

An exploration of young people's contribution to the type of service provision provided by their RAPID area based youth clubs.

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## Signed Declaration

I declare that this dissertation and the research involved in it are entirely the work of the author. The work, or part of it, has not been submitted for a qualification to any other institute or university.

Signature.....

Date.....

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## Abstract

The main focus of this study was the exploration of young people's (YP) contribution to the type of service provision provided by their Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) area based youth clubs. Through this exploration it was envisaged that an argument would be put forward that as competent members of their community YP living in disadvantaged areas should have a say in decisions that will impact on their lives. More importantly, a key objective of the study was to highlight YP living in disadvantaged areas as competent members of their communities with a unique perspective on the issues impacting on their lives. A second key objective of the study was to highlight the competence of the YP living in disadvantaged areas to identify solutions to issues impacting on their lives. By highlighting these two objectives it was envisaged that an argument would be put forward that YP living in RAPID areas as competent members of their communities should be included in any decisions that will impact upon their lives.

A key driving force for study was the relaunching of the RAPID programme in October 2017 by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The relaunching of this programme brought with it the possibility for organisations engaging with disadvantaged YP to secure funding for youth facilities and play/recreation spaces. As this funding will have an impact on YP's lives it was imperative that the study highlighted the importance of including YP in decisions making process in relation to how organisations utilise this funding.

In an effort to achieve this the study engaged with a youth service who managed youth clubs within the RAPID areas in a Midlands town. As part of this engagement, focus groups with YP were held in three separate youth clubs. A total of fourteen YP attended these focus groups. Additionally, three youth workers (YW) employed by the service were interviewed. Key findings that emerged from this study included, the competence of YP to identify issues that are impacting on their lives such as lack of facilities for YP in their areas and no support for secondary students. One group in particular were very aware of issues in the community such as anti-social behaviour, violence, gangs and the negative reputations on their estate. Additionally, the

findings showed that the YP identified viable solutions to the issues that were impacting on their lives; however, they lacked awareness of how to have their voices heard at a local level in relation to the issues in the community. The implications of these findings show that YP have a unique perspective on issues that are impacting on their lives; hence their voices must be heard in relation to the allocation of funding that has a potential to impact on their lives. Additionally, it showed that YP need to be made aware of how they can have their voices heard at a local level in relation to the issues in the community.

## Literature Review

### Introduction

In the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 the Irish Government (2000) believed that in order for funding to have a significant impact on communities, they would have to encourage community members from marginalised areas to participate in the process. They maintained that allowing community members to identify their own problems and work towards solutions in an integrated approach with agencies of the state empowered them to help themselves. This belief was central to the implementation of the Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development (RAPID) Programme (Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants, 2006). This belief is also recognised in relation to children by Articles 12 and 13 of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC) which stipulates that children are understood to be competent and so entitled to have the right to participate in society and have a say in issues which affect their lives (Skelton, 2008). When focused on these viewpoints allow for the argument that, YP (YP) living in RAPID areas are competent members of society and therefore have a right to identify their own problems and work towards solutions in an integrated approach with agencies of the state.

The voices of YP are however often disregarded or ignored in Ireland in relation to the decision making. This point was highlighted by Loncle et al. (2012, p. 114) when they argued that *'although the state is strong on rhetorical rights for YP, "...their translation into reality is often weak"*. This viewpoint was given further credence by McAuley and Brattman (2002) who argued that although the Irish Government has taken some steps to structurally embed YP's voices in the policy-making process on issues pertaining to them, their voices remain tenuous. Byrne et al. (2006) argued that the voices of YP from disadvantaged areas were even more tenuous and that the YP from these areas often felt *'ignored and excluded by residents groups and community development committees within their neighbourhoods and experienced a sense of isolation and marginalisation from the wider society'* (p. vii). Considering the viewpoints above an argument can be put forward that more weight needs to be afforded to the voices of YP living in disadvantaged areas in relation to services that impact on their lives.



In light of the facts this review will primarily focus on the voice of YP from disadvantaged RAPID areas in relation to the services provided by their local youth service. This will be done by firstly outlining what RAPID areas are and why they are an ideal area for front line services to engage YP from disadvantaged areas in the decision making process. The review will outline two commonly utilised models of engaging YP in the decision making process. The review will then focus on YP's experiences of participation, before outlining the benefits of including YP in the process. When all the evidence presented are combined an argument will be put forward that YP living in RAPID areas are competent members of society and therefore have a right to identify their own problems and work towards solutions in an integrated approach with agencies of the state.

### Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID)

The Irish Government (2000) estimated that they would have an investment of €19.08 billion to target a wide range of social inclusion measures over its planning period. The rationale behind this investment was to ensure that any individual or communities who were socially excluded were enabled to participate and contribute to the future progress of the country (Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants, 2006). Within the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 the Irish Government (2000, p.196) maintained that in order to achieve this objective they need to adopt '*a comprehensive, holistic approach, involving the target communities and bringing together the services of a range of Departments, the Local Authorities, the relevant State agencies and the voluntary sector*'(2000, p.196). Focusing on this viewpoint an argument can be put forward that, as YP living in RAPID are members of a community who are often socially excluded, this comprehensive and holistic approach must take into account their voices in any decisions that may impact upon their lives.

In 2017 the Department of Rural and Community Development relaunched a recast RAPID Programme in an effort to support groups tackle social inclusion and improve the quality of life of individuals living in disadvantaged areas (The Department of Rural and Community Development, n.d). Furthermore, two of the key areas highlighted by the department where funding could be secured are youth facilities

and play/recreation spaces. The relaunching of this programme and the availability of new funding for youth facilities and play/recreation spaces highlights the importance of the timing of the present research project. That is to say, as this present funding will have an impact on lives of YP living presently living in RAPID areas it is therefore imperative that organisations applying for this funding give due consideration to these YPs voices in the decision making process.

### Young people in the RAPID areas of a Midlands town

Presently there are six RAPID areas within the Midlands town that this research pertains to (Pobal, 2010). In 2010 the RAPID Co-ordinator and project manager conducted a house-to-house survey of the RAPID estates within this area. A key feature of this survey was to draw up an age profile for these communities from which projections could be made for future service requirements (Galvin, 2010). This report showed that there were 465 children between the ages of 0-18 living in these RAPID areas in 2010, which equates to 35.6% of the population of these RAPID areas. Of these 465 children, 248 of them were between the ages of 1 to 10 (in 2017 these children are now aged between 8 and 17). Considering these numbers, a position can be taken, that at present a substantial section of the community living in RAPID areas comprises of YP whose lives will be impacted upon by the aforementioned funding. Thus, again highlighting the relevance and importance in timing of the present research project.

### Young people's experience of disadvantage

Poorer physical health, lower levels of educational achievements, and emotional and behavioural problems, are key issues highlighted by Watson et al. in their report on understanding childhood deprivation in Ireland (2012). Alongside this, they found that similar to many other EU countries, children in Ireland have a higher rate of deprivation and poverty than adults. Considering these findings in relation to YP living in RAPID areas in Ireland, a stance can be taken that YP presently living in RAPID areas are at risk of experiencing poorer physical health, lower levels of educational achievements, and emotional and behavioural problems.

Whilst examining educational achievements McKeown and Sweeney (2001) maintained that poverty is a known predictor of low educational attainment. One possible reason for poverty impacting on a child's educational achievement is the parent investment model which Gershoff et al. defined as '*the effect of family income on children will be evident in parents' decisions about how to allocate a range of resources that include money, time, energy, and support*' (2007, p. 72). Gershoff et al. (2007) further argued that restrictions on a parent to invest money and/or time in their children exposed the children to fewer enriching experiences or materials, which in turn affected outcomes for the children and in particular their cognitive outcomes. Focusing on these viewpoints in relation to YP living in RAPID areas, these YP are prone to lower educational achievements due to their parent's restrictions to invest time or money in their children, due low income.

The impact of growing up at risk of poverty has on a child's physical well-being was examined by Swords et al. (2011) utilising the data from Growing up in Ireland report. Through their research, they found that the parents of children at risk of poverty were of the view that their children were less healthy when compared to the views of parents of children not at risk of poverty. One possible reason for Individuals at risk of poverty considering themselves to be less healthy was put forward by Safefood (2011, p. 13) when they stated '*limited economic resources and the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet are considered to be major barriers to sustaining a healthy diet and subsequent good health*'. Additionally, they maintained that individuals who are unable to access the food required to maintain a healthy life are said to be experiencing food poverty. As RAPID areas are highlighted as high poverty areas, it can be argued that YP in these areas who are experiencing poverty are also likely to be experiencing food poverty, thus having poorer physical health.

The relationship between poverty, depression, and anti-social behaviour was explored by McLeod and Shanahan (1996) using the data from the Children of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (1986, 1988, 1990). Through this exploration, they found that children experiencing poverty in 1986 or had previously experienced poverty had higher levels of anti-social behaviour and depression. More importantly, they found that between 1986 and 1990, the number of years that a child experienced poverty correlated significantly with changes in the child's anti-social

behaviour. One speaker at the GreenSpace conference cited boredom as the biggest cause of anti-social behaviour in YP. Speaking at the event Danny Walsh of social enterprise DCT argued that '*vandalism cost Preston parks £130,000 a year and was mostly caused by bored teenagers who did not have any spaces designed for them*' (Hotton, 2008, p. 7). Adding to this, former Thames Valley police officer Roger Hampshire argued that '*a lack of facilities for young people drives them back to the play areas they have grown up with and ensuing boredom leads them to vandalise those sites*' (Hotton, 28, p. 7). When considering anti-social behaviour, Machell et al. (2016) explored whether a sense of purpose in life can serve as a resiliency factor for adolescents experiencing poverty. The results of their study showed that purpose in life diminished the relationship between poverty and antisocial behaviours, such as disobedience and bullying, for the youth in their study. These viewpoints highlight the fact that YP presently living RAPID areas and experiencing poverty are more likely to display anti-social behaviours due to boredom. Additionally, an opinion can be formed that instilling a sense of purpose in life in these YP can aid in reducing their anti-social behaviour.

### Models of engaging young people in the decision making process

One model for engaging YP in the decision making process is the Lundy model of participation (Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) argued that there was a need for a new model to conceptualise Article 12 of the UNCRC in relation to the UK's legal obligations to children in relation to educational decision making. She maintained that Article 12 has two key components. Firstly, the right to express a view and secondly, the right to have that view given due weight. Furthermore, she argued that the components of Article 12 '*can only be understood when they are read and interpreted in conjunction with the other rights protected in the Convention*' (Lundy, 2007, p. 932). Outlining her model she proposed four chronological elements of youth participation. These elements are *space, voice, audience* and *influence*. Considering the nature of the present research project, the Lundy model of participation is an ideal framework to explore if organisations are fulfilling the requirements of Article 12 in relation to youth participation.

Another model of youth participation which focused on the levels of participation afforded YP was proposed by Kirby et al. (2003) cited in Kennan, et al. (2015, p. 6). Kennan, et al. argued that 'the term *'participation'* has evolved to encompass *decision-making power beyond the scope of Article 12'* (2015, p. 6). They further maintained that the model outlined by Kirby et al (2003) allowed for YP and adults to share power and responsibility in the decision making process. Level one of the model is when children/YP's views are taken into account by adults. Level two is when children/YP are involved in decision making (together with adults). Level three is when children/YP share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults. Finally, level four is when children/YP make autonomous decisions. This model will offer the present research project an opportunity to explore the level of power sharing between the youth service and the YP beyond the scope of Article 12 of the UNCRC.

### Young people's experience of participation in decision making

In a recent Irish study published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Horgan, et al. explored children and YPs experience of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their communities (2015). Within this study they utilised Lundy's (2007) model of participation to explore the level at which YP are able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their homes, schools and communities. The sample employed during this research comprised of seventy four YP who participated in group interviews, and a further twenty YP involved in the Children's and Young People's Advisory Groups at the pilot phase of the fieldwork. Alongside this, thirty four adults comprising of parents, school principals, teachers, and community stakeholders were interviewed. The results of Horgan's et al. (2015) study are key for the present study. In particular, their results in relation to decision making in the community, as they will offer a perspective on how YP living in RAPID areas experience input into the service provision of their local youth service.

Outlining their results in relation to YP's perception of their level of input into the decision making process in relation to their local community, Horgan, et al. (2015) found that in general YP were undecided or dissatisfied. However, they did find that YP who were involved youth clubs or community initiatives were much more positive

about their experiences in these settings. Additionally, they outlined four key barriers and enablers to youth participation in the community as perceived by the YP. The barriers identified include negative adult attitudes generally towards YP in the community and the lack of identified spaces for YP in communities. Enablers identified include, a readiness of adults in dedicated youth spaces to listen to them, and adult recognition of the YP's agency with increasing age and maturity (Horgan, et al., 2015). These barriers and enablers are central to this study, as they will allow for the identification of both barriers and enablers encountered by YP involved in the decision making process of their RAPID area based youth service.

### Benefits of Youth Participation

The views of adults and YP involved in twenty nine organisations who were engaging YP in the decision making process in an effort to change their practice or service were explored by Kirby et al. (2003). A requirement of this study was that the decisions made by children and YP '*must have been perceived to have made some impact – by influencing policy or service planning or the delivery or evaluation of services for children and YP*' (p. 32). Through this research they published their Handbook on Building a Culture of Participation which outlined their findings in relation to the benefits of youth participation in the decision making process. These findings were divided into the three areas of *practical benefits to services, citizenship and social inclusion, and personal development* (Kirby et al., 2003). Their findings in relation to each of these benefits are outlined below and will be central to the exploration of the benefits to YP engaging in youth participation with their local RAPID area based youth service in the present study. Alongside this, practical examples highlighting these benefits will be outlined for two of the examples. These examples are of relevance to the present study as they will act as templates to outline findings of benefits in the present research project.

#### Practical benefits to services

In relation to practical benefits to services Kirby et al. (2003) found the services benefited in four key areas. Firstly, the services benefited through improved service development, whereby new services were introduced that better met the needs of the YP. Secondly, there was improved client support, as listening to the YP allowed

the services to better meet the needs of individuals. Thirdly, by listening to and involving YP, the services increased YP's access, use, and positive experience of the service. The final benefit outlined was the service's development of their own knowledge, attitude and skills in relation to involving YP more within the service (Kirby et al., 2003). As the present research project's main focus is on youth participation in a RAPID area based youth service these results will be utilised as indicators to explore areas where the youth service has benefited as a result of youth participation.

### Citizenship and social inclusion benefits

When outlining their findings in relation to citizenship and social inclusion Kirby et al. (2003) firstly highlighted the benefit of children's rights, whereby they found that involving children helped fulfil their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC. Secondly, they highlighted the benefit of empowering the YP, which in turn increased the YP's belief in their own ability to create change and exert control over elements of their lives. Thirdly, under the benefit of citizenship and political education, Kirby et al. (2003) found that YP had increased political and social knowledge, and awareness of their rights. Other benefits outlined are the increased level of responsibility afforded the YP and improved perceptions of YP by communities, professionals and peers.

A good example of a project in Ireland where the benefits of citizenship and social inclusion are to the forefront is Comhairle na nÓg. This project is for YP under the age of 18. In Ireland these YP have no right to vote and therefore have no voting mechanism to have their voices heard in relation to policies, services and issues that impact upon them in their local communities. However, YP involved in Comhairle na nÓg sit on a Child and Youth Council which gives them an opportunity to have their say in the development of local services and policies (Comhairle na nÓg, n.d.). A prime example of the impact these councils can have on policy is the setting up of Carlow's first LGBT group, known as 'My Unique Individuality'. The YP of Carlow who attended the Comhairle AGM identified homophobic bullying as a major issue in their area. The YP then set out to research causes and effects of homophobic bullying. Once completed, they presented their findings from the research to the community and the relevant decision-makers, advocating the need for an LGBT

support group in Carlow. In 2001 their work came to fruition when My Unique Individuality was set-up (Comhairlí na nÓg, 2012).

### Personal development benefits

Kirby et al. (2003) found that personal development was cited by nearly all the organisations involved in the research as an outcome for the YP involved in participatory activities. Areas highlighted by the organisation included increased confidence and self-belief, the development of group skills, pro-social behaviour, and learning new practical skills. Moreover, in relation to practical skills Kirby et al. (2003) found that the YP developed technical skills such as filming, editing, website design, and information technology. By participating in meetings, they developed presentation skills, facilitation skills, public speaking, and minute taking. Other practical skills included adherence to meeting deadlines, workspace skills, coping with stress and time management.

One example of such a service is Youth Work Ireland (YWI) who actively engage with 116,000 YP between the ages of 10-25 every week, making them the largest youth organisation in Ireland. Youth participation is at the heart of their organisation and they actively engage with YP to provide services that the YP identify (Youth Work Ireland, 2017). One of the key projects run by YWI in 2017 was the Work to Learn programme. This programme was specifically designed by the Ossory Youth club in Kilkenny in 2015 for YP who found the mainstream education system difficult and were at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. The programme supports YP to find part-time employment through a structured process of preparation, placement and reflection. In doing so, the programme exposes the YP to the world of work where they learn the practical skills required to enter the labour market. To date the project has been very successful to date and is now in the process of expanding to a number of other sites (Youth Work Ireland, 2017).

### Conclusion

When all the evidences presented here are considered a stance can be taken that YP living in RAPID areas are competent members of society and therefore have a right to identify their own problems and work towards solutions in an integrated



approach with agencies of the state. This was achieved by firstly outlining YP's right to participate in the decision making process as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC. The review then outlined that as YP are members of a RAPID community they should have an input into an applications for funding that will impact on their lives. The review then noted the importance of timing for this present study by highlighting the relaunching of a recast version of the RAPID programme, with funding available for youth facilities and play/recreation spaces. This argument was further validated when the review highlighted that there are presently a high number of YP living in RAPID area communities. Moreover the review highlighted the risks to these YP of poorer physical health, lower levels of educational achievements, and emotional and behavioural problems. The review then outlined two models for engaging YP in the decision making process that are central to this research project. Alongside this, the review highlighted barriers and enablers to youth participation which will allow this research project to identify barriers and enablers encountered by the participants in the present study. Finally the review outlined the benefits to both the YP and service providers when YP are engaged in the decision making process. In light of the evidence presented here a stance can be taken that YP living in RAPID areas are competent members of their communities and should therefore, have a say in any decisions that will impact on their lives.

## Methodology

### Research design

When considering a design for the present study, the works of Geraghty (2006) in relation to social research skills and Geraghty (2008) on methodology in the social sciences informed the bulk of the choices made as outlined in this chapter. After considering the five research designs of cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, case studies, comparative studies, and experimental studies outlined in this work, it was decided that a case study design was best suited to this project. The rationale for this decision stemmed from Geraghty's belief that 'case studies involve the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case, whether it be of a single community, a single family or a single event' (2006, p. 32). Taking this definition on board a case study design seemed the most logical choice for this research project, as it was primarily concerned with the single community of a RAPID area based Midlands youth club. Additionally, considering Geraghty's stance that case studies 'are good for describing and exploring social matters' (2006, p. 32), a case study was deemed ideal for exploring the social question of YP's input into the service of their RAPID area based youth club and the influence it had on their quality of life.

Once a case study design was decided upon the three types of case studies as outlined by Yin (1984), cited in Geraghty (2008) were considered. These three types were the *critical case* in which the researcher has a clearly specified hypothesis they want to test, the *unique case* which examines some extreme or unique interest, and the *revelatory case* which allows the researcher to carry out inductive research on a single case in order to thoroughly observe and analyse it. Considering that the present study is an exploration of YP's input into the service provision of their local RAPID area based youth club and the influence their decisions have on their quality of life, it was only natural that a revelatory approach was adopted. This type of inductive or explorative research often entails the compilation of qualitative data (Geraghty, 2008). It was decided at this stage that the views of both the YP and the YWs were required in order to triangulate the data in an effort to produce the best results.

When considering the methods to be employed to gather this qualitative information, Geraghty's (2006) information gathering methods of documentary research, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observation were considered. As this project was concerned with the views of both YWs and YP it was felt that after considering Geraghty's (2006) views that two approaches would be adopted for the project.

Firstly, in relation to the YWs it was felt that a semi-structured interview was best suited. This decision was reached after considering Geraghty's stance that semi-structured interviews 'combine the efficiency of a structured interview with ability to probe and investigate interesting responses' (2006, p.75). As a researcher visiting an organisation previously unknown to them, described by Alderson and Morrow (2004) as an '*outsider*', it was felt that a semi-structured interview was an ideal tool that could be utilised to explore and probe YWs responses in areas that were interesting or previously not considered. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were decided upon for the benefits as outlined by Geraghty (2006), such as information can be checked for accuracy as it is being collected, and allows for observation of non-verbal gestures. When these benefits were considered it was felt that semi-structured interviews were a much better option in this scenario than questionnaires, focus groups or observation.

Secondly, in relation to the YP, a decision was made to employ focus groups as the primary information gathering method. One of the key reasons for this decision was Lewis viewpoint that 'children may be less intimidated by talking in a group than when talking individually to an adult, particularly if the interviewers is not well known to the children' (1992, p. 413). Additionally, Shaw's et al. (2011) viewpoint on addressing the issue of the power imbalance between the adult researcher and the YP was considered. It is Shaw's et al. (2011) belief that if the researcher groups YP who already know each other together that they are more likely be less intimidated and be more open and honest, whilst also encouraging their peers to act the same. Finally, the views of Kitzinger (1995) in relation to the difference between group interviews and focus groups, were considered when designing the focus group schedule (Appendix 9). Kitzinger (1995) maintained that although focus groups were types of group interviews, the two methods are structured differently. She argued

that 'although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method' (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). Considering this the researcher adopted a facilitator style role as opposed to an interviewer role during the focus groups. That is to say the YP were given topics and pointers by the researcher, they were then asked to discuss the topics amongst themselves and put their ideas on a flip chart.

## Participants

### Population

As stated earlier the population pertaining to this research is the community of a RAPID area based Midlands youth club. This community includes YP attending their RAPID area based youth club and the YWs employed by the youth service.

### Sample

A non-probability convenience sample was utilised for this research. Due to the constraints of time, the parents of all YP who attend the youth club received an information leaflet and consent form. Children whose parents consented were then selected to take part. It was initially proposed that if more than six parents from one area consented that only six YP would be randomly selected, so as to restrict the group from becoming too large. However, only four parents in two of the RAPID areas consented and six parents in the third.

Initially it was intended to hold a focus group with between four and six YP from four separate RAPID areas within the Midlands town. (Total Participants 16-24 YP). However, saturation was reached after three focus groups with a total of fourteen participants. Two groups consisting of four participants and one group consisting of six as outlined below:

Group 1: Four females, ages 20, 15, 14, & 13

Group 2: Three females and one male, all aged 17

Group 3: Six females, ages 9, 9, 10, 11, 12, & 14

Similarly, it was initially intended to hold four interviews with four YWs employed by the youth services delivering services in the separate RAPID areas within the Midlands town. Again a non-probability convenience sample was utilised, as the supervising YW on the night of the focus groups was selected for interview. However, saturation was again reached after three interviews. These interviews were held after each of the focus groups with the supervising YW on the night.

## Materials

### Letter for consent to engage with youth service

Prior to commencing the research, a letter requesting permission to engage with their employees and the YP attending the service (Appendix 1) was drafted and given the service manager. A written response was received from the youth service confirming consent to engage with their YWs and participants.

### Parents of young people

Once permission was received from the Midlands based youth service, the next step of engaging with the YP's parents/guardians to seek consent for their child to participate in the research project was taken. This comprised of an information sheet outlining the research project (Appendix 2) and a consent form for the parent/guardian to sign allowing their child to participate in the research (Appendix 3).

### Young people

Once permission was received from the parents/guardians of the YP the next step was to obtain assent from the YP. Again, care was taken to fully inform the YP about the research project. A separate information leaflet was designed for the YP (Appendix 4) alongside a separate assent form (Appendix 5).

### Youth workers

Once permission was received from the Midlands based youth service it was possible to engage with the YWs employed by the service. Again, care was taken to fully inform the YWs about the research project. A separate information leaflet was designed for the YWs (Appendix 6) alongside a separate consent form (Appendix 7).

## Focus group and interview schedules

A schedule was drawn up for the focus groups (Appendix 8) with the YP and was followed for each of the three focus groups. Additionally, a short evaluation form was drafted for the YP to fill out at the end of the focus group (Appendix 9). Likewise, an interview schedule was drawn up for the interviews (Appendix 10) with the YWs. All the YWs were asked the same questions.

## Procedures

### Application to ethics committee

After meeting with the project supervisor it was agreed that some changes would have to be made to the proposed project, due to ethical considerations, prior to the project submission to the ethics committee. One of the key ethical concerns was that the initial project proposal was partially concerned with the negative impact poverty has on YP's well-being. It had been proposed that the YP would discuss the negative impact poverty has on their lives in a focus group. In hindsight, this proposal would have put the YP in an uncomfortable situation by highlighting the fact that they lived in a high poverty area and thus caused more harm than good. Putting the YP in this situation would have failed the scrutiny of any ethics committee utilising any one of the three ethical frameworks for assessing research of *deontology*, *rights*, and *utilitarianism* as outlined by Alderson and Morrow (2004). Ethical committees utilising the deontology, or the duties based approach are primarily concerned with the three main duties of justice, respect, and the duty to do no harm; as opposed to those considering the rights based approach, who focus on whether the researcher respects the participant's rights. Whilst committees who adopt a utilitarianism approach analyse the effect the research has on the participant in order to reduce the harm and increase the benefit. It was therefore agreed to adopt a utilitarian approach in an effort to reduce the harm to the participants. It was at this stage that it was decided to briefly have the YP discuss areas in their life where they felt there was room for improvement as opposed to the negative impact poverty had on their lives.

## Primary research

In relation to the focus group with the YP, a discussion was held with the gatekeeper surrounding the location where the sessions would take place. It was agreed with the gatekeeper that the sessions could take place in the youth centre as it was a familiar setting for the YP. A suitably sized room as advised by Shaw et al. (2011) was assigned in each of the youth clubs and in order for confidentiality to be maintained it was agreed that a time for the session would be set when no other YP were attending. Times were allotted on separate evenings for the researcher to hold the focus groups in four different youth clubs. It was also agreed that a YW from the service would sit in on the session for the protection of both the YP and the researcher. This step was taken contrary to Shaw's et al. view that when 'staff are present during interviews or focus groups to discuss a particular project or service that they have some responsibility for (for example, as part of an evaluation), CYP may feel unable to offer critical comments' (2011, p. 14). The rationale for this decision was that the safety of the YP and the researcher were paramount.

The evening of the focus group was the first time the researcher had an opportunity to engage with the YP whose parents had consented to their participation. It was at this stage that the researcher went through the information sheet for the YP (Appendix 4) and answered any questions they had. Additionally, as this project was concerned with youth participation in decision making it would have been ironic not to consult with them in relation to the data gathering process. However, again due to the constraints of time it was not feasible to have a full consultation with them, so partial consultation was achieved at this stage by asking the YP their views on the proposed process and if they had any other suggestions on how the data could be collected. When the YP were happy to proceed, they were asked to sign the assent forms.

After the assent forms were signed a pre-prepared flipchart of ground rules (Appendix 11) for the focus group was unveiled. These ground rules covered typical areas such as one person speaks at a time, no jumping in when others are speaking, and confidentiality. The YP were also offered the opportunity to add their own rules to the list. As total confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to the nature of focus

groups, this time was also taken as an opportunity to inform the participants that they should not discuss anything that was said outside the focus group.

With the participants agreement the recording of the focus group began. The focus group was broken into three distinct areas. Firstly, the group were asked to briefly discuss their views on the three areas of areas for improvement in their lives, services needed to address their needs, and what input they had into their youth clubs service provision. During each of the discussions the YP also wrote down their ideas and views on a flip chart. Secondly, the YP were asked to partake in a group exercise, whereby they had to choose which services to provide in a fictitious youth club. Each group were presented with six options for services by the facilitator and then asked to individually submit an idea of their own. The six options presented by the facilitator included sensible and non-sensible suggestions pertaining to physical, educational and social well-being as outlined below.

	<b>Physical Health</b>	<b>Educational</b>	<b>Social</b>
<b><i>Sensible</i></b>	Healthy eating/cookery course	Trip to museum	Mentor Programme
<b><i>Non-sensible</i></b>	Pizza Night	Trip to cinema	Disco

Each participant added their own suggestion to the board, so two groups had a total of 10 suggestions and the third group had 12 suggestions. The participants were then asked to work together in a group to decide on which three of the services they would like to see implemented. The final stage of the focus group was a short evaluation form which the participants were asked to fill out.

As mentioned earlier, the supervising YW on the night of each of the focus groups had been proposed by the gatekeeper as potential interviewees. Prior to each of the nights the gatekeeper asked the YWs if they would like to participate. Each of the supervising YWs agreed to participate. The night of the focus group was the first time that the researcher engaged directly with the YWs themselves. Time was taken to go through the information sheet with the YWs to fully inform them. A key point outlined at this stage was that participation was voluntary and that they should not feel under pressure to participate because their manager had asked them to. After answering any questions the YWs had and when they were happy to proceed the



YWs were asked to sign the consent forms. When the consent forms were signed the recording started and the semi-structured interviews began.

### Feasibility and limitations

As this study focused on a Midlands based youth service operating in the RAPID areas of a Midlands town, the study's findings cannot be generalised beyond these disadvantaged areas. However, the findings of the research should have relevance to other youth clubs situated in similar disadvantaged areas.

## Results

### Introduction

#### Pseudonyms

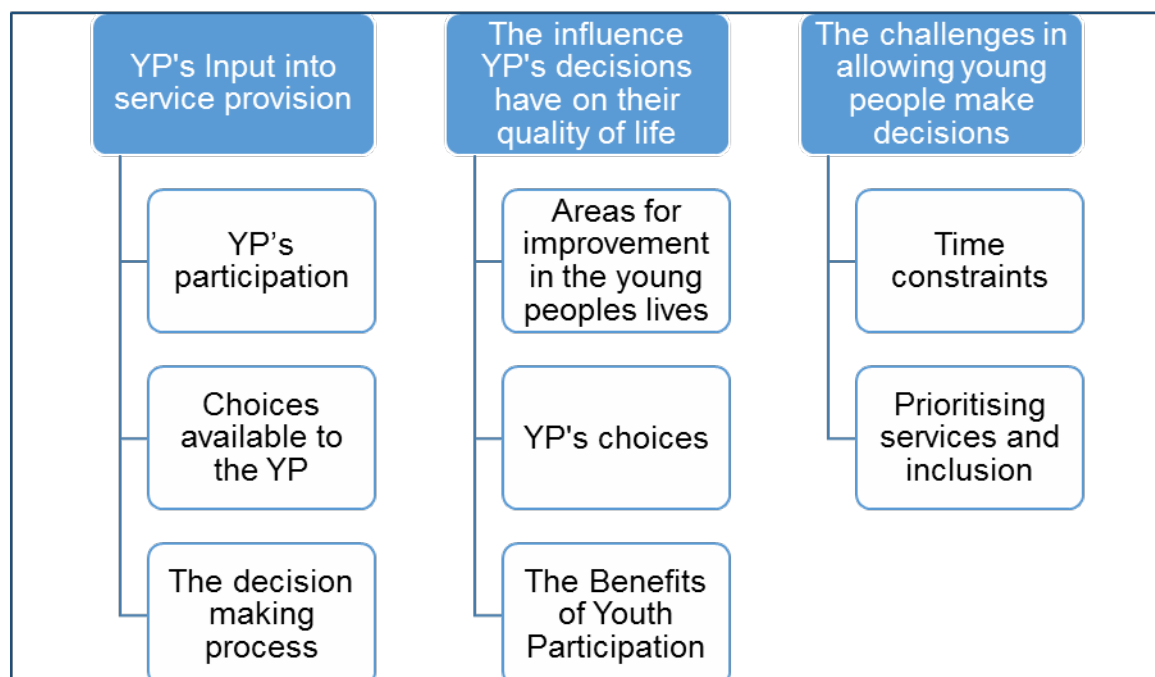
This chapter describes the findings of the qualitative study which explored the views of YP attending their local RAPID area based youth club, in relation to their participation in decisions about service provision, and the views of YW's employed by the Midlands based youth service. A total of fourteen YP attended focus groups and three YWs were interviewed. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for all involved the following pseudonyms are used. The first letter of YPs pseudonyms were chosen to coincide with the first letter of the clubs pseudonym.

<b>Young People</b>		
<b>Pseudonym of participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Pseudonym of Youth Club</b>
Sean	17	Summerhill
Susan	17	Summerhill
Shirley	17	Summerhill
Stephanie	17	Summerhill
Betty	20	Birch grove
Breda	15	Birch grove
Bridget	14	Birch grove
Biddy	13	Birch grove
Wilma	9	Woodville
Wendy	9	Woodville
Wanda	10	Woodville
Willow	11	Woodville
Wenona	12	Woodville
Whitney	14	Woodville
<b>Youth Workers</b>		
<b>Pseudonym of participant</b>	<b>Years Employed by Service</b>	<b>Pseudonym of Youth Club</b>
YW1	15	Summerhill
YW2	18	Woodville
YW3	15	Birch grove

## Researchers observations of the groups

A key observation in relation to the composition of the group was the lack of male YP who brought back consent forms from their parents. It is unknown if this was a lack of interest from the male YP or non-consent from the parents. Additionally, as the youth service divides their groups based on age and gender, many of the YP who attended the focus groups were not in the same club groups. Another key point revealed to the researcher was that the youth service were the owners and sole users of the Woodville and Summerhill buildings, however, the Birch grove building did not belong to the service and was shared with other groups.

When the recordings of the focus groups with the YP and the interviews with the YW's were transcribed the data collected was analysed. During the analysis of the data the following themes and sub-themes came to the researcher's attention:



## Young people's input into service provision.

### Young people's participation

During the discussion with the YP surrounding their participation in the decision making process the responses from the Summerhill and Woodville groups were positive. When they were asked to think of a time they were asked about what services they needed in their area. Sean talked about his group's monthly meeting

stating *'Like we have a youth club every week, and, so we plan on one night for the next few weeks'*. This response was backed up by Susan and Willow who said their group also had a monthly meeting where they made suggestions and decided on the services for the coming weeks. The YP's views were validated by the responses of the YW's. All three YWs were of the opinion that the YP made all the decisions in relation to the services provided. YW1 talked about the clubs efforts to promote youth participation from the very start when the YP engage with the service at the age of 10. YW two was of the same opinion and echoed the views of the YP when she stated *'Yes they have to plan every month and we are decorating the house they have input into the decisions around the decoration. They decide what goes into the youth centre not us'*.

When the same questions were put to the YP from Birch Grove the responses were not as positive with conflicting opinions between the younger and older participants. Bridget one of younger participants stated that *'No way that never happens'* in relation to the when the YP were asked to think of a time they were asked about what services they needed in their area. She then began to argue that the members of the club wanted to start a football team but *'but we had no coaches'* and *'Sean and John (Pseudonyms for two YWs) would not do it'*. Betty the oldest in the group did not agree and gave some examples of when they asked for things and they were allowed them, such as, *'like three years ago we asked if we could go on a group exchange, and we actually did go'* and *'there was a suggestion that we paint this place. We painted it, like with designs'*.

YW1 did however concede that the level of participation afforded the YP depended on *'the age of the young people, the ability of the young people, the size of the group that they are in and the stage that they are at'*. More importantly, she talked about a learning curve and the progression in the level of decision making responsibility afforded the YP. She highlighted the monthly meetings as a starting point with progression onto funding applications and youth committees. She also talked about progression on to the towns youth committee which feeds into Comhairle na nÓg and empowers the YP to have a real impact on local issues. She also highlighted the fact that two YP from the town were on the regional committee which is a step up

from Comhairle na nÓg, as it covers all the counties that the youth service operates in. She felt that the services '*overall aim of the youth forum is that a young person on the youth forum will be able to sit on the board of management*'. She felt that this aim was achievable and not too far down the line.

### Choices available to young people

The general consensus amongst the YP was that there was no choice to big. When asked about choices available to them the YP talked about weekly activities such as movie nights, sports events, cooking sessions, swimming, art, and other programmes. Susan's response to options available was simply 'We can do whatever we want'. These responses were echoed the YWs. YW1 even spoke about encouraging the YP to think big, telling them '*anything is possible in terms of youth work*'. Moreover, listening to YW1 her willingness to work with the YP in an effort to fulfil their choices was apparent when she stated '*in general we have certain restrictions such as funding and insurance but in a lot of cases particularly funding wise there are ways around that*'. This view was also taken by YW2 and YW3 who both outlined options such as youth exchanges and programmes which offered the YP the opportunity gain recognised qualifications.

The services available to the YP went much further than generic weekly programmes. As highlighted in the previous section Betty outlined how her group had asked for an exchange programme offering them the opportunity to travel and see new places. They also got to make decisions about the design of the buildings which made the club feel more like their own.

When the YP were asked if the club always listened to their suggestions the YP from Summerhill and Woodville were of the consensus that the youth club always took their suggestions on board. Both the groups responded with a 'yes'. However, in the Birch grove group the younger participant's responses were not as positive. Again, Bridget mentioned the time they wanted to start a football team and the youth club did not support their decision. When probed further and asked if there was ever a time the youth club said no their suggestions the group from Summerhill also conceded that there were times when the youth club would say no. Susan was one of the first to admit this when she stated '*a here now! If it cost a lot of money they*

say no'. This was followed by Sean who indicated *'if we asked to go to Supermacs every week they would say no'*. It was apparent to the researcher that the YP understood the rationale for them saying no. This was particularly evident to the researcher when Shirley stated *'You have to be realistic about what you want to do, obviously you're not going to be able to get everything that people want'*.

It was also at this stage of the focus group that the YP from the Birch grove group outlined their feelings surrounding their suggestion to decorate the youth club. It was revealed that the youth club agreed to allow the YP to decorate the walls by putting murals on them, however, they were very upset that when they came back from their summer break and the murals were painted over by the caretaker. Betty was visibly upset over this and stated *'they said yes, we done it, from July, we all left what we were doing, and when we came back in September, it was all gone'*. When pushed further on this they were asked if the youth club gave them a reason why their murals were painted over, or if they asked why, Betty replied *'no, because they will make up stupid excuses that no one can listen to'*. It was at this stage the researcher observed the other YP in the group displaying signs of being very upset with the decision pointing out where on the walls they had put their murals and describing how they looked. Additionally, an unexpected issue that came to light during the discussion was that there is a slight underlying rivalry between the youth clubs from the different areas. This rivalry was highlighted firstly by Bridget who stated *'It is unfair, like in Woodville, they can have anything in their club. They have Bob Marley on their walls and everything'*. This rivalry was further highlighted by Susan who stated *'Yes, Birch grove get everything'*, whilst Sean argued *'Yes they get better shopping'*.

### The decision making process

As part of the focus group the YP were presented with six ideas for services on a flip chart by the facilitator. They were then asked to individually add an idea of their own to the flipchart. Once all the participants added an idea of their own, they were asked to work together as a team to agree on three services for the youth club to deliver. At the end of the focus group the YP were given a short evaluation to fill out. One of the questions on the evaluation asked the YP to compare the decision making exercise to how they usually make decisions in the youth club.

Responses from the Summerhill group varied from *'it's kind of the same way'* to *'in our club we just shout out our ideas but the way we done it today during the focus group was better'* and *'we usually just talk through our planning. We could start writing down ideas'*. The responses from the group in Woodville were also very positive with participants writing *'I liked the exercise better than the one we did before'* and *'I would like to do the exercise that we did a lot more'*. As mentioned earlier the group from Birch grove became restless near the end of the focus group and were anxious to get outside to play. Only one of the participants fully completed the evaluation and wrote that she preferred the way we did it *'because we don't have plan sheets and markers'*. It was also noted by the researcher at this stage that all three groups enjoyed the introduction of flip charts and markers to put down their ideas. It helped them to focus on the task and aided in the discussion.

During the interviews with the YW's all three interviewees mentioned the monthly meetings that the YP hold in order to decide on what services the youth club would provide for the next four weeks. Responses from two of the YWs lacked detail with YW2 saying that the YP make decisions *'In a group and they all put in ideas'* and YW3 gave a similar response. YW1 on the other hand expanded on the process saying *'with some of the younger groups they might have a more creative way of planning rather than discussion like we have groups who will rate activities from 1 to 10 because that's easier for them because of their age and ability'*. In general this monthly group meeting appeared to be the main method employed by the youth service to let the YP have a say in the weekly service provision of the club.

## The influence young people's decisions have on their quality of life

### Areas for improvement in the young people's lives.

The method employed to gather this data from the YP was a group exercise during the focus group. The YP were given a flipchart and markers. They were then asked to discuss areas where they felt there was room for improvement in their lives and then write them on the flipchart. The facilitator provided them with prompts such as:

- Are there enough activities in the area?
- Do you feel you get enough exercise?

- Are you finding your school homework difficult?

Each of the groups came back with a list as outlined below:

Summerhill	Woodville	Birch Grove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School Homework assistance</li> <li>•No facilities in area for teens apart from clubs</li> <li>•Most of the time they sit and do nothing when there is no club</li> <li>•Other areas get treated better in clubs eg. Food shopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•No homework support for secondary level students</li> <li>•Would like tutors for activities such as swimming / gymnastics / dance / hairdressing</li> <li>•Need outdoor play areas like swings</li> <li>•Would like film making and acting lessons</li> <li>•Would like to work with animals</li> <li>•Would like to help the homeless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•More sports in the area</li> <li>•More shops in the area</li> <li>•Help stop the violence</li> <li>•A place for teens to go – chilling area</li> <li>•Better playing area (for younger people)</li> <li>•Homework club for secondary schools</li> <li>•More community involvement</li> </ul>

The researcher intentionally did not ask the YWs for their views on what areas for improvement they felt were needed in the YP’s lives. Instead, the researcher explored the views of the YWs in relation to the YP’s understanding of the link between choosing services and areas for improvement in their lives. When the YWs were asked if the YP associated service provision with areas for improvement in their lives, the YWs were of the opinion that the YP did not relate the two and gave the following responses:

YW1 stated *‘the young people are making choices and they are not associating them with their own lives or their future or how they will make their lives better’*. While YW3 replied *‘The younger ones 10 to 13 probably don’t but the older ones 17 and 18 year old they can see it now because they have been involved since early teens’*.

However, the YWs did argue at this stage that by allowing the YP to make decisions it empowered them and let them take ownership of the project. YW1 felt that this was a very important point. She felt that although the children did not associate the



decision making process with areas of their lives that could be improved, allowing the YP to make decisions had a significant positive affect on their psychological well-being. This point was highlighted when YW1 stated about the YP's attitude "*yes I can make decisions and I can actually make a difference*". Alongside this she talked about the club being the only place some people were afforded the option to make decisions. She felt '*young people don't have the opportunity to make decisions for themselves outside of here and sometimes it's quite shocking how little they make decisions for themselves because a lot of their decisions are made for them*'. She also believed that outside the club a lot of YP just followed the crowd in relation to decisions '*they are influenced so strongly by what others do that they don't even think for themselves*'. Her generally feeling in the end was that the YP were learning a life skill that they could bring out into their daily lives.

Two key areas that came to light in all three youth clubs were the lack of supports for YP in relation to assistance with secondary school homework and the lack of areas/facilities for YP to hang out or congregate. This issue was first highlighted in Summerhill by Stephanie who said '*Most of the time we sit around doing nothing*'. This was followed by Shirley who stated '*You know sometimes you just wanna go outside but there is nowhere to go, you're just sitting on the steps like*'. Similar views were also presented by the YP in Birch grove and Woodville.

A key difference noted by the researcher between the three areas was the visibility of social issues. In Summerhill and Woodville the issues were not as visible, however, in Birch grove there were visible signs of social issues such as burnt out houses, broken windows, damage to facilities, and boarded up houses. Moreover, the YP in the Birch grove area were very aware of social issues and talked about violence in the area, littering, the bad reputation of the area, gangs, vandalism, and friends not allowed to visit the area. YW3 also highlighted this concern in relation to the YP's wellbeing. Whilst discussing services available to the YP, YW3 raised the concern about the discrimination between different ethnic groups living in the estate. She maintained that the YP were seeing a lot of discrimination between different ethnic groups and that they were responding by doing a lot of intercultural awareness work.

## Young people's choices

When the YP finished identifying areas for improvement in their lives, they were then asked to discuss what services the youth club could provide to help. Again the YP were given a flipchart and markers to write down their ideas. The results are as follows:

Summerhill	Woodville	Birch Grove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help with studying and homework.</li> <li>• Help with getting somewhere to hang out at any time.</li> <li>• Buy better shopping.</li> <li>• Spreading the shopping evenly between the clubs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source tutors for homework grinds, acting, etc</li> <li>• Trips to animal shelter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiate use of the pitch once a week</li> <li>• Stop all the gangs</li> <li>• A place to sit in the local park (refurbish the seats)</li> <li>• A second homework club</li> <li>• Set up a big family day</li> <li>• Ask Gary to open the shop</li> </ul>

This discussion was followed up by a more structured exercise to explore the types of decisions YP make. The YP were asked to take part in a group exercise whereby they had to choose which services to provide in a fictitious youth club. Each group were presented with six options for services by the facilitator. The six options presented by the facilitator included sensible and non-sensible suggestions pertaining to physical, educational and social well-being as outlined below.

	Physical Health	Educational	Social
<b>Sensible</b>	Healthy eating/cookery course	Trip to museum	Mentor Programme
<b>Non-sensible</b>	Pizza Night	Trip to cinema	Disco

The YP were then asked to individually submit an idea of their own ideas to the list. Suggestions made by the YP to add to the list were:

Summerhill	Woodville	Birch Grove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Beauty course</li> <li>•Grinds</li> <li>•Gym programme</li> <li>•Sports programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Swimming</li> <li>•Trip to an animal shelter</li> <li>•Gymnastics lessons</li> <li>•Set-up a Youtube channel</li> <li>•Make a movie</li> <li>•Trip to Tayto Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Make-up programme</li> <li>•Football programme</li> <li>• Trip to different towns</li> <li>•Beauty course (Nails &amp; Hair)</li> </ul>

With all the choices listed on the flip chart the YP were then informed that the fictitious youth club only had the funds to provide for three of the programmes and that they would have to work together as a group to decide which three programmes the youth club would run. Decisions made by the group were:

Summerhill	Woodville	Birch Grove
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grinds</li> <li>• Cookery course</li> <li>• Beauty course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trip to Tayto Park</li> <li>• Trip to cinema</li> <li>• Healthy eating course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make-up programme</li> <li>• Disco</li> <li>• Football programme</li> </ul>

One of the prominent observations noted by the researcher during this stage was that the YP were very aware of the social issues in the area impacting on their lives, especially the YP in Birch grove. However, when asked how the youth service could help solve these issues, the YP were unsure in their responses.

All three YW were of the opinion the YP sometimes make decisions that are not in their best interest. YW3 replied '*One hundred per cent what young person doesn't? They are chancers but at the end of the day we have learned, don't say no*'. While YW2 stated '*They might go overboard in their decisions*'. The YWs were however of the opinion that this was not to be seen as a bad thing but more so an opportunity for the YP to learn. With YW1 stating '*Sometimes its decisions you know are not the best decisions, but sometimes it's important to let them run with it and to get the*

*learning from it'. Whilst YW3 stated 'we get them to research it we get to them to look into our insurance what we are covered to do, I am not saying no to them, but they will find out for themselves by the email back'.*

### The benefits of youth participation

When questioned about the challenges of youth participation all three of the YWs felt, the benefits of youth participation outweighed the challenges. In the example above of the festival the YP wanted to run YW1 talked about empowering the YP to make their own decisions. She argued that it would have been much easier for her to say no in the beginning. However, she further argued that she would have been taking the power away from the YP and they would not have had the opportunity to learn from the process. In her opinion youth participation *'is what youth work is all about and if you are not empowering the YP to make those kind of decisions then it's not youth work'*. Likewise, when YW3 spoke about the YP and the go-kart programme she outlined the benefits of the YP working together, learning new skills, working on machinery. *'it's not the go-kart itself it's the learning of different skills, working with equipment working within the group and the go cart is the happy thing it's the learning, taking responsibility is the key'*.

One of the key observations of the researcher in relation to the benefits to YP was in relation to group dynamics during decision making process. From observing the YP working together it was noted by the researcher that the YP from Summerhill and Woodville were used to working together when making decisions. The rationale for this were the phrases they used while they were discussing their options, such as *'we all kind of like that', 'it would be something we would enjoy'* and *'we all need them'*. Additionally the groups in Summerhill and Woodville did not shout over each other, they thought about the needs of the group rather than the individual, and the older children assisted the younger children with issues such as spelling. In contrast to this the Birch grove group did not seem as cohesive, the YP spoke over each other and interrupted each other quite a lot. They questioned points that Betty made in an effort to undermine her. They were restless by the end and wanted to finish quickly. It was also noted in all groups that the some of the YP copied the suggestions of their peers in relation to areas for improvement in their lives and suggestions on how the youth club could help. Additionally, it was noted that one of

the younger participants who was most vocal imposed their choice on the other three participants.

## The challenges in allowing young people make decisions.

### Time Constraints

#### *Youth Workers Views*

One of the key challenges outlined by the YWs during the interviews was that of incorporating youth participation into the decision making process *can be* quite time consuming. YW2 highlighted this challenge when she stated *'if you want a process to move along quite quickly well youth participation can hazard that because sometimes for young people to make decisions it can be quite a slow process because we are not seeing the same young people every day'*.

This viewpoint was further highlighted by YW1 when she discussed a time when the YP wanted to run a youth festival in the Midlands that was open to all youths. On initially hearing the idea YW1 felt that this would be a non-runner stating *'straightaway I thought this is not going to happen for a hundred reasons and the main one being insurance and this group of young people were not experienced enough to kneads out something like that'*. However, the YP were adamant that they were going to do this. The youth club supported the YP's decision and offered all their support. They had the YP do all the research and contact the relevant agencies. They YP went through 3 meetings of investigating the festival over a period of 4 to 5 months, it was only then that they admitted the festival was not going to happen. However, they came round to the realisation themselves after investigating costs, insurance, numbers that would attend etc.

YW3 also highlighted the challenge of time when she spoke about a group of 10 to 12 year olds who wanted to take part in a programme to build a go-kart. They spent two weeks planning the programme and on the third week a tutor was brought in. When the tutor was brought in and explained what would be involved in the process, the YP decided that there was too much work involved and decided they were no longer interested. It was explained to the YP that the tutor would give them any help

that they needed and the club who also assist in any way they could. The YP went off and thought about it and came back 10 minutes later to say they would take part.

### Prioritising services and inclusion

This challenge was highlighted by YW3 who spoke about working with a group of up to 10 YP who have a massive list of what they would like to do. She found that one of the biggest challenges is *'trying to break that down and prioritize what will we do first and every young person is included and it's not just the one person that's always talking'*. She maintained that this was one of the hardest parts of the job. She felt that it was very important to include everyone's views especially *'the person in the corner that hasn't really much of a voice'*. Additionally she talked about a group of YP who were from a marginalised area. The YP wanted to go on an exchange outside of the Ireland. However some of the other YWs voiced their concerns saying *"are you sure about this these young people have never been outside of the town, Dublin would be far enough for them"*. YW3 stood by the YP's decision and helped them to fund raise, eventually leading to the YP going on an exchange to Wales.

## Discussion

### Young people's input into the service

#### Article 12 of the UNCRC

The general consensus between both stakeholders the YWs and the YP is that the YP have a voice in what services are delivered by their local youth club. The question to be considered in relation to this voice is, whether the voice of the YP from these marginalised areas is not taken seriously by the YWs or not acted upon by the YWs as argued by Byrne et al. (2006) who found their voices to be tenuous (their voice did not hold weight), or if the YP are facilitated in expressing their views to an audience that will act upon their decisions as outlined in Lundy's (2007) model.

Lundy's (2007) model focuses decision makers on four key elements from Article 12 of the UNCRC to aid them in fulfilling their obligation to the provision. These elements appear in a chronological order starting with *space*, whereby children must be given the opportunity to express a view. The next element is *voice* and maintains that children must be facilitated to express their views. The third element is *audience* which stipulates that the children's view must be listened to. The final element is *influence* which requires that the view of the children be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007). These elements are interrelated and have a significant degree of overlap. In particular, Lundy (2007) outlined an overlap between the elements of space and voice. She maintained that these elements pertained to the child's right to express a view as required by Article 12. Additionally, she maintained that the elements of audience and influence significantly overlapped and related to the child's right to have their voice given due weight as mandated by Article 12 Lundy (2007).

The evidence from the present study shows that the Midlands youth service has endeavoured to provide a space in which YP are offered the opportunity to express their views. In particular, the monthly meeting was highlighted by both stakeholders, the YWs and the YP. Evidence was also found that YP are facilitated in expressing their views at these monthly meetings. This was particularly evident when YW3 stated '*making sure that the person in the corner that hasn't really much of a voice that their needs and wants are included in this programme and plan*'. Moreover, the commitment of the youth service to facilitate the voice of YP in the decision making

process was highlighted by YW1 when they talked about the goal of having a young person sit on their board of management where they would have real influence in the running of the youth service. Additionally, evidence was uncovered that youth service encouraged YP to join committees outside of the youth service to increase the range of their voices. These committees include Comhairle na nÓg and the Child and Youth Council, where the YP can have a real say on issues that impact on them in the wider community. The evidence here suggests that the Midlands youth service provide Lundy's elements of space and voice and therefore, fulfilling their obligation in relation to the child's right to express a view as required by Article 12.

### Power sharing in the decision making process

In relation to the youth service requirement to ensure the children's right to have their views given due weight, evidences uncovered were positive. When outlining her viewpoint in relation to an audience Lundy (2007) maintained that children have a right to have their views listened to and not just heard. Again, both stakeholders were of the opinion that YPs suggestions at the monthly meetings were listened to by the YWs. This was particularly evident when YW1 spoke about the youth festival. YW1 knew the project was not going to be successful, however, she listened to the YPs views and decided to let the YP run with the programme. Another key area in relation to the weight afforded the YPs suggestions uncovered by the research is that the weight afforded the young person's view is dependent on the young person's age and ability. This area was also addressed by Lundy (2007) when she discussed influence. She maintained that it is easy to listen to the voice of YP and that the real challenge is giving due weight to their views. In general the evidence from the research showed that the youth service afforded due weight to the YPs voices. YW3 highlighted the youth service commitment to giving due weight to the YPs voices when she spoke about the group of YP from a very disadvantaged area who wanted to do an exchange. Other adults told her that it was not going to happen but she stood with the YP and the exchange came to fruition. The evidence provided here show that the youth service are fulfilling their obligation to ensure the children's right to have their views given due weight.

When combined, the finding thus far show that the youth service are fulfilling their obligation to Article 12 by facilitating YPs right to express their view and affording



their voice due weight. It is evident that this facilitation of views is however dependant on the YP's age, ability, and group size. Hence; the evidences from the research showed that at times there is a need for the YP to share power with the adults in the decision making process as outlined by Kirby et al. (2003). Kirby et al. maintained that power sharing is dependent on young person's evolving capabilities, the best interest of the child, the preferences of the YP, and their available time. Considering these factors they outlined their four separate levels of participation and is set out in a non-hierarchical way. The first level of participation is when adults take YPs views into consideration and then the adults decide if they will act on them. Level two is when YP and adults are involved in the decision making together. Within this level YP and adults explore issues together. However, the adults hold ultimate responsibility for deciding the course of action to be taken. Level three is when adults relinquish this ultimate responsibility and YP and adults share power and responsibility for decision-making. At this level adults share power with YP and make joint decisions by negotiating, consensus or voting. The final level of participation is when YP make autonomous decisions. This is when YP make decisions for themselves and do not share power and responsibility for the decisions with adults (Kirby et al.,2003). Of these four levels, three became apparent during the present study.

Evidence of power sharing between the YP and YW's highlighted by the research project included the aforementioned monthly meeting. Initially this meeting appeared to show the YWs allowing the YP to make autonomous decisions in relation to the services provided, evident in Kirby's et al. 4<sup>th</sup> level. However, when the results of the research are examined more closely, it clearly shows that the YP are sharing power and responsibility with the YWs in relation to the decisions, Kirby's et al. 3<sup>rd</sup> level. That is to say the YP understand that there are certain restrictions imposed by the adults on their decisions. For some of the older YP, this power sharing is something that they have learned from attending the service over a period of time. A prime example is the Summerhill group which comprised of four seventeen year olds who are regular attendees to the service. The results from this group showed that these YP had an understanding of restrictions on their decisions. These restrictions included practical issues like funding, which was highlighted by Susan, who knew if something cost too much they were not likely to get it. Additionally, Sean understood

that there was a restriction on the treats that they would receive. However, these YP understood the rationale for these restrictions such as funding could not always be secured and getting a treat every week was not in their best interest. This understanding allowed these YP to make logical decisions about service provision without the input of a YW at the meeting.

It was evident that some of the younger participants did not possess this same understanding. This was particularly evident in the Birch grove group where the younger participants in the focus group felt they did not have a say in the service provision. This was particularly evident in Bridget's complaint that two of the YWs would not coach the YP who wanted to start a football team. One possible rationale for Bridget's complaint is that she did not understand the logistics of her request in relation to prioritising of services. This was one of the challenges highlighted by YW3 when she spoke about the need to prioritise services and ensure that every YP's needs are met. Not all of the YP wanted to create a football team. This left the YWs with the choice of allocating their available time to the YP who wanted a football team or allocating their time to the whole group of YP on a project they were all interested in. In this case the YWs took the YP's views into account, but felt it was not in the best interest of everyone in the group to proceed as highlighted by Kirby et al. (2003) in the 1<sup>st</sup> level.

Bridget was visibly upset by this decision. Two possible reasons for this upset may have been that she felt that her voice did not hold any weight and therefore not acted upon by the YWs, or that the rationale for the YWs not acting on the suggestion was not communicated to the YP concerned. Similar, to when the YP expressed their upset at the caretaker painting over their murals, the YP maintained that no explanation was communicated to them. This upset may also have been the cause of some of the rivalry between the different clubs. This became apparent when Betty argued that it was unfair that Woodville were allowed to murals and they were not. This upset could possibly have been avoided if the YWs had adopted Kirby's et al. (2003) 2<sup>nd</sup> level of power sharing, which involves the YP and adults working together on decisions. Adoption of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level would have allowed the YWs to sit down with the YP and communicate their rationale for not acting on the suggestion or explain why the caretaker painted over the murals. More importantly, it would have allowed

the YP to air their upset at the decisions made, possibly allowing for a compromise to be made in both situations.

The benefits of utilising Kirby's et al. (2003) 2<sup>nd</sup> level of power sharing were highlighted by YW3 in her example about the YP and the go-kart project. Initially, the YP made the decision they wanted to take part in the project. However, when they realised the work that was involved in the project they decided to pull out. At this stage the YW sat down with the YP and discussed the project with them. She communicated to them that they would receive support in completing the work. Sitting down with the YP and alleviating their concerns got the YP to re-engage their interest in the go-kart project. Likewise, the benefits utilising Kirby's et al. (2003) 4<sup>th</sup> level of power sharing by allowing the YP to make autonomous decisions in relation to the services provided, were highlighted by YW1. When YW1 spoke about the YP wanting to organise a youth festival, she admitted that she knew the YP's aspirations would not come to fruition, due to practical reasons. However, rather than just say no to the YP and risk them feeling that their idea was not being taken seriously, she agreed to the project and allowed the YP to take responsibility for organising it. The YP researched the project over a period of time, contacting agencies such as insurance companies to enquire about cost. After researching the project the YP came to the decision themselves that the project was not a viable option.

Considering these examples above it is imperative that the level of power sharing between the YP and YWs is considered when engaging with YP in the decision making process. Choosing the right level of power sharing can help support YP in the decision making process, thus, enabling them to take action. Additionally, it can help avoid decisions being made that may leave YP feeling upset, or allow for compromises to be reached between YP and adults. Moreover, by choosing the right level of power sharing the YWs are recognising the YP's agency with increasing age and maturity, one of the four enablers outlined by Horgan et al. (2015). Considering the arguments above two key points in relation to power sharing come to light. Firstly, although YP are competent members in the process, they often require adult support to aid them in making decisions. Secondly, communicating the rationale for decisions to the YP is essential and can aid in reducing any negative feelings the YP have about any decisions made.

Considering the viewpoints put forward thus far, the evidence shows that the youth service are engaging the YP in the decision making process utilising the Lundy's (2007) model of participation. However, when this engagement is examined more closely shows that when the sharing of power between the YP and YW's in the process is not assessed on a case by case scenario, the YP may feel at times that their voices are not been heard. This in turn can cause the YP to experience feelings of upset. The evidences highlighted how communication between the YP and YW's is central to the avoidance of YP feeling this way. Moreover, the evidence showed that although YP are competent members of the community they often require the support of adults when making decisions.

### Barriers to youth participation

It is important to note that although the youth service may strive to ensure the YP's voices are heard and that power is shared at the right level in the process, sometimes the outcome is out of the services control. Focusing on Horgan's et al. (2015) barrier to youth participation of negative adult attitudes generally towards YP in the community, possible reasons for the caretaker painting over .the YPs murals become apparent.

Through their research Horgan et al. found that many adults did not share YWs understanding of youth participation and frowned upon YP in community spaces. This could possibly explain why the caretaker of the of the Birch grove centre painted over the YP's murals. The caretaker may not have understood that by letting the YP have a say in the design of the building and allowing them to put murals on the walls, gave them a sense of ownership of the space. Another possible explanation is that unlike the Summerhill and Woodville centres, the centre in Birch grove is not owned by the youth service and is shared with other groups such as the Birch grove residents committee. These other users of the facilities may not have understood the importance of the murals to the YP, or even viewed them as graffiti/vandalism. This view could have incited them to put pressure on the caretaker to paint over the murals. This barrier highlights the importance Lundy's (2007) point that YP should be given a space where they can express their views. In turn, highlighting the

importance of the new RAPID funding available to the youth service for the provision of youth facilities.

A second key area of concern highlighted by the YP was the lack of facilities outside of the youth service for YP in the areas. Horgan's et al. (2015) noted the lack of identified spaces for YP in communities as a barrier to youth participation. Each of the groups noted that apart from the youth service there are a lack of facilities for YP in their areas. This lack of facilities for YP often left them feeling bored with nothing to do except sit on the steps in the estate. The research shows that this can be quite a substantial amount of the time, as slots available to the YP to attend the youth service are restricted due to the demands on the youth club to provide services for different groups, depending on the group's age and gender. This issue of time constraints was also highlighted by YW2 who said '*it can be difficult because we do not see the same children every day*'. Considering the news report by Hotton (2008) this boredom experienced by the YP may account for the vandalism to the play areas and facilities reported by the YP in the Birch grove area. The evidence presented shows that YP in these RAPID areas are experiencing boredom on a regular basis due to the lack of facilities for YP in the area. The evidences further show that the YP are at risk of tuning to anti-social behaviour due to this boredom. This evidence in turn reaffirms the importance of the newly available funding for youth facilities and play/recreation spaces under the revamped RAPID programme.

## Young People's Concerns

### Educational achievements

Evidence from the research show that the YP are very aware of areas in their lives where there is room for improvement. One of the key areas identified by the YP was their educational achievement. A majority of the YP from the focus groups were attending secondary school and all three groups expressed that they were having difficulty with their homework. This was a major concern for some of the YP as they are presently studying for their Junior and Leaving certificates. A potential reason for this concern is that the YP are living in RAPID areas which are identified as having high levels of unemployment and poverty, which McKeown and Sweeney (2001) found to be known predictors of low educational attainment. Outlining the parent

investment model Gershoff et al. (2007) maintained that this low educational attainment due to poverty stems from the restrictions on the YP's parent's to invest time or finances in their children's education. As outlined earlier RAPID areas are known for their high levels of poverty and unemployment. Therefore many of the YP's parents in these areas are restricted in the amount of finances they can invest in their children's education. That is to say a family on a low income may not be able to afford to send their children on educational school trips, hire a private tutor, or pay for extracurricular activities. A prime example of this was highlighted by YW3 when she talked about the YP going on an exchange programme she maintained that the YP '*these young people have never been outside the town*'. The evidence presented here allows for the argument that YP growing up in RAPID areas are more prone to low educational attainment due to restrictions on their parents ability to invest time and finances in their education.

When questioned about how the youth service could help with this issue the YP gave some excellent responses in relation to supports. Ideas submitted by the YP included a second homework club specifically for secondary schools and the sourcing of tutors in specialised subjects. These suggestions were very practical and showed how competent the YP were at identifying an area in their life that required improvement, whilst also presenting a practical solution. At present these suggestions may not be feasible for the youth service to implement due to constraints of time and funding. However, when the YP's educational achievement is considered in relation to the parent investment model, evidence was presented that the youth service is exposing the YP to enriching experiences, which they probably could not otherwise afford. These experiences included exchange programmes, movie nights, art, and programmes such as the go-kart project.

During the structured group exercise in relation to service provision choice for the fictitious youth club, the YP came back with some very creative ideas. However, it was noted that only the Summerhill group added grinds to the list of services proposed by the researcher. This was somewhat of a surprise to the researcher as earlier in the sessions all three groups identified homework support as an area for development in their lives. Alongside this, they suggested that the youth service could source tutors the help them with their homework. A possible reason for this

may have been that all the participants in this group were of leaving certificate age. The focus group took place in April when the YP had just recently gone through a stressful time with mock exams, which in turn could possibly have put them under more stress thinking about their upcoming leaving certificate exams. If this is the case, rather than introducing an after schools programme for secondary school as initially suggested by the YP, it may be a more feasible suggestion for the youth club to facilitate a supported study group specifically aimed at leaving certificate students.

### Social issues

Results from the research showed that all three groups were aware of the social issues in their areas. As mentioned earlier all three groups highlighted the lack of facilities for YP in their areas. Alongside this the fallout of anti-social behaviour from the boredom associated with a lack of facilities were discussed. The YP from Birch grove in particular were very aware of these social issues and talked vandalism, violence, and gangs. Additionally, they highlighted the fact that some of their friend's parents would not let their children go into the area. YW3 also noted tension in the area when she highlighted discrimination in the area between different ethnic backgrounds. These issues were quite visible to the researcher as an outsider visiting the area, noting burnt out houses, broken windows and damage to property. The signs were less visible in the other two estates. However, Wenona, Wendy and Whitney brought up the issue of homeless people and suggested the youth service could help the homeless. Sean also touched on the reputation of the Summerhill estate, when asked if other areas got more opportunities than them, he responded with '*yes, because we are Summerhill*'. This was backed up by Susan who stated '*other areas get treated better*'. Considering the evidence outlined here a stance can be taken that YP are very aware of social issues in their areas and therefore their views should be given due weight when decisions are being considered in relation to policies to tackle social issues in the local community.

When questioned about how the youth service could help with these issues the YP gave responses such as, '*help us get somewhere to hang out*' and talked about '*a place to sit in the local park*'. However, when pushed on these issues and asked how the youth service could help achieve this, the YP were unsure of who they should approach. This lack of awareness is one of Horgan's et al. (2015) barriers to youth

participation. From speaking to YW1 it was evident that there is a mechanism in place for YP to air their concerns on local issues. The youth service have YP sitting on the towns youth committee which feeds into Comhairle na nÓg, a committee that can have a real positive impact on local issues and policies. However, when speaking to the YP about how the youth service could help, none of the YP mentioned this mechanism. Considering the YPs lack of awareness on where to air their views on local issues is a barrier to youth participation it is imperative that the youth service address this issue. One possible solution the youth service could adopt is the introduce of a mechanism at the YPs monthly meeting to collect YPs concerns on local issues, these issues could then be passed onto the YP sitting on the Child and Youth Council where they have an opportunity to air their concerns on local issues to the relevant policy makers.

#### Young people's choice of services

Focusing on the other suggestions from the YP there is an opportunity for the youth club to promote programmes that could lessen the impacts growing up in a low-income area has on young person's well-being. If one considers Watson's et al., (2012) highlighted areas of a young person's well-being that can be impacted negatively upon by poverty, there is ample scope for the youth service to lessen these impacts. In relation to the YP's physical health, the youth service could design programmes around some of the YP's suggestions that promote positive health. Some of these programmes are easy to identify such as the YP's suggestions of gym, sports, swimming and football programmes. It is worth noting that a beauty course was suggested twice alongside a make-up course. This is obviously an area that the YP who attended the focus group have a keen interest in and therefore an opportunity for the youth service to promote YP's health. This could be achieved by incorporating health eating and drinking habits to promote clear skin. Additionally, negative behaviours such as smoking could be addressed by highlighting the bad points such as stained teeth, poor blood circulation, and the smell on clothes.

From focusing on the YP's other suggestions there is also an opportunity for the youth service to promote educational activities that could aid in the YP's educational achievements. The obvious suggestion is the grinds for secondary school students. Alongside, this the suggestions of setting of a YouTube channel and making a movie



are two opportunities for the service to deliver multimedia courses. This would encourage the YP to learn IT skills, most notably film and sound editing. Additionally, the service could incorporate a session on online safety which would educate the YP on the dangers of the internet. Another suggestion that the service could utilise to increase YP's educational achievement is the trips to other towns. The service could organise trips to visit sites or towns of historical importance, thus, increasing the YP's knowledge of history and possibly their geographical awareness.

Allowing the YP to run with projects even when the YWs knew they would not come to fruition, it encouraged the YP to focus on a task. Focusing the YP on a task is similar to Machell et al. (2016) concept of instilling a purpose in life, which can counteract anti-social behaviour in YP. In the case of the go-kart project, focusing the YP on the project gave them a purpose. This purpose was to design a go-kart to compete against other areas. This purpose required the YP to dedicate their spare time to working on the go-kart. This dedication of time to the project in turn reduced the spare time available to the YP; thus reducing the likelihood of the YP feeling bored and prone to acts of anti-social behaviour.

The evidence uncovered throughout the present research project showed that the youth service has been very innovative in utilising YP's decisions as learning opportunities. This was clearly evident when YW1 stated '*its decisions you know are not the best decisions but sometimes it's important to let them run with it and to get the learning from it*'. In particular she highlighted the aforementioned case of the YP wanting to organise a youth festival. By letting the YP run with the idea they the YP learned some very practical skills even though the festival did not go ahead. Similarly by participating in the go-kart project the YP were offered the opportunity to learn new skills, most notably they were going to use the machinery in the local Men's Shed project. A key finding from this evidence is that there is no right or wrong choices made by the YP, only opportunities for the YP to develop skills that they can use in their everyday lives.

## Conclusion

In summation this study shows that YP living in RAPID areas are competent at identifying issues that are impacting on their lives such as lack of facilities for YP in their areas and no support for secondary students. Additionally, the study shows that YP are very aware of social issues in their local communities, such as anti-social behaviour, violence, gangs and the negative reputations on their estate. More importantly, the YP identified viable solutions to the issues that were impacting on their lives; however, they lacked awareness of how to have their voices heard at a local level in relation to the issues in the community. The implications of these findings show that YP living in RAPID areas have a unique perspective on issues that are impacting on their lives; therefore their voices must be heard in relation to the allocation of funding that has a potential to impact on their lives. Additionally it shows that YP need to be made aware of how they can have their voices heard at a local level in relation to the issues in the community.

## Recommendations

- Combining the facts that YP who attended the focus groups expressed concern over their school work and that YP in these RAPID areas are at risk of low educational attainment, it is recommended that the youth service make an application for funding under the recast RAPID programme for the provision of a supported study group for leaving certificate students.
- It is recommended that the youth service make an application for funding under the recast RAPID programme to secure a space specifically for YP in the Birch grove area. This stems from the fact that YP in the Birch grove are sharing the premises with adults who may not have an understanding of youth participation; thus inhibiting the YP from feeling they have ownership of the present space.
- It is recommended that the youth service implement a mechanism for YP to feed their views on community issues into committees such as Comhairle na nÓg. The rationale for this recommendation lies in the evidence uncovered that showed the YP were unsure about how to have their voices heard at a local level.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Letter to request permission to engage with the service

Noel Breslin  
AIT Student  
Athlone  
Co Westmeath

Manager  
Youth Service  
Midlands Town

Re: Engagement with service for a final year dissertation

Dear sir/madam,

I am a Masters student in Applied Social Care with the Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final project I will exploring young people's involvement in the decision making process in relation to the services provided by their local RAPID area based youth service.

As your service is based in a local RAPID area, I would like to take this opportunity to invite your service to be a part of the study. The study will consist of focus groups with some of the young people attending their local service and interviews with some of the YWs employed by the service.

If you would like your service to be a part of the study I would appreciate if you could forward me a letter of consent, on headed paper, to engage with your employees and your service users.

Yours faithfully,

---

Noel Breslin

## Information sheet for parents of participants.

### ***An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

#### ***Invitation Paragraph***

I am a Masters student in Applied Social Care with the Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final project, I would like to invite your child to participate in a research project that will contribute towards my Master's dissertation.

#### ***What is the study for?***

The study will explore young people's involvement in the decision making process surrounding the services provided by your local youth club.

#### ***Why has my child been invited to take part?***

Your child is a regular attendee at the local youth club. All children who attend the youth club on a regular basis were provided with an information leaflet and consent form to give to their parents.

#### ***Do I have to consent to my child taking part?***

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You should only consent to your child participating once you have read and understood all the information provided in this information sheet. You should not agree for your child to take part until you have clarified any questions you may have with me.

#### ***Will anyone know my child took part?***

No. Your child's name will not be used during any part of this research. It will also not be possible to identify the youth service or the town of XXXX. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed by myself. The only other person with access to this data is my project supervisor from Athlone Institute of Technology.

#### ***What happens if I consent to my child participating?***

Children whose parents have consented will be given information about the research and will be asked for their assent. If more than 6 children consent, only 6 will be selected randomly to participate.

#### ***What will my child's role in the project be?***

If selected, your child will be asked to participate in a group discussion with other young people from the area. The young people will be asked for their views on areas in their life where they feel there is room for improvement. They will then be asked to give their views on what services they feel the youth centre could provide help in improving their lives. The young people will then take part in an exercise where they allocate resources to youth services. Finally, the young people will be asked to fill out a short confidential feedback form.



***Where will the project take place?***

The group discussion will take place in your local youth club. The only young people attending the youth club at the time of the discussion will be the young people who are invited to participate.

***What are the possible risks of my child taking part?***

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in the study. The main disadvantage to your child taking part in the study is that they will be donating around 1 hour of their time. If, during the discussion, your child decides they do not want to continue, they may withdraw without any explanation.

***What are the possible benefits to my child taking part?***

There are no direct benefits of taking part in the study. However, the results of the research will be discussed with your local youth club. The data collected will provide for a greater understanding of decisions that young people would make about services and how their voice can be included in the decision-making process.

***Can I withdraw my consent for my child to participate?***

Yes you can withdraw your consent for your child to participate in the focus group at any stage prior to its commencement. Additionally, you will be able to withdraw any data collected on your child at the focus group before the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018

***What about Child Protection?***

A local youth worker will be present throughout the duration of the focus group, for the protection of your child and myself.

If your child tells us anything that may place them or any other child in danger, I am obliged to report this to the authorities.

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

The results of the study will form part of my research and will be analysed within my Master's dissertation. I will also return to the youth centre in May/June to present my findings to both the youth workers and the young people.

***How should I contact you for further information or if something goes wrong?***

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following details:

Noel Breslin

E-mail [A00237433@student.ait.ie](mailto:A00237433@student.ait.ie)

Phone: 087 7683645

If this study has harmed you or your child in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, you can contact my dissertation supervisor at Athlone Institute of Technology for further advice and information using the details below.

Mairead Seery

E-mail: [mseery@ait.ie](mailto:mseery@ait.ie)

Phone: 090 6468275

### Appendix 3: Parent/guardian consent form

#### **Consent form for guardians to consent to their child's participation** **Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and contacted the researcher with any questions or concerns**

##### **Title of Study: *An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

Thank you for considering your child's participation in this research project. Before completing this form please ensure that you have read the Information sheet. If you have any questions or concerns arising from the information sheet please contact me before deciding if your child can participate in the project. If your child tells us anything that may place them or any other child in danger, I am obliged to report this to the authorities

I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box I am consenting for my child to participate in each element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element my child may be deemed ineligible for the study. Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the enough time to consider the information and asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily. Please tick
2. I understand that I can withdraw my consent for my child to participate in the focus group any time prior to its commencement.
3. I understand that I will be able to withdraw any data collected on my child at the focus group up to 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.
4. I consent to the data collected on my child been used for the purpose explained to me.
5. I understand that my child's information may be subject to review by my supervisor from the Athlone Institute of Technology for monitoring and audit purposes.
6. I understand that and it will not be possible to identify my child in any publications, as no information identifying my child will be used as part of the research and that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.
7. I consent to my child's participation in a group discussion being observed
8. I consent to my child's participation in a group discussion being audio recorded.

**Child's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guardian's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: Information sheet for young people

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Information sheet for young people.**

#### ***An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

#### ***Invitation Paragraph***

I am a Masters student in Applied Social Care with the Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final project, I would like to invite your child to participate in a research project that will contribute towards my Master's dissertation.

#### ***What is the study for?***

The study will explore young people's involvement in the decision making process surrounding the services provided by your local youth club.

#### ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

You are a regular attendee at the local youth. All young people who attend the youth club on a regular basis were provided with an information leaflet and consent form to give to their parents. Your name was randomly selected from the young people whose parents consented to their children participating.

#### ***Do I have to consent to taking part?***

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You should only consent to participating once you have read and understood all the information provided in this information sheet. You should not agree to take part until you have clarified any questions you may have with me.

#### ***Will anyone know I took part?***

No. Your name will not be used during any part of this research. It will also not be possible to identify the youth service or the town of XXX. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed by myself. The only other person with access to this data is my project supervisor from Athlone Institute of Technology.

#### ***What will my role in the project be?***

You will be asked to participate in a group discussion with other young people from the area. You will be asked for your views on areas in your life where they feel there is room for improvement. You will then be asked to give your views on what services you feel the youth centre could provide to help improving these areas. Next you will take part in a group exercise to resources to a made up youth service. Finally, you will be asked to fill out a short confidential feedback form.

#### ***Where will the project take place?***

The group discussion will take place here in your local youth club. The only young people attending the youth club at the time of the discussion will be the young people who are invited to participate.

***What are the possible risks to me taking part?***

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in the study. The main disadvantage to you taking part in the study is that they will be donating around 1 hour of your time. If, during the discussion, you decide you do not want to continue, you may finish without any explanation.

***What are the possible benefits to taking part?***

There are no direct benefits of taking part in the study. However, the results of the research will be discussed with your local youth club. The data collected will provide for a greater understanding of decisions that young people would make about services and how their voice can be included in the decision-making process.

***Can I withdraw my consent to participate?***

Yes you can withdraw your consent to participate in the focus group at any stage prior to its commencement. Additionally, you will be able to withdraw any data collected on you at the focus group before the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

The results of the study will form part of my research and will be analysed within my Master's dissertation. I will also return to the youth centre in May/June to present my findings to both the youth workers and the young people.

***How should I contact you for further information or if something goes wrong?***

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please ask your parent to contact me using the following details:

Noel Breslin

E-mail [A00237433@student.ait.ie](mailto:A00237433@student.ait.ie)

Phone: 087 7683645

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, please ask your parent to contact my dissertation supervisor at Athlone Institute of Technology for further advice and information using the details below.

Mairead Seery

E-mail: [mseery@ait.ie](mailto:mseery@ait.ie)

Phone: 090 6468275

## Appendix 5: Assent form for young people

### Assent form for participating young people.

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and contacted the researcher with any questions or concerns

**Title of Study: *An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

Thank you for considering your participation in this research project. Before completing this form please ensure that you have read the Information sheet. If you have any questions or concerns arising from the information sheet please have your parent contact me before deciding if you can participate in the project.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box I am consenting to participate in each element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may not be able to participate in the study.

Please tick

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the enough time to consider the information and asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that I can withdraw my consent to participate in the focus group at any time, with no explanation needed.
3. I understand that I will be able to withdraw any data collected on me at the focus group before 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.
4. I consent to the data collected on me been used for the purpose explained to me.
5. I understand that my information may be subject to review by my supervisor from the Athlone Institute of Technology.
6. I understand that and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications, as no information identifying me will be used as part of the research and that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.
7. I consent to my participation in a group discussion being observed
8. I consent to my participation in a group discussion being audio recorded.

Young Person's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 6: Information sheet for youth workers

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Information sheet for youth workers.

***An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

#### ***Invitation Paragraph***

I am a Masters student in Applied Social Care with the Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final project, I would like to invite your child to participate in a research project that will contribute towards my Master's dissertation.

#### ***What is the study for?***

The study will explore young people's involvement in the decision making process surrounding the services provided by your local youth club.

#### ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

You were invited to take part because you work with young people in a RAPID area based youth service.

#### ***Do I have to consent to taking part?***

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You should only consent to participating once you have read and understood all the information provided in this information sheet. You should not agree to take part until you have clarified any questions you may have with me.

#### ***Will anyone know I took part?***

No. Your name will not be used during any part of this research. It will also not be possible to identify the youth service or the town of XXXX. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed by myself. The only other person with access to this data is my project supervisor from Athlone Institute of Technology.

#### ***What will my role in the project be?***

You will be interviewed in relation to young people's involvement in the decision-making process for services provided by the youth club. Additionally, you will be asked for your views in relation to allowing young people to make decisions.

#### ***Where will the project take place?***

The interview will take place here in your local youth club. The interview will take place prior to the focus group with the young people.

#### ***What are the possible risks to me taking part?***

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in the study. The main disadvantage to you taking part in the study is that they will be donating around 1 hour of your time. If, during the interview, you decide you do not want to continue, you may finish without any explanation.



***What are the possible benefits to taking part?***

There are no direct benefits of taking part in the study. However, the results of the research will be discussed with your local youth club. The data collected will provide for a greater understanding of decisions that young people would make about services and how their voice can be included in the decision-making process.

***Can I withdraw my consent to participate?***

Yes you can withdraw your consent to participate in the focus group at any stage prior to its commencement. Additionally, you will be able to withdraw any data collected on you at the interview before the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

The results of the study will form part of my research and will be analysed within my Master's dissertation. I will also return to the youth centre in May/June to present my findings to both the youth workers and the young people.

***How should I contact you for further information or if something goes wrong?***

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following details:

Noel Breslin

E-mail [A00237433@student.ait.ie](mailto:A00237433@student.ait.ie)

Phone: 087 7683645

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, please contact my dissertation supervisor at Athlone Institute of Technology for further advice and information using the details below.

Mairead Seery

E-mail: [mseery@ait.ie](mailto:mseery@ait.ie)

Phone: 090 6468275

## Appendix 7: Consent form for youth workers

### Consent form for participating youth workers.

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and contacted the researcher with any questions or concerns

**Title of Study: *An examination of young people's input into the service provision of their RAPID area based Youth Clubs.***

Thank you for considering your participation in this research project. Before completing this form please ensure that you have read the Information sheet. If you have any questions or concerns arising from the information sheet please have your parent contact me before deciding if you can participate in the project.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box I am consenting to participate in each element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may not be able to participate in the study.

Please tick

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the enough time to consider the information and asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that I can withdraw my consent to participate in the interview at any time, with no explanation needed.
3. I understand that I will be able to withdraw any data collected on me at the focus group before 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.
4. I consent to the data collected on me been used for the purpose explained to me.
5. I understand that my information may be subject to review by my supervisor from the Athlone Institute of Technology.
6. I understand that and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications, as no information identifying me will be used as part of the research and that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.
7. I consent to my participation in the interview been observed
8. I consent to my participation in the interview been audio recorded.

Young Person's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 8: Focus group schedule

### **Focus Group:**

#### **Facilitator's welcome, introduction, instructions to participants and Ground Rules**

##### **Welcome**

Hi all my name is Noel and I would like to thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedule to volunteer for this focus group. You have all been invited to participate as you are regular attendees to the youth club and I believe your views on the subject I am researching are very important.

##### **Introduction:**

This focus group will need your input in following three key areas:

1. We will have a brief discussion on the following three topics
  - a. Areas for improvement
  - b. Services to address needs
  - c. What input the young people have into service provision
2. Group decision making exercise
3. Evaluation sheet

##### **Anonymity**

- Session will be recorded
- Access to recordings restricted
- Transcripts held under lock and key
- Use of pseudonyms
- Do not discuss outside
- Participation is voluntary

##### **Ground rules (Written up on flip chart)**

- Only one person speaks at a time.
- No jumping in until others have finished talking.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- You do not have to speak in any particular order.
- If you have something to say don't be afraid to say it.
- Everyone's opinion is important and will be listened to.
- If you do not agree with a viewpoint please say so without arguing
- Would you like to add anything to the ground rules?
- OK, let's begin

##### **Warm up**

- First, I'd like everyone to introduce themselves. Can you tell us your name, how old you are, and how long you have been attending the youth club?

## **Focus Group: Discussion Guide**

### **Exploration of young people's views**

#### **1a. *Areas for improvement***

- Are there enough activities in the area?
- Do you feel you get enough exercise?
- Are you finding your school homework difficult?
- Are there things you would like to do but can't?
- How are you getting on with friends?
- Are there things you would like to learn about?

#### **1b. *Recommending services***

- How can the youth club help lessen the impact the issue is having on you?
- What service would you like the youth club to provide?

#### **1c. *Input into services***

- Can you think of a time when you were asked about what services were needed in your area?
- Did you give suggestions?
- Do you feel you were listened to?
- Were your ideas implemented?

## Focus Group:

### Group Exercise

#### *Introduction to group exercise:*

What I am going to do now is ask you to pretend that you are in charge of the budget for the youth club. You have received a grant to provide services and you have to choose what services to provide.

#### *Outline of exercise*

Step 1: Facilitator submits three sensible and three non-sensible ideas for the funding

	<b>Physical Health</b>	<b>Educational</b>	<b>Social</b>
<b>Sensible</b>	Healthy eating/cookery course	Trip to museum	Mentor Programme
<b>Non-sensible</b>	Pizza Night	Trip to cinema	Disco

Step 2: Facilitator asks the young people to make further suggestions.

Step 3: Facilitator asks the young people to decide on three ideas to spend the funding on.

## Focus Group:

### Conclusion/Wrap-up

- Recap on answers. Everyone ok with that?
- Evaluation sheet
- Thanks for time & info
- Answers = great help for my project
- Enjoyed session? Hope so.
- Reminder – keep confidentiality
- Goodbye and thanks again

Appendix 9: Focus group evaluation sheet

**Evaluation form – Young people’s focus group:**

Q.1 Did you enjoy the focus group? Yes  No

Q.2 What did you like most about the focus group?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.3 What did you like least about the focus group?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.4 Can you compare the decision making exercise to how you usually make decisions?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 10: Youth worker's interview schedule

### **Semi-structured interview schedule with youth workers:**

Pseudonym of Interviewee:

---

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Welcome:**

Hi my name is Noel and I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to volunteer for this interview. You have been invited to participate as you are a youth worker employed by YWIM and I believe your views on the subject I am researching are very important.

#### **Introduction:**

The key area that I am interested in researching is, the level of input the young people have in relation to the service provision of the youth club and your views around allowing the young people to make these decisions. With that in mind are you OK to continue?

#### **Ice Breakers:**

1. How long have you worked for the youth service?
2. How many young people usually attend the youth club?
3. What age ranges are the young people who attend the service?

#### **Young people's input to service provision**

4. Do young people make decisions in relation to the service provision of the youth club?
5. What types of choices are offered to the young people in relation to service provision?
6. What process do the young people use to make decisions?
7. Can you give me a specific example of a time when the young people were offered a choice on service provision?

#### **Youth workers views**

8. Do you feel the young people made a sensible decision in the example you outlined?
9. Can you explain why you are of that opinion?
10. In your experience, do young people associate service provision with areas in their lives where there could be room for improvement?
11. Do the young people ever make decisions that you feel are not in their best interest?
12. If so can you give me an example?

13. What is the youth services response when this happens?
14. What do you feel are the challenges in allowing young people a say in service provision?
15. Do you feel there are benefits to allowing young people have a say in service provision.
16. Do you feel the benefits can outweigh the challenges, or do the challenges outweigh the benefits?

That's all the information I need from you so is there is anything you would like to ask me before we finish up?

I would like to thank you for your time and cooperation as they are greatly appreciated and will be very helpful to my research.