people and the expression of sectarian views in a youth work setting provided an opportunity for dialogue.
- The young people involved had an existing interest as a result of their own experiences of sectarianism.
- An awareness of the impact of sectarianism on their wider community was the starting point for discussion.

One group told us that their project was formed as a response to the articulation of sectarian views by a young person. A youth worker encouraged the young person, through constructive challenging and dialogue, to reflect on these views and consequently to help start a group which brought together young people from different schools (denominational and non-denominational) with the aim of challenging sectarian attitudes and beliefs.

## Agreeing a programme

The nature and purpose of the work the group will carry out should be developed and agreed with the young people involved. A co-production approach ensures that the work is relevant to, and directly relates to, the young people's own experience of sectarianism. This is important if you want to support active learning by young people and foster commitment to the project.

- How will you support the young people you're working with to develop a programme for learning and action on sectarianism that is relevant and meaningful to them?
- What will your role be in that process?
- What initial information about sectarianism can you provide that will support the young people involved to make informed decisions about the focus of the programme?
- What options can you share with the group of young people to guide their thinking about what can be achieved?
- Is there a need for the group to carry out some initial research on the topic of sectarianism to inform the programme of learning and action?

## Example:

In all the groups the programme for learning about, and taking action on, sectarianism was developed in partnership with the young people involved. Some of the young people were already trained as peer educators and wanted to work in this way with other young people to raise awareness of sectarianism and the impact that it can have on community life. In this case, the learning programme was developed to support the young people to understand more about sectarianism but tailored to ensure that they developed the skills to work with other young people on this issue.

In other groups the young people wanted to explore their own values and beliefs and understand more about the views of the wider community. In these cases, the learning programme was structured to support more reflective learning and the research that the young people wanted to carry out in the community.

**“[It] is education through fun and it's taking that step away from being school-like and structured and very much putting it in the hands of the young people and being led by them and that was the empowerment and self-confidence element. To be honest sometimes it threw me because I felt 'oh my god, I have timescales and stuff' but it's their research, it was reversing it round and making it person led and needs led and led by them, and [I] think that's an opportunity you don't really get in another setting. Always flexible and adaptable, not pushing and forcing things on young people and making it about their choice”**

Youth Worker



### Recognising Learning

Youth work is a learning process, and youth workers should give consideration to appropriate and meaningful ways of recognising learning. Structuring the learning programme and process around the objectives of recognised a youth work award is one way of doing this. Young work awards offer young people the opportunity to achieve widely recognised qualifications and accreditation. The achievement of youth work awards mean that young people can demonstrate their skills, knowledge, commitment, and confidence and are a useful currency for accessing future learning or work.

While not all young people will wish to have their learning recognised through awards, it is the responsibility of the youth worker to offer the opportunity for recognition of their learning.

- What are the motivations of the young people engaged in your learning opportunity?
- Do you have a good understanding of the range of youth awards that are available?
- Which award scheme is most appropriate to your youth work programme or activity?
- Do you have the skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver the appropriate youth award?

For more information on the range of Youth Awards available in Scotland visit [www.awardsnetwork.org](http://www.awardsnetwork.org)

### Example:

The Participatory Democracy Certificate (SCQF level 5) recognises and credits young people's participation in a project or programme which involves research. This Certificate includes 20 notional learning hours, which can take between 12 and 16 weeks to complete and is externally verified by YouthLink Scotland. The award recognised young people's research skills, groupwork skills, leadership skills, and decision-making approaches.

Four of the LFNB groups decided to work towards the PDC. The young people involved told us that accreditation was a key motivating factor for taking part in and completing the project.

**"The P.D.C. award [is] really important to them and played a major role in encouraging them to attend"**

Youth Worker

## Learning about sectarianism

Supporting young people to develop an understanding of sectarianism and how it affects them and the communities they live in is a crucial step in supporting young people to take informed action. It is also one of the ways in which youth work can contribute to addressing sectarianism. It should be a process of not only learning about the facts and the history of sectarianism but one which supports young people to reflect on their own experiences, values, attitudes and behaviours through dialogue with their peers in an environment that promotes respect and values diversity.

### Group work – a learning tool

Group work is an important tool and process within youth work. When purposefully facilitated, group-based learning is a social process which can help young people to form, understand and assess their own views in dialogue with others. On the topic of sectarianism, group-based learning can provide a safe environment for young people to question where sectarian views and beliefs come from, what purpose they serve and to understand and perhaps assimilate different perspectives.

The role of the youth worker is to ensure a safe environment, to guide the learning and dialogue, to prompt active reflection and to model respectful and inclusive interaction.

- What is your experience of group work? Are you confident that you can effectively facilitate this kind of learning?
- How will you ensure that you create a safe environment for young people to enter into meaningful questioning and reflection? How confident are you that you can guide the focus of the group and support active learning and reflection?
- How will you develop and agree ground rules with the young people you are working with? For example, what do the group think about the use of sectarian terms?
- Have you identified appropriate resources that will support the process of learning and reflection?

### Example:

All of the Looking Forward Not Back groups used group work to support the young people's learning. The length of time the young people had known each other varied from group to group. They were, however, all encouraged to accept each other's differences, share tasks and communicate effectively with each other by co-producing group rules to ensure they were working in a productive, respectful and safe learning environment.

**“It was in their group agreements, not to offend people and not to hurt people's feelings... it was a safe environment, we do always say 'you're okay to have opinions but it's the way that you voice them'”**

Youth Worker

### Considerations when using group work

It is important to be aware that exploring the issue of sectarianism can be a challenging process for young people especially when their own, and possibly family engrained norms and values, are being examined. It is important to prepare for this and have some understanding of the young people's social reality.

- Are you aware of any issues this topic may raise for young people?
- Have you thought about how you would deal with any issues that might arise?

#### Example:

For some of the young people in Looking Forward Not Back, sectarianism was an issue they had heard about in their community, for others it affected their daily lives. It was, at times, a challenging process for some of the young people and it was important that the supporting youth workers were aware, sensitive, and able to engage in open and reflective dialogue with the young people at critical points.



**“(Young person) had a bit of a tantrum on the residential and he was like ‘Am I allowed back?’ (He) even questioned me about why he was allowed back because he didn’t think he should be because he’d had a tantrum, but it was minor, and I said ‘so if you didn’t come back, what would that change?’ I had a whole conversation with him about him being in conflict, so I said ‘maybe you’re having a wee tantrum because you’re in conflict, you’re being told this from us and yet your family are telling you that, you’re in the middle trying to make sense of it all and it might not make sense to you for 6 months, a year, until you have your own kids’”**

Youth Worker



### Residential Experience

A well planned residential experience can provide a good opportunity to develop group work skills, build relationships and introduce the issue of sectarianism. Through creating a safe and creative learning environment the parameters of the project can be set in partnership with young people.

#### Example:

One of the Looking Forward Not Back groups decided to run a residential at the beginning of their project. Before the project young people did not know each other and though had personal experience of sectarianism, they had little awareness of the history of sectarianism and its impact on Scotland. This provided an opportunity to develop as a team and begin to introduce the topic of sectarianism. A young person from the group said:

**“We done topics, activities, team building... we had workshops related to sectarianism... it’s helped actually... we’ve been brought closer as a group”**

Youth Worker



### **Reflection – a learning tool**

In step one, the importance of reflecting on your own views and beliefs and how these might impact on your practice was highlighted. Purposeful reflection is also an essential part of the learning process for the young people you are working with. Developing critical awareness and understanding (rather than just acquiring knowledge) involves processing information, relating this to previous knowledge, working through the attitudes and emotions that might impact on understanding and ordering and making sense of new ideas. You can support reflection in a number of ways.

### **Group discussions**

Ensure that as well as supporting the young people to acquire new knowledge about the history and nature of sectarianism you are also engaging the group in discussion about what this new information means to them. What has it made them think about? How does it make them feel? What do they think about other people's views?

### **Interviews**

You could interview the young people or encourage them to interview each other to explore what they have learned and draw out their personal reactions to new information and understanding.

### **Reflective journals**

Encourage the young people to keep a reflective diary in which they reflect on their own learning and feelings throughout the project.

### **Interviews**

You could interview the young people or encourage them to interview each other to explore what they have learned and draw out their personal reactions to new information and understanding.



### Example:

As part of the Looking Forward Not Back project, youth workers supported young people to reflect in a number of ways including:

- **Timelines** - Young people in one group created a project timeline which mapped key milestones of the project. It provided a visual representation of their learning journey and was used to support reflection on the group's progress, learning and achievement.
- **Graffiti walls** - Some of the groups used graffiti walls to support reflection. This involved young people writing their thoughts on the wall after each learning session or activity.
- **Written and video diaries** - Most of the young people involved in the groups kept written reflective diaries to document and support reflection on their learning. Some groups chose to keep video diaries. This involved the young people interviewing each other on camera about what they had learned and what impact this had on them personally. The video diaries were included in a documentary about the making of their Looking Forward Not Back group.

## Taking action on sectarianism

This is a toolkit for organisations working with young people to support youth action on sectarianism. However, it is important to note that in youth work, youth action is not an end in itself. The desire to take action emerges organically, with encouragement and support, from the young people's learning and the critical awareness they have developed. For some groups this may not occur. For some it may involve simply sharing that learning with others. For others it may result in a community campaign or a funding application for a major project. The youth work process is about encouraging reflection on learning and identifying any action that the group might want to take. Your group will come up with their own ideas based on their own experience and learning.

### Encouraging young people to take action on sectarianism

Encouraging young people to take action on sectarianism can be achieved in a number of ways and at various points in the learning process. Here are some of the ways you might support action-orientated learning.

- Develop a learning programme that is grounded in young people's own experience of sectarianism or the impact it has on their community. This builds in the idea of the need for change and the potential for action from the start.
- Encourage the young people you are working with to take a "questioning" or "problematizing" approach to their learning on sectarianism. Encourage them to ask thought-provoking questions and to question answers as well as answer questions. For example, as well as encouraging young people to understand "how" sectarianism is passed on from generation to generation, encourage them to consider "why".
- Develop a learning programme that involves identifying ideas for solutions rather than just identifying problems or a better understanding of sectarianism.
- Incorporate an awareness of young people's rights, roles and responsibilities as active citizens into the learning programme you develop to explore sectarianism.
- Explore and identify young people's aims and aspirations regarding their involvement with the wider community, promoting and responding enthusiastically to ways of becoming involved.



### **Example:**

As a result of exploring and learning more about sectarianism, the young people involved in Looking Forward Not Back were inspired to take action in different ways.

### **Generating Dialogue in the Community**

**Short film** - Young people from two of the groups created short films about sectarianism to use as a discussion point in workshops in their schools and community.

**Drama** - One group wrote and performed in a hard-hitting play as part of a wider community event. The performance was interactive, allowing the audience to engage with and challenge the behaviour and attitudes of the characters. The play was followed by a debrief workshop in which participants discussed the key themes explored in the drama.

**Peer education** - Young people from two of the groups developed and delivered workshops to their peers in schools and in their communities. The workshops were designed to raise awareness of sectarianism and to generate discussion with their peers. One group developed a human board game in which participants became the game "pieces" and moved around the board by answering "truth" or "myth" to questions related to sectarianism. This interactive game sparked discussion about myths and misinterpretations of sectarianism.

**Research** - This method was used to explore the impact of sectarianism in their community and learn from others. A formal research methodology provided structure to designing the research questions, methods, conducting the research, analysing and presenting their findings. Through using this method the groups started discussions with their peers, family members and local community, to try and understand the impact of sectarianism in their lives.

### Raising Awareness

**Mural** - One group designed a mural with a professional artist to reflect what they had learned and share their hope and vision for an integrated community, and it is now a permanent feature at their community centre.

**Posters** - One group created a series of posters to explore what sectarianism meant to the young people and the impact it has on community life. These were displayed in a pop-up gallery in prominent places in the community including supermarkets. After engaging with the community the young people then created canvases incorporating community views and experiences with the support of a local artist. The canvases are now displayed in their local community centre, for all members of the community to see.

**Radio Show** - Young people from one group created podcasts based on interviews with their peers about their understanding of sectarianism. The group were invited to take part in a local radio show where they shared what they had learned and played the podcasts. The radio station also hosted an open day inviting community members to meet the young people and hear about what they had learned about sectarianism.

### Top Tip

Where young people are interacting with each other and community members it is important to consider the use of language and its potential impact. Sectarian language can be bold, aggressive, offensive, and emotive.

The Looking Forward Not Back groups took very different approaches to the use of sectarian language in their community-based activities.

One group decided not to use sectarian language because they wanted to expose the absurdity of sectarianism by removing the recognisable and emotive terms used and to ensure that the workshop they developed was accessible to younger people and appropriate for a school setting.

In contrast, one of the groups created a powerful performance piece that incorporated strong sectarian language. This was well received by the audience members because it was realistic and challenging.

### Reflective questions:

- What will work best in your setting?
- Is the target audience for your community-based activity likely to be offended by the use of sectarian language or will they appreciate the realism that it brings?
- Does removing the words remove the meaning?
- Does creating an understanding of the words make young people more likely to use them?

## Action planning

Supporting young people to take action on sectarianism should be a process of supporting the involvement of young people in their community, supporting young people to develop the skills and confidence required to participate and supporting young people to learn from the experience. It is important to support the group you are working with to develop an action plan that will achieve these objectives. Action planning should involve consideration of the following.

- **Outcomes** - What do the group want to achieve in relation to sectarianism? What change do they want to affect through the action they take?
- **Activity** - What concrete action can they take that will achieve the desired outcomes?
- **Learning** - What skills do the young people in the group need to develop to effectively carry out that activity? For example, if the group want to research other people's experiences of sectarianism they will need to understand basic research processes. If the group want to share what they have learned with their peers, they will need to understand a peer education approach and develop presentation skills. How will this be achieved?
- **Resources** - What equipment will the group require to carry out the activity they have planned? What support might they need from other people? Is there a budget for the project? How will the budget be managed by the young people involved?
- **Barriers and risks** - It is important to guide the young people through a process of considering the feasibility of their action plan, identifying any risks associated with potential actions, balancing the risks against the benefits that are likely to arise and identifying any barriers that may need to be addressed.

You should also consider the following in relation to your own practice.

- Does the group's action plan meet legal, regulatory and ethical requirements?
- How will you create opportunities for young people to reflect upon and learn from their experiences?
- How will you support access to local stakeholders, organisations and decision-making structures?

### Reflection and next steps

Having supported the group of young people you are working with to take action on sectarianism in the community, it is important to consider what comes next. You should support the group to reflect on and celebrate what they have achieved. This should involve a consideration of any further action on sectarianism and any new areas of interest that have emerged as part of the learning journey the young people have been on. If this was a time limited project it is still important to support the young people to identify what they have learned, how they will use that learning in other situations, what they have achieved through their action and their aspirations in relation to ongoing participation in the community and wider society. It is also important that you take the time to reflect on what you have learned from the process of supporting the group and how this will inform your practice in the future.

#### **Parting Words from Youth Workers and Young People Involved in Looking Forward Not Back**

We asked the youth workers involved in Looking Forward Not Back to reflect on the experience of delivering their local project. Here are some of the themes that emerged and some tips that might be helpful for you to consider.

- **Timescales are great until young people's lives get in the way**

Looking Forward Not Back activity had to compete for a place in the lives of busy young people. Issues such as child care disasters, family problems, bereavements and sporting commitments had to be worked around. As a result, project plans had to be revised and supervision and training programmes changed to meet the needs of young people and young volunteer leaders. None of this is unusual, but for some of the groups it meant developing a less ambitious action plan.

**Top tip** - *Be prepared for life to get in the way. It might be necessary to consider the balance that should be found between implementing the group's action plan and the more general support that members of the group may need. It may be necessary to renegotiate and revise the action plan with the young people you're working with.*

- **Practice makes perfect**

Several of the youth workers involved in supporting the Looking Forward Not Back groups found that the young people's confidence dipped in advance of the delivery of their community engagement workshops. This happened regardless of whether they were delivering to adults, children or young people. A practice run with a friendly but critical audience proved to be an effective way of encouraging and bolstering their confidence.

**Top tip** - Give the young people opportunity to practice their engagement activity and remind them that making mistakes is part of learning. If they need help to deliver on the day, staff can support.

- **Ensuring support for volunteers**

A youth worker from one of the groups reflected on the need to ensure that volunteer and trainee youth workers are supported by a qualified and experienced member of staff. Issue-based youth work can be very challenging at a professional and personal level and requires a level of competence that less experienced members of staff weren't able to bring.

**Top tip** - Ensure the staff team supporting the project has the right mix of experience and enthusiasm.

- **Don't underestimate the potential of young people**

The Looking Forward Not Back groups found that the community members they engaged with welcomed the discussion with young people and were impressed by the fact that they were willing to tackle and explore a challenging subject like sectarianism. They also felt that because young people were leading the discussion on sectarianism it felt less "taboo" and intimidating.

**Top tip** - It's important to find a balance between encouraging and empowering young people as active citizens and supporting them to be realistic about what they want to achieve through their involvement in the project.

## Further Information

For further information on the Looking Forward Not Back groups and more support resources please visit the Looking Forward Not Back page on the "Action on Sectarianism" website.

[www.actiononsectarianism.info](http://www.actiononsectarianism.info)



**Investors in Diversity**



LOOKING  
FORWARD  
NOT BACK

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