



YouthAction
NORTHERN IRELAND

MOVING ON PROGRAMME

an opportunity for young mothers

A report on the model of practice - 15 years on

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Northern Ireland
Training Awards
2005

65
The Development Agency for
Young People in Community
YEARS



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and Public Safety
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

ycni
investing in youth work
strategic funding (wider life chances for young adults)

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1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

This report examines the structure, content and impact of the current **Moving On** Programme (2004-2009) funded through The Children's Fund by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The purpose of this report is to identify elements of the programme which add to its success, with a view to replicating these effectively in the future. The report offers a critical eye over the evolution of the **Moving On** Programme: an opportunity for young mothers, to ensure its relevance to the contemporary lives of young mothers in Northern Ireland. Here, we illustrate how the principles are translated into practice by the workers and identify how the participants view their experience.

1.2 Background to YouthAction Northern Ireland and the Gender Equality Unit

YouthAction Northern Ireland is a youth development agency which is committed to enabling and equipping young people with the skills to be active and equal citizens whose voices are heard, represented and valued. The organisation, through its six priority youth work areas seeks to respect the rights and responsibilities of individuals, to value young people as they are rather than as they should be and to include young people in the social and economic life of communities (YouthAction Northern Ireland, 2004).

Gender equality¹ based work is at the heart of the organisation. Through research, practice and training initiatives the organisation has developed innovative practice in relation to work with young women and with young men. The work and ethos of the Gender Equality Unit is set within the historical perspective that women are structurally disadvantaged and occupy an unequal position in society. It works to acknowledge and challenge those systems which undermine the position and role of women and to enable and empower young women themselves to recognise and

challenge gender inequalities in various spheres of their lives (ibid.). Within the Unit there is a clear awareness that the disadvantage and inequalities that young women face are multi-faceted and that multiple identities can further exacerbate feelings and experiences of social exclusion.

1.3 Rationale for 'Moving On' Programme in 1994

The programme is part of a long pedigree of work which traces back to the 'New Steps' programme in 1994, (itself prompted by research by YouthAction Northern Ireland's Gender Equality Unit in 1990 into youth service provision for young women). 'Equality of Opportunity'² (YouthAction NI, Trimble J, 1990) highlighted young women with children as a neglected priority. As a result, the New Steps programme was piloted in 1994 offering young mothers, aged 18-25 the opportunity to develop existing and new skills, receive information on important issues, do a short work placement and take part in an overseas exchange visit. The external evaluation of the programme³ (Abbot, 1995) found that the self-confidence of the young mothers had increased, with a greater awareness of issues relating to their own lives and increased expectations and determination to take greater control over their own lives and futures.

The original **Moving On** programme was conceived in 1995 and was funded through the Horizon strand of the European Community Employment initiatives.

The rationale for the original programme lay in a prevailing moral panic which surrounded young mothers, without offering any insightful understanding about the needs of this vulnerable and marginalised group. A dominant attitude presented by the press, media and politicians was of young mothers as 'irresponsible, spongers, and morally deviant' (cited in A.M. Gray, *New Opportunities for Young Mothers*, 1998). Gray⁴ (ibid, 1998) records the many accusations levelled

against young mothers in the 80's and 90's, which detracted from public understanding of the reality of the lives of young mothers at this time. The high costs of childcare in relation to poor earnings, the stresses of combining motherhood with training or work, and the absence of adequate benefits and childcare options are some of the very pertinent issues faced by young mothers. The **Moving On** programme was devised and structured to counter some of the difficulties experienced by young mothers and to offer a high-quality programme which is accessible and supportive to young mothers and can lead to a broadening of employment or educational choices for the future.

1.4 Rationale for 'Moving On' Programme in 2004

Many of the issues for young mothers recorded by Gray⁴ in 1998 continued to present when the funding application for the current **Moving On** programme was made in 2003. These include the failure of the social security system to adequately meet the needs of these young women and their children, the difficulties of moving from benefits to work and the problem of accessing appropriate education and training (Horgan, 2001⁵; Evason et al, 1999⁶; Kiernan, 1995⁷).

63% of the young mothers under the age of 25 were classed as economically inactive with no access to independent sources of income.

Further local and UK research reinforced the need for intensive support measures for young mothers rather than misplaced judgement which can further alienate these young women and their children. 'Myths and Realities: Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood' (2000)⁸ stressed the importance that employment offers young mothers as a means of moving out of poverty and social exclusion. It also acknowledges that many young mothers do wish to work, but are less able to do so due to childcare and benefit dependency which limits employment and educational choices.

The UK Government's Report on Teenage Pregnancy (1999)⁹ further recognised that;

'teenager's who become parents should not lose out on opportunities for the future, young parents should have the chance to complete their education and prepare to support themselves and their family.'

Moving On was funded by the Children's Fund through the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, at that time, to support teenage mothers who had few academic qualifications, limited experience of the workplace, are unemployed and suffer from low self-confidence to step confidently back onto a pathway to further training, employment and greater community involvement. This fits within the priorities and support measures identified in the subsequent Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy and Action Plan from 2002-2007¹⁰.

The current **Moving On** programme is located in the Southern Health Board Region from wards with high levels of deprivation in the Armagh and Dungannon area and within pockets of high teenage pregnancy rates.

1.5 Aim, structure and content of 'Moving On' Programme

The purpose of the **Moving On** programme is to provide both practical and emotional support to young mothers to enhance their capacity for





positive choices about their future in education or employment. Practically, the programme does this by promoting independence and autonomy amongst the participants, through enhancing their employability and training opportunities. Furthermore, it promotes not only notions of independence but of positive and healthy interdependence whereby the young mothers value peers, communities and healthy relationships. Evaluations of previous **Moving On** programmes and discussions with current staff highlight that it also acts to significantly improve the self-awareness and self-confidence of the young mothers. Emotionally, it provides valuable time, space and social contact with other young mothers to enable participants to develop friendships and long-term support, while enhancing their sense of self and self-esteem.

The **Moving On** model has three key parts to its delivery format – first training; second, practical support measures and third, emotional support.

1.5.1 Training

The structure of the current training package has changed significantly since the beginning of the Children's Fund Package in 2004. These changes have reflected young mother's evaluations, feedback regarding difficulties in recruitment of young mothers for the programme and some structural changes to training which best suited the emerging groups.

Programmes originally ran for 26 weeks, for 2 full days per week and provided the following suite of training and experiences:

- 7 OCNNI accredited modules at levels 1 and 2. These are:
 - Communication and assertiveness (Level 1)
 - Young women's health (Level 1)
 - Introduction to job skills (Level 1)
 - Working with others (Level 1)
 - Introduction to child development (Level 2)
 - Parenting skills (Level 2)
 - Travel and exchange (Level 1)
- A week-long work placement
- ECDL or CLAIT computer training
- First Aid training for child-carers
- Often the programme included a trans-national exchange as one of the elements of the programme with travel abroad for the young mother and their children.

Post-programme support is provided for 4 weeks, covering future opportunities and progression routes. In practice young people continue to keep in touch with staff informally and continue to receive advice and encouragement.

The current **Moving On** programme is designed to suit the specific requirements of a specific group of young mothers, taking into consideration the time of year, the learning interests of the group and the timeframe available to the young mothers and the workers. This flexibility allows for different training options to be run, from one programme to another. The Current **Moving On** programme runs for one or two days per week for a minimum of twelve weeks and a maximum of twenty-six weeks. The options available within each **Moving On** programme include:



- OCNNI Certificate for Progression at 15 National Credit points. The modules include:
 - Improving assertiveness and decision making
 - Developing own interpersonal skills
 - Developing group and team work communication skills
 - Healthy living
 - Sex and relationships
 - Recognising employment opportunities
 - Preparing for recruitment and interview
- ECDL Computer Training or OCNNI Level 1 & 2 Computer Training
- British Red Cross First Aid or First Aid for Child-carers
- Choices programme of Sexual Health – by Family Planning Association
- Entrepreneurship for young women – by Invest NI
- Literacy, Numeracy or Maths where specific Essential Skills needs are identified.

A key change in the content of the programme has been to leave out parenting skills and child development modules. This does not underestimate the importance of these issues,

but where shorter programmes were chosen for specific groups, other modules which focused specifically on employability and further education opportunities were prioritised by participants and workers.

1.5.2 Practical support measures

The practical support is provided through financial support for travel, lunch and childcare which make participation in the programme possible for those with few resources or limited support.

Lunch is provided on-site for all participants. Childcare can be arranged by the young mother with a family member or friend, or through the **Moving On** Worker with a registered child-minder or day-care/crèche facilities. Where registered childcare is used the full costs of this are paid through the programme. Where childcare is provided by a family member or by friends, a contribution is made towards these costs. Transport costs to and from the **Moving On** programme (and for the children to reach their childcare) are fully reimbursed and can be arranged by the **Moving On** worker. This financial support, when coupled with the emotional and practical support of the workers is a subtle yet important element of the programme.

1.5.3 Emotional support

The second key element lies in the style of delivery, which creates a supportive atmosphere for learning and development. The need for the programme as an emotional support to the young mothers is a feature of how the workers interact with the young women and how the programme is delivered.

The programme is staffed by a Project Co-ordinator and a Peer Support Worker. The Project Co-ordinator is a professionally qualified Community Youth worker, with overall responsibility for the learning environment, the content and assessment of the programme and the care of the participants. The Peer Support Worker is a training and development opportunity for a young woman or young mother aged 16-25 years. Their role is to provide one-to-one support

for training, working as a role model, someone the young mothers can quickly relate to and trust. The role provides continuous opportunity for the peer support worker to develop their own professional capacity as a youth support worker, with the opportunity for on-site learning from the Project Co-ordinator. Both workers either deliver modules themselves or facilitate inputs from external agencies and workers.

The style of working, and the way the worker creates a safe space in which young mothers can readily feel safe and learn is crucial to the success of the programme as a whole.

'...and... like Tricia, she's just one in a million, she listens to you when you talk we find that we are all like respected you know nobody gets judged...' Young woman

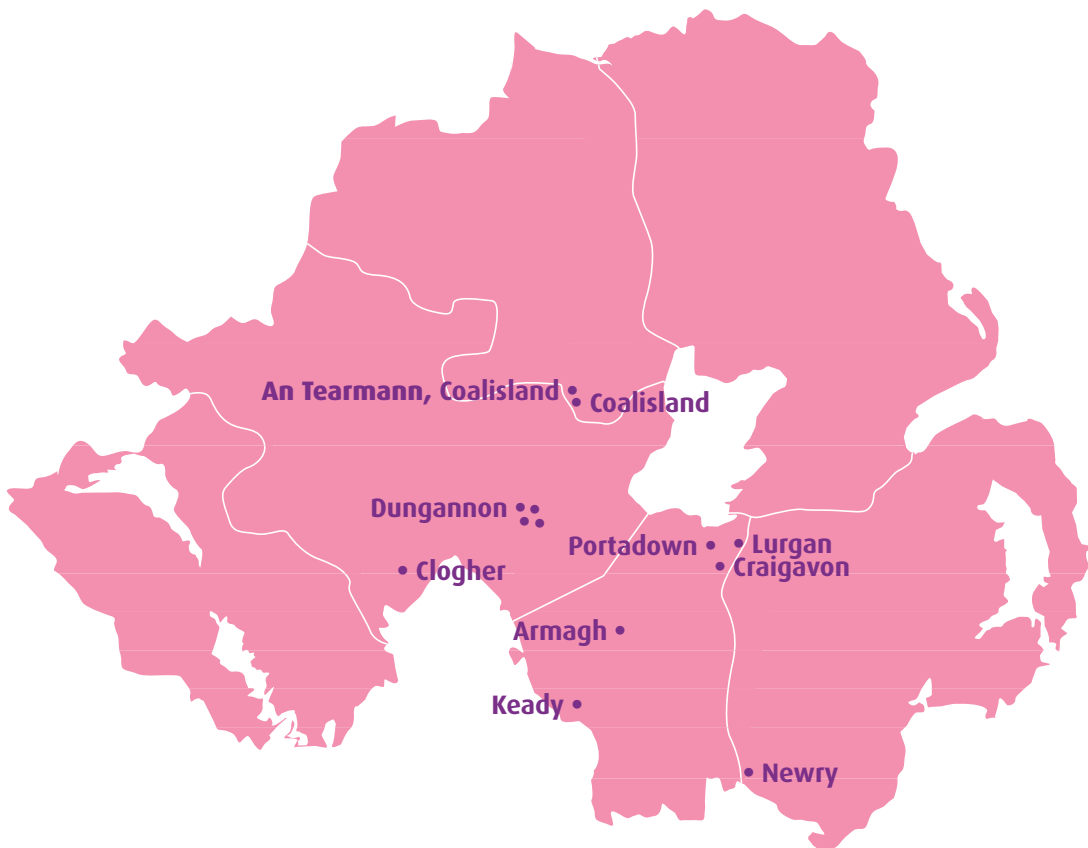
This is enhanced by ensuring space and time outside the parenting role, with financial contributions made to family childcare arrangements or the full costs provided for childcare from professional child-carers. This removes the financial burden of childcare and allows guilt-free space for the young women.

1.6 Profile and achievements of 'Moving On' participants

Since the beginning of this funding stream from the DHSSPS in April 2004, there have been 97 young mothers who have successfully achieved accredited training through the **Moving On** programme. Participants are aged 16-25 years and are both lone parents and parents with partners. Most participants have between one and three children. A small number of participants have been ante-natal young women.

The programme achievements of the young mothers vary depending upon the options for each group. For example, the **Moving On** Summer School run in Dungannon in 2009 was a short programme, providing OCNNI Level 1 & 2 Computer and Information Technology Training, with five young mothers successfully gaining their Certificates. At the other end of the spectrum is the **Moving On** programme run in Dungannon in Spring 2008, with 15 young mothers gaining their ECDL qualifications, 13 completing five OCNNI modules, 14 completing Entrepreneurship for young women modules and 15 completing the CHOICES programme delivered by the Family Planning Association.

13 programmes have been run across 9 geographical locations as shown below:



2. TOWARDS A MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE – KEY ELEMENTS IN ‘MOVING ON’

2.1 Recruitment and retention

A considerable amount of effort is required to secure the engagement of young mothers into the programme. This is compounded by the ‘psychology’ of the disjuncture young mothers have experienced and the relationship that many have toward formal education. Some young mothers who have been unable to complete their formal education fully but are not yet interested in or ready for adult education and training, are harder to convince of the value and relevance of an accredited training programme. Many young mothers have been or felt marginalised throughout pregnancy, which can affect their confidence to take on a new experience or challenge such as **Moving On** when their child is born.

Recruitment targeted both those young mothers already being supported through existing support initiative and also those young mothers who had often not taken part in other community youth programmes, who were isolated or lacked family support.

A wide range of avenues were used to promote the programme which combine

- Familiarity (articles in the local press written in a friendly style),
- Professional contacts (referrals via DHSS lone parent advisors, Sure Start family care workers, Health Visitors)
- Existing or new partners (First Step Women’s Group, Drumellan Activity Centre, Lite)
- Information and publicity in accessible places to increase the likelihood that young mothers will find out about the programme (leaflets

and posters in post offices, primary schools, credit unions, doctors, crèches, mother and toddler groups, items in parish bulletins etc)

Street work is a central part of the approach, in which staff literally look for young mothers on the streets, in estates or door-to-door and approach them to tell them about the programme and try to encourage them to take part. This aspect of the work requires a great deal of skill on the part of the **Moving On** workers in building up a relationship quickly with the young women, ‘selling’ the programme realistically but with enough enthusiasm to inspire the young mothers to take part, and a great deal of tenacity to stick with what can be very disheartening work. This, however, ensures that even those who feel isolated in their own homes are being reached and offered the support to take up this new opportunity:

‘If I hadn’t somewhere like this to go I’d be sitting in the house on my own right now.’ Young woman

Taster sessions or Open Days are held at regular intervals during the promotional phase, including kids entertainment, and based on a relaxed and open approach, talking informally and ‘putting names to faces’, as another step in building trust which was felt crucial in a young mother making the step to join the programme:

‘...so then I went over to the open day and Trish was showing me the file and what was to be done. It sounded like a really good programme so I signed up for it. She showed you what qualifications you get out of it so I got really interested. I’m just like a wee sponge, I just want to do all these wee courses...’ Young woman



Even those who have shown an interest in and commitment to the programme can lose confidence before the start of the programme. Therefore, follow up phone calls and a large measure of persistence is needed to continue to convince young mothers into attending the first session.

As one worker commented regarding this recruitment phase and the importance of face-to-face engagement,

'It wasn't the programme they bought into, but the workers and how they interacted with them at an early stage.'

Worker

Once young mothers join the programme the retention rates for the programme is very high, particularly because of the facilitative, supportive style.

"The leadership of the worker is key to the group and the connection of worker to individual is the only way in which the young mothers can be retained in the programme. The creation of loyalty to the programme and the worker encouraging participation and attendance - this link cannot be underestimated".

Worker

However, those who leave the programme will mostly do so in the early stages of the programme. Reasons which have been cited for leaving the programme include a second pregnancy or in some cases, the influence of partners has deterred some young mothers from taking part. Partners can be very controlling,

exerting power through threats, and refusing to mind 'your child'. The father may feel threatened by the mother attending a course for a variety of reasons – loss of control, the possibility of a shift in status quo, the threat of broader friendships and influences. In these cases **Moving On** workers offer additional support and signposting to other services, but are not in a position to get involved in domestic and family arrangements.

In other cases the programme has retained young people with poor attendance records on previous courses. One participant, for example, was very unsure about engaging and had a history of 'dropping out of most things' (her own phrase). Whilst her mother made the call to inquire about the programme, staff first met her for a coffee before she decided to join the programme. **'Standing outside to talk'** in the breaks, also allowed her to open up and share her problems. The key skill used by peer workers was and is to listen without an agenda, **"taking it easy, allowing her control over what was said"**. As a result, she completed the course and has gained significantly in terms of self confidence and self esteem.

One or two cases of non-attendance during the programme are 'let go' or can be followed up on a one-to-one basis by the Peer Support Worker. However, with further absence from the group, participants are encouraged to talk about what is standing in the way of their participation and helped to developed personal strategies to address any such issues.

2.2 Programme set-up and arrangements

The programme set-up and arrangements, when carried out well provide participants with a sense of security at the start of the **Moving On** programme. The workers highlighted trust as a crucial ingredient in the initial stages, as they are setting up much of the childcare, transport and practical arrangements which the young mothers will depend upon over the entire programme. These arrangements are set up in full collaboration with the young mother, taking into account her individual circumstances and wishes.

A key part of creating a space for young mothers is the provision of childcare support off-site to ensure time and space is given to the young mothers:

'...Even getting away from the child for a couple of hours as well, just to relax.' Young woman

If this was not provided through family members (or if this was not the choice of the young mother), the mothers were taken to visit potential providers first, so that they could be happy their child was in quality care and to meet the provider in person. Apart from being able to relax trusting that their child was in good hands, the need expressed by mothers to vet providers illustrates two things worth noting -

- That contrary to some stereotypical views of young mothers (Clement, 2003), motherhood is taken seriously and the needs of the child are uppermost in the minds of participating mothers.
- On occasion, the young mother has to prove herself responsible to family and friends who may well ask about childcare provision. Not only is it important this does not represent an opportunity to undermine the mothers attendance at the programme, it is vital the mother is able to show she has dealt properly with arrangements in order to maintain her own status as a responsible mother.

Transport is also provided for those who need it, and local venues are used for programme delivery. Again these are negotiated based upon the young mother's circumstances and geography. Lunch is provided for all participants to encourage the group to stay together during this informal time. The impact of having clear and well-planned arrangements cannot be underestimated in easing initial tensions and setting the tone for the programme.

2.3 Partnership approaches

Partnership is key to each stage of the **Moving On** programme, from recruitment to programme set-up, from delivery to signposting, but is not as fully developed as it could be. Partnership has been defined by Harrison et al¹¹ as:

'... a cross-sector alliance in which individuals, groups or organisations agree to: work together to fulfill an obligation or undertake a specific task; share the risks as well as the benefits; and review the relationship regularly, revising their agreement as necessary.' (Harrison et al 2003)

Moving On has recruited young mothers through links to other organisations or initiatives likely to have contact with them. Trust also has had to be built with initiatives such as Sure Start or First Step Women's Group, which has overlapping objectives, to ensure the distinct contribution of **Moving On** is recognised and that the partnership is seen as mutually beneficial rather than threatening.



A key aspect of the programme is recognising the various areas of expertise which exists outside of the programme and a willingness to incorporate this into programme planning. Other bodies therefore are used in providing specialist inputs to the course (Family Planning Association) or in signposting future options (Adult Education Guidance Service) as well as others that could be called upon in response to needs arising within the course of the programme and associated discussions (e.g. Women's Aid, Lone Benefits Advisors, Essential Skills Tutors).

As with all partnership working agreements it can take time to establish this relationship and when it works well it can be of great value but this is not without considerable work and effort. There have been examples of times within the **Moving On** programme when the partnership has been strained. This is most keenly felt where the workers within the partnership are not in sufficiently close communication and misunderstandings arise. Where the partnership has numerous organisations and workers, the potential for miscommunication is greatly increased. The skill of the **Moving On** worker is necessary to manage these arrangements and to establish and maintain a clear working agreement between partners.

There are aspects of Harrison et al's(2003) partnership model which could reasonably be adopted for **Moving On**, such as the regular review of partnership relationships, with greater explanation of the process on an on-going basis and a more collective approach to the risks and benefits of the project. However, the sustained and highly engaged partnership described by Harrison et al (ibid) is most appropriate for long-term partnership interventions rather than for the **Moving On** programme which is developed and delivered in a local area over a specific limited timescale and then moves to respond to newly identified need elsewhere.

2.4 Accreditation

The balance of accredited and non-accredited training is an evolving picture within the **Moving On** programme. At the recruitment stage of the programme, accreditation is very important for

young mothers, with many of them being attracted by the ECDL qualification or to build up their educational or employability profile.

'... it (Moving On) sounded pretty interesting and I heard that it was going to add things to my CV so I thought I'd give it a go.' Young woman

Also, when they receive their certificates at a final celebration event for their family and friends, there is a great deal of pride in what they have achieved.

In terms of the content of the programme, however, accreditation can often lead to more emphasis on course work and portfolio-building to provide evidence of learning which can take away from the learning process itself. For this reason it can be counter-productive, if a balance is not reached and if the accreditation process is not effectively managed. This is given a great deal of attention by **Moving On** Staff:

'See on a Tuesday night I'm like 'Oh, I can't wait for the morning.... sometimes with OCN, you're like oh GOD, there's just loads of work to be done, but this course I just love this course and I just make sure that I'm here every Wednesday.' Young woman

Given both positions, the current level of emphasis on accreditation within the programme could be reduced with only one or two accredited parts rather than three or four.

2.5 The Programme Content

The programme is distinct in providing a tried and tested package of 'holistic' personal development and training support for young mothers, to help them get to grips with all aspects of their lives. Other initiatives aimed at young parents have shown some convergence with this approach, but the emphasis is, more often than not, on the parent and child as a family unit rather than the young mother as an individual and a young woman.

Through the **Moving On** programme, YouthAction Northern Ireland do not deny that the young woman's identity is now unavoidably and strongly informed by the reality of being a

mother, but they work with the young mothers to re-discover some of their own individual identities beyond being a young mother. The difference in emphasis may seem subtle but has more profound impact upon the type of support programme on offer. Other programmes for young mothers place greater emphasis on health and wellbeing, and in particular on the health issues associated with pregnancy, and the support services of early parenting.

The **Moving On** Programme gives time and space for the **personal, social and educational development** needs of the young woman herself, and addresses specific issues such as **employability, skills development, communication** and assertiveness. YouthAction Northern Ireland provides support for motherhood as the new reality for the **Moving On** participants, but also helps participants to re-establish a firm sense of 'self' for the young woman, which may have gone astray in the busyness of parenthood. Ultimately, the strengthening of the young mother's mental wellbeing and confidence through the **Moving On** programme, will have a cascade effect on the success and ability of that person as a parent.

2.6 Approaches to non-formal learning

The strong non-formal elements which define the **Moving On** programme are well received by participants and are perhaps the most important hallmark of the programme brought by YouthAction Northern Ireland. Its characteristics place emphasis on a variety of ways of learning underpinned by what is essentially, a social / inter-personal learning approach or a 'constructivist' approach; a widely recognised philosophical framework or theory of learning, that validates the important underpinning principles used by YouthAction Northern Ireland, for example;

- That each learner is seen as unique with **unique needs, background and culture**, and that it is important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process. YouthAction N.I.'s use of peer support workers strengthens

this link to the experiences and background of young mothers and uses this connection to pass on knowledge and information effectively. The strong emphasis on different learning styles and approaches also helps to place the participant in the context of their previous learning experiences.

- That **social interaction** with others including those who have knowledge to offer, can help the learner, and is crucial to the way new knowledge is internalised. In the social constructivist approach, **instructors have to adapt to the role of facilitators** and not teachers. Where a teacher gives a lecture which covers the subject matter, a facilitator helps the learner to get to his or her own understanding of the content. Most social constructivist models also stress the need for collaboration amongst learners, in contrast to traditional competitive approaches.
- That **responsibility for learning should reside with the learner**. The learner should be actively involved in the pace, style and content of the learning process, unlike more traditional educational viewpoints where the responsibility rests with the instructor to teach and the learner plays a more passive, receptive role:

'...And you don't get rushed about in here, you can just do stuff at your own pace and that's the best thing about it - you're not forced to do anything, it's your option at the end of the day. That's what I like about it.' Young woman

Sustaining motivation to learn is strongly dependent on the learner's **confidence in his or her potential for learning**. These feelings of competence and belief in potential to solve new problems, are helped by valuing the first-hand experience learners have of solving life problems in the past, no matter how 'mundane' the life problem might be – juggling benefits, for example, to sustain the household, is a complex but often undervalued 'skill' which can be appreciated in this context as a basis for building the confidence needed to go further:

'...I think it comes from being able to speak so

openly (increased confidence) I think that's where it comes from. Nobody seems to take a back seat, everybody seems to speak openly and I think that makes you more confident, you know not being embarrassed to say anything or not being judged by anybody just makes you confident.'

Young woman

Moving On Staff emphasised that they 'were not teachers' several times in talking about the programme. Their approach instead was to draw on youth work practice and facilitate; enable; support and encourage, working as far as possible as peers rather than through a hierarchy.

'...It's really good fun, it's not boring they don't just throw things at you. We do role plays and we just have really good craic. It's actually learning in a fun way.'

Young woman

Relationship building is core to the approach, continuing to build trust, understanding and connection, to allow participants to open up, to '**off load in a safe place**' and to feel some control over the way course sessions take shape:

'... There's nothing really that I'd change (about the programme) cause everything we do it helping us, there's nothing we do that we don't want to do. I'd change nothing.'

Young woman

The approach was often seen, by the young women, as reassuringly different from that experienced with other walks of life – the doctor, DHSS benefits office, health visitors, sometimes family (although results from the 7 participants in the focus group suggest family support was good) and wider society. Once again this approach had to be genuine and consistent in order to establish trust in this context and instil confidence within participants, enabling them to take a positive approach to the course, to learn, and more importantly, to see the information being provided as 'theirs' to help them in making positive life choices for themselves.

2.6.1 Building on experience and reflective learning

Along with the interactive approach to learning and the flexibility to accommodate and gain from the group, the programme also incorporates a

reflective approach, based on diary sheets completed every couple of weeks, and evaluation of each day's session. This re-emphasises ownership and equality in the course delivery, but also encourages participants to 'internalise' learning by applying it to their individual lives.

The **Moving On** Co-ordinator highlighted the appreciation that is often uncovered throughout the programme by participants for their already existing skills:

'This is a very reflective process for the workers and the young mothers - rather than learning new things they are learning about their own habits and their own lives, while trying to re-invent it all.'

Worker

Sessions may often 'detour' to accommodate a group's desire to discuss something that has arisen during the session (but which may not be directly relevant to it). The discussions 'unpack' being a young mother, enabling members to share and compare and make sense of experiences, often involving strategies for dealing with the perceptions and attitudes of other people.

2.6.2 Group directed learning and one-to-one support

As far as possible, the approach to course delivery places emphasis on **choice** by the group – for example, in how an exercise is completed, (if an approach isn't working find another way) or how fast or slow progress is through the different topics covered:

'If the group mentions something (they want to know about) staff look into it - bring people in. We offer ideas but avoid directing or pushing'. The underlying aim is one of 'creating opportunities.'

Worker

Role plays, games and creative group tasks maintain the interest, openness and motivation of members and therefore ensures delivery of courses effectively so that the learning 'sticks'.

Responsibility is inherent in the approach therefore from the start and grows alongside the information and knowledge which is imparted.



Equally, where necessary the Peer Support Workers can challenge individual members about their behaviour or support those young mothers who find the group approach more difficult.

One-to-one support is provided by the Peer Support Worker and can often be crucial to the young mother's fulfilling all the course requirements for accreditation. This one-to-one support is usually carried out in the young mother's house in order to make this support as accessible and private as possible.

2.6.3 Social connections

Maintaining the social connections and relationships established early on is also important. The participants 'come as much for the social side as for the programme', or as a chance to get some time for themselves (without children), which effectively acts as a reward for coming.

'Doing things together, just having company you know.' Young woman

'From the first day that we went in everybody just had so many stories our personalities all sort of seemed to click.' Young woman

'The residential, it had to be the best like just brought everybody closer together and we all had just the best craic like and meeting all the girls and that too and just talking, you'd think we'd known each other for years the way we get on like we just bonded.' Young woman

2.6.4 Post-programme support

At the end of the programme staff assist in signposting young mothers to further support or training appropriate to their needs and interests. They may also provide references, and continue to be available beyond the four week period allocated by the programme to give advice and encouragement and to continue to sustain the feeling of connectedness that young mothers have achieved in attending:

'Hopefully stay in contact with the girls for a start, look after the baby and if there is another group I'd definitely come to it.' Young woman

Sustaining post programme support can be difficult as the focus for the worker shifts to developing the next programme and to providing support for new young mothers on the programme.

3. TAKING FORWARD MOVING ON

3.1 The distinctiveness of Moving On

Taking into account the particular characteristics of **Moving On** explored in Section 2, the challenges associated with teenage and young parents, and the approaches being taken by other agencies (Sure Start plus is perhaps the nearest equivalent), what added value does the **Moving On** Programme offer as a package of expertise and as a model? Looking at other initiatives, **Moving On** has been distinct in a significant number of ways.

3.1.1 The group approach

Much of the Government and the Northern Ireland Strategy for teenage parents focuses on joined up services for individuals to access in a timely and responsive manner, cutting down the confusion, delay, and effort required by the person to meet their particular needs. Embedding a **Moving On** programme into this fabric has the potential to deliver motivated individuals into the support arrangements that are put in place, if they are at the right stage to plan for their future education/employability. It is one thing professional service staff, managers and policy makers meeting to agree ways of working which make sense to them as a partnership approach, but it is also vital to ensure vulnerable individuals struggling with a range of challenges are in the right state of mind to engage effectively with that new service structure on an equal footing.

The second distinctive feature of **Moving On** is its approach to groupwork and building a social support network for young mothers. Positive mental health is a constant theme of the research associated with the difficulties flowing from teenage pregnancy which **Moving On** has been able to address quickly through this approach. Sure Start Plus also incorporated groupwork along with one-to-one support to tackle both practical and emotional needs, providing the valuable opportunity for young mothers to meet each other and gain support and re-assurance from others in similar

circumstances. The one-to-one element of the approach may well have something to offer a new **Moving On** programme model, building on one-to-one work done perhaps more informally within the current model.

3.1.2 Youth Work approaches and context

YouthActions 'hallmark' approach is drawn from its pioneering youth work; of enabling, giving space, control and choice to participants, and using peers as facilitators / workers who have often experienced what young motherhood is like and can relate to participants on a level footing. It is perhaps this style of 'delivery' or of creating the right social learning environment that underpins all other aspects of the programme. Whilst the content is comprehensive and well tuned to need, it is the way of working, of building positive relationships, which goes beyond the content to 'teach' self worth and self confidence as a 'way of being' rather than a rational set of tools and techniques. **Moving On's** basis in youth work has been key to its ability to attract, retain and enable the young women during the course.

Moving On has clearly arrived at a well crafted set of modules, tools and techniques, and an associated way of working that offers significant but perhaps underappreciated best practice to government and to other initiatives addressing similar issues. If other programmes emerge in Northern Ireland which, for example, take up the Sure Start Plus initiatives in England, or the young parents strategy within Every Child Matters, then the work of this programme should be used as a benchmark informing best practice. YouthAction could help 'train the trainers' or provide an advisory role in the development and delivery of such programmes.

However the YouthAction approach to facilitative, social and participant driven learning is likely to be difficult to replicate but crucial to the effectiveness of the programme, arguing for a more central delivery role for YouthAction and its peer workers.

3.2 Development opportunities for Moving On

From the discussions and analysis of this report a number of ideas offer themselves for consideration in taking **Moving On** further. It should be noted, however, that the core model discussed here is a valuable asset which is to be maintained and strengthened.

3.2.1 To mainstream or not to mainstream?... A partnership approach

The **Moving On** programmes through the years has been funded from different sources. This leaves some uncertainty over the ability of Youth Action to be able to offer programmes continuously, and the case must be made each time, sometimes to a new funder, in order to run the programme again. This represents significant effort for YouthAction staff and insecurity for peer workers, meaning good workers can be lost and momentum must be re-built.

Action 13 of the Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy and Action Plan also calls for Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts in partnership with the Health Promotion Agency and Voluntary and Community organisations to ensure that “staff working with young people, including Primary Care staff, receive training that will maximise their effectiveness in communicating and working with young people including those with a disability or from an ethnic minority background”. **Moving On** clearly has established a significant body of expertise in this regard that should be made available. Some form of core funding to deliver the programme consistently is clearly necessary to retain this expertise and ensure a long sustainable future for the programme.

Partnership approaches linking together statutory and community/voluntary sector bodies and expertise are increasingly common. Investing for Health has provided some good demonstrations of what can be achieved. Developing a partnership approach to link together the role of **Moving On** with onward support services is well worth considering as a mainstreaming model.

3.2.2 Transition support

Agreeing inter-agency working arrangements was mentioned earlier in relation to partnership working. If the aim is to build good connections to wider support structures for the young mothers, then greater attention needs to be given to ensure how and when this happens and how this can be more clearly built into the programme. There is a broader issue here about how the transition is managed for participants between the space and culture of personal development created and sustainable by **Moving On** and the more formal service environment ‘outside’. Getting this right will be important in ensuring the benefits of the programme are translated into positive further outcomes rather than un-done.

The preparation provided by **Moving On** gives young mothers a positive attitude to learning and a confidence in their ability to learn, as highlighted in reflecting on the approach in Section 2. However, these young mothers will eventually encounter the less flexible approach of formal education and training. Some accompanying support in the form, perhaps, of a mentor or ‘friend’ from the **Moving On** team or by continuing to sustain the social network established during the programme may help in this and other aspects.

Young Mothers highly rate the connections they made to other young mothers and to the staff as sources of re-assurance and support – one recommendation for a future programme may be to continue to maintain a young mothers club or network for past and current participants, or, recognising the particular bonding which occurs in each cohort, to enable cohorts of young mothers to remain in touch.

3.2.3 Introduction to childcare

As Gray and Carragher highlight “One factor of importance may be participants’ lack of experience of using formal childcare and whether this had any bearing on the strong preference for family care. One woman talked of a crèche close to where she lived but said that ‘it looks like a



really posh place, it's not for the likes of me.' Bryson et al¹³ (1999) argue that if mothers had more experience of formal provision, they would rate it more highly. A House of Commons report¹⁴ (2003) recommended that childcare 'taster' weeks should be introduced for low-income families so that they could take on paid work "safe in the knowledge that their children are being cared for in quality childcare settings."

Moving On has also found it important to introduce participants to childcare providers in order that they felt comfortable with the arrangement. This uncertainty may be rooted in a need to feel comfortable with the idea of childcare and that such childcare can be made use of (provided it is, at the same time, made affordable). **Moving On** might consider placing more time and discussion on childcare provision as part of the learning element of the programme as well as the steps that are taken.

3.2.4 Health aspects

The Western Investing for Health 'Health Promoting Homes'¹² programme revealed considerable problems around dependency on tranquilisers, anti-depressants and alcohol to relieve and cope with the stress of poverty. If not already covered under health issues, this aspect may well be worth considering further, and contact with 'Health Promoting Homes' workers could be

valuable in exchanging experiences and ideas. The **Moving On** participant focus group held in preparing this report highly rated the health and wellbeing modules which, out of a possible score of 1-5 (where 5 was very good), received six stars.

Whilst the distinctive focus on the mother as a person rather than solely as a mother has been highlighted, discussion with staff nevertheless suggested that including something on health in pregnancy, perhaps in conjunction with Sure Start, would be worthwhile.

3.2.5 The approach

The flexible, creative, interactive approach to conveying course objectives and knowledge is a model of value to any situation where marginalised individuals need help to 'work out their lives'. The young mothers in the focus group session highly valued the 'fun' approach ('not the teacher type')

Focus group participants also suggested a longer programme, or perhaps a second stage programme to allow follow-on into more detailed or advanced aspects addressed in stage 1, 'so we could by-pass the tech' and continue to benefit from the unique learning approach. A second stage might explore starting a business, or exploring personal interests and development options in more detail to avoid the tendency to be channelled toward easy (low paid) employment by jobcentre staff (see Gray and Carragher paper on training and employment referenced earlier).

A longer residential was also suggested, with participants having greater input into the location and setting. The residential can act as a break from the stresses of parenting and a reward for positive engagement in the programme, but the practicalities of running residentials over more than two days can be off-putting for many young mothers who lack the family support or access to overnight childcare arrangements.

4. Conclusions

1. The Moving on programme was developed and driven by the need for *a high quality programme accessible and supportive to young mothers* and which would widen their choices for future employment or educational opportunities.

Moreover it was driven by a need for interventions which *addressed the difficulties experienced by young mothers* against a prevailing moral panic which often surrounded young mothers.

2. The Moving On model leads to *more than employment and educational outcomes* for young mothers. In addition, through a range of emotional and practical support it results in greater independence, greater autonomy, alongside increased positive and healthy interdependence within their communities

3. Moving On is designed to meet the specific needs of young mothers, and as such it adopts *a flexible approach* in delivery, duration, content and structure to ensure that it meets those needs and is effective. The programme changes and develops to reflect the changing needs of young mothers. This is one of the key attributes of the programme

4. The *skills of the youth worker* play a fundamental role in the success of the programme. Skills of *engagement, relationship building, emotional and practical support* offered to the young mothers is crucial in ensuring young mothers complete the programme successfully. The relationship that is built between the worker and the young mother is the catalyst to their involvement and plays a fundamental role in the continued engagement of the young mother in the programme.

5. The *youth work methodology and approach* is central to the programme. It underpins content, structure and process. This approach is based on the premise of *understanding* where young mothers are at and *proactively reaching out* to them, many of whom feel very isolated and lack the confidence to take the first step. The non

formal approaches are key defining characteristics of the programme and account for the success of the programme in motivating the young mothers to learn and in the retention of the young mothers throughout the programme.

6. The model draws on *a partnership approach* which is key to each stage of the programme from recruitment to delivery and signposting young mothers following completion. There is scope for a partnership approach to be more fully developed within the programme, one which would ensure *a mutual benefitting approach*.

7. Great importance and value is placed on *creating a positive learning environment* which enables the participants to develop the skills and confidence to make future decisions and choices. This is done by the worker promoting a culture of self directed learning which takes account of needs, culture and background. The responsibility for learning ultimately resides with the young mothers and their desire to learn. Particular attention is paid to ensuring a positive experience of learning as in some instances young mothers have had negative experiences within formal education.

8. The emotional, practical and financial support provided acknowledges the needs of young mothers and ensures their continued engagement throughout the programme. *Providing financial support for childcare is of particular importance*. It allows young mothers to make planned childcare arrangements and from the outset diminishes any concerns or anxieties young mothers may feel in relation to this.

9. The *social connections and relationships* that are built between the worker and the young mothers and between the young mothers themselves provide a much needed space for themselves as individuals with their own needs. The talking, sharing and listening in turn promotes the well being and *positive mental health* of the young mothers.

Moving On Policy Recommendations:

- **Department of Education: *Strategic Plan 2008-2009***

The strategic plan for the Department of Education 2008-2009 identifies the greatest challenges for education in improving educational standards and increasing access. In raising standards, the department recognises that 'social and economic disadvantage still, too often leads to educational under-achievement' and recognise that the challenge is to continue to raise overall educational standards while ensuring that this gap in achievement is reduced. The **Moving On** programme is ideally placed to raise the educational standards for young mothers and compliments the Department of Education's early years interventions through motivating young mothers and subsequently, their children to enjoy learning.

- **Department of Education: *Priorities for Youth***

The Department of Education is working with stakeholders across the Youth Sector and beyond to identify the main issues facing youth work and determine priorities on which to focus, prior to and beyond the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority.

Evidence from this **Moving On** report should inform the Priorities for Youth. Post-teenage young mothers (aged 18-25 years) should be recognised as a priority target group in the policy and the impact of non-formal models of learning should be recognised as a successful medium to return young mothers to education, employment and active roles in their community.

- **Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: *Mental Health and Well-being Strategy***

The Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report (2008) advises that 'the Mental Health and Well-being Strategy to be published, will recognise the importance of efforts to improve the ability of our population to cope with life's stresses and challenges with an increased focus on well-being... Issues emerging include the importance of early years intervention as well as targeted support at

groups such as young men, single mothers and people from socially deprived backgrounds'.

Moving On should be included in this strategy as a tried and tested model of improving the mental health and well-being of young mothers.

- **Department for Employment and Learning: *Beyond Leitch: skills policy for the upturn***

The Centre for Innovation in Learning, in a recent report, has considered the impact of the recession on the delivery of training and the longer term implications for skills policy. Page 51 recommends that 'Sector Skills Councils should not only focus on ensuring that the content of qualifications meets the needs of employers, they also need to ensure that the way training is delivered also meets their needs.'

The evidence from this **Moving On** report demonstrates a model of learning which is responsive, creative and which provides participants with positive experiences of learning. The youth work approach used in **Moving On** is worthy of inclusion in the implementation of the current skills policy.

- **Department of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister: *Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016***

In the Programme for Government 2008-2011, the Northern Ireland Executive voice their commitment to tackling remaining gender inequalities through implementing the cross-departmental Gender Equality Strategy. They state they will ensure there are effective programmes and strategies aimed at the eradication of all forms of violence against women, examine strategies to combat the lack of women's representation in political and public life and to ensuring access to affordable quality childcare.

Moving On meets a number of targets set in the Programme for Government 2008-2011 and should be embedded as a cross-departmental initiative to tackle inequalities and unlock the potential of young mothers.

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Additional Reading

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YouthAction Northern Ireland is a regional, voluntary organisation with bases in Belfast, Armagh, Ballygawley, Enniskillen, Newry and the North West.

Through all our work we are striving to make a significant difference to the lives of young people throughout Northern Ireland.

During 2008, 6634 disadvantaged young people engaged in developmental programmes to maximise their skills, qualifications and potential through our six priorities.

- Youth Arts
- Area Based Strategies
- Gender Equality
- Training and Accreditation
- Work With Young Men
- Rural Development

21456 young people and adults are supported through our membership services and a further 8,000 attend shows, conferences, seminars and events.

We also contribute to the development of youth work by:

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