



Year One Evaluation

(October 2017 to August 2018)



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1.0 Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of Year One of the 'No Limits' programme, delivered by Bardic Educational Arts and Media Ltd Creative Network (BEAM) and funded by the Big Lottery Fund 'Empowering Young People's Programme'. 'Insight Solutions' were appointed by BEAM to undertake this evaluation, and have carried out all elements of the process.

The evaluation outlines key objectives and outcomes achieved by the *No Limits* programme through its focus on empowering young people with mild to moderate learning difficulties to inspire them to fulfil their potential through the development of key social, educational and wellbeing skills.

At the time of writing, the *No Limits* programme has three further years of committed funding, meaning this evaluation allowed for both true understanding of the impact made by the programme in Year One, and exploration of opportunities which may enhance future delivery.

1.1 No Limits Programme

The *No Limits* programme aims to empower and build the confidence of at least 137 young people with mild to moderate learning difficulties in its four-year proposed time span. Predominantly, the programme focuses on young people with identified gaps in their own educational and social needs.

The programme aims to facilitate young people aged 16-22 years old from the Mid-Ulster, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon areas of Northern Ireland. The young people affiliated with the programme are considered at risk of social exclusion, poverty and disengagement from positive societal influence.

No Limits, through a tailored support and early intervention programme, aspires to: help develop social skills, improve and enhance overall health and well-being, build self-esteem, self-belief and confidence, assist preparation for further education or employment, provide hands-on work experience and accreditation and provide options to help the young people involved aspire, realise and fulfil their true potential. The programme is unique in its focus on executing the above aspirations by incorporating creative multi-arts media.

1.2 Evaluation of the No Limits Programme

The evaluation of Year One of the *No Limits* programme is based on engagement with project staff, professional stakeholders (social workers and teachers), young people and their parents/guardians. Predominantly, research was carried out through focus groups and one-to-one interviews. These methods allowed for the development of rapport, relationships and trust which enabled open and honest discussions. Throughout the period of evaluation, Insight Solutions staff visited *No Limits* groups at key points and formed familiarity with the young people involved, which greatly aided the evaluation.



2.0 Objectives and Outcomes

2.1 Key Objectives of the No Limits Programme

Table 1.0 below provides an overview of the key aims of the *No Limits programme*, as well as outlining four key project outcomes which the programme aims to have successfully met by project end (Year 4). Table 2.0 gives an overview of the structure of the *No Limits programme*, which runs over 3 days (the 'Day Programme') and 2 evenings (the 'Evening Programme')

Aims of No Limits Programme		
Empower and build the confidence of young people with moderate learning difficulties (including e.g. Asperger's, Autism) with identified gaps in their own educational and social needs	Use creative multi-arts media, build their social skills, help them to prepare for further education and enhance their overall health and wellbeing through improved access to adult and community life	Build their self-esteem, self-belief and confidence, providing them with options to inspire them and help fulfil their potential
Key Outcomes (by end of project)		
Project Outcome 1	'Young people, their support networks and communities are involved in the planning and delivery of the project'	
	Indicator 1: 'Young people feel confident and connected within their community and engage with positive activities'	
	Indicator 2: 'Support network members, including families, for the first time feel more fully connected to other partners and services'	
	Indicator 3: 'Young people are actively involved in the design, delivery and review of the project'	
Project Outcome 2	'Young people with learning difficulties/disabilities have improved health and wellbeing with better connections to their community and activities'	
	Indicator 1: 'Young people set and achieve their own health and wellbeing targets'	
	Indicator 2: 'Young people understand healthy lifestyle choices and the impact of not taking care of themselves'	
Project Outcome 3	'Young people with learning difficulties/disabilities and their families have improved relationships with support partners and their community'	
	Indicator 1: 'Volunteers from the local community contribute to young people's mentoring;	
	Indicator 2: 'Young people volunteer in community events'	
	Indicator 3: 'Young people and their families take part in activities with support partners/services'	
Project Outcome 4	'Young people with learning difficulties/disabilities are empowered and prepared for education, work and training'	
	Indicator 1: 'Young people achieve new skills'	
	Indicator 2: 'Young people overcome their barriers such as lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and a lack of social and communication skills'	

Table 1.0: Key Outcomes of *No Limits Programme*

2.2 Programme Structure

The outcomes and the indicators used cover the four-year lifespan of the programme. For that reason, it is difficult to establish the true extent to which these outcomes have been achieved within the confines of this Year One evaluation. However, using the information gleaned from this evaluation, it does appear that there is good progress towards achieving all desired outcomes and the programme appears to be on track to achieving the desired impact by project end.

Day Programme	Evening Programme
3 days (6 hours per day) per week for 40 weeks (September – June)	2 evenings per week for 40 weeks (September – June)
Aim to engage 52 young people over 4 years (7 in year 1, 15 in years 2, 3 and 4)	Aim to engage 85 young people over 4 years (25 in year 1, 20 in years 2, 3 and 4)
<p>Aimed at those not staying on at school, whose needs include social, educational and employability development. The Day Programme incorporates learning across five interlinked subject areas with underlying themes of employability skills development, career development, health and wellbeing awareness and community connectivity.</p> <p>The subject areas are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity Building /Communication/Social Skills 2. Arts and Crafts 3. Social Enterprise Skills 4. Personal Development and Holistic Wellbeing Development 5. Digital Photography/Video <p>Support, with an informal approach to learning includes: multi-arts and personal fitness activities, preparation for interviews, CV building, communication skills and developing and planning for the future.</p>	<p>Aimed at young people who are staying on at school but who have identified the need for additional social and personal development opportunities to help them prepare for further training, education and/or employment, and connect more with their community.</p> <p>Young people decide on which components they wish to participate in. On completion, participants will attain relevant OCN Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications.</p>

Table 2.0: Programme Structure of No Limits Programme

Activites	Thematic Workshops
Interactive/Drama	Personal and social development
Art	Drug and alcohol awareness
Drumming	Internet safety
Health and fitness	Bullying
Movie Making	Social Enterprise
Animation	Body image and self-esteem
Graphic design	Crime and consequence
Photography	Chill skills
Pilates	OCN Level 1 Stress Management Techniques
Make-up masterclass	
Horticulture	
Trips	
Fashion design	
Residential	

Table 3.0: No Limits Activites and Thematic Workshops

2.3 Programme Delivery/Management

The *No Limits programme* is overseen by the FACES (Families and Community Engaging and Supporting) Consortium and Management Committee, established specifically for the project, with BEAM as the lead organisation. The FACES consortium consists of young people, parents, schools, the Education Authority, Department for Economy, PSNI, Dungannon Enterprise Centre, Mid-Ulster District Council, Donaghmore District and Community Association, Disability Action and the Integrated Care Partnership.

BEAM (based in Donaghmore, County Tyrone) focus on creating and delivering interactive learning experiences through the arts and have engaged over 150,000 people in their programmes throughout Ireland since 2002. BEAM focus on arts-based mediums such as drama, story-telling, scriptwriting, animation, creative media, film production, photography, music, art and dance and aim to explore social and life issues such as anti-bullying, conflict resolution, diversity and inclusion through these methods. Based in the Torrent Complex, Donaghmore, BEAM have access to the Bardic Theatre and are surrounded by a number of other community and voluntary organisations, local businesses, sports and leisure facilities.

On securing funding to deliver the *No Limits programme*, BEAM were able to cover the salaries of one new Project Development Manager (Full Time), 3 Support Workers (Part Time) and 11 Facilitators (Part Time). The project funding enabled the refurbishment of an existing conference room into a multi-activity hub allowing facilitation of the programme, as well as the purchase of necessary equipment. Furthermore, funding covered the recruitment of local highly-respected sessional tutors from the creative industries who have excelled in their sectors, and facilitators from health and wellbeing organisations.

Under the guidance of the Project Development Manager, BEAM facilitation staff were upskilled to meet the complex needs of the programme beneficiaries, and in Year One have put policies and procedures in place to ensure appropriate staff training and knowledge. Staff have attended various training initiatives including: Disability Awareness, Safeguarding, Child Sexual Exploitation, Mental Health, First Aid, Trauma Informed Practice and Autism Awareness and continue with efforts to learn and grow with the programme as it develops.

Despite Year 1 officially commencing in October 2017, the first intake of young people to the day programme was not until January 2018 so some delivery time was understandably affected. BEAM did take the initiative to deliver a summer '18 programme which proved to be very popular and helped contribute towards meeting objectives and targets in Year One.

2.4 Recruitment

Recruitment for Year One of the programme focused predominantly on referrals from Consortium members, schools and the wider community. There was focus on neighbouring schools St Ciaran's College (Ballygawley), St Patrick's College (Dungannon), Drumglass High School (Dungannon) St Joseph's College (Coalisland) St Joseph's Grammar School (Donaghmore), Integrated College Dungannon and City of Armagh High School.

No Limits staff developed PR and marketing initiatives with the creation of flyers, posters, pop-up stands, press releases and e-mail shots which were distributed to local schools, social services, 14+ teams, disability teams, intensive support teams and voluntary agencies.

The staff team indicated some minor difficulties at the promotion and recruitment stage of the programme. Initially, promotional materials indicated the term 'disabilities', which attached stigma and prevented young people and parents coming forward for participation. On discussion with Big Lottery, this term was removed and replaced with positive language and interest therefore increased as a result.

Meetings were also carried out with Special Educational Needs teachers and taster sessions delivered to pupils who were either referred to or expressed interest in the programme. When young people had been recruited, BEAM staff organised a launch event to allow for introductions, launch the new space and 'kickstart' the programme.

In Year One, BEAM successfully recruited and sustained **11** young people in the Day Programme and **28** in the Evening Programme in Year One, exceeding targets of 7 and 25 young people, respectively. The Day Programme is predominantly made up of young people on the Autistic Spectrum, whilst the evening programme is majority Newcomers.

Whilst the programme did aspire to reach young people from a wider geographical area, the vast majority of participants were recruited from the Mid Ulster area.



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Primary Research

The approach of Insight Solutions was based on achieving engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, who could provide information and insight on their own personal experience and perspective of the *No Limits programme*. Table 4 provides a summary of the engagement carried out with stakeholders over the evaluation period.

Stakeholder	Method	Engagement
No Limits Staff	Focus Group	1 focus group with 5 project staff
	One to One Interview	1 interview with Project Development Manager
Parents	Focus Group	1 focus group with 5 parents
	Telephone Interview	1 interview with 1 parent
Social Workers	Telephone Interview	2 x Social Workers interviews (1 x SHSCT, 1 x NHSCT)
Teachers	Telephone Interview	1 x Teacher
Young People	Focus Group	1 focus group with 5 young people
	One to one/group interviews	10 interviews conducted with 16 young people
Young People and Staff	Attendance at Sessions/Events	Attendance at No Limits Got Talent and numerous sessions

Table 4.0: Primary Research/Engagement for No Limits Evaluation

3.2 Secondary Research

Insight Solutions also considered reporting, monitoring and evaluation documentation regarding the programme. Where relevant, this information has been incorporated within this report.



4.0 Findings

"He seemed to come alive. He had left school the June before and didn't have much interest in anything. He loves No Limits and talks about it when he gets home." (Parent)

4.1 Impact on Young People

The *No Limits* programme has made every effort to contribute to tackling barriers that the young people who participate face. The positive and far-reaching impact evidenced below is no doubt a reflection of the nature in which the programme is shaped, with significant input from the young people with regards to activities and schedules. The Programme Development Manager stated that young people were '*consulted at every level*' and they had opportunity to indicate what they would like to build knowledge and skills in, complimenting

their own Personal Development Plans. This approach was also welcomed by parents, who stated that '*all tastes really are catered for*' and by social workers who believed young people were '*listened to and their interests were accommodated for*'. As well as empowering them, this also proved to be a good learning opportunity for young people who had to practice compromise and understanding of different people's tastes and interests. Parents regarded participation in an array of topics as vital in showing their young person that '*not everyone likes the same things or shares the same interests*'.

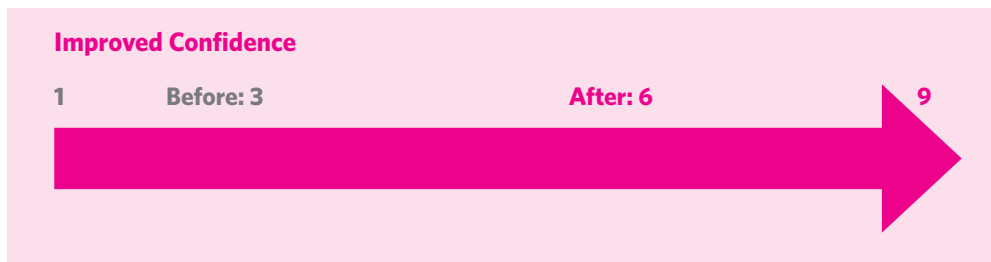
When asked to describe *No Limits*, the following diagram is testament to the impact that this programme has had on the 39 young people involved.



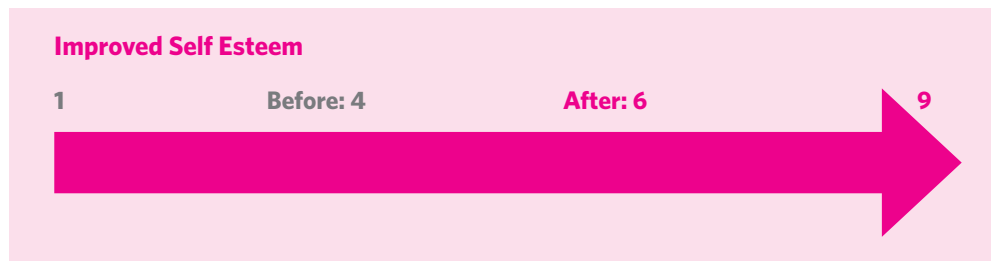
Each of the following sections provides an insight into the impact of the programme across a number of key areas. This draws upon direct engagement by the evaluation team and analysis of secondary data provided by the *No Limits* staff team. Additionally, quotes relevant to each area have been used from various stakeholders to show first-hand the personal impact.

4.1.1 Confidence and Self-Esteem

Confidence and self-esteem have a clear impact on the development of young people. Young people involved in the *No Limits programme* highlighted difficulties in previous educational and youth club settings, and many suffered low confidence and self-esteem as a consequence of both this and often difficult personal circumstances. The programme has stimulated confidence and self-esteem in participants by creating a welcoming, safe space in which they can try new things and develop new skills.



Young people stated an increase of 31% with regards to confidence, while self-esteem increased by 28%. This shows significant improvement in these areas from beginning to the end of Year One. In one-to-one interviews, all stakeholders reflected on noticeable changes in young people with regards to confidence and self-esteem.



Young People	Parents	Staff	Social Workers	Teacher
"I literally had no confidence before- now it's great"	"She really came out of herself. Before, she just wouldn't talk to anyone."	"Trying to get them to do things independently really boosts their confidence."	"This is a mixed ability programme and I think it's shown this young person that everyone has different capabilities and they can do things and succeed - realising 'I can actually do this!'"	"Even those who might have appeared as confident at the start had fears around performing in front of others - there was definitely a lot of work done by staff to get them to that place."
"It's all really good, I love it. It's built my confidence up"	"It's a great confidence building exercise."	"Confidence is increasing as independence increases."	"Confidence has definitely improved - socially and through performance."	"It has all been a great confidence boost."
"I got on stage and performed. I'd never done anything like that in my life before. It helped with nerves."	"Most people come out of school and have never been involved in art, drama and performance - it's a great opportunity to try those things and overcome the fears involved."	"Their confidence increases as they make new friends and learn to deal with their stresses and anxieties."	"She has really come on leaps and bounds!"	

Table 5.0: Confidence and Self-Esteem Quotes

4.1.2 Independence

Perhaps stemming from increased confidence and self-esteem, the *No Limits* programme has allowed young people to experience a sense of independence they may not have encountered prior to participation in the programme. Although the development of independence was not always noted by young people themselves in one-to-one discussions, staff and parents unanimously agreed that increased independence was one of the most notable changes in the young participants.

Parents, staff and social workers noted that independence increased 'week on week', with staff helping young people work towards total independence in practical areas such as making toast, cups of tea and juice for themselves and others.

It is with total encouragement from staff members that young people have been able to flourish at tasks they felt incapable of completing prior to attending the programme.

This increased independence was arguably most apparent at the end of Year One, when young people attended a residential at Lusty Beg island. For some, this was their first time staying away from parents/the family home.

Internal evaluations completed at the end of Year One indicate that young people's ability to 'take responsibility' improved by 19% since the beginning of the programme - an encouraging development in a key area.



Parents	Staff
"They went on a residential trip to Lusty Beg and he had never been away from home before. He goes to a respite facility, but this was a totally new experience."	"The change really was progressive week on week"
"He just couldn't wait to go - that's how you know it's a good programme. The usual stresses that go with going places for him were minimised and he is happy to go in alone. It is really comforting."	"One young person learned to dry dishes, make toast and make himself a cup of tea - he wouldn't have had the confidence or independence to do this before. It's practical skills like that that can really change someone's life"
	"It's about a sense of empowerment, and it shines through in the young people."

Table 6.0: Independence Quotes

4.1.3 Social Development

4.1.3.1 Peer Relationships

The ability to form and maintain relationships is a key component to being emotionally and mentally healthy and having a positive sense of wellbeing. No Limits has proven to be a programme which has allowed young people who may otherwise feel marginalised or isolated to connect and develop relationships. Within the focus group, young people all stated that meeting new friends was a key highlight of their No Limits experience.

*"My favourite thing has been meeting friends who care about me, they really do care about me a lot".
(Young person)*

Many parents had reflected on school and other youth clubs where their son/daughter had had negative experiences and felt socially excluded and felt that the smaller, close-knit group and staff support system enabled the development of strong friendships in the No Limits setting. Further, both young people and parents agreed that these relationships would be sustained long after the programme finishes, which is clear reassurance that the legacy of the No Limits will continue far beyond its completion.



Young People	Parents	Staff
"I have new best friends now"	"There is very little for my son to do outside the house. He does very little for someone his age, and he is very isolated. The programme gives him a brilliant social outlet."	"All the groups members have excellent relationships with each other – great friendships have been made."
"I've become really close to people by taking part in the programme"	"The change in social skills was unbelievable. My son couldn't hold a conversation with eye contact with anyone but me, now I see him having conversations and speaking back to people confidently. This time last year he wouldn't have been able to do that."	"The young people have met new friends and definitely have a better social ability as an outcome of the programme."
"I meet with new friends from here outside of the group now"	"No Limits is his main social outlet."	

Table 7.0: Peer Relationships Quotes

4.1.3.2 Relationships with Staff

Not only has No Limits increased social opportunities between young people, the support network developed with staff has played a vital part in their journey.

Throughout the evaluation, strong and positive relationships between staff and young people have been evident. Parents expressed gratitude that staff had *'got to know young people's specific needs and honed-in on their interests'*.



There are occasions throughout Year One where staff catered to particular interests above and beyond the requirements of the programme. This included facilitating a trip to a country and western concert in Omagh and to a networking opportunity for young people with additional needs. Examples like this highlight the establishment of trust which has been created between staff, young people and parents which without a doubt has aided the success of Year One, and the positive development of the young people involved.

The strong staff support system ensures young people are encouraged and motivated at every stage of the programme. Throughout the duration of the evaluation, young people spoke fondly of staff and were grateful to have mentors and leaders who they were reassured by. This support system also allowed for staff to address personal problems brought to them by young people by having conversations with parents/guardians or social workers and supporting young people to access external services to assist them in their own personal and social development.

Parents, social workers and teachers all agreed that the staff team was one of the most important elements of the *No Limits programme* and credited much of the development of the young people to the approach of the programme's team.

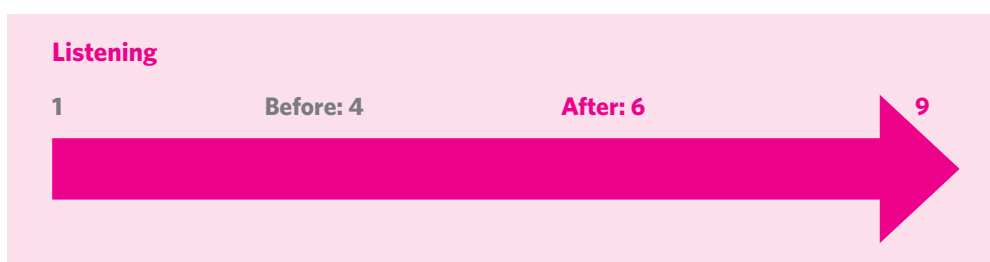
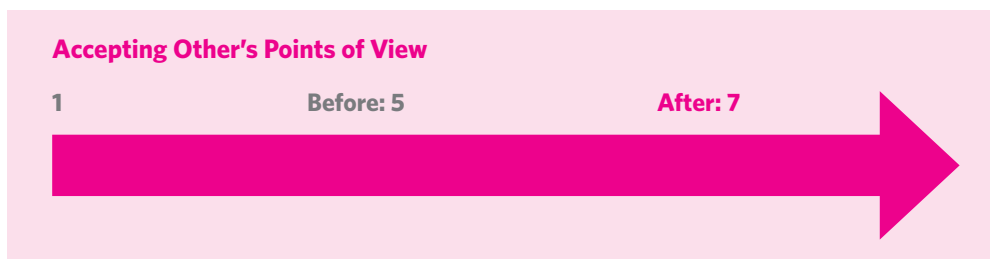


Young People	Parents	Staff	Social Workers	Teacher
"I never would have talked about my life or situation, but I can talk to her (Project Development Manager). She gives really good advice. It's far better getting it off your chest."	"The staff bonded with them all right away. They just know when and how to get the best out of them."	"Children give trust immediately, but with young adults it takes more time. We've got to know them, and they know us, and we've got to a really nice level of trust."	"There is a huge support network on the programme - unlike anywhere I have ever seen before."	"It was clear to see at the performance how amazing the relationships were between staff and the girls."
"I can talk to everyone and everyone is lovely."	'They're the type of people who would say 'have a go!' - they show them they CAN do things, and can enjoy them"		"The Programme Development Manager is great with this particular young person - providing general support and acting as a mentor."	"BEAM staff developed great relationships with them instantly, I could see how the relationships had developed right from the taster session."
"Everyone is just there ready to greet you."	"They got to know their specific needs and honed-in on their interests"		"This young person has been really comforted and reassured by staff. The staff team are very supportive."	

Table 8.0: Relationships with Staff Quotes

As a result of the enhanced social opportunities and the development of strong relationships, young people expressed vast improvement in communication and social skills from beginning to end of Year One.

On average, the young people's ability to 'accept other's points of view' improved by 21%, their 'helping others' capabilities improved by 29% and their 'listening' abilities improved by 20%. This reiterates the impact of the *No Limits programme*, evidencing that young people have nurtured skills which will be of huge benefit to them both in terms of integrating within their own community and in further education, training or employment settings.



4.1.4 Alternative to Formal Education

The *No Limits programme* has proven to be a comfort to both young people and parents, many of whom reflected on negative formal education experiences. Each young person affiliated with the *No Limits programme's* educational background and stage differs. Some young people attend the *No Limits programme* as part of their school curriculum, some attend the programme outside of school hours and some have finished education and *No Limits* acts as the only educational and structured learning experience in their week.

Regardless of these varied stages, the programme appears to work well for the young people involved for a number of reasons: the wide range of activities on offer, the physical, creative and practical focus of many activities, the higher staff to young person ratio and the smaller groups (significantly smaller than a classroom setting).

Although some parents felt their child's additional needs meant they would struggle with the pressures of full-time employment, some felt that the programme had enabled their son/daughter to consider part-time employment, a volunteering opportunity or a course in a local College when the *No Limits programme* concludes.

It is important to note that for those in full time education and participating extra-circularly in the evening group, their teacher noted that the programme was a fantastic opportunity to extend skills which were already being developed in a school setting as well as giving young people a chance to nurture new skills they wouldn't get the opportunity to in formal education. This exemplifies the diverse impact made by the *No Limits programme*, which proves beneficial to all who participate regardless of circumstance.

Young People	Parents	Staff	Social Workers
"I don't have to wear a uniform"	"He didn't enjoy school. The timetable was too rigid, and he didn't like living by the bell. There is more freedom here, and more chance to go at your own pace."	"They get much more one to one attention than in school - it's a more relaxed form of education"	"The school experience was horrendous. Half an hour of something then packing up and moving on just didn't work, nor did bigger groups. There were many issues at school. Since starting No Limits there has been a complete turnaround - absolutely thriving."
"It's way less stressful than school"	"He had a very bad experience at school with pressures such as learning maths which was beyond his concept. The teachers didn't seem to understand or care. This is completely different."		"It has allowed for more active learning - my young person found it very difficult in a classroom setting - with variety and physical movement it is easier."
"I completed OCN work - I was proud. When I asked for help in school they just said 'no'. If I ask for help here they all come over and help."	"I had a lot of worries initially. He had a bad experience at a previous school, so I was worried the staff wouldn't understand him."		"Rather than complete subjects they are not interested in, they've been able to complete an OCN Level 1 in Stress Management - something relevant they can use in daily life."

Table 9.0: Alternative to Formal Education Quotes

4.1.5 Health and Wellbeing

Through increased social interaction and exposure to a range of health and wellbeing activities, young people involved in the *No Limits programme* have developed vital physical and emotional self-care skills.

"It is the best thing that has ever happened in my entire life. When I started in January, I was nowhere. I was recovering from depression, in fact I think I still was depressed in January. I was suffering so badly. It's unimaginable to compare the difference. It's the best thing in the world". (Young person)

4.1.5.1 Physical Health

The *No Limits programme* focused heavily on physical health and wellbeing, with a menu of sports and leisure activities on offer to the young people. Alongside the physical and mental benefits of exercise and activity, young people learned about personal hygiene and physical self-care. As a result, staff, parents and social workers noted an increased sense of pride shown by the young people, and an improved awareness of hygiene and the benefits of incorporating physical activity into daily life.



Young People	Staff	Social Workers
"My favourite bit is going to the gym and boxing. I'm going to start kickboxing soon"	"They've been learning about hygiene, nutrition and sleep - important life skills that they can use in the future"	"My young person's physical health has greatly improved. From not wanting to do anything to attending the gym every day."
"I got to try things I've never tried before."	"As a result, they've really started taking an interest in themselves and it's a real confidence boost for them."	"The sense of self-care has improved hugely."
	"They've learned how to look after their skin, keep their clothes clean, to wash after exercise etc."	"It's given my young person a real pride in themselves."

Table 10.0: Health and Wellbeing Quotes

4.1.5.2 Building Resilience

Resilience is a vital component in young people's positive mental and emotional health and wellbeing and building the strength to overcome stressful life situations is essential. As well as the emotional benefits which stem from physical exercise, young people benefitted from participation in stress and anger management sessions. With a focus on practical techniques such as breathing, young people have been equipped with skills which are vital to their everyday lives and which will encourage further social development and community participation. Complementing this, participants had a chance to complete an OCN accreditation in Stress Management Techniques.

"This was really important to me as I find it hard to keep calm about things". (Young Person)

"I learned how to calm down by learning the relaxation techniques. On Monday I was feeling a bit stressed, but I've learned how to cope". (Young Person)

"I can't remember the last time I felt this relaxed about everything in life". (Young Person)

"They (the young people) really have more confidence in their ability to deal with stresses and anxieties". (Staff member)

Young people declared a 22% improvement in their 'anger management' skills and noted 'resilience' had improved on average 22% by end of Year One, further emphasising the benefits of such a focus.



4.1.7 Creative Arts

The incorporation of multi-media arts in the *No Limits programme* is something which was an initial attraction to parents, and a factor they regarded as unique about the programme. The use of the arts has contributed significantly to the development of the skills previously discussed and despite an initial reluctance, is something the young people have grown to enjoy and excel in.



Young people participated in 'No Limit's Got Talent', a showcase of the drama, dance, musical, animation, video-making and clothing design skills they had developed in the first few months of the programme. This show is highly regarded by both staff and young people as one of their most memorable moments of Year One; with young people overcoming fears and anxieties to step on stage and staff using it as a marker to witness the true development of the young people in the programme. Young people arrived at the show in limousines where they were greeted by friends, family and local press. No Limits staff have gone above and beyond at every chance possible in Year One - experiences like this give young people a huge sense of value and empowerment whilst helping them develop important lifelong memories. Recognising and rewarding participation and achievement have been a clear focus of the programme and this affirmation provides a sense of motivation for young people, which has contributed positively to their overall experience of the programme.



"This has been a great life opportunity for him - a protected environment to learn and socialise - outside of the 'big bad world.'" (Parent)

Young People	Parents	Staff	Teacher
"I learned how to make a movie which was cool."	"My son is really interested in animation. This was a great opportunity to get experience in this."	"The showcase was a huge sense of achievement. It was a real highlight. We were so emotional watching the performance and seeing how far they've all come."	"They got to experience things they never had before."
"I got to try animation and photography and was taught how to make a movie."	"He got to experience DJing, photography and animation - things he never would have done in school."	"They made masks which they wrote positive and negative feelings on and hopes and fears. They can express feelings through methods like this, which they would not talk about openly."	"We had one particular girl who was really interested in fashion design. No Limits let her get experience in that field, which she would have struggled to get elsewhere."
	"It's amazing because the young people are having so much fun they don't realise they're learning."	"The activities help their ability to express feelings."	
	"I never thought I would see him dancing on stage. It goes to show how feeling comfortable and encouraged by the right people can help."	"Young people overcame many barriers to get to performance stage. Many were not confident enough to even participate at the start and ended up performing in front of friends and family."	

4.1.8 Life Skills

Alongside the aforementioned skills developed, No Limits has focused on interventions and activities to encourage the development of skills which can be used practically in life, employment or further education. Young people involved have been exposed to a variety of activities and situations which have enhanced their knowledge and understanding, and furthered practical skills.

Young people participated in a Social Enterprise venture, where they had the opportunity to develop products and take part in public selling opportunities. This process allowed the development of key entrepreneurship and employability skills, while strengthening skills such as teamwork, communication, negotiation, money management and compromise.

The businesses and employees situated within the Torrent Complex have acted as a community around the young people

and BEAM have used this to their advantage, connecting young people to important local assets. The Programme Development Manager described the Torrent Complex as a 'safe haven' and noted that 'it's so lovely to see the young people at ease in the entire building'. The network within the Torrent Complex has allowed the young people opportunities to explore other businesses, talk to professionals and through the support of the Programme Development Manager, some young people experienced work shadowing opportunities within the complex.

Further, attendance on day trips allowed for the opportunity to practice key life skills in the wider community. Young people were guided to socialise and carry out tasks independently in public scenarios with support from the staff team - significant developments for young people who often have little interaction outside of their home/family.

Parents	Staff
"They helped him by allowing him to shadow the cleaner in the centre. He has a real interest in cleaning and needed job experience. It can be so hard to get anyone to consider him for work experience never mind paid employment. This was a great opportunity. It gave him purpose and he even made a few pounds in the end."	"It's important to create REAL experiences for the young people. Some are very attached to the virtual world. Providing them with real experiences which challenge them has been great."



4.2 Staff Development

Staff have been enabled to develop professionally through the programme, equipping them with the general skills required to handle situations which may arise and to specifically enable them to manage individual medical and behavioural needs.

The significant time dedicated in Year One to consistently nurturing and expanding staff skills has proven to be an investment for subsequent years and will no doubt prove to be invaluable during their term on the *No Limits programme*.

Staff retention is crucial to the programme and equipping staff will ensure they do not face obstacles or challenges beyond their ability. Staff noted that they feel comfortable, confident and able to confront challenging behaviour. As well as staff confidence, the upskilling of staff allows parents to *'feel comforted knowing the staff are competent and skilled'*.

The Project Development Manager stated that whilst the programme is an empowerment project for young people, it is also an empowerment programme for staff. This approach appears to have led to a successful, driven and knowledgeable staff team who are upskilled and motivated for a further three years' delivery.

4.3 Impact on Parents

Parents and guardians of the young people involved in the *No Limits programme* have a key part to play in this evaluation, and it has been apparent the programme has been as beneficial to them as it has been the young people themselves. Since the early stages of the programme, parents have been involved in the planning and progression of the programme and as a result have clear vision of its outcomes and aims.

*"You have no idea just how much the programme means."
(Parent)*

4.3.1 Confidence and Reassurance

Overwhelmingly, parents expressed a sense of relief that their son or daughter had been able to participate in *No Limits programme*. There was a clear agreement that programmes which provide an alternative learning opportunity for young people with additional needs are minimal in the local area. Many of the young people involved had finished school with no future plans, while others had been job-searching with no success – leading to isolation and lack of social and learning opportunities. Parents were unanimous in the fact that the programme alleviated a great deal of parental stress, as they spent a considerable amount of time worrying about their child’s welfare and future.

“We just grabbed the opportunity as there really isn’t that much for young people with these needs – so it was exciting.” (Parent)

“He has left school with no qualifications, no prospect of a job. It has helped me so much knowing he is happy and doing something – and he’s actually learning new things. It’s helped us both. We don’t know what the future holds for him, so right now we are happy he is busy, making friends, mixing with groups and getting used to working with others.” (Parent)

The programme provides relief from the concerns parents face about their young person’s uncertain futures, however, this relief is temporary, and parents felt it a shame that their child could not avail of more than one year on the programme in some cases.

4.3.2 Support Networks

Parents have developed relationships with each other as a result of their children attending the *No Limits programme*, which they described as a ‘support network’. Not only has *No Limits* provided an excellent social opportunity for the young people involved, it has proven to be a great outlet for parents giving them a chance to spend time with like-minded people. This is welcomed, as many of the parents stated their son/daughter cannot be left at home alone which often results in isolation and limited opportunities to meet new people.

“I meet up with other mums during the evening while my son is in the group. We get to catch up and relax, and it’s lovely to be able to laugh and talk about our experiences with someone else who understands.” (Parent)

“It’s not just about the kids!” (Parent)

“There’s a great impact on both sides – for both parents and young people.” (Parent)

Further, parents described ‘easy communication channels’ with staff, who also act as an extended support network. Parents have no hesitation contacting the Programme Development Manager for information, advice and updates and describe staff as ‘supportive’ to both young people *and* parents. The Programme Development Manager reiterated this, stating the importance of being ‘accessible’ to parents.



5.0 Challenges

Despite the positive feedback and outcomes of the programme, BEAM staff encountered some minor challenges in Year One of the programme, which are identified below.

Recruitment:

BEAM encountered difficulties with recruitment of young people to the evening programme, which was overcome through the establishment of a working partnership with St Patrick's College Dungannon. This partnership has developed well, with the link teacher reflecting on 'great links with BEAM' and the 'amazing relationships' which have been created.

Although challenging in the early stages of the programme, Social Workers and the link teacher involved agreed that the demand for the programme was definitely high and stated that knowing the quality of the programme at the end of Year One, they would have no issue recruiting young people to the programme. As we approach Year Two, the link teacher at St Patrick's College said students are already being turned away due to high demand, proving the programme has made significant impact and established an excellent reputation at this early stage.

Attendance:

There were some difficulties encountered with regards to consistent attendance to the evening programme. The Link Teacher involved stated that this was no fault of No Limits staff and felt that the young people involved did not sufficiently communicate when they would not be attending the programme.

No Limits staff and the Link Teacher have strengthened communication channels between them and the young people involved in the programme. No Limits will gather contact information which will allow for direct communication with young people and will send reminders and transport arrangements to them before each meeting.

Rurality:

The rural location of BEAM often provided some logistical challenges relating to transportation of young people. The Programme Development Manager described transport as 'logistically difficult' due to the rurality of Donaghmore and dependence on sustaining reliable transport providers. This is a challenge which will undoubtedly be prevalent throughout the duration of the programme, but one which is managed by the organised nature of the No Limits staff and the use of transport providers who have proven to be the most reliable.

Mentoring:

Although the mentoring element of the programme was not achieved in Year One, there is no doubt that this element will be established in Year Two. With the achievement of the majority of outcomes in Year One, it is expected that there will be some limitations to the first year of the programme. As well as introducing community mentors to the programme, the Programme Development Manager hopes to attach a Counsellor to the programme to allow for the emotional support which participants often require.

Demand:

Parents, Social Workers and the Programme Development Manager all stated that young people on the day programme would benefit from an extra day. All felt that 3 days was not sufficient, and Social Workers felt that many other young people aged between 14 and 22 years were in a form of education or employment which kept them active for five days a week. The Programme Development Manager and social workers agreed that there is enough demand to fill more day sessions, however this is limited by funding.

Further to this, many parents noted that there was a demand for a programme such as No Limits for young people over the upper age limit.

6.0 Recommendations

In reflecting on the experience of delivering Year One of No Limits and this evaluation process, a number of recommendations have been suggested. All recommendations will need further discussions with BIG Lottery to explore the implications of each on the programme.

Recommendation 1:

BEAM should consider changing the delivery model (currently 3 days and 2 evenings) to 4 days and 1 evening. The most significant impacts being achieved are clearly with those young people attending the daytime service and that is where demand is greatest. This reconfiguration would not have a negative impact on the overall programme and objectives and outcomes would still be achieved in full. It also maximises the resources which are available and contributes to more efficient and effective delivery.

Recommendation 2:

The current programme has many different facets from personal and social development, skills development, volunteering and employment. Limiting young people to one year appears to be restrictive in terms of achieving an impact across all of these areas. BEAM should consider the merits of developing a two year intervention, working with young people across a longer period to ensure they reap the full benefits of the service.

Recommendation 3:

The quality of the staff team has been a major positive influence on the programme in Year One. The advantage of investing in staff and developing their skills to work with young people with complex needs has clearly reaped rewards. BEAM should continue identifying learning and development opportunities for all staff so that high standards can be maintained, but also to ensure that an important legacy of knowledge and skills is in place post programme.



7.0 Conclusions



Undoubtedly, the *No Limits programme* provides an excellent foundation for young people to develop essential skills, and has created memorable experiences for them which will last far beyond the duration of the programme itself.

By reaching out to often marginalised groups, the programme has proactively made an impact on young people by increasing crucial skills which will equip them to reach their full potential and integrate fully into their community and surroundings.

Although employment and further education/training is not feasible for all participants, the programme has allowed young people life-changing experiences and exposures which will certainly assist full integration into and participation in community life.

The strength of the programme is without doubt down to the way in which young people are empowered to shape its activities and agenda, as well as the team of dedicated and enthusiastic staff who drive the programme and timetable forward.

There is a strong community ethos within the programme and BEAM have successfully linked delivery to the exemplary physical, social and environmental assets within local community. Young people feel a real sense of belonging to the programme and this has been carefully nurtured by programme staff, but also by other people they interface with during their time in the Torrent Complex.

It is important to credit the *No Limits* staff for the tireless work they have completed in Year One. The programme benefits from effective leadership and a creative team who are innovative in their approach and sensitive to the needs of every single young person.

No Limits programme is one which continues to evolve, but even after Year One it is clear the significant and far reaching impacts which can be achieved over the remaining three years.