



# Report of the Public Consultation



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Compiled by Colgan & Associates





As Minister of State with responsibility for Children, I am delighted to publish the “Report of the Public Consultation” for the National Children’s Strategy. The National Children’s Strategy will set out the means to better support our children to enable them to enjoy their childhood and enhance their capacity to contribute to our society.

A critically important element of the development of the National Children’s Strategy, which I was pleased to initiate, was to listen to what the children and young people themselves have to say. This has been an innovative new development in the formulation of government policy.

The response has been extremely positive and indicates a strong desire among children to be heard. I have immensely enjoyed meeting with hundreds of children, their teachers, care workers and parents over the past number of months to hear directly from them. I would also like to thank the hundreds of children who sent letters and e-mails to me. In all some 2,500 children and young people took the opportunity to give their views. This report summarises the ideas and suggestions put forward.

The letters and submissions I have had from their parents and others who love and care for them and from the agencies providing the necessary supports and services to children and young people have yielded a wealth of ideas and proposals. The consultation does not end here. It will continue as part of the implementation of the Strategy.

The next step will be the publication of the National Children’s Strategy. This publication will fulfil the Government’s commitment in our review of the Action Programme for the Millennium, which prioritised the need to put in place a coherent system of support to care for all of our children.

Bháin me an-taitneamh agus tairbhe as an gcaidreamh seo and táim thar a bheith buíoch do gach duine a chabhraigh linn.

Mary Hanafin T.D.

Minister of State with responsibility for Children





Introduction

<b>PART ONE</b>	<b>CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	<b>9</b>
	Overview of the process	10
	Overview of the submissions	12
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in? What is good about it?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Issues and Challenges</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1	Facilities and activities for children and young people	22
2.2	The Environment	26
2.3	Respect, responsibility and having a say	29
2.4	Health, personal well being and safety	34
2.5	Learning and education	38
2.6	Social issues and concerns	41
2.7	The experience of being of traveller, of homelessness, of being in care	45
2.8	The future	48
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>What the children and young people said ...</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>PART TWO</b>	<b>CONSULTATION WITH ADULTS AND ORGANISATIONS</b>	<b>53</b>
	Overview of the process	54
	Overview of the submissions	56
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Opportunities and challenges facing children and young people</b>	<b>59</b>
4.1	Opportunities	60
4.2	Challenges	63
4.3	The relationship between opportunities and challenges	67
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Policy and service delivery structures</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1	Policy development, planning and priorities	70
5.2	Co-ordination in policy-making and service provision	73
5.3	Research, evaluation and quality services	77
5.4	Legislative initiatives	80



<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Responding to children's and young people's needs</b>	<b>81</b>
6.1	Health and well being	82
6.2	Learning and education	86
6.3	Supporting children and young people with disabilities	92
6.4	Children and young people who are marginalised	94
6.5	Play, recreation and development opportunities	96
6.6	Children and young people as active citizens	98
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Enabling families, communities and professionals to support children</b>	<b>101</b>
7.1	Childcare	102
7.2	Family and parenting support	105
7.3	Professional and staff support	110
<b>PART THREE CONSULTATION FORUM</b>		<b>115</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Report on the consultation forum</b>	<b>117</b>
Appendix 1	The arrangements for consultation with children and young people	119
Appendix 2	Invitation for submissions	125
Appendix 3	List of contributors	129

In July, 1999 the Government announced its decision to develop a National Children's Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy is to lead the development of supports and services for children up to eighteen years of age, to improve their quality of life over the next ten years and reflect the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

An Interdepartmental Group at Assistant Secretary level, representing the various government departments which are centrally involved in children's issues, was established under the chair of the Department of Health and Children to oversee its preparation. A cross-departmental team comprising civil servants from the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, Social, Community and Family Affairs and Justice, Equality and Law Reform was established under the Public Service Management Act, 1997 to support the development of the Strategy. An expert in child welfare from Queen's University, Belfast was brought in as a consultant to advise and assist in its development.

It was decided that key elements of the National Children's Strategy would be a more holistic, child centred perspective for thinking about the needs of children and young people growing up in Ireland today. This includes:

- **Recognition that the best interest of the child is a first consideration;**
- **Recognition of the intrinsic worth of childhood and as a foundation for adulthood and citizenship;**
- **Promotion of the complementary relationship between the child, the family and the voluntary/community sector, the private sector and the State.**

A central part in the development of the National Children's Strategy has been the wide ranging consultation process. Invitations for submissions through the national press sought contributions from parents and others who care for and work with children. A targeted consultation was carried out with children and young people with the assistance of various schools and voluntary organisations throughout the country and with the support of the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council. Children also wrote or e-mailed the Minister of State with responsibility for Children to give their suggestions, comments and observations on growing up in Ireland. The aim was to provide the young people with an opportunity to share in the development of the Strategy.

## **Purpose of Consultation Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the various themes, concerns and issues raised by children, young people, adults and organisations during the consultation process. The success of the consultation, with children and young people in particular, whose insights are reported here, highlights the immense benefits that can be gained by directly consulting with them in terms of policy formulation and service delivery. This innovative departure of consulting with children and young people brings new demands to planning and evaluating supports and services. A range of mechanisms needs to be developed and put in place to support this new approach.

These measures, and others to provide new arrangements for continued involvement by the key stakeholders, will be developed within the National Children's Strategy, which will be published in the near future.







# Part 1

**Consultation with children and young people**



# Overview of the Process

There were three strands to the consultation process:

- Children and young people were invited to respond by e-mail or letter to an invitation from the Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin, T.D., to give their views on the following questions:

*Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in? What's good about it? What would make it better?*

- The Minister of State visited five primary schools and five post-primary schools, where she met with a number of students (about 60 in each school) and discussed a range of issues with them.
- Ten organisations working with children and young people undertook in-depth consultations with children and young people connected with their organisations.

A brief overview of the approaches used in the school and organisational consultations is contained in Appendix 1.

## Participation in the consultation process

A total of 2,488 children and young people took part in the consultation process (see Figs1-3). Sixty per cent (60%) of respondents were girls, and forty per cent (40%) boys. Sixty five per cent (65%) were over thirteen and thirty five per cent (35%) under thirteen. The participants ranged in age from 3 years to 19 years.

## The content of part one of this report

As well as a brief overview of the main themes part one of the report contains three chapters.

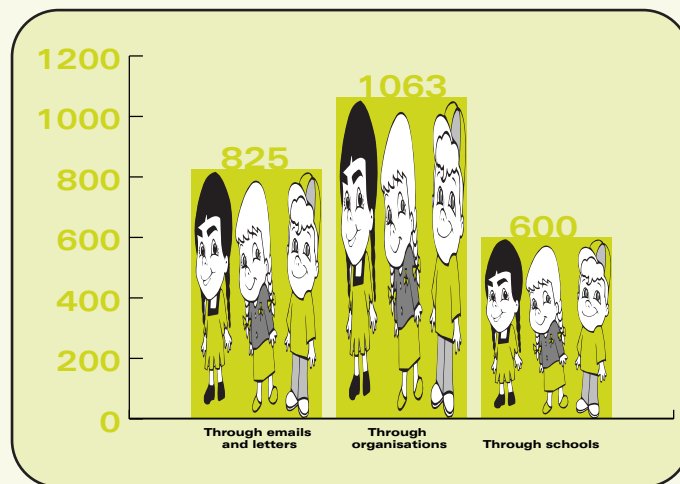
**Chapter 1** describes the response to the question - Is Ireland a good place to live? The main positive features spoken about by the children and young people are described, together with extensive quotes, which give insight into their particular 'take' on the benefits of Ireland.

**Chapter 2** draws on all the consultations to identify the issues and concerns that children feel strongly about, together with some solutions which they offer. It also describes the thoughts young people had about what Ireland might look like in 2010.

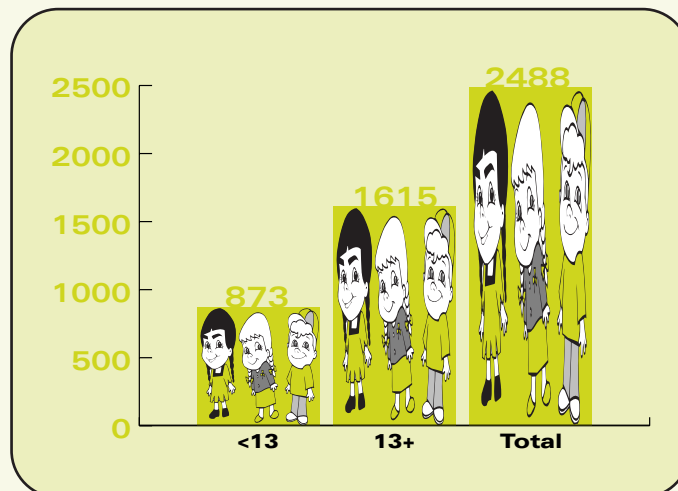
**Chapter 3** contains a sample of the range of comments from children.

Any factual summary could not do justice to the clarity of ideas, the intuitive insight of the contributors, the depth and breadth of their thinking, experience and views and the meanings contained in the ways in which their experience is expressed. For this reason, the Report draws heavily on extracts from the letters and e-mails from young people. Where the ages of the contributors are available, these are given alongside the comment from the person concerned.

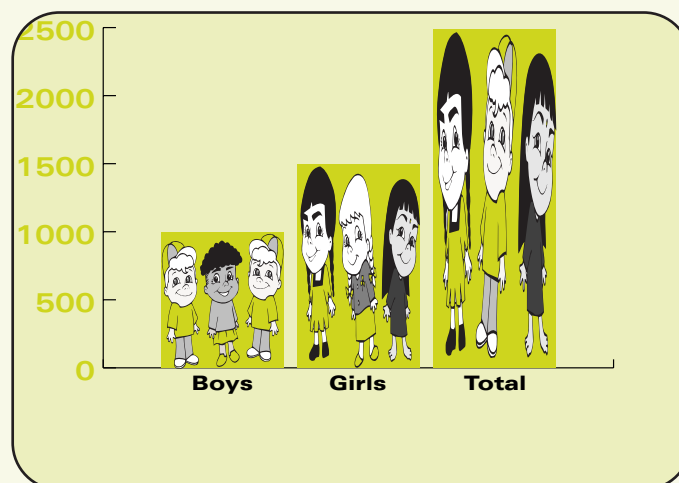
### Sources of Childrens Submissions



### Children's Submissions Analysis by Age



### Children's Submissions Analysis by Gender





# Overview of the Submissions

## The scope of the responses

Views were received through letter, e-mail and through discussion sessions organised by a number of Voluntary Agencies.

The contributors covered a very considerable amount of ground in their responses. Local issues and national issues were examined. Matters directly affecting the participants were discussed or written about, as well as broad social issues. Young people gave thoughtful time to describing their own experiences – often painful experiences of difficult life situations.

The contributions were invariably characterised by clarity, honesty and courtesy. There was a strong sense of optimism. Complex issues were explored with an enviable simplicity and a refreshing lack of jargon or excess of words.

## The key themes emerging from the consultation process

Although the contributions ranged over a great many topics, there were some predominant themes. The views on these key themes are summarised here as faithfully as possible.

### Play and leisure

Leisure and recreational facilities need to be provided throughout Ireland as part of a coherent, planned and well resourced response to enabling children and young people to have a good quality of life.

Play and recreation are part of the fabric of childhood and young adulthood. Provision for them has been neglected. Without these facilities, the quality of life for children and young adults is impoverished. These facilities are needed to allow children to enjoy a balanced life. But their absence has serious social consequences too, for children and for their communities.

### The environment

The environment, locally and nationally, is precious to children and young people. They value it for themselves, for visitors, and for future generations. They see it as under serious threat from litter, pollution, over-development and vandalism. They want the Government to act to protect the environment. But they also want people to take on the responsibility themselves and take action.


Children and young people are deeply concerned about our environment now. One might say that the strength of the concern would lead one to believe that they see the situation, especially with regard to litter and pollution, as a crisis. They do not appear to believe that the benefits of prosperity and development can outweigh the environmental costs that it is bringing with it.

### Social issues

There are some very major social concerns that are experienced in a very particular way by young people. Drug use, early drinking and smoking and homelessness tend to be experienced especially by their age group. These issues were a major concern for them, either as realities for themselves or fears for their peers.

The theme of personal safety was very closely linked to the concerns about social issues. Children talked about their fears for themselves – on the streets, in their parks and in their communities. They were concerned about the ways in which their lives are being restricted because of these fears and their parent's fears for them.

The children and young people responding to the consultation had a keen sense of the urgency of dealing with some pressing social issues. They had many ideas for addressing some of these



issues and they wanted the Government to act. They were acutely aware of the problems of children in Third World countries and in other developed countries.

### **Having a say**

Children and young people want to be active participants in shaping their own lives, their educational experience and their communities, as well as the wider national life. They are seeking the right to be consulted, to be listened to and to have the means to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

Children and young people were very clear about the need for them to have a real say in matters that affect them. They believed that they have insight, knowledge and needs that they themselves are best placed to express. They identified several areas, at all levels where they can have a say and ways in which they can express their views. For young people in care, having a say in decisions that affect them had an added sense of immediacy.

### **The right to a good quality of life**

There is a need for balance in young people's lives and freedom to enjoy childhood and young adulthood.

There was a sense in the submissions of the importance of balance and the right to enjoy the experience of childhood and young adulthood. Perhaps for this reason, young people seemed less in awe of the benefits of economic growth and more ready to challenge its downsides. This need for balance was articulated also in the concerns about examination pressure and the need to balance academic development with social and personal development.

### **Expectations for the National Children's Strategy**


There were relatively few explicit references to the National Children's Strategy. However, there was a strong expectation, expressed very courteously at the end of the majority of letters, that, having asked for their views, the Minister and the Government would now take action on the issues which they had raised. Many contained a respectful challenge to Government. Some were quite clear about their expectations, as the following extract shows:

I would like to hear from you with details of how you are going to improve this.

Others don't intend to wait around, as demonstrated by the following extract:

Please reply. Because we are going to do something about it if you don't, like write to newspapers or magazines. Please help. Thank you for reading this.

It is worth noting here that each child who wrote in response to the Minister's invitation, received a personalised reply to their letter or e-mail.

side  Full Size - in there are  
ones, more bins - We need something  
to be around.



The background of the page is a solid yellow color. Overlaid on this background is a faint, stylized illustration of a hand reaching upwards from the bottom left towards the center. Several five-pointed stars of varying sizes are scattered across the upper half of the page. The word 'Chapter' is written in a large, dark blue, sans-serif font, and the number '1' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font to its right.

# Chapter 1

Is Ireland a Good Place for you  
to grow up in?  
What is Good about it?

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, we look at the responses to the question 'Is Ireland a good place to live' which was posed to young people in public advertisements, on scoilnet and on the Department of Health and Children web site. Material on this topic is also drawn from the consultations with young people who engaged in consultations at school level or through organisations.





# Is Ireland a Good Place to Live - The Overview

The overwhelming thrust of the comments from children and young people about Ireland as a place to live was hugely positive. The recurring terms were 'brilliant,' 'cool' and 'a good place to grow up.' There was a strong sense of optimism and positive feeling running through the majority of contributions.

One of the notable features of the views about Ireland as a good place to live was the extent to which children compared Ireland favourably to other countries. These comparisons were made about climate, absence of natural disasters, clean environment and safety. Children drew repeated comparisons with America. The reports of school yard shootings and murders there have clearly made a very powerful impact. Comparisons were also drawn with Africa, in relation to famine, Kosovo and other war torn regions, and India, where child labour was seen as an unfavourable feature of life for children.

While young people named very many positive attributes of life in Ireland, they were equally strong in pointing to their concerns about the negative dimensions. In the case of many of the facets of Irish life, which they saw as positive, they also pointed to weaknesses and to threats to their future and the future of the country.

Children and young people were very clear about the fact that, while it is possible to make generalised statements about Ireland as a place to live, the reality is different for each individual and is shaped by many facets of their own lives - family, community and geographic location. Several contributors pointed to the fact that life can be good generally, for most children and young people, who have good family supports and access to life's advantages, while very many other young people had a very different experience.

All of these qualifications were raised, highlighting the fact that the answer to the question 'Is Ireland a good place to live' is complex and the honest answer must be 'yes and no'. However, in engaging in a process of balancing out the positives with the negatives and taking account of the qualifications, there appeared to be a consensus that the positive aspects of Irish life outweigh the negative and can continue to do so, provided we, as a society, take action to avert the threats and address the weaknesses.

The following extracts from letters and e-mails give an insight into the general views about Ireland:

...if someone asked me to move I wouldn't as I love living in Ireland because it's a beautiful country.  
Cherie, age 13

Overall...I think there are far more positive aspects to growing up in Ireland than negative. I know in the future, I will be bringing my children up in Ireland.  
Cloidhna, age 16

Is Ireland a good place to grow up? It depends on where you live, how many facilities are available to you and how you are brought up. In my opinion, Ireland is a good place to grow up as it is economically stable etc. but that is not to say that there won't be children who are deprived and abused.  
Ashling, age 13

Fortunately, we have moved on from emigration and unemployment to a modern and



admired country. I appreciate what my predecessors have achieved, the fact that I am nearly guaranteed a job on finishing my education, a beautiful language and culture and a wonderful education system that is fair to all. However, some things have not been inherited from past generations such as the new attitude towards enterprise and achievement. I am glad that our old, frightened impression of risk taking and creativeness has diminished, especially within the new youth culture.

Helen

I think Ireland is a great place to live in. It is good mainly because the green's are lovely and its fun. I still think you can change it to make it brilliant.

Eimear, age 9

Is Ireland a good place to grow up in? Yes, if you are from a loving family, with a decent income, supportive family network and nice community. Children as we know thrive in a secure happy family and social environment, where there are enough facilities to meet their needs. For most of the young population, life in Ireland is good.

However, if you are less well off, have medical, learning or emotional needs and the family situation is unstable or plagued by drink, drugs or depression, things are quite different.

Erica

## What is Good about Living in Ireland?

Several features of life in Ireland attracted positive comment. These were the scenic beauty of Ireland and the environment, Irish culture, heritage and talent, the services and the education system. The contributors were very positive about Ireland as a safe place to live in and grow up in and a place enjoying the benefits of democracy and good government. The current prosperity of the country and the benefits coming from that prosperity were mentioned repeatedly. The other strong theme was the value and strength of close knit families and supportive communities.

### **The scenic beauty of Ireland, and the environment**

Children and young people commented favourably on several aspects of Ireland's landscape and its environment.

The beauty of the scenery, the greenness of the country, the easy access to beaches, hills and open spaces were mentioned repeatedly. Many of the notably beautiful scenic areas were mentioned regularly as places to enjoy and be proud of.

The contributors talked about the quality of the blue flag beaches and the relatively pollution-free environment. Clean water, fresh vegetables and quality food also attracted positive comment.

Young people appreciated being an island community and the relative sparseness of the population, giving a sense of space and freedom.

Irish wildlife and its survival was appreciated by young people.

### **Irish culture and traditions, the talent and the atmosphere**





There was a strong appreciation of Irish heritage and traditions and the fact that our unique identity is surviving and growing stronger, even though we have become part of the wider European community.

Irish music, song and dance were mentioned, as well as our folklore and the Irish language and hurling. There was some pride in the fact that we are cherishing old traditions and customs in an era where change is so rapid. Many of the most notable examples of Irish culture such as the Book of Kells were mentioned many times.

### **The variety and diversity of lifestyles, urban and rural was a source of pride.**

Young people spoke with great pride about the talent of our writers, past and present. They made particular mention of Irish people who have gained international acclaim in several fields of endeavour. Among those mentioned were Mary Robinson, Westlife, Bob Geldof, Charlie Swan (and Istabraqe!).

Young people were proud of our capacity to celebrate! The St. Patrick's Day Parade was one concrete example of this, but there were also many general references to Ireland as a fun place, a place of celebration and even *'the best country in Europe for parties.'* It has to be said that this last comment was qualified - *'but only for 17 to 30 year olds.'*

### **The Irish education system**

There were a huge number of comments from young people about the quality of the Irish education system.

There was favourable comments about the fact that schools are relatively small and that facilities are good, including access to computers and technology. For example:

There is a good educational system here in Ireland. We at our school have televisions and CD/tape recorders in almost every classroom. We also have access to the Internet in our computer class, which we have twice a week.

Emma, age 12

Children spoke positively about their good teachers, the high standard of education and the range of things that one can learn. The Leaving Certificate Applied got favourable mention.

The relatively short school day, long summer holidays and mid-term breaks were commented upon - *'they give us a chance to do other things besides school work and homework.'*

And the relative absence of competition, was noted by one child who had moved to Ireland:

In Canada there was a lot of competition inside and outside of school, somebody always had to be better than the other, it was sad because some people might not have as good as others and might be bullied. In Dublin there is some competition, in Wicklow there was only a fraction of what there was in Dublin.

Niamh, age 13

### **Families and communities**

There was much positive comment about Ireland as a place where people are friendly and helpful, where family life is generally good and communities are healthy and supportive. These views are captured in comments like *'we always look out for each other'* and:

A lot of families live near each other and that is wonderful. All my family live around each other and they are always around if there is a problem.

Paula



I think Ireland is a lovely place to grow up in. There are many towns in Ireland and every one of them would be a great place to grow up in. Irish people have a great sense of unity and children who grow up in Ireland feel like they belong to a community, something more than just a family.

Greg

One of the good things about local communities, according to one contributor, was that there are many parish activities that don't cost young people a lot of money to join.

Contributors were happy that Ireland is a place where charitable organisations are well supported.

Young people also welcomed the fact that people are now more open about teenage pregnancy and more supportive of single mothers. They were glad too that child abuse is 'out in the open' and being addressed.

### Being safe in Ireland

There was a great deal of comment about Ireland as a safe place to grow up in. In very many of the comments, favourable comparison was made with other countries, which were perceived as much less safe.

The freedom from natural disasters attracted much comment and children were very satisfied that Ireland did not experience the extreme conditions such as hurricanes, tornadoes and floods. The absence of dangerous creatures was welcome, including '*snakes and killer wasps*.'

Many spoke positively about the benefits of living in a country that was free from war, although there was also much comment about the wish for peace in Northern Ireland.

The comparative freedom from crime, murder, muggings and shootings was mentioned a lot - '*we feel safe in our homes and on our streets*'. Children were pleased that the public does not have free access to guns in Ireland. It was clear that media reports of school yard shootings and violence in America had made a profound impact on many children. There were several references to this including this one:

I did not like it when I heard over in America about the boy killing the little girl over a fight in the yard.

Anon.

Two other aspects of safety that were mentioned by a number of young people were Irish neutrality and the fact that we do not have a nuclear industry in Ireland.

### Democracy and rights

As well as being safe, being free was mentioned as important by a number of young people, as demonstrated in the following extract:

We live in a democracy so everyone's view is important. The law is fair.  
You have the right to choose your leader.

Marita

Other facets of rights and democracy mentioned were equality between men and women, equal pay and racial equality among children (but not adults).

Several contributors expressed satisfaction with Government and administration:



We have a small, well run country.  
Anon.

The government has created an island to be proud of.  
Anon.

I think that we have one of the best Governments in the world. I can always rely on you to fix something that is wrong.  
Ciara

Finally, there was some satisfaction that Ireland does not use capital punishment.

### **Services and facilities**

There were several comments about good public services and some about good facilities for young people. However, it must be said that the comments about leisure facilities for young people were overwhelmingly negative.

Among the services getting positive mention were doctors, nurses, Gardaí and as already noted, teachers. There was a good deal of positive mention about a range of people who are helpful to children including traffic wardens, lollipop ladies and dentists.

Some positive general comments were also made about the care of elderly people, healthcare services, social welfare and childcare. Childline and the Samaritans were mentioned by one young contributor, who qualified her welcome by wishing that these services were not needed.

### **Ireland's wealth and prosperity**

The booming economy and the benefits flowing from it attracted a good deal of comment. The job opportunities, the chances for young people and the opportunities for the Government were noted. The fact that there is no pressure on young people to emigrate was welcomed and there were many references to the fact that many parents are now in a good financial position to care for their children. The following extract is typical:

The unemployment rates are at an all time low and businesses are crying out for young skilled professionals. Thankfully now it seems that whatever their background, all young people have a chance to take a look over the edge, jump and survive, hopefully coming out the better of the risk they took.  
Charlene, age 17



# Chapter2

## Issues and Challenges

### Introduction

In this chapter, we draw together the views of young people about their main issues and concerns. The material covers the views which emerged from the consultations run by groups and organisations, the school-based consultations and the letters and e-mails received.

Although a range of different questions were explored in each of the separate consultations that were undertaken, it has been possible to draw the outcomes together around a series of common themes. Where a consultation focused on one particular theme, or facilitated very particular experiences, attention is drawn to that material. For the most part, however, it has been possible to integrate the responses from all the young people who took part in the various forms of consultation.



# An Overview of the Issues and Concerns

The following are the main issues and concerns raised by children and young people who participated in the various consultations:

- Facilities and activities for children and young people
- The environment
- Respect for children and having a say
- Learning and education
- Children and young people's health, well being and safety
- The experience of homelessness, being in care
- Social issues and concerns

There is considerable overlap and interconnectedness among these issues and the distinctions drawn often seem arbitrary.

As well as raising issues, many children and young people proposed solutions to the problems which they identified.

## 2.1 Facilities and Activities for Children and Young People

The absence of leisure and recreation facilities and activities for children and young people was the most pressing issue raised in the course of the consultations.

Young people clearly felt that facilities for them were a neglected aspect of the social fabric of our society. Access to such facilities, at no cost or reasonable cost, has not been a priority either for the public sector or the commercial sector, though several young people acknowledge the efforts made by voluntary workers and parish organisations.

### Facilities for teenagers

The 12-15 age group believed that they are particularly badly served. However, so too did young people in the 15-18 age group.

While young people wanted facilities and activities to enhance the essential quality of their lives, they were really clear that there is an intrinsic link between the lack of those facilities and a whole range of social and personal problems for teenagers. In particular, problems which then go on to manifest themselves as serious problems for communities and for society as a whole. The young people involved in this consultation repeatedly make a clear case for investment in leisure facilities as a preventive strategy for a whole range of social problems.

The following extracts are typical of the many comments on this matter:

What I strongly dislike is the fact that there is very little to entertain or occupy young people in the same age group as myself. I am 16 years old and in ..... there is very little to do in the evenings for young people between 15 and 18. A recent survey has shown that there is a high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse amongst teenagers in ..... According to many adults this is due to peer pressure, however I do not agree. I feel that being a member of this age group I should be aware of the reasons why young people resort to drugs and alcohol. In my opinion boredom is to blame. "There is nothing else to do" is a common reason that I have heard too often.



Aine, age 16

I personally think that Ireland today hasn't enough facilities for young people as they are growing up. Although we are blessed with beautiful surroundings, children need more excitement and interests. Teenagers also need places to go out to at night. From my experiences, I have seen teenagers spending all night drinking on the beach. Even in the bitter cold of winter, teenagers are forced to sit outside in the cold simply because there is nothing else to do. Perhaps something could be done about this. It may result in less accidents and underage drinking.

Annette

Young people catalogued the gaps in facilities and the ways in which these might be met. The issues and solutions varied from area to area, depending on the extent of the problem. The problem identified by young people appears to be nation-wide, although a small number of young people spoke quite positively about their own local area.

Most of the facilities which teenagers want to have were also mentioned by younger children.

They spoke of the lack of physical facilities - community centres, youth clubs, swimming pools, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, rugby and soccer pitches. Swimming and gymnastics facilities were said to be particularly neglected.

Among the many suggestions, there were proposals for skateboarding and roller blading arenas, water parks and theme parks, swimming pools and local rugby pitches.

One contributor would like to see a space reserved for children in Lansdowne Road.

Young people in rural areas argued that they were especially deprived. The absence of local transport made their situation particularly difficult.

One contributor suggested that there was a gender issue here, with girls being more deprived when it comes to leisure facilities in rural areas.

As well as needing physical facilities, young people made the linked case for more activities for their age group. They made the case for more summer activities and summer courses, discos, Youth Olympics and concerts.

The following extracts from letters and e-mails highlight the issues and solutions:

I have noticed that there are many bars, restaurants, museums etc. for adults to have a fun day out but there are no rollerblading parks or skate boarding parks for children like me to have fun in.

I would like to hear from you with details of how you are going to improve this.

Colm

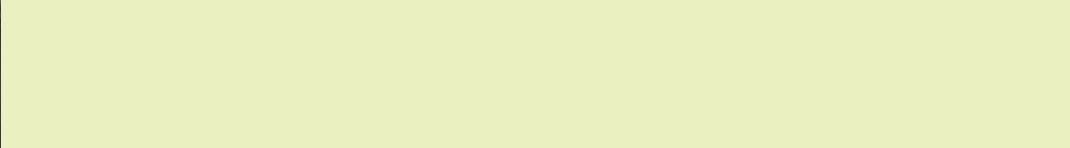
I have a skate board and every time I go out on my skateboard I always hear someone shouting 'go skate somewhere else' or 'move it or I'm calling the gardaí.' I think everybody with a skate board, roller blades and a BMX should have somewhere to skate without getting into trouble.

Stephen

I feel sorry for all the children who live far away because the small towns do not have any facilities. They boys are not too bad because they get to play football as most towns have playing pitches and also indoor games.







I think it would be nice if your Department could make some transport available at a low cost for the young people of these outlying towns, so that they can benefit from all the good facilities that will soon be available in Letterkenny.

...if your department could organise playgroups, drama groups and other activities that would bring children from deprived areas to meet with and play with young people from the better off areas.

I would like you to write to me with some of your views on these ideas.

Irene, age 13

Here in Shannon we are continuously getting harassed by security personnel, neighbours and the gardaí for skateboarding. All we are doing is practising a sport, how come people playing hurling, football or basketball are allowed to continue but we are given out to? Just because skateboarding is a minority sport does not mean we have different rights to other children our age playing their sport of choice.

Paudie, age 15

My brother and his friends are very into soccer and they started their own soccer club ....They used the GAA pitch for training, but then the GAA wouldn't let them go there anymore.... I think this is horrible because nobody uses the GAA pitch anyway. Please talk to the GAA and come to some agreement because it is many boys dream to become a famous soccer player and the GAA are ruining that dream.

Clare

Ireland has nightlife for eighteen's and over but for eighteen's and under to ten it's boring. Only drastic measures can mend this with the help of the government.

Gabrielle

I went to my first concert in March 2000, but would have gone sooner if they were held closer to my area. I think famous bands should hold concerts all over Ireland instead of just Dublin.

Maire

In this village..it is as if we are forgotten. There is absolutely nothing to do in this village....with so much potential. .... The area is so beautiful, but scarcely populated..... It sickens me to think that I will not live here in the future.. no industry or employment, no facilities....I'm fed up living in a JAR. There has to be some sort of development done to this area before it dies away.

Pat, age 17

...an idea for a youth club for 15-18 year olds in our locality....It wouldn't be called a 'youth club' ... different activities every night/evening such as soccer, basketball or table tennis...for those not interested in sport there would be an area to relax, buy coffee or soft drinks... an area to socialise with your friends and other people from your own age group from your locality....extremely comfortable with couches and cushions. The club would be open every evening and all day at the weekends. In the evening local bands could play for the young people..

4th year students

In Lansdowne Rd there should be a place where children can go and cheer on Ireland and we never get tickets.

Ross, age 11

For some young people, the absence of facilities and the state of existing facilities made for a serious deficit in their quality of life. The problem for them, living in a very deprived area, was

bound up with other problems in the area and other challenges facing the young people who lived there. One extract states:

The club is fun but it is only on a Monday night. The club is great but it might be closing down over children stealing and painting the toilets. I think this is unfair because the leaders are coming to help us and all they get it is all thrown back in their face.

Ciara

### Play areas and playgrounds

Younger children highlighted a major deficit in the provision of public playgrounds and play areas in housing estates, as well as the absence of other facilities for their age group. The problem of play space was voiced from all parts of the country. Circumstances vary, and on occasion, children spoke in very positive terms about what was provided in their area. However, the overwhelming thrust of the comments concerned the lack of play facilities.

One important issue raised by several children in relation to public playgrounds was the fact that in some areas, the amenities in parks and playgrounds had actually been removed by the local authority. When they themselves compensated, by building their own makeshift facilities in the local area, these too were taken away. This issue was not confined to one area, but was raised by children from Dublin and Cork.

The explanation may have some connection with a comment made by a contributor to the adult consultation, who suggested that local authorities were closing playgrounds on account of insurance issues.

Children and young people linked the problem of the availability of green spaces for play and the absence of play areas in housing estates, to the surge in building related to the current economic boom. While many had acknowledged the benefits of the boom, they were very clear that there is a high price to pay and that that price may be too high. They expressed serious concern about the longer term impact of building, the removal of trees, the pressure on green space and the longer term consequences for children and families. There was also comment about the lack of forward planning to take account of their needs.

Among the solutions suggested is the need for planning laws, which require that certain amenities be provided in all new housing estates.

Children want to be consulted about what happens in their local area. They want to be in a position to recommend what amenities should be available for them in their area and in their parks and playgrounds.

The following series of extracts from letters and e-mails highlight the range and strength of opinion:

Where I live the only place there was to play was the park, with swings, slides etc. But the Corporation took them all down, with no consideration for anyone but themselves. The park is now full with drug dealers.

There are so many houses going up everywhere that the builders, government and the people moving into the houses don't realise that in ten years there's going to be no trees, fields or animals and the pollution is going to be horrific.

Jenni

Please ask the government to stop knocking down our bases and treehouses. The Corporation are knocking down a tree because we made a swing in it but the only reason it is there are that there are no playgrounds.

Jane, age 9



My wish is to have obstacles in my nearest playground. There used to be obstacles there but sadly they had to be taken away.

Hannah, age 10

How can we make things better? Creating more after school activities would keep kids off the streets but in order to do this we need funding and children to advise on what they think is ‘cool’.

Muireann, age 12

Every single bit of green area in Galway is being built on and housing estates, hotels, apartments and car parks are being built there and we don’t need buildings we need children’s play areas and activities.

Susan

I live in ....., about 20km from Cork city and have an abundance of space. There are parks with swings, a rugby pitch, a soccer pitch, a swimming pool and many other facilities. I am very happy with my area, but other people in my class have no play facilities. I think if I lived in a place like that, I would go crazy.

Please make it a law that builders must provide more space for a park, and children’s facilities and supply access to transport to the nearest shop and town centre.

Timmy

The builders are only interested in cutting down trees for new houses, but they are not taking into account that each family are going to have two or three children on average and in a few years time there will be no facilities for those children.

Edel

## 2.2 The Environment

The condition of our environment attracted a very high level of comment and criticism from young people. They identified a range of environmental problems which they see as damaging the quality of life, being potentially damaging for the tourist industry, causing serious health risks, as well as posing a long term threat to the environment itself.

While many of the problems were generalised and expressed as national concerns, young people were very concerned about their own local area. For some, the poor quality of their environment was linked to other problems in their area and to problems of anti-social behaviour.

The main environmental problems identified were:

- **litter and dirt of various kinds**
- **pollution**
- **the problems as a result of building and development**

### **Litter and dirt**

The problem of litter was raised in almost all of the letters and e-mails, as well as in some of the other consultations. Children were very concerned about the look of the litter and the health consequences. Broken bottles were seen as a very big problem, especially in playgrounds.

Other problems raised included the problem of dog litter, dirty beaches and dirty swimming pools.



## Pollution

There were a great many comments about pollution. The concerns were raised about river pollution, sea pollution, the air and sea pollution from Sellafield but most especially the pollution arising from traffic.

## The problems as a result of building and development

Some of the main problems arising from building and development have already been raised - the problems of lack of green space and play areas. There were many concerns about tree felling and the non-replacement of trees. There were concerns too about major building programmes in small villages and about the building of dumps. The problem of boarded up houses was also raised.

Some of the strongest comments on this matter were made about the clash between development programmes and the need to preserve green spaces for play areas. Some of these have already been noted in the earlier section on playgrounds.

Some extracts from letters demonstrate the range of views:

I don't like wasting paper, although sometimes I have to because of the fee to recycle paper. This fee is two pounds for one black bag of paper, now say if I wanted to bring three black bags of paper to the recycling bank it would all cost six pounds and that is almost two weeks money of mine gone just because I want to recycle paper. I would love for this to change.

Anon

Tourists say that Ireland is famous for all the green grass and the fresh air. Over the past few years I have noticed a big change in this. Soon there will be no green left because of all the building going on. I used to love going for long walks in the convent if I was upset, and then the nuns couldn't afford to pay for the land and now I've nowhere to go for walks when I'm upset and I'm having a hard year.

Tiffany, age 12

I am very disappointed at the amount of housing estates and new roads being built in the country. It is ridiculous. OK so our bloodstock, livestock etc. are doing brilliant at the moment, but for how long?? It might not happen in the next 10 years or even 50, but later in the future of Ireland I bet there will be hardly any land or fields left for our animals, e.g. my family have been trying to buy an acre of land beside the house for grazing for a pony, but instead it is being sold for housing. And my Granny's field was taken as the Council used it for a road. This means I will never be able to own my own pony as there will be no land.

Lauren, age 13

I live on a farm and the government is taking our neighbours land to put factories on it. It will make an awful mess at our farm and I won't be able to cycle my bike on the road anymore because it will be too busy. I love living on a farm but sometimes the boys in my class call me farm boy, my mum says I am very lucky to live on a farm and not to take any notice of the others.

Conor, age 10

The worst thing though is the litter, everywhere is so dirty. My friends throw litter and they don't see that it is wrong. We should learn more about the environment and keeping it safe for the future.

In Dublin city centre everywhere you go you can see rubbish all over the streets. It looks terrible and it ruins the atmosphere. It is also unhygienic and dangerous to touch



the rubbish and broken glass bottles. You can get various diseases and infections just from touching the rubbish and broken bottles on the streets.

Ben, age 11

At the moment the government wants to build a square in the village. They also want to build factories and a sewage plant (YUK). It will make our village stink. Our village is quite small and it will be turned into a small town. They also want to build a retirement village. At the moment they are having a meeting at the clubhouse. Nobody wants it and they are starting a petition. But the government are just ignoring it all.

Nicola, age 12

### The solutions

Several solutions were proposed for the problem of litter and dirt. Recycling was the most popular solution. One child questioned the wisdom of making recycling so expensive that children (and presumably adults) would not find it attractive as a solution. Statistical information was given, to highlight the low level of use of recycling here, compared to Germany.

There were several proposals for recycling schemes, including a detailed proposal for a volunteer scheme in local areas.

The wider use of litter wardens and the enforcement of the litter laws was strongly recommended. There was a suggestion that offenders caught littering should have to undertake community service.

The poster campaign on approach roads to Dublin and Cork, saying ‘Welcome to Dublin/Cork...., excuse the litter’, got mixed reaction.

Other measures recommended were:

- **Tree planting and replacement of trees**
- **The closure of Sellafield**
- **Use of car pools**
- **The development of clean alternatives to petrol/diesel, such as electric cars**
- **National Walk Week to encourage people to leave their cars at home.**
- **Government campaign to make people more aware of their responsibility for their environment.**

### Who needs to act?

There was an interesting range of views as to who needs to act to solve the litter/pollution problem. These ranged along a continuum, from a call to Minister Hanafin to arrange a clean-up in a named local area, to a number of challenges to adults and to young people themselves, to take personal responsibility for their own area and for not adding to the litter problem. On balance, the problem appeared to be mainly one to be resolved by the authorities, although there were several calls for people to make their contribution to the solutions. The following extracts demonstrate this:

Everyone complains about how dirty we are and that we should do something about it but I don't see anyone trying to do anything. Also, the traffic and pollution are really bad and again, people are saying we must change the system but I doubt if any of them are willing enough to give up their car.

Megan

Now they can comment on the litter as much as they like and the politicians can promise and smile into the camera as much as they like but it is time we stop talking and start the action. Now I know you cannot stand up in the middle of nowhere and decide to dedicate the rest of your life to picking up litter, but have you heard the saying ‘every little





counts'.

Ashling, age 13

## 2.3 Respect, Responsibility and having a say

All of the issues and concerns raised by young people thus far have a bearing on the experience of childhood. The contributors to the various consultations also talked about specific aspects of their lives that have a very special bearing on the experience of childhood. These included:

- **How children and young people are viewed by adults - the question of respect**
- **Freedom and responsibility**
- **Consultation and being listened to**

### **Respect for children and young people**

The general view of the contributors was that children and young people are not held in high esteem by adults in Ireland. The view was that young people are labelled and that adults do not have a positive attitude to young people.

The lack of respect was felt very keenly by some young people who live in an area that has 'a bad name.' For these young people, they believed that they carry a particularly heavy burden of labelling - once adults hear where they are from, they automatically assume that the young people are joy riders and engage in all sorts of anti-social behaviour.

They struggle with the burden of the fact that their area is, in their view, stigmatised by the media and that this leads to difficulties in getting work or being allowed into certain facilities.

The business of how children are treated in shops was raised by a group of children who had strong, shared views about this. Their concerns about how they are treated was reinforced by similar views from individual children who stated '*young people are not trusted in shops and are watched.*'

The children and young people had several concerns:

- **The layout and design of shops does not cater for children. In particular, counters are too high for small children.**
- **They are continuously passed over by assistants, who serve adults ahead of them in the queue.**
- **They are sometimes given wrong change - their experience was that sometimes, they are deliberately short changed and their word is then challenged. One boy gave an account of how he held his ground until the shopkeeper finally gave in and returned the proper change.**

These experiences were clearly described and illustrated in pictorial form by several children.

Another child spoke about not being treated with respect and not being listened to by Gardaí.

Some direct quotes:

*Shopkeepers don't be so nasty.*

Danielle, age 9

“Not many people take kids seriously.”.



[Ireland] would also be better if adults could be nicer to children.  
Alison, age 9





Ireland would be better for grown ups to be less nasty to children.

Jamie, age 9

Not many people take kids seriously.

Anon.

And perhaps the sense of powerlessness of young people in the face of adult authority can be sensed from this comment:

Parents can punish you but you cannot punish them.

### **Respect for children and young people who are availing of services**

During the consultation with young people in care organised by the Irish Association of Young People in Care, several points were made by participants on their thoughts about respect for young people. These are best highlighted through a small number of the quotes from the young people themselves:

Staff don't ask the young person before they look through their personal belongings.

It's not right, that if a young person wants to make a phone call, that a staff member makes the call and then passes the call over to the young person.

Staff always confront you with another staff member present - staff should confront you on a one to one basis.

Staff send notes to school, for example, on the residential home's 'headed paper.' This is embarrassing and makes you different to the other children in the school.

All the children travelling around in a mini-bus, especially if there is a name or sign (logo) painted on the side, can be very embarrassing.

And an extract from a submission by a child attending a special school:

I am 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years old and I go to a special school and my mammy says I need a lot of care and attention. And I hope to see children listened to more and believed ..and for social workers to listen to us and our families and not blame my mammy and care workers.

..and for people to believe me and listen to me, not for care workers or social workers to make up their own mind, and not listen to others about me..

### **Personal freedom and responsibility**

The well being of individuals is linked to their level of freedom to take decisions about their own lives and their level of personal responsibility.

For most children, the issue of freedom and responsibility was focused on use of free time, spending and making health choices. Students in post primary schools spoke positively about the fact that they had a reasonable degree of freedom, in relation to use of free time, choosing clothes, etc. This was bound up for many with question of access to money. Those involved in part-time work saw this as a means of having some independence.

Freedom around choosing one's sexuality was also mentioned.

For younger children, the safety issue was the one which had an impact on their level of independence in their free time. They spoke about the constraint of not being allowed into town on their own and their parent's fears about attacks and kidnapping. Children living in the country were conscious of having somewhat more freedom, but in their case too, there were



growing constraints. Interestingly, some older students spoke about being glad that they did not have to carry a lot of responsibility.

This sense of the need to be able to be free to be a child, came through too from young people in care. Many of those who contributed through the Irish Association of Young People in Care consultation, were clearly struggling with the limitations on their freedom as a result of being in care, while at the same time feeling that the level of responsibility they had to carry was a burden for them. The following comments from a number of young people in care highlight the dilemma:

The need to be supported:

I have moved out of care and have started college. I'm really scared about being on my own...I was used to having a lot of people around all of the time and now I'm on my own.

You shouldn't have to leave care at 18, it should be 19.

From age 13, each evening the young person has to cook the dinner (in turn) for 4 young people and the childcare worker. This age is too early to start preparing for leaving care/caring for yourself. Children in ordinary homes don't have to cook meals for their family.

and the need to be free:

If you have a job and get paid, staff take your money off you, for safe keeping or for a holiday etc. This reduces the young person's choices and level of responsibility....You should be able to control your own money.

I'm fed up having to get the social worker's permission to do lots of things.

More money for your clothes and choices in them.

Not allowed posters on the walls.

### Consultation with children and young people

The issue of consultation, involvement in decision-making and participation was the subject of much comment from young people. It was explicitly explored in a number of the consultations arranged by organisations.

Several young people expressed appreciation about the fact the Government has asked for the views of children and young people as part of the work of the National Children's Strategy.

Children and young people identified three areas in which they believe they should be consulted and listened to:

- **Where decisions affect them directly and personally, at home and at school**
- **Where decisions are being made about local community issues and general school issues**
- **In political/national decision-making**

In the course of the consultation conducted by the Catholic Youth Council with young people, the issue of participation in key decision making was raised by the young people. Summarising the outcome, the CYC noted this as one of the common themes coming through from young people - *'the desire of young people for participation in decisions affecting them, their need to be given the opportunity to express themselves and the guarantee that they will be listened to*





*and their opinions respected.'*

In the course of a workshop organised by the National Parents Council - Primary on the broad theme of 'modern childhood and democracy in the home and school'; children in the 9-12 age group explored the right to participation in decision-making. The facilitator reported the following outcome:

The children were told about Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and asked their views on children's participation in decision-making and for examples of things they would like to have a say in at home, in school and in their community. The children felt that they do not have a sufficient say at present and that they would like to be afforded more opportunities to participate in decision-making. In stating as much, they were confident that their input could be valuable, indeed invaluable. Again, the children tended to speak in general terms, but they did provide some concrete examples of what they would like to have a say in, namely: what they wear, what the class/school rules are, what subjects they do at school, where they go on their school trip and changes in their community that would impact on the natural environment.

### **What is happening now?**

At present, young people's experience of being asked their view and being listened to was fairly negative, at home, at school, in relation to the wider community and on social and political issues.

The following observations were made during the Minister's consultation in schools:

- **Parents sometimes listen but don't take into account your opinion**
- **Parents should listen, sometimes they have no time because they are working**
- **We don't feel we have a say in the local area**
- **Our voice is not listened to at school**
- **Politicians do not listen**
- **The school council is not always listened to**
- **The Parents Council should listen -they made a decision that the students couldn't wear trousers even though the student council wants to wear trousers**
- **The Church should listen**
- **The Department of Education should listen to young people's views on the examination system...**

### **What children and young people should be consulted about**

Children and young people expressed a wish to be consulted about all the issues that affect their lives directly, at home, at school and in the communities, as well as in the wider world. In the course of the ISPCC Consultation, 14-18 year olds wanted to be consulted about growing up, violence, racism, the school curriculum, underage drinking, drug use and transport.

Similarly, when young people in schools were asked what they wish to be consulted about, they named:

- **The school curriculum both the wider curriculum and particular subjects**
- **School uniform**
- **Grants to schools**
- **The points system**
- **Work legislation affecting young people**
- **The environment**
- **Local facilities**

And emerging from the CYC consultation:

The most pressing needs seem to be the need for involvement in their community and to



have a say in what activities they can access and take part in and the need for information on issues that affect their lives, in particular factual information on drugs.

Facilitator, Donaghmede Group, CYC consultation

...the most pressing item was the issue with schools - that they had no voice and were not allowed to set up a student council.

Facilitator, Clondalkin Group2, CYC consultation

For some young people in care, the issue of consultation was a very immediate one. Their wish was to be actively engaged in the decisions that shape their lives. They stated:

I think we should be allowed to go to our own review because we can only come in at the end.

I am 15 and I am not allowed to attend all of my 'placement review meeting.' I'm just brought in at the end to hear the decisions and be asked, 'now, do you have anything to add?'

### Ways of consulting

Young people identified a range of ways in which consultation could take place, for example:

- School Councils
- Meetings in the local area
- Surveys on key issues
- Use of television
- Open meetings held by politicians and local councillors
- Community Youth Councils
- The voting age should be lowered

The young people who were consulted by the Development Education Forum for Youth took the view that young people have to be proactive themselves. They must lobby, petition, organise workshops with people in power and communicate with each other through new technology. Young people must prove that they are responsible and that they hold strong beliefs.

### Can children and young people make a worthwhile contribution?

In summarising the feedback from the Regional Forums, the ISPCC made the following overview comment on the value of young people's input:


The children and young people who participated in the four ISPCC regional Forums have clearly highlighted the importance of consulting with children. The diversity in the topics discussed by the children and young people and their openness and honesty in their approach highlights how well children can express their views. The children and young people responded very well to being consulted and approached the issues with definite ideas and thoughts. This report highlights that children have a clear idea of what they want in their lives and how they think the Government can facilitate this. This information indicates how important a process of consultation with children is in ensuring the National Children's Strategy is effective in meeting young people and children's needs.

### And the letters and e-mails:

The following extracts highlight issues raised about consultation in the letters and e-mails from young people:

Recently I came across an article on [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie) requesting views of what we, the youth think is needed in our society today. I was very interested when I read on, and am





looking forward to the outcome of the children's strategy. I really think it is a brilliant idea.

The only thing that I am confused about was that it was about the needs of children and what is best for us, but when it came down to deciding what was best, it was all left up to adults it seems. I find this very annoying in a sense, that there was no direct input from the young people in these discussions (as it did not state this in the article I read). OK, there may be people advocating on our behalf, but still the young people do not in one sense have a direct role in deciding what is best for our future.

I hope your talks go well and that you and your panel have the National Children's Strategy up and running in the near future....I also hope that in the future if you are planning something like this again, that the youth will be more active in it as we are the future of Ireland.

Darren, age 15

People should think more about children's opinions....I'm glad our Government is taking time out to listen to our opinions.

Susan, age 12

I think children in primary schools throughout Ireland would love having no uniforms. Uniforms are really annoying, mostly ties and that is why I would like that to be changed.

Adam, age 11

The only thing I would change [in Ireland] would be we would listen to our nation's children and young people much more as we are the next generation that will have to run the country. The voice of innocence can sometimes be wiser than a hundred years of experience.

Anne Marie, age 16

I think adults shouldn't make all the decisions for children, like education. Children should have a say in the way they are taught.

Jimmy, age 11

## 2.4 Health, Personal Well Being and Safety

In this section, some further strands of the feedback from children and young people on 'quality of life' issues are drawn together.

In a number of the consultation processes, children and young people had the opportunity to explore issues about childhood through artwork or other media, or to speak about their thoughts on childhood and young adulthood - what is important to them, who is important to them. A brief overview of that material is contained in this section.

Issues to do with health - both personal health and public health- were raised in many letters and e-mails, as well as issues to do with mental health and personal well being. That material is described in this section.

“more support groups for everyday problems”.



A number of young people for whom childhood and young adulthood is difficult and often very painful have offered insights into their particular experiences. Some of those experiences are reflected in this section too.



## Who is important in the lives of children and young people

In terms of personal well being and emotional support, for all young people, family and friends were the most significant people in their lives. For older children, they had some differences as to the respective place of family and friends, since a growing amount of time is being spent with friends.

For many young people living in care, or out of home, the absence of family was spoken of with evident pain. Speaking about what she liked and did not like in her life, Áine, aged 10, said about her children's home:

[What I like is] there are people to help you and there are people here for me to talk to. The worst thing is it is not a family.

The home shouldn't be located too far from your family, because otherwise you waste too much of your time getting to and from your visits to your family.

but the alternative concern:

[there should be] less pressure to see your family.

Grandparents and extended family were very important to young people. Pets were also mentioned as important and for one young person in care, not being allowed to have a pet was a disappointment.

## Health

Most of the children and young people who contributed to this consultation raised concerns about aspects of teenage health. Their main concerns were with smoking, drinking and the use of drugs.

Many young people in second level schools spoke about the numbers of students of their age group already smoking and drinking; they described having been offered drugs at an early age.

Many saw the problem as a social problem as well as a health problem, linking drinking and drug use to vandalism, young people getting into trouble with the law, as well as creating public health problems. One young person said:

Would you try to help the junkies get off the drugs, because they are sitting on the streets doing drugs. And when they go they leave the drugs there for anyone and even sometimes you would never know, it could be kids.

Sinead, age 10

In the course of the consultations conducted by the Catholic Youth Council with groups of young people in Clondalkin, Balbriggan, Tallaght and Donaghmede, the facilitators reported on the extent of the concern about drugs as follows:

The drugs issue is emerging as a huge issue, with some of the [group] members' siblings in prison on drugs related charges. There is almost no drug awareness programmes on offer in the second level schools and no sex education is available at the moment.

Young travellers attending this consultation expressed the following concerns to the facilitator:

The back of the site was used by addicts, syringes have been found on a number of occasions. The young people are very aware of the danger that these syringes can cause.



## Solutions

While a large number of the contributors felt that the provision of facilities for young people would help to address the problem of underage drinking and drug use, one young person at least was not convinced and they stated:

It is a myth to say that young people drink because there are not facilities. They will drink anyway. Drink is only a problem if you drink to excess.

And there was one proposal that the legal age for purchasing alcohol should be reduced to 16.

But a group of young people from Finglas are very clear that the influence of their youth club and their youth club leaders have been important to them in their decision to stay away from smoking, drinking and drug use. They said:

We need to stop people from taking drugs and people need to stop selling drugs. This Youth Club is telling us not to take drugs or drink or anything that you are not meant to take or drink. My friends....are all in the Youth Club and none of us drink or smoke or take drugs.

There were many proposed actions to reduce underage smoking. These include:

- **Enforcing the law about smoking on buses**
- **Raising the price of cigarettes**
- **Showing smokers models of lungs of a long-time smoker**
- **A ban on advertising**
- **Talks in schools**
- **A poster campaign**
- **Abolishing cigarette machines**

## Other health issues

Other health issues raised included teenage pregnancy, cancer, HIV, meningitis, poor diet and poor health as a result of low levels of physical fitness and the fears about genetically modified food.

## Mental and emotional health and well being

There were relatively few references to mental and emotional health. There were a number of calls for student counsellors in schools. One young person called for help and guidance for young people in the following extract:

The Government has created an Ireland to be proud of. However, I am very worried, I go to school and mix with a lot of young people every day. There are a lot of unhappy people. They do not have a fatal disease nor have their families been killed-but they are missing something. Most people make an effort and try to be nice, but a lot are hurting inside. The government, politicians and public servants are doing a fabulous job of running the country, but the quality of life of some people is quite disturbing. Maybe psychologists or music therapists could be built into the school curriculum...At the moment, the youth need some kind of help and guidance.

Evelyn, age 17

One young person wants to see support groups for young people whose difficulties are not major, but who would like some help. She said:

One thing I would like to see in Ireland would be support groups that would listen to small problems. Such as if you were lonely or upset and wanted to talk to someone but you didn't feel that your situation was important enough to go to a group such as the ISPC. I feel that there should be more support groups for everyday problems.





Lucy, age 11

Some young people who engaged in the Catholic Youth Council consultation said that they felt their mental, physical and spiritual needs were being addressed at home and that, on account of the amount of time spent at school, those needs should be met there too. They expressed the view that those needs were not being met at several levels in school - the absence of organised physical activity and the lack of a means to voice their needs because of the absence of a student council. They felt that their spiritual health was being 'suffocated by being preached to death.'

## Safety

Children and young people had a lot of concerns about their personal safety. They certainly saw Ireland as a much safer place to live than many other countries. However, this did not mean that they felt that all is well here.

For many, their personal safety was intimately bound up with problems in their area - problems of vandalism and the problems of living in a very poor environment. This note from a group of young mothers highlights the concern:

As young mothers of children under seven, we are worried about what the future holds for our kids. For example, they want to go out to play but there is nothing to let them out to. You are either letting them out to busy roads, dirty flat complexes, broken houses or older kids that lead them astray. One child has to play in an alleyway behind her house beside a busy road. Others can only play in the rubbish chutes or beside a dirty pool that has been in the flats for years.

## Road safety

There were many calls for action about road safety - more footpaths, cycle lanes, pedestrian bridges, traffic lights and traffic wardens or lollipop ladies.

Safer school buses and seat belts on school buses were also asked for.

## Safety from attack

Children were really concerned about their personal safety from attack. They expressed worry about kidnapping, people going missing and murderers released from prison. Many felt that they were not safe, walking on the street or in the park. Innocent people, they said, are being killed, robbed and beaten.

Many young people were clearly worried by media reports of violence. They would like to see more police presence in public areas.

The following extracts highlight the concerns:

Ireland is a good country to live in because you don't hear of as much attacks as you would in America. But of course that is all changing because long ago children used to be let out on the street to play and they could be out until nine but now parents are too worried because of all the attacks and kidnaps they hear about on the news.

Susan, age 12

I also think it is very dangerous for children walking to school because there are a lot of cars going around, with people asking children to get in. They bribe the children by saying 'do you like sweets, come and get into the car and I will give you some'.

(no name, primary school)

I think Ireland is a good safe place to live in as there are not people running about mad



like in some parts of America. When those boys shot their poor school mates - I think that's sick.

Diane

The town at night time is a bit unsafe, especially around the centre of the town - there are people fighting, breaking shop windows and people going about drunk. Sometimes these people are only in their teens. The town is most unsafe at night and at weekends, usually after discos and when pubs close.

Claire, age 13

I wish I could be safe on the street when I am on my own.

Leonda, age 10

## 2.5 Learning and Education

When talking about their views on Ireland as a place to live, there was a very high level of satisfaction with the education system - its quality, the quality of teaching, resources and access.

As with other facets of Irish life, however, these expressions of satisfaction did not mean that young people were completely satisfied and saw no room for change and improvement. In the case of education, there were very many comments, concerns and proposals for change.

One organisation consulted with very young children about their views of pre-school education. In the main, however, the consultations focused on issues in relation to primary and post primary schools. For them, the main areas of concern were:

- **Facilities and resources**
- **The curriculum and the content of teaching/learning**
- **Exams and exam pressure**
- **Access to education**

### Early education

Very young children (3-4 years) talked about why they like coming to play group and what they like best at play school. Their responses highlight the intrinsic value of their experience for them in terms of play, socialising and learning. The following are a small number of extracts from their comments:

#### Why do you like coming to playgroup?

#### What do you like best at playgroup?

Patrick "cause I just do and I like playing with Shane and Sean"

Eimear " I love all the toys and the dressing up clothes"

Colm " I like playing with the big blocks and the tool box and I can make a ferry"

Conor " because I like to come, I like to play with the paint and water and my  
friends, I like the sand and the dollies"

Sarah " I like making a bus out of sticking things"





Brid " because its fun"

John " 'cause I need to!"

### **Facilities and resources**

Children and young people made the case for more computers in their schools and more extensive Internet access. This need varies, as some young people were very satisfied with their level of access to technology.

The need for better playgrounds and more cheerful, decorative schools were mentioned; one child was unhappy that on account of the small school yard, children are not allowed to run at lunchtime - a shortcoming for active children.

Young people made the case for hot lunches in school and cafeterias. The need for lockers, which fit all the books and sports gear, came in for a number of mentions - linked to the concern about the weight of schoolbags. One student made a plea for better, more comfortable and healthy chairs in school - in the light of the amount of time and years that young people spend sitting in those chairs.

Being allowed to be indoors at lunchtime on cold days would make a difference; and there were some mentions of the school transport system - the case for school buses in Dublin and better school buses generally.

There were relatively few references to personnel resources. There were some calls for more counsellors, smaller classes and more than one adult in each classroom.

### **The curriculum and the content of teaching and learning**

Several aspects of curriculum at both primary and second level were raised. At primary level, the range of points included:

- PE each day
- More time for creative writing
- More time for reading
- Lessons and information about drugs, smoking and bereavement
- Sex education
- More projects where the class works together

At post primary level, the range of curriculum issues included:

- The availability of PE in sixth year
- A changed approach to the teaching of Irish
- A wider range of subjects in girls schools
- Cooking lessons for boys

In broader terms, some young people expressed concerns about the attractiveness of the second level curriculum and its relevance, especially for young people who might be inclined to leave school early. The sense of too great a focus on academic learning was raised and there was approval for new qualifications such as the Leaving Certificate Applied.

After school activities and after school support were mentioned too.

The following extracts give an indication of how these points were put forward:

I also feel that what would be helpful would be an Education Centre. Here children of all ages (but especially secondary school pupils) could go to study for several hours out of school. This would be especially for children who find their schoolwork hard. There



would be one or two adults keeping things under control. These adults could also help any children who are stuck or confused at their work. After a couple of hours they could play some games.

..many pre-teens do not attend secondary school....There is nothing there to stimulate them into staying, perhaps if there were 2 or 3 subjects that pupils really found interesting they would look forward to attending instead of waiting for the day to end.  
Muireann, 6th class

I feel that we have a necessity for lockers in our school as the weight of our school bags on our backs is extremely heavy. I have researched what damage this could do in later life and came up with some shocking results.  
Joanne, 3rd year

Irish is our native language, I would love to be able to speak Irish. It should be made more interesting as a subject and if the teachers taught it as if they wanted to rather than they had to, it would be much better.

Thank you for asking for my opinion.  
Anon.

Summing up the views of young people who took part in the Catholic Youth Council consultation, the facilitators noted:

The need for personal development to become central to our education system, so that issues such as communication skills, drugs awareness, relationships and sexuality are addressed progressively and consistently throughout school life.

In one of the consultations conducted by Barnardos with a small group of young children (6-8 years), one of the key issues reported by the facilitator was the reluctance of approximately 50% of the group to ask for help at school, if required.

### Exams and exam pressures

There was a very strong view coming from young people about examination pressure, the points system and the need for continuous assessment at post-primary level. This view came through consistently from young people in schools, through the e-mails and letters and in a number of the consultations arranged by organisations. The following extracts are typical of the views expressed:

...I think the points system is quite unfair. I work hard at school yet I probably will never get enough points to pursue my ambition.  
Sara, age 14

Also, whilst there is a very good secondary school system I think that students should be tested every year instead of two major exams every three years. I also think the points system should be changed – I think that some of the points required are just too high, even for hardworking students, never mind those who may have any difficulties.

I hope this e-mail is of some use to you when looking after the interests of children.  
No name, age 16

One of the things I dislike about Ireland (and I'm not sure what happens in other countries) but I think a lot of emphasis is put on exams. I know that I am still young and I don't do many exams in school and when I do, they aren't that important, but I still think that less pressure should be put on exams. Especially the Leaving Cert. That exam decides on your job and how you spend the rest of your life.





Anon.

And the following extract from the Catholic Youth Council consultation:

...the group spoke about the stress and amount of pressure they felt the school and their families placed on them around the Leaving Cert. They realised the importance of obtaining a good Leaving Certificate but most of them felt they would not be capable of attaining a level that they or their family are satisfied with.

Facilitator Balbriggan Group, CYC consultation

### Access to education

There were a number of comments about access to education. There were some concerns about the costs of education and a view that people who have money can do better in education. A small number spoke about problems of access to education for children with disabilities and the problem, in some areas where there are growing populations, of finding a place in secondary school. The following extracts make the points:

I would like to see more done for disabled children in Ireland....My sister is very intelligent, but when she gets bigger there is nowhere near for her to be educated. She needs 24 hour care because she is on a special diet, and needs medication very often.

Sharon, age 11

Recently, I received disappointing news that I had been refused a place in ....Community School for September 2001, even though I satisfy all the criteria for a place in the school, both in terms of living in the area and in attending one of the catchment schools. Since I am the eldest it might mean that my brother and my sister might be split up into different schools.

Anon.

Perhaps you could let the Minister for Education know how disappointed and distressing it is that I cannot be educated in my own community and with my friends.

Sorcha, age 11

I have a little Down's Syndrome brother. My mum has tried but she cannot find a suitable school. Please make one in the ..... area

Anon.

## 2.6 Social Issues and Concerns

Many social issues and concerns were raised by children and young people. The vast majority wanted to see improved conditions for people - and for children, in particular- who needed help and support. Although most of the issues raised were about social conditions in Ireland, concern was also expressed about children throughout the world whose lives were impoverished by poor conditions, poverty, wars, famines and exploitation.

The main concerns raised were:

- **Anti-social behaviour**
- **The situation of refugees, asylum seekers**
- **Homelessness and begging**
- **Third world issues**
- **Public services**

### Anti-social behaviour



Many of the concerns about anti-social behaviour have come up in earlier parts of this report, dealing with the environment, the issue of respect for children and facilities for young people.

The main problems spoken about were crime, gangs and fights, stealing, joy riding and vandalism.

For some young people, the anti-social behaviour had a very direct impact on their lives, as in the case of the young boy who cannot sleep, because of the noise from drunken young people on his road. Or the young people whose youth club may be closed down on account of vandalism.

They described their various concerns as follows:

I would like to have a better community. I would like to stop drugs and robbed cars and bikes....I can not get to sleep at night because of the drunk kids. My road is in bits. I wish it could be better. If this can't be done, then could you get us a park and a better club, because it is cold inside and the toilets are smelly and we would like more equipment.

Paul, age 13

I live in [named suburb of Cork city]. It is a very rough place. There are vandals all over the place, from age 4 to 18. If a playground was built here, it would be vandalised because people would have no respect for it....If only adults knew how bored we get with nothing to do. There is the odd disco. Its no picnic getting there, as there are druggies and drunks everywhere who hassle and terrify you. There are fields nearby but they are in bad condition. If we could fix them up we would have one more place to play. There is waste land nearby in which a playground or sports hall could be built.

Jason

Our school is being used as a hangout place for past pupils, we have made a flower bed and they have pulled the flowers out and destroyed our window boxes..writing was all over the school where we had painted pictures which mean a lot to us.

Ciara

### **The situation of refugees and asylum seekers**

There were very many observations about the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland. There was also comment on the broader issue of tolerance for all people of different races. One interesting observation was the suggestion that there is tolerance between children, but not between adults.

In the main, there was concern for refugees and asylum seekers and support for any actions by Government that would help them. However, as in the wider population, there was a mix of views. Some contributors strongly condemned the idea of allowing refugees and asylum seekers into Ireland, while others welcomed them. There were general views about tolerance and mutual respect for all:

I also don't like some people's attitude towards black people, they are just the same as us. My best friend Lennel is black and my friend Katherine is too.

Anon.

It would be better if Ireland cut down on racism and had better opportunities for travellers and black people.

Louise et al, age 12

I think Ireland would be a better place if we got all the refugees and black people out, because we have enough problems without them getting in.

Susan



One thing that really annoys me is that Ireland are taking in refugees and housing them but they can't even house their own people. I don't have anything against refugees but I simply can't understand it.

Sarah, age 12

I think that by bringing more foreign people over to Ireland it adds to our history. The bad thing is that people are discriminating against these people because of colour, race or religion. I think it is a good thing there are more Afro/Celtic workshops for kids and adults, but there needs to be more effort to let refugees have more status in Ireland.

Anon.

...my sister met a refugee that was very rude for example. She was in McDonalds and a 13 or 14 year old refugee approached her and asked her for money. When she refused because she had just enough money for her lunch, he verbally assaulted her. I have nothing against them, but my sister was scared by the experience.

Andrew

I don't mind refugees coming into this country, but languages are making them very distant in our relationship with them. Some of them could be doctors or lawyers for all we know. ...But the Government are at least trying to improve by putting them up in hostels etc. until they get a job or a life here. Even the hotel near me is being turned into a hostel for refugees. I am glad to see they are being brought off the streets and are being given another chance in life.

Thomas

I think the country is overrun with refugees. OK that might have been the right thing to do at the time, but the war is over and they still come to our country. The state provides them with accommodation, allows them to draw the dole which I think is about £70 pounds a week. They go out and sell the Big Issue and beg. Now there are many Irish people drawing the dole but you don't see them on the streets begging. I think they should be told to get a job or get out.

Colm

The amount of homeless people on our streets is disgraceful and it has not been helped by the number of refugees on our streets. There have been Irish people living on the streets for years and the refugees have only been here for a couple of months and the Government are already building places for them to live.

Colm

### Homelessness and begging

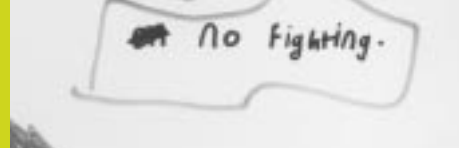
While there were mixed views about how refugees and asylum seekers should be treated in Ireland, there was no doubt at all among young people about the response that we must make to people who are homeless or begging. All of those who raised this issue were sympathetic to the plight of homeless people and wanted to make the case for more refuges, more houses, 'fair play' and more money for homeless people. It was noteworthy that some children who, in earlier parts of their letter had described their own very poor living conditions, went on to talk about their concerns for homeless people.

The following comments underline the points made:

When ever I go to the city, all I see lately is people begging for money. Some might have no socks or shoes on them, and they'll sit in the stinging cold and you'd feel so sorry for them but you couldn't give money out to them all. I think only five should be allowed out at a time..If they took turns a different five every day.

Suzie





It would be great if we had much less homeless people. Every time I see a homeless person I feel so sorry. I give them money. One time I gave one some money but he just gave it back. At the time I thought he was mad.

Sean

I think that the Government should spend more money on the homeless people in Ireland than they do on refugees because the homeless here are from our own Country.

Anon.

### Third world issues

The situation of children in Third World countries was raised by many contributors. Young people attending the consultation forum organised by the Development Education Forum for Youth raised both Third World issues and their concerns for children in the developed world generally.

Their concerns for children in Third World countries included famine, the threat of nuclear arms, the lack of education and the absence of information on human rights. Their major concerns over corrupt and non-representative governments, poverty, debt, war and violence were also raised, as well as particular concerns such as arranged marriages for young people.

Internationally, this group raised the problems of AIDs, racism of both culture and religion and threats to the environment.

### Public services

Some public services attracted comment from children. The main issues raised were public transport, childcare, income support, health services and housing.

While the comments were often general, on occasion they came from young people who were drawing attention to their own experience of these services.

With regard to public transport, there was quite a lot of comment about overcrowded DART trains. One child described his frightening experience of being crushed by adults on the train and thought that there should be a carriage reserved for children.

Poor transport in rural areas was the other main subject of complaint.

Young people spoke about the need for cheaper and more accessible childcare, especially for parents on low incomes. One group felt that all employees should have access to the 'term-time' scheme used by civil servants, who may take time off while their children are on summer holidays, with a pro-rata reduction in income.

There were a number of proposals that children themselves should have income support directly paid to them - about ten to twelve pounds per week. Improved income for single parents and for parents of children with long term illness was also proposed.

Help for parents of children with a disability was identified as a need, as well as improved hospital services and a reduction in waiting lists.

Some of the more personally experienced service needs are to be found in the following extracts:

My Mammy is a single parent and she wants a part time job. She has very little money.  
Seamus





My mammy takes me for counselling and we get two buses and travelled a long way...we could be cold, wet but we still get two buses there and two buses back. My mammy has no help and I have brothers that my mammy has to look after. The Government and Health Board needs to do a bit more for children like me and maybe give me and my family a holiday or more help from the Health Board or other services...

Anon.

And on poverty the following statements were made:

However, one thing which I think could be improved is the price to take part in these activities. Children who live in families with a low income are very unfortunate. Most activities are highly expensive to be part of. For example, Irish dancing costs approximately two pounds per week. On top of that is the cost of dancing shoes, costumes etc.

At the end of the day you can choose a lot of things in life but you cannot choose a family and it is a shame children must suffer because their family does not have a large income.  
Erica

## 2.7 The Experience of being a Traveller, of Homelessness, of being in Care

While many young people were deeply concerned about homelessness, they were in the happy position of not having direct experience of this.

In this section, the experiences of being a Traveller, of homelessness and of being in care are recorded through the young people's own stories and their own words.

### Being a Traveller

A small number of children who are members of the travelling community and live on official halting sites and housing schemes in the Dublin area gave their views on their experience of childhood. They all liked living on the sites but would have liked more leisure facilities. They enjoyed travelling and felt they didn't do enough travelling. They said:

I would like a big swimming pool, swings and slides on our site. More things to play on.

I prefer travelling, it's too boring in a house.

All the children spoke about their experience of school. Only one of the children interviewed attended secondary school; some attended training centres for Travellers. The children spoke about how they played with settled children in school but not at home and felt settled children had a lot more freedom socially than Traveller children. The children disliked being called names because they were Travellers. They felt settled people called them names because they were different, they talked differently and lived a different type of life. The following extracts demonstrates these problems:

The children call us knackers, b\*\*\*\*\*s, p\*\*\*\*\*s and all and we tell [ --- ] and nothing is done. If we called them names they'd tell [ --- ] and we'd get suspended.

The settled people in boxing are nicer than the settled in school. They call us names



# Chapter3

What the Children and Young  
People Said....



because they're jealous of us.

I want to learn. My Mam and Dad never learned. They went to school when they were younger but were just given pen and paper like this to draw on. They were never really taught.

They are nicer people in England. They don't call us knackers and they ask us to play football and don't call us names.



Several children said they would like to be treated equally, as demonstrated by the following extract:

I would like settled people to agree with us, not agree with us but...I'd like to be treated equally.

All the children were proud to be Travellers and one child said:

We play with settled children in school. Sometimes they ask me about being a Traveller. I tell them, I do. I'm not ashamed of being a Traveller.

### Being homeless

A small number of young people wrote in detail about the experience of being homeless. The stories of some young people here were submitted through the careworker in their shelters. In the following extract, one of those careworkers drew attention to their efforts to remain positive and hopeful, in spite of their experiences:

Not only have they been deprived of their most basic rights but they have been deprived of the right to express their own personality and to be at ease with themselves. Their days consist of walking from place to place just to fill basic requirements, while all the time putting on a brave face and clinging to the small bit of pride and hope they have left.

These children have witnessed and experienced feelings and situations you or I might have nightmares about. Despite what they have been through, they remain beautiful, bright people who are a joy to be around.

V's story:

...

I have nothing to do and nowhere to go all day-I get bored out of my head, get fed up with life, take drugs to forget my problems and when that doesn't work you try to kill yourself.

...

All I'm looking for is a flat and some help with money to start off. Then I will be able to go back to hairdressing and also do a computer course. The Government has lots of money to spend on things like the Millennium Bridge, Fireworks and the Smithfield Tower but they can't spare a small amount just to give me a chance !!!!!

...

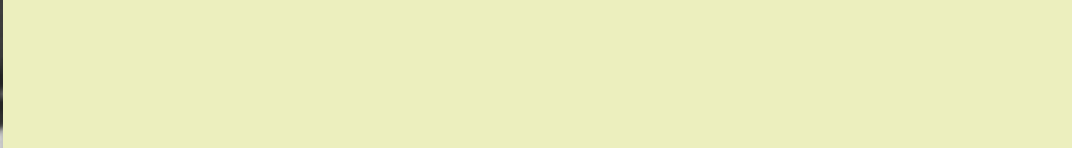
I just need a chance in life, a chance to show people who I really am and to reach my potential, a chance to have a nice life - a chance is not too much to ask for!

L's story:

I started going through [named service] about a year ago I got kicked out of my house because of drugs. I started taking heroin when I was 15 and was strung out when I was 16. I am now 18 and am going to a clinic since December. At the start it was hard, I was using all the time and it was too tempting. I was living with my aunt for a while, she tries her best all the time to help me but I don't try hard enough. She doesn't ask much of me, just to stay away from drugs. At the moment I am off it and everyone is telling me I look great. If I stay away from drugs long enough, I am going to see if my aunt will take me back but that is a big 'I' and a big 'F.' All I have to say is if you are only starting on gear, stay away from it because once it gets a hold of you, your f\*\*\*\*d.

B's story:

I hate the streets. It's not very nice on the streets. It's cold and lonely and you meet all





# Part 2

**Consultation with adults and organisations**

sorts of people. It's not where I want to be. I want a home but I can't get one. I have nothing to look forward to and nothing to do. I leave[named service] at 9.30 a.m. I wander the streets until I find something to do and at 8.00 p.m. I go back to...and wait for a social worker to put me in a hostel for the night. At least there is ....because in ....you can wait for a social worker and get some warm food. But again the same thing all over again, I leave at 9.30 a.m.

I am on the streets because my mum died last year and my dad sent me to England to live with my big sister for a few months, until he sorted his head out. Three months later, my sister sent me back to my dad. But I could not wait with him because he is an alcoholic. So that's my story.

Anonymous:

Dublin is a great place to live but it is terrible that there are so many homeless people in Dublin.

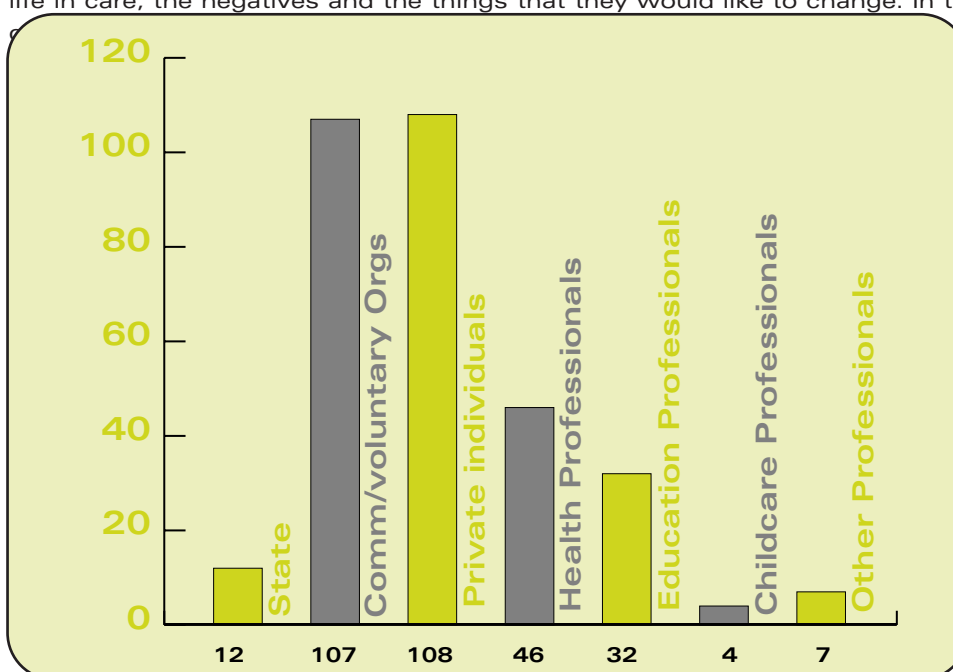
I'm homeless and it is not nice at all we have places to go during the day but some people don't like going to them and have to walk around. I've been homeless about three months now and I've seen people been left out every night and its not nice. They have to sleep at the four courts and at the pillars. I think that you should help more buy some buildings and turn them in to hostels so that young people have some where to sleep at night. If I am ever left out I will sue them and I won't think twice about it. So the health board will have a lawsuit on their hands. And the buses need to be cleaned because they are so dirty and smelly and too expensive.

Anonymous:

I think the way the hostels are arranged is terrible. Most times there mightn't be enough places and if there isn't a place they leave you on the street which is worse for girls because they could get raped or kidnapped or even killed. In most places this could happen to the fellas as well. There are more hostels for foreigners than there are for Irish people.

## Being in care

Sources of Adult Submissions



positive aspects of life in care, the negatives and the things that they would like to change. In the course of a and young people wishes for emerged when g. This list, entitled

## 2.8 And the Future.....

In the course of a number of the consultations, children and young people spoke about what they thought life might be like in 2010. The following is a selection of their ideas about the future. It contains a 'mix' of the practical and the imaginative, the positive and the (mostly) negative. A point noted by one facilitator was that, whatever their views about the world, the young people were all very positive about their own futures....

Robots and computers will do everything and people will be very lazy.

People will meet only for pleasure.

There will be lots more population.

More disasters.

Pollution might get out of hand or it might improve.

Some places will be even dirtier than now with lots more murder and drugs.

Children will be living with their parents when they're old as houses will be too expensive.

No space left to play.

Skyscrapers.

There won't be much emphasis on reading or play, there will be more emphasis on videos and computer games.

Everyone will want to make as much money as possible as quickly as possible.

Family values will not be what they used to be.

Going on holidays to the moon.

Having aliens as friends.

It won't be as nice, because we won't be children any more and won't be able to play games.



# What the children and young people said....

"Children need a fun childhood because if they don't their whole life will be miserable and I would like a park."

"I think it would be good if we had a National Children's Day, where children have a really fun day at school, like play games and everything and get sweeties and get the special treatment just like mums on Mothers Day."

"Thank you for asking for my opinion."

"I think adults shouldn't make all the decisions for children, like education. Children should have a say in the way they are taught."

"Another thing about Ireland is children have equal rights and everyone pays attention to us and most of us are lucky to have kind, loving parents and we are allowed to enjoy our childhood and not have to get out and get jobs for measly wage."

"Despite all the cons I love Ireland and would never want to live anywhere else."

"I would like to hear from you with details of how you are going to improve this."

"We are a first year CSPE class and we are studying children's rights. We have discovered through our research that Ireland has no national policy on children. We as 13 year old young adults are quite concerned and disappointed about this issue."

"I would like you to write to me with some of your views on these ideas."

"People should think more about children's opinions....I'm glad our Government is taking time out to listen to our opinions."

"Ceapaim má athchúrsáilann daoine a n-éadaí, plaisteach, gloine agus páipéir beidh an t-aer níos soiléire."

"In order for change you need to work and spend a lot of time at it, but I believe that if you want it bad enough you can always achieve your goal."

"Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and best of luck in your long political years ahead. Always remember, Governments should do what is right for Ireland and not what makes their party popular. Feel free to contact me to discuss anything I have written."

"I live in ....., Co. Wicklow and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. There isn't a lot to do in ..... but my friends and I have a good laugh."

"I am so sorry to be writing to you, I am sure you have more important letters to read and reply to. But this is bugging me"

"I think there should be more beds in hospitals, more nurses and more churches all around the country, more doctors, no wars, no famine, more foster homes and more foster parents, no rapers, no killers, more money for sick and poor people, no drugs, no alcoholics on the streets, more policemen and police women and more prisons".

"Thank you for your time."

"I would like to have a better community. I would like to stop drugs and robbed cars and bikes....I can not get to sleep at night because of the drunk kids. My road is in bits. I wish it could be better. If this can't be done, then could you get us a park and a better club, because it is cold inside and the toilets are smelly and we would like more equipment."

"Bá chóir dóibh níos mó aiteanna a dhéanamh chun spóirt agus rudaí eile a dhéanamh."

"I wish I could be safe on the street when I am on my own"

"I want that every child is loved like I am loved"

"The Government has created an Ireland to be proud of. However, I am very worried, I go to school and mix with a lot of young people every day. There are a lot of unhappy people. They do not have a fatal disease nor have their families been killed, but they are missing something. Most people make an effort and try to be nice, but a lot are hurting inside."

"The Government, politicians and public servants are doing a fabulous job of running the country, but the quality of life of some people is quite disturbing. Maybe psychologists or music therapists could be built into the school curriculum...At the moment, the youth need some kind of help and guidance."

" It would be good if the parents were nicer."

" Shopkeepers don't be so nasty."

"The boom of Ireland's is (although the cause of great worry at the moment) a benefit to many people. The majority of people are getting richer at the moment. The reason for this, in my opinion, is that the majority of people in Ireland are 'middle' class; a term which I don't like using, but as it is one which most people are familiar with, I thought it the best one to use. The middle and higher classes are the ones benefiting from Ireland's boom. This brings rise to the fear that Ireland's rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer."

"If this is what a boom in the economy does to a country, is it really such a good thing?"

"The only thing I would change [in Ireland] would be that we would listen to our nation's children and young people much more, as we are the next generation that will have to run the country. The voice of innocence can sometimes be wiser than a hundred years of experience."

Bheadh sé níos fearr dá gcuirfeadh siad níos mó boscaí bruscar gach áit.

# Overview of the Process

The call for submissions was placed in newspapers in November 1999 and again in January 2000 and was placed on the Department of Health and Children web site.

Those making submissions were asked to organise their material around the following set of questions:

## **Q.1. Towards 2010**

What are the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years?

## **Q.2. Provision of services and supports for children and young people**

What works well and why? How should these be developed over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?

## **Q.3. Delivery of services and supports for children and young people**

What works well and why? What changes would improve service delivery over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?

## **The response to the call for submissions**

Three hundred and sixteen submissions were received, ranging from hand written letters to substantial documents, many of which were supplemented with detailed policy statements about aspects of children's well being.

Private individuals accounted for 34% of submissions, as did service providing organisations, including community development groups and representative bodies. Professional personnel in the health, child care, education and related fields constituted 28% of contributors. State bodies accounted for 4%.

# Chapter 4

## Opportunities and Challenges facing Children and Young People

### Introduction

This chapter draws out the main themes, which emerged from the submissions in answer to the question:

What are the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years?

The material which was presented was very rich and provides extremely interesting 'snapshots' of how Irish society is being perceived by a wide variety of groups and individuals. Some of the submissions drew heavily on existing research and other sources, while most seemed to have been written from a more 'subjective' viewpoint. What is particularly striking about the overall pictures which emerged is the extent of the range of perceptions along an optimistic/pessimistic continuum. Where a submission fell on this overall continuum seemed to be very much dependant on whether or not it related to either a disadvantaged area or a marginalised or socially excluded group within society.

Part 1 and Part 2 of the chapter will set out the main opportunities and challenges which were identified. Part 3 will draw on material which was more analytical and which looked at the relationship between the opportunities and challenges.

## The content of the report

### Chapter 4: Opportunities and challenges facing children and young people

This section describes the material on the range of opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years. The connections made in the submissions between the challenges and opportunities is also discussed.

This section outlines the material in the submissions dealing with the policy and service infrastructures that support provisions for children. The main areas covered are policy development, planning and priority setting and co-ordination at national and local level. Legislative proposals are described together with material on research, evaluation and quality standards.

This is the biggest section of the report, containing the extensive material about the kinds of responses that are needed to meet a wide range of children's needs. The main areas covered are children's health and well being, children's learning and the supports needed by children who are marginalised or who have a disability. The material also deals with the needs of young people in the areas of play, recreation and development. Comments on the support needed for the place of the child as active citizen is dealt with in this section.

Material dealing with the ways in which families need to be supported in their task as caregivers is contained in this section. The main issues raised are childcare, supports for families, for parenting and for communities. Issues concerning professional and staff support are also dealt with in this section.

# Overview of the submissions

## **The broad content**

All of the submissions addressed some aspect of children's needs and children's well being. The main focus was on children's health, learning and education, children's participation as active citizens and children's informal learning, play and recreation. The needs of children living in poverty or experiencing some form of disadvantage had a very strong emphasis.

Family and community support systems for children were addressed and included a focus on childcare. Staffing levels, training and qualifications of personnel constituted another significant strand in the material.

The area of policy co-ordination, the removal of fragmented systems of service and the devolution of services to local community level attracted a high level of comment.

## **Focus of the submissions**

The majority of submissions had a very heavy focus on service inputs and service delivery, with many staying with the particular aspect of service in which they were directly involved. This resulted in an emphasis on those groups of children and families who are more likely to be in direct receipt of services - children and families who are disadvantaged and marginalised, children with disabilities and children who are ill. Many contributors were keen to emphasise that their concern was for all children, though they had special concerns for children facing poverty or other forms of disadvantage.

## **Some themes about children, their needs and issues**

### **A new focus on children's quality of life, their life experience and their experience of services.**

Positive personal experiences of health services, schooling and other services, were seen as central to children's well being and development. So, service delivery must respond to a wide range of needs and capacities and must find out from children how they experience services, as part of essential evaluation and quality control. The child's right to a quality of life is underscored through the emphasis on importance of play, cultural and aesthetic development and safety. The removal of barriers to a good quality of life for all children, especially poverty, child abuse and unequal access to support are central themes.

The 'quality of life' emphasis was expressed in this extract:

Children are not just consumers of services; they also need genuine opportunities to relax, have fun, exercise their imagination and cultivate a sense of the aesthetic. The quality of children's experience growing up has developmental implications for the individual, shaping their destiny in different ways. But the quality of children's experience, collectively, also has economic, social and cultural implications for the quality of life in society generally. If we want to produce citizens and people who are adaptable, flexible, sociable, active, compassionate and creative, then we have to be concerned with the quality of experiences in childhood in which these qualities are laid down.

### **The child as active citizen**

There was a consistent focus on the many dimensions of children's rights and their entitlement to the status of partner in the planning, delivery and evaluation of service. In parallel, the submissions acknowledged the need for the structures and cultural shifts needed to

accommodate the place of the child as active citizen and the skills needed by both children and adults for this new relationship.

### **Some themes about families and communities**

#### **Supporting the child within the framework of the family and the local community**

The submissions addressed the need for universal forms of support for family and, in particular, for parenting, with added measures for marginalised and vulnerable families. Local, community based support systems and resources were prioritised, which are planned and delivered in partnership and consultation with local people, especially young people themselves. Local communities should be empowered to have ownership of and responsibility for shaping services. There was a strong emphasis on devolved and integrated services, which are experienced by families as a seamless service.

### **Some themes about policy and service delivery**

#### **Co-ordination, integration and coherence**

One of the strong themes was the need for co-ordinated and integrated approaches to addressing children's needs through policy co-ordination, interdepartmental and interagency working. This must be supported by coherent, integrated structures and systematic removal of overlaps, gaps and fragmentation in policy and service delivery.

#### **A 'whole-community' approach**

Needs should be met in a way which does not stigmatise or marginalise particular children or particular communities. In the long run, a strategic commitment to prevention will serve to reduce the extent of crisis interventions and will ultimately be less costly as well as genuinely inclusive of all the children and families in any community.

### **The expectations for the National Children's Strategy**

There was a universally warm welcome for the National Children's Strategy and praise for Government for having taken this challenging initiative, as demonstrated in the following extract:

The development of the National Children's Strategy presents a unique opportunity for consultation and strategic policy development on all aspects of lives of children and young people. The inevitably complex executive and administrative issues associated with this process must not overlook the significance of this opportunity.

There was a wide range of expectations for what the Strategy will contain and achieve. The range of expectations span specific strategies for areas such as the arts, statutory/voluntary co-ordination in youth services and a children's rights strategy.

In addition, there are expectations that the Strategy will set some very specific targets for areas such as the time scale for eliminating child poverty, youth homelessness and the setting up of a network of family resource centres.

At a different level, there is an expectation that the Strategy will set out a broad vision for children in Irish society. One of the views about that vision is expressed in this extract:

Although the Strategy should advocate equality of opportunity and a universal adherence to high quality service provision, a rigid and standardised vision of the desirable

developmental pathway for all children should be avoided. Children's differences should be celebrated and given scope to flourish whether they be ethnic differences, religious differences, differences of talent and preferences.

In the main, the contributors who comment on the scope of the Strategy expect that it will be a Strategy for all children and young people (up to eighteen years), but with a particular focus on the situation of children who are disadvantaged.

### **Developing and implementing the Strategy**

There is an expectation of wide ranging and ongoing consultation in the development of the Strategy and in the course of its implementation. Consultation with children and the building of structures for that consultation is central to the process.

Legislation, policies and resources must be put in place to make the Strategy a reality. There are calls for funding and legislation to underpin the proposals in the Strategy. For example:

While we welcome the advent of a National Strategy, we want to emphasise that the Strategy will be a paper exercise unless appropriate legislation and State policies are put in place and adequate funding made available to provide integrated, community-based services and development opportunities for children and their families.

The case is made for an ongoing communications strategy about progress towards the goals of the Strategy, as well as formal mechanisms for evaluation, reporting and review.



## 4.1 Opportunities

The main opportunities for children and young people identified in the submissions are presented here. Observations and comments on some of these opportunities are also highlighted, using direct extracts where appropriate.

**Table 1**

### Education

There were far more references to opportunities in education than to any other area of life. The aspects which were most often highlighted included:

- Increased focus on early and pre-school education
- Developments in relation to curricula at both primary and post-primary levels
- Easier access to education at all levels
- More flexibility in relation to education
- Increased awareness of the need for a wide range of educational opportunities for children of all ages and abilities
- Increased emphasis on flexible and lifelong learning
- Improvements in relation to educational provision for children and young people with disabilities

On the subject of improvements in relation to educational provision for people with disabilities, the following extract, concerned with opportunities for those with visual impairment, was quite typical:

Segregation or rather non-segregation is the greatest opportunity and challenge facing blind children today. New technology enables access to the printed word through electronic media and optical recognition. With the provision of equipment and non-teaching assistance, integration in mainstream schooling for the academic life of the child is a reality. Social acceptance and understanding of blindness is improving. The built environment is becoming safer for blind children to be mobile in. Children can, if they wish live with their families and are not required to become resident at a 'Special

School'.

### **Economic prosperity**

The highly successful state of the Irish economy was identified in many of the submissions as opening up opportunities for children and young people. One group wrote:

In the current time of increased employment and the so-called Celtic Tiger, opportunities for most children and young people have never been higher. These opportunities include: near full employment, new careers in modern technological industries, the opportunity to return to education as mature students and the provision of lifelong learning. Increased material wealth enables many young people to avail of opportunities and experiences in leisure such as foreign travel that were unheard of to previous generations.

It was also stressed that the present economic prosperity provides opportunities to work on the elimination of poverty and exclusion, as the following extract demonstrates:

The National Children's Strategy is being framed at a time of great change and great opportunity. Unprecedented economic success is now providing resources to address long-rooted problems. Policies that were only previously aspirations can now become a reality, in particular the eradication of child poverty. In a climate of educational opportunity and almost full employment, students who emerge from childhood having successfully completed their education now have a well grounded expectation that they will find employment in Ireland and make a successful transition into economic independence and adulthood.

While sizeable groups have been largely left behind by the general growth in prosperity, the public finances can now permit an all out attack on the causes of poverty and exclusion. There are now funds to address the specific problems of groups like children with disabilities, early school leavers and children leaving care.

### **Employment**

Many submissions highlighted the point that children and young people of today can look forward to far greater employment opportunities than many previous generations. There tended to be relatively little elaboration around this general point and it was interesting to note that only one or two submissions made reference to the decreased need for emigration. The main aspects of employment opportunities which were stressed included:

- **Availability of well paid employment**
- **More varied and wide-ranging choice of career**
- **Greater employment opportunities for people with disabilities**

### **Health**

Improvements in the area of health were identified as being highly important, especially by a number of health professionals and health organisations. The key points made included:

- **Increased survival rates of babies**
- **Increased survival rates of children undergoing organ transplants**
- **Early detection of disabilities**
- **Increased awareness of a holistic approach to health status**
- **Advances in medical technology/treatments**
- **Development of multidisciplinary teams for patient care**
- **Increased opportunities to have good oral health**
- **Increased appreciation of the role of nutrition in medicine**
- **Development of effective health campaigns which enhance children's health**

## Information technology

There were many references throughout the submissions to the growing importance of information technology in Irish society and the world generally and the opportunities that this is opening up for children and young people. Crucially too, technology was identified as having a major role to play in improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. For example, it was stated in one submission that:

Proficiency with technology can allow people (including children) to be treated on an equal basis with the so-called "normal" population. The introduction of a technological society can therefore be a great leveler for those with disabilities.

## Acknowledgement of children's rights

The main points which were made in relation to the growing acknowledgement of children's rights, in the context of providing opportunities over the next ten years, can be summarised as follows:

- Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a very positive step and provides an excellent basis for future development
- Irish children could achieve the status offered by the UN Convention if legal and constitutional changes were made
- Children are becoming more aware of their rights
- Children's rights and needs are more visible and recognised

## Growing up in a multicultural society

There were some very strong references within the body of submissions to the point that the developing multiculturalism of Irish society should be viewed in a very positive way. The following extract goes a long way towards capturing the views which were put forward in this regard:

Given that Ireland, in line with our European neighbours, is becoming a multicultural society, refugee children are ideally placed to enrich our society culturally, economically and socially. Refugee children and their families often bring a host of skills and talents, (including languages and professions). In most cases they have a strong desire to 'get on' in the new society and to integrate as much as possible and to be able to contribute to their adopted country. Their very presence also assists our society to modernise, in the sense that they bring new ideas and perspectives, which can challenge what has been an essentially homogenous and insular culture.

## Concluding comment

This section has only given a flavour of the vast amount of comment about the opportunities facing children and young people over the next ten years. In an analysis of any set of submissions, there are always a few which contain points that one tends never to forget. From this present set, there were two that were striking in terms of their level of humanity. The first was from a small organisation and included the following section:

The opportunities are in the explosion of knowledge, the advent of the global village, the money to invest in education, the opportunity to follow their dreams beyond the needs to just survive.

The second submission which stood out was among the few sent in by 'ordinary individuals', in this case a grandfather. The warmth of the submission certainly highlighted the opportunities available to children who are fortunate enough to experience the companionship and love of caring grandparents:

I write as a grandfather who is enjoying the frequent company of grandchildren and who remembers the joys and difficulties of childhood..

Most children have a good natural capacity to learn languages from an early age – certainly from age three onwards. I speak Irish on a daily basis with my youngest grandchild (now aged 5 years and 7 months) and she has a very good understanding of the basic essentials of communication through Irish. The everyday language of her environment is English. I also give her access to tapes (such as "Rabhlaí, Rabhlaí") and to CDs (such as Multimedias "Learn Irish") and read her stories in Irish. She has no difficulty understanding the stories from the third class Irish textbook that her mother used in primary school and she enjoys hearing them. She also enjoys Softkeys CD "Let's Learn Spanish", as she attempts her third language.

## 4. 2 Challenges

There was much more material in the submissions relating to the challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years than there was on the perceived opportunities. The data on challenges was very wide-ranging indeed and difficult to categorise in a systematic way. The hierarchical listing which follows presents the main issues which were raised.

**Table 2**

The first 12 areas on the list received significantly more attention than the remainder. Challenges involving education were mentioned far more than those in any of the other areas. The areas of poverty, marginalisation and disadvantage tended to underpin very much of what was written in relation to the other topics.

The remainder of this section will highlight some of the key themes and issues that were raised

especially within categories 1-10 in Table 2.

### Education

There were approximately 60 references to challenges in the area of education and these covered a wide range of topics. Those which were most frequently mentioned included early school leaving, literacy problems, academic pressure on adolescents and access to mainstream education for students with disabilities. The difficulties of combining education with part-time work and the scarcity of pre-school places were also seen as significant challenges.

The following extract from one of the submissions that focused heavily on education captures many of the key points that were raised in relation to challenges in this area:

The current education system contributes to promoting competitive individualism. This is sometimes at the expense of the greater good. There is a serious challenge to create a more caring society with a greater emphasis on co-operation rather than competition...

The education system and social partners will have to ensure that literacy problems are addressed. Other problems; financial, social, educational must also be tackled to ensure that young people will avail of educational opportunities. There is a need to develop self-motivation among young people...

The challenge of lifelong learning must be met at a variety of levels: school, home, community etc. In some cases, this means a cultural shift in attitudes and work practices ...

### Changing family structures

The point that family structures are undergoing major changes in Irish society was highlighted in many of the submissions. Particular attention was drawn, for example, to marital breakdown, separation and divorce, one-parent families and reconstituted or blended families. The advent of multiple families and the loss of support from extended families were also raised as significant challenges.

The following extract, from an association in the educational field, provides a good example of the type and level of difficulties which children and young people experience around these changes:

Family difficulties and separations cause pain, disruption, fear and anger to children and young people. The removal of security and of joint parental presence, love and support can be a source of major upheaval for children. Schools see children suffering as a result of difficult or changed domestic situations. The breakdown of marriage and the (sometimes frequent) interchange of 'partners' can be disturbing for children who lose their sense of belonging and can be faced with stark choices at an early age. Children and young people who have to share their homes with families of 'partners' can become resentful and disturbed. This can affect their personalities and their developments. Inconsistencies and loss of certainties can leave young people floundering, unsure of what to do or who to turn to. They can seek escape from hurt and from reality in substance abuse and in a peer culture, which can be destructive.

### Complexity and changing values and mores in society

It was stressed within many of the submissions that Irish society has become much more complex in recent decades and that there has been a major shift in accepted values and norms. The types of changes that were most frequently identified were:

- The demise of traditional society
- Increasing pace of life
- Greater urbanisation

# Chapter5

## Policy and Service Delivery Structures

### Introduction

Many contributors addressed strategic issues concerning the way in which policies and services are planned and delivered and the bearing, which these structures have on children's lives and their life experience.

The scope and quality of policy development, administration and administrative structures is not seen as a distant concern, of interest only to service providers. Rather, they are seen as a set of systems whose culture, philosophy, value systems and quality impact strongly, if indirectly, on the life experience of children and families.

The following are the aspects of policy and service delivery which attracted most attention in the submissions:

- Policy development, planning and priorities
- Co-ordination in policy making and service provision
- Legislative issues
- Research, evaluation and service quality issues

- Decline in the influence of the church
- Decreasing religious belief and practice
- Increasing materialism

### **Drug abuse**

Although drug abuse was listed as a key challenge in many of the submissions, there tended to be little or no elaboration on the topic. The issue of substance abuse tended to be portrayed as the result of other pressures in the lives of children and young people. In this regard, peer pressure was noted as being of particular significance.

### **Disability issues**

The submissions that dealt with issues relating to disabilities tended to come from organisations involved with particular disabling conditions. Consequently, some of the points made were very specific. For example, one group representing people with visual impairments noted that there are major problems around provision in State examinations for young people who are visually impaired or blind.

More general challenges associated with disability, which were highlighted included:

- Need for support for all concerned when a child is diagnosed with a disability
- Need for clarity of words used around disability
- Difficulties in acquiring information on entitlements
- Problems with access and mobility

### **Multiculturalism**

The fact that Ireland is fast becoming a much more multicultural society was underlined in very many of the submissions and there was a good deal of comment about the challenges which this presents both to Irish children and young people and to refugee children and families.

The submissions which addressed the issue of multiculturalism from the perspective of Irish people tended to share the view that the main challenge lies in developing a much more tolerant attitude amongst the population generally, including children and young people. For example, one submission stated:

We are now living in a country where cultural diversity is changing rapidly. Ireland does not have a great reputation for dealing well with cultural difference, as the story of the travelling people tells us. We need to view this growing multiculturalism from a positive viewpoint and endeavour to see the advantages to all of us. The so-called problems caused by the increase in non-nationals only serve to highlight already existing problems such as housing and hospital waiting lists and a National Children's Strategy must ensure that our children grow up understanding this and welcoming these people.

### **Health issues**

The challenges identified under the general heading of health issues were quite diverse and in some cases were very specific to particular illnesses or conditions. The key challenges that were highlighted can be summarised as follows:

- The fact that Irish children and young people are leading more sedentary lifestyles than previously
- AIDS
- Need for more health care with increased survival rates of children
- Need for more health education and promotion to enhance health of the young population
- Need for a multidisciplinary approach to the promotion of child health

- **Need to provide adequate basic nutrition to all children in the nation**
- **Problems for children and young people in coping with physical or mental illness in their families**
- **The need for greater awareness of the seriousness of eating disorders**

### **Sexuality**

A number of topics emerged as being most appropriately classified under the general heading of sexuality. These include the challenges associated with:

- **Sexual relationships at an early age**
- **Teenage pregnancies**
- **Child prostitution**
- **Unhealthy/unsafe sexual behaviour**
- **Correctly informing children about the facts of life**
- **Pornography**

As with the drugs issue, the submissions contained relatively little elaboration on these perceived challenges.

### **Information Technology**

There was a general consensus among those who wrote of challenges associated with the advances in information technology that this technology provides many opportunities if appropriately handled. Thus, the challenges were largely concerned with managing the developments around IT as a whole. The main points that were made in this regard can be summarised as follows:

- **The challenge of managing children's access to computers and the Internet so that it is a positive experience**
- **Development of critical faculties to cope with the multiplicity of information with which we are confronted**
- **Advances in technology curtail opportunities for creative play in its traditional form**
- **Importance of not becoming 'slaves to IT'**
- **Need to ensure that children and young people acquire skills to cope with developing technology**
- **Need for ethics to be applied to new technology**

### **Suicide**

The increasing rate of suicide among young people, especially young males, in Ireland was highlighted in many of the submissions as presenting major challenges. However, very few of the submissions looked in depth at this problem. The National Youth Council of Ireland was one notable exception in this regard as it included a full discussion paper on Young People and Suicide with its submission. The following extract from that document gives a clear indication of the level of concern that was evident around this complex topic:

The increased incidence of suicide among young people in Ireland is the most complex and worrying social concern in Irish society today. The upward trend has rightly caused widespread concern. Suicide, particularly among young people, has become a most pressing issue, particularly in the light of the fact that we still do not fully understand the causes.

### **Concluding Comment**

While much of the subject matter in this section has been very dark, there were some notable comments on challenges which point to a more optimistic outlook. It seems appropriate to include one of them here as we move forward to looking at material on the relationship between opportunities and challenges:



The challenge for young people is to be able to play their part, to be listened to and to be able to access the skills and support they need in order to develop as active citizens. Young people today, as in the past, appreciate and rise to challenges that stretch their capabilities and enable them to feel valued and appreciated. We need to allow them the opportunities to make their contribution at a number of levels.

## 4. 3 The Relationship between Opportunities and Challenges

Some submissions concentrated quite heavily on the connections between opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years. In fact, some made it very clear that to separate opportunities and challenges is to adopt an over-simplistic approach which does not capture the complexities of the situations facing many children and young people. This section aims to draw together some of the key points raised in this regard and will focus on the following topics:

- **Social disadvantage**
- **Disability issues**
- **Children's welfare**
- **Play**

### **Social disadvantage**

Some of the strongest writing in the submissions focused on the point that opportunities and challenges are by no means equally distributed in society and that many groups are in highly disadvantaged situations when it comes to capitalising on opportunities or trying meet challenges. The following extract provides a good example of how this point tended to be made:

The opportunities over the next ten years for children and young people from families with material, financial, emotional, educational, cultural and social resources are tremendous. The prosperity of the country and the atmosphere of hope and excitement that this has generated have opened up windows of opportunity both educationally, economically and in many other ways. Many can now dream and those dreams have the possibility of fulfilment. For these young people there is the opportunity of being able to reach their full potential and to contribute in a life-giving manner to their communities both at home and abroad. However, for the children from families without these resources the future is still an uphill battle. Taken as a whole Ireland (the 'Celtic Tiger') is growing more prosperous by the year, but a distinction must be made between the wealth of the country on the one hand and the poverty of significant groups within the country.

Another group highlighted the important point that the young people who are facing the most challenges are often those who are least well equipped to deal with them. They said:

In the current time of increased employment and the so-called Celtic Tiger, opportunities for most children and young people have never been higher....

The increasing apparent success of those who are succeeding has shown an increasing gap between those who have and those who have not in our society. This leads to large numbers of young people feeling increasingly marginalised within our society and excluded from it.

The fragmentation of services for young people at risk of social exclusion and a lack of continuity between home, school and other caring agencies contributes to the increased

marginalisation of young people. The treadmill nature of society, the survival of the fittest ethos and rising expectations of all young people in a consumer driven society have also contributed to some young people feeling alienated and excluded. Often those young people facing such isolation are those least able to deal with it.

The importance of Government now seizing the economic opportunity to target areas of disadvantage was highlighted in a number of submissions. This emphasis on targeting resources towards disadvantaged areas was taken up very strongly in another submission:

With the economic boom, there should be a decrease in poverty and better provision for education and employment for all. This will only occur if services and resources are targeted at areas of deprivation and if education is flexible enough to encourage children to stay at school until qualifications are achieved. Although we have a highly educated workforce and free education has been available for the past 30 years, there are many children who are leaving school with literacy and numeracy difficulties. The challenge over the next decade is to target resources so there is equal opportunity for all.

### **Disability issues**

One of the key organisations of people with disabilities stressed how the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people with disabilities are inextricably linked. The following extract from this submission highlighted the importance of the Government building on the work that it has already begun in the whole area of improving provision and services for people with disabilities:

The challenge ... is for the Government to stay committed and focused to deliver the promise to all our children and build a new totally inclusive and enlightened society alert to the needs of all children.

We herald the initiatives already established by the Minister and the Department of Health and Children in support of children who have a disability and we look forward to continued commitment to the establishment of many more improvements to give 'real equality of opportunity' to all children in our education system.

### **Children's welfare**

A number of the submissions that raised the issue of child abuse welcomed the developments that have occurred in recent years in terms of raising awareness of this issue and making provision to deal with it. The following extract is quite typical in the way it portrays the challenges and opportunities in this field as being inextricably linked:

Both the opportunity and challenge centre on the increased awareness of child abuse, neglect, discrimination and injustice. The Strategy must act upon this knowledge to protect against preventable illness and disability but also to eliminate or at least minimise social and emotional harm.

### **Play**

A further striking example of the emphasis on the relationship between opportunities and challenges arose in relation to the issue of children's play. This submission had the following comments to make around this matter:

With the increase in families comes a major expansion of urban areas. Less green space, trees, hills and ditches and the fear of parents to allow their children to roam and explore the area have resulted in indoor play. Social interaction as a result of play and the widening of the mind to new experiences with nature and the out of doors are critical to the development of young people.

### **Concluding Comment**

This section has aimed to provide an insight into the complex interplay that is perceived to exist between the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years. Positive developments can have negative consequences and it is clear from contributors that only a coherent, integrated and strategic approach to economic and social development will ensure that all children and young people can grasp the opportunities while successfully meeting the challenges.

## 5.1 Policy Development, Planning and Priorities

About a third of the submissions raised issues concerning the development of policies for children within the framework of the National Children's Strategy.

The main concerns to do with policy development were the following:

- **The place of children's policy in overall policy development**
- **The principles that should underpin policies relating to children**
- **The range of areas where national policies and strategies are needed**
- **Targets and priorities**
- **Implementing policy**

### **The place of children's policy in overall policy development**

The submissions called for a stronger emphasis in all national policy-making on children's issues. They noted the absence of a focus on children in key policy documents, such as the National Development Plan and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. The thrust of the viewpoint is captured in the following comment:

The harsh reality is that, despite comprising almost a third of the population of the state, and Ireland's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are remarkably invisible in many areas of policy which nevertheless impinge hugely on the quality of their lives...With such a creditable emphasis on social inclusion in public policy in NDP and PPF and elsewhere it is important that children are seen as a large social group entitled to such inclusion as of right in terms of the policy process, both as participants and as a category of concern.

This submission went on to propose that the programmes and forums on housing, estate management, public transport and national rural development within the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness should explicitly address children's interests, together with other fora such as the City/County Development Boards and the Arts Council. Attention was drawn too to the role of the commercial sector in the following extract:

The Strategy should require the commercial sector to audit the child friendliness of public spaces in which it conducts business with the public. The quality of Danish efforts in this regard are worth studying.

Within the specific area of social policy, concern was expressed about what is seen as the neglect of the general welfare of children and the emphasis on child protection. The following extract states:

A pro-active and comprehensive policy, based on a paradigm of children's rights, is required in order to enhance the welfare of Irish children.

### **The principles that should underpin policies relating to children**

Several submissions made proposals about the perspectives on children and childhood and the principles, which should underpin children's policy. While there is overlap in the thinking on these principles, each tends to bring a distinctive focus:

- **A holistic perspective, based on children's needs rather than on service delivery systems**
- **A children's rights perspective, involving a shift from a welfare based model to a rights**

model

- A child centred approach
- A developmental child centred approach

The concept of a child centred approach can mean many things. One definition of the nature and importance of a developmental child centred approach was the following:

While viewing a child as an integral part of a family unit and engaging and involving relevant systems in making change for children is crucial, the key focus of support services must remain on the child as an individual with developmental capabilities, limitations and tasks. Any shift to viewing the family or carers as the primary focus of services will lessen the impact in children and in many cases fail to make a real change for these children.

Another perspective offered on a developmental approach to policy suggested that the Strategy needs to envisage clear progression routes through childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

A further principle emerging was the principle of prevention. However, a broad policy based on the principle of prevention has significant implications, according to the following extract:

In order for services to be directed more towards prevention, it is important to consider child welfare as part of a broader domain. Changes are required at a number of different levels, including National Policy level in relation to prioritising prevention, at agency level in relation to mandating and prioritising such work and at individual level in relation to providing adequate supports to staff such as supervision and training to facilitate this work to be carried out.

## The areas where national policies and strategies are needed

Several areas were proposed where new policy is needed.

### Children's health

Policy and strategy development in children's healthcare services was mentioned most frequently, along with play policy and childcare policy.

Strategic and policy needs in the area of child health focused particularly on the mental health of children and young people, including a proposal that children's mental health needs to be given the same status as physical health. In the wider understanding of health needs, the case is made for a national strategy on children's well being, with programmes geared to the earlier years of the child's life, along the lines of a Norwegian model which has, apparently, worked well.

### Play policy

A national play policy would, it was argued, address issues of supervised playgrounds, planned open spaces and facilities in housing developments. The case was made that there is a *'lack of clear direction, no recognition, no strategy and no structure for children's play services in Ireland'*.

### Leisure and sport

The need for a national policy in the area of leisure and sport, was flagged. The need for an infrastructure for public leisure, sports and culture, was also seen as being needed, in association with schools.

### Child protection

The need for a specific child protection strategy, with a national and local framework was mooted. The elements of such a strategy were described as:

- **Mandatory reporting**
- **Articulation of a whole family interagency approach, with health board structures for this**
- **Identification of service and staffing levels and service gaps**

A strategy for alternative care was also proposed, supported by research, funding and staff training *'if residential care is to be seen as more than a dumping ground.'*

### **Public art**

The case was made that Public Art provision for Irish children lags well behind other European countries. The following extract appealed for funds:

...the economic status of children, the developmental significance of childhood and the distinctive contribution the arts can make to self-realisation, are all factors which, allied to the particular demographic realities of Ireland, underline that Irish children have a particularly pressing claim on arts provision funded from the public purse.

### **Children with disabilities**

The concept of national action plans for categories of children with special needs was proposed, which would involve co-ordinated approaches to those groups of children, as the following extract demonstrates:

This does not mean that these children should be treated separately from others. Indeed, a central challenge is to promote the inclusive treatment of children with special needs into our mainstream services. This requires a strategic and planned approach initiated at national level.

Other strategy and policy gaps/needs identified include:

- **Equal status policies**
- **Anti-discrimination policies and strategies**
- **A national plan and strategy for Irish medium pre-schools**
- **Youth policies**
- **Accessible public transport policies outside cities**
- **Recognition of adoption as 'a valued and important aspect of national policy for the welfare of children'**

### **Targets and priorities**

Several submissions identified priority or target areas for the National Children's Strategy. With one exception, all the proposed target and priority areas address the needs of children who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

### **Child poverty**

The need to address child poverty was most frequently mentioned. The submission from the Combat Poverty Agency proposes a ten year target time-frame to end chronic poverty through the following proposal:

A composite minimum income for children in need of £30-£40 per week depending on age  
Greater employment opportunities for unemployed families  
A child benefit of £25 per week for all children  
A childcare supplement of £32.50 per month via child benefit.

The groups identified as at risk of poverty included those children whose parents are

unemployed, children in lone parent households and children in larger families. Specific groups of children were also identified as having particular needs to ensure they do not fall into poverty. These include early school leavers, Traveller children, children with disabilities, children at risk of falling through the support net, abuse survivors, children who are homeless or living out of home, children who are abusing drugs and children who are involved in prostitution.

### **Educational disadvantage**

Educational initiatives to address the needs of children who are disadvantaged were also highlighted and within that, both pre-school children and young people leaving school were seen as most in need of support. A case is made for ten and twenty year targets for the development of pre-school services, pupil teacher ratios in primary school, staffing levels for counsellors and remedial teachers and for the development of play areas, leisure centres and other facilities.

A different approach to priority setting is contained in a submission which suggests that priority should be given to measures outlined in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.

### **Other target and priority areas named:**

- **Targets for the development of the national network of family resource centres**
- **Targets and actions for children's rights and the implementation of the UN Convention were also proposed**
- **Targets for the reduction of waiting times for services**
- **Priority to be given to measures in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness**
- **Removal of underfunding of disability services**

### **The process of setting targets**

There was a consensus among those commenting on the need for targeting that it should be done and should favour the child who is marginalised. However, targeting needs to happen in a manner which leads to inclusion. The intricacies of defining need was also raised, in a submission about support for child care providers, as follows:

I've come across many parents who are not seen to be disadvantaged, but would have difficulty coming up with the necessary fees for childcare due to high mortgage expenses etc. These people should not be excluded from the 'affordable childcare' plan.

One submission proposed that the process of target setting needs to be done in a partnership of national policy makers and service providers as follows:

The challenge of the Strategy is to combine the knowledge and experiences of services and projects 'on the ground' with public policy to target resources to areas of greatest need.

### **Implementing policy**

While the majority of submissions dealing with policy have focused on needs and gaps in policy, a small number raise the issue of implementation. Each of these submissions called for the implementation of several existing reports which have a bearing on children's lives.

## **5.2 Co-Ordination in Policy Making and Service Provision**

### **The importance of co-ordination**

The importance of a co-ordinated and integrated approach to policy and services attracted a great deal of attention in the submissions. The material tended to fall under two headings, reflecting the levels at which co-ordination and collaboration needs to work so that children and families can experience seamless services:

- **Interdepartmental co-ordination and national level co-ordination relating to policy development and planning**
- **Interagency co-ordination at local level (either in respect of geographical areas, or responses to particular needs experienced by children and families)**

The work being done on this area at the moment is acknowledged in the following submission:

It is welcome that the task of integration and partnership is being increasingly identified as an intrinsic part of the work of State agencies and their staff and not an add-on.

#### **Interdepartmental/national level co-ordination**

Many of the groups commenting on the need for policy co-ordination contented themselves with stating the need for this to happen. Others proposed structures and mechanisms to make it happen.

At a broad governmental level, there was a proposal that the development of the National Children's Strategy is an opportune time to address fragmentation in administration and delivery and that there should now be an independent, rigorous examination of the current assignment of departmental responsibilities for policies and services for children. In any such examination, *'an overarching question should be to what extent are the structure and allocation of services fulfilling the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.'*

There was a proposal for a comprehensive infrastructure for co-ordination as follows:

...an institutional framework to support children, including a dedicated children's affairs unit, a national database on child welfare, an interdepartmental policy committee on children, an ombudsperson for children and social partner status for children.

#### **Specific co-ordination mechanisms**

The mechanisms proposed range from the appointment of a full Minister for Children in Cabinet to the need for a process of proofing policy development in respect of particular children's issues.

Some of the structures and mechanisms being proposed relate to specific aspects of policy. In relation to children's play, for example, there was a proposal for a clear allocation of departmental responsibility, underpinned if necessary, by legislation and supported by an interdepartmental working group to co-ordinate the expertise of various Government Departments. The suggestion was that this group would be led by the Department of the Environment.

An interagency body to tackle educational disadvantage and a national Early Years Development Unit to co-ordinate pre-school services were suggested. The need for the establishment of a Childcare Authority as recommended in the Task Force Report of 1989 was also supported.

An institutional mechanism to underpin work on the broad issue of children's rights and welfare was mooted in the following submission:

An inter-agency committee on children's rights would provide a new institutional mechanism to promote the National Children's Strategy and for the co-ordination and streamlining of policy initiatives relating to welfare, well-being and rights of children and young people.



And the National Children's Strategy should co-ordinate the co-ordinators!:

Any strategy for children must try to itself bring together all these other integrative structures with a view to bringing together and co-ordinating the often mystifying array of proposals emanating from the various Statutory and Voluntary Organisations.

### **Interagency co-ordination at local level**

The problems arising for children and families as a result of poorly integrated local service delivery evoked much more strongly worded criticisms and concerns. There were references to fragmentation of services, confusion, duplication and disjointed services. The flavour of the concerns and some of the dimensions of the need for change, are caught in the following extracts from submissions:

The lack of integrated locally based services means that people in crisis are sent to a range of different offices to access their entitlements. This causes extreme frustration and militates against the good relationships and co-operation with professionals so necessary when sorting out crises.

That submission was addressing difficulties in community and family support services for homeless and disadvantaged families. Another submission offers an analysis of similar issues in child mental health services and childcare/child protection services:

Services...currently tend to be cut off from one another and working in an isolated and idiosyncratic manner, specialising in their own internally set priorities and leaving huge gaps of unmet needs between them. There are also gross failures of co-ordination. For example, a child with a complex developmental problem such as autism may spend months or years moving from one departmental waiting list to another getting a small part of the picture from each, but a full diagnosis and treatment plan from none. The new proposal for a Child Health Co-Ordinator (Best Health for Children) could, if properly set up and supported, be a great help with this problem, which is effectively one of getting different professionals from related but distinct services together on one task-oriented team, which is set up so as not to replicate the rigidity of the system it is replacing.

While the frustration of professional personnel with the absence of co-ordination was quite palpable in these extracts, the stresses on families was equally evident in the comment from the father of a child with special needs, who is proposing that a named person (social worker) would be the contact point for parents, giving them all the information they need about choices and entitlements. He said:

It would avoid the degrading and disgraceful effect of being pushed from pillar to post to find out what is best and what is available. It would be a huge improvement by reducing the strain and stress for families who already have enough of it..

### **What services need co-ordination?**

The perceived need for co-ordination was not narrowly focused on one aspect of services or for any one user group. People who are involved as providers or service users in a wide range of areas described the need for reducing fragmentation. The areas include paediatric services, child mental health services, family support services and services for children at risk. The need and value of a 'multi systemic approach' to working with and supporting 'out of control' children and children who are out of home was noted; the need for co-ordination and collaboration between hospital and community care health providers, GPs, Non-Governmental Organisations and early assessment teams was also discussed. The following extract demonstrates:

Children's [hospital] services go far beyond the walls of hospitals. Joint working

# Chapter 6

## Responding to Children's and Young People's Needs

### Introduction

All of the submissions put forward concerns, proposals and issues relating to children's needs. The range of material was wide and varied. A high proportion of the submissions dealt with matters which were to do with the day to day business of the organisation or group making the submission. Others took a broader view and addressed several dimensions of children's needs, children's rights and the needs of families, communities and staff/professionals.

There were timely warnings in the submissions about the need to avoid viewing children only as recipients of services. The following extract offers such a warning:

The needs of the child must be catered for in a holistic sense. The emotional, physical, educational, societal and cultural needs should be looked at in the context of the family and the community. The creation and building up of a sense of belonging, of being a valued member of the community, should be incorporated into all services.

The main areas of children's needs dealt with in the submissions are the following:

- **Health and well being**
- **Learning and education**
- **Supporting children and young people with disabilities**
- **Supporting children and young people who are marginalised**
- **Play, recreation and development opportunities**
- **Children and young people as active citizens**

relationships must be developed with parents, education, justice and social services.

### **The benefits of co-ordination**

The benefits to be gained from more effective co-ordination of service delivery are clearly felt most directly by children and families. However, the submissions suggested a range of benefits for service delivery systems as well; better and more effective use of resources, sharing of data, better communication and more rational referral systems, are among the benefits mentioned.

### **Mechanisms**

As in the case of policy co-ordination, several mechanisms for solving this problem were put forward and there was acknowledgement of proposals and processes already being discussed or in operation.

The need for service co-ordinators was identified and there was a suggestion that people might have a legal right to a co-ordinator. The suggestion was that the team of co-ordinators in any given area would collectively have a significant contribution to make to service planning. Child Care Managers were also seen as well placed to effect co-ordination.

One submission moved beyond formal structures to look at the solution in terms of professional attitudes and role definition, suggesting that part of the solution (in the context of the school and classroom) lies in cultural and attitude change and a new definition of professionalism, as follows:

While multi-disciplinary working is recognised as part of the role of many professionals, this is not generally seen to be the case by teachers. The absence of a collaborative culture between and within organisations results in isolation and an absence of professional peers support for practitioners that emphasises the gaps between services operated by different agencies

The submission argues for a new definition of professionalism, which moves away from the idea of the professional as expert, on the grounds that the concept of the 'expert' is contrary to the notion of collaboration.

### **Other service delivery issues**

One submission stated the following:

Delivery of services need to be flexible, focused and need to be regularly evaluated in order to ensure that needs and targets of specific groups are constantly being recognised and met. The basis of all service delivery should be client empowerment and development.

### **Local, community based service delivery**

The need for local, community based service delivery, which is flexible and responsive to local needs was highlighted in several submissions:

Ownership of initiatives belongs in the community...Community managed responses to needs are flexible and can respond quickly in a changing society.

To make this happen, services will need to be decentralised and delivered locally. In the hospital/health care area, there was a call for tertiary centres, to develop peripatetic clinics in local hospitals so that their expertise is available to children nearer their homes and shared care made more possible.

A further local service delivery theme is the need for seamless services, resulting in a continuum

of family-centred service, where gaps are minimised. The uneven dispersal in remote rural areas was acknowledged as a difficulty, with some contributors arguing that small towns and villages do not get a fair share of resources.

The issue of the availability of services through the Irish language was also raised:

Aitheantas le cothromaíocht a thabhairt do thuismitheoirí atá ag tógail páistí le Gaeilge agus na seirbhísí tacaíochta chuí a bheith ar fáil tré mheán na Gaeilge.

### Local planning

Closely linked to the matter of local delivery is that of local planning, in which communities are actively involved. The need for partnership in planning should, it was argued, be built into service agreements between state and other service providing agencies. These service agreements should be based around user rights and commitments to quality. The need for partnerships among professionals and between professionals and families, was also highlighted several times.

In the educational area, the absence of local or regional structures was seen as a barrier to local planning and partnership in the planning process. The advent of several national agencies in the educational field was seen as adding to the difficulty, as stated in the following extract:

Services (especially in education) are becoming too specialised, resulting in marginalisation of groups e.g. disadvantaged children. Perspective gets lost as services become unduly specialised and 'professionalised.' There are too many national agencies being set up in education. This development, together with the absence of regional structures, runs counter to any holistic concept of service and will lead to unhealthy boundaries between services.

### Prevention

The theme, which has prevention as the primary goal of service delivery was raised in many submissions. After prevention, early intervention was the next priority identified.

### Avoiding stigma

Finally, there was a view that services must be delivered in a manner which does not stigmatise children and young people. Services which are 'medicalised' or problem focused, should be avoided; young people will not draw on services that label them, as the following extract argues:

Young people often have vulnerable self esteem and self identity and therefore tend to be more sensitive to issues of labelling. If services are to be used by young people they must be viewed by them as catering for all young people and not specifically for 'people with difficulties.' Combined with this factor, research would suggest that young people find it easier to discuss difficulties or problems with other young people rather than with other adults. This factor should be integrated into service provision and delivery.

## 5.3 Research, Evaluation and Quality Services

Issues relating to quality of service received a lot of attention in the submissions, with about one fifth of contributors making comments on these themes. The topics raised included research, evaluation and standard setting.

## General research issues

A national longitudinal study of children in Ireland was seen as fundamental to the development of the National Children's Strategy.

Attention was drawn to a recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding data collection and the development of indicators and the need to adjust these to include all children up to the age of eighteen years, with a view to incorporating all areas covered by the Convention.

In the conduct of any research on children's life experience, it was argued that children themselves should participate and give their views. The dissemination of research findings should be shared among professionals and should inform development.

One very comprehensive and detailed proposal for a research and information strategy, was described and costed as a tool of capacity building for full implementation of the Strategy. Research priorities, timescales, infrastructures and project costings were included in the proposal.

## Particular research needs

There was a wide range of proposals for studies on particular aspects of children's lives:

### Children's health

There were several proposals for specific studies on aspects of children's health. Among those mentioned were research into eating disorders, reasons why young people smoke and what preventive strategies are effective and research on barriers to effective dental care. The need for national databases in relation to paediatric diabetes and diabetes care was raised.

### Children's income

It was proposed that the Strategy should commission research aimed at defining the concept of an adequate income for children and as a basis for setting targets for reaching this. There was a further suggestion in the following extract, that baseline data is essential in general terms and would also assist target setting in the elimination of child poverty:

There is a need for more information and research on the quality of life, lifestyle and health experience of children in health board areas with particular attention to differences across occupational and social classes. These might be poverty and health audits at a community level and could generate baseline data to inform anti-poverty planning and poverty proofing in health board regions. Importantly, they could also provide a mechanism for measuring the effectiveness of health programmes in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and in identifying changing patterns and needs.

### Juvenile justice

The area of justice and crime prevention attracted several proposals. These dealt with the potential and limitations of community based sanctions and research into the reasons for Ireland's high proportion of prisoners under twenty one.

### Other suggested research areas

Other areas mooted for research included:

- **Proposals concerning children with special needs, including research on respite care needs, special needs in education, medical and care services**
- **Research into children's experience of separation, as well as research on the status of one parent families and step families**
- **A 'scoping study' into the needs of young gay people**

- Research into the life experience of non-problem families, as a way of identifying possibilities for preventing family difficulties

## Evaluation and quality standards

### Indicators of quality

The proposal was made in the following extract that, in regard to indicators of quality, the key indicator must be the quality of children's life experience:

Policies must prioritise and be assessed by commitment to quality of each child's daily living experience growing up in the home, school, neighbourhood and beyond. This consideration of quality of life must embrace diverse aspects of childhood. It must be concerned not only with quality of service and provision, but also with the quality of experience.

The range of possible indicators of quality is highlighted in this extract:

To work well, services should have the following characteristics:

They meet a defined need  
 They are accessible  
 They are reviewed and evaluated and the views of those using them are key to the evaluation  
 There is a clear child and family focus  
 The values of the service and the model are made explicit  
 They are delivered in a timely way  
 The deliverers are properly trained  
 There is full information, to facilitate choice.

There was a proposal in the following extract that several services might have joint performance indicators as a means of promoting interagency working:

Professionals and managers of the Health Board, Local Authority, Education Department, Gardaí and Voluntary groups should sit on joint children's committee and have joint performance indicators designed to reflect desired outcomes achieved by good interagency working.

Such formalised indicators, according to another submission, should inform professional development. The absence of written, comprehensive standards for children's and adolescent's health care is seen as a barrier to measuring consistency, efficacy and suitability of services.

### Evaluation processes

One of the strongest themes emerging in the material on evaluation is the need to evaluate by finding out from people what their views are as to what works well for them - *'generally what works well is what people in difficulty say works well, not what researchers and academics say.'*

A further theme is that the emphasis in evaluation must be on the measurement of outcomes, rather than inputs; there is a view that services can only be deemed to have had an impact, when they have actually penetrated into the lives of children, rather than simply on the basis of being made available. An example given to highlight the point is the Relationships and Sexuality programme in schools, which, though available to all children, is not yet in operation in all schools, according to Departmental statistics.

In learning disability services, the benefit of a system known as 'five values to practice' is noted as a successful approach to quality. These values ensure that services work towards

maximising the child's opportunity for choice, being treated with dignity, sharing ordinary places with non-disabled peers, having access to meaningful relationships and contributing to family and community life.

## 5.4 Legislative Initiatives

Several submissions made suggestions about the need for legislative change, or commented on some existing legislation.

### **Children's rights**

The main focus was on the need to introduce constitutional change to give rights to children, with supporting legislation. A Constitutional amendment should support and reflect the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Child protection**

Proposals were made relating to the area of child protection. These included the need for laws relating to begging, the banning of corporal punishment in the home, mandatory reporting and legislation to enable a child to get services, where parental permission is refused.

### **Juvenile justice**

Proposals about juvenile justice included a proposal to raise the age of criminal responsibility to fourteen years. The need for a new framework for juvenile justice was mooted. It was suggested that the law regarding sexual offences needs to be overhauled, in particular the law regarding sexual offences between minors.

### **Pre-school regulations**

The pre-school regulations were the subject of a range of proposals in one submission. Concerns related to the perceived onerous nature of the space regulations. Concern was also expressed about the exclusion of home-based minders from the remit of the regulations and the implications for both children and providers. This exclusion was seen to impact most strongly on older children, who are less likely to be looked after in group situations.

### **Other areas covered in the submissions:**

- Legislation to underpin staffing ratios and staff qualifications in children's services
- The need for legislative underpinning for the Millennium Charter for Children's Health Services
- Legislation to address the fact that the only legal link that can be established between step parents and a child is through adoption
- Play legislation
- Anti discrimination legislation for children



## 6.1 Health and Well Being

### The key concerns raised

Health professionals and health related organisations were heavily represented among those who made submissions, so it is not surprising that there is such a strong focus in the material on issues relating to children's health and well being, with about forty per cent of the submissions contributing views on this area.

What is perhaps more surprising is that there is at least as much emphasis on children's mental health and wellbeing as on their physical health. Even in the material dealing with hospital care and the care of sick children, there is a very strong focus on children's experience while using the services, as well on issues to do with inputs of professional expertise.

The material on health ranges along a continuum of issues from health promotion and illness prevention, to the concerns about sick children and children in hospital. It incorporates material about mental health and mental illness, issues relating to substance abuse and addiction and more general concerns about health related information for children.

Two themes of particular interest warrant special mention. One is the repeated call for dedicated health services, both in hospitals and in community services, for adolescents - a call that seems to have at least as much to do with the quality of the young person's experience as with the quality of their treatment. This need is highlighted across the board - in relation to illness, drug treatment and child and adolescent psychiatric services. A second recurring theme is the one already mentioned - the emphasis on mental health and mental treatment. More than one third of those who dealt with health and well being issues were focused on some dimension of the mental health/mental illness continuum.

The main focus of the material on children's health and well being falls under the following headings:

- Children's general health needs and issues
- Children's mental health needs and issues
- Children in hospital and sick children
- Information for children and young people

### Children's health needs and issues

The submissions make the case for adequate and effective health services for all children. The case is also made for specific measures for groups with particular needs such as Traveller children.

The changing pattern of health needs will have an impact on future development of children's health services. Attention was drawn to some features of the new situation in the following extract:

- Children who would have died are now surviving because of advances/developments in medicine and surgery
- There is a much greater involvement by parents in the care of the child
- More home care. There is a greater move to caring for the ill child at home

### Access

Proposals are made for widening access to free medical and dental services. Among the proposals were the following:

- Free medical card and dental treatment for all children

- **School health services to all children in primary and post-primary education**
- **Free access to GP services for the under 5s or half-price consultations**
- **Free paediatric health services, specially designated for children's needs**

There was a call for dental services to meet the particular needs of children with special needs and disadvantaged children.

More broadly, there was a call for guidelines and recommendations to ensure that the rights of children with regard to health services are guaranteed.

### **Needs of particular groups**

The case was made for particular attention to be given to the health care needs of teenagers, who are referred to in one submission as *'the forgotten population'*. Within that group there was a call for an understanding of the health needs of the young gay community and evaluation of the accessibility of services to that community.

The submission from an organisation whose remit is to promote improvement in the quality of life of Travellers puts forward a detailed and comprehensive plan for the health and well being of Traveller children, with goals, outcome measures and proposed action plans.

There was concern about the isolation of children in rural families, on account of poor public transport and the impact on access to health clinics and developmental checks.

### **Safety and positive health**

Various dimensions of children's safety and well being were raised. The issue of road safety was raised, with a request for immediate action on child safety in cars, an advertisement campaign on this and compulsory seat belts for children under six. Food and nutrition issues were also raised, with a call for nutrition guidelines for various age groups and free or subsidised food in schools and creches. The case was made both for and against water fluoridation.

The issue of the weight of schoolbags came up, with a strong suggestion that the weight of the children's bags is a big problem for children, as demonstrated in the following extract:

My six year old grandson's bag weighs seven pound - half a stone. This is cruelty and abuse of a child. This is an ongoing complaint from parents but it falls on deaf ears. The Government recently tried to encourage children to walk to school. How far would any one of them walk carrying 7lb or more that older children carry.

Safety in school transport was raised. One submission made several proposals e.g. beacons on school transport and a ban on overtaking school buses - a provision existing in many European countries.

The case was made for school meals for *'children who go to school hungry every day.'*

### **Children and the media**

The portrayal of children in the media should be the subject of ethical guidelines; advertising to children should be banned or should be the subject of restrictions; in particular there is concern about the cost of branded items and a suggestion that these should be the subject of price control. In the following extract, there is a call for the appointment of a censorship board with the specific remit of looking at materials aimed at young people and a call for the restriction of access to pornography:

The issue of the availability of pornography to children through television, video and the internet is of major concern. We would like to see any possible measures taken to avoid unrestricted access to pornography for children.

There was a call also for more support from the media for children to be in married families. There were proposals aimed at ensuring that Traveller children will experience the depiction of their community in a positive way throughout the media, as a norm.

### **Staffing**

In addition to issues of access, issues of staffing and staffing specialisms were raised. School nurses were proposed. The need for paediatric nurses and special needs nurses working in communities, was also raised. The remit of the paediatrician should be extended to 18 year olds, it was argued and the remit of the health nurse should be extended beyond three years.

The need for a new post of health visitor with special responsibility for infants and young children was mooted.

### **Children's mental health needs and issues.**

The material on this topic covers issues concerned with the maintenance and promotion of good mental and emotional health, as well as the responses needed when emotional or mental health breaks down.

There was a strong emphasis on improvements needed in the provision of psychiatric services for children and adolescents. An extensive range of gaps in services and necessary service developments were outlined.

### **Service provision**

Both hospital and community psychiatric services for those with acute difficulties were seen as in need of major development, together with community based supports for dealing with the issues and traumas of childhood and adolescence.

The extension of community based services throughout the country, based on a model which has been implemented in Ballymun was suggested in a submission. One of the features of this latter model is that young people self refer, rather than needing to be referred by a GP or other medical referral.

### **Needs of particular groups of young people**

The absence of residential services for children under twelve years outside the Dublin area is a concern and the view was expressed that young people's services are difficult to access and too far from families to be actively engaged in therapeutic work. The complexity of the service needs are outlined in this submission:

A range of units is required - assessment and treatment services fully staffed with a range of disciplines, including psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists and family therapists; longer term therapeutic communities where severely traumatised children can live for lengthy periods of time in emotionally containing settings in order to grow ..and sheltered dwellings for older teenagers. All of these settings require an educational component.

A number of submissions addressed the particular health care needs of young people who are drug users. It was felt that for them too, the best process for offering support is to provide services away from *'mainstream; drug treatment centres and as part of a designated community health facility'*.

### **Counselling**

While the number of young people needing to avail of acute treatment facilities may be a minority, the submissions appeared to indicate a very pressing need for support services by way of counselling for many groups of young people.

The submissions identified the need for a very wide range of counselling support services for young people experiencing particular emotional traumas, or coping with the stresses of adolescence.

The need for bereavement and pre-bereavement counselling, counselling around bullying, school behaviour, separating or divorcing parents, were among the experiences where counselling support is seen as necessary for young people. Family mediation services were also mentioned. The manner of delivery of these services was also discussed:

Preliminary research shows..that young people do want an easily accessible, confidential and discreet counselling service. They find the existing clinic-based medical model service offputting and difficult to access because of the long waiting lists and the need for GP referral, transport and time off school. The research shows that adults do not know what is right for young people and will keep getting it wrong if they don't ask them directly.

### **Prevention**

Preventive measures were also discussed in the submissions. Among the strategies mentioned as likely to promote positive mental health were self esteem programmes, access to supportive and stable relationships, relationship education and social and personal development education. The significance of access to the arts in promoting healthy psychological development was mentioned.

### **Children in hospital and sick children**

Again, children's experience of service, as distinct from the quantum of service, got attention in submissions. The need for family centred hospital care, partnership with children and parents in decision-making about treatment and information sharing were raised as part of the need for a quality service.

### **Access**

Equality of access to both inpatient and outpatient treatment was seen as being denied to children, on account of delays and waiting lists for public hospital care.

### **Needs of particular groups**

The need for designated facilities for adolescents arose here as in other contexts. Those designated facilities included the need for privacy and confidentiality, recreational areas in hospital, access to a ward kitchen and telephone and flexibility in rules.

Facilities are needed, it was argued, to meet the distinct needs of some particular groups of children. Those mentioned include children with traumatic brain injury, young people with eating disorders and young people with cardiac conditions. In the case of each of these groups, the need is either for extension of services around the country (for example, children with cardiac conditions) or some special facilities.

Traveller children need to have access to culturally appropriate health services and accessible information about those services.

### **Consent to treatment**

A further issue raised was the issue of children's consent to treatment. One submission suggested that the principle of true voluntary consent from children is paramount in children's services. A further submission suggested that the age of consent to treatment should be lowered, so that young people can be consulted at an earlier age about their wishes.

### Information for children and young people

The key to accessing services is to know about those services. The information needed by children and young people, according to the submissions, is the range of information that adults also need, but specifically geared to the needs and issues of young people.

Children and young people need many kinds of health related information, according to the submissions. Some of the specific issue based information would address sexual health, substance abuse, matters relating to HIV and communicable diseases and drug use.

A comprehensive information service system for children is suggested in the following extract:

Child Health Information Centres, containing information on medical conditions affecting children's health, improving health and related information regarding the bodies' development i.e. sex education, social behaviour, should be established. There is an obvious need for such a facility as reflected by the number of queries from children, parents and others on health related issues/matters. This facility could also be used as a resource centre for professionals.

## 6.2 Learning and Education

...the key to child poverty is education and ...this should be the foundation, if not the principal strategy for a National Children's Policy for the coming ten years

This quotation sums up the emphasis on education within the submissions, as a means of tackling poverty and exclusion. Several contributors offered detailed plans and strategies for addressing educational disadvantage, appended to their submissions.

About one third of all contributors commented on matters to do with children's learning and education. The general thrust of the comments were on the importance of equal and free access to education for all children coupled with support for those likely to need extra help to reach their learning potential.

The main issues raised were:

- What children and young people need to learn and know
- The nature of schooling/teaching and its responsiveness to the unique needs of individual children
- Interventions to help those young people experiencing difficulty
- Resources for learning in school
- Young people leaving school early
- Early Learners
- The child as partner in the teaching/learning process

There were some quite striking emphases in the material. In relation to school learning and curricula, virtually all the focus was on skills of relating and personal and social development - there was little comment on any area of 'academic' learning, beyond challenging the 'academic focus' of schooling.

The support and interventions sought were mainly focused on difficulties that fall into the remit of the psychologist rather than the remedial services.

There was a strong emphasis on the experience of schooling and ways in which school needs to respond to young peoples' needs, their cultures and in particular, the diversity of their abilities.

## What children and young people need to learn and know

All of those commenting on children's learning needs expressed views about the areas of skill and knowledge that children and young people need to acquire. The pattern of the thinking here is an interesting one, as already noted.

### Life skills

The strongest emphasis was on the need for children and young people to learn life skills, confidence and self esteem through personal and social development programmes and health education programmes. The important role of the schools' Social Personal and Health Education programme (SPHE), the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme (RSE) and the Civics, Social and Personal Education Programme (CSPE) was heavily emphasised.

The need for education to give young people skills in systems thinking, experimentation and collaboration, is raised. The following quotation suggested that an emphasis should be placed on the personal and social development of young people through youth and sports activities.

Béim níos mó a chur ar chláracha forbairt phearsanta agus shóisialta do dhaoine óga mar aon le breis aitheantais agus maoiniú dá réir a thabhairt do chlubanna óige, spóirt agus caitheamh aimsire.

Children need to learn how to make rules for themselves, to take personal responsibility and to learn the limits and boundaries of what they can have, it was suggested.

Prevention programmes relating to drugs, alcohol and smoking got regular mention, together with the need for young people to begin to learn about good parenting and home making while still at school.

While most submissions dealing with life skills appeared to focus on programmes delivered by teachers or other adults, a small number called for peer education programmes. One of these makes an interesting plea for peer mediation programmes to give children conflict resolution skills. Another unusual input was the call for driving lessons to be given in schools, as a way of cutting down on dangerous joy riding.

Surprisingly, perhaps, only one submission made explicit reference to the teaching of religion, religious values and the need for a religious ethos in schools. That submission wished to see a non-denominational approach to promoting Christian values adopted in schools and the provision of information to children about other world religions.

### Access to the arts

A surprising number of submissions spoke about children's need to have free access to the arts, music, drama, literature and writers and opportunities to learn about media working and broadcasting.

There was a concern about equality of access for those who cannot afford to give children these chances and also for those living in parts of Ireland where access to the arts may be limited. The focus of these concerns are captured in the following comments:

Many Irish children are born into socio-economic circumstances which are disadvantaged, relative to those of their fellow citizens. That disadvantage takes many forms. Some of the least visible are in fact the most insidious. If it is accepted, from a broad cultural perspective, that the arts are a reservoir of some of the major achievements of humanity to date and if, from a more psychological perspective, it is accepted that the arts are a crucible for self realisation, then the fact that the arts, for the most part, are the preserve of 'those who can pay' this has significant implications in terms of social justice and cultural poverty.

...their culture is circumscribed by economic considerations and ...ironically, its focus is often governed by the power of the marketplace, against which formal education and publicly-funded arts provision must work, though they are usually poorly resourced to do so.

And the rural perspective in the following extract:

With an ever present drug and alcohol culture, children and young people need stability and positive stimuli in their free time...There should also be greater provision of facilities for creativity in the arts, drama and music in rural towns and villages as well as in cities.

### **Inclusion**

Several submissions highlighted the need for school based programmes which equip young people to respect minorities and respect the rights of others. They referred to the need for disability awareness, human rights education, education preparing young people for a multicultural society and education about responsibility to others (and their property).

An 'anti-bias' approach in education was part of a proposal to ensure that Travellers and minority ethnic communities have access to an education system which delivers an intercultural/anti-bias approach throughout the entire curriculum.

An anti-bias approach is explained in the following extract:

An anti-bias approach unlike a multicultural or intercultural approach incorporates cultural issues but broadens to the areas of class, language, religion, gender, disability etc. All areas of diversity are recognised and respected and skills are offered to help children deal with negativity.

The underlying intent of an anti-bias approach is to foster the development of children and adults to become critical thinkers and be active in building a more caring, just and diverse community and society for all.

### **Other issues**

The learning and teaching of the Irish language was raised in a small number of submissions, as was the teaching of information technology skills.

### **The nature of schooling/teaching and its responsiveness to the unique needs of individual children**

Several submissions raised a critique of schooling and the capacity of schools to respond to the individual needs of young people. This material was distinctive, in that it raised questions about the ethos of schooling and the 'hidden curriculum' of teaching and learning which shapes the child's learning experience, rather than the content of teaching and learning.

These submissions made points about the culture of schooling, teaching methodologies, the impact of examination-based assessment mechanisms on young people and what is perceived as failure to serve the needs of the less academic child. The challenge for schools, it was argued, is to offer the space and time for young people to learn in a reflective and experiential manner, rather than in a product focused, exam-oriented one.

There were reflections on the experience of school failure by young people and some calls for an exploration of why the needs of many children do not appear to be met in school. As is often the case, the experience of the user of the service tends to be expressed with great feeling. In the following case, the mother of a young girl talked with some emotion about her



experience and acknowledges the new developments that would have benefited her :

The real reason why I am writing is my oldest child struggled all the way through school. I really felt the education system failed her miserably. I would so much like to see a real change in the academic side of education for children like my daughter. I am so pleased to see the Leaving Cert. Applied is now in most schools. Unfortunately it came too late for my daughter....It left my daughter with very low self esteem. As you can imagine when one is constantly at the bottom of the class through no fault of their own its soul destroying. So I would definitely like to see a big change in all this area.

Submissions called for education to promote the holistic development of all aspects of the young person, not only the academic dimension and pointed to the consequent need for radical change to curriculum and assessment. A strong emphasis here was on the uniqueness of each individual learner, as in the following extract:

...the main focus of education in the coming years is to value each child's gifts and intelligence and thereby build up self confident and respected learners, each in his own field and discard forever the theory that all children should be educated in the same way.

### **Interventions to help those experiencing difficulty**

Submissions recognised the difficulties facing school personnel who want to help young people who are particularly disadvantaged. A wide range of interventions are needed to support young people who are experiencing difficulty with learning and school, according to the submissions. Some related to learning difficulties. Others were intended to support young people whose difficulties are around behaviour, poor self esteem and psychological or psychiatric problems.

An interconnectedness of learning difficulties, the capacity of schools and other agencies to respond to needs and behaviour difficulties was proposed in the following extract:

There are students who find it very difficult to cope with school and who need additional support within and without the school... Schools also find it difficult to cope with them and, in many instances, have neither the skills or the resources to do so. Many in this group exhibit behavioural difficulties, poor attendance, serious academic underachievement and social disaffection. They are highly likely to drop out early.

### **Counselling and psychological support**

The need for psychological support to students, teachers and parents, was given a high priority in the submissions. Other interventions identified include systems for early detection and screening for learning difficulties, alternative learning programmes and assessment mechanisms and the mainstreaming of successful projects to address educational disadvantage.

### **Current strategies**

There was some critique of current strategies to address educational disadvantage:

There is a need for greater clarity and strategic focus in many of the current intervention projects and for systematic evaluation over time on children's level of educational participation and achievement. There is almost no research on the impact of such projects on parents and the local community. There is also a concern that the experiences and expertise developed within the projects are not systematically disseminated into the mainstream educational system.

This submission goes on:

A core feature...should be the focus on the individual child. The current strategy which



aggregates needs and allocates resources to selected schools in a limited number of geographical areas is completely unsatisfactory and ineffective. Interventions should address the multi-dimensional nature of educational disadvantage and promote an integrated response to the needs of students who are educationally disadvantaged.

There is a further challenge to the practice of giving extra resources to schools to address the problem of non-attendance at school. It was proposed that this approach is not adequate and that providers external to the school may be better placed to tailor provision to the needs of children who do not go to school.

Concerns were expressed about suspensions and expulsions from school. There was a call in the following extract for measures to 'bridge the gap' between school and 'out of school' as a result of suspension or expulsion:

Continuous suspension of mainly pupils who are already disadvantaged leads to early school leaving. Suspensions because of breaking discipline in a class leads to exclusion from the whole school.

On returning after missing periods of time students are again starting back into classes with no mechanism to help them to catch up with the rest of the class

### **Needs of particular groups of students**

Groups needing additional support are young mothers and children from ethnic minorities. The school which aims to be inclusive of children with disabilities, it was argued, should get extra help. At a more strategic level in relation to the schooling system, the case was made for embedding an equality focus in the work of schools through the school planning and the Whole School Evaluation process. The following statement was made:

It is recommended that the terms of reference for the school plan (at both primary and secondary level) should be broadened to include an overall equality/social inclusion strategy that outlines specific policy within each school relating to social disadvantage, gender equality, children with special needs, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities (including Travellers). The implementation of such a framework should be one of the criteria examined under the Whole School Evaluation process.

A Traveller education service, with tracking systems to monitor the progress of Traveller children within the system was proposed, as one of a series of measures to ensure equality for Travellers.

### **Resources for learning in school**

The need for improvements in a range of staffing resources for learning and education were identified in the submissions. For the most part, these were school-based resources, with the exception of psychologists, where the need for both school based and community psychologists was suggested.

Class teachers, remedial and resource teachers, guidance counsellors and psychologists were the main professional staffing groups mentioned. The need for follow through on psychological assessment is highlighted, 'because the problems are named but not addressed.'

A small number of submissions called for a school social worker for all schools. The need for trained classroom assistants was also mentioned.

### **Early school leaving**

Many of the interventions already described would help to prevent young people from leaving school early.

There was some relatively limited discussion on the situation of those who have left. There was a proposal that the school leaver should continue to be the responsibility of the education system, until they have received a qualification or skill; it was suggested that progression routes to qualifications need to be more flexible and that there is a need for greater access to more practical subjects and apprenticeships.

Comment was made in the following extract on the need for an educational component - in particular literacy and numeracy programmes - in a community training workshop setting:

Many of the young people who join CIW programmes have left school without completing Junior Cycle. They have very poor reading, writing and numeracy abilities. Because the CIWs focus on training, the issue of their poor literacy and numeracy skills is not being addressed. This means that, after spending between one and three years in such centres, they are unable to cope with working situations which demand functional literacy skills.

## Early Learning

The distinction between early learning and early care is an arbitrary one and there is some overlap between the material described here and later material on childcare.

### Access

The call was for all children in the 3-5 year age group to have access to early education; a substantial increase in state support for pre-schools was argued for and it was suggested that Irish provision for this age group is extremely low, compared to our European neighbours. Inclusive provision was sought, but also specialist provision for particular groups of children with very special needs.

The case was made in one submission for an extensive range of supports for the network of naonraí (Irish medium pre-schools) and there was a call for the extension of the naonraí model.

### Programme content

It was argued that national policy on early childhood education must be developed based on a holistic approach to the developmental needs of children and on the principle of equality of opportunity and access.

The strong emphasis was on play as the vehicle for learning. Quality early play was seen as providing the foundation for life long learning and pro-social behaviour. The need for balance between play and achievement is mooted. Pre-school was seen as offering the possibility for preventing literacy problems and as offering the opportunity for early diagnosis and intervention.

### Staffing

There was variation in the range of views about professional inputs to early education. Qualified teachers, trained play leaders, psychologists, play therapists and occupational therapists are all mentioned as being appropriate contributors to delivery of early education.

## The child as partner in the teaching/learning process

The case was made in a number of submissions for the child to be recognised as a party to the schooling process and a partner in that process.

### Areas of participation

The submissions mentioned several areas of school life and education more generally, where children and young people could have active involvement. The need for participation for young people in areas of educational policy and decision-making, involvement in the evaluation process in schools and in school planning was raised. The need for an independent system for dealing

with school based disputes was also raised.

### **Mechanisms for participation**

A number of submissions drew attention to the provisions in the 1998 Education Act for the involvement of children and young people in school life. One in particular criticised the provisions of the Act, suggesting that the Act goes some way to giving young people a voice, but in a conditional manner 'reflecting a highly qualified perspective on the rights and status of children and young people in schools'. The limits on the scope of school councils at second level was raised in the following extract:

Within the Education Act (1998, Section 27) school boards (at second level) having considered the age and experience of students, in association with teachers and parents, are encouraged (rather than required) to establish student councils and have the authority to draw up the rules for the establishment of such councils.

The submission went on to argue a rationale for student councils at primary level, which is rooted in an educational and social argument as well as in the need to promote participative democracy:

To exclude primary school children from involvement in such structures, however, is not only to undermine their capacity as thinking, acting, reflecting beings, but also detracts from developing within them the critical skills with which all citizens living in a pluralistic society should be equipped. Children who experience democracy in practice, will incorporate concepts of equality, difference and respect into their world view. The earlier this occurs, the greater the impact on their cognitive and social development.

Consultation with children and young people in schools could take the form of both direct consultation on specific initiatives and the building up of a representative database of children's perspectives on the education system.

One submission described a new research instrument being tested, to ascertain the satisfaction levels of children with their experience of life in hospital services. It said:

Currently there is growing awareness among medical professionals of the importance of seeking patient's views and patient satisfaction surveys are increasingly being used as part of quality assessment procedures. However, much of the literature to date has tended to focus on adult patients with a consequent neglect of children's views and experiences.

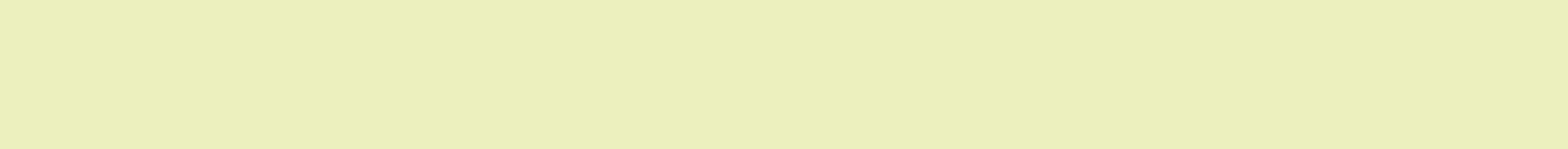
The research project has adopted a child-centred approach to devising an instrument that is based on children's needs and abilities.

## **6.3 Supporting Children and Young People with Disabilities**

About fifteen percent of the submissions raised issues concerning the supports needed by children and young people with disabilities. By far the majority of these were concerned about educational opportunities. A further significant concern was service co-ordination and delivery. Matters to do with health services, access, information technology and sports/recreation were mentioned, but only by a minority of contributors. The special concerns of several groups of young people with particular disabilities were raised also.

### **Inclusion**

It is interesting to note that the only educational option given serious consideration in the submissions on the matter of the educational provision for children with disabilities was inclusion in mainstream schools.





# Chapter 7

## Enabling Families, Communities and Professionals to Support Children

### Introduction

The main areas addressed in this section are:

- **Childcare**
- **Family and parenting support (including support for communities)**
- **Professional and staff support**

Since families and communities are the primary support systems for children, it is not surprising that the submissions raised issues about ways of assisting them. Almost 40% of submissions referred to family support needs.

The role of community is, in fact, interwoven through the material on family needs, with a good deal of the approaches to supporting families located in a community context. There was quite a strong emphasis on ways of supporting professionals in their work with children.

The same levels of access and service should be available to a child with a disability in any part of the country, it was argued. There was concern about the level of availability of pre-school services - both mainstream and specialist pre-schools.

The need for schools to plan in an explicit way for the inclusion of children with disabilities was mooted. Again, the School Plan was seen as the appropriate vehicle for this. One additional proposal was that financial support should be linked to specific planned reforms, with the NRB's 'Positive to Disability' symbol awarded to inclusive schools. Funding linked to the student, rather than the school was also seen as a way of enabling the student to access the school of their choice.

A wide range of supports for inclusion were identified. These included teaching support (particularly at second level), assistive technology, as well as improved school transport and transport grants.

### **Integrating health and education provision**

The integrated provision of support for children's health and their learning/teaching was raised. A holistic service to children with disabilities, as part of their 'educational package' should, it was argued in one submission, include all disciplines and be provided by the Department of Education and Science.

### **Local services**

The need for local delivery of these integrated services was stressed in the submissions - the need to bring the service to the child rather than the child to the service. This is a theme that has already been highlighted about general service provision. In the context of schooling for children with disabilities, the additional rationale is about reducing the stigma for children of having to leave school regularly for appointments, together with the loss of teaching time that this entails, as well as the need to take account of the fatigue that children with many disabilities can experience when having to travel long distances to services.

The need for reduced waiting times for speech and language therapists and early provision of that service was raised in a number of submissions.

### **Co-ordination**

Children should be assigned a key worker or a children's resource co-ordinator. The role of the co-ordinator would be to identify and provide access to all educational and care support services for the child with a disability and their family.

### **Learning programmes**

There was relatively little specific comment on the content of learning programmes for children with disabilities. Alternative teaching strategies for Physical Education for children with disabilities is needed, together with appropriate equipment, so that the children can be included in the PE programme. Sex education materials in accessible formats for deaf children and deaf parents were also mentioned. In general, the case is made for imaginative, creative, learning programmes in both schools and residential centres, that tap the creative abilities of young people with disabilities. The challenge to the educational system of catering to the 'new' group of children with severe and profound learning disabilities was acknowledged.

### **Particular needs**

The needs of deaf children were raised and a range of proposals for meeting those needs were identified. An emphasis in one of the submissions was on the right of access of deaf children to their own language and cultural identity. The particular needs and issues of visually impaired children, children with behavioural difficulties and children with diabetes were also raised. Among the points made about the needs of children with developmental disabilities, is the need

for access to sport and recreational activities suited to them.

There was a plea for funding for timely provision of seating, technical aids, artificial limbs for children with physical disabilities and *'radical change to ensure that the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities, their families and carers and advocates are comprehensively addressed.'*

## 6.4 Children and Young People Who Are Marginalised

The main focus in this material was on the supports needed for four groups - children in need of care and protection, homeless children, immigrant children and children and young people in trouble with the law. There was a call for greater focus on prevention and early intervention, to reduce the need for crisis intervention.

The need for more effective emergency services was mooted and in particular, access to support services 'out of hours' and at weekends. Children themselves need to know where to get help.

### Children in need of care and protection

Among the issues raised about children in need of care and protection were the following:

- The legal framework for child protection and the rights of the child who is removed from the family
- The accommodation needs of children who are not with their family
- Children with learning disabilities
- The operation of the Courts

### Legal frameworks

The rights of adults and families are much stronger, it was argued in the context of child care, than the rights of children *'and this can lead to children being returned to dangerous situations.'* Constitutional and legal changes were seen as needed in order to remove *'the constitutional invisibility of the child'*.

The post of Children's Rights Officer was proposed in the following extract:

We recommend that the posts of Children's Rights Officer should be introduced and available nation-wide. These posts should be independent of health boards and other agencies involved in the provision of services for children. Officers should have special responsibilities for children in residential and foster care. A complaints procedure for children needs to be transparent, accessible, independent and functional.

### Children who are not with their families

There was a good deal of discussion about appropriate responses to the accommodation needs of children who cannot live at home. The issues raised included the following:

- The unsuitability of the hospital setting to provide accommodation for children needing care
- The need for more and improved residential facilities, with units for no more than five children
- The need to explore the possibilities of open adoption
- The need for local fostering



- **The need for 'respectful access' for the parents of children who have been removed from their family setting.**

The particular needs of children and young people leaving care were raised. In the light of experience about their vulnerability, they should be given intensive supports, both in preparation for leaving care and afterwards.

**Children with learning disabilities**

Children and young people with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect, due to factors of social isolation, poor communication and social skills, a high dependence on adult carers and limited mobility. While it was acknowledged that the recent 'Guidelines for Protection and Welfare of Children' has helped to clarify matters, there is a need for greater attention to the form and nature of abuse experienced by people with learning disabilities.

**The operation of the courts system**

The operation of the court system with regard to child protection was also raised in several submissions. The importance of the Guardian ad Litem service was stressed and a fully comprehensive service was sought; there is a suggestion that this service does not function well at district court level, leading to a call for national guidelines about the operation of the service; concerns were expressed about the perceived unwillingness to prosecute in the case of very young children, *'even where there has been a confession of child abuse.'*

The experience of children with the court system was discussed. Waiting times for hearings are seen as damaging for children and the need for child friendly court procedures were stressed.

**Homeless and 'out of home' children and young people**

While there were references to homelessness in several submissions, the main material was contained in a small number of submissions from agencies who have a particular remit in supporting young homeless people.

The extent of child homelessness was described and the 'at risk' groups were named. The need for updated research was suggested. An extensive critique of the existing services was offered, together with a description of the elements of a comprehensive service, which runs from the legal framework, through prevention, services and aftercare. In the main, all the issues and concerns raised in other submissions were covered in this proposed strategy.

The needs of young homeless people go well beyond accommodation provision - aftercare, housing, health, education and employment needs have to be addressed in a holistic way. The reality for homeless young people of having to live independently of family at an earlier age than the majority of young people is highlighted.

The nature of what a holistic service might look like is described:

By implementing a health promotion strategy in the provision of services for out of home young people, service providers will be able to focus in increasing participation by young people, empowerment, increasing personal control and positive health and social gain.

**The needs of immigrant children**

Several submissions wanted to see improved resources and facilities for immigrant children. The supports ranged from family support workers, to practical matters of telephones that can be used by ethnic minority children to get help, interpreters and language teaching. Voucher systems should not be used, it was argued, except to supplement allowances. There was a call for particular support for unaccompanied minor refugees.

Many submissions called for training and development programmes for staff in organisations to undertake multicultural work or to address racism.

### **Children and young people in trouble with the law**

A comprehensive strategy to prevent young people from getting into trouble with the law would, it was proposed, involve a co-ordinated approach in which youth services, clubs and projects would play a major part. After school services in disadvantaged areas would also help. The Probation and Welfare service has an important preventive role to play at community level. The success of the juvenile liaison scheme in helping young people to avoid conviction has been significant.

A radically new model of juvenile justice was proposed in one submission. According to that submission, such a model would effectively remove most young offenders from the garda/courts/juvenile liaison office system, into a clearly defined welfare response. The following statement was made:

The operation of systems in Scotland and New Zealand are quite well known in Ireland and it would be helpful if the Strategy was to articulate an appropriate model for the Irish situation.

Urgent action to address gaps in provision of residential places, especially for young female offenders under eighteen years and intensive treatment for young people with particular needs, was recommended.

## **6.5 Play, Recreation and Development Opportunities**

The problem of drawing distinctions between care and learning has already been noted in the material on early learning. A similar issue comes up with the material on play, recreation and youth work. The learning dimensions of both play for children and youth work for young people were highlighted in submissions. Indeed, in a number of the submissions on youth work, the case was made for *'more emphasis...on a social education model of youth work, as opposed to a purely recreational model of youth work.'*

The material in this section deals with a continuum of concerns and needs, from needs for physical facilities for play and recreation, to much more complex matters relating to the role of youth work in young people's development and in preventing/addressing disadvantage. There is also an age-related continuum - from the play needs of young children through to the needs of older teenagers and young people.

The broader organisational point is made in relation to all of these services and needs, that there must be consultation with young people, parents and communities about provision.

The material falls mainly under the following headings:

- **The role of youth work**
- **General facilities and resources for play, recreation and development**

### **The role of youth work and the resourcing of youth work**

The particular place of youth work in a learning spectrum was outlined in a submission which set out definitions of formal, informal and non-formal education as follows:

Formal education is the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded, educational system running from primary through to tertiary institutions.

Informal education is the process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience, such as from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences and factors in the person's environment.

Non-formal education is organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to service an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

The very important part that youth organisations play in this level of non-formal education was highlighted in the submissions. The need for recognising and resourcing this role was underlined.

The case was made for greater connection between the formal and informal education systems, with programmes complementing each other.

This kind of work is seen as contributing in a whole range of ways to the development of young people. But it is also seen as playing a very central part in supporting the emergence of community leaders, offering very positive role models to young people and encouraging commitments and good value systems. The following quotation sums up the high expectations that youth organisations have for youth development work:

By youth development, we mean knowing more, being able to do more and being more. In other words it refers to the development of knowledge, the development of ability and the development of those specifically human qualities which characterise what is best in human nature. These include creativity, respect for human dignity, active concern for the common good, personally enhancing ethical standards and so on. It is the development of human potential so that the individual may achieve personal fulfilment and take his/her place as an active and valued member of society.

One submission sets out clearly its expectations as to how the National Children's Strategy will support its youth development work:

We want the National Children's Strategy to foster and promote co-ordination provided by the statutory agencies and genuine partnerships between the voluntary and statutory sectors in the future development of the Youth Service. Furthermore, we want these principles underpinned in appropriate legislation.

### **Resource issues**

The submissions mentioned a number of resources needed for the work of youth organisations. These include a professionally managed youth resource centre in every community, core funding for ongoing work as well as for projects, a designated youth officer in each club, trained in volunteer recruitment and employer recognition of the work, through giving time off work for certain youth work activities.

It was suggested that funding levels for youth work should be benchmarked across all government departments and statutory agencies.

Recognition and support for the wide and diverse range of activities is needed. These activities include one-to-one youth mentoring programmes, arts based youth work, peer education programmes and after school support.

The case was also made for mainstreaming successful projects in all of these areas.

The funding base of some organisations such as scouting (where young people make a

subscription to the work) prevents them from working with disadvantaged young people. There is a need, it is suggested, for public funding and multi-agency funding to help those organisations to give access to their activities to all young people. The case is made for support for summer projects.

### **General facilities and resources for play, recreation and development**

Many submissions called for play, recreation and leisure facilities to be provided in every community. This provision needs to be built into local authority planning and into estate design. There was an emphasis on safety, good quality play provision and aesthetically pleasing facilities, based in the local community. Drop-in centres and purpose built facilities are needed. School buildings, facilities and school transport should be available for use by those working in informal education. The successful experience of some local authorities in the UK in providing skateparks is described and there is concern about the use of 'insurance difficulties' as an argument for not providing local authority playgrounds.

Rural children and young people need to have these facilities, as well as children in large towns. There was also a view that the four to fourteen age group is not well catered for and that this gap can lead to later difficulties. A suggestion was that facilities should be provided in a way which gives young people opportunities to connect with senior citizens.

## **6.6 Children and Young People as Active Citizens**

The concept of the child as active citizen was quite strong in the submissions. The case is made for the strengthening of children's rights in our laws, policies and practices. Some dealt with the issue of rights in detail; others noted the UN Convention as an important development and commented about its implementation. Yet others drew down rights for particular groups, as the basis of their entitlement to particular kinds of service provision.

Attention was drawn to the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe concerning Children's Participation in Family and Social Life and a range of principles set out in that recommendation to underpin participation.

The main thrust of the comments was that young people need to be respected and valued, with the right to express views on all matters that affect them and to have those views heard. One dissenting view is that 'autonomy' for children can easily lead to disastrous results for children and for their families. There was a call for more public debate about children's issues.

As well as making the case for children's right to be heard, there were several proposals about the areas of public life where young people should have a say and there were suggestions about how young people might be equipped to play their part as citizens in an effective way.

### **On what issues should children and young people have a say?**

In general, there was a view that *'all children through their representative groupings should be consulted at the planning stage for all services targeted at or for the benefit of children.'*

Specific areas that received particular mention are education, health services, local authority planning and in particular in the new local planning and consultation structures being established by the Local Authorities.

### **Mechanisms for consultation**

Some mechanisms were suggested:

Under the Strategy, incentives, pilot schemes and protocols should be developed for

operationalising compliance with Article 12 of the Convention across different systems of services....

The Strategy should ensure that School Plans required under the Education Act 1998 and highlighted under the PPF should include attention to meaningful and explicit mechanisms for participation by young people in the governance and organisation of each school....

Consideration should be given to Dáil na n-Óg initiatives in each county constituency in which young people could elect representatives to debate and influence relevant policies. Consideration should also be given to this being linked with CSPE teaching in schools.

This submission goes on to propose that the local Dáils should be used to give service managers the opportunity to present policies and be questioned from the perspective of young service users.

Other fora suggested included a Youth Forum in Dáil Éireann and a national youth forum.

### **How should young people's participation be supported?**

People need skills in order to participate effectively. Young people need skills and role models. The challenge for adults and service providers is a major one, for which they, as well as young people, will need training and support: *'This requires much work to empower children to participate and to facilitate adults to be able to listen.'* It was envisaged that training modules for adults and professional staff will be an essential support for young people's participation.

Other support systems noted were independent complaints procedures, an advocacy process for children at all levels, active consumer feedback, as required in the Strategic Management Initiative, information for children about services and in particular, the advent of the Ombudsman.

## 7.1 Childcare

The comments on childcare could be summed up as a call for high quality, safe, affordable childcare for all parents. A further theme was that of flexibility to meet varying needs and the need to offer choice to parents.

Some suggested that state support for childcare should not be confined to families who are recognisably disadvantaged in financial terms. A playgroup leader from a rural area makes the point:

...I've come across many parents who are not seen to be 'disadvantaged' but would have difficulty coming up with the necessary fees for childcare due to high mortgage expenses.

Another dimension of the same argument is the need to avoid stigmatising children and families from particular backgrounds.

Childcare provision is not only needed by working parents, parents working in the home will have need for childcare at times of family crises, to enable them to attend appointments, shopping, etc and also on account of its dual role in early education. The following statement was made:

Comprehensive, top quality subsidised State, Voluntary and Private provision of childcare ...should also be available to all parents, including non-working parents. This is deemed as important in a situation where family size is decreasing and for children to have contact with other children.

A flexible range of local options were seen as the way to respond to the many kinds of childcare needs in an area.

The childcare/early education issue is seen as having special significance for promoting social inclusion, as demonstrated in the following extract:

The [contributor organisation] sees childcare as a fundamental part of any strategy for promoting social inclusion. The issues of childcare are not stand alone issues but an integral part of all community development. In a report commissioned by Peace and Reconciliation on Educational Disadvantage in early 1999, it was recommended that the role of parents and the intervention of the pre-school sector are some of the most effective ways of addressing early school leaving. Childcare also plays a fundamental role in encouraging people to go back to training, education and work.

A particular need identified by the group who made this submission was the need for information and training for parents on what to look for in choosing a childcare service.

As well as these general matters, the following were the main areas of concern which were raised about childcare:

- **Approaches to provision**
- **Funding for childcare**
- **Quality**

### **Approaches to provision**

The three main forms of provision discussed were workplace provision, community based provision and childcare in the home. The greater focus was on community and home based provision.

### **Workplace provision**

The material on employer support for childcare dealt with the importance of two approaches - the availability of part time working, flexi-time and job sharing arrangements on the one hand, and on the other hand, the provision of workplace creche facilities. These options are seen as recognising the need for children to bond with and develop stable and secure relationships with their parents.

The tensions which can arise between competing needs of family and economy are highlighted in the following extract:

There is a need for achieving a better balance between the demands of employment and the requirements of family life, particularly the needs and rights of children..This requires radical innovation and much greater flexibility in employment structures - in effect, a reversal of the current situation where it is the family requirements which are expected to adjust to the needs of the job market.

### **Community-based provision**

The case for supporting childcare provision by local community groups was made in several submissions. This is seen as having the capacity to offer a quality service at a low cost. But, it was argued, these providers need various forms of state assistance if they are to function effectively in childcare provision. Play groups are seen as an important form of provision, whose development should be targeted, in line with the National Development Plan. There was a proposal that childcare centres should be attached to all national schools.

The need for a wide range of childcare provisions operating through the medium of Irish was identified in one submission. There was a suggestion for mobile childcare services for rural areas.

The role of grandparents in the childcare area was highlighted in a small number of submissions.

The particular needs of older children was raised in several submissions and there were many calls for the development of after-school facilities, homework clubs and facilities to look after older children during school holidays, as part of a comprehensive after school policy.

Attention was also given in several submissions to the need to support and recognise the particular role of family-based private day care and those who provide it.

### **The pre-school regulations**

The impact of the pre-school regulations are seen as negative for family-based providers-*'The Childcare Regulations have created a situation whereby the only legitimate childcare available is institutional'*.

This sector, it was argued in the following extract, is particularly important for older children who will not be looked after in workplace creches or playgroups:

The children arrive at the creche/nursery at 7.30. They then wait for school to start at 9-9.30. When school finishes at 3-4.00 they return to nursery and wait for collection at 6-7.00. This is their routine five days a week for fifty weeks of the year. There are no services to cater for the needs of older children. As the age range increases the problems will increase. Older children will insist on returning home after school caring for themselves, rather than wait at a nursery. The present situation is unacceptable. If action is not taken now, the problems facing Irish society will only multiply.

One parent expressed palpable frustration on account of the impact of the childcare regulations:

Three weeks ago, we received shocking news that our creche in [town name] is to close in July. The reason is because of non-compliance with health board regulations. In order to remain in existence, the creche would have to halve its numbers ..an act which would make it economically unviable.

As well as documenting the dilemmas now facing him and his wife as a result of the closure of the creche, this parent offers an analysis of the interplay of social, economic and regulatory factors which appear to him to conspire against working parents. His argument relates to the planning of infrastructure:

Childcare is not seen as infrastructure but rather a contentious issue best avoided if at all possible. An example is that in the new five year development plan for [named town] there is no provision for childcare facilities. All this in spite of the population explosion and the hundreds of new houses planned in the coming years.

### **Full time parenting**

The view was expressed in a number of submissions that care by the parent in the home is the most effective and appropriate form of care for children and there is concern in these submissions that economic policies or childcare policies should not undermine that role.

Strong concern was expressed in one submission that the material expectations of parents may be running counter to the well being of children. The following statement was made:

The society that they are now living in has become so self centred and selfish that the children are now not placed first on the list of priorities of parents. They must have their jobs, their cars, their annual holiday abroad, their nights out etc.,

### **Funding for childcare**

Both direct and indirect forms of funding were raised.

#### **Direct State funding for providers**

Capital funding, funding for equipment, funding to enable pre-school providers to meet the requirement of the pre-school regulations, funding for set-up costs and funding for training for playleaders and playgroup assistants were the main funding areas identified in the submissions. Multi-annual funding for childcare services is sought, for a five year funding period. There was a proposal for a subsidy for each child looked after by every registered carer or creche in proportion to the numbers being served.

#### **Indirect funding**

Tax relief for private minders was proposed in a further submission, which suggests that £120 per week of income should be tax free.

The costs of insurance were raised and there was a proposal that a Government sponsored insurance scheme be established *'providing a consistency in cover and affordable to the provider, thus reducing the overall costs to the parent/guardian'*.

A further proposal was that the provider would be insured, rather than the venue, so allowing private minders to work in children's homes, allowing children to spend time in their own homes.

There were also suggestions about tax reform and subsidies to enable parents to purchase childcare. The 'non-recognition of childminding expenses' is seen as a source of severe strain on parents.



Tax relief or other state support for both parents and grandparents offering childcare was mooted. Proposals included non-contributory social insurance credits for parents childminding at home equivalent to Class A PRSI payments.

There were several criticisms of the provisions for individualisation of taxation and their impact on full time parents.

### **Quality**

There was a call for transparent and unambiguous standards as the basis of inspection in all parts of the country. While the new regulations were seen as addressing some dimensions of quality in physical facilities, there is a need, it was suggested, to go further and focus on excellence in childcare provision.

‘Non punitive’ registration of carers is proposed.

## **7.2 Family and Parenting Support**

Articles 5 and 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were quoted as the basis for an obligation on Government to support parents in fulfilling their essential role as primary caregivers. As well as occupying that pivotal caring role, parents are seen as essential role models for children and young people. Support for parenting and for families was seen in the submissions as an important ingredient in the strategy for supporting children.

The submissions identified additional supports for parents and families who may have additional needs. The main emphasis was on families who are disadvantaged or marginalised, but there was also some commentary on the needs of families of children with disabilities and children who are ill.

In this section we look at the observations on the following themes:

- **Family and parenting support**
- **Services and facilities for vulnerable families**
- **Support for separated and divorced parents**
- **Support for going to work, training or education**
- **Income support**
- **Supports for families of children with disabilities and children who are ill**
- **Support for communities**

### **Support for Parenting**

The need for assistance for parents in the task of parenting was raised frequently. For example:

Society has changed dramatically over the past number of years, as has the traditional family unit. Parents are finding it increasingly difficult to parent effectively. They do not have the support structures to call on within the extended family. All families are affected by the ever changing outside influences, support should be available at all stages to empower parents to maintain a family environment where children can be nurtured and encouraged to reach their potential.

## Parenting programmes

Parenting programmes were the most frequently mentioned form of support. The view in the submissions was that these programmes should be available to all parents, to support them in all stages of children's development. For example:

...there should be ongoing available parenting support to families throughout the childhood years and beyond. The widespread availability and normalising of access to this type of help would have major spin off effects in helping both individuals and families access help earlier and with less resistance when and if a more serious need should arise later in life.

There were suggestions for maximising access to parenting programmes and the take-up of these; classes should be free to parents of children up to four years old; an alternative approach was to suggest payment to parents for attending parenting courses; the learning about parenting should begin at school and that people in their communities should be resourced to give parenting support to the young people in their own communities; the restoration of village-style support was seen in one instance as a most effective way of helping young parents.

The issue of standards in parenting programmes was raised in the following extract:

We recommend setting standards for all parenting courses regardless of who is providing them. The current situation allows anybody and any group or organisation to set these training courses with varying degrees of standards.

The view was expressed that parenting programmes should begin as part of ante-natal care. According to one contributor, the challenge is to change the way in which children are perceived by adults and especially by parents:

...this expected baby is not just 'a baby' but a person first and foremost, to be treated with respect in the way they would like to be treated themselves and how they treat adults whom they respect....I can't emphasis enough the importance of changing this mindset of 'baby' 'kids' etc. They are people first - tiny people right now, but one day will be grown up and what happened to them from birth will make the difference between happiness and sadness for that person.

## Family resource centres

Family resource centres are seen as being a very important part of the family support process. There was an acknowledgement of the worth of the various initiatives to set up such services and a call to continue to develop them.

The possibilities for community based family support, organised around a family resource centre was put forward as including:

- Family resource centre managed by all stakeholders in the community
- Community consultations used to identify needs and gaps in services
- Roster of professionals drawn up
- Programmes change to meet new needs
- Inter generational involvement
- Outreach
- Stakeholders responsible for the service

A similar proposal argues for inter-agency working as follows:

My vision is for each small town or area to have a co-ordinated family resource centre. Services in the centre would include creche, play group, homework clubs, after-school





# Part 3

## **Consultation forum**



A stylized illustration in a light yellow-green color on a darker yellow-green background. It depicts a child's profile from the chest up, with one arm raised high, reaching towards three five-pointed stars of varying sizes scattered in the upper half of the page. The child's head is on the left, and the arm extends diagonally upwards towards the center-right.

# Chapter8

Report on the Consultation  
Forum

clubs, holiday projects, youth club as well as group work, home management advice and counselling support etc. The only way that this can be achieved is that there is a contribution from all relevant agencies into the one service based on a local model.

### **Other forms of parenting support**

Among the range of approaches mentioned for parenting support (in addition to formal programmes) were mother and toddler groups, information on child development provided by schools, video material, sex education materials for parents, more frequent visits to new mothers by public health nurses and regular visits in the pre-school years.

The community mother's scheme was seen as a most effective form of support for parenting (see next section).

Fathers' role in parenting was mentioned in a very small number of submissions. The need for more research around that role was proposed, as well as greater encouragement for fathers' involvement in parenting through improved paternal leave.

One submission argues, to support children, the State must provide for support for marriage. This support would include financial incentives for married couples over and above those available to other individuals or groups and financial incentives for one parent to stay at home to look after children, as well as family friendly work practices.

### **Parents as partners with service providers**

Support for parental involvement in education and in the development of good home-school links was mentioned in a number of submissions. There was a plea for greater flexibility on the part of schools to enable lone parents who are working to participate in parent teacher meetings.

One parent expresses concern in the following extract about the 'lost resource' for children's learning, when parents are not drawn into school life:

I am left out of this part of my child's life, which makes me very sad. I have spoken with other parents and there are many of us out there who would like to be more involved with our children's school and would like to be regarded as a resource rather than as a nuisance, to be kept away from the school. Research has shown that when a parent is involved in a school, the child is more likely to do well in school and isn't that our goal - to have all our children do well in school.

In relation to children's health, the issues raised include:

- The importance of active partnership with parents in planning services
- The need for support for breastfeeding
- The need for support for the parental role in screening and surveillance
- The proposal that health record forms should be distributed to parents at the birth of a child and held by the parents

### **Legal initiatives**

It was stated that the implementation of the Law Reform Commission's recommendations for a period of public education on parenting without physical punishment should be commenced urgently, with a view to a full legal ban.

### **Services and Facilities for Vulnerable Families**

Systems and strategies to help troubled and vulnerable families need to be innovative, intensive and sustained. They need to focus on the whole family and all aspects of the family's well

# Appendix 1

## The Arrangements for Consultations with Children and Young People



being. The support services need to be available continuously and not only during office hours. Planning needs to involve the families, there needs to be more emphasis on parental decision-making and evaluation needs to take account of their views. Systems to identify families under pressure are needed and preventive strategies should have a high priority. These were among the main general points made about family support systems for vulnerable families.

### **Family resource centres and support workers**

Family resource centres were seen as being particularly valuable to vulnerable families. Linked to this is the need for family support workers or home support workers. Such open-ended support may be an essential pre-requisite to enable some people to take advantage of other services. A recognition of the level of need that some families have to deal with is put forward graphically in this extract:

Many parents (particularly single parents) with young children simply cannot cope. No amount of counselling and parenting programmes is going to help them to get the dishes washed, the kids off to school, the bills paid, the clothes cleaned, the shopping done. The number of family support workers should be increased dramatically and it should be possible for stressed parents to receive support on a daily basis where required. It is often the case that only when the day to day pressures of the real world are eased can depressed mothers really benefit from counselling etc. This is of course the same for children.

### **Community mothers programme and community nurses**

Among the range of support programmes that would make a difference, the community mothers scheme was consistently mentioned as being of particular value to new mothers, single mothers, mothers and families under pressure and the expansion of the scheme is recommended. The focus of the scheme is seen to be on the empowerment of parents. The support of the community/public health nurse is also seen as very valuable and needs to be increased.

### **Targeted parenting programmes**

Parenting courses targeted to meet the particular needs of vulnerable groups were recommended. These should be provided on an outreach basis. They should address giving parents an understanding of children's developmental milestones.

### **Information**

Well resourced information services would be a further strand of service to meet needs. The importance of self-help groups as a form of support is highlighted in this extract:

Social isolation is one of the key difficulties for unmarried parents. There is significant growth in the development of self help support services for lone parents and the value of support groups cannot be overestimated. They are one of the greatest resources for single parents in terms of emotional support, practical support and as a source of information which empowers them. The fact that consumers have an input into their development is central to their success.

Attention was drawn to a successful web site where lone parents can provide mutual support.

### **Separated and divorced parents**

The submissions identified separating and separated/divorced parents as having particular needs. Access to counselling, parenting skills for their circumstances and relationship skills training are mentioned among the kinds of interventions needed. There is a need for information about mediation, as well as access to mediation services all around the country. One particular programme - Families in Transition Programme, pioneered in Kentucky- was mentioned in a submission as being successful and having a particular focus on children's welfare.

The submissions raised the issue of housing for separated families and the challenges that arise because both parents need the kind of housing which allows them to have their children stay with them. Linked to this is the need for a network of community facilities where both parents and grandparents can meet children, in a safe, child friendly and inexpensive environment.

A new and more child friendly language should be promoted around litigation issues, it was proposed, with terms such as 'contact' and 'residence', replacing 'access' and 'custody.'

### **Support for going to work, training or education**

The importance of offering parents in marginalised groups opportunities to go to work, training or further education was mentioned in several submissions. Not surprisingly, the absence of affordable childcare was seen as one of the biggest barriers here.

### **Income support**

Many of the comments about improved income support for children were directed to all children. However, the particular need to address child poverty was a strong theme. While the ways of addressing this are multi-dimensional, basic income support is seen as one important aspect of an anti-poverty strategy. The following extract demonstrates:

One of the huge challenges for a substantial number of children is having opportunities to achieve their potential, particularly in low income families. Families on low income struggle daily with providing for the material needs of their children - healthy food, clothes, shoes, education resources, health care, trying to balance these with the needs of the parents.

As well as general calls to increase child benefit, there was a detailed proposal for a ten year strategy to address child poverty:

- **A composite minimum income for children in need of £30-£40 per week depending on age**
- **A child benefit of £25 per week for all children**
- **A childcare supplement of £32.50 per month via child benefit**

### **Supports for families of children with disabilities and children who are ill**

The issues for families of children with disabilities and children who are ill mirror very closely the issues for other families with particular needs. They cover parenting support, services, information and income support.

The theme of information about entitlements is strong in relation to families of children with disabilities. Information on entitlements is said to be 'muddled and elusive.' The issue of choice is linked to the availability of information.

Parenting support needs identified include disability awareness training for parents, support at the time when a child's disability is diagnosed and co-ordination of the approach to families. As with other groups, mutual support groups are seen as particularly helpful.

The range of service inputs mentioned include respite care, home support for the parent and the pre-school child with a disability, family therapy, paediatric physiotherapy to support both parents and other service providers and the availability of a social worker with the task of liaising between the family, the health board and the Department of Education and Science. There was a submission for support for the development of a national centre for families of children with rare disabilities, along the lines of the FRAMBU model in Scandinavia.

The material concerning the needs of children who are ill has already been described in an

earlier section. A small number of additional points about specific family needs were made. These include the need for facilities for parents to stay on wards with children, the need for outreach nursing support, oncology social workers to give assistance to families of children with cancer and support for self help groups and organisations. The need for families to be involved in policy decisions about services was noted again. The advent of access to records under the Freedom of Information Act were seen as a way of dealing with parents' concerns that they may not hear everything they need to know about a child's condition.

### **Support for communities**

The theme of community runs through much of the material in submissions - the emphasis on local delivery of services, locally based resource centres, community 'ownership' of services.

#### **Physical facilities for communities**

The need for community facilities for after school care, sports, leisure activities, childcare and play facilities, were among those noted. The physical facilities are seen as an essential catalyst for harnessing voluntary effort in support of young people and capital funds should be made available by the exchequer, it was argued.

It was proposed that local authorities should make community facilities mandatory in all new housing developments. Community centres in rural areas got mentioned. Community facilities are seen as an important mechanism through which people of all generations can come together and benefit from the interaction.

#### **Community-based planning**

The importance of consultation with communities about local needs was highlighted over and over in the submissions. Linked to this point is the value that comes from the co-working of community, statutory and voluntary agencies, as a way of enhancing local skills.

#### **Communities in disadvantaged areas**

Submissions from a number of youth organisations highlighted their role in promoting and developing community leaders and argued for support for that role for youth organisations working in disadvantaged areas.

The following extract describes how a strategic approach has worked in a deprived community in the US. The contributor describes the outcome of a neighbourhood Transformation Family Development Initiative:

A ten year centrepiece investment designed to demonstrate that severely troubled communities can be remade into places where strong families form and children thrive:

They arrived at the conclusion that for a growing number of families and children affected by social deprivation, the future will not be altered by small or narrow initiatives but instead requires an unprecedentedly intense, extended and comprehensive commitment from a range of players, including state and local officials, neighbourhood residents and leaders, employers and investors and leaders in the local philanthropic and non-profit community.

## **7.3 Professional and Staff Support**

The importance of training and development for professional personnel and service staff in securing good outcomes for children is underlined in the extent of the material in the submissions about staffing and training/development issues. Almost 30% of submissions raised issues on this matter. This reflects to some degree too the fact that organisations and professionals were the main source of submissions. The focus of the material on professional issues is on the following areas:

- **Training and development**
- **Staffing**
- **Qualifications**

The material deals mainly with healthcare personnel, teachers, childcare workers, youth workers and a small number of other named professional groups.

### **Training and development**

The submissions addressed both general training issues and specific training needs of some staff groups.

#### **General training and development needs**

The following are among the main areas of training and development noted as being essential for all those working with children:

- **Training to enable staff to be more client centred**
- **Learning how to listen to and talk to children**
- **Open-mindedness to lifelong learning, collaborative planning and an action research philosophy**
- **A commitment to the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and education about the Convention**
- **Commitment to the best interests of the child**
- **Support for the development of more Irish medium professionals**
- **Involvement of young people themselves in delivering training about their needs**
- **Training in communication and attitudinal change**

The issue being raised in this last point is as follows:

Professionals and agencies need training in communication and attitudinal change so that they can convey a non-judgemental attitude to families in difficulty. This training should include community development methods of involving, consulting and engaging parents and children in the solutions to their problems.

#### **Specific training needs**

Several specific training needs were noted:

- **Training to apply the 'Children First Guidelines for Protection and Welfare of Children'**
- **Health promotion modules in all training/education courses for staff working with children**
- **Training about the importance of play**
- **Bereavement education for all staff**
- **Training regarding children with special needs and appropriate use of language around disability**
- **Training about culturally sensitive practice and refugee issues**

Additional training areas mentioned for medical and nursing staff include training in the need for confidentiality and respect for the privacy of adolescents, counselling training for staff giving

diagnoses and development of the skills to involve parents.

For teachers, the additional training and development areas mentioned related to:

- Skills to implement programmes for children of different abilities and non-academic abilities
- Training in supporting emotional development
- Training about recognising dyspraxia
- Information/training about asthma
- Modules relating to children's rights and status in education
- Training in operating participatory mechanisms for children
- Support for policies on inclusion
- Support to effect curriculum change

There were many calls in the submissions for quality training for playgroup leaders, playgroup assistants and childcare workers. This training should be free, locally based, high quality training leading to recognised qualifications. It was also proposed that there should be a network of development workers or advisory workers in each county to support providers. This extract highlights the issue:

...it is very important that the issue of quality is now addressed through the availability and provision of flexible training programmes for playgroup staff. There was very little reference to the need for training and qualifications in the Pre-School Services Regulations and this is something that will need to be addressed in the future. Investing in training now will help to meet the need for qualified staff in the future. It would also give due recognition to the large number of women who have relevant experience within their own communities.

There was a specific proposal for a two-year pilot employment programme, involving a two year apprenticeship, geared towards childcare. Community Childcare Centres could, it was argued in another submission, become a training ground for future childcare professionals, in consultation with FÁS.

Training for Gardaí in dealing with domestic violence, training and support for youth workers and training for judges dealing with child sexual abuse cases, are among the other areas named in the submissions.

## Staffing

### Staffing levels

Several groups indicated that there were deficits in staffing levels in particular professions. This would probably be a common call across service boundaries. The impact of gaps is seen in the following submission as having a 'cascade' effect on needy children:

One of the fundamental difficulties facing the provision of services for children and young people, especially those with difficulties, is the huge shortages in appropriately trained staff. For some of the most needy and vulnerable children within our society, there are vacancies within every service - clinical psychology, speech and language therapists, child care workers, occupational therapists, child and adolescent psychiatric nursing.

The submission went on to express concern about the impact of delays and gaps in therapeutic support:

I feel this is a very serious problem as the result can be that children are 'labelled' as

# Appendix 2

## Invitation for Submissions

being 'untreatable' whereas the paucity of services means that they do not get the appropriate input when they need it. The child becomes blamed rather than focusing on the lack of support and provision of input that is needed to help this child and family.

### **Staff support**

There were a small number of general points made about staff well being. These included the need for affirmation and encouragement for staff and the need for salary levels and structures that reflect the value and importance of the roles that particular groups play. The following submission made the point strongly in relation to staff working with emotionally disturbed children:

Where services are relatively new, enthusiasm has not been turned to burnout by way of lack of supervision, lack of ongoing training or the lack of opportunities for promotion (for instance, the lack of career development opportunities for childcare workers). Unfortunately, for those services where these problems exist and staff are under what seems like a deluge of demands for finished work, then it is very difficult to prevent burnout, reduced efficiency, mental health problems and quitting from the service. The nature of the work with emotionally disturbed children requires that staff have time to reflect on their own responses to these children and sometimes their emotional congruencies with these children's lives - pressure to deal with throughput prevents such processing occurring.

### **Qualifications**

Some very profession-specific matters were raised about qualifications. The professional qualification for paediatric nurses was raised, with a call for the re-introduction of a three year paediatric training programme; there was a call for the discipline of sick children's nursing to be included in a four year degree programme.

There were many contributions about the need for a standardised approach to qualification and certification in the childcare area and a number of proposals, including the need for training to be standardised to diploma and degree level and for a system accreditation of prior learning.

The Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin T.D. hosted a consultation forum in June to review the findings of the consultation process. Those invited to the morning session were some of the younger children who made submissions through their organisations and schools, with over one hundred attending. Those invited in the afternoon included older children, adults and organisations who made submissions.

The younger children worked through drama workshops with members from both the National Theatre Education Outreach and The Ark to review some of the findings of the consultation with children and help them prioritise the themes raised in the submissions. A draft, age-appropriate version of the consultation report was given to each of the children. The children spoke with the Minister throughout the session. Their priorities for the National Children's Strategy were:

- **Children need to grow up in a world that is clean with fresh air and clean streets**
- **Children need to have places and time to have fun**
- **Children deserve to be listened to**
- **Children need somewhere safe to live and have family and friends to care for them**
- **Children need to be respected**
- **Children need to feel safe outside**
- **Children need nice schools.**

In the afternoon, the Minister and senior civil servants from the relevant government departments met with over two hundred attendees to hear a presentation by the researcher who analysed and compiled a report on the submissions. A draft copy of the report was made available. There was also a presentation detailing how the consultation process will inform the development of the National Children's Strategy. A period of time was taken to allow attendees to review and discuss the findings. During this time facilitated workshops were offered to all attendees, which were taken up by most of the young people who attended. On resumption to a plenary session, representatives from each of the young people's groups were invited to give their comments, which included:

- **The need for quality accessible sports and recreational facilities for all age groups and in all areas of the country**
- **With reference to schools, the issues of restrictions on subject choices and the need for consultation within schools**
- **All types of discrimination should be tackled**
- **The consultation with young people was welcomed and it was hoped that it will continue.**

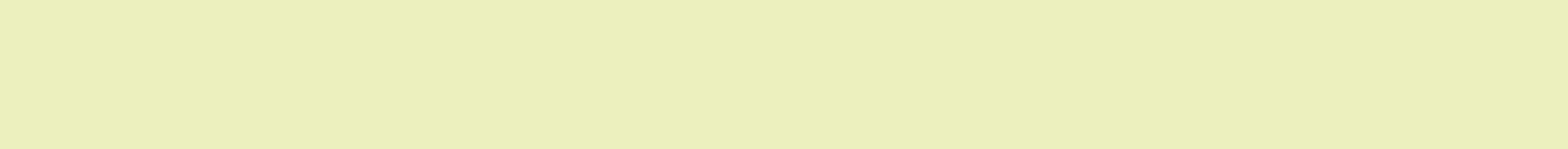
A significant number of attendees spoke, broadly welcoming the Government initiative for a National Children's Strategy, the consultation undertaken and the engagement of children and young people. Other points addressed the consultation process and the expectations from the National Children's Strategy. Many of the points reiterated contributions made in submissions to the Strategy and their perception of how individual concerns were treated in the draft report. Some of the issues raised included:

- **The importance of the family and community in supporting children's lives**
- **The need for more consultation in preparation for the Strategy**
- **The need to focus on children with disabilities in the Strategy**
- **There was specific reference to the needs of deaf children and their families**

Attendees were given an additional three weeks for their comments before preparing the report for publication.

In the weeks following the Forum, additional comments were made and further submissions received. All of the points made at the Consultation Forum and received subsequently will be considered in drawing together the National Children's Strategy.





# Appendix 3

## List of Contributors

There were submissions from 316 organisations and adults including:

# The Consultations through letters and e-mails

## The invitation to children and young people

The Minister of State with Responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin T.D., issued an invitation to children and young people to send their views on the following questions:

Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in? What's good about it? What would make it better?

This invitation was placed in national daily and evening newspapers, and in a number of other newspapers such as The Farmers Journal.

The invitation was placed in magazines and journals, including the RTÉ Guide, The Big Issue, as well as in journals of a number of young people's organisations.

The invitation was placed on the schools' web site, Scoilnet, and on the web site of the Department of Health and Children. It was also circulated to all libraries.

The text of the invitation is reproduced in Appendix 2.

## The response

825 responses were received from children and young people. They came from individuals and from groups of young people who sent letters from their class in their school, from their youth group and from their Brownie or guide group.

Each of those who wrote were sent personalised responses from the Minister.

# Consultations facilitated by organisations

## Preliminary planning

Organisations affiliated to the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council were invited to facilitate a consultation with young people involved with their organisation, or whom they link with through their work.

These organisations were invited to attend a preparatory workshop. This workshop was run by the National Children's Strategy team, in co-operation with the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council.

The purpose of the preparatory workshop was to give representatives of organisations background information on the National Children's Strategy, to provide an opportunity for them to share ideas about good ways of consulting with children and young people and to discuss some of the arrangements for the consultations, such as formats of feedback.

## The consultations with children and young people

Consultations with children and young people were subsequently facilitated by ten organisations. Here we give a brief overview of the nature and scope of those consultations, reproduced from the information provided by each organisation.

# The

## Barnardos

Barnardos consulted with children ranging in age from 4 -13 years, inclusive. The children all live in urban disadvantaged areas. The consultation was undertaken with children who are already attending Barnardos services in their local communities. The children were brought together in the small groups in which they usually meet, therefore they knew one another and were familiar with the project setting.

Parents were given information on the National Children's Strategy with particular reference to the consultative process with their children. All of the parents gave consent to their children's involvement.

The methodologies used included questionnaires, drawings, collages and group discussion. The process was undertaken in a way which was developmentally appropriate. The feedback on the consultation took a number of formats i.e. written material, art, worksheets and collage. The children were eager and willing to be part of the process.

	Total no. of participants
	21
	4-6 years
4	
	6-8 years
8	
	11-13 years
9	

## Border Counties Childcare Network

The Border Counties Childcare Network consulted with pre-school children in the 3-4 year age group. The focus of the consultation was on young children's experience of pre-school and play school.

The process of consultation was undertaken through the play leaders working with play groups in each of the border counties. Play leaders engaged the children in simple conversations around two questions:

Why do you like coming to playschool?  
What do you like best at playschool?

Approximately eighty children took part in the

consultation.

## Catholic Youth Council

The Catholic Youth Council undertook focused consultation on the issue of the health needs of young people.

The consultations were conducted through seven separate focus groups held with young people in seven Dublin locations. Each focus group worked for between one and two hours. The locations for the focus groups were:

	Balbriggan
1 focus group	
	Clondalkin
1 focus group	
	Deansrath,
Clondalkin	1 focus group
	Donaghmede
1 focus group	
	Neilstown, Clondalkin
1 focus group	
	Tallaght
2 focus groups	

In two of these focus groups, held in Tallaght, young Travellers looked at their particular health needs. Seventy-two young people participated in the consultation.

## South West Inner City Network Limited

The South West Inner City Network Limited arranged an open-forum for young people in the 11-16 year age group. The Forum examined the question 'Is Ireland a good place to grow up in?' and also explored ways of making Ireland a better place.

Workshops were held on the specific issues of drugs, young people's rights and cultural identity. As part of the Forum, a group of children put on a play dealing with the problems of cultural identity and showed how schoolchildren could be more tolerant of non-Irish nationals.

The Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin, T.D. launched the Forum.

Thirty children took part in the Forum.

### **Pavee Point**

Pavee Point consulted with Traveller children and young people ranging in age from 6-18 years.

Two focus groups were held, one for children aged 6-12 years, and one for a group of young people aged between 12-18 years.

The groups explored their experience of being a Traveller on sites and in school and they also talked in general terms about their life style and life experience.

The groups also looked at what would make their lives better and explored their hopes and expectations for their future.

Four boys and four girls participated in the consultation.

### **Development Education For Youth (DEFY)**

Development Education For Youth undertook a consultation with their members by means of a residential training session at Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

Thirty young people in the 15-17 age group took part in the consultation. Of these, eighteen were from urban areas and twelve from rural areas. Ten young people from Northern Ireland took part. Eighteen participants were girls and twelve were boys.

### **Girls Brigade**

The Girls Brigade

undertook consultations with children and young people from Dublin, Wicklow and Cork.

The focus of the consultation was on key trends and developments, childhood, vision for the future and consultation

A range of age appropriate mechanisms were used, including games, art work, responses to pictures and questionnaires.

Twenty seven young people took part in the consultations; Seventeen were in the 5-9 year age group, seven were in the 10-14 age group and three were in the 15-18 year age group.

### **Irish Association of Young People in Care**

Thirteen young people came together in Athlone to talk about topics that were important to them in their lives in care. A further six sent written and artistic submissions.

The group that met for the consultation day ranged in age from 13-19 years. Seven were female, six were male. The thirteen who attended came from the following areas in Ireland: Co. Dublin, Galway, Waterford, Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire and West Cork. The group who were unable to attend the day were also based in West Cork. All of the young people who were involved in the consultation day are currently in the care of various health boards or have just recently left care

The organisations and schools which undertook a consultation with children and young people include:

and are engaged in after-care programmes.

The young people discussed the issues that they felt would be faced by them over the next ten years. They debated 'the good, the bad and the ugly' of living in care in Ireland today and compiled a list of the changes they would make.

The organisers of the day were the National Co-ordinator of the Irish Association of Young People in Care, a social worker and two young people with care experience. The two young people facilitated the day's activities.

### ISPCC

The consultation process took place in four Regional Children's Forums held in Dublin, Galway, Cork and Drogheda. The structures of the regional forums were similar, in that the day began with an opening ceremony and children's press conference. Children participated in workshops, followed by presentations of the artwork, drama, or dance created during the workshop and a closing ceremony. The workshops facilitated the children and young people in expressing their thoughts, feelings and needs through a variety of different mediums.

The key topics examined in the consultative process were key trends and developments, childhood, priorities for action and vision for the future and Consultation

The Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin, T.D. attended all four forums and consulted with the children and young people directly.

In total, 767 children and young people participated in and were consulted at the forums. These young people ranged in age from 3-18 years, The geographical spread covered urban, rural and town areas of fifteen counties and included children from the Travelling community, Belfast and one child from Nigeria.

### National Parents Council-Primary

The National Parents Council undertook a

focused consultation with children on the theme 'Modern Childhood and Democracy in the Home and School: A Workshop for Children'.

The workshop was approximately one hour and fifteen minutes in duration. The processes used were based on individual discussion and worksheets.

The themes examined by the young people were, what is a child, what rights do you think children should have, introducing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right to information.

The workshop took place within the context of a national conference for parents of children in primary school. The children made a presentation on their consultation to over 200 adults attending the conference. When asked whether they had a message or question for delegates at the conference, they agreed between themselves on the following:

Message 1: "Thank you for inviting us to participate"

Message 2: "Thank you for asking us whether we have something we would like to say"

Message 3: " To parents and teachers: Jump in at the deep end and give us a chance to have more of a say."

Question: "Why has it taken so long to recognise that children are people who have rights."

Nine children, aged 9-12 years participated in the consultation.

## The Consultation through schools

The Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin, T.D. visited ten schools in order to consult with young people. These schools were selected by the Department of Education and Science and they represent most of the different types of schools, including primary schools, secondary schools, community schools, VEC schools, gaelscoileanna, special schools, Church of Ireland schools and schools in disadvantaged areas, urban areas and rural areas.

In each group, the Minister gave a brief description of the National Children's Strategy and the consultation process. She then asked the group a number of questions and obtained their views on the issues. Among the questions discussed were:

- What is important to you
- Who is helpful to you
- What makes children sad
- When do you want people to listen
- What would make life better
- What do you think life will be like in ten years time
- What are the problems facing young people
- What rights do you want as a young person
- What would you like to be consulted about

In most of the schools, the Minister visited two classes. In some schools she met the student council. Approximately sixty pupils were consulted in each of the ten schools. In total, Minister Hanafin consulted with approximately 600 children.

# National Children's Strategy

## Children and Young People

**Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in?**

**What's good about it? What would make it better?**

I would like to hear what you have to say,  
so that I can let the Government know what you think.  
Your views are important!

Please email your thoughts and views to me at

**[minister\\_forchildren@health.irlgov.ie](mailto:minister_forchildren@health.irlgov.ie)**

or write directly to me at  
Department of Health and Children  
Hawkins House, Hawkins Street  
Dublin 2

Fáilteofar roimh litreacha i nGaeilge.

Looking forward to hearing from you,  
Mary Hanafin TD,  
Minister of State with Responsibility for Children.

Please send your submissions before Friday 28th April 2000.  
Younger children should let their parents know they are emailing the Minister.  
Submissions will be accessible under the Freedom of Information Act 1997.



# National Children's Strategy

## Call for Submissions

An Inter-Departmental Group has been established by the Government to oversee the preparation of a National Children's Strategy. The Strategy will map out the direction for the next ten years through a set of realisable goals which will address all aspects of the child and young person.

Submissions are now invited around the following questions:

### **Q1. Towards 2010**

What are the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years?

### **Q2. Provision of services and supports for children and young people**

- What works well and why?
- How should these be developed over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?

### **Q3. Delivery of services and supports for children and young people**

- What works well and why?
- What changes would improve service delivery over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?

Submissions are welcome on other issues you think should be addressed in the National Children's Strategy.

Please forward submissions in writing, in braille, on tape, disk or other format to:

**National Children's Strategy  
Department of Health and Children  
Hawkins House  
Dublin 2**

**Closing date for submissions is 14th January 2000**

**Submissions will be accessible under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997.**

**If you require any further information, please contact:**

**Tel: (01) 6354590**

**Email: [child\\_strategy@health.irlgov.ie](mailto:child_strategy@health.irlgov.ie)**

**Fax: (01) 6719530**

**or see our website [www.doh.ie](http://www.doh.ie)**

A.S.T.I.  
ACCORD  
Adelaide & Meath Hospital  
Amnesty International  
An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo  
Ark  
Ash Ireland  
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools  
Association of Garda Sergeants & Inspectors  
Association of Health Promotion and Health Education of Ireland  
Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools  
Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland  
Association of Optometrists Ireland  
Asthma Society of Ireland  
Bantry Integrated Development Group Ltd  
Barnardos  
Bereavement Counselling Service  
Bodywhys  
Bray New Directions  
Cáirde  
CARI Foundation  
Castlefinn Playgroup  
Catholic Guides of Ireland  
Catholic Primary School Managers' Association  
Catholic Youth Council  
Central Remedial Clinic, Dublin  
Centre for the Study of Developmental Disabilities  
Cerebral Palsy Ireland  
Chartered Physiotherapists in Paediatrics, Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists  
Cherish  
Child and Family Centre, St Mary's Hospital  
Children in Hospital Ireland  
Children's Rights Alliance  
Church of Scientology  
Citywise  
Combat Poverty Agency  
Concerned Parents in the North Offaly Region  
CORI  
Cork Women's Political Society  
Council for Children's Hospital Care  
Daisychain Child Care Centre  
DEFY  
Dental Health Foundation  
Department of Applied Social Services, UCC  
Department of Child & Family Psychiatry, Mater Hospital  
Department of Paediatrics, UCD  
Department of Psychology, UCD  
Department of Social Studies, TCD  
Department of Social Policy and Social Work, UCD  
Diabetes Federation of Ireland  
Donegal Childcare Strategy Group  
Drogheda Lone Parents Network  
Drogheda Partnership  
Drumcondra Education Centre  
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre  
Early Childhood Services, Galway

East Tallaght Home-School-Community Liaison Co-ordinators  
 Eastern Health Board  
 Eastern Health Board Community Mothers Programme  
 Education Department, UCD  
 Faculty of Paediatrics, The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland  
 Family Mediation Service  
 Federation of Irish Scout Associations  
 Film Censor's Office  
 Focus Ireland  
 Focus on Children  
 Foróige  
 Galway Diocesan Youth Services (G.D.Y.S.)  
 Gay HIV Strategies  
 Heart Children  
 High/Scope Ireland  
 I.N.T.O.  
 I.S.P.C.C.  
 Ilen River Playschool, Drummig, Skibbereen  
 Inner City Organisations Network  
 Interagency Working Group on Child Abuse in Kerry  
 International Adoption Association  
 Irish Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus  
 Irish Association of Social Workers  
 Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists  
 Irish Council of People with Disabilities  
 Irish Deaf Society  
 Irish Girl Guides  
 Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind  
 Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute  
 Irish Society for Autism  
 Jack & Jill Children's Foundation  
 Katherine Howard Foundation  
 Kerry County Network of People with Disabilities  
 Legal Aid Board, Dun Laoighaire  
 Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities Ltd  
 Library Road Playcentre, Dun Laoghaire  
 Lourdes Youth and Community Services  
 Lucena Clinic  
 Maharishi International University Ireland  
 Marriage & Relationship Counselling Services  
 Massabielle  
 Mater Dei Counselling Centre  
 Meath Community Care Psychology Team  
 Mid-Western Health Board  
 Model School for the Deaf Project  
 Mol an Óige  
 Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project  
 Muíntearas  
 National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland  
 National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education  
 National Association of Housing for Visually Impaired  
 National Childminding Association of Ireland  
 National Children's Hospital  
 National Children's Nurseries Association  
 National Federation of ARCH Clubs  
 National Heart Alliance

National Maternity Hospital  
National Parents Council - Primary  
National Parents Council - Post Primary  
National Performing Arts School  
National Rehabilitation Hospital  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
National Youth Federation  
Newbury House Family Centre  
North Eastern Health Board  
North Western Health Board  
O'Brien Press Ltd  
Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative  
Our Lady of Lourdes N.S.  
Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children  
Parentline  
Pavee Point Travellers Centre  
Peamount Hospital  
Presentation Sisters, Mountmellick, Co. Laois  
Rahoon Family Centre  
Rehab Care  
Rialto Community Network  
Roscommon Childcare Network  
Rotunda Hospital  
Schizophrenia Ireland  
School of Nursing, Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children  
Scouting Ireland, CSI  
Sisters of the Holy Faith, Glasnevin  
Sligo Leader Partnership Company  
Southern Health Board  
Southside Childcare Action Network  
St Francis Hospice  
St James Child Guidance Clinic  
St Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired  
St Mary's Hospital & Residential School  
St Michael's House, Ballymun Road  
St Michael's School, Ballyfermot  
St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland  
St Patrick's College  
St Pauls Secondary School, Greenhills, Dublin  
St Peters School Parents Association, Greenhills, Dublin  
Sugradh  
Teachers' Union of Ireland  
The Children's Hospital, Temple Street  
The Forum of Health Promotion Officers  
The Mothers' Union  
The Royal College of Psychiatrists  
Thurles Parents & Friends of People with Special Needs  
Tralee Community Development Project Co Ltd  
Treoir  
Triple Cross Network  
Tullamore Employment Resource Centre  
West Cork Education Centre  
Western Health Board  
Westview House Residential Unit, Cork  
Wexford County Network of the Irish Council of People with Disabilities  
Women in the Home

Women's Aid  
XLC Project