

A Study for the EQUAL Youth Project

**Experiences
and Attitudes of
Early School Leavers:**

**A Survey of Early School
Leavers in Ballymun & Mayo**

A Report by

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September 2006

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the contributions of many people to this report. The study was overseen by a Working Group which played an invaluable role in shaping the scope and content of the study and made helpful suggestions at the outset of the research process. The members of the Working Group are:

- Máirín Kenny, Coordinator of EQUAL Youth Project
- Sara Slattery, Local DP Coordinator, Ballymun
- Mary Conlon, Local DP Coordinator, Mayo
- Nuala Whelan, Ballymun Job Centre
- Caroline Macken, Coordinator, Gateway Programme, Ballymun Job Centre
- Angie Birch, Youth Worker, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR).

The fieldwork, involving 48 interviews, was a substantial undertaking and was excellently managed by Sara Slattery in Ballymun and Mary Conlon in Mayo. Interviews were carried out by young people who were still in education or nearing its completion. Each interviewer was assisted by a recorder who noted and then typed all responses to the questionnaire.

In Ballymun the interviews were carried out by Claire McGuire, Justine McDonagh and Danielle O'Brien; recording was done by Sara Slattery and Máirín Kenny. A number of organisations – BRYR, Youthreach, Ballymun Job Centre - were very helpful in recruiting respondents and providing a place for holding the interviews.

In Mayo the interviews were carried out by Ann Marie Gallagher, Bridget Reape and Geraldine Marley; recording was done by Helen Barrett-Howko, Grainne Gallagher, Mary Conlon. A number of organisations – Youthreach, NYP, Local Employment Service, Club Vario, Parkside CDP, Erris CDP - were very helpful in recruiting respondents and providing a place for holding the interviews.

The study would not have been possible without the young people who agreed to be interviewed and who shared their experiences openly and honestly. The report has endeavoured to accurately record and interpret their experiences and attitudes and our hope is that the report will, in some way, bring benefits to them and other young people who have left school early.

The Coordinator of the EQUAL Youth Project, Máirín Kenny, played a key role in facilitating and encouraging the research and ensuring that the focus was kept firmly on the views of the young people for the purpose of developing a more comprehensive approach to the needs of early school leavers.

We acknowledge the contributions of all the above to this report. At the same time, as authors of the report, we accept full responsibility for its content.

Chapter One

Context of Study

1.1 Introduction

EQUAL is a Community Initiative co-funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) for the period 2001 to 2007. The EQUAL programme is designed to support the four-pillar approach of the EU Employment Strategy which is based on promoting employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship, and equality. As such, the overall aim of EQUAL is to identify and address fundamental forms of inequality in the labour market, including discrimination, through innovative policies and practices. The programme is implemented at local level through Development Partnerships (DPs) which comprise representatives of key service providers in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. EQUAL has a transnational component that creates learning opportunities across the EU member states. Accordingly, all Development Partnerships are involved in at least one Transnational Co-operation Agreement with a counterpart in another EU member state.

In Ireland, EQUAL has a total ESF budget of €34 million euro. During the first funding period (2001 –2004), EQUAL supported 21 DPs in Ireland and a further 22 DPs are being funded under the second period (2005 – 2007). The EQUAL Youth Project is funded under the second funding period and is based at two sites, one in Ballymun and one in Mayo. The objective of the EQUAL Youth Project is “to ensure that early school leavers obtain and sustain employment through access to quality services that enable them secure appropriate training and educational supports”.

In this chapter we describe briefly the main features of the EQUAL Youth Project. These features include the target group (Section 1.2), the membership of the Development Partnership (Section 1.3), and the activities being undertaken to achieve the project’s objectives.

1.2 Target Group

The target group for the EQUAL Youth Project is early school leavers. This group is defined, for the purposes of the project, as anyone aged 16-24 who has left school without a Leaving Certificate. The project has a specific focus on young early school leavers in the 16-21 age-group. In turn, this target group forms three distinct clusters of early school leavers:

- (i) young early school leavers who are currently unattached to any services and are referred to as ‘unattached’;
- (ii) young early school leavers who have completed, or are completing foundation training, and are referred to as ‘attached’;
- (iii) young Early School Leavers who are job-ready, or already in low status employment, and are referred to as ‘ready’.

1.3 Development Partnership

The specific aim of the EQUAL Youth Project is to bring together the main stakeholders who provide services for young early school leavers for the purpose of developing a model of integrated approach to policies and services which, in turn, will help these young people to obtain and sustain employment. In Ballymun and Mayo, the EQUAL Youth Project has been formed a Development Partnership whose membership is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Members of the Development Partnership in the EQUAL Youth Project, Ballymun and Mayo

Members of Development Partnership in Ballymun	
Ballymun Job Centre	CDYSB
Ballymun Women's Resource Centre	Exchange House
BRYR	HSE
Ballymun CTC	Ballymun Adult Read & Write Scheme
Ballymun Youthreach	BLDTF
BEST/SCP	DSFA
YAP	FÁS
PACE	
Members of Development Partnership in Mayo, focussing on Belmullet and Ballina	
Meitheal Mhaigheo	An Garda Síochána
LES	Mayo County Development Board
Youthreach Ballina	Linkage Programme
Foroige/ Neighbourhood Youth Project	

1.4 Activities

The activities of the EQUAL Youth Project are planned and implemented over three phases. The first phase involved setting up the Development Partnerships. This involved defining roles and responsibilities but also involved setting agreed targets in relation to policy, practice and protocol actions. This phase also involved setting up a Transnational Partnership agreement with partners from Spain and Italy for the purpose of sharing good practice with other EQUAL projects in the EU.

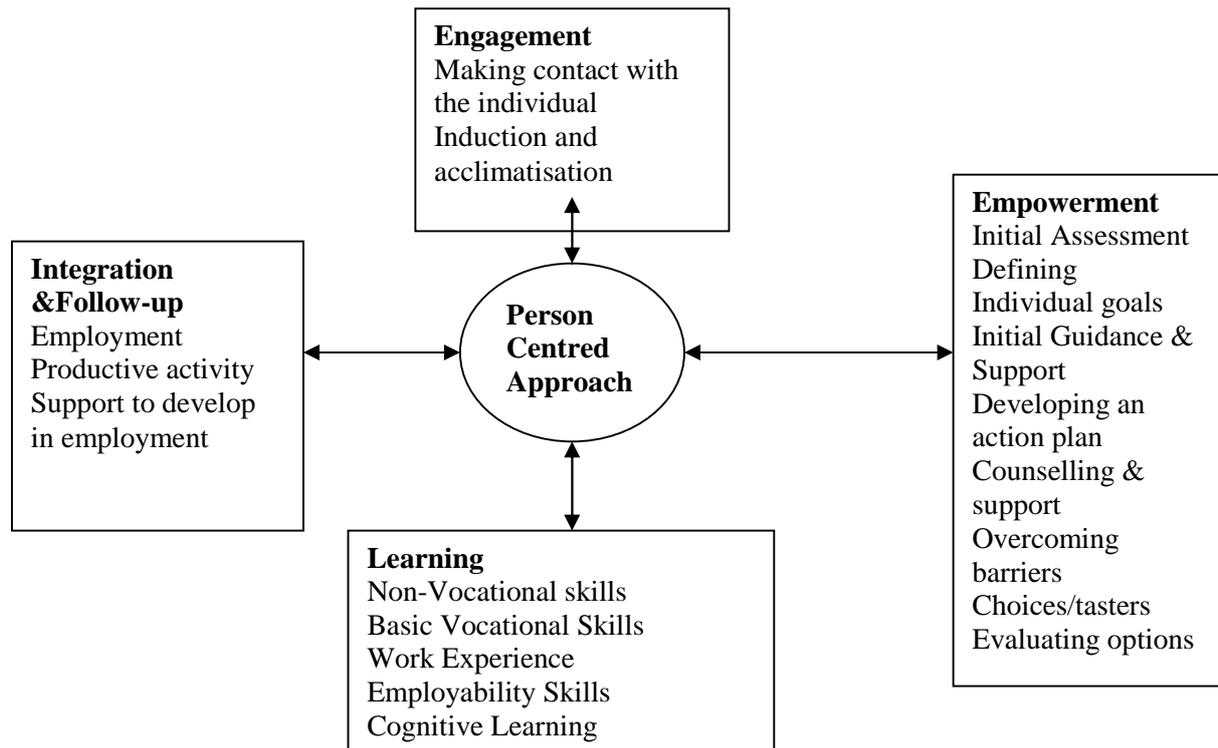
The second phase involves establishing a model of inter-organisational best practise that effectively engages with the three clusters of young people in the target group. The central focus and the guiding philosophy of the proposed model will be on addressing the individual needs of each young person. The specific activities to be undertaken in this phase include:

- (i) Analysis of current services and the policy frames in which they operate;
- (ii) Development of a model of inter-agency co-operation by organisations that work with young people;

- (iii) Development and implementation of a common profiling system;
- (iv) Research into the profile, views, opinions and attitudes of young people;
- (v) Piloting a ‘comprehensive pathways approach’ to working with young people, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, using an inter-agency approach to deliver and coordinate services;
- (vi) Mainstreaming of outcomes, policies and protocols amongst the relevant agencies.

This study constitutes one of these actions, namely to research the profile, views, opinions and attitudes of young people.

Figure 1.1 The Comprehensive Pathways Approach to Young Early School Leavers



The third phase has a focus on mainstreaming and will endeavour to incorporate at a national policy level the new approaches, operational structures, and inter-agency practices established between the partnership organisations.

Chapter Two

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The main objective of the study is to assess the experiences and attitudes of early school leavers in Ballymun and Mayo. In this chapter we describe the methodology used to achieve this objective, beginning with the questionnaire (Section 2.2). We then describe the sample (Section 2.3), and explain how the data is analysed (Section 2.4). Finally, we give an overview of the structure of the report (Section 2.5).

2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to assess a wide range of experiences and attitudes that are generally thought to be relevant, directly or indirectly, to education, training and employment. A range of information was collected on the background characteristics of the young people such as their age and gender, family and household characteristics, education and employment experiences. This data was collected using questions which allow for comparison with national data sets such as the Census of Population, Quarterly National Household Survey, the Living in Ireland Survey, etc.

The questionnaire also collected data on the young people's experiences of primary and secondary school, their reasons for leaving school, whether they regret it, and their use and perception of services since leaving school. Similarly, the questionnaire asked about the young person's appraisal of his / her employment prospects and the obstacles to improving those prospects.

Finally, a significant part of the questionnaire asked about different aspects of well-being such as physical well-being (including smoking, drinking and drugs), emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness, and support networks. These dimensions of well-being were measured using the instruments listed in Table 2.1 in order to establish if the young people may have particular needs in any of these areas. In this study, need is measured by reference to the average scores found in representative samples of the Irish population for each of these instruments¹. As such, the definition of need is 'statistical' rather than a 'clinical' and the results are best regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

¹ See notable McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003; National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

Table 2.1 Instruments for Measuring the Well-Being of Respondents

Dimensions of Well-Being	Scales for Measuring Well-Being
Physical Well-Being	1. Revised Symptom Checklist ² , comprising 19 items and five sub-scales: (i) somatisation (ii) anxiety (iii) hostility (iv) general symptoms (v) other.
Smoking, Drinking and Drugs	2. Smoking, Drinking and Drugs questions from NACD's Drug Prevalence Survey ³ 3. National Health and Lifestyle Surveys ⁴ .
Emotional Well-Being	4. Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) ⁵ , comprising 20 items and two sub-scales: (i) positive affect (ii) negative affect.
Life Satisfaction	5. Satisfaction with Life Scale ⁶ , comprising five items.
Hopefulness	6. The Hope Scale ⁷ , comprising 8 items divided equally into two sub-scales: (i) pathways (ii) agency.
Social Support Network	7. Compiled from various scales

2.3 The Sample

A total of 48 early school leavers were interviewed; all but two were in the 16-21 age range. The characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 2.2. This reveals that there were 31 respondents from Ballymun and 17 from Mayo; the original intention was to have an equal number of respondents (30) from both Ballymun and Mayo but this proved difficult to achieve in practice. The sample was designed to recruit respondents with different levels of attachment to services⁸ and, as Table 2.2 also reveals, interviews were held with 16 respondents who were unattached to any service, 20 were attached to at least one service, and 12 were employment ready⁹. Given that boys are more likely to leave school early than girls¹⁰, the sample includes more males (30) than females (18).

2 Adapted from Derogatis, 1992.

3 National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

4 See Centre for Health Promotion Studies, 2003.

5 Adapted from Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988.

6 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

7 Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002:268-270

8 A service in this context refers to any intervention such as education or training which improves the employability of the respondent.

9 The decision on whether a respondent is 'employment ready' is made by the mediator in the Local Employment Service (LES).

10 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

Table 2.2 Characteristics of Sample of Early School Leavers

Characteristic	Ballymun		Mayo		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Unattached	7	4	4	1	11	5	16
Attached	6	4	6	4	12	8	20
Ready	6	4	1	1	7	5	12
Total	19	12	11	6	30	18	48

2.4 The Analysis

The interviews collected both quantitative and qualitative data and this is reflected in the analysis. Throughout the report, we analyse differences between Ballymun and Mayo as well as between those classified as unattached, attached and ready. In this way, the analysis tries to identify the extent to which the needs of respondents are affected by both location and situation.

In Chapter Three, data is presented on the background characteristics of respondents. These are mainly descriptive statistics on family and household characteristics, education and employment experiences, with comparative data from Ireland in order to place the results in a broader context.

Chapter Four presents results on various aspects of well-being. This involves comparing the mean scores of respondents with the mean scores of a larger representative samples. In the case of physical and emotional well-being, respondents are compared with a representative sample of Irish parents¹¹; in the case of smoking, drinking and drugs, they are compared with a representative sample of Irish adults¹²; in the case of life satisfaction, the comparison is with a representative sample of US adults¹³. None of these are perfectly matched comparisons since the sample of respondents in this study is much younger and for this reason the results should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

Chapter Five reports on experiences of school and of other services. This analysis combines both quantitative and qualitative data and examines variations by location (Ballymun and Mayo) and situation (unattached, attached, and ready). Chapter Six analyses data on the previous employment experiences of respondents and their self-rating of employment prospects and the obstacles facing them. The analysis follows a similar template to that used in Chapter Five.

11 McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003.

12 National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

13 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

2.5 Structure of Report

The report is divided into seven chapters as follows:

Chapter One	Context of Study
Chapter Two	Methodology
Chapter Three	Background Characteristics
Chapter Four	Dimensions of Well-Being
Chapter Five	Experience of School and Other Services
Chapter Six	Employment Prospects
Chapter Seven	Summary, Conclusions and Implications

Chapter Three

Background Characteristics

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the background characteristics of our 48 respondents in Ballymun and Mayo. We have already seen that some of these characteristics were pre-set in order to pick a sample which reflected the known diversity of early school leavers. As a result, all but two respondents were aged 16-21 years with a higher number of males (30) than females (18).

We begin by describing the age of respondents (Section 3.2), and whether they live in the family home (Section 3.3). We describe other background characteristics including: family type (Section 3.4), household size (Section 3.5), housing status (Section 3.6), education (Section 3.7), and economic status (Section 3.8). We conclude by summarising the distinguishing features of respondents, drawing on comparative data for Ireland (Section 3.10).

3.2 Age of Respondents

The mean age of respondents was 18 years. Tables 3.1a and 3.1b give a more detailed breakdown of the age of respondents. This shows that respondents in Ballymun and Mayo were of similar age. Respondents who are employment-ready were, on average, over a year older than other respondents.

Table 3.1a Age of Respondents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total
Under 19 years	58	76	64
19 years to 21	36	24	32
22 and over	6	0	4
Total	100	100	100
<i>Mean Age</i>	<i>18.0</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>18</i>

Table 3.1b Age of Respondents in each service category(%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Under 19 years	75	75	33	64
19 years to 21	19	20	67	32
22 and over	6	5	0	4
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Mean Age</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>18.9</i>	<i>18</i>

3.3 Living in Family Home

All but three of the 48 respondents live in the family home. Tables 3.2a and 3.2b reveal that there is almost no variation according to either location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached or ready). This reflects the young age of respondents, combined with their lack of independent means to live away from home.

Table 3.2a Respondents who live in the family home in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Live in family home?	Ballymun	Mayo	Total
Yes	97	88	94
No	3	12	6
Total	100	100	100

Table 3.2b Respondents who live in the family home in each service category (%)

Live in family home?	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Yes	94	90	100	94
No	1	2	0	6
Total	100	100	100	100

All but four respondents were born in Ireland. However this information was collected from less than two thirds (30, 63%) of respondents so it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about this aspect of the sample. Tables 3.3a and 3.3b reveal that respondents born outside Ireland were more likely to be living in Mayo and to be unattached to any service. This may point to difficulties being experienced by young immigrants in terms of integrating into Irish schools, but further information would be needed to test this possibility.

Table 3.3a Respondents who were born in Ireland and now living in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Born in Ireland?	Ballymun	Mayo	Total
Yes	74	41	63
No	3	18	8
No information	23	41	29
Total	100	100	100

Table 3.3b Respondents who were born in Ireland in each service category (%)

Born in Ireland?	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Yes	62	50	84	63
No	13	5	8	8
No information	25	45	8	29
Total	100	100	100	100

3.4 Family Type

Data on family type is summarised in Tables 3.4a and 3.4b, based on those living in the family home. This reveals that more than half the respondents (54%) live in a one-parent household, while less than half (46%) live in a two-parent household. This contrasts strongly with the pattern in Ireland where the vast majority of households with children (79%) are two-parent households.

Ballymun and Mayo offer contrasting pictures of family type. In Ballymun, three quarters (74%) of respondents live in a one-parent household compared to a fifth (20%) in Mayo.

Table 3.4a Family type of respondents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total	Ireland*
Two parent family	26	80	45	79
One parent family	74	20	55	21
Total	100	100	100	100

*McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003.

Table 3.4b Family type of respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Two parent family	53	50	27	45
One parent family	47	50	73	45
Total	100	100	100	100

A small number of respondents (5), all female, are themselves parents (Tables 3.5a and 3.5b). All but one of these are to be found in Ballymun and represents 33% of the female sample in Ballymun.

Table 3.5a Respondents who are parents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Respondent a parent?	Ballymun	Mayo	Total
Yes	13	6	10
No	87	94	90
Total	100	100	100

Table 3.5b Respondents who are parents in each service category (%)

Respondent a parent?	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Yes	6	10	17	10
No	94	90	83	90
Total	100	100	100	100

3.5 Household Size

Information on household size is summarised in Table 3.6, with comparative data on the household size of family units in Ireland. This reveals that respondents come from households which are significantly larger (4.9 persons) than households in Ireland (3.6 persons). Respondents from Mayo come from larger households (5.3 persons) than respondents from Ballymun (4.6 persons).

Table 3.6 Household Characteristics

Persons Per Household	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total	Ireland*
<i>Mean</i>	<i>4.6</i>	<i>5.3</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>5.2</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>3.6</i>

*Source: Census of Population 2002, Household Composition and Family Units, Volume 3.

3.6 Housing Status

The housing status of the family home is summarised in Tables 3.7a and 3.7b, with comparative data for Ireland. This reveals that three quarters of respondents (75%) live in housing which is rented from the local authority while less than a third (24%) live in an owner-occupied home. This contrasts strongly with the pattern in Ireland where the vast majority of people (81%) live in owner-occupied housing. Respondents in Ballymun are more likely than Mayo respondents to live in accommodation which is rented from the local authority (80% compared to 65%).

Table 3.7a Housing status of respondents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total	Ireland*
Owner occupied	17	35	23	81
Renting from private landlord	3	0	2	12
Renting from Local Authority	80	65	75	7
Total	100	100	100	100

*Source: Census of Population 2002, Housing, Volume 13.

Table 3.7b Housing of respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Owner occupied	13	26	33	23
Renting from private landlord	6	0	0	2
Rent from Local Authority	81	74	67	75
Total	100	100	100	100

3.7 Education

The target group for the EQUAL Youth Project is early school leavers and, as indicated in Chapter One, this is defined as anyone aged 16-24 who left school without a Leaving Certificate. Tables 3.8a and 3.8b reveal that around two thirds of respondents (69%) have a Junior Certificate; this compares to 95% of the pupils who entered second level schools in 1996 and have a Junior Certificate¹⁴. Significantly, more than a quarter (29%) have no qualifications, compared to 5% of the 1996 cohort of second-level pupils¹⁵.

Respondents in Ballymun and Dublin have similar levels of education. However, as might be expected, respondents who are employment-ready are more likely to have a Junior Certificate (83%) compared to those who are either unattached (75%) or attached (55%). One respondent, from Ballymun and employment-ready, has obtained the Leaving Certificate since leaving school.

Table 3.8a Highest qualification of respondents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total	Ireland*
None / Primary Education Only	29	29	29	5
Junior Certificate	68	71	69	95
Leaving Certificate	3	0	2	78
Total	100	100	100	100

*Source: Department of Education & Science, 2005, Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools: 1996 Cohort.

¹⁴ Department of Education & Science, 2005.

¹⁵ Department of Education & Science, 2005.

Table 3.8b Highest qualification of respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
None / Primary Education Only	25	45	8	29
Junior Certificate	75	55	83	69
Leaving Certificate	0	0	8	2
Total	100	100	100	100

The low educational attainment of respondents is clearly related to the fact that their mean age on leaving school is 15.3 years (Table 3.9). Since 2000, under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the minimum school-leaving age is 16 years. One respondent, from Ballymun, left school at nine years.

Table 3.6 Age on leaving school

Age left school?	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
<i>Mean age</i>	<i>15.3</i>	<i>15.4</i>	<i>15.3</i>	<i>15.1</i>	<i>15.8</i>	<i>15.3</i>
Earliest age	9	14	9	13	12	9

3.8 Economic Status

The economic status of respondents is summarised in Tables 3.10a and 3.10b. This reveals that half (50%) are unemployed and seeking work, just under a third (30%) are at school / college, and a fifth (20%) are in work. The main influence on how respondents define their principal economic status is whether they are unattached, attached or ready. All of the unattached respondents (100%) regard themselves as unemployed and seeking work while the majority of the attached (65%) define themselves as attending school / college; about half of those who are employment-ready (49%) are in work, with most of the remainder (42%) unemployed and seeking work.

Table 3.10a Principal economic status of respondents in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total	Ireland*
Paid work – full-time	13	6	10	47.5
Paid work – part-time	3	24	10	9.9
Unemployed / seeking paid work	58	35	50	3.5
At school / college	26	35	30	10.9
Home duties	0	0	0	16.1
Other	0	0	0	12.1
Total	100	100	100	100

*Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, 2006; based on the population aged 15 and over.

Table 3.10b Principal economic status of respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Paid work – full-time	0	5	33	10
Paid work – part-time	0	15	16	10
Unemployed / seeking paid work	100	15	42	50
At school / college	0	65	8	30
Home duties	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

3.9 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter described the background characteristics of our 48 respondents in Ballymun and Mayo. As explained in Chapter Two, the respondents were selected because they left school early, defined as those who left school without sitting the Leaving Certificate. On average, respondents left school at 15.3 years, with one respondent, from Ballymun, leaving school as early as nine years. Since 2000, under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the minimum school-leaving age is 16 years. Respondents in both Ballymun and Mayo now have a mean age of 18 years, which means that they have been out of school for an average of three years.

Early school leaving creates problems for young people essentially because it places them at a disadvantage relative to other young people. The extent of this disadvantage can be seen by comparing the educational qualifications of respondents with the generality of young people in Ireland. For example, more than a quarter of respondents (29%) have no qualifications compared to 5% of the 1996 cohort of second-level pupils in Ireland¹⁶. Although two thirds of respondents (69%) have a Junior Certificate, most Irish pupils (95%) who entered second level schools in 1996 also have a Junior Certificate¹⁷. Only one respondent (2%) has a Leaving Certificate – achieved since leaving school - compared to 78% of Irish pupils who entered second level schools in 1996¹⁸.

Early school leaving affects over a fifth (22%) of young people in Ireland¹⁹, according to the results of a cohort analysis of Irish pupils who entered second level schools in 1996. However the risk of early school leaving varies considerably in different parts of the country. Dublin has the highest risk of early school leaving in the country (31%), which is twice the level found in Mayo (15%), where the rates of early school leaving are among the lowest in Ireland²⁰. In view of this, the survey found interesting differences in the background characteristics of respondents from Ballymun and Mayo.

16 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

17 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

18 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

19 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

20 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

A key difference between Ballymun and Mayo is the different family structures in which respondents live. In Mayo, respondents are most likely to live in two-parent families (80%), similar to the rest of Ireland (79%), although they tend to come from considerably larger households (5.3) than either Ballymun (4.6) or Ireland (3.6). In Ballymun, by contrast, respondents are much more likely to live in a one-parent family (74%) where household size is also larger than in Ireland. The fact that four of the 12 female respondents in Ballymun were themselves parents (equivalent to 33% of this sub-sample) suggests an inter-generational dimension to lone parenthood in Ballymun.

Previous studies have highlighted how early school leaving²¹, like lone parenthood²², is related to economic and social disadvantage, both as its cause and its consequence. In the case of early school leaving, this is illustrated by the low level of owner-occupation among respondents' families, given that owner-occupation is a reliable predictor of economic well-being. The level of owner-occupation in Ballymun (16%) and Mayo (35%) is substantially lower compared to Ireland (81%). Equally, the consequences of early school leaving are to be found in the fact that all of the unattached respondents are unemployed although this falls to 42% for those who are employment-ready.

The findings in this chapter describe some key background characteristics of respondents relative to other young people in Ireland. In the next chapter we examine aspects of the well-being of respondents. Unlike the background characteristics of respondents, which are relatively 'static' because they are not amenable to change through intervention, many aspects of well-being are more 'dynamic' in the sense of being open to change through interventions. Given that a core objective of the EQUAL Youth Project is to identify effective interventions for early school leavers, it is appropriate to examine the well-being of respondents in more detail.

21 See McKeown and Clarke, 2004

22 McLanahan, Donahue and Haskins, 2005

Chapter Four

Dimensions of Well-Being

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we assess the well-being of respondents relative to the well-being of a representative sample for which there is comparable data on each of the measurement instruments used (see Table 2.1 above for the list of measurement instruments). For this reason, comparative data is used from samples of Irish adults²³, Irish parents²⁴, and US adults²⁵. The extent of need among respondents is assessed by comparing their mean scores with the mean scores of the representative sample. As indicated in Chapter Two, none of these are perfectly matched comparisons since the sample of respondents in this study is much younger and, for this reason, the results should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

In a number of instances explained below we use the concept of effect size to measure the extent of need. The concept of effect size is a simple way of standardising and comparing the difference between two groups on a range of test scores. The formula involves subtracting the mean of one group (respondents in Ballymun and Mayo) from the mean of the other (the representative sample) and dividing by their pooled standard deviation. Thus, the effect size is measured in standard deviation units and the score varies from 0.0 to 3.0²⁶; given that the baseline figure for Ireland is 0.0, the effect size measures how far respondents are from the this norm. As a rule of thumb, effect sizes around 0.5 and over indicate a significant level of need.

In this chapter we report on the different dimensions of need which we found among respondents. These include physical well-being (Section 4.2), emotional well-being (Section 4.3), life satisfaction (Section 4.4), hopefulness (Section 4.5), and support networks (Section 4.6). We conclude with a summary of the key findings and their implications (Section 4.7).

4.2 Physical Well-Being

The presence of physical symptoms can be a sign of either physical problems or psychological problems, or both. Where symptoms are based entirely on self-report, as here, they are a reliable indicator of psychological

23 National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

24 McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003.

25 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

26 The concept of effect size is typically used to compare the difference between an experimental and a control group. The convention established by Jacob Cohen (1988) and referred to as 'Cohen's d', is that a coefficient between 0.2 and 0.5 indicates a small effect, between 0.5 and 0.8 indicates a moderate effect, and above 0.8 indicates a large effect. A guide to the interpretation of effect sizes is summarised in the table below and shows, for each effect size, the proportion of the experimental group (EG) whose scores exceed the average score of the control group (CG), based on the assumption that scores are normally distributed.

Effect Size	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.5	3.0
% exceeds CG	50	54	58	62	66	69	73	76	79	82	84	88	92	95	96	98	99	99.9

Source: Carr, 2002:12

problems. Indeed it has been found that subjective ratings of personal health – but not the objective ratings of a medical expert - are associated with levels of happiness and associated personality traits. In other words, a person’s self-reported symptoms may indicate more about their psychological than their physical state. Indeed, there is growing evidence that a person’s physical well-being is influenced by their psychological well-being since “the immune systems of happy people work more effectively than those of unhappy people ... [which] may account of the longevity of happy people”²⁷.

We measured symptoms using a shortened version of the Symptom Check List (SCL)²⁸. The two aspects of physical well-being which we measured are: general symptoms (such as poor appetite, overeating, trouble falling asleep, sleep that is restless or disturbed, feeling weak or hot all over, cold sweats) and somatisation (such as the frequency of headaches, pains in heart or chest, nausea or upset stomach, soreness of muscles).

The results on physical well-being are summarised in Tables 4.1a and 4.1b. These show that all respondents, irrespective of location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached or ready), have fewer physical symptoms compared to the general population of parents in Ireland. This suggests that respondents have better physical health than the general population of adults, possibly because of their younger age. However, there are significant differences in the number of symptoms presented by the three categories of respondents: unattached respondents show the most symptoms, ready respondents show the least symptoms, and attached respondents fall between these two groups. The difference between unattached respondents and the other two groups is an effect of size of 0.5 which, according to our rule of thumb, is a substantial difference. These results suggest that the journey from being unattached to being employment-ready is mapped in the body in terms of increased physical well-being.

Table 4.1a Physical Well-Being of Respondents in Ballymun and Mayo Compared to Ireland

Variable	Ballymun		Mayo		Total		Ireland
	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean
General symptoms	1.6	-1.6	1.1	-1.9	1.4	-1.7	4.5
Somatisation symptoms	1.6	-2.0	1.3	-2.4	1.5	-2.2	5.3

*ES = Effect size. Effect size refers to the difference from Ireland and is measured by subtracting the two means from each other and dividing by their pooled standard deviation.

²⁷ Carr, 2004:29

²⁸ Derogatis, 1992; see also www.pearsonassessments.com

Table 4.1b Physical Well-Being of Respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached		Attached		Ready	
	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*
General	1.7	-1.5	1.3	-1.8	1.2	-1.8
Somatisation	1.7	-1.5	1.4	-2.3	1.2	-2.3

*ES = Effect size. Effect size refers to the difference from Ireland and is measured by subtracting the two means from each other and dividing by their pooled standard deviation.

Health behaviour influences physical well-being and, for this reason, we collected data on the prevalence of smoking, drinking and drugs among respondents in Ballymun and Mayo. For each of the substances listed – cigarettes, alcohol sedatives / tranquilisers / anti-depressants, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, methadone - service users were asked: ‘During the last month, have you taken any of the following?’ The results show that respondents in Ballymun have a much higher usage of all the substances listed than either their counterparts in Mayo, or the average Irish adult.

Beginning with legal substances, cigarettes are taken by 68% of respondents in Ballymun compared to 47% in Mayo and 33% in Ireland. Alcohol is taken by 97% of respondents in Ballymun compared to 59% in Mayo and 74% in Ireland.

Turning to illegal substances, cannabis is taken by 45% of respondents in Ballymun compared to 6% in Mayo and 2.6% in Ireland. Cocaine is taken by 13% of respondents in Ballymun compared to 6% in Mayo and 0.3% in Ireland.

There is also a high usage of sedatives, tranquilisers and anti-depressants in Ballymun (13%) compared to 6% in Mayo and 4% in Ireland. These are prescription drugs, commonly referred to as benzodiazepines, and a recent study in Ballymun noted that “a considerable proportion of patients who are initiated on benzodiazepine continue to take them for many years”²⁹. The high usage of dangerous substances among young people in Ballymun suggests that these are likely to threaten the good physical health which they currently enjoy.

The high level of drug use in Ballymun is consistent with other data, circulated by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs³⁰, which indicates that Ballymun has one of the highest prevalence rates for opiate use among the 13 Local Drug Task Force areas. Prevalence rates should be treated with caution however since they vary by age and sex – with men aged 15-35 years having the highest prevalence rates for opiate use – and by the size and concentration of disadvantage in the local area. Nevertheless it is clear that the problem of drug use in Ballymun is significant and substantial and needs to be taken into account in addressing the needs of early school leavers.

29 Ballymun Youth Action Project, 2004:8

30 NACD, 2006; this estimate was prepared by Dr. Alan Kelly for each of the 13 Local Drug Task Force areas and is derived from two data sources for the year 2001: (i) Central Drug Treatment List (ii) Garda Study on Drugs, Crime and Related Criminal Activity. The methodology of the study is described in Kelly, Carvalho and Teljeur, 2003.

Further analysis by service group reveals that unattached respondents have significantly higher usage of all substances by comparison with respondents who are attached or ready. This suggests that attachment to services and progression towards employment readiness has the effect of reducing the use of addictive and harmful substances and, as we have just seen, reducing the physical symptoms of ill health.

Table 4.2a Last Month Prevalence of Smoking, Drinking and Drugs Among Respondents in Ballymun and Mayo Compared to Ireland (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total	Ireland*
Cigarettes	68	47	60	33.3
Alcohol	97	59	83	74.0
Sedatives, tranquilisers, etc.	13	6	10	4.0
Cannabis	45	6	31	2.6
Cocaine	13	6	10	0.3
Heroin	0	0	0	0.1
Methadone	0	0	0	0.1

*Source: Based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of Irish adults for the Drug Prevalence Survey³¹.

Table 4.2b Last Month Prevalence of Smoking, Drinking and Drugs Among Respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Cigarettes	81	55	42	60
Alcohol	94	70	92	83
Sedatives, tranquilisers, etc.	19	0	17	10
Cannabis	50	20	25	31
Cocaine	19	5	8	10
Heroin	0	0	0	0
Methadone	0	0	0	0

4.3 Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being is measured by each person's experience of positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions increase well-being while negative emotions reduce it. The emotional quality of a person's life can be reliably measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS)³² and this is used here.

31 National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 2005.

32 Adapted from Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988.

Positive and negative emotions are independent of each other and both have a cognitive as well as a feeling dimension. Psychological research has established that a person’s emotional state is equally influenced by genetic and environmental factors and each individual has a ‘happiness set-point’ – their normal level of happiness – that remains relatively constant over time³³. There is general consensus that positive emotions, despite having a heritable dimension, can be increased over time through ‘environmental’ influences. In this context, environmental influences mainly refer to the person’s ‘internal’ environment, particularly ways of thinking about the past, the present and the future³⁴ rather than the ‘external’ environment – such as age, sex, income, education, etc. – which have been found to have relatively modest influence on emotional well-being and, according to one review of the evidence, “probably account for no more than between 8 and 15 per-cent of the variance in happiness”³⁵.

Against this background, we summarise the results on emotional well-being in Tables 4.3a and 4.3b. These show that respondents in Ballymun and Mayo tend to have fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions compared to the average Irish parent. The overall difference is equivalent to an effect size of 0.5 (for positive emotions) and 0.3 (for negative emotions). These are significant differences in the small-to-medium range and are more pronounced among respondents in Ballymun. Unattached respondents have substantially lower levels of emotional well-being compared to attached and ready respondents. By comparison with Irish norms, unattached respondents have significantly fewer positive emotions (an effect size of -0.9) and significantly more negative emotions (an effect size of +0.6). This suggests that the emotional well-being of respondents improves as they become involved in services and make progress towards employment readiness.

Table 4.3a Emotional Well-Being of Respondents in Ballymun and Mayo Compared to Ireland

Variable	Ballymun		Mayo		Total		Ireland
	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean
Positive affect	34.3	-0.6	35.6	-0.4	35.3	-0.5	37.8
Negative affect	25.7	+0.3	25.0	+0.2	24.5	+0.3	23.1

*ES = Effect size. Effect size refers to the difference from Ireland and is measured by subtracting the two means from each other and dividing by their pooled standard deviation.

Table 4.3b Emotional Well-Being of Respondents in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached		Attached		Ready	
	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*	Mean	ES*
Positive affect	32.2	-0.9	35.0	-0.5	37.8	0.0
Negative affect	26.8	+0.6	23.9	0.0	26.3	+0.5

*ES = Effect size. Effect size refers to the difference from Ireland and is measured by subtracting the two means from each other and dividing by their pooled standard deviation.

33 For a review of this research, see Carr, 2004:Chapter One

34 Seligman, 2002; for further information on cognitive therapy, see www.beckinstitute.org

35 Seligman, 2002:61

4.4 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction refers to a person’s cognitive and affective evaluation of his / her life. It is sometimes referred to as ‘subjective well-being’ or ‘hedonic happiness’ because it focuses on the prevalence of positive feelings and satisfaction with life³⁶. Life satisfaction has a substantial genetic component which means that, to some degree, people are born prone to be happy or unhappy³⁷. However as one review of the research has noted, “It is not just who we are that matters to happiness, but how we think about our lives”³⁸.

We measured life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale³⁹. This comprises five items which are rated on a seven point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The five items which make up the scale are: ‘in most ways my life is close to my ideal’, ‘the conditions of my life are excellent’, ‘I am satisfied with my life’, ‘so far I have got the important things I want in life’, ‘if I could change my life I would change almost nothing’.

The results of the survey are summarised in Table 4.4 and reveal that Ballymun respondents (3.9) have lower levels of satisfaction than the norm – based on US rather than Irish data – while Mayo respondents (5.3) are well above the norm. Unattached respondents have the lowest level of life satisfaction and their score (3.6) is well below the US range (4.0 to 5.0) as well as below the level of both attached respondents (5.0) and ready respondents (4.4). In addition, the range of scores show that some respondents who are unattached and from Ballymun are close to the lowest point on the life satisfaction scale (1.8).

Table 4.4 Life Satisfaction Scores of Respondents

Life Satisfaction	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total	US*
Mean Score	3.9	5.3	3.6	5.0	4.4	4.4	4.0 to 5.0
(Range)	(1.6-7.0)	(1.8-6.8)	(1.6-6.4)	(1.6-6.8)	(2.4-7.0)	(1.6-7.0)	

Note: The scores in brackets refer to the minimum and maximum scores. *Most people, based on US data, score in the 4.0 to 5.0 range; see Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002.

4.5 Hopefulness

Hopefulness, as the concept is defined in psychology, refers to a pattern of thought about one’s ability to find ways of achieving goals and having the motivation to achieve those goals. As one leading researcher has put it, “hopeful thought reflects the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways”⁴⁰. In other words, hopefulness has two dimensions which are referred to as ‘pathways thinking’ (meaning that the person is capable of generating workable solutions to achieve their goals) and

36 Carr, 2004:38-9

37 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:66

38 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:67

39 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

‘agency thinking’ (meaning that the person believes in their own ability to carry through those solutions). In everyday language, a person is described as hopeful who believes that they have the will (‘agency thinking’) and the way (‘pathways thinking’) to achieve their goals.

This definition of hopefulness emphasises the cognitive rather than the emotional aspect of hopefulness and is informed by research which suggests that cognitive patterns cause emotional outcomes, rather than the reverse. According to one review of the research, “the growing consensus is that the perceived lack of progress towards major goals is the cause of reductions in well-being, rather than vice versa”⁴¹.

The Hope Scale which is used here was developed by Rick Snyder and colleagues at the University of Kansas, USA⁴². It comprises two sub-scales – pathways and agency – each containing four items which are scored on a seven-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The pathways sub-scale comprises the following items: ‘I can think of many ways to get out of a problem’, ‘There are lots of ways around any problem’, ‘I can think of many ways to get things in life that are important to me’, ‘Even when others get discouraged about a problem, I know I can find a way to solve it’. The agency sub-scale comprises the following items: ‘I energetically pursue my goals’, ‘My past experiences have prepared me well for my future’, ‘I’ve been pretty successful in my life’, ‘I meet the goals that I set for myself’.

The rule of interpretation is that respondents who are one standard deviation above the mean are regarded as having high hope; those who are one standard deviation below the mean are regarded as having low hope. The same principle of interpretation applies to each of the pathways and agency sub-scales. In clinical practice this implies that respondents whose mean score on the total scale (or either of the two subscales) is 5.7 or higher are regarded as having high hope while those whose mean score on the total scale (or either of the two subscales) is 4.4 or less are regarded as having low hope. In reality, some respondents may present with a mixed pattern such as high agency and low pathways, or *vice versa*. For example, a high agency/low pathways person would have lots of energy but would not be putting it to productive use, whereas the low agency/high pathways person would have lots of great ideas but never put them into practice. This illustrates the advantage of looking at the agency and pathways subscales separately since these offer a more detailed picture of what type of intervention may be the most appropriate, such as helping the person to work on motivation and energy, or helping the person to think more creatively/flexibly about problems.

The results of the survey are summarised in Table 4.5 and reveal an overall hopefulness score of 5 for all categories of respondents. This is above the threshold of low hopefulness (4.4) but below the threshold of high hopefulness (5.7). In other words, although respondents are not without hope, there is scope to increase their level of hopefulness to a level which is regarded as healthy and productive. This applies to both the agency and the pathways dimensions of hopefulness which suggests a need to increase the energy and motivation of

40 Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002:257

41 Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002:259

respondents (the agency dimension) as well as their problem-solving techniques (the pathways dimension). It should also be noted that some individual scores (2.6) fall way below the threshold of low hopefulness (4.4) and indicate a serious level of hopelessness.

Closer inspection of the data in Table 4.5 reveals two significant sources of variation between respondents. The first is that Ballymun respondents have higher pathways (5.4) and lower agency (4.7) scores than Mayo respondents while, conversely, Mayo respondents have lower pathways (5.0) and higher agency (5.2) scores than Ballymun respondents. In other words, Ballymun respondents are more confident in their problem-solving abilities while Mayo respondents are more motivated and energetic. The second variation is that unattached respondents have the lowest agency score (4.5) of all the sub-samples – and close to the threshold of low hopefulness (4.4) - suggesting that these respondents are not confident in their own ability to remain committed and motivated to solving their problems. One of the respondents in the unattached group had an agency score of 1.8 indicating an extreme level of hopelessness. As in earlier sections, the influence of being unattached to services is greater than the influence of living in Ballymun or Mayo.

Table 4.5 Hopefulness of Respondents

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Mean Score for Hopefulness	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.0
(Range)	(2.8-6.5)	(2.6-6.8)	(2.8-6.8)	(3.1-6.5)	(4.1-6.5)	(2.6-6.8)
Mean Score for Agency	4.7	5.2	4.5	5.0	5.2	4.9
(Range)	(1.8-7.0)	(3.0-6.8)	(1.8-6.8)	(3.1-6.8)	(4.0-6.8)	(1.8-7.0)
Mean Score for Pathways	5.4	5.0	5.4	5.0	5.4	5.2
(Range)	(3.5-6.8)	(2.3-7.0)	(2.3-7.0)	(3.0-6.8)	(3.5-6.5)	(2.3-7.0)

4.6 Support Networks

There is extensive research to show that support networks are a significant influence on the well-being of individuals and their families⁴³. In addition, positive support networks are known to improve physical health and mental health, and to aid in recovery from illness and adversity⁴⁴. It is generally acknowledged that the relationship between support networks and well-being is ‘bi-directional’ in the sense that happier people tend to have stronger support and friendship networks but these networks in turn also contribute to a person’s happiness⁴⁵.

We measured support networks by asking respondents to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10, the supportiveness of the following people, if they needed help: your parents, your brothers and sisters, your children, your relatives, your

42 Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002:268-270

43 For a review, see McKeown, 2000:11-13

44 See Scovern, 1999, pp. 272-273; Sprenkle, Blow and Dickey, 1999, p.334, respectively review the evidence.

45 Carr, 2004:20-24; Seligman, 2002:56

friends, your neighbours, your partner (if you have one), people at work (if you work), etc. The results are summarised in Table 4.6 and indicate that Ballymun respondents (4.5) feel significantly less overall support than Mayo respondents (5.8), while unattached respondents (4.2) feel the least overall support. These levels of support are significantly below that experienced by Irish parents but this may be due to the fact that respondents are much younger and living at home with their parents. Parents are given a high supportiveness rating by all respondents, averaging 8.4, while brothers and sisters are given an average rating of 6.9.

Table 4.5 Hopefulness of Respondents

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total	Ireland
Overall supportiveness	4.5	5.8	4.2	5.5	5.0	4.9	7.1
Supportiveness of parents	8.1	9.0	8.1	9.1	7.9	8.4	-
Supportiveness of siblings	6.3	8.1	7.0	6.8	6.9	6.9	-

4.7 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we assessed the well-being of our respondents and used comparative data from samples of Irish adults⁴⁶, Irish parents⁴⁷, and US adults⁴⁸ to give an indication of the extent of need. We did this using the concept of effect size which is a simple way of standardising and comparing the difference between two groups on a range of test scores. As a rule of thumb, effect sizes around 0.5 and over indicate a significant level of need.

Beginning with physical well-being, as indicated by the presence of physical symptoms (such as difficulties with eating, sleeping, aches, pains) we found that all respondents, irrespective of location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached or ready), had fewer symptoms compared to the general population of parents in Ireland. Notwithstanding this, we also found that unattached respondents had the most symptoms, followed by attached respondents, with ready respondents having the least symptoms, suggesting that the journey from being unattached to attached to ready is mapped in the body of respondents through increased physical well-being.

Given that physical symptoms are influenced by health behaviour we analysed data on the prevalence within the past month of smoking, drinking and drugs. The results show that respondents in Ballymun have a much higher usage of all the substances listed than either their counterparts in Mayo, or the average Irish adult. We also found that unattached respondents have significantly higher usage of all substances by comparison with respondents who are attached or ready, mirroring the results on physical symptoms.

We measured emotional well-being by asking respondents about their experience of positive and negative emotions. This revealed that respondents in Ballymun and Mayo tend to have fewer positive emotions and more

46 National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

47 McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003.

48 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

negative emotions compared to the average Irish parent. The overall difference is equivalent to an effect size of 0.5 (for positive emotions) and 0.3 (for negative emotions). More significantly, unattached respondents have fewer positive emotions (an effect size of -0.9) and significantly more negative emotions (an effect size of +0.6) compared to the average Irish parent.

We measured life satisfaction and found that Ballymun respondents have lower levels of satisfaction (3.9) than the norm (4.5) – based on US rather than Irish data – while Mayo respondents (5.3) are well above the norm. Unattached respondents have the lowest level of life satisfaction and their score (3.6) is well below the level of both attached respondents (5.0) and ready respondents (4.4).

The concept of hopefulness, as defined in psychology, refers to a pattern of thought about one's ability to find ways of achieving goals and having the motivation to achieve those goals. In everyday language, a person is described as hopeful who believes that they have the will ('agency thinking') and the way ('pathways thinking') to achieve their goals. Using this definition, we measured the hopefulness of respondents and found an overall hopefulness score of 5.0 which is above the threshold of low hopefulness (4.4) but below the threshold of high hopefulness (5.7). In other words, although respondents are not without hope, there is scope to increase their level of hopefulness to a level which is regarded as healthy and productive. The main source of variation among respondents is that those from Ballymun tend to be more confident in their problem-solving abilities, while Mayo respondents tend to be more motivated and energetic. In addition, unattached respondents lacked confidence in their own ability to remain committed and motivated to solving their problems.

Support networks refer to the people from whom you can expect help, if you need it, and the level of supportiveness was measured on a scale from 1 (not supportive) to 10 (extremely supportive). The results show that Ballymun respondents (4.5) feel significantly less overall support than Mayo respondents (5.8), while unattached respondents (4.2) feel the least overall support. These levels of support are significantly below that experienced by Irish parents (7.1) but this may be due to the fact that respondents are much younger and living at home with their parents. Parents are given a high supportiveness rating by all respondents, averaging 8.4, while brothers and sisters are given an average rating of 6.9.

These results, although based on a small sample, suggest some more general insights into early school leaving and how to respond to it. Four implications in particular are worth noting.

First, the results clarify how the well-being of respondents is influenced by two key factors: (i) whether they are attached to a service and (ii) whether they live in Ballymun or Mayo. Both factors are important, but attachment to a service is the more important of the two. Respondents who are unattached are greater at risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. Respondents who are from Ballymun are also at greater risk in terms of all these variables. This implies that respondents who are both unattached and living in Ballymun are at highest risk of experiencing significantly lower levels of well being relative to the norm in society generally.

Second, these results show that the consequences of early school leaving extend well beyond the failure to achieve a Junior Certificate or a Leaving Certificate. Early school leavers who remain unattached to services experience significant reductions in physical and emotional well-being, in life satisfaction and hopefulness; in addition, they are at a much increased risk of smoking, drinking and taking drugs. An important implication of this result is to draw attention to the broader range of consequences of early school leaving, which extend beyond the confines of education, training and employment as conventionally understood.

Third, an encouraging result is that when early school leavers become attached to services, there is a gradual but significant improvement in all the measured dimensions of well-being. Although most education and training services do not specifically target these dimensions of well-being, their effect – however unintended or unnoticed - is to reduce physical symptoms and improve emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. This draws attention to the broader range of outcomes produced by interventions targeted at early school leavers, and raises the possibility that these outcomes may be enhanced by giving them more explicit attention in the design of programmes.

Fourth, the chapter highlights the role of ‘neighbourhood effects’ and the negative influence exercised by Ballymun on the lives of early school leavers. This finding, although helpful and possibly predictable, does not clarify precisely which aspects of the Ballymun neighbourhood have the greatest impact on early school leavers. We have seen that Ballymun is distinctive, by comparison with Mayo, in terms of a number of variables such as: (i) low level of owner occupation (ii) high level of lone parenting (iii) low level of school retention (iv) high prevalence of opiate use. None of these risk factors operate in isolation from each other, or in isolation from the protective factors which undoubtedly exist in Ballymun. Moreover it is in the nature of neighbourhood effects that they require intervention at a neighbourhood level, and not just at the level of individual services. For this reason, responses to early school leaving in areas like Ballymun require interventions at a neighbourhood level while cognisant of the fact, as confirmed by this and other studies⁴⁹, that direct service interventions will have the greatest impact.

⁴⁹ The scale of influence exercised by neighbourhood is difficult to measure but estimates tend to vary between 5% and 20%. For a review of studies, on neighbourhood effects, see Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley, 2002, Pratschke, 2002.

Chapter Five

Experience of School and Other Services

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how our respondents experienced school and other services. We begin by examining experiences at primary school (Section 5.2) and secondary school (Section 5.3). We examine the reasons given by respondents for leaving school early (Section 5.4) and if they regret leaving school early (Section 5.5). We also analyse their usage of services since leaving school (Section 5.6) and the characteristics of services which were found to be most helpful (Section 5.7). In light of this analysis, we conclude with a summary of the key findings and their implications (Section 5.8).

5.2 Experience of Primary School

Each respondent was asked to describe their time at primary school using a five point scale containing the items: very unhappy, unhappy, unsure, happy, very happy. Scores are in the 1-5 range with a mid-point of three. The responses are summarised in Table 5.1 and reveal that the vast majority of respondents (83%) were either happy or very happy at primary school, with an overall mean score of 3.9. Ballymun respondents were slightly happier (mean score of 4.1) than Mayo respondents (mean score of 3.6) and those who are job-ready (mean score of 4.1) were slightly happier than those who are unattached or attached (mean score of 3.8).

Table 5.1 Happiness of Respondents at Primary School (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Very unhappy	3	12	6	10	0	6
Unhappy	10	0	13	5	0	6
Unsure	0	12	13	0	0	4
Happy	45	71	31	70	58	54
Very happy	42	6	38	15	42	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Mean</i>	<i>4.1</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>4.1</i>	<i>3.9</i>

Respondents who were happy at primary school, and these were the majority, were virtually unanimous in explaining that this was because they had a good relationship with teachers and other pupils. Typical comments were:

'All my mates and cousins were there. I was happy enough there'

'Met friends and liked the way teachers did work'.

'Teachers were very good to me, good friends there'.

'One teacher was excellent, spent a lot of time with me. Loved her class, didn't like other classes'.
'Teachers were friendly and I had all my friends to play with'.
'Enjoyed it a lot, nice teachers, got on well with everyone'.
'The teachers were supportive up until sixth class and then they got strict'.
'It was a great school, great teachers. The atmosphere and the pupils were excellent'.
'We didn't work as hard, there was less stress, we got off early, there was no Junior or Leaving Cert'.
'Liked the teachers and the pupils. It was a friendly place and I wasn't fighting'.
'I liked the teachers and the people in school. Had friends'.
'Was put on track, put the head down, was inspired, got goals, the teachers were down to earth'.
'I had great friends and could be free to have fun, had some support from the teachers'.
'The teachers were nice, there were no fights, it was good'.
'Had great support from teachers, had lots of friends and enjoyed challenging my self at PE'.
'Enjoyed sports, was very clever in primary school, the teachers were nicer'.
'I liked my teacher and friends. We did projects which was good'.

By the same reasoning, respondents who were unhappy at primary school also tended to explain this by reference to difficulties with teachers and other pupils, but some also found that learning was difficult or uninteresting, or were unable to cope with the discipline of school. Typical comments were:

'I couldn't cope with sitting in a classroom. I couldn't do the work and there were too many in the class. I used to rob because I had a habit'.
'If I was in the class I got the blame for doing things wrong and that made me feel bad about myself. I didn't get respect because the teachers didn't like me'.
'I couldn't read or spell. They wouldn't teach me properly'.
'I was bullied, had no support from the teachers or the principal'.
'I used to like it, had friends there but never liked school. Didn't like homework'.
'Could never get on with teachers, bored and messing in it. Moved from the UK, found it hard to fit in. I went to three different primary schools'.

5.3 Experience of Secondary School

Each respondent was also asked to describe their time at secondary school using a five point scale containing the items: very unhappy, unhappy, unsure, happy, very happy; scores are in the 1-5 range with a mid-point of three. The responses are summarised in Table 5.2 and reveal that nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) were unhappy or very unhappy at secondary school. The mean 'happiness score' was below the mid-point (2.4) with almost no variation according to location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached, ready) of respondents.

Table 5.2 Happiness of Respondents at Secondary School (%)

Hopefulness	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Very unhappy	13	25	20	21	8	17
Unhappy	50	38	47	37	58	46
Unsure	10	25	20	16	8	15
Happy	27	13	13	26	25	22
Very happy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Mean</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>2.4</i>

Respondents who were unhappy at secondary school, and who were the majority, tended to explain this by reference to difficulties with teachers and other pupils, but some also found that learning was difficult or uninteresting, or were unable to cope with the discipline of school. Typical comments were:

'I couldn't do any of the work but my friends were messing and I joined in, enjoyed that'.

'Didn't like the teachers because they always give out. If you sit talking to your friends they give out to you'.

'I was bullied, I didn't like it'.

'Didn't like the teachers and the principal but here was a good atmosphere between the students'.

'The teachers were putting too much stress on the students'.

'I didn't like the teachers, I was immature and started fights'.

'I was bullied by the same students from primary school and again I had no support from the teachers'.

'The work was too hard. I was in too many schools and moved a lot and I got thrown out'.

'The people were different, the teachers picked on you, some teachers were stricter than others, some subjects harder than others. Was always fighting and getting into trouble and getting suspended. One of the teachers threw the chalk duster at me so I hit him and knocked him out. He was out cold. I tried to talk to him after but he wouldn't look at me. I was told I was a danger to the teachers and school so they sent me to anger management. It was good to make me control my temper but made me worse in my boxing, I wasn't as good'.

'The teachers didn't like me because of my second name. My father went to school there and so they treated me the same'.

'The teachers didn't seem to want to help. Everyone was against each other, there was too much pressure'.

'It was unfair, I felt unliked by the teachers'.

'The teachers were ignorant and the principal was argumentative, I was just bored'.

'Just wasn't me, never wanted to go to college. Only wanted a laugh, not into learning at all'.

'Brutal, couldn't learn or anything. Teachers didn't give a shit and we didn't either, we wouldn't do anything either'.

'Just didn't like school and didn't attend very much. My mother got a therapist to help me to go to school but it didn't work'.

'Didn't like teachers, not very fair to class, picked on someone new everyday, discipline was very strict, focused on little things'.

'Teachers weren't teaching right'.

'Everything went too fast, felt I was being left behind, no classmates'.

Respondents who were happy at secondary school were virtually unanimous in explaining that this was because they had a good relationship with either other pupils or teachers, or both. Typical comments were:

'I had a laugh'.

'I was inspired by business studies, the teachers were inspiring and supportive. They continued with the pushing. If I did something wrong, I was told to try again until I got it right'.

'Great friends and atmosphere'.

'Some of the teachers were fine, got on with most people, didn't get on with some of the students'.

'I had a laugh with friends but I didn't get along with teachers'.

'The teachers were able to teach us and able to learn from them'.

5.4 Reasons for Leaving School Early

Each respondent was asked to give specific reasons why they left they left school without a Leaving Certificate. For many, leaving school was a logical outcome of the unhappiness which they experienced there which was related, in turn, to difficulties with teachers, peers, or with learning generally:

'The teachers got in the way. Everything was fine until the teachers started to pick on me in fifth year. I started with work experience and was kept on'.

'The teachers were unsupportive'.

'Just that I was being bullied, couldn't take it any longer'.

'I didn't like the school and I didn't like the class work'.

'The principal was always sending me home for being five minutes late. I would have stayed in school if it was different'.

'Just couldn't take anymore and went to Youthreach'.

A substantial minority of respondents left school without a Leaving Certificate because they were expelled:

'I got thrown out for taking the handles of the doors with a snips, was suspended loads of times before that'.

'I was in too much trouble and getting suspended'.

'I got thrown out'.

'I was always in trouble. I was always in a class with all my mates and was always messing'.

'I got thrown out of school for messing'.

'I was expelled for hitting the teacher. I was suspended nine times in third year for fighting and messing'.

'I had no support, was illiterate, couldn't do my homework and so I got kicked out'.

'I got suspended and then expelled from school. I stood up to the teachers and told them exactly how I felt. The principal believed the teachers over me'.

'Got expelled because I didn't like them and they didn't like me. I decided I needed to do something to get out of school so I decided not to obey the school rules – such as being cheeky to teachers'.

Some respondents were attracted by the prospects of a job or learning a trade and found that school had little to contribute to that objective:

‘I wanted to be independent and earn money’.

‘I just didn’t like it. I wanted to be working. Anything that I wanted to do didn’t involve a Leaving Cert’.

‘I thought about being a hairdresser and getting an apprenticeship. I thought it was what I wanted to do’.

‘I was offered a job doing something that I loved’.

‘I got a job so I left for the money’.

‘I left that school in fourth year to do LCA but it wasn’t as good as I thought. I always wanted to do an apprenticeship but the LCA wasn’t going to get it for me so when I got the chance to train as an electrician I went for it. I left that after 1 year to take up carpentry and that’s what I always wanted’.

Finally, some respondents left because of specific life circumstances such as pregnancy, the death of a friend, or an accident:

‘Getting into trouble, my friend passed away’.

‘I lost two friends who died and couldn’t return to school. It was my best friend in school. The teachers offered counselling but I didn’t take it’.

‘I got pregnant and i also didn’t like the senior side, the way it was run’.

‘I was in a accident and couldn’t handle the pressure, people looking at me, too much pressure, depression and paranoia’.

‘Got pregnant, my mother was battling cancer and I couldn’t cope with more stress’.

5.5 Regrets at Leaving School Early

We asked respondents if they regretted leaving school without a Leaving Certificate in order to assess their retrospective judgement on early leaving school. The results are summarised in Table 5.3 and reveals that the overall sample is relatively evenly split between those who regret leaving (55%) and those who do not (45%). However there is a significant variations within the sample: the majority of Ballymun respondents (71%) regret leaving school early while the majority of Mayo respondents (75%) do not; similarly, those who are attached and ready are more likely to regret leaving school early but a majority of attached (63%) have no regrets.

Table 5.3 Regrets at Leaving School without a Leaving Certificate (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Yes	71	25	63	37	75	55
No	29	75	38	63	25	45
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The main reason why respondents regret leaving school early is that it restricts opportunities for employment, further education, and even social life:

'I want my Leaving. I would get a good job if I had my Leaving Cert'.

'I would now be able to read and write, that's a big regret'.

'I would love to go back to school, my mates are still there, you get to mix with girls'.

'I should have stayed and I would have got a better job'.

'You get a better job with a Leaving Cert'.

'I would like to have it, you need to have it to have a future'.

'It is very hard to get a job without a Leaving Cert'.

'There are more options available to you when you have a Leaving Cert'.

'Well you need it for most jobs'.

'I'll never get a job'.

'I regret messing and should have stayed to get a job'.

'I was going to do my Junior Cert in school and then to for an apprentice mechanic, now it will take longer'.

'Most jobs employ people with a Leaving Cert'.

'I would have liked to have done my Leaving and gone to college'.

'I found it extremely hard to get a job without qualifications'.

'I need a job and it makes you feel confident about yourself'.

'I would like to go to college, I know some people going this year'.

'I sometimes regret because I miss out on jobs if I don't have a Leaving Cert'.

Some respondents also regret leaving school early because they lack the sense of achievement, self-esteem and competence which the Leaving Certificate confers:

'No one in my family did the Leaving Cert and I would have liked to have done it'.

'I wanted to go to college and make something of myself'.

'I would like to have it, I could travel the world, would be nice to have on my CV'.

'Although there are other alternatives, many people look down on a person without a Leaving Cert and judge before they know you'.

'I had to go back when I was 18 and I got slagged off'.

The main reason why respondents have no regrets at leaving school early is that it removed a major source of distress and unhappiness from their lives:

'Happy days not being in school, I feel like I am doing OK without it'.

'I'm glad that I left'.

'My life is much easier without being in trouble every day'.

'Wanted to get out of that situation'.

Other respondents have no regrets at leaving school because they have since found an alternative route to achieve their ambitions:

'I am currently studying for the Junior Cert and will do the Leaving Cert later'.

'I don't regret because I have found an alternative route'.

'You could do with it but you only need a Leaving Cert for college and that is not a priority at the moment'.

'Can still do what I want to do without my Leaving Cert, I'd still be doing the same thing'.

'What I am doing is what I want to do, I don't need the Leaving Cert'.

'I can get money at Youthreach and my mates and cousins are there'.

'I would rather do the Leaving in a place that gave me more respect, like Youthreach, I'm doing grand now'.

'Happier going to Youthreach'.

'I am here in this facility and happy'.

5.6 Use of Services

The mean number of services used by respondents since leaving school is summarised in Table 5.3, with more details in Tables 5.4a and 5.4b. Table 5.3 reveals that, on average, each respondent has used 2.7 services since leaving school. Respondents in Ballymun used considerably more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (an average of 1.9), possibly reflecting the different levels of service availability in both places. Significantly, respondents who are unattached have used more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents who are attached (an average of 2.8) or ready (an average of 2.2).

Table 5.3 Respondents Usage and Experience of Services (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Mean no of services used	3.1	1.9	3.1	2.8	2.2	2.7
(Range)	(0-7)	(0-4)	(0-7)	(1-6)	(0-5)	(0-7)
Mean helpfulness score	2.7	2.5	2.3	2.7	2.7	2.6
(Range)	(2-3)	(2-3)	(2-3)	(2-3)	(2-3)	(2-3)

The helpfulness of services was assessed by asking each respondent to rate every service used on a three point scale - using the terms 'unhelpful' (a score of 1), 'unsure' (a score of 2), and 'helpful' (a score of 3). From this a mean 'helpfulness score' was calculated; scores are in the 1-3 range with a mid-point of two. The results in Table 5.3 indicate that the mean helpfulness score, based on all services used by all respondents is 2.6, above the mid-point of the scale. There is relatively little variation between respondents although it is noteworthy that unattached respondents have the least helpfulness score (2.3) given that they are currently unattached to services and have had one of the highest usage of services. This suggests that the task of engaging unattached respondents in services may be challenging and require some innovation in how services are designed and targeted.

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Tables 5.4a and 5.4b provide more details on the actual services used in Ballymun and Mayo respectively. In Ballymun, the services most frequently used by respondents are FAS (61%), Job Centre (61%), Youthreach (48%) and BRYR (32%). All services in Ballymun – excluding those used by only one respondent - received a mean helpfulness score of 2.6 or higher, indicating a relatively high level of satisfaction. In Mayo, the most frequently used services are Youthreach (71%), FAS (41%), and NYP (24%). Youthreach received the highest helpfulness score (2.9) followed by NYP (2.5) and FAS (2.2).

Table 5.4a Usage and Experience of Specific Services by Respondents in Ballymun (%)

Variable	% who used this service	Mean Helpfulness Score
FÁS	61	2.8
Job Centre	61	2.7
Youthreach	48	2.6
BRYR / 'The Reco'	32	2.9
Gateway	26	2.9
Community Training Centre / Workshop	16	2.6
Ballark	19	2.8
BEST	3	2
BITE	13	2.8
Columban Youth Project	10	3
YAP	3	3
PACE	3	1
Women's Resource Centre	3	3
Exchange House / St Margaret's Traveller Services	0	0
Geraldstown House	6	3
% who used no service	6	-

Table 5.4a Usage and Experience of Specific Services by Respondents in Mayo (%)

Variable	% who used this service	Mean Helpfulness Score
FÁS	41	2.2
Youthreach	71	2.9
Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP)	24	2.5
North Mayo Youth Action Programme	12	2.0
Parkside Community Programmes	12	3.0
Erris Community Programme	0	-
Senior Traveller Training Centre	18	3.0
% who used no service	6	-

5.7 Characteristics of Most Helpful Services

Respondents were asked to pick the one service which they found the most helpful and to explain why they found it the most helpful. Their responses revealed that the most helpful services have four main characteristics. The first, and most important, is having staff who are friendly, fair, understanding and committed:

‘I enjoyed Youthreach, people treat you better, it’s like talking to normal people, you call them by their names’.

‘Youthreach is the same as school just a bit softer. ... You have more respect for teachers there, you can have a laugh with them’.

‘At Youthreach they don’t treat you like at school, they are normal, you can talk to them, you have to go or you wouldn’t get paid, if you are messing you get put out and you don’t get paid. The teachers are all grand’.

‘Youthreach, the staff are nicer and I get along with them’.

Youthreach, they accepted me even though I was kicked out of school. they understand my problems, have not been in any fights here’.

‘I feel more comfortable there, I feel more wanted there, I am more settled there’.

‘Youthreach, the students and teachers are nice; you know everyone there – and not just a few people as in school’.

‘Youthreach, people and the way they go about and the way they do it. Seem more interested’.

‘Good teachers, helped getting work, always there when you need them’.

‘Youthreach teachers easy to get on with, doing he Leaving Cert next year’.

‘CTC, they keep you motivated’.

The second characteristic is having a programme which offers personalised and practical support to acquire skills and qualifications which are valued by the respondent:

‘The Job Centre showed me how to use the internet and find jobs’.

‘Ballark because you get paid, learned how to cook, never done that before’.

‘Youthreach, got my Junior Cert there, very supportive regarding jobs’.

'Ballark provided trust and work experience, pushed you to your limit, got me into Youthreach and were supportive of my family problems'. At CTC I learned more skills that help you through anything'.

'Learned to read and write here in a relaxed environment, very relaxed and very supportive'.

'Ballark, they got me my Junior Cert, I improved my reading and writing, and I trained as a commis chef'.

'Gateway, they took me off the streets and I got lots of training in computers, first aid, communications and they get me back to school'.

The third characteristics involves organising teaching in small classes which facilitate interaction between teacher and student:

'Youthreach is a small classroom and you get more attention since there are only five in the class, and you get to different subjects. I was told to leave because I was messing'.

'Youthreach is better than the Comp, you didn't have to change classes every hour'.

'Youthreach, the classes are smaller and easier to teach. You can't mess because classes are smaller'.

'Youthreach has ten in each class, better relationship with teacher. In school, too many in one class (35) ad could learn anything. Don't both questioning at school – can in Youthreach'.

'Mixing with Travellers, small classes'.

The fourth characteristic is offering career guidance and helping the student to find appropriate placements in education, training or employment:

'The Job Centre are getting me onto a course and helping me out with a Junior Certificate'.

'The RECO helped to get me on into CTC and they put me on my two feet. Get a lot of support from them'.

'The Job Centre help you to find a job and put your CV forward'.

'The Job Centre, they show you how to prepare for jobs and train you to look for a job'.

'Youthreach can get you a job faster, great teachers there, I had to leave after a couple of months, I wasn't well'.

'The RECO will help you get a course in FAS and they give you a lost of support'.

'Both the Job Centre and CTC were helpful. The Job Centre tried to get me a training course and jobs, and got me into the CTC place'.

'FAS, they were very helpful and also keep you on the database for future reference'.

'The Job Centre help to send CVs and cover letters to get a job'.

'FAS always get you a job if you need one, ring and see how you are getting on, if you have a problem and call them back they get back to you and give you the help you want'.

5.8 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter described how our respondents experienced school and other services. We found that the vast majority of respondents (83%) were either happy or very happy at primary school, with an overall mean happiness score of 3.9 out of a maximum total of 5.0. Ballymun respondents were slightly happier (mean score of 4.1) than Mayo respondents (mean score of 3.6) and those who are job-ready (mean score of 4.1) were

slightly happier than those who are unattached or attached (mean score of 3.8). At secondary school we found that nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) were unhappy or very unhappy with an overall mean happiness score of 2.4 out of a maximum total of 5.0, and almost no variation according to location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached, ready) of these respondents. Respondents gave broadly similar reasons for being happy at both primary and secondary school and this essentially involved having a good relationship with teachers and other pupils. By the same reasoning, respondents who were unhappy at secondary school also tended to explain this by reference to difficulties with teachers and other pupils, but some also found that learning was difficult or uninteresting, or were unable to cope with the discipline of the school.

Respondents were asked to give specific reasons why they left school without a Leaving Certificate. For many, leaving school was a logical outcome of the unhappiness which they experienced there and was related, in turn, to difficulties with teachers, peers, or with learning generally. A substantial minority of respondents also left school without a Leaving Certificate because they were expelled. Some were attracted by the prospects of a job or learning a trade and found that school contributed little to that objective. Finally, some respondents left because of specific life circumstances such as pregnancy, the death of a friend, or an accident.

We asked respondents if they regretted leaving school without a Leaving Certificate in order to assess their retrospective judgement on early leaving school. The results show that respondents are relatively evenly split between those who regret leaving (55%) and those who do not (45%). However there is a significant variations within the sample: the majority of Ballymun respondents (71%) regret leaving school early while the majority of Mayo respondents (75%) do not; similarly, those who are unattached and ready are more likely to regret leaving school early but a majority of the attached (63%) have no regrets. The main reason why respondents regret leaving school early is that it now restricts their opportunities for employment, further education, and even social life. Some respondents also regret leaving school early because they lack the sense of achievement, self-esteem, and competence which the Leaving Certificate confers. By contrast, a major reason why respondents have no regrets at leaving school early is that it removed a major source of distress and unhappiness from their lives. Other respondents have no regrets because they have since found an alternative route to achieve their ambitions, such as doing the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate through Youthreach or a Community Training Workshop.

Since leaving school, the average number of services used by respondents is 2.7. Respondents in Ballymun used considerably more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (an average of 1.9), possibly reflecting the different levels of service availability in both places. Significantly, respondents who are unattached have used more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents who are attached (an average of 2.8) or ready (an average of 2.2). Respondents also rated the helpfulness of each service on a three point scale – from ‘unhelpful’ (a score of 1), to ‘unsure’ (a score of 2), to ‘helpful’ (a score of 3). The results show that services are generally experienced as helpful with an average helpfulness score of 2.6, above the mid-point of the scale. It is noteworthy that unattached respondents had the lowest helpfulness score (2.3) since these respondents also had one of the highest usage of services, a finding which suggests that the task of engaging

unattached respondents in services may be challenging and require some innovation in how services are designed and targeted.

In order to help identify the characteristics of helpful services, we asked respondents to pick the one service which they found the most helpful and to explain why they found it the most helpful. Their responses revealed that the most helpful services have four main characteristics. The first is having staff who are friendly, fair, understanding and committed. The second is having a programme which offers personalised and practical support to acquire skills and qualifications which are valued by the respondent. The third involves organising teaching in small classes which facilitate interaction between teacher and student. The fourth is offering career guidance and helping the student to find appropriate placements in education, training or employment.

These results throw light on the experience of early school leaving which have broader implications for the education system. Four implications are worth noting.

First, it is clear that, for many young people, the seeds of early school leaving are to be found in the transition from primary to secondary school. The dramatic rise in unhappiness in the transition from primary school (12% unhappy) to secondary school (63%) indicates that the majority of our respondents did not make this transition smoothly. It is true, as international research indicates, that the motivation and engagement of pupils takes a 'dip' in the early years of secondary school⁵⁰. However the research also shows that most pupils regain their commitment to school although a significant minority – mainly comprising boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds and lower ability pupils concentrated in lower ability classes - tend to become more disengaged and to compensate for academic under-performance by identifying with a similarly under-performing peer group. A recent study carried out in Irish secondary schools found that a key influence on students' motivation and engagement was the informal climate of the school and the classroom, where climate refers to "the quality of relations between teachers and students and among students themselves"⁵¹. According to the authors, a range of policy measures to build student engagement would include "promoting a positive school climate, rewarding positive behaviour rather than utilising negative sanctions and providing students with access to subjects with a more practical orientation"⁵².

Second, the process of early school leaving is itself a transition out of secondary school which is unnecessarily distressing for young people. We have seen that the average age on leaving school among our respondents was 15.3 years and it is likely that the previous three years became progressively unhappy for them, marked by poor attendance, discipline problems, low achievement, reduced self-esteem, etc. As a consequence of this protracted process of disengagement, many early school leavers are harmed by their experiences in secondary school and this is reflected in the results of our survey which found that unattached respondents are at greater risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs,

50 Rudduck and Flutter, 2004a; 2004b

51 Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006:202

52 Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006:201

emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. These negative outcomes could be avoided by introducing measures to build student engagement, as suggested in the previous paragraph, or by finding alternative placements in Youthreach or Community Training Workshops where their needs could be catered for in a more appropriate manner.

Third, it is possible that a significant proportion of early school leavers may have a special education need under the recently enacted Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act). The EPSEN Act 2004 defines a child with special education needs as one with “an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition” which restricts the child’s capacity to “participate in and benefit from education” (Section 1). Without proper assessment, it is difficult to know what proportion of early school leavers may have specific learning or mental health difficulties; however there is a substantial body of research to indicate that the prevalence of mental health difficulties among children in disadvantaged areas in Ireland could be as high as 20%⁵³ while the prevalence of specific learning difficulties is estimated to be at least 5% of school children⁵⁴. The core objectives of the EPSEN Act, as stated in its Preamble, are to provide children who have special education needs with: (i) an inclusive and appropriate education (ii) the skills needed to participate in society on leaving school and (iii) the greater participation of parents. Significantly, the EPSEN Act creates enforceable rights for all children to an appropriate and inclusive education and this legislation may offer a new way of meeting the needs of children who would otherwise end up as early school leavers.

Fourth, the type of education which our respondents would like to have experienced at school – and which some are already experiencing through Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FAS and other services – provide valuable guidance on what constitutes a more appropriate education and training system, particularly for vulnerable young people. The key features of a more appropriate system, as envisaged by respondents, would involve: (i) staff who are friendly, fair, understanding and committed (ii) personalised and practical support to acquire skills and qualifications which the student values (iii) teaching through small classes which facilitate interaction between teacher and student (iv) career guidance and helping the student to find appropriate placements in education, training or employment. It is clear that some of these requirements have resource implications, particularly in terms of smaller classes and opportunities for more one-to-one instruction and support, than is currently available. However, when full account is taken of all the costs of early school leaving for individuals, families, schools, neighbourhoods and society generally, the benefits additional resources spent on this relatively small group of young people are likely to outweigh the costs, and to be cost effective.

53 Fitzgerald and Jeffers, 1994; O'Connor, Ruddle and O'Gallagher, 1988; McCarthy and O'Boyle, 1986; Porteus, 1991; O'Rourke and Fitzgerald, 1985; Lynch, Fitzgerald and Kinsella, 1987; Barton and Fitzgerald, 1986; Stone, Fitzgerald and Kinsella, 1990; Mohan, Fitzgerald and Collins, 1998.

54 See, for example, the World Dyslexia Network Foundation (<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/wdnf>); International Dyslexia Association (<http://www.interdys.org>); Dyslexia Association of Ireland (<http://www.dyslexia.ie>).

Chapter Six

Employment Prospects

6.1 Introduction

A core objective of the EQUAL Youth Project is to assist early school leavers in obtaining and sustaining employment. For this reason, it is appropriate to examine our respondents' previous employment experience, how they perceive their employment prospects, and the obstacles which they may be experiencing in accessing education, training or employment. That is the purpose of this chapter. We begin by examining the previous employment experience of respondents (Section 6.2) and how they assess their employment prospects (Section 6.3). We examine the obstacles which respondents face in accessing education, training or employment (Section 6.4) as well as their aspirations and regrets (Section 6.5). In light of this, we summarise the key findings and their implications (Section 6.6).

6.2 Previous Experience of Employment

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of jobs held since leaving school and the results are summarised in Tables 6.1a and 6.1b. These indicate that over two thirds of respondents (69%) have had at least one job since leaving school. This is equivalent to an average of 1.7 jobs each, but respondents in Ballymun had more than twice the average number of jobs (2.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (0.9), possibly reflecting greater availability of job opportunities in Ballymun and Dublin. Similarly, respondents who are employment-ready had more previous jobs (2.2) compared to other respondents.

Table 6.1a Number of jobs respondents have had since leaving school in Ballymun and Mayo (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Total
None	25	41	32
One	23	41	29
Two to three	29	12	23
Four to five	13	6	10
More than five	10	0	6
Total	100	100	100
<i>Mean</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>0.9</i>	<i>1.7</i>

Table 6.1b Number of jobs respondents have had since leaving school in each service category (%)

Variable	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
None	31	40	17	31
One	37	25	25	30
Two to three	13	20	42	23
Four to five	13	10	8	10
More than five	6	5	8	6
Total	100	100	100	100

Each respondent was asked to describe their overall experience of previous employment using a five point scale containing the items: very unhappy, unhappy, unsure, happy, very happy; scores are in the 1-5 range with a mid-point of three. The responses, based on those who have had at least one job, are summarised in Table 6.2 and indicate that the experience of employment has tended to be a happy one with a mean score of 3.5, above the mid-point on the scale. The exception to this is unattached respondents whose mean score is 2.7, suggesting that previous employment experiences have tended to be unhappy.

Table 6.2 Rating of Previous Employment Experience by Respondents (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Very unhappy	4	0	9	0	0	3
Unhappy	9	10	18	0	10	9
Unsure	26	30	45	25	10	27
Happy	35	40	9	42	60	36
Very happy	17	0	18	17	0	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	3.4	3.7	2.7	3.9	3.9	3.5

*Never had a job.

Respondents were also asked to explain their answer. The number of responses to this question was relatively small, partly because nearly a third (31%) had no previous employment experience while those who had experience did not always explain their answer.

Respondents who were happy in their previous jobs tended to mention the enjoyment of doing things and working with others as well as earning money and feeling independent:

'I like what I do and I am good at it'.

'I only recently started working and am very happy that I eventually got a job'.

'I liked working, and I liked the people, and I liked getting paid'.

'First job not happy but my job now is perfect'.

'Was getting paid, getting out of school'.

'I was working with my brother, was happy doing things, wasn't happy sitting at home'.

'They were enjoyable and informative at the same time. They gave me good experience and great life skills'.

'Away from the house and children, a bit of independence'.

'People and place nice, training and getting paid'.

'Being educated, very friendly environment'.

'Work was alright'.

'Getting out of Youthreach, doing work outside'.

'They were fine, I got on with people, no hassle'.

'I get to travel in my present job and I was doing what I loved in my last job'.

By contrast, respondents who were unhappy in their previous jobs tended to dislike the work and the person who was their boss:

'The boss was not nice, I didn't like him, was doing plumbing and wasn't into it'.

'Didn't like it, the bossing around, I suppose you have to get used to it if you want to make more of yourself'.

'Wasn't in the mood for work'.

'Well I was cleaning, I just wasn't interested in it, it was something to get you by'.

'Didn't like travelling to work, didn't like the job'.

'Lasted four months, went to Germany on holidays and didn't go back, didn't want to go back to work'.

'The last job I had an argument with the boss over wages'.

'Liked them sometimes, hated them sometimes, especially when I was being told what to do'.

'Working with my father painting, very uncomfortable'.

'Unhappy about the first two jobs, I got treated unfairly. In my current job I feel insecure around qualified people'.

'In my last job my boss was very ignorant but I was very interested in the other jobs'.

6.3 Self-Appraisal of Employment Prospects

Respondents were asked to describe their chances of getting a job compared to their friends using a five point scale containing the items: much worse, worse, same, better, much better; scores are in the 1-5 range with a mid-point of three. The responses are summarised in Table 6.3 and reveal that a majority of respondents (51%) rated their chances of getting a job as the same as their friends; more than a third (39%) think they have better prospects, and a tenth (10%) think they have worse prospects. The main exception is unattached respondents who regard their prospects as slightly worse than their friends.

Table 6.3 Employment Prospects of Respondents Compared to their Friends (%)

Variable	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total
Much worse	6	0	13	0	0	4
Worse	6	6	13	0	8	6
Same	42	69	50	53	50	51
Better	29	25	19	37	25	28
Much Better	16	0	6	11	17	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Mean</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>3.3</i>

Respondents who believe their prospects are the same as their friends (51%) base their judgement on the fact that their friends left school at the same time, have the same qualifications, and have similar opportunities open to them:

‘Some of them left school the same time as me’.

‘None of them are working either, they don’t have the experience’.

‘There isn’t much if you haven’t got a Leaving Cert’.

‘Same as most friends, some move on and some don’t, those that move on maybe try harder or know people who might get them a job’.

‘My mates have the same education I have’.

‘Most of us are the same’.

‘Most of my friends left school when I did and have kids’.

‘We all left school early and have the same qualifications and skills’.

‘None of us have done the Junior Cert so we have the same chances’.

‘Me and my friends are all the same’.

‘I have the same experience as my friends, pretty much’.

‘Most of my friends have kids and have no Leaving Cert’.

‘We all know about the same and I think everyone has the same chance of getting a job’.

Respondents who believe their prospects are better than their friends (39%) base their judgement on the fact that, by comparison with friends, they have more qualifications and experience, and are more motivated and energetic:

‘I’m the only one looking for a job, my friends are lazy’.

‘I have a lot of certificates compared to others’.

‘I did a lot more courses and have more qualifications’.

‘I get more support from my parents’.

‘Some don’t even have a Junior Cert, they left school earlier and are less intelligent’.

‘I have a Junior Cert, am more focused, my friends are not motivated’.

'My friends are lazy, won't get up in the morning, prefer to watch football, they don't do anything during the day'.

'Most of them haven't had any jobs, at least I am trying to get something'.

'I am not as de-motivated as my friends are, I couldn't be bothered with some of them'.

'My friends have not got good speaking skills and they can't get a job. My friends wouldn't be able to get on with people in work. My friends are still in school and encourage me to get a job'.

'My friends, five of them, are on drugs already, some of them are still in school but they will be kicked out soon for drugs. I stay away from them when they are on them but they don't do any peer pressure or anything'.

'I'm educating myself'

'Youthreach will help us get a job whereas in school they don't help you to get a job'.

'I think I have an edge on them, I have work experience whereas they don't'.

'I have better experience than my friends and I did courses when I finished school'.

'I have qualifications as a chef, my friends are not into work, I am out there looking'.

'My friends couldn't be bothered, they think that all they can do in life is to scam money off their parents, drink on the blocks, and get everything they want'.

'I have more experience than any of them'.

Respondents who believe their prospects are worse than their friends (10%) base their judgement on the fact that, by comparison with friends, they have no qualifications or experience, cannot read or write, and their friends are still at school:

'I don't have a Junior Cert and I can't read and write whereas they do'.

'They are still in school and I am not. I can't read or write. I would like to get a job as a security guard because then I could sleep in the cabin all day and smoke hash. The guard dog would do all the looking out'.

'I didn't get my Junior Cert and won't get a job without that'.

'I wouldn't try, known locally as a Traveller'.

'They have a better chance, I have no experience, most jobs want experience in some way'.

6.4 Obstacles to Improving Employment Prospects

Respondents were presented with a list of 10 difficulties and asked: 'Do you face any of the following difficulties in terms of education, training, or getting a job?' They were also asked to identify the biggest difficulty which they were experiencing. The results are summarised in Table 6.4.

On average, respondents face 2.4 difficulties each with almost no difference between Ballymun (2.5) and Mayo (2.4). However respondents in the ready category had a higher than average number of difficulties (3.1).

The four biggest difficulties facing respondents are: finding it hard to get interested in education (25%), no jobs if you do not have a Leaving Certificate (19%), difficulty with reading and writing (17%), and problems at home (13%).

Ballymun respondents were more likely to report having problems at home, other difficulties, personal problems, and no one to encourage me, whereas Mayo respondents were more likely to report having difficulty reading and writing, difficulty finding someone who can help and knowing where to get help. Unattached respondents were most likely to report that they had difficulty getting interested in education.

Table 6.4 Difficulties Faced by Respondents in Accessing Education, Training or Getting A Job (%)

Difficulties	Ballymun	Mayo	Unattached	Attached	Ready	Total	Biggest Difficulty*
I find it hard to get interested in education	55	47	69	35	58	52	25
There are no jobs if you don't have a Leaving Certificate	45	35	38	45	42	42	19
I have difficulty with reading and writing	16	47	31	25	25	27	17
I have problems at home (eg. family problems)	32	12	25	20	33	25	13
I have other difficulties	23	0	6	15	25	15	4
I find it hard to get interested in training	16	24	31	15	8	19	2
I have no one to encourage or support me	10	0	6	0	17	6	2
I have difficulty finding someone who can help	10	35	19	15	25	19	0
I have difficulty knowing where to get help	16	29	19	15	33	21	0
I have personal problems (eg. health problems)	16	6	13	5	25	13	0
I have no difficulties	3	0	0	15	0	2	0
Mean number of difficulties	2.5	2.4	2.6	1.9	3.1	2.4	-

*Ranked according to the frequency with which they were mentioned as the biggest difficulties.

6.5 Aspirations and Regrets

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked two questions to help identify what they desired most and what might frustrate the achievement of that desire. Respondents gave similar answers to both questions are for this reason we report their answers together. The two questions are: 'What are the things that would help you

most in terms of improving your education, training, or chances of getting a job?’ and ‘If you were able to change one thing about your life, what would that be?’

A small number of themes consistently emerged in the responses. First, there is widespread awareness of the need to complete their education and training in order to get a job:

‘I would change the fact that I left school’.

‘I would be able to read and write, can’t do anything without it’.

‘To have my Junior Cert and become a hard worker and have a car’.

‘Get a Leaving Cert’.

‘Wouldn’t leave school and would have a steady job’.

‘Stayed in school and done the Junior and Leaving Cert’.

Getting an apprenticeship and proving to people that I can become a mechanic. Thought I could make a career of boxing but I am not as good now as I used to be’.

‘Go back and stay in school’.

‘It would help if I studied by myself which I don’t do, but I’ll have to do since the exams are in two weeks’.

‘Having the Leaving Cert, to a future in most careers it’s necessary’.

‘If I had stuck out school, I would be in my second year of college’.

Second, some respondents would like to make lifestyle changes such as getting fit, playing sport, having more energy and motivation, getting a car, and stopping smoking:

‘Stay playing football’.

‘More energy and get a Leaving Cert’.

‘Wouldn’t drink or smoke’.

‘I need to get fit and I need to improve my reading and writing’.

‘Being able to switch off and relax about stuff, I over-worry’.

‘I would stop smoking because I have a bad chest and have been in hospital over it’.

‘Move out of the house, get a car for myself’.

Get a job, would like to play football for Man United too’.

‘Stay more positive in my school work’.

‘Having a Leaving Cert, having support around you, having a huge amount of motivation and ambition’.

‘Have a house’.

Third, a small number of respondents have been affected by significant life events and difficulty coping with them:

‘Know who my father was’.

‘I’d bring back my three dead brothers’.

‘That my mother wouldn’t have to suffer the pain for this long, she’s had cancer for three years’.

‘Not to go to Dame Street where I got knocked over by a bike, not to leave school at all’.

Fourth, a few respondents feel stigmatised by living in Ballymun and are aware of the adverse consequences which this has on their job prospects:

'I think that I have a Ballymun address stops employers from hiring'.

'Change people's outlook on Ballymun, show them that not everyone is bad'.

'Get out of this kip, Ballymun'.

'People look down on you coming from a certain area'.

6.6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter examined our respondents' previous employment experience, how they perceive their employment prospects, and the obstacles which they currently face in accessing education, training or employment. In the time since leaving school, over two thirds of respondents (69%) have had at least one job, equivalent to an average of 1.7 jobs each. Respondents in Ballymun had more than twice the average number of jobs (2.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (0.9), possibly reflecting greater availability of job opportunities in Ballymun and Dublin. In general, the previous employment experience of respondents has tended to be slightly happy, as indicated by an average happiness score of 3.5 on a scale from 1.0 (very unhappy) to 5.0 (very happy). The exception to this is unattached respondents whose mean score is 2.7, suggesting that previous employment experiences have tended to be unhappy. Respondents who were happy in their previous jobs explained that this was because they enjoyed doing things and working with others as well as earning money and feeling independent. By contrast, respondents who were unhappy tended to dislike the work and the person who was their boss.

A majority of respondents (51%) rated their chances of getting a job as the same as their friends; more than a third (39%) think they have better prospects and a tenth (10%) think they have worse prospects. The main exception is unattached respondents who regard their prospects as slightly worse than their friends. Respondents who believe their prospects are the same as their friends base their judgement on the fact that their friends also left school at the same time, have the same qualifications, and have similar opportunities open to them. By contrast, respondents who believe their prospects are better base their judgement on the fact that, by comparison with friends, they have more qualifications and experience, and are more motivated and energetic. Respondents who believe their prospects are worse than their friends base their judgement on the fact that they have no qualifications or experience, cannot read or write, and their friends are still at school.

Respondents identified a number of specific difficulties which they are currently facing in terms of education, training, or getting a job. Each identified an average of 2.4 difficulties with almost no difference between Ballymun (2.5) and Mayo (2.4) but ready respondents had a higher than average number of difficulties (3.1). The four biggest difficulties facing respondents are: finding it hard to get interested in education (25%), no jobs if you do not have a Leaving Certificate (19%), difficulty with reading and writing (17%), and problems at home (13%). Ballymun respondents were more likely to report having problems at home, personal problems,

and no one to offer encouragement, whereas Mayo respondents were more likely to report having difficulty reading and writing, difficulty finding someone who can help, and knowing where to get help. Unattached respondents were most likely to report that they had difficulty getting interested in education (69%).

Respondents were also invited to discuss their aspirations and regrets and this generated a number of thematic responses including (i) a widespread awareness of the need to complete their education and training in order to get a job (ii) the desire to make lifestyle changes such as getting fit, playing sport, having more energy and motivation, getting a car, and stopping smoking (iii) acknowledging difficulties in coping with significant life events such as death and illness in the family (iv) recognition that, for some people, a stigma attaches to living in Ballymun which adversely affects their job prospects.

The findings in this chapter throw light on the needs of early school leavers and the difficulties they face in not having a Junior or Leaving Certificate. Four implications are worth noting from the point of view of designing services for this target group.

First, most early school leavers retain a huge desire to achieve something with their lives in terms of education, training and employment. Despite the negative experiences at school, they recognise the importance of getting the Junior and Leaving Certificate as the gateway to the world of work. This desire for achievement needs to be nurtured and cultivated by programmes which restore hope and motivation and which set realistic targets.

Second, any programme for early school leavers must recognise that learning usually has quite negative associations for this group of young people. The most frequently cited difficulty being experienced by our respondents – both those who are unattached – is finding it hard to get interested in education. Despite their ambition to succeed, many will be unable to make progress unless programmes are designed and delivered in a way which ignites and sustains their interest, and allows them to recover the natural enjoyment of learning.

Third, of the population of early school leavers, the most vulnerable sub-group are those who are unattached to services. This group, as we have already seen, are at greater risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. This group has also used more services than other respondents but are least likely to find them helpful. They have also had more unhappy experiences of previous employment and are more likely to regard their employment prospects as worse than their friends. For this reason, there are particular challenges in recruiting and engaging this sub-group which need to be recognised by services.

Fourth, and finally, the results of this study provide a strong endorsement of existing services for early school leavers since they show a clear progression in outcomes as young people move from being unattached to being attached and ready. This does not mean that existing services – such as Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FAS, etc – are perfect, but it clearly indicates that being attached to a service is much better than not being attached to a service. These services offer a viable alternative to the model of mainstream education

which palpably failed these young people. The results of this study underline the scale of challenges posed by early school leaving but also points the way towards viable solutions – both inside as well as outside the system of mainstream education - which help these young people to achieve their hopes and ambitions.

Chapter Seven

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

7.1 Introduction

This report was written to assist the EQUAL Youth Project in its task of designing programmes which will help early school leavers to obtain and sustain employment by improving their access to high quality services. The results of this study provide useful insights which will help in the design of interventions to support the progression of early school leavers towards the goal of employability and employment.

In this chapter we draw together the main findings of the report and draw out their implications for policy and services. We begin by describing the sample (Section 7.2) and the questionnaire (Section 7.3). The results are presented in terms of the background characteristics of respondents (Section 7.4), their well-being (Section 7.5), their experiences of school (Section 7.6), services (Section 7.7), previous jobs (Section 7.8), their employment prospects (Section 7.9), and the specific difficulties which they are facing (Section 7.10). In light of this, we draw out the key implications of the study (Section 7.11).

7.2 The Sample

A total of 48 early school leavers – defined as those aged 16-24 who left school without a Leaving Certificate – were interviewed. Given that the EQUAL Youth Project is based at two locations – Ballymun and Mayo – respondents were selected from both places: 31 from Ballymun and 17 from Mayo; the original intention was to have an equal number of respondents (30) from both Ballymun and Mayo but this proved difficult to achieve in practice. All but two respondents were in the 16-21 age range. Given that boys are more likely to leave school early than girls⁵⁵, the sample includes more males (30) than females (18). The sample was also designed to recruit respondents with different levels of attachment to services,⁵⁶ and interviews were held with 16 respondents who were unattached to any service, 20 who were attached to at least one service, and 12 were employment ready⁵⁷.

7.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire collected information on the background characteristics of respondents such as their age and gender, family and household characteristics, education and employment experiences. Information was also collected on their experiences of primary and secondary school, their reasons for leaving school, their use and

⁵⁵ Department of Education & Science, 2005.

⁵⁶ A service in this context refers to any intervention such as education or training which improves the employability of the respondent.

perception of services since leaving school, perceived employment prospects, and the difficulties which they currently face in terms of improving their education, training, or chances of getting a job. A significant part of the questionnaire asked about different aspects of their well-being such as physical well-being, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness, and support networks. These dimensions of well-being were measured using tried and tested instruments and for which comparable data is available.

7.4 Background Characteristics

On average, respondents left school at 15.3 years, with one respondent, from Ballymun, leaving school as early as nine years. Since 2000, under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the minimum school-leaving age is 16 years. Respondents in both Ballymun and Mayo now have a mean age of 18 years, which means that they have been out of school for an average of three years.

By definition, our respondents are educationally disadvantaged and the extent of this can be seen by comparing their qualifications with the generality of young people in Ireland. For example, more than a quarter of respondents (29%) have no qualifications compared to 5% of the 1996 cohort of second-level pupils in Ireland⁵⁸. Although two thirds of respondents (69%) have a Junior Certificate, most Irish pupils (95%) who entered second level schools in 1996 now have a Junior Certificate⁵⁹. Only one respondent (2%) has a Leaving Certificate – achieved since leaving school - compared to 78% of Irish pupils who entered second level schools in 1996⁶⁰.

Early school leaving, defined as leaving school without a Leaving Certificate, affects over a fifth (22%) of young people in Ireland, according to the results of a cohort analysis of Irish pupils who entered second level schools in 1996⁶¹. However the risk of early school leaving varies considerably in different parts of the country. Dublin has the highest risk of early school leaving in the country (31%), which is twice the level found in Mayo (15%), where the rates of early school leaving are among the lowest in Ireland⁶². In view of this, the survey found interesting differences in the background characteristics of respondents from Ballymun and Mayo.

Respondents in Ballymun and Mayo live in quite different family structures. In Mayo, respondents are most likely to live in two-parent families (80%), similar to the rest of Ireland (79%), although they tend to come from considerably larger households (5.3) than either Ballymun (4.6) or Ireland (3.6). In Ballymun, by contrast, respondents are much more likely to live in a one-parent family (74%) where household size is also larger than in Ireland. The fact that four of the 12 female respondents in Ballymun were themselves parents (equivalent to 33% of this sub-sample) suggests an inter-generational dimension to lone parenthood in Ballymun.

57 The decision on whether a respondent is 'employment ready' is made by the mediator in the Local Employment Service (LES).

58 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

59 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

60 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

61 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

62 Department of Education & Science, 2005.

Previous studies have highlighted how early school leaving⁶³, like lone parenthood⁶⁴, is related to economic and social disadvantage, both as its cause and its consequence. In the case of early school leaving, this is illustrated by the low level of owner-occupation among respondents' families, given that owner-occupation is a reliable predictor of economic status. The level of owner-occupation in Ballymun (16%) and Mayo (35%) is substantially lower than in Ireland (81%). Equally, the consequences of early school leaving are to be found in the fact that all of the unattached respondents are unemployed although this falls to 42% for those who are employment-ready.

These background characteristics illustrate the position of respondents relative to other young people in Ireland. However, by their nature, background characteristics are relatively 'static' in the sense that they are not amenable to change through intervention. Given that a core objective of the EQUAL Youth Project is to identify effective interventions for early school leavers, we also measured a range of 'dynamic' characteristics of respondents, particularly their well-being, since these are more amenable to intervention and are reported in the next section.

7.5 Well-Being of Respondents

We assessed the well-being of respondents and used comparative data from samples of Irish adults⁶⁵, Irish parents⁶⁶, and US adults⁶⁷ to give an indication of the extent of need. We did this using the concept of effect size which is a simple way of standardising and comparing the difference between two groups on a range of test scores⁶⁸. As a rule of thumb, an effect size around 0.5 and over indicates a significant level of need.

Beginning with physical well-being, as indicated by the presence of physical symptoms (such as difficulties with eating, sleeping, aches, pains), we found that all respondents, irrespective of location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached or ready), had fewer symptoms compared to the general population of parents in Ireland. Notwithstanding this, we also found that unattached respondents had the most symptoms, followed by attached respondents, with ready respondents having the least symptoms, suggesting that the journey from being unattached to attached to ready is mapped in the body of respondents through increased physical well-being.

63 See McKeown and Clarke, 2004

64 McLanahan, Donahue and Haskins, 2005

65 National Advisory Council on Drugs, 2005.

66 McKeown, Pratschke and Haase, 2003.

67 Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002:70

68 The concept of effect size is typically used to compare the difference between an experimental and a control group. The convention established by Jacob Cohen (1988) and referred to as 'Cohen's d', is that a coefficient between 0.2 and 0.5 indicates a small effect, between 0.5 and 0.8 indicates a moderate effect, and above 0.8 indicates a large effect. A guide to the interpretation of effect sizes is summarised in the table below and shows, for each effect size, the proportion of the experimental group (EG) whose scores exceed the average score of the control group (CG), based on the assumption that scores are normally distributed.

Effect Size	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.5	3.0
% exceeds CG	50	54	58	62	66	69	73	76	79	82	84	88	92	95	96	98	99	99.9

Given that physical symptoms are influenced by health behaviour, we analysed data on the prevalence within the past month of smoking, drinking and drugs. The results show that respondents in Ballymun have a much higher usage of all the substances listed (cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, sedatives and tranquilisers) than either their counterparts in Mayo, or the average Irish adult. We also found that unattached respondents have significantly higher usage of all substances by comparison with respondents who are attached or ready, mirroring the results on physical symptoms.

We measured emotional well-being by asking respondents about their experience of positive and negative emotions. This revealed that respondents in Ballymun and Mayo tend to have fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions compared to the average Irish parent. The overall difference is equivalent to an effect size of 0.5 (for positive emotions) and 0.3 (for negative emotions). More significantly, unattached respondents have fewer positive emotions (an effect size of -0.9) and significantly more negative emotions (an effect size of +0.6) compared to the average Irish parent.

We measured life satisfaction and found that Ballymun respondents have lower levels of satisfaction (3.9) than the norm (4.5) – based on US rather than Irish data – while Mayo respondents (5.3) are well above the norm. Unattached respondents have the lowest level of life satisfaction and their score (3.6) is well below the level of both attached respondents (5.0) and ready respondents (4.4).

The concept of hopefulness, as defined in psychology, refers to a pattern of thought about one's ability to find ways of achieving goals and having the motivation to achieve those goals. In everyday language, a person is described as hopeful who believes that they have the will ('agency thinking') and the way ('pathways thinking') to achieve their goals. Using this definition, we measured the hopefulness of respondents and found an overall hopefulness score of 5.0 which is above the threshold of low hopefulness (4.4) but below the threshold of high hopefulness (5.7). In other words, although respondents are not without hope, there is scope to increase their hopefulness to a level which is regarded as healthy and productive. The main source of variation among respondents is that those from Ballymun tend to be more confident in their problem-solving abilities ('pathways thinking'), while Mayo respondents tend to be more motivated and energetic ('agency thinking'). In addition, unattached respondents lacked confidence in their own ability to remain committed and motivated to solving their problems ('agency thinking').

Support networks refer to the people from whom you can expect help, if you need it, and the level of supportiveness was measured on a scale from 1 (not supportive) to 10 (extremely supportive). The results show that Ballymun respondents (4.5) feel significantly less overall support than Mayo respondents (5.8), while unattached respondents (4.2) feel the least overall support. These levels of support are significantly below that experienced by Irish parents (7.1) but this may be due to the fact that respondents are much younger and living

Source: Carr, 2002:12

at home with their parents. Parents are given a high supportiveness rating by all respondents, averaging 8.4, while brothers and sisters are given an average rating of 6.9.

7.6 Experience of School

The survey found that the vast majority of respondents (83%) were either happy or very happy at primary school, with an overall mean happiness score of 3.9, based on a scale from 1.0 (very unhappy) to 5.0 (very happy). Ballymun respondents were slightly happier (mean score of 4.1) than Mayo respondents (mean score of 3.6) and those who are job-ready (mean score of 4.1) were slightly happier than those who are unattached or attached (mean score of 3.8). At secondary school we found that nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) were unhappy or very unhappy with an overall mean happiness score of 2.4 out of a maximum total of 5.0, and almost no variation according to location (Ballymun or Mayo) or service category (unattached, attached, ready) of these respondents. Respondents gave broadly similar reasons for being happy at both primary and secondary school and this essentially involved having a good relationship with teachers and their friends. By the same reasoning, respondents who were unhappy at secondary school also tended to explain this by reference to difficulties with teachers and other pupils, but some also found that learning was difficult or uninteresting, or were unable to cope with the discipline of the school.

Respondents were asked to give specific reasons why they left school without a Leaving Certificate. For many, leaving school was a logical outcome of the unhappiness which they experienced there and was related, in turn, to difficulties with teachers, peers, or with learning generally. A substantial minority of respondents also left school without a Leaving Certificate because they were expelled. Some were attracted by the prospects of a job or learning a trade and found that school contributed little to that objective. Finally, some respondents left because of specific life circumstances such as pregnancy, the death of a friend, or an accident.

We asked respondents if they regretted leaving school without a Leaving Certificate in order to assess their retrospective judgement on early leaving school. The results show that respondents are relatively evenly split between those who regret leaving (55%) and those who do not (45%). However there are significant variations within the sample: the majority of Ballymun respondents (71%) regret leaving school early while the majority of Mayo respondents (75%) do not; similarly, those who are unattached and ready are more likely to regret leaving school early but a majority of the attached (63%) have no regrets. The main reason why respondents regret leaving school early is that it now restricts their opportunities for employment, further education, and even social life. Some respondents also regret leaving school early because they lack the sense of achievement, self-esteem, and competence which the Leaving Certificate confers. By contrast, a major reason why respondents have no regrets at leaving school early is that it removed a major source of distress and unhappiness from their lives. Other respondents have no regrets because they have since found an alternative route to achieve their ambitions, such as doing the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate through Youthreach or a Community Training Workshop.

7.7 Experience of Other Services

Since leaving school, the average number of services used by respondents is 2.7. Respondents in Ballymun used considerably more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (an average of 1.9), possibly reflecting the different levels of service availability in both places. Significantly, respondents who are unattached have used more services (an average of 3.1) compared to respondents who are attached (an average of 2.8) or ready (an average of 2.2). Respondents also rated the helpfulness of each service on a three point scale – from ‘unhelpful’ (a score of 1), to ‘unsure’ (a score of 2), to ‘helpful’ (a score of 3). The results show that services are generally experienced as helpful with an average helpfulness score of 2.6, above the mid-point of the scale. It is noteworthy that unattached respondents had the lowest helpfulness score (2.3) since these respondents also had one of the highest usage of services, a finding which suggests that the task of engaging unattached respondents in services may be challenging and require some innovation in how services are designed and targeted.

In order to help identify the characteristics of helpful services, we asked respondents to pick the one service which they found the most helpful since leaving school and to explain why they found it the most helpful. Many picked Youthreach and the Job Centre. Their responses revealed that the most helpful services have four main characteristics. The first is having staff who are friendly, fair, understanding and committed. The second is having a programme which offers personalised and practical support to acquire skills and qualifications which are valued by the respondent. The third involves organising teaching into small classes which facilitate interaction between teacher and student. The fourth is offering career guidance and helping the student to find appropriate placements in education, training or employment.

7.8 Experience of Previous Jobs

In the time since leaving school, over two thirds of respondents (69%) have had at least one job, equivalent to an average of 1.7 jobs each. Respondents in Ballymun had more than twice the average number of jobs (2.1) compared to respondents in Mayo (0.9), possibly reflecting greater availability of job opportunities in Ballymun and Dublin. In general, the previous employment experience of respondents has tended to be slightly happy, as indicated by an average happiness score of 3.5 on a scale from 1.0 (very unhappy) to 5.0 (very happy). The exception to this is unattached respondents whose mean score is 2.7, suggesting that their previous employment experiences have tended to be unhappy. Respondents who were happy in their previous jobs explained that this was because they enjoyed doing things and working with others as well as earning money and feeling independent. By contrast, respondents who were unhappy tended to dislike the work and the person who was their boss.

7.9 Employment Prospects

A majority of respondents (51%) rated their chances of getting a job as the same as their friends; more than a third (39%) think they have better prospects, and a tenth (10%) think they have worse prospects. The main exception is unattached respondents who regard their prospects as slightly worse than their friends. Respondents who believe their prospects are the same as their friends base their judgement on the fact that their friends also left school at the same time, have the same qualifications, and have similar opportunities open to them. By contrast, respondents who believe their prospects are better base their judgement on the fact that, by comparison with friends, they have more qualifications and experience, and are more motivated and energetic. Respondents who believe their prospects are worse than their friends base their judgement on the fact that they have no qualifications or experience, cannot read or write, and their friends are still at school.

7.10 Specific Difficulties

Respondents identified a number of specific difficulties which they are currently facing in terms of education, training, or getting a job. Each identified an average of 2.4 difficulties with almost no difference between Ballymun (2.5) and Mayo (2.4) but ready respondents had a higher than average number of difficulties (3.1). The four biggest difficulties facing respondents are: finding it hard to get interested in education (25%), no jobs if you do not have a Leaving Certificate (19%), difficulty with reading and writing (17%), and problems at home (13%). Ballymun respondents were more likely to report having problems at home, personal problems, and no one to offer encouragement, whereas Mayo respondents were more likely to report having difficulty reading and writing, difficulty finding someone who can help, and knowing where to get help. Unattached respondents were most likely to report that they had difficulty getting interested in education (69%).

Respondents were also invited to discuss their aspirations and regrets and this generated a number of thematic responses including (i) a widespread awareness of the need to complete their education and training in order to get a job (ii) the desire to make lifestyle changes such as getting fit, playing sport, having more energy and motivation, getting a car, and stopping smoking (iii) acknowledging difficulties in coping with significant life events such as death and illness in the family (iv) recognition, felt by at least some respondents, that a stigma attaches to living in Ballymun which adversely affects their job prospects.

7.11 Implications

The findings in this report help to clarify the needs of early school leavers and the difficulties they face in not having a Junior or Leaving Certificate. As such, they are likely to confirm the experiences of many early school leavers as well as those who work with them. In view of this, it is important to draw out the implications of these results so that policies and services can respond more fully to the needs of these young people. We conclude by drawing attention to a number of key implications which follow from the study. Although these

implications are derived from a relatively small sample of respondents in Ballymun and Mayo, they may have more general applicability for agencies who are responding to the needs of early school leavers.

7.11.1 Consequences of Early School Leaving

The study shows that the consequences of early school leaving extend well beyond the failure to achieve a Junior Certificate or a Leaving Certificate. Early school leavers who remain unattached to services experience significant reductions in physical and emotional well-being, in life satisfaction, hopefulness and support networks; in addition, they are at a much increased risk of smoking, drinking and taking drugs. An important implication of this result is to draw attention to the broader range of consequences of early school leaving, which extend beyond the confines of education, training and employment as conventionally understood.

7.11.2 Key Influences on Well-Being

The well-being of respondents, according to this study, is influenced by two key factors: (i) whether they are attached to a service and (ii) whether they live in Ballymun or Mayo. Both factors are important, but attachment to a service is the more important of the two. Respondents who are unattached are greater at risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness, and level of support. Respondents who are from Ballymun are also at greater risk in terms of all these variables. This implies that respondents who are both unattached and living in Ballymun are at highest risk of experiencing significantly lower levels of well being relative to the norm in society generally. The fact that living in Ballymun, rather than Mayo, has a negative influence on the lives of early school leavers is clear evidence of a 'neighbourhood effect'. This finding, although helpful and possibly predictable, does not clarify precisely which aspects of the Ballymun neighbourhood have the greatest impact on early school leavers. We know that Ballymun is distinctive, by comparison with Mayo, in terms of a number of variables such as: (i) low level of owner occupation (ii) high level of lone parenting (iii) low level of school retention (iv) high prevalence of opiate use. None of these risk factors operate in isolation from each other, or in isolation from the protective factors which undoubtedly exist in Ballymun. Moreover it is in the nature of neighbourhood effects that they require intervention at a neighbourhood level, and not just at the level of individual services. For this reason, responses to early school leaving in areas like Ballymun require interventions at a neighbourhood level while cognisant of the fact, as confirmed by this and other studies⁶⁹, that direct service interventions will have the greatest impact.

⁶⁹ The scale of influence exercised by neighbourhood is difficult to measure but estimates tend to vary between 5% and 20%. For a review of studies, on neighbourhood effects, see Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Pratschke, 2002.

7.11.3 Impact of Services on Well-Being

An encouraging result is that when early school leavers become attached to services, there is a gradual but significant improvement in all the measured dimensions of well-being, notably physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. Although education and training services may not specifically target these dimensions of well-being, their effect – however unintended or unnoticed – seems to reduce physical symptoms and associated habits of smoking, drinking and taking drugs, as well as improve emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness and level of support. This draws attention to the broader range of outcomes produced by interventions targeted at early school leavers, and raises the possibility that these outcomes may be enhanced by giving them more explicit attention in the design of programmes.

7.11.4 The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

It is clear that, for many young people, the seeds of early school leaving are to be found in the transition from primary to secondary school. The dramatic rise in unhappiness which accompanies the transition from primary school (12% unhappy) to secondary school (63%) indicates that the majority of our respondents did not make this transition smoothly. It is true, as international research indicates, that the motivation and engagement of pupils tends to ‘dip’ in the early years of secondary school⁷⁰. However the research also shows that most pupils regain their commitment to school although a significant minority – mainly comprising boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds and lower ability pupils concentrated in lower ability classes - tend to become more disengaged and to compensate for academic under-performance by identifying with a similarly under-performing peer group⁷¹. A recent study carried out in Irish secondary schools found that a key influence on students’ motivation and engagement was the informal climate of the school and the classroom, where climate refers to “the quality of relations between teachers and students and among students themselves”⁷². According to the authors of this study, a range of policy measures to build student engagement would include “promoting a positive school climate, rewarding positive behaviour rather than utilising negative sanctions and providing students with access to subjects with a more practical orientation”⁷³.

7.11.5 The Transition from Secondary School to Early School Leaving

The process of early school leaving is itself a transition out of secondary school which is unnecessarily distressing for young people. We have seen that the average age on leaving school among our respondents was 15.3 years and it is likely that the previous three years became progressively unhappy for them, marked by poor attendance, discipline problems, low achievement, reduced self-esteem, etc. As a consequence of this protracted process of disengagement, many early school leavers are harmed by their experiences in secondary school and

70 Rudduck and Flutter, 2004a; 2004b

71 Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006

72 Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006:202

73 Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006:201

this is reflected in the results of our survey which found that unattached respondents are at greater risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and hopefulness. These negative outcomes could be avoided by introducing measures to build student engagement, as suggested in the previous paragraph, or by finding alternative placements more quickly in Youthreach or Community Training Workshops where their needs could be catered for in a more appropriate manner.

7.11.6 The Special Education Needs of Early School Leavers

It is possible that a significant proportion of early school leavers may have a special education need under the recently enacted Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act). The EPSEN Act 2004 defines a child with special education needs as one with “an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition” which restricts the child’s capacity to “participate in and benefit from education” (Section 1). Without proper assessment, it is difficult to know what proportion of early school leavers may have specific learning, mental health or other difficulties; however there is a substantial body of research to indicate that the prevalence of mental health difficulties among children in disadvantaged areas in Ireland could be as high as 20%⁷⁴ while the prevalence of specific learning difficulties is estimated to be at least 5% of school children⁷⁵. The core objectives of the EPSEN Act, as stated in its Preamble, are to provide children who have special education needs with: (i) an inclusive and appropriate education (ii) the skills needed to participate in society on leaving school and (iii) the greater participation of parents. Significantly, the EPSEN Act creates enforceable rights for all children to an appropriate and inclusive education and this legislation may offer a new way of meeting the needs of children who would otherwise end up as early school leavers.

7.11.7 Type of Education Desired by Early School Leavers

The type of education which our respondents would like to have experienced at school – and which some are already experiencing through Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FAS and other services – provide valuable guidance on what constitutes a more appropriate education and training system, particularly for vulnerable young people. The key features of a more appropriate system, as envisaged by respondents, would involve: (i) staff who are friendly, fair, understanding and committed (ii) personalised and practical support to acquire skills and qualifications which the student values (iii) teaching through small classes which facilitate interaction between teacher and student (iv) career guidance and helping the student to find appropriate placements in education, training or employment. It is clear that some of these requirements have resource implications, particularly in terms of smaller classes and opportunities for more one-to-one instruction and support, than is currently available. However, when full account is taken of all the costs of early school leaving

74 Fitzgerald and Jeffers, 1994; O'Connor, Ruddle and O'Gallagher, 1988; McCarthy and O'Boyle, 1986; Porteus, 1991; O'Rourke and Fitzgerald, 1985; Lynch, Fitzgerald and Kinsella, 1987; Barton and Fitzgerald, 1986; Stone, Fitzgerald and Kinsella, 1990; Mohan, Fitzgerald and Collins, 1998.

75 See, for example, the World Dyslexia Network Foundation (<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/wdnf>); International Dyslexia Association (<http://www.interdys.org>); Dyslexia Association of Ireland (<http://www.dyslexia.ie>).

for individuals, families, schools, neighbourhoods and society generally, the benefits of additional resources spent on this relatively small group of young people are likely to outweigh the costs, and to be cost effective.

7.11.8 The Desire for Achievement Among Early School Leavers

Most early school leavers retain a huge desire to achieve something with their lives in terms of education, training and employment. Despite the negative experiences at school, they recognise the importance of getting the Junior and Leaving Certificate as the gateway to the world of work. Many lack – and are aware of lacking – the sense of achievement, self-esteem and competence which accompanies the Junior and Leaving Certificate. This desire for achievement needs to be nurtured and cultivated by programmes which restore their hope, motivation and appetite for learning. At the same time, services must recognise that learning usually has quite negative associations for early school leavers and this is evidenced by our finding that the most frequently cited difficulty which respondents are experiencing – both those who are unattached and those who are ready – is finding it hard to get interested in education. Despite their ambition to succeed, many will be unable to make progress unless programmes are designed and delivered in a way which ignites and sustains their interest, and allows them to recover the natural enjoyment of learning.

7.11.9 The Vulnerability of Early School Leavers Who Are Unattached to Services

Among the population of early school leavers, the most vulnerable sub-group are those who are unattached to services. This group, as we have already seen, are at greater risk of reduced well-being on a range of indicators including physical symptoms, smoking, drinking and drugs, emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness, and level of support. This group has also used more services than other respondents but are least likely to find them helpful. They have also had more unhappy experiences of previous employment and are more likely to regard their employment prospects as worse than their friends. For this reason, there are particular challenges for agencies in recruiting and engaging this sub-group of early school leavers.

7.11.10 Concluding Comment

Finally, the results of this study provide a strong endorsement of existing services for early school leavers since they show a clear progression in outcomes as young people move from being unattached to being attached and ready. This does not mean that existing services – such as Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FAS, etc – are perfect, but it clearly indicates that being attached to a service is much better than not being attached to a service. These services offer a viable alternative to the model of mainstream education which palpably failed these young people. The results of this study underline the scale of challenges posed by early school leaving but also points the way towards viable solutions – both inside as well as outside mainstream education - which could help these young people to achieve their hopes and ambitions.

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