


# Evaluation of WIMPS

A Civic Youth Work Programme Operated by  
Public Achievement Northern Ireland

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A Report to The Atlantic Philanthropies  
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www.wimps.tv  
CREW

# Foreword

It is incredible to think that the WIMPS project is now 10 years old. In internet terms it has really stood the test of time – WIMPS is the same age as Facebook.

The idea came from a desire and an opportunity. The desire was to connect young people to the new political institutions in Northern Ireland following a meeting between young people and the then Education Minister – Martin McGuinness, and members of the then new Northern Ireland Assembly back in 2002. The opportunity came in 2004 when a funder – YouthNet – told us that they had a little bit of funding that needed to be spent quickly on projects that could make an impact. With other funding from Youth in Action we were able to get running.

The project was predicated on a simple idea. Politicians work for citizens – and citizens should be able to hold them to account. By connecting postcode to electoral areas, we were able to let young people find out who represents them and email them about things that are important to them.

In 2006, we secured funding from the then Finance Minister, Peter Robinson to take WIMPS to the next level – embedding video. I still remember the audible gasps in Queens University when we launched the new site. Hard to believe now, but then few people had seen video on a website.

This report relates to the latest, and most significant period in the development of WIMPS. The Atlantic Philanthropies made an investment in late 2010 that has totaled just over £1 million. It has allowed us to



build the website of our dreams – adding fantastic campaigning functionality to the political database, and showcasing the work of now 14 WIMPS Crew (and growing) across Northern Ireland. We have also built a fantastic team of skilled and dedicated staff members who have worked incredibly hard to create a fantastic network of groups of young people tackling issues in their communities, and working together on issues of common concern.

A key element of any attempt to put the divisions of the past behind us, is ensuring that young people are fully involved in co-creating new ways of doing citizenship and being a citizen in a post-conflict society. As you will read in these pages, our evaluators and local evaluation team have produced strong evidence of the efficacy of WIMPS and its impact on the young people engaging in the local 'crew'.

Our sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr Paul Mattessich, Dr Cherylynn Bassani and our colleagues at the National Children's Bureau in Northern Ireland who worked with us to teach us to embed the evaluation into our work and to engage the participants in the process.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation of WIMPS (“Where Is My Public Servant?”) indicates that this civic youth work programme can significantly influence the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours of young people with respect to political participation and related forms of engagement in democratic processes.

The evaluation design team included external evaluators (2 international and 1 from Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>), WIMPS staff, and young people who participate in WIMPS. They co-created a research approach and methods which took a “before-during-after” look at WIMPS participants during the period from 2011 to 2013. This partnership between evaluation researchers and WIMPS participants transpired in order to fulfil the goal of building evaluation research skills among the participating young people, coaches (volunteers) and staff.

The study gathered information about 118 crew members and 33 coaches who participated in WIMPS at community-based sites in Northern Ireland.

Results of the evaluation so far have demonstrated that, after participating in WIMPS:

- Young people’s knowledge about their politicians increases, as does the amount of interaction they have with politicians – at local and national levels.
- Skills in using audio and video technology increase.

- Acquisition of information about local, national and world politics and affairs increases.
- The social capital of participants increases.

Major conclusions and lessons from this research, in the opinion of the external evaluators, include:

- The WIMPS programme can effectively achieve many of its intended outcomes. It appears to produce positive changes in knowledge, skills, and behaviour among young people who participate, leading to longer-term effects.
- The WIMPS programme appears to build the social capital of young people who participate.
- Developing a programme such as WIMPS requires adequate time. It cannot occur quickly.
- Community-centred evaluation, involving young people, can enrich an evaluation process and can contribute to the skills of young people.

Major recommendations from the external evaluators include:

- The Atlantic Philanthropies and other grant making organisations interested in promoting youth civic engagement should consider the features of this programme, for replication in whole and in part.
- Further demonstration and testing should occur to understand the ingredients necessary for success.

<sup>1</sup> International: the authors of this report, Paul Mattessich and Cherylynn Bassani. National: Rachel Shannon, of the National Children’s Bureau, Northern Ireland, with additional consultative support from Frances Molyneux.

# EVALUATION FINDINGS

This report describes the findings of an evaluation of the civic youth work programme, WIMPS, managed by Belfast-based NGO, Public Achievement. WIMPS ("Where Is My Public Servant?") intends to make politics more relevant and accessible to young people. As a project and a website, run for and by young people since 2004, WIMPS attempts to teach young people skills to organize, campaign, and bring views directly to politicians in order to influence decisions that affect their lives. The WIMPS project builds upon Public Achievement's 'Civic Youth Work' methodology, and combines youth work and media skills, so to support the increased civic engagement of teenagers.

This evaluation report addresses six questions:

1. What is WIMPS?
2. Who has participated in WIMPS?
3. How has evaluation occurred?
4. What evaluation evidence points to WIMPS' transformative impacts upon young people?
5. What key lessons can we learn so far from the evaluation of WIMPS?
6. What is recommended for moving forward?





## What is WIMPS?

WIMPS states its vision as:

*"To help create meaningful relationships between young people and the decision makers who influence their lives.*

*To be informative, inspiring, un-biased and accessible to everyone; creating, sustaining and multiplying educated and empowered young people as a significant force for good in Northern Ireland and the world."*

WIMPS attempts to communicate the voice of young people to public servants, both elected and appointed. It carries out this communication through campaigns on important issues, articles (web and print), films/videos, social media, and other means.

Crews, normally comprised of 5-10 people aged between 13 and 18 years, exist at each of 14 community-based sites across Northern Ireland. Each crew has at least one coach (a volunteer or a Public Achievement staff person). Crews meet approximately weekly, from September through May. Public Achievement also organises summer activities such as media camps for teenagers.

Crew members learn about political processes, as a regular part of the WIMPS curriculum – visiting political institutions and meeting politicians. They also receive training and supervised experience in interviewing, the use of video technology, social media, and campaign management. Each crew plans and develops its own media, projects and campaigns around issues the young people regard as important and relevant.

The WIMPS programme has developed a highly interactive multi-media website ([wimps.tv](http://wimps.tv)). The website contains tools such as a political search where young people can identify and message their elected representatives, and a bespoke set of campaigning tools – allowing young people to set up and run their own campaigns. The site also houses a repository of local crews' work – including interviews with politicians, films about issues that the young people are concerned about, and articles and discussions created by young people.

Public Achievement created WIMPS in 2004 and has managed the project since that time. The investment of funds by the Atlantic Philanthropies in late 2010 significantly enhanced the reach and scope of the project. Further information about the operations

of WIMPS appears on its website: [www.wimps.tv](http://www.wimps.tv). Annual reports to funders have provided detailed documentation of operations and finances.

### Major Campaign Activities

In addition to the educational and experiential activities described above, WIMPS participants engage in campaigns. Campaigns launched under the auspices of WIMPS, during the three year period of this study, include:

- A unique and effective campaign to end paramilitary beatings and shootings known locally as 'punishment attacks' in Northern Ireland
- A successful campaign to get the Northern Ireland Assembly to debate votes at 16
- A campaign for first aid and suicide prevention training in schools
- Campaigns for better rural transport
- Campaigns on other issues.

### WIMPS Programme Theory and Intended Outcomes

WIMPS builds upon a programme theory which incorporates elements of youth development, youth civic engagement, and the values related to participation in democratic civil society. Staff and coaches attempt to use this theory to shape their day-to-day interaction with the WIMPS crew members.

The WIMPS programme hopes to achieve both individual and societal outcomes. For young people as individuals, WIMPS intends to produce the following:

- Increased knowledge about, and interaction with, politicians
- Increased campaign skills
- Increased technology based skills which are important for communications
- Increased social capital – including the ability to overcome societal divisions

For society (in Northern Ireland, at a minimum), the programme hopes to:

- Influence the political decision-making process
- Improve the well-being of young people
- Create bridges among groups and communities who have been separate from, and sometimes hostile toward, one another
- Support a stronger sense of citizenship and a commitment to a shared society
- Create new models of youth advocacy, youth advocacy training, and capacity building
- Increase evaluation capacity within the youth advocacy community

A logic model, depicting the civic action theory of WIMPS, appeared in the original grant proposal to The Atlantic Philanthropies. See Figure 1.

This report focuses primarily on the measurement of individual outcomes listed above.

Figure 1  
**WIMPS Logic Model**  
Examples of Elements



\* This diagram contains sample elements from the original logic model developed for the programme.



# Who has participated in WIMPS?

## Number and Locations of Crews

The number of crews at community-based sites in Northern Ireland currently totals 14. Table 1 documents the growth of sites from 2011 through 2013.

Table 1. WIMPS Crew sites 2011 - 2013			
Year	2011	2012	2013
Number of sites	Goal: 5 Actual: 5	Goal: 10 Actual: 7	Initial Goal: 21 Revised Goal: 14 Actual: 14
Locations	Belfast (Central, West and South)  Craigavon, Bainbridge	Belfast (Central, West and South)  Craigavon, Banbridge, Derry, Coleraine	Belfast (Central, West, South, East and North), Craigavon, Banbridge, Derry (Foyle), Coleraine, Enniskillen, Armagh, Newry, Lisburn and Portadown

## Number and Types of Crew Members

In 2011, 2012, and 2013, registration records indicate that a total of 118 young people have participated in WIMPS as crew members. Characteristics of crew members appear in Table 2. About two-thirds are female; almost two-thirds fall between the ages of 15 and 17. Fifty-four percent are Catholic; 41% are Protestant.

Table 2 Characteristics of WIMPS Crew Members, 2011 – 2013		
Number of Crew Participants		118
Gender	Female	74 (62.7%)
	Male	44 (37.3%)
Age	12 – 14	27 (22.9%)
	15 – 17	73 (61.9%)
	18 and older	18 (15.3%)
Community Affiliation		
	Protestant	48 (40.7%)
	Catholic	64 (54.2%)
	Other	5 (4.2%)
	Refusal	1 (0.8%)

The 118 young people who registered as crew members do not include young people who participated in WIMPS briefly and never registered. Such young people might have attended just one meeting, or participated for one or two months, but never fully engaged with the programme. No reliable count of these individuals exists for the current evaluation; such a count could offer important information for a future evaluation.

In addition to young people who participate as crew members, a significant number of young people engage through the website and events run by Public Achievement both on-line and in the real world. These young people are not formally counted. However, some evidence regarding the reach of WIMPS into other youth-serving organisations appears later in this report.

### Number and Types of Coaches

Since 2011, registration records indicate that 33 individuals have participated in WIMPS as coaches. This includes both volunteers and staff.

Table 3 Characteristics of WIMPS Coach Members, 2011 – 2013		
Number of Coach Participants		33
Gender	Female	22 (66.7%)
	Male	11 (33.3%)
Age	12 – 14	0 (0.0%)
	15 – 17	2 (6.1%)
	18 and older	31 (93.9%)
Community Affiliation	Protestant	12 (36.4%)
	Catholic	18 (54.5%)
	Other	3 (9.1%)
	Refusal	0 (0.0%)

Qualitative interviews of seventeen coaches revealed that 11 became coaches as a result of their acquaintanceship with a WIMPS staff member or another coach. Some reported that they had first been recruited by Public Achievement or WIMPS for another role prior to deciding to become a coach.

Nine reported that they wanted to serve as a coach primarily in order to work with young people and help them to develop skills; five sought primarily to build their own skills and/or their own self-confidence.

Almost all of the coaches considered their role to be a developer of the skills and talents of young people. However, 8 attempted to play that role as a guide or advisor – letting young people set the direction; 5 attempted to play the role as a teacher or trainer of skills.

All of the coaches appreciated the opportunity to witness the development of young people's political and social skills. For themselves, coaches expected to gain youth work experience, gain media experience, learn more about politics, and help young people. All but two coaches said that WIMPs had met their expectations (and one of those two said that it was too early to report whether expectations had been met).

## WIMPS and Other Youth-Serving Organisations

One representative from each of 44 voluntary sector youth organisations participated in a survey intended to understand awareness of, and opinions about, the WIMPS project within the sector. Due to the nature of the questions, the survey was managed by the National Children's Bureau (Northern Ireland) - an organisation unaffiliated with WIMPS; respondents could therefore remain anonymous and provide candid responses.

The results, which appear in Table 4, reveal a high level of knowledge about WIMPS. Among users of campaign tools developed by WIMPS, the results indicate very positive appraisals of the value of WIMPS and a willingness to continue to use WIMPS as a resource.

Table 4. Awareness, Opinions about WIMPS, among Representatives of Youth-Serving Organisations June 2012						
Familiarity with WIMPS	Heard of WIMPS: 82%			Never heard of WIMPS: 18%		
How organisation heard of WIMPS	Facebook: 11%	Twitter: 59%	Epipe or other newsletter: 29%	Through work with Public Achievement: 11%	Through colleague or friend: 59%	From the media: 29%
Is WIMPS relevant to the work you do with young people?	Yes: 69%		No: 22%	Don't know: 8%		
Do you use WIMPS as a resource in your work with young people?	Yes: 36%		No: 64%	Don't know: 0%		
Do you plan to use WIMPS in the future in your work with young people?	Yes: 58%		No: 31%	Don't know: 11%		
Would you recommend WIMPS to others?	Yes: 75%		No: 22%	Don't know: 3%		
Have you or the young people you work with used WIMPS to run a campaign?	Yes: 14%			No: 86%		
(Of those who used tools) How satisfied were you with the tools on the site?	Very satisfied: 60%		Satisfied: 40%	Dissatisfied: 0%		Very dissatisfied: 0%
(Of those who used tools) Would you use WIMPS again, if you did another campaign?	Yes: 100%			No: 0%		

## Other Engagement with Youth

In progress reports to The Atlantic Philanthropies, WIMPS staff estimated that, from the third quarter of 2011 through the first quarter of 2013, WIMPS had engaged with well over 2,000 other young people through road shows, conferences and other events.

They reported the actual number of registered web site users at just over 700. However, the site does not require users to register unless they are posting and using the functions such as the campaigning tools or the political search.

Finally, progress reports indicated 38,198 Unique Users from 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2013. Average monthly Unique Users as of mid-2013 stood at about 1600 people. This figure seems to increase whenever new crew become established, according to staff reports.

## How has evaluation occurred?

### Evaluation Purposes

The evaluation of the WIMPS project has the following purposes:

- To understand effectiveness: What impacts does the project have? What outcomes does it achieve? (E.g., establishing itself as a youth advocacy tool, building the skills of young people to engage people in power, changing policy related to youth issues, building social capital, etc.)
- To contribute to the development of the project: Based on feedback from participants and others, how can WIMPS improve?
- To build the capacity of young people to do evaluation: Young people participate in the design of the evaluation and the interpretation of results. This distinctive feature of the evaluation enables young people to develop critical thinking and evidence-gathering skills which they can apply in other situations.
- To demonstrate the potential value of WIMPS for other organisations: Results from the evaluation will be presented to, and discussed with, others in the field of youth work locally and internationally.

Similar to all elements of WIMPS, the design of research and evaluation of the programme involved a group of young people working in partnership with WIMPS staff to identify evaluation questions and methods. Two international evaluators have facilitated the evaluation process, which began formally in April 2011 and remains active. WIMPS formed an evaluation committee, comprised of programme participants (both coaches and crew members) from several sites; several WIMPS staff; a local evaluator; and the international evaluators. Over the course of the evaluation, some turnover has occurred among the members of the committee.

The evaluation designed for WIMPS has focused almost exclusively on measuring the impacts of the WIMPS programme on crew participants.

### Design Process

The evaluation committee made major decisions regarding the evaluation design at a series of weekend residential meetings held every six to twelve months. About 20 young people (crew members, plus a few coaches), 4 Public Achievement staff and 3 consultants (2 international; 1 from Northern Ireland) participated in each Friday through Sunday meeting during which the group focused intensively on evaluation. Each meeting had a similar format:

- Review of the background, aims, and activities of the WIMPS programme.
- Education regarding evaluation, delivered by the international evaluators. This had two purposes: to enable the group to contribute more productively to evaluation discussions, by virtue of understanding evaluation concepts and terms; and to further the aim of building evaluation capacity among young people and youth advocates.
- Discussion and decisions regarding the design of the evaluation. Meeting participants co-created every element of the plan for collecting, analysing, and reporting information.
- Review of findings (at the later meetings)

In order to fulfil the WIMPS evaluation goal, “to build the capacity of young people to do evaluation,” the overall design of the evaluation process, as well as selection and design of specific data collection instruments, occurred co-creatively among WIMPS crew members and coaches, WIMPS staff, and the external evaluation team. Young people participated fully in all aspects of the design: identifying key questions which the evaluation should answer; determining data requirements for assessing the project; and specifying procedures to maintain the objectivity, relevance, and usefulness of the evaluation results.

In selecting and designing data collection instruments, young people assessed with the professional evaluators which instruments would have the greatest reliability and validity. They contributed to the generation of the initial drafts of instruments; they tested and critiqued the drafts, to produce optimal final versions. They were quick to contribute their ideas about how to word the questions to help ensure we obtained the clearest possible answers.

Young people also participated in the initial review and interpretation of interim findings, which broadened the external evaluators’ perspective on the first two waves of data.

## Data Collection

Data collection, to provide information for the evaluation of WIMPS, has included:

- Registration forms completed by crew members and coaches (at the time of joining WIMPS)
- Surveys of crew members (at the time of joining WIMPS, and twice more, at 6 to 9 month intervals)
- Coach interviews (in-depth conversations once or twice during the evaluation)
- Coach surveys on joining and at the same intervals as participants
- Interviews of program staff (every 1 to 3 months during the evaluation)
- Survey of other, youth-serving organisations (once)

## What evaluation evidence points to WIMPS' transformative impacts upon young people?

As of now, the surveys of WIMPS crew members include data collected at three time points: baseline information for program participants (that is, measurements at the time of joining WIMPS); a wave of follow-up information, collected approximately 6 to 9 months after program entry; and another wave 6 to 9 months thereafter.

## Changes in Knowledge and Skills

Results of the evaluation so far have demonstrated that, as a result of participation in WIMPS:

- Young people's knowledge about their politicians increases, as does the amount of interaction they have with politicians – at local and national levels.
- Skills in using audio and video technology increase.

As Table 5 shows, within six to nine months of joining WIMPS, the proportion of young people who increased their acquaintanceship with their politicians (local councillors as well as MLAs) increased significantly.

Table 5 Changes in Knowledge and Skills																
	Prior to Joining WIMPS n=151					1st Follow-Up n=86					2nd Follow-Up n=65					
Interaction with Politicians																
	None	1-3	4+	None	1-3	4+	None	1-3	4+	None	1-3	4+	None	1-3	4+	
# local councillors names known*	52.3%	36.7%	11.9%	12.8%	24.5%	62.8%	0.0%	1.5%	98.4%							
# local councillors met*	56.3%	37.8%	5.9%	11.6%	37.2%	51.2%	0.0%	45.0%	56.9%							
# MLAs met*	72.2%	23.8%	4.0%	24.4%	52.3%	23.2%	0.0%	63.1%	36.9%							
	Never	1-few	Every mo +	Never	1-few	Every mo +	Never	1-few	Every mo +	Never	1-few	Every mo +	Never	1-few	Every mo +	
Frequency talk councillor or office*	68.2%	29.1%	2.7%	18.6%	52.3%	29.1%	1.5%	64.6%	33.8%							
Political Participation – Member of, or Participated in																
	Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes		No	
Political society in school	10.7%		89.3%		17.4%		82.6%		20.0%		80.0%					
Political society*	8.0%		92.0%		19.8%		80.2%		23.1%		76.9%					
Campaigning	12.6%		87.4%		17.4%		82.6%		18.5%		81.5%					
Media Production Experience – Experience:																
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Use video camera*	27.8	29.1	27.2	11.3	4.6	5.8	7.0	9.3	29.1	48.8	3.1	0	1.5	23.1	31.8	
	Yes			No		Yes			No		Yes			No		
Edit audio files*	28.5%			71.5%		70.9%			29.1%		84.6%			15.4%		
Edit video files*	36.4%			63.6%		75.6%			24.4%		83.1%			16.9%		
Edit pictures*	58.9%			41.1%		87.2%			12.8%		95.4%			4.6%		

\* = differences statistically significant at .05 level (chi square or anova)

### Changes in Social Media Use and Linkages to News Sources

Results of the evaluation so far have demonstrated that, as a result of participation in WIMPS:

- Social media use increases – particularly in terms of those using Twitter
- Acquisition of information about local, national and world politics and affairs increases.

Table 6 shows that, before they join, WIMPS participants tend to use social media and obtain news from a variety of sources. Nonetheless, such behaviours increase significantly after they begin to take part in WIMPS.

Table 6 Changes in Social Media Use & Linkages to News Sources																
	Prior Joining WIMPS n=151					1st Follow-Up n=86					2nd Follow-Up n=65					
Posted comments, photos, videos, links, or status updates on:																
	Yes		No			Yes		No			Yes		No			
Facebook*	93.4%		6.6%			97.7%		2.3%			100.0%		0.0%			
Twitter*	42.0%		58.0%			66.3%		33.7%			72.3%		27.7%			
Other site*	39.1%		60.9%			64.0%		36.0%			63.1%		36.9%			
Type of News Consumption																
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Watch/listen*	7.9	4.0	34.4	10.6	43.0	3.5	2.3	16.3	14.0	64.0	0	0	3.1	21.5	56.0	
Websites*	18.5	3.3	31.8	11.3	35.1	4.7	0	18.6	14.0	62.8	1.5	0	10.8	9.2	78.5	
Read*	11.9	6.6	33.1	13.9	34.4	4.7	3.5	17.4	16.3	58.1	3.1	4.6	20.0	18.5	53.8	

\* = differences statistically significant at .05 level (chi square or anova)

### Changes in Social Capital

Social capital is the product of relationships that enables well-being. While seemingly intangible, we might think of social capital in terms of trust, reciprocity and even self-worth, self-esteem and the like. Results of the evaluation so far have demonstrated that participants have developed their social capital as:

- Youth from diverse backgrounds engage in WIMPS.
- Three key groups acted as bridges for youth into WIMPS.
- The social capital of participants increased.
- Social capital between WIMPS and other groups exists.

The social capital among WIMPS participants is reflected in four respects:

- Bridging mechanisms of social capital that brought youth to WIMPS
- Development of social capital amongst youth who participate in WIMPS
- WIMPS youth as bridges
- Development of social capital between youth and political arena

The data reveal that participants' social networks – or groups that they belong to – bridged them to WIMPS. Peers, community organisations, the family and the internet served as the predominant bridges. Forty-four percent of participants had heard about WIMPS from their friends, while 40% heard about WIMPS from another youth or community organisation that they were involved with. Almost a quarter of participants (23%) stated that they heard about WIMPS online at the WIMPS website, on Facebook and other social media or through a search engine, and nearly 20% heard about WIMPS through their family.

The evaluation illustrates the development of social capital amongst youth, after they joined WIMPS. To date, the WIMPS project has provided youth the opportunity to work with others from a variety of traditions and communities. As noted in Tables 2 and 3, WIMPS participants have diverse backgrounds. They range in age from 12 to 30 and older, with the median and modal age being 16 years, and the mean age of participants being 17.8 years. Both females and males participate in WIMPS: approximately 63% female and 37% male. In addition WIMPS participants come from diverse backgrounds: 40% of participants are Protestant, 54% Roman Catholic and the remaining 5% reported belonging to another religion.

Upon entry into WIMPS, youth had 1 friend on average who was a member of WIMPS; after six to nine months, on average youth had 7 friends that belonged to WIMPS<sup>2</sup>. Due to community segregation (in the school system and beyond), many of these youth might not otherwise have the opportunity to develop friendships and partnerships with others from different traditions. WIMPS provides a physical location where youth from any tradition or community can feel at ease in coming together.



<sup>2</sup> A t test found this mean difference to be statistically significant at the  $p = 0.000$  level.

The development of social capital amongst youth volunteers was also observed through crew interviews.

Qualitative interviews of seventeen coaches offered insight regarding the motivations of the coaches, the impacts they experienced as a result of participation in WIMPS, and the changes they observed in crew members.

Coaches reported these specific personal impacts:<sup>3</sup>

- Improved communications skills (7)
- More knowledge about politics, the political process (7)
- More knowledge about the media (5)
- Better understanding of young people and their issues (4)
- Improved group facilitation and conflict management skills (3)
- Increased self-confidence (3)
- Improved ability to listen and constructively guide others (3)
- Improved youth work skills (2)
- Improved technical skills (2)

Coaches generally saw positive changes individually and collectively among crew members. They noted, for the crew, such changes as: increased ability over time to work jointly with others (increased social capital); greater sociability, less shyness; greater self-confidence; improved communication skills; improved media skills.

The development of self-confidence is a tangible outcome that many of the coaches discussed –whether it be about themselves or their crew. Self-confidence is one potential aspect of social capital that WIMPS programme enabled in its participants. The development of social capital amongst youth in WIMPS (as noted through increased self-confidence in addition to their communication skills (i.e., conflict management, listening)) is apt to be intricately linked to the fact that these youth – themselves became bridges, discussing WIMPS with family, friends and school peers. In addition this WIMPS based development of social capital also enabled youth to develop social capital in the political arena.

The evaluation clearly depicts youth bridging WIMPS to other groups. As noted in Table 7, the majority of youth involved with WIMPS discussed the programme with family and friends. As illustrated, approximately 65% of youth discussed WIMPS with their friends (who were not in WIMPS) and nearly 70% discussed WIMPS with their family. While the frequency of dialogue varied, about one-third of participants discussed WIMPS with their friends or families on a monthly basis. While the trends displayed in Table 7 do not statistically vary over time, it is clear that youth are acting as bridges, engaging family and friends with WIMPS.

<sup>3</sup> Each coach could report more than one personal impact. Only impacts reported by at least two coaches appear in the list.

Table 7 Youth Involved in WIMPS as Bridges								
	1st Follow up n=86				2nd Follow-Up n=56			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Talk Friends	65.1%		34.9%		64.6%		35.4%	
Talk Family	68.6%		31.4%		69.2%		30.8%	
Social Media	89.5%		10.5%		90.8%		9.2%	
	1x	Few x	Every Month	Every Week	1x	Few x	Every Month	Every Week
Frequently talk Friends	52%	17.9%	30.4%	0.0%	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%	0.0%
Frequently talk Family	50.8%	10.2%	37.3%	1.7%	46.7%	4.4%	48.9%	0.0%
	Min-Max		Mean		Min-Max		Mean	
# Friends Talk	1-100		10.09		1-100		11.9	

*Note: chi square tests were not statistically significant.*

The final development of social capital that the evaluation uncovered was between youth and the political system - politicians. In conjunction with the interviews, participant surveys illustrated an increase in politically-based social capital. As Table 5 shows, political interaction increased significantly after young people joined WIMPS. The longer a youth participated in the programme, the more likely he or she had connections with local politicians (and other politicians). By the second data collection point, most youth knew all of their local politicians' names and had met over half of them. During informal dialogue with youth during routine evaluation visits, evaluators often heard that local politicians knew specific WIMPS members by name and would engage in casual conversation on the street when they crossed paths. Such examples provide clear evidence that social capital had developed between some of the local politicians and the youth.

Finally, the effects of the WIMPS programme on social capital also become evident in the bonds formed, and the positive affect reported, between the coaches, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the staff, the website, and the products developed by crew members. Coaches gave high praise to the project infrastructure and support elements: equipment; training; the website; and the ongoing support they receive from staff. They tended to feel good about their role as a coach, and they felt similarly about the interpersonal dynamics within their crew. Three-fourths expressed high satisfaction with the content created by their crew members; one-fourth felt that they did not yet have enough time or enough crew members to create the content that they believed their crew capable of creating.

## What key lessons can we learn so far from the evaluation of WIMPS?

### Lessons about the programme's effectiveness

The programme can effectively achieve many of its intended outcomes. The evidence gathered in three waves of data collection, and reported in this document, regarding the short and long-term aims of the programme, indicates that WIMPS produces positive changes in knowledge, skills, and behaviour among young people who participate, leading to longer-term effects. The evidence shows:

- Initial, short-term results (within the first year of participation)
  - Increased knowledge about, and interaction with, politicians
  - Increased skills for social campaigning
  - Increased technical, media, and reporting skills
- Intermediate results (within one to three years of participation)
  - Acquisition of social capital (discussed in more detail below)
  - Bridging among diverse community groups
  - Implementation of campaigns which have an impact on attitudes, policies, and practices

Potentially, these initial and intermediate results will achieve the longer-term aims of the programme, including:

- A stronger sense of civic engagement and a commitment to a shared, democratically-organized society



These findings add another dimension to our understanding of how young people act politically, and how we can enable them to improve the efficacy of their action. A recent report from Demos used survey data to characterise the present generation of teenagers as "committed, connected, and caring", but also emphasised the importance of educational and experiential opportunities to build skills for political action.<sup>4</sup> This aligns well with the findings in this evaluation of WIMPS.

Interpretation of the findings, from this first evaluation, suggests that WIMPS creates a space where young people with different histories and outlooks can come together in a safe environment to pursue civic projects collaboratively. WIMPS creates an alternative youth environment within the unique context of Northern Ireland.

The diversity established in WIMPS is important to highlight since the project has created a safe and shared space where youth can come to work together on common goals. This is no small feat, given the traditional community-based segregation of Northern Irish society, and the socio-economic and gender-based segregation of youth via the school system.

<sup>4</sup> Birdwell, Jonathan, and Mona Bani, "Introducing Generation Citizen. Demos, 2014.

## Lessons about the impacts of WIMPS on social capital

The development and use of social capital by young people underlies several of the outcomes of the WIMPS project. It has great significance both because it has a positive direct influence on young people's well-being, and it also can mediate capital deficiencies in other groups. As bonds and trust develop in a group, social capital is developed and enriched.

The bridging which occurred among youth, as reported in the evaluation data, is a cornerstone to the development of social capital. While social capital often forms naturally (e.g., in families), societies such as Northern Ireland that have historically promoted segregation require

intentionally-created programmes to nurture the development of social capital among various communities. Specifically, programmes need to encourage the bridging of individuals from different backgrounds and with different beliefs. The initial evaluation of the WIMPS project has found strong evidence of bridging and the development of social capital. In addition, group members share the unique social capital that they developed in WIMPS in their pre-existing (i.e., family, school, friends) and new groups that they join.

In terms of knowledge development, crew reported that they had gained a better understanding and appreciation of communities other than their own.

As one coach stated, participating in WIMPS has "opened my eyes more - now I know what's going on." This general point was reiterated in the formal interviews in addition to informal conversations that evaluators had with coaches and crew over the three evaluation visits (2011-2012). This is perhaps one of the most valuable effects of the development of social capital: youth coming to understand that community issues/ struggles are complex and that there are multiple sides to understanding 'truth.' Such changes in individual thinking necessarily point to both the development and use of social capital within the WIMPS group. This point must be stressed, as individuals do not always utilise the capital that they have access to.





From the coach interviews it appears that the youth have actually utilised the social capital that they developed in the WIMPS project.

In assessing the development of social capital in the WIMPS project during the course of the evaluation, it has become evident that social capital has not only developed between crew members, and between crew and coaches, but also between crew members and staff/management. Because of the Chief Executive's and Head of Social Media's rich social capital in youth services and political and media circles they have been able to bridge WIMPS volunteers to a variety of individuals and groups that the youth would not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with. During the evaluation period for

the project, young people have met politicians at all levels of Northern Irish society, and young people have met the British Prime Minister – to receive a 'Big Society Award' in Downing Street. They have also spoken at a number of conferences, including a UNESCO seminar in Paris.

During the evaluation we found that youth were initially bridged to WIMPS via their friends, family, school and other youth groups. As a direct result of joining WIMPS we have also found that youth have developed their social capital. Lastly, we have also noted that youth have now begun to bridge WIMPS with other groups that they are a part of. Based on the evidence discussed in this report, WIMPS has acted as a conduit of social capital, positively influencing the youth that participate in the programme.

WIMPS has created a (virtual and face-to-face) safe space where youth can network with one another, thereby enabling a physical space for social capital to develop. While it is too early to extensively quantify the social capital that youth have developed through their participation in WIMPS, initial evidence suggests that social capital has the ability to blossom and in fact is already evidenced among youth who participate in the programme.

### **Lessons about programme development**

Developing a programme such as WIMPS takes time. It will probably always take more time than anyone anticipates or predicts. So, for example, the implementation of crew sites required more time and effort than initially expected; in the end, the original goal for the number of sites was reduced.

Some of the challenges which WIMPS staff encountered, and then described to the evaluators, included:

- They needed to determine the best way to align website resources with the needs of young people doing campaigns. This required developing both good content and an accessible format. They tried several different approaches, to discover the best.
- Not all individuals trained as coaches performed equally well. Much staff turnover occurred. Staff tried to make adjustments, but better prediction of who will succeed as a coach would help the programme.
- Distance from the WIMPS office created logistical barriers to recruitment. A programme such as this might require an effective intermediary in local settings to link potential crew members with the programme.
- The time required to recruit the initial staff, and later to deal with any turnover which occurs, can add significantly to the development time for a programme such as WIMPS.

### **Lessons about community centred evaluation, specifically evaluation involving young people**

This evaluation process demonstrated that young people, such as those who participate in WIMPS, can collaborate productively in, and add value to, the design and implementation of a programme's evaluation. This evaluation showed that young people without formal evaluation training can grasp the basic principles of evaluation and use those principles to develop overall research questions and to participate in the selection and design of reliable, valid evaluation data collection instruments.

The perspectives of the young people in the WIMPS evaluation committee injected new dimensions into the evaluation on at least two levels. On one level, their perspectives enhanced the operationalization of concepts. At another level, the input from young people on the committee ensured optimal alignment with the contemporary vernacular among youth. That input also significantly shaped expectations regarding the logistics of evaluation data collection, thus improving the completeness and richness of the information collected, thereby positively influencing both the reliability and validity of the data and this report.

Involvement of young people, did however present special challenges. For example, school schedules dominate the lives of youth and largely dictate their availability. In addition, over time youth's circumstances can sometimes change so as to preclude continuation with the evaluation work. Young people may progress into a new school, accept new employment, or change their residence – resulting in a change in their ability to participate in WIMPS. Nonetheless, this case study shows that an effective process which genuinely involves young people in meaningful co-creation of an evaluation can overcome those challenges. Young people whose schedules permitted remained engaged over time; others cycled in and out of participation, but nonetheless contributed substantially.

The inclusion of youth in the evaluation process has contributed to the success of the evaluation and aligns well with the WIMPS programme intention to instil agency in participants.





## What is recommended for moving forward?

Based on analysis and interpretation of the evaluation data for the WIMPS programme, the external evaluators make several recommendations.

1. The Atlantic Philanthropies and other grant-making organisations interested in promoting youth civic engagement should consider the features of this programme, for replication in whole and in part. Clearly, this programme can have strong, positive impacts.
2. Further demonstration and testing should occur to understand the ingredients for success. Where WIMPS took root, young people significantly developed skills and social capital; they implemented outstanding campaigns. Yet, some

crews achieved less than others, and some sites did not even get off the ground. Understanding the differences between those sites that did well and those that did not will increase the productivity of future efforts, not just for WIMPS, but also for other youth programmes which promote civic participation.

3. Consider further the value of social capital theory for understanding the civic and social impacts of initiatives such as WIMPS. Looking at how the networks of young people develop, and at how social capital increases among WIMPS participants, along with the bridging of WIMPS youth to others, provides valuable insights into the potency of informal educational and situated learning approaches.
4. Any further evaluation of the programme should continue to incorporate a triangulated approach. This first WIMPS evaluation made use of several data collection instruments – coach and crew surveys that are conducted every 6 to 9 months; coach interviews that are conducted every 6 to 9 months; and the youth serving organisation survey. In addition, information was gleaned during evaluation meetings when the evaluation committee came together, via informal conversation with young people who were engaged with WIMPS, and conversations with staff and management. Additional evaluation should also seek to understand why some young people do not fully engage with WIMPS after attending just one or two meetings; additional evaluation should address the issue of coach turnover.



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## Conclusion

The evaluation of the WIMPS programme in Northern Ireland demonstrates a productive joining of civic youth work, youth civic engagement, and programme evaluation for programme improvement (providing sound, relevant information for decision-making), accountability (offering transparency to all who have a stake in funding, operating, and/or participating in the programme), and sustainability (delivering to funders and prospective funders valid, empirically-based evidence of effectiveness). The evaluation also demonstrates how young people can join in the co-creation of an evaluation of their own programme, increasing the reliability and validity of the evaluation.

At a time when many in the world are panicked about the apparent disengagement of young people from politics, this evaluation gives vital insight into approaches which engage and orient young people – and also public servants – to create new forms of civic discourse, centred around the interests and passions of young citizens. In our work we witnessed more than a youth programme – we met young people, volunteers and staff who displayed courage and determination to overcome societal divisions, forge democratic processes, and build a shared society.

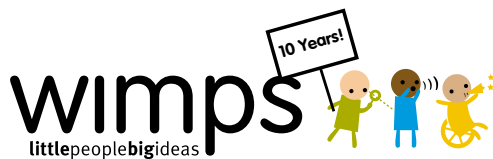




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