



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Evaluating the implementation of the youth-led emotional well-being project 'Getting it Together'.
Author(s)	Meade, Kathryn; Rowel, Dhammica; Barry, Margaret M.
Publication Date	2008-08
Publication Information	Meade, K., Rowel, D. & Barry, M.M. (2008). Evaluating the implementation of the youth-led emotional well-being project 'Getting it Together'. <i>Journal of Public Mental Health</i> , 7(1), 16-25.
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17465729200800004">http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17465729200800004</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2863">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2863</a>

Downloaded 2024-03-13T06:57:30Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



# Evaluating the implementation of the youth-led emotional well-being project 'Getting it Together'

**Keywords**  
emotional well-being  
peer-led programme  
participatory evaluation

This study reports on the evaluation of a youth-led initiative on the promotion of emotional well-being among young people aged 16–25 years. Over a six month period, the Getting it Together project worked with a group of 12 young people from both the Republic and Northern Ireland in building their understanding of emotional well-being and developing a youth friendly, needs-led resource. Employing a mix of research methods, including participatory methods, this evaluation documents the process of actual project development, partnership working and overall experience and the impact of project participation for the young people. Following the development of the resource, its pilot implementation by the peer educators with 58 young people in the region was also evaluated.

The evaluation findings indicate that the key objectives of the project were achieved and that it resulted in an intense, positive and productive experience for the participating young people, which enhanced their understanding of emotional well-being. A resource package was successfully developed and designed with direct input from the young people, and was assessed by their peers to be youth friendly. The young people were successfully trained to deliver the resource to their peers, who assessed very positively both the resource and their experience of the training. The implications of the evaluation findings for developing this peer-led initiative are discussed.

## EVALUATION

**Kathryn Meade**  
Researcher

**Dhammica Rowel**  
MA Student

**Margaret Barry**  
Head of Department

Department of  
Health Promotion, National  
University of Ireland Galway,  
Ireland

**Correspondence to:**  
Professor Margaret Barry  
Health Promotion  
Research Centre  
Department of  
Health Promotion  
Clinical Science Institute  
National University of  
Ireland Galway  
University Road  
Galway  
Ireland  
margaret.barry@nuigalway.ie

**T**his paper presents the findings from the evaluation of a youth-led initiative on the promotion of positive mental health among young people aged 16–25 years. Over a six month period, the Getting it Together project worked with a group of 12 young people from both the Republic and Northern Ireland in building their understanding of emotional well-being and developing a youth friendly, needs-led resource. This project was developed under the auspices of the CAWT (Co-operation and Working Together) Mental Health Sub-Group, which embraces four health boards/authorities in the border region between the Republic and Northern Ireland and

has a dedicated function in relation to mental health. The project, which was designed as a cross border initiative, was funded by the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace II). The National Children's Bureau (NCB) was commissioned to undertake the implementation of this youth-led initiative, working in partnership with a group of young people who were already engaged in youth participation initiatives in the CAWT area. The findings from the evaluation of the process and impact of this project on the participating young people and the extent to which the project achieved its aims and objectives in general, are reported in this paper.

A number of health promotion programmes for young people have employed peer-led approaches where peers are involved in delivering the intervention. The rationale for peer-delivered interventions is that they have the potential to be able to start with the agenda of young people rather than of adults and, therefore, young people are more likely to engage with approaches which involve them and engender a sense of ownership. Peer influence is a key factor for young people, who may be more likely to take account of the views and behaviours of their peers than adults. Peer-led approaches are seen as a way of harnessing the health education that naturally occurs between peers. Peers are thought to be more credible sources than traditional adult providers of health promotion; interventions presented by peers may be more acceptable and it is argued that peers are able to reinforce learning through ongoing contact (Hart, 1998; Turner & Shepherd, 1999). In addition it is also argued that peer-led approaches are better able to reach traditionally 'hard to reach' groups. Peer-led initiatives are also in keeping with the principles of participation and empowerment whereby groups and individuals work in partnership to define and work out strategies to meet their own needs. There is supporting evidence from systematic reviews of the effectiveness of peer-led approaches for young people (Harden *et al*, 1999; Lister-Sharp *et al*, 1999; Durlak & Wells, 1997) and they have been applied to a wide variety of health topics and in many different settings. This project applies a peer-led approach to the promotion of young people's positive mental health, based on the principles of best practice identified in the literature (Barry, 2007; Barry & Jenkins, 2007; Harden *et al*, 1999; Jané-Llopis *et al*, 2005; Mental Health Foundation, 2002).

The Getting it Together project aimed to develop a youth-friendly resource to promote emotional well-being which would be designed and delivered by young people for young people. In accordance with the principles of peer-led health promotion programmes, the Getting it Together project set out to achieve the following objectives:

- to work with a representative group of young people, already engaged in youth participation (or like) initiatives, build their understanding of emotional well-being, and to facilitate them to develop a youth friendly, needs-led resource, which takes account of existing research evidence
- to identify opportunities for young people to pilot the resource with their peers and support other young people to use or deliver it

- to contribute to the evaluation of the impact of the resource, amend it as needed and print the final resource
- to plan for further dissemination of the resource.

The expected outputs and impacts of the Getting it Together project were to:

- have an evidence-based, youth-led resource for promoting emotional well-being and plan for further dissemination
- enhance the understanding of emotional well-being within the youth participation projects
- strengthen the framework and links between youth participation projects in the CAWT area
- develop the capacity of a group of young people to influence policy and practice towards promoting their emotional well-being.

The project set out to create a space within which a group of 12 young people could develop a resource that promotes emotional well-being in a youth-friendly manner, and is suitable for use by young people across the CAWT region. The project was implemented over a six month period in the form of two residential weekends and three training meetings, which were facilitated by the NCB project team. During this period, working in partnership with the young people, a resource was successfully developed and professionally produced. The resource package consists of the following: a briefing on young people's emotional health and well-being; a series of messages on young people's emotional well-being written by the project participants for the three target groups of young people; adults and service providers; discussion cards and scenario cards for use in group work activities; posters on the definitions and meanings of emotional health; and a resource list. Following completion of the resource, eight of the young people were trained as peer educators and went on to pilot the resource successfully with their peers. Further details on the resource and the project, may be found in the full report by Meade *et al*, 2006.

### Methodology

The evaluation study set out to determine to what extent this peer-led programme on emotional well-being achieved its aims and objectives. The methods selected included focus group discussions, interviews, questionnaires, researcher observation and participatory methods of data collection. The evaluation approach adopted sought to engage young people as active partners in the research process rather than as research subjects. In keeping

with the philosophy of the project, peer-group methodologies were employed to document the process of actual project development, partnership working and overall experience and impact of project participation. It was agreed that the evaluation would be incorporated as an integral part of the process of programme development. The evaluation of the project was carried out in a series of stages (see **table 1**) and the range of different research methods employed at each stage of the evaluation process is outlined in **table 2**.

### **Project participants**

Twelve young people (15–20 years; nine females and three males) from the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI) participated in the Getting it Together project. The young people were recruited from existing youth participation projects to act as a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) and to work with the NCB team to develop the resource. Project participation was open to interested young people of different skills and abilities who were already involved in youth participation initiatives. They were invited to apply to take part in the project by contacting the NCB and informing them on why they wanted to participate in this project, outlining their motivation through a short piece of writing, pictures, short video diary or tape. The ideal participant had to have an interest in learning about emotional health and well-being and be able to commit to the project for four months. The ideal participant could not be in an exam year and not involved in another youth participation study over the same time period.

A comparison group of 20 young people from the same area (nine males and 11 females), including nine young people from a school in the Republic of Ireland and 11 from a youth group in Northern Ireland, were also recruited to participate in focus groups conducted at the beginning and end of the project. These young people were interviewed concerning their understanding of emotional well-

being and their views on young people's mental health over the same timeframe as the project participants, but they had not participated in the project or in any other mental health promotion programme over this time period.

### **Phase 1: Evaluation of the Getting it Together project**

Focus groups were undertaken to determine the perceptions and expectations of the participating young people at the beginning of the project. A comparison group of young people not participating in the project was also included at this stage. In order to identify models of best practice to inform an effective action plan for the project, a short briefing paper on the evidence-base and principles of best practice in peer-led health promotion programmes was prepared by the research team for the Advisory Group. Throughout the process of project development, a key element of the evaluation was the documentation of the processes of project development and partnership working. Observational research was undertaken by the researchers to document the process of development and partnership working during the residential meetings.

Participatory research methods, based on the work of Douglas *et al* (2000) and previously adapted by Byrne, Barry and Sheridan (2004), were used to evaluate the impact of project participation on the young people. A participatory workshop was conducted with the young people, which included buzz groups (small groups of two or three people formed impromptu to discuss a topic for a short period), development of a graffiti wall sticker sheet, peer interviewing and a participant written evaluation questionnaire as outlined in **table 2**. The use of this more interactive evaluation format allows for increased participation and articulation by the young people of their views on the project in a more naturalistic way. The six buzz groups considered their reactions to the project as a whole and appointing a 'group journalist' and 'reporter' they fed

**Table 1: Evaluation stages of the Getting it Together project**

Stage	Objective
Stage 1	Establishing pre-intervention perceptions and expectations of the young people
Stage 2	Identifying models of best practice and effective action plans
Stage 3	Documenting the process of programme development and partnership working
Stage 4	Evaluating the impact of the process implementation of the resource
Stage 5	Determining the impact of the project on participating young people and Advisory Group
Stage 6	Evaluation of the pilot implementation of the resource

their responses to the group both verbally and in written format on sheets. The written responses were given to the researcher who analysed the responses by theme. In the graffiti wall sticker exercise, the group as a whole prioritised their key recommendations from the buzz groups. Working in pairs, the participants then interviewed each other on their personal experience of the project. With their mutual permission, the interviews were tape-recorded and responses were later transcribed and analysed by theme. Ground rules for conducting the interviews were given to the group in advance and each person had the opportunity to act as interviewer and interviewee.

On completion of the project, focus groups were again repeated with the project participants and the comparison groups to determine the impact of the project on their understanding of emotional well-being and perceived benefits of the project in terms of their capacity in the promotion of emotional well-being. Structured interviews were conducted with members of the Advisory Group to explore their views on the partnership process applied in the project, its overall impact and key learning points.

#### **Phase II: Evaluating the impact of the pilot implementation of the Getting it Together resource**

Evaluating the impact of the pilot implementation of the Getting it Together resource (discussion cards and messages) was undertaken following Phase I of the research. The process of training the project participants as peer educators for the delivery of the resource to their peer group, the experience of the peer educators following delivery of the resource to

their peers, and how the resource was received by the young people in the peer group was evaluated using self-administered questionnaires.

### **Results**

The evaluation findings are presented in two phases: Phase I aimed to evaluate the process and impact of developing the youth-led emotional well-being resource with 12 project participants. Phase II was carried out following the development of the resource and sought to evaluate the pilot implementation of the resource by the peer educators with 58 young people in different settings in the CAWT region.

#### **Phase 1 findings**

##### **Pre-intervention focus group findings**

At the beginning of the project, the understanding of emotional well-being was similar in both the project participants and the comparison groups. These centered on themes such as 'good self-esteem', confidence, 'what you think about yourself and others' and 'having a happy medium'. The two groups mentioned a variety of determinants of emotional well-being such as 'having family and friends around you', 'how people treat you', self-confidence, achievements and engaging in different activities. All the young people agreed that there is a need for resources to help them feel positive about themselves. They suggested the necessity for young people themselves to be there for each other and the need to have services that they can trust. While project participants expressed their apprehension about participating in this cross border project as 'a bit scary', they also expressed the view that it would

**Table 2: Range of research methods employed in the evaluation of the Getting it Together project**

<b>Evaluation method</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Process</b>
Focus group discussions	To determine pre-intervention perceptions and expectations and post-intervention impact of the project on their understanding of emotional well-being and perceived benefits of project participation	Focus group interviews with participants and comparison groups
Buzz groups	To obtain a group consensus on various issues pertaining to the project, by brainstorming in small groups	Each group was charged with developing a consensus on key research questions
Graffiti wall sticker sheet	To prioritise the most significant recommendations for future research as perceived by the group	The young people voted on their top recommendations for improving the resource by placing colour-coded stickers on wall charts.
Peer interviewing	To obtain the participants' personal insights into a range of issues pertaining to the project	Young people interviewed each other in pairs about a range of issues central to the programme objectives
Participants written evaluation questionnaire	To evaluate of the Getting it Together project and process	Participants individually completed an anonymous evaluation questionnaire

build their confidence and that getting involved in a cross border project would be a positive experience.

#### **Documenting the process of project development and partnership working**

Throughout the process of programme development, a key element of the evaluation was the documentation of the processes involved in the actual development and implementation of the peer-led intervention. Two residential weekends, two training sessions and one feedback day were facilitated by the NCB project team. These events took place in selected youth friendly venues in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland as agreed with the Advisory Group. Process evaluation data were obtained from the reports of the participating young people, researcher observation and feedback sessions concerning partnership working, development of the resource, and the overall project process as experienced by the participants.

The findings suggest that partnership working was in evidence during all phases of the project. Project leaders facilitated the positive interaction of the young people and consulted participants throughout the project development. Participants were encouraged to brainstorm, reflect and present their ideas through dialogue, art, music, and role play. At all stages of the project development, the young people's ideas were incorporated into the development of the various components of the resource, including writing the key messages, designing the cards and working with the designer on the final design and look of the resource materials. There was good interaction and rapport among the participants and between the NCB project leaders and participants. Participants stated that they worked well together as a team because they listened to each other, trusted each other and became friends. Participants outlined that this was accomplished through a mixture of work, games and activities. It was evident that there was good communication, understanding and respect between the project leaders and the participants.

#### **Evaluating the impact of project participation on the young people**

Data from the participatory workshop buzz groups and peer interviews indicated that the project participants' perceptions of the project process were extremely positive. The participants were of the view that the project was of equal benefit to males and females: *'we thought it was good for both genders, at start, intimidating for boys'*. The young people were very positive about their interaction with the

project leaders throughout the project and they felt that they were given time and space to express their opinions and feel understood.

*'Yeah, it did allow me to express my views, they were really, really friendly.'*

*'They always encouraged you to give your own opinions. Any discussion we had, we sat in a circle and we were very open about what we thought.'*

Comments indicated that there was good teamwork which was well facilitated by the project leaders.

*'Individuals worked together as a team and listened to each others' views and worked together better.'*

*'I did enjoy working with the leaders, eh, it was easy because they were so laid back and good craic and all, they made you feel comfortable around them.'*

*'They created a relaxed atmosphere.'*

Participants reported that they had gained in confidence, improved their coping skills and their communication and facilitation skills: *'confidence and the ability to speak out more'*. Participants also reported that they had developed new friendships, had more consideration for other people and acquired new information. They also acknowledged that in order to successfully use the resource with their peers that they would need further training. Particular reference was made to the need for presentation and communication skills, together with confidence and respect for others, in order to enable them to use the resource with other young people in their youth group.

*'To help use the resource pack with a youth group, you would need, you know, presentation skills and need to be able to work in a group and be able to make the person comfortable saying what he wants to say.'*

The top two recommendations for improving the project from the graffiti wall sticker exercise were that there should be an *'even number of girls and boys'* participating in the project and that there should be *'more residential'*.

With regard to the resource, the participants reported in the peer interviews that the new resource would work well for their peers as it was created by people of their own age. They emphasised that the content of the resource was

'designed around factors that affected their lives', it was based on feedback from their own age group and that the project group included a representation of young people from different backgrounds and from north and south of the border. Those participants who had worked on the cards and/or the messages with other young people their age, reported positively on their experience, stating that their peers '*thought they were brilliant ... they really liked them*'. They endorsed that using the cards was a good idea and a positive experience. Overall, the participants were very positive about the resource developed but did acknowledge that they were uncertain about its future use and that it needed to be tried out with other young people. They also commented that as some of the emotional well-being messages developed in the resource were for adults and service providers that it would have been useful to have had their input into the process. Clearly, the participatory and consultative approach to project development had imprinted positively on the working ethos of the project participants.

The participants' written evaluation questionnaires provided information on the participants' assessment of the project process. The participants rated the Getting it Together project extremely positively (50% rated the project as 'excellent', 30% as 'very good' and 20% as 'good'). The majority of the participants reported that they had participated in all the activities and discussions throughout the project and confirmed that the venues chosen worked well. They also reported that they found the project to be interesting, stating that they had learned new things and that the project had contributed to improving their understanding of emotional health: '*positive, enjoyable, sad to be leaving, learnt a lot*'. However, the participants were less sure about the impact of their experience on wider relationships eg. with their family.

#### Determining the impact of the project on participating young people

Through active participation in the project development process, the project sought to build the young people's understanding of emotional well-being. Based on the findings from the focus group discussions on completion of the project, it would appear that over the lifetime of the project participants' understanding of emotional well-being and their perceptions of the factors that make young people feel positive about themselves had broadened. Project participants identified emotional well-being with aspects of coping, resilience, '*people's bounce-*

*backability*', and self-awareness, '*... how you express how you are feeling inside*', '*just partly knowing yourself*'. They appeared more comfortable in the post-intervention focus groups in articulating their views and opinions on emotional well-being. However, it is difficult to attribute this change exclusively to the Getting it Together project. It is reasonable to assume however, that the very focused group work undertaken during the project on defining emotional well-being and writing key messages for young people and adults did help them to elaborate their understandings and articulate in a more explicit manner their implicit knowledge about young people's emotional well-being.

In their evaluation of the impact of the project, the majority of participants strongly agreed that they had acquired a better understanding of emotional health and well-being as a result of the Getting it Together project. It is interesting to compare the project participants with the comparison group of non-participating young people in this respect. The comparison group primarily related emotional well-being with feelings of happiness or sadness, during both the first and second focus groups and were less likely to refer to concepts such as resilience, sense of balance, confidence and coping skills, which emerged very clearly from the focus groups with the project participants.

In addition to improving their knowledge about emotional well-being, the project participants perceived that they have gained more confidence in participatory work, which was evident from their conduct at the post-intervention focus group. However, the project participants felt that the resource they developed could be further fine tuned by evaluating it with other young people: '*...make sure that everything is relevant, go and ask them their opinion*'. They felt it would need to be updated periodically '*... 'cause society is always changing.*' A few participants commented that while they enjoyed the project they did not enjoy sitting in lengthy discussion groups.

With regard to cross border working, it was obvious at the post-intervention focus groups that project participants were more positive in their attitudes to cross border initiatives. The project participants were able to appreciate the value of cross border projects and how they contribute to recognising the similarities and shared needs of young people from each side of the border: '*does really enforce that a lot of young people have the same traditions, doesn't matter where you are from... they all stress about the same things, they worry about the same things and different things*'.

### **Advisory group**

The Advisory Group represented both statutory and voluntary agencies in the cross border regions. Interviews with the Advisory Group members suggested that their experience of the Getting it Together project was very positive. They were generally in agreement that their expectations of the project had been met. Though some challenges and difficulties were acknowledged, it was felt that the project achieved what it set out to do and it also helped to build the young peoples' understanding of emotional health and well-being. The Advisory Group members felt that the project reinforced their belief in the capacity of the young people and that the project was a very inclusive process. The members generally agreed that the partnership process with the young people had worked well and that the young people's voices were heard. The members assessed the overall impact of the project to be generally positive and further suggestions for improvement, such as the need to pilot the resource were outlined.

### **Phase II Findings**

#### ***Evaluating the impact of the pilot implementation of the Getting it Together resource***

Evaluation of the pilot implementation of the Getting it Together resource (scenario card and messages) was undertaken following Phase I of the research.

#### ***The process of training peer educators for the delivery of the resource***

Two training workshops were conducted, one in the ROI and one in NI, to train the project participants to deliver the resource they had developed to their peers. Eight of the young people were trained as peer educators. In general they rated the training workshops quite positively and reported being satisfied with the training programme and the instructions given at the training workshop. Following the training workshop they reported feeling confident and comfortable in using the resource pack and facilitating a group session with a group of peers; 'I was given points on how to facilitate a group in the best way, by knowing these points I am more confident'. Both groups positively rated their interaction with the training workshop facilitators. All the peer educators from NI and all but two of the peer educators from the ROI felt that they had adequate support as peer educators to deliver the resource. For further improvement of the training workshop they recommended providing more literature, more time to think and further information on the timescale and aims of the programme.

#### ***The experience of the peer educators in facilitating a peer group training session***

Following the pilot implementation of the resource with a group of their peers, the overall experiences of the peer educators were again positive. They were satisfied with the session they had facilitated, the number of participants in the programme, and the interaction they had with their peers. The peer educators felt that they had confidently carried out the training session and were positive about their experiences: 'We were well informed in what we were doing'. The majority of them felt that they had successfully delivered the resource materials with their peers and reported that their peers responded positively to the resource.

#### ***Evaluation of how the resource was received by the young people in the peer group***

Five sessions were facilitated by the peer educators, with a total of 58 pilot participants across three venues in ROI and two venues in NI. The participants were 22 males and 36 females aged 14–18 years old, recruited from the post-primary schools and youth groups in the CAWT region. The majority of the pilot participants rated the experience of their respective sessions very positively.

*'There was a lot of deep discussion, which were very interesting, and I learned a lot more about group members.'*

*'The facilitator was very well informed, and very professional and helpful.'*

Overall feedback about the session, the available resources and the number of participants in the training session was positive. Most of the pilot participants considered the resource pack to be useful.

*'The resource pack was a great way of raising topics that a lot of people don't talk about eg. friends.'*

*'I thought the use of the cards was an excellent idea.'*

They reported that they personally benefited from the session and would recommend it to friends and other young people.

*'Good way to discuss issues that may not be talked about.'*

*'I found it a good way to explore your emotions and I feel young people today need to do that more.'*



Some of the young people recommended that more activities should be included to make people feel comfortable.

*'More activities, bigger variety of questions in the scenario cards.'*

*'It was good that it was presented by class mates but some questions and scenarios were over-lapping on some questions.'*

They recommended that more young people should go through this training programme and also recommended that the programme should be carried out on a cross community basis (ie. with young people from both sides of the border) with more activities, games and visual aids included.

## Discussion

It is clear from the evaluation findings that the Getting it Together project resulted in an intense, powerful and productive experience for the participating young people and for all involved. The evaluation set out to determine whether the following key aims and objectives of the project were achieved.

### ***Facilitating the development of a youth-friendly resource***

The project was successful in engaging the participation of a diverse group of young people from the existing CAWT youth participation initiatives. The participants were from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds, from urban and rural areas and from both sides of the border. The participants also demonstrated a varied range of skills and abilities. All the participants engaged actively with the process of project development and demonstrated commitment throughout.

The project successfully facilitated the development of a youth-friendly resource, which included colourfully designed posters, cards and materials containing key messages about emotional well-being. The resource materials were written and designed by the participating young people for other young people their own age, for adults and health service providers. In this respect, one of the main aims of the project was achieved, ie. a resource package was successfully developed with direct input from young people and was designed, and assessed by peers, to be youth friendly.

### ***Enhancing the young people's understanding of emotional well-being***

Based on the findings from the focus group discussions, it would appear that over the lifetime of

the project, participants' understanding of emotional well-being and their perceptions of the factors that help young people feel positive about themselves had broadened. During the first focus group, which took place at the beginning of the first residential, participants were understandably anxious about beginning the project and meeting new people. They were therefore not as forthcoming in their views and less elaborate in their responses. In contrast, during the second focus group at the end of the project, participants were much more at ease than the comparison group in discussing and voicing their views on emotional well-being. It is reasonable to assume that the very focused group work undertaken during the project, on defining emotional well-being and writing key messages for young people and adults, did help them to elaborate their understandings and articulate in a more explicit manner their implicit knowledge about young people's emotional well-being.

### ***A process of project development based on partnership working with young people***

Feedback from both the project participants and researcher observation of the residencies and training meetings, suggest that partnership working was in evidence during all phases of the project. Project leaders consulted participants throughout the project development and the participatory and interactive approach adopted in the project process facilitated and sustained the young people's engagement throughout. The young people reported that their voices were being heard and that their views and opinions were respected. Overall, a positive partnership was established between the project leaders and the participants and this contributed to achieving the aims and objectives of the project.

### ***Developing a needs-led and evidence-based resource for promoting emotional well-being***

The resource was needs-led in as much as it was based on the expressed needs and direct input of the participating young people. A peer consultation exercise was included in the project development process in order to include the perceptions and opinions of other young people beyond the project group. However, this exercise was not as extensive as planned and turned out to be quite limited in scope with responses obtained from 15 peers. Therefore, the extent to which the resource meets the needs of a wider population of young people remains to be established.

Based on the principles of best practice in peer-led health promotion programmes identified by the

research team, the Getting it Together project incorporates a number of elements of best practice as follows.

- The selection criteria for peer-leaders included the recruitment of a mixed group of young people who showed genuine commitment to the project and an interest in learning about emotional health and well-being.
- The specific boundaries of working in partnership with young people were established at the initial recruitment of the project participants. Limitations and boundaries were established to create a safe, respectful working environment.
- The project was implemented on the basis of group work and discussions during the residencies to identify the needs of the young people in relation to their emotional health and well-being. Determining the needs of a wider group of young people who would potentially use the resources, however, does need to be established through a broader peer consultation exercise.
- The project was framed within the young people's values and informed by the social and material context of their lives. The project participants were confident that the resource would, therefore, work well for other young people their own age.
- The Advisory Group and the NCB project team facilitated and engaged the active input of the young people in the development, organisation and implementation of the project, by consulting and working in partnership with young people as described earlier. The participating young people were not, however, represented on the Advisory Group. This matter was discussed but not resolved. The extent of the participation of the young people at this level of project planning and organisation needs to be considered for future initiatives of this kind.
- The Getting it Together project adopted a systematic approach to the planning, implementation and evaluation of this peer-delivered initiative by ensuring that the project had clear aims and objectives and that a project management process was put in place through the Advisory Group.

### **Factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the project**

A number of factors facilitated the success of the Getting it Together project. First, the provision of funding made possible the initiation of the project and the allocation of resources and expertise to ensure its successful development. The commitment

of the Advisory Group, the NCB staff and the young people who participated in the project were key to its success. The successful partnership that was established with the young people and the participatory and interactive approach adopted in the project process facilitated the sustained engagement of the young people. The development of the project within the framework of the existing CAWT youth participation initiatives provided a suitable context for the project to be developed and also provided the local background support to make the project viable.

The process of training peer-educators for the delivery of the resource to a peer group turned out to be an extremely successful exercise in the ROI and NI. The training workshops facilitated the enhancement of confidence in delivering the resource to a group of their peers.

Although the project timeframe was acknowledged by all involved as being too short, the tight timelines did focus the project activity on its key outputs right from the early stages. The clear articulation of the project aims and objectives guided the project planning, implementation and evaluation, and the overall management of the project.

### **Conclusions**

It is clear that the project accomplished a considerable amount in a short space of time and succeeded in meeting its key aims and objectives. While the development of the resource marks the completion of the project work, it may however, be seen as the beginning rather than the end of the process. The project has produced a youth-friendly resource developed with input from the participating young people. The use of this resource now needs to be tested with a wider group of young people from the region. This group of young people is now primed to take on the role of peer-leaders. However, to fully exploit the benefits of what has been achieved to date, the young people will need to be given further training in implementing the resource and the opportunity, through structured initiatives locally, to apply their newly acquired skills.

To achieve the full potential of this peer-led initiative and to extend the benefits to as wide a group of young people as possible, a plan for the testing and wider dissemination of the resource is needed. Building on the project success achieved to date, the following recommendations for further development are made.

- In order to ensure that the longer-term benefits of the project are not lost, it is critical that the roll-out and dissemination of the project is

supported, including building the young people's capacity to deliver the resource.

- The resource is available for implementation and it is important that it should be evaluated in order to determine its impact on different sub-groups of young people in the wider community.
- The engagement of a wider group of young people as peer-leaders needs to be explored by including approaches such as reciprocal peer education.
- Similar to other health promotion interventions, this peer-delivered approach should be implemented in the context of wider strategies to promote the well-being of young people. The use of the resource and peer-led approaches within existing community, youth and school-based mental health promotion initiatives should be explored in order to support the take-up and sustainability of the project outputs.
- The support and engagement of the local agencies and partners in the region will be critical to the sustainability of this initiative into the future. Getting buy-in from the local youth, school and community agencies will greatly influence the wider implementation of the project resource and its dissemination in the CAWT region and beyond. 🌀

#### REFERENCES

- Barry MM (2007) Generic principles of effective mental health promotion. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion* 9 (2) 4–16.
- Barry MM & Jenkins R (2007) *Implementing Mental Health Promotion*. Oxford: Churchill Livingstone, Elsevier.
- Byrne M, Barry MM & Sheridan A (2004) Implementation of a school-based mental health promotion programme in Ireland. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion* 6 (1) 17–25.
- Douglas N, Warwick I, Whitty G & Aggleton P (2000) Vital youth: evaluating a theatre in health education project. *Health Education* 100 (5) 207–15.
- Durlak JA & Wells AM (1997) Primary prevention mental health programs for children and adolescents: a meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 25 (2) 115–152.
- Hart GJ (1998) Peer education and community based HIV prevention for homosexual men: peer led, evidence based, or fashion driven? *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 74 87–94.
- Harden A, Weston R & Oakley A (1999) *A Review of the Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Peer-delivered Health Promotion Interventions for Young People*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.
- Jané-Llopis E, Barry MM, Hosman C & Patel V (2005) Mental health promotion works: a review. *Promotion and Education* 12 (2 supplement) 9–25.
- Lister-Sharp D, Chapman S, Stewart-Brown S & Sowden A (1999) Health promoting schools and health promotion in schools: two systematic reviews. *Health Technology Assessment* 3 (22) 1–207.
- Meade K, Barry MM & Rowel D (2006) *Evaluation of the Youth Led Emotional Well-being Project 'Getting it Together'*. Galway: Unpublished Report, Health Promotion Research Centre, Department of Health Promotion, NUI.
- The Mental Health Foundation (2002) *Peer Support – Someone to turn to: An evaluation report of the Mental Health Foundation Peer Support Programme*. London: The Mental Health Foundation.
- Turner G & Shepherd J (1999) A method in search of a theory: peer education and health promotion. *Health Education Research* 14 235–247.