



Springboard Our Lives Our Legacy – Baseline Report

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Introduction

The Springboard Opportunities Ltd. Our Lives, Our Legacy project aims to bring together young people from different backgrounds to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) by exploring the legacy of the Northern Ireland (NI) conflict through their 'lived experience'; and reflecting on their hopes for the future. The project is funded through Spirit of 2012's Moments to Connect programme.

Springboard considers the Our Lives, Our Legacy project as an opportunity to use the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement as a platform to build connections between divided communities. By linking Our Lives, Our Legacy to the anniversary of the GFA, the project will gather learning on how significant events can be maximised to bring people together, and help promote integration. It is intended the findings will help widen learning around how to better plan events to help maximise community cohesion.

The 15 young people involved in the project are drawn from divided communities across Belfast and form Springboards 'NextGen' youth advisory group. Through a co-design and co-delivery approach they will be supported to participate in a series of development opportunities through the year, including a co-created event.

Evaluation of the Our Lives our Legacy programme

In March of 2023 inFocus Consultancy Ltd started a year-long evaluation of the Our Lives Our Legacy programme. The project seeks to generate an understanding of the impact of the project on...

1. **...young people** (NextGen advisory group and event attendees) in relation to their distance travelled, in particular relating to a change in perspective of people from different backgrounds.
2. **...building social cohesion between direct beneficiaries** (NextGen and event attendees) across divided communities and indirect beneficiaries (e.g. peers and families).
3. **...the relationship of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA),** and the GFA itself, to the project and outcomes generated from the project. .

In December 2023 a baseline report was developed as part of the overall evaluation in order to assess the NextGen group at the beginning of the programme – this expands on the baseline data at the start of the project to add further narrative. The report uses data collected before the group engaged in programme activities, from qualitative and quantitative data sources:

- A baseline survey had 15 responses from the NextGen youth advisory group
- A focus group consisted of 5 of the youth group members, 2 male and 3 females, from a mix of backgrounds (3 Protestant and 2 Catholic), from the ages of 18 – 28 years old.
- A staff interview included the Deputy Director and Programme Coordinator in Springboard, and one of the NextGen youth group members.

Findings

This section details the outcome data collected in April of 2023, setting an evaluation baseline for the NextGen youth group involved at the start of the Our Lives Our Legacy project. This report will form the basis of the final report for the project in 2023.

Confidence & Wellbeing

Average wellbeing, confidence and anxiety levels for the young people involved follows in the table below. The average baseline ratings of group wellbeing levels include *life satisfaction* at 4.07, *life is worthwhile* at 3.73, and *happiness* at 4. **In comparison to the general population of the United Kingdom, these scores are substantially lower.** According to the Office for National Statistics, as of March 2023, the *life satisfaction* score for the UK was 7.45, for *life is worthwhile* it was 7.93 and for *happiness* it was 7.57. the youth group's scores were even lower than the Northern Ireland average. The *life satisfaction*, *life is worthwhile* and *happiness* scores were 7.63, 7.93 and 7.57, respectively, as of March 2023.

The group's confidence score was 4.47. In terms of *anxiety* scores, the group's was 4.13, which is higher than the UK average (3.23) and the N Ireland average (2.91).

	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety	Confidence
NextGen group	4.07	3.73	4.00	4.13	4.47
Northern Ireland	7.63	7.93	7.57	2.91	
United Kingdom	7.45	7.73	7.39	3.23	

Across the group wellbeing, confidence and anxiety scores could be mostly found in the Low (a rating between 0 and 4, inclusively) and Medium (a rating between 5 and 6, inclusively) categories. 67%, 60% and 60% of the NextGen group could be found in the Low categories of *life satisfaction*, *life is worthwhile* and *happiness* measurements. More than half of the youth group reported to have Low levels of *confidence*. 47% of the NextGen group were experiencing Medium and High levels of *anxiety* at baseline.

	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Confidence	Anxiety
Low (0-4)	67%	60%	60%	53%	53%
Medium (5-6)	33%	40%	33%	40%	40%
High (7-8)	0%	0%	0%	7%	7%
Very High (9-10)	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%

Confidence & Wellbeing (cont.)

Some individuals within the group identified in the open text answers of the survey that issues around wellbeing, such as past trauma and self-confidence could impact their ability to have an open and positive attitude towards people from different backgrounds.

'I think when you have any trauma or issues, it is a lot harder to have a positive attitude' – NextGen group member

'I think if you feel better about yourself, it's easier to be positive towards others.' – NextGen group member

It is likely that the young people spoke from personal experience, as according to Springboard's Deputy Director, the youth group is ***'made up of young people who come with their own lived experiences, including personal and social issues heightened by growing up in communities emerging from conflict.'***

In fact, when asked what they hoped to get out of the programme, a common theme that emerged was being able to find their voice and gain confidence in using it.

'I want to really push myself to shape and contribute to the project to help my own confidence.' – NextGen group member

Furthermore, when asked to identify what support they may need during the programme, maintaining motivation levels was frequently mentioned by members of the NextGen group. They also requested to have check-ins with staff members, in case topics covered had a triggering effect on the group members.

Social Connectedness

On the topic of loneliness, over half of the NextGen group reported that they sometimes felt lonely, 33% felt occasionally lonely, and 13% often/always felt lonely at baseline. No group members reported hardly ever or never feeling lonely.

One of the members of the youth group mentioned that they hoped to make new friendships during the programme. Another member was concerned that their strong opinions might cause conflict and offense within the group.

Another anticipated that making new friends would be a challenge due to the differences between the communities.

Generally speaking, the group had minimal contact with others from different backgrounds/areas before engaging in the programme, actively avoiding or even being punished in some cases if they deviated from this.

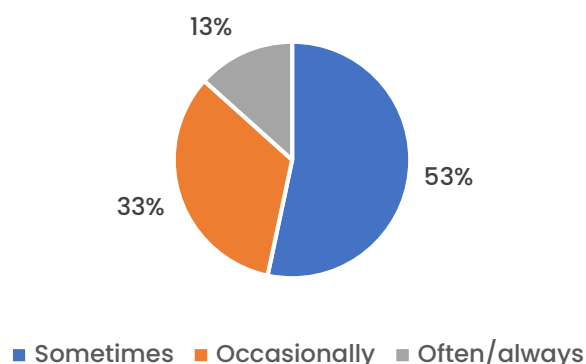
'I wouldn't have taken a job if it was working with someone from a different background.' – NextGen group member

'I was grounded (kept in and not allowed out of the house) if I was seen with someone from a different background.' – NextGen group member

It should be noted, however, that the young people feel that this has been changing in recent times. One of the NextGen group members highlights that all of their friends come from different backgrounds. A few members in the group expressed that there are more opportunities and spaces for the communities to intermingle than ever before. All 15 members of the youth group Strongly Agree that Springboard is one of those spaces that provides opportunities for people from different backgrounds to interact. They go on to say that because of Springboard they are more aware and knowledgeable around others' experiences, and now spend time and even co-habit with others from different backgrounds, since joining Springboard. However, a few NextGen group members expressed that more work needs to be done to encourage this.

'There's a lot more multicultural activities now than there were before, but it's still a place that shows division. Belfast could do a lot more to encourage people to be open & positive towards others through integration.' – NextGen group member

How often do you feel lonely?



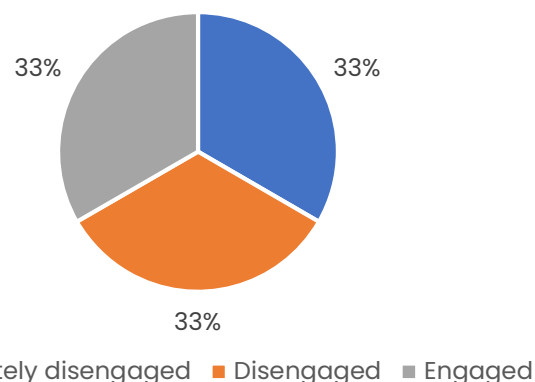
Social Connectedness (cont.)

Another challenge to overcome was the general disengagement from their communities that the young people in the group felt at baseline. Two thirds of the group were either completely disengaged or disengaged from their communities, with only a third feeling that they were engaged. No group members said that they were very engaged.

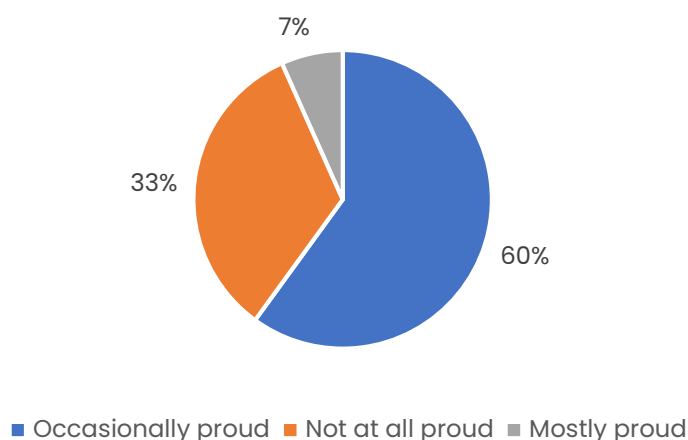
One of the members of the NextGen group members expressed their desire to get more involved and have an impact on their community, having no opportunity to do this previously .

'I hope to be able to try and raise the aspirations of people in my community, because I think it's something I didn't get.' - NextGen group member

How engaged do you generally feel with your local community?



How proud do you feel of your contribution to the community?



This is further reflected in the answers that the NextGen group provided when asked how proud they felt of their contribution to the community. 60% of them felt occasionally proud, while only 7% felt mostly proud. A third of the group did not feel proud at all at the baseline. None felt very proud.

When asked about their expectations of the programme some participants expressed their desire to make an impact in their communities. Particularly, they were hoping that the programme would create a space for young people to come together, speak their minds and shape their futures.

Additionally, they were eager to share learning around their experiences, developing their voices to be able to adequately express themselves, but also hearing the views of others.

'I want to be more educated on the place I live as a whole and to hear other people's attitudes on this. I want us as young people to have a say on our future.' - NextGen group member

Community Action

At baseline, responses around ability to take community action were generally more negative amongst the NextGen group. 73% of the group responded negatively (disagreed and strongly disagreed) to feeling confident about running events/ taking community actions. 67% responded negatively to being able to address issues in their communities, feeling like their views are heard by their communities and being able to challenge the ideas and perspectives of the community. 47% responded negatively to feeling like they could make a difference in their communities, 27% responded neutrally and a further 27% agreed with this statement. No group member strongly agreed with any of the aforementioned statements.

	Confidence running events/ taking community actions	Ability to address issues in community	Can make a difference in community	Views are heard by community members	Ability to challenge the ideas and perspectives of community
Strongly Agree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Agree	13%	0%	27%	13%	13%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13%	33%	27%	20%	20%
Disagree	47%	47%	40%	40%	40%
Strongly disagree	27%	20%	7%	27%	27%

Some of the qualitative answers provided by the NextGen group when asked what they hoped to get out of the programme, highlight their perceptions of their skills and abilities coming into the programme. 7 out of the 15 members mentioned that they hoped to gain skills related to running community events, such as leadership, organisation, facilitation, evaluation, and public speaking.

'I hope to gain more confidence with public speaking and being part of events. Also, I hope to gain new skills that will help me personally and socially.' – NextGen group member

Furthermore, one of the anticipated challenges that group members noted was event attendance and engagement, specifically around engaging youth in the project. This may be a reflection on their confidence to facilitate an engaging event, relevant to their peers at baseline.

Good Friday Agreement

The communities the NextGen group come from have been impacted by the Troubles historically and this is reflected in the focus group and survey answers. When asked if they felt that Belfast is a place where they could have an open and positive attitudes towards people from different backgrounds, some of them feel that this will have been impacted by conflicts of the past. They go on to say that this is especially prevalent in the older generations, which go on to influence the younger ones.

'It can be tough for people to open up as they can be influenced by their communities and made to feel afraid/suspicious of others.' – NextGen group member

This is also reflected in their answers to the statement *'the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) has had an influence on those around me'*. 80% the NextGen group responded positively (agreed and strongly agreed) to this statement. In the focus group answers, some members identified ways in which the GFA had impacted their families.

'My Granny and Granda got to see peace.' – NextGen group member

Attitudes around whether the GFA had an influence on the group members' lives were mixed, however. While 40% of members agreed that it had, 33% responded neutrally and 27% responded negatively (disagreed and strongly disagreed). The variety is also present in the focus group answers. One member expresses that they had minimal knowledge of what it was like before the GFA and are not sure whether it has had an influence, because there is still division. Another felt more strongly about the still-existing divide, saying:

'There are still people who have really strong views (including young people our age) and want to inflict violence.' – NextGen group member

One of the challenges anticipated by a group member was around their concern that they wouldn't be able to engage with the project due to feeling removed from the GFA and the wider context.

'Not being fully passionate about different parts, as I feel disconnected from the GFA & impact of 'The Troubles' – NextGen group member

	The Good Friday agreement has had an influence on my life	The Good Friday agreement has had an influence on the lives of those around me
Strongly Agree	0%	0%
Agree	40%	53%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	33%	13%
Disagree	13%	7%
Strongly disagree	13%	27%

Good Friday Agreement (Cont.)

In terms of relevance today, the NextGen group views and opinions are split. 67% of members neither agree nor disagree that the GFA is still relevant today, while 20% responded negatively (disagreed & strongly disagreed), 13% agreed and none strongly agreed. This is strengthened by their answers in the focus group. While some feel that it is relevant, provoking emotional reactions in the community, others feel that it is not.

'It's not talked about or known by people in our generation' – NextGen group member

Views and opinions around the impact of the GFA also vary. Some of the members note that the GFA has led to violence reduction and more equality in workplaces. Others, meanwhile, feel that the GFA has not been effective, stating that it *'hasn't really stopped the violence and hatred'* and *'paramilitaries are still here'*.

	I know the Good Friday Agreement well	The Good Friday Agreement is still relevant today
Strongly Agree	0%	0%
Agree	7%	13%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13%	67%
Disagree	60%	13%
Strongly disagree	20%	7%

Good Friday Agreement (Cont.)

In terms of the knowledge that the young people in the group had of the GFA before coming to Springboard, results were similarly mixed. A little less than half of the members were aware of it, while a third weren't sure, and 20% outright didn't. Furthermore, 80% of the group responded negatively (disagreed & strongly disagreed) with the statement '*I know the Good Friday Agreement well*'. 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% agreed and none strongly agreed.

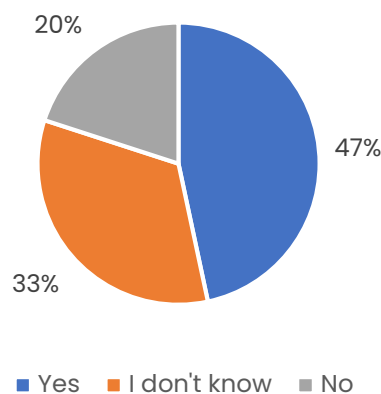
When asked what they knew about the GFA before, some small bits of information, such as it being a peace agreement, there being a vote and prisoners being released, they reported having picked up from their families.

Others confused the GFA and its impact with other historical events, such as the Easter rising in Ireland, the hunger strikes of Republicans or the brief intervention of William III ('King Billy') in Ireland.

One of the challenges going forward in the programme that one of the members identified was not knowing enough about the GFA and its impact to be effective.

When asked about expectations and what they hope to get out of the programme, several of the group members expressed that they wished to gain more knowledge around the history of their communities, other backgrounds the impact of the Troubles and the GFA.

Were you aware of the Good Friday Agreement before coming to Springboard?



Conclusions

Confidence & Wellbeing

The average baseline ratings of group wellbeing levels, which include *life satisfaction*, *life is worthwhile*, and *happiness*, were much lower than the UK and Northern Ireland averages. In terms of *anxiety* scores, the group's was higher than the UK average and Northern Ireland averages. The group's confidence score was also relatively low.

Social Connectedness

The majority of the NextGen group reported that they sometimes or often felt lonely at baseline, some being concerned about making friendships during the programme. There was minimal contact with others from different backgrounds/areas before engaging in the programme within the group, some feeling like more could be done by authorities to change this. However, some expressed that there were more opportunities than ever before to engage with others from different backgrounds, Springboard being one of them. Some group members reported having made new friends across the divide now even lived together with them.

Most of the group were generally disengaged from their communities at baseline. The majority only felt occasionally proud their contribution to the community and a third of the group did not feel proud at all. However, willingness to change this became apparent in some participants, which expressed their desire to make an impact in their communities, never having opportunities to do so before.

Community Action

At baseline, the NextGen group felt generally negative towards their ability to take community action. The majority responded negatively to feeling confident about running events/ taking community actions, being able to address issues in their communities, feeling like their views are heard by their communities and being able to challenge the ideas and perspectives of the community. Around half doubted they could make a difference in their communities.

Some of the qualitative answers provided by the group uncover their negative perceptions of their skills and abilities coming into the programme, hoping that they would acquire the skills needed to run events, such as leadership, organisation, facilitation, evaluation, and public speaking. Furthermore, some anticipated challenges around event attendance and engagement, specifically around engaging youth in the project.

Conclusions (cont.)

Good Friday Agreement

Historically, the Troubles have had an effect on the community the group comes from, which is reflected in their views. Some of them noted that conflicts of the past have impacted people's open and positive attitudes towards those from different backgrounds. For them, this is especially prevalent in the older generations, which influence the younger ones.

While the GFA's impact was generally agreed upon for those around them, results on whether it had an impact on the members of the group were mixed. Some members were unsure whether it's had an influence, while others felt that there were still youth out there that wanted to continue the cycle of violence. One of the challenges anticipated by a group member was that they wouldn't be able to engage with the project due to them feeling removed from the GFA and the wider context. The majority of the members felt neutrally about the GFA still being relevant today.

Views and opinions around the impact of the GFA also varied. Some of the members noted that the GFA has led to violence reduction and more equality in workplaces. Others, meanwhile, felt that the GFA has not been effective.

Only a little less than half of the members said that they were aware of the GFA before coming to Springboard. When asked what they knew about the GFA before there were some small bits of information that they picked up from their families. Others confused the GFA and its impact with other historical events. Several group members expressed that they wished to gain more knowledge around the GFA and its impact during the programme, and one member anticipated that not having enough information about this would stifle their ability to be effective in the programme.