



# youthlink

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 ONWARDS  
*PURSUING THE COMMON GOOD*



## VISION

Youth Link has a Vision of:

Churches working together to empower and equip leaders in youth work and ministry, to help build a peaceful and just world, in which young people can flourish.

## MISSION

AsaFaith-Based Youth Work organisation, our Mission is to:

- Empower leaders through training in youth work and ministry, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to help young people flourish in a more peaceful and just world.
- Serve as witnesses of churches working interdependently by advocating for young people, championing youth work and ministry, and upholding gospel values of peace, justice, and reconciliation in pursuit of the common good.

## VALUE BASE

The Christian Faith is central to our values and approach and compels us to:

- Foster a spirit of welcome and hospitality
- Embrace the transformative power of education and lifelong learning
- Love young people and create opportunities for them to live life to the full
- Value the dignity and worth of every human being
- Act fairly, embrace diversity and work interdependently
- Be a peacemaker and an ambassador of reconciliation
- Act justly, love mercifully and walk humbly
- Bring the Good News and be a source of hope and hold an optimistic stance in the world

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles of faith in action:

- Seek first to understand
- Lead by example and serve others
- Uphold integrity and professionalism in every action
- Promote learning that is fun, inclusive, and lifelong
- Create safe spaces and open conversations that build peace
- Go beyond our walls and borders to embrace new perspectives
- Foster a community-based and intergenerational approach to our work
- Remain adaptable and responsive to changing environments
- Build meaningful connections between local and global communities
- Act as witnesses of churches working together for the common good

## Youth Link's Strategic Plan: 2025 and Beyond

Welcome to Youth Link's strategic plan for the next chapter of our journey. In recent years we have experienced seasons of change — new leadership, the conclusion of our degree programme, and the shifting contexts in which we work. Yet through it all, one thing has remained constant: the steadfast commitment of our board, staff, and church partners to nurture young leaders, build peace, and embody reconciliation.

As we look ahead, we recognise that Northern Ireland and our shared island continue to face division, uncertainty, and diversity of identity and belief. In this landscape, the presence of well-formed Christian youth workers in the public square is not only valuable but essential. They are the leaders who can bring faith, hope, and courage into fractured spaces, offering young people the skills and vision to contribute to a more peaceful and just society.

This strategic plan is not only about responding to today's challenges but about renewing Youth Link's vision for the years to come. Together with our founding churches, we will reflect on our constitution and our core aims to ensure that our identity, purpose, and mission remain faithful, relevant, and resilient.

While Peace Plus funding has enabled important work, we know our calling is deeper and longer-lasting than any single programme. We look forward with faith and determination to a future that extends beyond Peace Plus — a future where Youth Link continues to serve as a prophetic voice for reconciliation, faith-based youth work, and leadership development across Northern Ireland and the wider island.

In this next chapter, Youth Link will:

- Renew our vision and mission, ensuring they reflect our calling and context in partnership with our founding churches.
- Strengthen faith-based youth work, equipping leaders who can engage confidently in a divided and diverse society.
- Sustain peace and reconciliation, working beyond project cycles to embed lasting transformation.
- Foster collaboration, uniting churches, communities, and young people around shared purpose and the common good.

The mandate entrusted to Youth Link remains clear: to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. In the years ahead, we will deepen our roots in this calling while preparing for new growth. With God's help, and in partnership with our churches and communities, we will equip leaders, renew our vision, and step with courage into the future.

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.***

May this be our prayer, our purpose, and our path.

**JOSEPH MCKEOWN, CEO**

# BACKGROUND

Since the last Strategic Development Plan, Youth Link has navigated a period of profound change, marked by shifts in our leadership and management, changing statutory funding arrangements, and a decline in student numbers for our degree program. This led to the unfortunate end of our Academic Collaborative relationships with the Institute of Children, Youth and Mission and Moorlands College. The challenges of financial uncertainty in the charity sector and other geopolitical events have further challenged our organization, resulting in rising costs and uncertainty about the future. During this time, our partner churches have also faced these challenges, necessitating a pause for reflection.

At the heart of this new Strategic Development Plan is a renewed commitment to the vision of “Churches Working Together” and a realignment with our core values. We are dedicated to being more responsive to the needs of young people and our church partners by actively listening, engaging, and adapting. To build our capacity for the future, we aim to strengthen our staff team and trustees, enhancing their resilience and reducing our reliance on statutory funding.

This strategic plan serves as a dynamic document that has been developed through extensive consultation. It includes input from staff, trustees, young people, and other key stakeholders. Their insights and feedback have been invaluable, ensuring our strategy reflects the realities of our community and the aspirations of those we serve.

As we progress, Youth Link is ready to embrace the future with renewed confidence and purpose. This plan has been shaped through thorough collaboration and articulates what individuals will feel, see, and hear about Youth Link as we implement our strategic initiatives. We are optimistic about working towards these goals over the next five years.



A clear purpose, identity, and mission in the church

Strong connections to local churches that work together

Young people, inspired, educated and transformed

Vibrant, dynamic and credible faith-based organisation

Flourishing, high quality youth work training

Hopefulness in the staff and trustees. A buzz in the building

Professionalism, trustworthiness and credibility in the youth sector

Communication of stories of transformation and change

A youth centred approach that works – championing young people

Youth Link on the map, locally, nationally and internationally. Being an international centre of churches working together for peace & reconciliation

Excellent governance and financial robustness

# ENABLERS

Three enablers emerged over the course of the strategic development process and consultation with our stakeholders. Each of them underpin, inform and support the delivery across our strategic plan.

## A vision of hope for young people and the world

Many of the priorities in this Strategy strive towards achieving the vision of seeing young people flourishing in a more just and peaceful world. The Christian Virtue of Hope is central to the work of youth ministry and Youth Link has to re-imagine and awaken its vision of hope for young people and enable those leaders that work with them to rediscover, rejuvenate and create this vision.

## Churches working together towards the common good

Youth Link striving to collaborate with the churches to bring transformation to the lives of young people and to ensure that the high quality youth work and peace and reconciliation initiatives by the churches are acknowledged as contribution to the common good. We are mindful too of the call of Christ in John 17:21, to dare to be 'One' and at the heart of all our work is being a genuine witness of 'churches working together' for young people and the wider community.

## Being connected Locally, Nationally and Internationally

Youth Link will strengthen relationships with trustees, member churches and with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. To develop credibility in these intentional relationships and partnerships, it is important that we have meaningful relationships locally in the community in which we are work. Nationally, across the Shared Island of Ireland, we must listen and be contextual in our work and Internationally we need to ensure that the unique vision of churches working together for young people and peace is known and developed as a model of good practice.

## OUR THREE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### 1. Training & Support



As a partnership of churches working together we will provide transformative and impactful training, support and resources that are responsive to the needs of young people, youth leaders and volunteers involved in Youth Work and Ministry.

### 2. Peace, Reconciliation & Social Justice



As a witness of inter-church collaboration, we will empower and equip young people and youth practitioners to promote reconciliation and good relations, by building a more peaceful and just society that pursues the common good.

### 3. Strengthening the organisation



Responsive to a changing environment we will become more resilient through effective and efficient systems and processes that strengthen leadership, enhance governance, foster creativity and increase strategic focus and sustainability



# 1. Training and Support

**Goal: As a partnership of churches working together we will provide transformative and impactful training, support and resources that are responsive to the needs of young people, youth leaders and volunteers involved in Youth Work and Ministry.**

**Training and Development for Youth practitioners:** Youth Link will empower and equip youth practitioners with the skills, knowledge and resources to engage with young people and the community. To improve opportunities for young people to raise aspirations and help them to grow and flourish.

**Provide support and capacity building to develop Youth Ministry:** Youth Link will engage in capacity building and support for new youth ministry initiatives that develop provision and opportunities for young people.

**Develop resources and research to inform and support youth ministry:** Youth Link will engage in research that helps youth practitioners reflect on the issues impacting the lives of young people living in a diverse and divided society and will develop and disseminate resources to enhance provision.

**To expand youth work and ministry training:** Youth Link will strengthen and widen the suite of accredited training in youth work and youth ministry by embracing digital, accessible delivery and new partnerships.



## 2. Peace, Reconciliation & Justice

As a witness of inter-church collaboration, we will empower and equip young people and youth practitioners to promote reconciliation and good relations, by building a more peaceful and just society that pursues the common good.

**Equipping the Next Generation of Peacebuilders:** Youth Link will provide young peacebuilders and youth practitioners with the knowledge, skills, and resources to promote Good Relations in daily life.

**Challenging prejudice and promoting cultural diversity:** Youth Link will equip youth workers with training, support and resources to tackle racism and discrimination.

**Creating spaces for reconciliation and good relations:** Youth Link will create experiential opportunities for youth practitioners and young people to build meaningful relationships across the community and to take time to reflect of reconciliation.

**Acting together for the common good:** Youth Link's commitment to the gospel values of social justice, ensures that active citizenship and interdependence are embedded in all programmes through social action projects.

**Engage in Dialogue and Mutual Respect:** Making space for dialogue, relationship-building, and practical collaboration with those of different faiths and cultures.



### 3. Strengthening the organisation

Responsive to a changing environment we will become more resilient through effective and efficient systems and processes that strengthen leadership, enhance governance, foster creativity and increase strategic focus and sustainability

- **Operational Sustainability:** Youth Link will develop a strategy to manage staffing beyond the end of Peace Plus Funding in 2028
- **Constitutional Review:** Youth Link will review and refresh governance structures, including the constitution and Articles of Association to ensure that we maintain continue to comply with charity laws and regulations.
- **Governance and Accountability:** Youth Link will uphold high standards in governance, robust financial management, safeguarding procedures and organisational integrity and effectively manage risk.
- **Building Strategic Partnerships:** Youth Link will build strategic alliances with churches, faith-based youth work and peacebuilding organisations to enhance collaboration, shared services and support
- **Communications Strategy:** Develop a Communications Strategy, enhancing social media presence, branding and marketing of services
- **Staff and Trustee Support:** Youth Link will provide leadership development opportunities, encourage collaboration, and increase support for staff and trustees.
- **Impact Measurement:** Youth Link will develop a quality assurance framework and manage how impact is measured and ensure compliance with statutory obligations.

# Measuring Progress

Performance goals are a good way to monitor and measure progress.

Reporting performance can include details such as indicators identified, data collected and activities accomplished. Clear and concrete performance goals make it easier to generate relevant, consistent and comparable data over time, in formats that your audience can understand and appreciate.

## MONITORING & EVALUATION

Youth Link is committed to ensuring that the plans contained in this strategy are effectively implemented and that the process of developing annual operational plans and future strategic plans are part of the planned work of the organisation.

To ensure this happens the following timetable has been agreed:

- January 2026 Begin work on the Operational Plan for 2026/27
- March 2026 Prepare a report against the outcomes and performance measures for 2025/26, for discussion by Council
- March 2026 Finalise the Operational Plan for 2026/27.
- January 2027 Begin work on the Operational Plan for 2027/28
- March 2027 Prepare a report against the outcomes and performance measures for 2026/27 for discussion by Council.
- March 2027 Finalise the Operational Plan for 2027/28.
- November 2027 Begin to prepare a new Strategic Plan for 2028-2031.
- February 2028 Finalise the Strategic Plan for 2028-2031.
- As Youth Link celebrates 40 years of achievements and contribution to youth work, youth ministry and peace and reconciliation, we will pause to reflect and celebrate on the great work of the churches in this unique inter-church organisation.

## FINANCE

You can find financial and administrative information on our website at [www.youthlink.org.uk](http://www.youthlink.org.uk), where the complete set of financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2025 is also available for viewing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since its establishment in 1991, Youth link has received essential funding from its member churches: the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Northern Dioceses of the Catholic Church in Ireland. We sincerely appreciate their ongoing support and commitment to inter-church youth work training and peace and reconciliation work.

We also wish to express our gratitude to all our project funders throughout 2025 including:

- The Executive Office
- NI Community Relations Council
- Belfast City Council
- Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB)
- Department of Foreign Affairs - Reconciliation Fund
- Rank Foundation
- The Irish American Partnership
- Halifax Foundation
- The Benefact Trust
- Education Authority NI

We are thankful for the Friends of Youth link, who make regular donations, and to the small team of volunteers who generously donate their time and energy.

Together, the staff and trustees of Youth link work collaboratively to realize our vision of excellence in youth work and ministry. We are grateful to our trustees for their generous commitment of time, sharing their expertise, and ensuring sound governance.





**youthlink**

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empower and equip leaders in youth  
work and ministry to build a more  
peaceful and just world in which  
young people can flourish.**

