

Free-time and Leisure Needs of Young People Living in Disadvantaged Communities

**Tina Byrne
Elizabeth Nixon
Paula Mayock
Jean Whyte**

**Combat Poverty Agency
Working Paper Series 06/02
ISBN: 1-90548-522-0
October 2006**



First published 2006
Combat Poverty Agency
Bridgewater Centre
Conyngham Road
Islandbridge
Dublin 8

© Combat Poverty Agency

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank a number of people for their support and help in completing this study. First and foremost we express our sincere thanks to all of the young people who took the time to meet with us and participate in this study. We hope the research findings are a fair and accurate reflection of their views and experiences. We would also like to extend our thanks to the service providers who willingly participated in the research and helped organise and facilitate the fieldwork.

Many thanks to Zosia Borska and Pilar Bujia-Couso, Children's Research Centre, who assisted with the interviewing and Mary-Louise Corr for her help with the analysis of the data.

Finally a special thank you to Sadhbh Whelan, Children's Research Centre, for her support and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this report.

Disclaimer

This Working Paper was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency under its Poverty Research Initiative. The views, opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed here are strictly those of the author(s). They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Combat Poverty Agency which takes no responsibility for any errors or omissions in, or for the accuracy of, the information contained in this Working Paper. It is presented to inform and stimulate wider debate among the policy community and among academics and practitioners in the field.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Chapter One: Background to the Study

Introduction

Structure of the Report

Chapter Two: Leisure and Recreation Facilities – Policy Context

Introduction

Anti-Poverty Policies and Initiatives

RAPID Programme

Child Poverty Initiatives

National Children’s Strategy and Play Policies

Youth Work and the Youth Work Act, 2001

‘At Risk’ Initiatives and the Children’s Act, 2001

Chapter Three: Free-Time and Leisure Activities

Introduction

Defining Leisure and Free Time

Free-Time Activities and Young People’s Well-Being

How Young People Spend their Free Time

Structured Leisure Activities

Leisure Activities and the Street

Studies of Young People and Leisure in Ireland

Summary

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

Selection of Sites

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment Procedures

Ethical Issues

Data Collection Methods

Data Analysis

Chapter Five: Area and Sample Profiles

Introduction

Area Profiles

The Study’s Young People

Young People’s Views on the Social Environment

Summary

Chapter Six: Free-Time and Leisure Activities

Introduction

Importance of Free Time

Involvement in Structured Activities

Community-Based Clubs

Mainstream Youth Clubs
'At risk' Provision
Leisure Complex Facilities
Unstructured Leisure Activities
Summary

Chapter Seven: Free-Time and Leisure Needs: Views of Young People

Introduction
Addressing Age and Gender Needs
The Importance of 'Feeling Safe'
Existing Facilities and Amenities – Suggestions for Improvement
Rural and Urban Concerns
'There's Nothing to Do' – Proposed Solutions
Involving Young People in Decision Making
Summary

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction
Social Environment
Involvement in Structured Leisure Activities
Involvement in Unstructured Leisure Activities
Factors that Facilitate and/or Inhibit Free-Time and Leisure Choices
Policy Recommendations
Concluding Remarks

Bibliography

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study into the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged areas was funded by Combat Poverty Agency under the Poverty Research Initiative, 2004. The main objective of the study was to investigate the free-time and leisure needs of young people aged 12-18 years living in areas designated as socially and economically disadvantaged. The research aimed to:

- Describe the physical and social environments that characterise the neighbourhoods where the young people lived
- Explore how the young people spend their free time
- Identify the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the choices the young people make about how they spend their free time
- Provide policy-orientated recommendations that will contribute to the development and provision of appropriate leisure and free-time facilities for young people.

Research Methods

Selection of Sites

Four geographical areas were selected for inclusion in this study:

- An inner-city Dublin area
- A suburban housing estate outside Dublin
- A neighbourhood within a large rural town
- A small rural town community.

The four areas have been designated as disadvantaged under the Government's RAPID programme and have been identified as having a high concentration of social and economic disadvantage, with high percentages of low-income families, high levels of unemployment and intergenerational educational disadvantage. The areas also experience drug misuse, high levels of vandalism, crime and anti-social behaviour. Two of the geographical areas (urban and suburban communities) were designated for inclusion in the Local Drugs Task Force Initiative (1996).

Sample Profile

We used a number of recruitment sites in each area. These included second-level schools, local youth groups/clubs, FÁS Community Training Workshops/Youthreach and Garda Diversion Programmes.

Eighty young people were interviewed for the purpose of this study (37 individual interviews and 41 in focus group discussions). The study sample included forty-two young women and thirty-eight young men. Forty-five of the young people were aged 12-15 years and thirty-five were aged 16-18 years. The majority of the young people we interviewed lived in local authority flat

complexes or in local authority housing estates. A small number lived in privately-owned dwellings or on the family farm. Nearly three-quarters (fifty-six) of the young people lived with both parents, twenty lived with one parent, usually the mother and the remainder of the young people lived with relatives, e.g. an older sibling or grandparents. One young woman, a single mother, was cohabiting with her partner.

The majority of the study respondents (seventy-two) were attending second-level school. Eight of the respondents were early school leavers, five of whom were attending Youthreach or FÁS Community Training Workshops, two of our respondents were unemployed and one was a single mother. Twenty-nine of the young people who were attending school were also working part-time, usually in the evenings or at the weekend. The hours they worked varied, some of the young people working four hours per week while others worked up to twenty hours per week. The majority of those working part-time were employed in the services sector, e.g. shop work, lounge work in local pubs. Others babysit for relatives or work on the family farm. The young people took up part-time work to establish financial independence and as a means of generating extra income to purchase clothes and mobile phone credit and to support their leisure activities.

Data Collection Methods

The research methodology adopted was a qualitative multi-method approach that comprised a mix of individual interviews and focus group discussions. Baseline data were also gathered for each participant using a pre-coded questionnaire that was administered subsequent to individual interviews and focus group discussions. Written consent was sought from the young people and their parents to participate in this study.

Findings

Data were analysed qualitatively to seek answers to questions about the young people's views on the social environment in which they lived, their use of leisure time, their feelings about obstacles to recreation in their areas and their opinions on how things could be improved. A number of issues emerged in relation to age, gender and neighbourhoods/ geography.

Social Environment

In relation to the social environment our findings revealed that:

- While describing a strong attachment to their communities, the young people focused on the negative characteristics of their social environment, including exposure to the sale and use of illicit drugs, public drinking and drunkenness and other anti-social and criminal behaviours

- The respondents 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
- Some of the young people, particularly those living in the urban and suburban areas, reported problematic relationships with local Gardaí.

Involvement in Leisure Activities

Free-time and leisure contexts that feature structured and unstructured leisure activities offer young people the chance to develop relationships with peers, to establish personal preferences and to experiment with various social roles. Some structured activities organised and staffed by local volunteers were available to the young people within their communities and we discovered that:

- A significant number of the study's young people attended structured activities within their neighbourhoods: these included youth groups and sports clubs
- The majority of neighbourhood youth clubs, particularly in the rural settings, were staffed and organised by community volunteers
- The youth clubs did not receive any government funding and many of them lacked even basic equipment. Consequently, the young people reported dissatisfaction with the service provided
- Young men were more inclined to be members of a sports club than their female counterparts
- Some more mainstream youth groups, staffed by professional youth workers, were available to the young people. However, some of the service providers reported difficulties in recruiting young people into these groups
- Some youth clubs targeted 'at risk' youth and the youth involved in these groups expressed a high level of satisfaction. Many availed of the opportunity provided by attendance to complete their Junior and Leaving Certificates
- The preferred free-time and leisure activity among the study's young people was 'hanging around' on the street with friends.

Factors that Inhibit Free-Time and Leisure Choices

A number of factors inhibited the young people's choices regarding their free-time and leisure choices:

- There was unanimous agreement among the young people that there is a distinct lack of adequate provision of free-time and leisure amenities available to them in their neighbourhoods.
- Young people are in many cases reliant on parents for 'pocket money' and therefore often lack the financial means to purchase commercial forms of leisure.
- Regeneration has attracted privately-owned leisure complexes into each of the four areas. The majority of the study's young people reported that in many instances local youth have been barred or excluded from using these premises.

- In general there is a lack of local sporting facilities in the four areas, with many of the young people reporting that there is usually only one local football pitch available to a significant number of young people. Over-use of local football pitches has damaged the grass surface and often renders them unplayable.

Age-Related Issues

- The young people identified the need for different and separate leisure activities and facilities for the various age groups.
- Younger teenagers (12-14 years) preferred to spend their free time in structured activities and they also enjoyed spending time with family members.
- Older teenagers (15-18 years) preferred to spend their free time in the company of their peers and reported that the time they spent with their family was obligatory rather than voluntary.
- Alcohol consumption featured strongly in many of the older teenagers' (15-18 years) descriptions of their preferred way to spend their free time.
- There was a lack of awareness and understanding among many of the young people of the potential harm and risk involved in substance misuse.

Gender Issues

- The most significant gender issue to emerge from the findings revolves around that of 'body image' among our female participants.
- Young women consistently produced accounts of a societal pressure to conform to a 'Barbie Doll' image.
- Young women were less inclined to take part in any form of exercise, especially in a public setting, because they were self-conscious and embarrassed about their physical appearance.
- Some of the young women often feigned illness to avoid PE in school.

Geographical Issues

- Our findings indicate that suburban and rural youth have less access to mainstream youth clubs than their urban counterparts.
- Rural youth reported that they often have to travel outside of their towns to access leisure facilities. They frequently have to access public transport which is sporadic in terms of timetabling, and/or they are dependent on parents for transportation.

Policy Recommendations

We focus on four major areas in making recommendations arising from the study findings: young people and their social environment; structured and unstructured leisure activities; age, gender and geographical location and future research. All are outlined in Chapter Eight of this report. The major recommendations can be summarised as follows:

Social Environment

- The inclusion of young people in a specifically targeted drive by local authority representatives and local development committees to ensure their meaningful participation in the regeneration of their social environments
- The use of creative means to engage young people in a consultation process, keeping technical language and jargon to a minimum.

Community-Run Activities

- The provision of financial support to local youth clubs to acquire basic equipment and ensure their continued existence
- The development of training for local volunteers to include organisational skills, management skills and training in working with youth.

Mainstream and 'At Risk' Youth Clubs

- The provision of multi-annual stable funding and additional training and support for youth workers
- The development of links with community-run activities in an effort to provide a holistic service to local youth.

Unstructured Activities

- The establishment of community-owned leisure and recreational amenities and facilities
- The designation of 'youth areas' within the local community.

Further Research

- Additional research needs to be carried out to further our understanding and inform policies regarding the free-time and leisure requirements of young people living in disadvantaged areas in Ireland.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Increasingly the area of leisure and recreation has come to be recognised as an important context for child and adolescent development. It is beneficial to young people because of the opportunities for socialisation and peer interaction that leisure activities offer and because of the psychological and physical health benefits. Participation in organised leisure and recreation by young people is also seen as having positive benefits for society since it reduces the amount of time available for engagement in anti-social behaviour (Caldwell and Darling, 1999). Internationally, it is recognised that youth from low-income backgrounds are often disadvantaged with respect to their participation in organised or structured leisure and free-time activities, whether due to financial constraints and/or a lack of provision of such activities and amenities in their local communities (Zeijl *et al.*, 2001).

This situation persists in Ireland despite the economic boom of the past two decades, which has had little or no impact on certain sections of the population. Despite unprecedented levels of economic growth, Ireland is still witnessing the cumulative disadvantage and spatial and geographical concentrations of disadvantage (Nolan *et al.*, 2000).

Research in Ireland has consistently noted the marginalisation of young people living in socially and economically deprived areas, whether due to poor housing conditions (Fahy (ed), 1999), high drug exposure (Mayock, 2000), unemployment or educational disadvantage (Boldt and Devine, 1998; Cullen, 2000). The communities, neighbourhoods and social spaces in which marginalised young people move and which they learn to negotiate as part of their everyday lives are increasingly recognised as influencing how young people perceive their positioning in society, their life choices and their future. Areas of social and economic deprivation generally have a long history of poverty and social deprivation in terms of unemployment, educational attainment and decaying, deteriorating and under-developed housing conditions.

Young people living in these areas may have high levels of exposure to the sale and use of illicit drugs, criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. In general these social environments provide little in the way of leisure and recreational amenities for children and young people. Playgrounds and playing areas are often minimal, inadequate or non-existent and the preferred and often only option for young people is to 'hang around' on the street (Furlong *et al.*, 1997).

The Irish government through the Department of Health and Children (DoHC) is now examining ways of providing leisure and recreation activities for young people living in Ireland, with a particular emphasis on increasing recreational

opportunities for young people living in marginalised communities and neighbourhoods in an attempt to reduce their exposure to and engagement in anti-social behaviour. This move, while welcome, suggests that involvement in anti-social behaviour by young people is generic, specifically to those living in marginalised communities. Arguably, adolescent leisure activities may conflict with societal norms and values, e.g. drinking and drug use, thus confirming the modern image of young people as a danger to society, as immoral, irresponsible and with criminal tendencies (Hendry and Kloep, 2003).

This negative image of contemporary youth, often generated by the mass media, concentrates on the negative behaviour of young people whilst ignoring the factors that may underlie involvement in such behaviour including limited or non-existent free-time and leisure amenities within the social environment. It also has far-reaching outcomes in terms of influencing and informing social policies in relation to young people.

Many of the lifestyle habits formed during adolescence are carried into adulthood and therefore an understanding of young people's leisure pursuits is vital to counteract any detrimental effects due to leisure or lifestyle choices. The results of this study highlight the importance of studying, in an Irish context, the social environment in which young people live, their engagement in structured and unstructured free-time activities and their use of social spaces. It examines the provision or lack of structured activities available to the young people, access to and erosion of public spaces and the level of parental involvement in their free-time and leisure choices. The research findings discussed in this report aim to contribute to a greater understanding of the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in marginalised communities. The research was funded by Combat Poverty Agency under their Poverty Research Initiative, 2004.

Structure of the Report

This report is organised into eight chapters. Chapter Two sets out the policy context within which the study was undertaken. Chapter Three reviews Irish and selected international literature on the free-time and leisure behaviours of young people. It also highlights gaps in research into this area in an Irish context. Chapter Four describes the methodological approach and data collection methods that were used. Chapter Five presents a brief area profile and sample profile of the young people who participated in the study. Chapter Six examines the importance of free time to the study participants, with particular emphasis on the availability of structured leisure facilities, the involvement of the young people in structured leisure activities and their engagement in casual leisure activities. Chapter Seven explores the opinions and views of the young people on the free-time and leisure needs that exist in their areas. In Chapter Eight the study's findings are discussed and recommendations are made regarding the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged communities.

CHAPTER TWO: LEISURE AND RECREATION FACILITIES – POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

In Ireland, and indeed internationally, it is recognised that we must aim to understand children's and young people's perspectives on their social positioning if we want to bring their views into public policy debates about children, adolescents and their experiences of social exclusion. It is widely acknowledged that without an informed awareness of the economic and social pressures that disadvantaged children and adolescents experience in the immediacy of their everyday lives, policies directed towards the alleviation of child poverty and social exclusion run the risk of failing to respond adequately to those children's needs (Ridge, 2002).

The past two decades in Ireland have seen a growing political awareness of the need to develop anti-poverty policies and initiatives. Within this context there has been official recognition of the impact of poverty on families and children. This has led to a number of critical policy developments since the late 1980s and early 1990s, e.g. the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997) and the National Children's Strategy (2000). This chapter examines the policy context with particular reference to anti-poverty and child poverty initiatives.

Anti-Poverty Policies and Initiatives

During the early 1990s, the government developed policy initiatives aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion. In 1997, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), *Sharing in Progress*, was published and has become the main government initiative to combat poverty in Ireland. Since then there have been a number of other significant policy developments including the National Action Plans Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2001-2003 and 2003-2005.

NAPS (1997) identified children, particularly those living in large families in disadvantaged areas, as being at a high risk for poverty. The most recent data on the incidence of child poverty in Ireland show that 23.4 per cent of children living in Ireland were experiencing relative poverty and that 6.5 per cent of Irish children were living in constant poverty (Living in Ireland Survey, 2001). National figures show that 1 in 7 Irish children is living in poverty (Barnardos, 2005). The persistently high rate of child poverty has placed Ireland sixth highest in a comparison of child poverty rates in 23 industrialised countries of the OECD.

Since the publication of NAPS, public policy has increasingly recognised that there are spatial concentrations of poverty and social exclusion where

individuals, families and communities suffer a form of cumulative disadvantage. However, it is important to point out that the key factors accounting for poverty and deprivation are socio-economic, e.g. unemployment, low educational attainment and old age, and that the spatial distribution of poverty largely reflects spatial variations in these variables (Watson *et al.*, 2005). The most recent review of NAPS shows that despite significant advances in tackling poverty and social exclusion these remain the major challenges facing Irish society.

RAPID Programme

In an effort to target urban and provincial centres with the greatest concentration of disadvantage, the government launched the Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) programme in 2001. The RAPID programme is funded under the National Development Plan (NDP) and is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The programme, based on a recognition of spatial trends in poverty, was designed to ensure that priority attention is given to the forty-five most disadvantaged urban and provincial areas in the country. RAPID is made up of two Strands – Strand I targets major urban areas and Strand II targets provincial towns.

The RAPID programme functions through Area Implementation Teams who, with the assistance of local co-ordinators and community representatives, are charged with drawing up local area action plans and identifying needs covering a range of aspects of everyday life. Funding has been provided, for example, to support the development or refurbishment of playgrounds in forty-five areas under the RAPID scheme. In conjunction with local authorities the government is investing in funding either refurbishment work on existing playgrounds, or building completely new facilities. To date 77 playgrounds are being developed around the country at a cost of €8.9 million.

Some city and county councils are also introducing policies on children's play. In 2004 Dublin City Council (DCC) was the first city council to launch its Policy on Children's Play document. This policy addresses the responsibility of Dublin City Council to the children of the city. The policy also underpins the principle of a 'child-friendly city', a concept that is growing in usage in Europe (Dublin City Council Play Policy 2004). For children this would mean safe, attractive neighbourhoods where they can play and socialise. The bulk of the policy deals with children under 12 years of age and there is little provision for teenagers. It includes a commitment from DCC to consult with young people and communities in order to explore innovative ways of creating outdoor recreation space suitable for young people. These are welcome developments because to date the area of recreation and the provision of facilities and amenities for the young people still remains seriously neglected at policy level.

Child Poverty Initiatives

Historically, children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion have remained largely absent from poverty discourse and public policy responses. Although policy is increasingly family-focused it is not necessarily child-focused and children's and young people's interests and needs are easily subsumed and hidden within family interests and needs (Ridge, 2002). In Ireland most research into child poverty has been based on assessing family income and by calculating a relative poverty line (Nolan, 2000). However, far less is known about how the experience of poverty and social exclusion impacts on children's and young people's own perception of their lives. In an attempt to combat child poverty and the social exclusion of children and young people in Irish society the government launched a number of initiatives. In 1992, the government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The guiding principles of the Convention are as follows:

- All children should be entitled to basic rights without discrimination.
- The best interests of the child should be the primary concern of decision-making.
- Children have the right to life, survival and development.
- The views of children must be taken into account in matters affecting them.

The UN Convention also recognises the right of children to engage in recreational and leisure activities and asserts that state parties respect and promote the right of the child to fully participate in cultural and artistic life. Article 31 declares that:

- State parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

The publication of the National Children's Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives* (2000), was the first major government initiative to progress the implementation of the UN Convention in Ireland.

National Children's Strategy and Play Policies

The National Children's Strategy highlighted an explicit recognition of the need to incorporate the views and experiences of children into policy making at all levels. The Strategy provided a set of operational principles to guide action in pursuit of three national goals.

- Children will have a voice in matters that affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity
- Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services
- Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

To support the implementation of the National Children's Strategy the government established the National Children's Office (NCO) in 2001.¹ The NCO also took the lead role in co-ordinating the implementation of the Children's Act, 2001. Since its establishment the NCO has produced a number of reports and publications that promote participation by children and young people in public policy and service delivery. In 2004 the NCO published *Ready Steady Play: A National Play Policy*. The objective of the Play Policy is:

To plan for an increase in public play facilities and improve the quality of life of children living in Ireland by providing them with more play opportunities. The policy will also address issues such as funding, standards and quality. This policy illustrates Government's recognition of the importance of play, and a commitment to making sure that play is facilitated for all children (National Play Policy, 2004:8)

The National Play Policy is the first phase in the development of future policies in the area of play and recreation. However, it is principally aimed at children up to and including primary school age. The NCO is currently developing a National Recreation Policy which will focus on publicly funded recreational opportunities for teenagers. In May 2005 the National Children's Office launched the Public Consultation on National Recreational Policy for teenagers. The consultation process is designed to capture both the successful initiatives and the gaps in recreation facilities for young people and feed into the development of the National Recreation Policy. Through a public consultation process the government proposes to examine ways of providing leisure and recreation activities for all young people living in Ireland. The emphasis of the National Recreation Policy will be on publicly funded recreational opportunities for teenagers (OMC, DoHC, 2006).

Youth Work and the Youth Work Act, 2001

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) describes youth work in Ireland as:

a planned systematic non-formal educational process which assists and enhances the personal and social development of young people. It is

¹ Since December 2005, the NCO has formed part of the newly established Office of the Minister for Children (OMC).

complementary to the school and in Ireland is implemented primarily by voluntary youth organisations and other groups (NYCI, 2006).

Currently over 50 youth organisations operate in Ireland and undertake a variety of programmes including arts, recreation, project work and international exchange. Legislation on youth work in Ireland was until quite recently provided under the Youth Work Act, 1997. The Youth Work Act, 2001 amends the 1997 Act and provides for the establishment of new mechanisms for the co-ordination and support of youth work at county and national level. The 2001 Act also provides for the establishment of partnership structures at local level between VECs and youth organisations to support the development of youth work.

However, some youth organisations argue that there is a growing sense of disillusionment, frustration and anxiety over the implementation of the 2001 Act. For example, additional funding for developing youth work at local level (1 per cent in 2003) does not adequately cover the cost of inflation and in fact represents a decrease in current levels of funding. Youth organisations, in a presentation to the Joint Committee on Education and Science (2003), suggested that unless additional resources are made available the full implementation of the Act is in doubt (NYCI, 2003).

'At Risk' Initiatives and the Children's Act, 2001

The term 'at risk' has many meanings and is not easily defined. Specific characteristics and situations have been identified that render a young person particularly 'at risk'. These characteristics or life situations include:

- Living in poverty and/or poor quality housing
- Having academic problems and/or a bad experience of school
- Living in geographically isolated areas
- Being involved in criminal behaviour
- Having a history of family problems
- Being out of home
- Having a crisis pregnancy at an early age.

When young people are exposed to these multiple risk factors they can be considered to be 'at risk' (Burke, 1999). In 1998, the government established the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) to target those young people most at risk from substance misuse in areas of social and economic disadvantage. The YPFSF is used to provide services and facilities aimed at children and young people in areas that already have a drug problem or are at risk of developing a drug problem. By developing youth sport and other recreational facilities, the YPFSF seeks to attract 'at risk' young people away from the potential dangers of substance misuse, into safe, non-threatening and constructive environments.

To date, the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion has approved allocations of €68 million, the vast majority of which, €56.4 million, has been allocated to the 14 Local Drugs Task Force areas. Other government initiatives directed at 'at risk' youth include Youthreach schemes and Community Training Workshops (CTWs). These initiatives target unemployed early school leavers and offer participants a wide range of subjects, skills training and work experience. Youthreach was introduced as part of a national programme of second-chance education and training in Ireland. The programme targets unemployed youth and early school leavers between the ages of 15-20 and offers participants the opportunity to acquire certification and to identify and pursue viable options within adult life. CTWs offer a wide range of subjects, skills training and work experience and participants may complete Junior and Leaving Certificates and/or enter into an apprenticeship in addition to having a minimum weekly income.

In 1991 the first Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP) were established. They are funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and administered through the Garda Community Relations Section. GYDPs are community based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives and there are currently sixty-four projects in operation.

In contrast to the lack of recreational policies for young people, there has been much debate and research into how to reform the system of juvenile justice. The Children's Act, 2001 was signed into law in July 2001 and was forecast as significantly reforming the system of juvenile justice in Ireland. However, according to some commentators the Act represents a striking continuity of past practices, which regulate those young people who are deemed to have transgressed both legal and societal norms. Our juvenile justice system remains firmly geared towards punishing the wayward children of the poor, without any responsibility on behalf of the state for the creation of social and economic conditions that might lead to involvement in anti-social or indeed criminal behaviour on the part of young people (O'Sullivan, 2001).

In Ireland in recent times, public order problems, coupled with strong media coverage of 'anti-social behaviour', has catapulted 'problem youth' to the forefront of public debate. This debate has concentrated to a large extent on behaviour such as drug misuse and binge drinking among young people. Arguably, this has contributed to a fear of young people, especially those from marginalised communities, among sections of the adult population. The government's response to the public panic associated with 'deviant youth and anti-social behaviour' was to announce its intention to bring forward legislation that would allow for the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) similar to those currently in operation in the United Kingdom. This proposal has been met with widespread opposition, opponents of ASBOs arguing that:

ASBOs are a serious threat to all citizens, and in particular children and young people. Anti-social behaviour can be tackled using the wide

range of measures available under the Children's Act, 2001 and through support services based in local communities (Children's Rights Alliance, 2005).

Opponents also argue that the introduction of ASBOs will most affect young people already marginalised in society.

CHAPTER THREE: FREE-TIME AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Current perspectives on youth and adolescent development have evolved significantly since early conceptualisations of adolescence as a period of inherent turmoil and stress for most or almost all adolescents. Adolescence is now perceived as a time during which conflicts with parents, resistance to adult authority, mood disruptions and engagement in risky behaviour are more likely than at any other time of life, although such pathways are by no means inevitable (Arnett, 1999). As the teenager negotiates increased levels of independence and autonomy, the peer group gains importance as a source of influence and companionship. Out-of-school and leisure contexts offer a chance for experimentation with various social roles, the establishment of individual preferences and the development of close friendships.

It is important to understand the ways in which young people think about leisure, their beliefs about, and attitudes to leisure, the meaning of leisure to them and the forces that influence and shape their involvement in leisure activities (Hendry *et al.*, 1993). Research and investigation of these issues can contribute to and inform any policy initiatives and provision of free-time and leisure activities in an Irish context. This chapter reviews Irish and selected international research literature on young people and their leisure pursuits and choices. It highlights gaps in research on the free-time and leisure needs of young people in Ireland.

Defining Leisure and Free Time

One difficulty relating to the area of research as a whole is the broad range of behaviours and activities considered under the domain of 'leisure' and 'recreation'. Leisure does not represent a homogenous category of behaviour and there is little consistency in terms of how leisure activities are categorised and defined. There is general consensus that leisure activities are freely chosen and 'non-obligatory' in nature, thereby excluding time spent at school and doing school work after school, time spent on household chores and time spent in paid employment. However, when it comes to non-obligatory activities, categories such as sport, media related activities (including watching television, listening to music, play computer games, reading), performance activities (such as music, dance and drama) and community service activities (such as volunteer work and church groups), have been used.

These activities are sometimes further described in terms of whether they are shared or solitary, active or passive activities, or relaxed or constructive activities. A final important distinction relates to whether free-time activities are structured and organised or unstructured and informal, involving 'hanging out' and socialising (Caldwell and Darling, 1999). Adolescent leisure is not confined

to 'activities', whether sporting or otherwise. Indeed, much adolescent leisure involves hanging around, being with friends and being alone, a time when self and group identities can be explored and defined. The leisure 'lifestyles' of young people in Scotland were explored in Hendry *et al.* (1993) in a large-scale longitudinal study where leisure was defined by each participant in terms of his/her perception of duties, responsibilities and demands placed upon the person within various contexts, e.g. families, school and community. However, the majority of work on adolescent leisure has not adhered to this open-ended approach.

Free-Time Activities and Young People's Well-Being

Much of the research on young people's leisure and free-time activities has been concerned with the link between engagement in various extracurricular activities and well-being. Constructive organised activities are considered a good use of a young person's time because such activities provide valuable opportunities to acquire and practise specific social, physical and intellectual skills, to belong to a socially recognised and valued group and to establish supportive social networks of peers and adults. One comprehensive review of studies indicated that participating in extracurricular activities is associated with long-term indicators of positive development (Eccles *et al.*, 2003). These include lower depressed mood, lower rates of school dropout and higher levels of educational attainment.

In a school-based survey concerning leisure activities and social relations, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) examined the relationship between involvement in school-based extracurricular activities and early school drop-out. Results indicate that engagement in school extracurricular activities is linked to decreasing rates of early school drop-out in both boys and girls. The outcome is observed primarily among students who were at highest risk of drop-out. The association between reduced rates of early school drop-out and extracurricular involvement differed according to competence of the individual. For students in the risk categories, the associated reductions in drop-out were stronger compared to more competent students. It is likely that the relationships were not as pronounced for more competent students because they presumably had one or more existing sources of positive connections to the school.

The authors conclude that extracurricular activities can provide a gateway into the conventional social networks, while simultaneously promoting individual interests, achievements and goals. Thus, school drop-out may be effectively decreased through the maintenance and enhancement of positive characteristics of the individual that strengthen the student-school connection.

Mahoney (2000) further studied school extracurricular activity as a moderator in the development of anti-social patterns. Individuals who became involved in school extracurricular activities were less likely to drop out of school as adolescents or to become arrested as young adults than were similar young

persons who were not involved. This finding confirmed expectations that extracurricular activities continue to have a positive influence beyond the years of formal schooling. The result was observed primarily among persons at highest risk for persistent anti-social behaviour.

How Young People Spend their Free Time

The questions of how much free time young people have and how they spend their free time have generated a considerable body of research. These questions are important since research indicates that specific characteristics of free-time activities matter and can have either a positive or negative effect on development (Larson and Verma, 1999). A comprehensive review of how children and adolescents spend time across the world found that, among children and adolescents in the United States, free-time activities accounted for between 40 per cent and 54 per cent of their waking hours. This figure was slightly lower among European adolescents, where leisure time accounted for a median of four hours per day across twelve European countries (Larson and Verma, 1999).

In terms of how young people spend their free time, Zeijl *et al.* (2001) reported upon highly differentiated patterns of leisure activities among adolescents in the Netherlands, dependent upon age, gender and social class. Almost three-quarters of adolescents in the study had organised leisure activities each week, with younger children (12-13 year olds) having, on average, more leisure appointments during the week than the older group (14-15 year olds). Significant effects pertaining to social class were found, with young adolescents from higher social classes accessing more organised or structured leisure activities than those from lower social classes. Moreover, the study findings indicate that young people's involvement in structured leisure activities did not mean that one had less time for more casual leisure pursuits.

Thus, in terms of unstructured leisure activities, the authors identified distinct dimensions of these leisure activities. These incorporated playing outside and street sports, and computer games, as the youth who were often involved in outdoor activities were also regularly found at home engaged in computer activities. Almost all of the younger boys from the lower social classes fitted into this pattern of unstructured leisure, while pre-adolescent boys from higher social classes engaged in a wider range of activities. Older adolescents focused more on activities such as listening to music, chatting with friends, hanging around, going out and watching television.

Zeijl *et al.* concluded that the age of 13, and entry into second-level school, represents an important transition point for re-defining leisure activity levels and that this transition is often accompanied by decreased participation in both structured and unstructured leisure activities, particularly for girls. Significantly, both boys and girls from the higher social classes had more access to, and opportunities to experience, a greater diversity of leisure activities.

Among 15-year-olds in Canada, Shaw *et al.* (1996) found that the most common free-time activity for both males and females was social activities with friends, including hanging out, talking on the phone and attending parties. Television was the second most common free-time activity, with sports and physical activities ranked third. Listening to music, participating in music activities, and playing various games (e.g. video games) were other listed frequent activities. In a more recent study, George and Chaskin (2004) reported findings from a comprehensive survey of 33,000 ninth-graders (14-year-olds) in Chicago. Over one-quarter of the students participated in structured activities, but many more spent their free time in unstructured leisure activities such as watching television, playing computer games, reading and hanging out with friends.

On the basis of an international review of 45 independent samples, Biddle *et al.* (2003) reported that the incidence of television viewing among young people is just under 2.5 hours per day, and for video game playing is just over 30 minutes per day. Biddle *et al.* (2003) documented diary data from 800 boys and girls aged 12 to 16 in the United Kingdom, which suggested that they watch about 1.8 hours of TV per day during the week and 2.7 hours on weekend days.

Structured Leisure Activities

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of adolescent leisure within the UK was carried out by Hendry *et al.* (1993). This longitudinal study, conducted between 1987 and 1991, initially involved just over 9,000 young people ranging from 9 to 20 years. Overall, a longitudinal sample of over 725 young people in cohorts one and two (age 9 to 12 years) and over 1,000 young people in cohorts three to six (age 13 to 20 years) participated in the three phases of the study. The aim of the study was to explore changing facets of structured leisure pursuits through adolescence, and to examine social and individual factors that influence young people's decisions to join, continue or cease certain activities. Hendry *et al.* (1993) reported upon three transitions in the leisure patterns of youth from early to late adolescence.

The leisure pursuits of early adolescents mainly took the form of organised leisure, including adult-led activities and participation in sport. As organised leisure declined into mid-adolescence, patterns of casual leisure emerged, primarily involving 'hanging around with friends'. This latter pattern became less common after mid-adolescence, and commercial leisure pursuits became predominant, including activities such as going to the cinema, pubs and clubs.

In spite of engagement in particular leisure activities as a result of individual preferences and choices, social class and gender differentiations among various leisure lifestyles of young people were apparent. Thus, middle-class youth were more likely to be involved in organised adult leisure activities and

clubs and less likely to be engaged in peer-oriented casual leisure. Even beyond the school-going years, the authors reported that economic status influenced leisure activities, with unemployed youth less likely to engage in commercial forms of leisure (which they found too expensive) and more likely to spend their free time hanging around or attending youth clubs.

In a similar vein, Ridge (2002) reported that younger children and adolescents from low-income families in three areas of England most frequently spent their free time watching television and playing outside with friends (although watching television was not perceived as a choice; rather it was something to do when there was no other option available to them). Few of the children in this study were attending any clubs or structured leisure activities with their peers. Hendry et al. (1993) also observed a number of gender differences in young people's leisure transitions. Thus, the movement from organised to casual to commercial leisure occurred earlier among females than males, the decline in the use of the local neighbourhood as a leisure site was more marked among the females, and males attended the pub more frequently than females.

However, despite the fact that gender and social class differences emerged, there was overlap in the uses of leisure by males and females from different social classes, indicating that young people's leisure activities and preferences are not neatly categorised according to age, gender and social class (Hendry et al., 2003; Roberts and Parsells, 1994).

Leisure Activities and the Street

Research suggests that the use of the street for leisure activities is often the only option available to children and young people living in poorer areas that lack social and recreational amenities (Matthews et al., 2000; Morrow, 2001). Indeed many studies depict the street as 'left over' space for use by children and young people and highlight that street-based settings may be the only autonomous space that youth are able to establish for themselves (Colozzi and Giovannini, 2003). Hanging around on the streets has also been seen as a form of resistance to adult power and a number of studies have highlighted adults' perceptions of teenagers on the street as a potential threat to public order, or as Valentine et al. (1998, p.7) put it, 'a polluting presence'. Indeed it is claimed in recent times that the popular media has significantly contributed to public alarm about the behaviour of young people who, more often than not, are portrayed as displaying violent, destructive conduct and as tending towards vandalism (Colozzi and Giovannini, 2003).

'Hanging Around'

'Hanging around' on the street has different meanings for young people and adults. As stated earlier, adults often perceive young people hanging around on the street as a potential threat to public order and as a form of resistance to adult control and power (Valentine et al., 1998). 'Problem youth' have been

identified as a group of young people who are not growing up as they should, who live in certain geographical areas, and have identifiable social characteristics, e.g. young people from single parent families (Wyn and White, 1997). This perception of 'problem youth' has contributed to increasing forms of spatial curfews for young people and increasing forms of surveillance of the public spaces traditionally used as gathering places or meeting points for young people.

In a study of the effectiveness of youth work with young people in the UK, Furlong *et al.* (1997) found that teenagers spend more time 'hanging around' with their friends during mid-adolescence. Overall, more than eight in ten females (85 per cent) and more than seven in ten males (74 per cent) reported spending more time hanging around outside than in any other type of free-time activity. Among both male and female participants the most common reasons for hanging around were to talk to friends, because there was nothing better to do and, finally, to get out of the house. The young people regarded hanging around as a normal source of association. However, the authors suggest that there was a sense in which a shortage of alternatives to hanging around leads many young people to spend more time on the streets than they would in ideal circumstances.

The study found that a significant proportion of the young people frequently engaged in forms of behaviour that made them vulnerable to police attention and intervention. The young people reported that they spent time drinking on the streets, smoking cannabis, joyriding and participating in acts of vandalism and the majority of the young people mentioned conflictual relationships with the police. However, only relatively few of the young people were persistent offenders and the most common offences were relatively minor. The study highlighted the positive relationship between attendance at youth groups and time spent hanging around on the street. Those who attended youth clubs had less time to spend hanging around and were occupied at times when they might otherwise have engaged in risky behaviour or indeed become the focus of police attention.

Research has also shown that European cities have increasingly privatised what were formally public spaces (Colozzi and Giovannini, 2003). This erosion and, in some cases, annihilation of public spaces has in effect ejected undesirable 'others', especially young people, out of these locations. The development and regeneration of many urban areas has contributed to the decline in public spaces where young people can hang around. Nor can one ignore the potential threat to the safety of children and young people of increasing levels of traffic. For many young people the street is an independent space where they are able to establish themselves away from the 'prying eyes' of adult society. Studies have shown that teenagers' 'hanging around' is one form of youth resistance to adult power (Corrigan 1979). The street is depicted as an autonomous arena for the socialisation of young people, particularly peer socialisation, and studies continue to find that 'hanging around' on the

street in the company of peers continues to be the preferred free-time activity of young people (Colozzi and Giovannini, 2003).

Studies of Young people and Leisure in Ireland

Within the Irish context, there has been until recently a dearth of research into how adolescents and young people actually spend their free time. As a consequence, we have largely relied on studies that examine other relevant social issues such as marginalisation and poverty to provide us with data on how young people spend their free time; choices of leisure activities predicated by financial constraints; the provision and/or lack of leisure and recreational facilities in the social environment and indeed how growing up and living in socially and economically disadvantaged areas impacts upon free-time choices and behaviours.

School-Based Studies

Whyte (1995) provides baseline data for leisure interests and activities, including structured and unstructured activities of 12-year-olds in Dublin, Belfast and London in 1981 and again in 1992. Participants in the study were drawn from second-level schools serving areas of severe social disadvantage in the three cities. They were asked how they spent their free time in the afternoons, evenings and at weekends. Comparisons were made between locations and between timepoints. Information was also obtained on part-time employment experiences. Leisure activities were similar for all groups and became more similar over time; the greatest differences were between boys and girls.

Fitzgerald et al. (1995), in a quantitative study of the leisure needs of adolescent school children, set out to measure the interest and participation of school children in various leisure activities and to find the correlation between interest and participation. Furthermore, the study aimed to find whether a difference exists in leisure-time pursuits between the sexes. The subjects in the study were 211 school-going adolescents from an urban disadvantaged area of Dublin. The young people were drawn from five schools in the area and the sample comprised 120 young men and 91 young women. The mean age for the sample was 16 years. The findings from the study revealed a high correlation between participation and interest in leisure pursuits, and considerable differences between the sexes. The young men preferred sports, watching television and videos while the young women enjoyed going to discos and talking to friends. The study concluded that the most frequent and preferred leisure activities were found to be passive but social in nature and that less interest was shown in cultural and educational pursuits.

In 2004 the National Children's Office commissioned research into the field of young people's recreation and leisure in Ireland. The research was carried out by de Róiste and Dinneen (2005) who investigated the opportunities, supports and barriers to recreation and leisure. A survey was undertaken with over

2,260 young people, aged 12-18 years, via a random sample of 51 schools across the Irish Republic. A further 100 young people participated in focus groups and interviews, designed to gain an insight into the additional needs of young people with disabilities and socio-economic disadvantage. The authors found that some activities were almost universal across the adolescent population. These included watching television, listening to music and hanging around with peers. The study concluded that among the majority of young people there is a belief that there is little leisure provision for young people in their localities, that significant numbers of young people from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to experience financial barriers to leisure activities and that rural youth experience transport difficulties. Overall, the authors present a positive picture regarding young people's motivation to participate in leisure activities, with significant gender, age, socio-economic and geographical differences.

A study of school children's participation in sport by Fahey et al. (2005) which is based on survey data collected from nationally representative school-based samples of students in second-level and primary schools, found that students in second level schools received less physical education (PE) per week than is recommended in the PE syllabuses for second level, and that primary school students received PE only once a week. The objectives of the study were to examine children's participation in the three main pillars of sport: the PE curriculum in schools, extracurricular sport played in school, and sport played outside the school. The data were gathered using self-completion questionnaires. The sample consisted of 3,527 students in 80 schools at second level and 3,833 pupils in schools at primary level.

The main findings from the study suggest that boys and girls behave differently when it comes to sports. Boys spend more time at and enjoy sports more than girls. A further recurrent theme is the decline in sports participation as students move up through the second-level cycle. Television viewing occupied a substantial part of the students' day, with around 40 per cent watching two to three hours television per day throughout the week. The study also found that girls studied more than boys, especially as examination pressures increased, but watched as much television, thus causing the drop-off in other activities, including sport, to be more pronounced in their case.

The findings from the study also indicate that one in five second-level students was either obese or overweight and that in fifth and sixth classes in primary school, levels of obesity were of a broadly similar magnitude. The authors conclude that while physical activity among children should continue to be strongly promoted it should be tempered by caution, given the limits of what has been achieved and understood in this area in other countries.

Studies of Poverty and Social Exclusion

In a detailed study of how poverty impacts on families and children, Daly and Leonard (2002) conducted an investigation of the situation of 30 Irish families chosen to reflect the broad spectrum of circumstances facing Irish families,

both urban and rural, living in poverty. The range of leisure activities engaged in by young people was one of the questions explored. The authors described how 12 to 16-year-olds from low-income families in Ireland frequently engaged in unstructured leisure activities with little cost attached, such as watching television, listening to music and hanging around with friends. Indeed, only 2 out of 25 teenagers interviewed participated in organised activities. More of the boys were involved in sport, and young people living outside Dublin had a more limited range of activities available to them. Meeting friends and 'just hanging around' was the most frequently cited activity by the young people.

Mayock and Byrne (2004) asked, among other questions, about recreational amenities available to the participants in a qualitative study of adolescent sexual health with 41 early school leavers. They reported that there was a glaring lack of social amenities in the neighbourhoods where the young people lived. Recreational facilities were clearly inadequate and this was true for both rural and urban settings. Among their sample of Irish 13 to 18-year-olds, the main leisure activities included visiting friends, listening to music, watching television and playing computer games. For many of the young people, particularly those living in Dublin, local discos were a preferred way to spend a night out. Rural youth tended to rely less on youth discos and had more access to local pubs where they were not served alcohol but were allowed onto the premises to play snooker or video games. Alcohol and drug consumption featured strongly in the young people's description of their preferred way to spend their free time and overall levels of alcohol and drugs use were high.

Overall, the neighbourhoods from which the sample was drawn were characterised by a lack of leisure amenities and facilities and as a result, unstructured activities, such as playing football and hanging out dominated their social lives. Most of the young people's leisure time was spent hanging around with friends and for a large number alcohol and drug use featured prominently in their descriptions of leisure activities.

Summary

Area-based studies conducted in localities where poverty is a feature have documented important findings on how young people spend their free time and suggest that passive activities such as watching television and listening to music feature predominantly in young people's leisure activities. Furthermore, it appears that young people view drinking and drug use as leisure activities. School-based studies have found that young people receive PE on average once a week and that as young people move through the senior cycle in second level their participation in sports declines. Some Irish studies indicate that young people who live in areas characterised by social and economic disadvantage engage in high levels of risk-taking behaviour, including regular drinking and drug use (Mayock, 2000; Mayock and Byrne, 2004).

This current study, by uncovering much-needed and up-to-date data on how young people spend their free time and by providing their views on the needs that exist in their social environments, has much to contribute to the body of research available in Ireland. The findings from this study can inform the planning of programmes and interventions at local community level by reflecting the reality of young people's social experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to systematically research the free time and leisure needs of young people living in areas of social and economic disadvantage. The study specifically targeted young people aged 12-18 years living in four separate areas designated as disadvantaged under the Irish Government's RAPID programme. The research aimed to:

- Describe the physical and social environments that characterise the four neighbourhoods where the young people live
- Explore how the young people spend their free time
- Identify the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the choices young people make about how they spend their free time
- Provide policy-orientated recommendations that will contribute to the development and provision of appropriate leisure and free-time facilities for young people.

Selection of Sites

The study was concerned with the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged communities. Therefore it was decided to invite participants from four areas designated as disadvantaged under the Government's RAPID programme as these areas have been identified as having the greatest concentration of social and economic disadvantage. The first two areas were drawn from the list of RAPID Strand 1, which targets 25 urban centres with the greatest level of disadvantage, while the latter two areas were drawn from RAPID Strand II, which targets 20 provincial sites in a similar fashion. The four areas selected for study were:

- An inner-city Dublin neighbourhood
- A suburban housing estates outside a city
- A neighbourhood within a large rural town
- An area within a small rural town community.

Descriptions of the sites may be found in Chapter Five.

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment Procedures

Our initial task was to establish contact with RAPID co-ordinators in each of the four areas as a means of identifying any existing youth services and/or youth intervention programmes in each of the target areas. This mapping exercise was used for the selection of possible recruitment sites and as a

means of establishing contact with young people who might be willing to participate in the study. We then made contact with seven second-level schools in the four areas and with various youth clubs/groups and other agencies including FÁS Community Training Workshops (CTWs) and Garda Diversion Programmes with responsibility for intervening in the lives of young people who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

All the schools and organisations we contacted received a detailed description of the study's aims and a written summary of the proposed research strategy. We received a positive response from schools and youth organisations, which may be an indication of the importance attributed to the area of youth leisure and recreation and a recognition of the lack of amenities available to young people in the four geographical areas. We received permission from all seven secondary school principals to visit their schools for the purpose of recruiting young people into the study. We also received permission from four youth workers to visit their youth projects in an effort to gain the consent of young people to participate in the study.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit eighty young people across the selected sites: in inner-city Dublin, a suburban housing estate, a large provincial town and a small rural town. When using a purposive sampling strategy respondents are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable the detailed exploration of the research objectives (Mason, 1996). The sampling strategy aimed to ensure coverage and diversity across key variables including age, gender and geographical location. In relation to age, we targeted young people aged between 12 and 18 years in an effort to capture a variety of views, experiences and needs. With regard to gender, we aimed to include roughly the same number of young women and young men. The inclusion of male and female respondents was considered to be important in order to gain a thorough understanding and representation of the issues pertaining to the free-time and leisure needs of marginalised young women and young men. In terms of geographical location, we aimed to include young people from a variety of locations countrywide, including both urban and rural localities.

Many of the young people, in particular early school leavers and those involved in training programmes, were recruited with the help of an adult gatekeeper, usually a youth worker. In total we recruited twenty-one young men and women from inner-city Dublin, twenty participants from a suburban housing estate, twenty respondents from a small rural town and nineteen from a large provincial town. Each young person received a voucher to the value of €10 as a token of appreciation for the time and effort expended participating in the study.

Ethical Issues

Ethics in social research is concerned with an effort to formulate principles and codes of moral behaviour (May, 2001). This study was mainly concerned with young people's views and therefore special consideration was given to the interests and needs of the young people during the interview process. The principle of informed consent was applied and no interview was conducted without the written consent of the young person's parent or guardian. A letter was sent to parents outlining the purpose and rationale of the study and asking for their permission for their child to be interviewed by a researcher. They were also invited to contact the researcher about any concerns or questions they might have regarding their child's participation.

Once parents had agreed to allow their child to participate in the study a meeting was arranged with the young people at which they were fully informed about the nature of the research and the expectations regarding their participation. We then obtained the informed consent of each young person prior to his/her participation. Time was spent at the beginning of each interview and focus group ensuring that the young people were fully aware of the nature of the study and the confidentiality of the interview. The young people were informed that they could refuse to take part in the study and that if at any time during the interview or focus group they felt uncomfortable and wanted to discontinue or withdraw they could do so. Information provided by the young people was kept confidential and all participants received assurances that their names would not be mentioned in any written distribution of the research findings.

Data Collection Methods

The study adopted a qualitative multi-method approach. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate when the research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted and experienced (Mason, 1996). Qualitative research is defined by inclusiveness and openness and aims to capture the lived experience of the participants and the meaning they attach to those experiences, without the level of constraint that is often used in quantitative approaches (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Our choice of data collection techniques was directly influenced by the primary objective of the study, which was to investigate the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in areas designated as socially and economically disadvantaged. It was felt that this approach would offer insights into the circumstances surrounding various behaviours, activities and lifestyle choices, as well as the difficulties and challenges the young people face in the negotiation of social space in their communities.

A combination of individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions was used in the study to elicit detailed information on the views, behaviours and free-time choices of the study participants. We also provided a camera for

one young person from each research site and requested that they take photographs of any structured activities they attended and/or areas within their neighbourhoods where they 'hang around' or spend their free time. The photographs were to be used as visual aids throughout the report. However, as cameras from two of the sites were not returned to the researchers we were unable to provide a comprehensive photographic documentary of each of the four sites. Each participant also completed a questionnaire covering socio-demographic information.

Individual Interviews with Young People

Individual interviews were semi-structured and commenced with a series of questions about the neighbourhoods where the young people lived, how long they lived there, what it was like growing up there, the provision of structured leisure activities in the area and friendships. This section of the interview was considered significant as a means of contextualising the social environment of the study participants. Furthermore, the information provided us with a means of charting any changes that had taken place in the physical environment during the lifetime of the young person. The subsequent sections of the interview explored with the young people the ways in which they think about free time and leisure, who they spend their free time with, where they spend it, how often and doing what.

We also examined their attitudes to free time and leisure and the factors that influence and shape their involvement in leisure activities. To this end, we questioned the young people about the provision, accessibility and availability of structured leisure and the level of parental involvement and monitoring in their free-time and leisure choices. Interviews were conducted at the site where contact was made with the young person, i.e. in schools and youth clubs. We carried out a total of thirty-seven individual interviews (20 young women and 17 young men). All of the interviews were tape-recorded.

Focus Group Discussions with Young People

The main purpose of the focus group discussions was to draw upon the young people's attitudes and experiences in relation to their free-time and leisure activities. These attitudes and experiences may be independent of the group but being in a focus group exposes the participants to the views of others through dialogue and group interaction (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups were usually comprised of 5-6 participants of the same sex and a total of forty-three of the young people (22 females and 21 males) took part in these discussions.

The focus group discussion interview guide was designed to cover the same topics as the individual interview guide but in a general rather than a specific way. It covered the following areas: social environment; importance of free time; involvement in structured leisure; unstructured leisure; home-based activities; parental influences; and needs assessment. The focus groups were

mediated by two researchers and were audio-taped. The young people who took part in the focus group did not take part in the individual interviews.

We also collected baseline data pertaining to age, gender, living situation, alcohol consumption and drug use, school history, employment status and the availability of and participation in structured leisure activities and youth clubs. The information was gathered using a pre-coded questionnaire that was administered subsequent to individual interviews or focus-group discussions.

Individual Interviews with Service Providers

As part of this initial process we interviewed four service providers, one from each area, and two school staff – a school principal from the small rural town and a Home School Liaison Officer from the inner city area – to ascertain their views on the provision or indeed lack of amenities and facilities in each of the four areas. The service providers were involved in working with young people in a variety of setting, e.g. mainstream youth work, working with ‘at risk’ youth, including young people who had come into contact with the Juvenile Justice System. The interviews were semi-structured and sought in-depth information on a range of issues including the role of the service provider; the aims and objectives of the service; knowledge of the neighbourhood; how they identified the target population; funding and resources; links between the service and the wider community and a needs assessment of the neighbourhood. The interviews were conducted by one researcher and were audio-taped.

Data Analysis

The data were qualitative, consisting of the tape-recorded interviews with the young people and a small number of school staff and youth workers. In addition, some quantitative data were collected through the use of a pre-coded questionnaire; these data were stored and analysed using SPSS. Verbatim transcripts of all the focus group and individual interviews were prepared. The initial stage of the analysis process involved a thorough reading of the transcripts. The views and experiences of the respondents formed the basis of the analysis, and representations of the young people’s views and experiences are supported by displays of excerpts and quotes throughout the study’s findings. Fictitious names are used throughout the findings to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. All other identifiers such as names of neighbourhood, friends, youth group, and so on, have been changed in an effort to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

CHAPTER FIVE: AREA AND SAMPLE PROFILES

Introduction

This chapter presents a brief profile of each of the four areas selected for study, giving a snapshot of the social environments in which the young people live. It then provides a description of the young people who participated in the study, focusing on age, gender, geographical area of residence, and school and work history. We also note their living situation and their parents' occupational status. We present some of their views and perspectives on everyday life in the areas in which they live. Particular attention is given to the provision, or lack of, amenities and facilities available to the young people in each of the four geographical areas.

Area Profiles

Poverty is not uniformly distributed throughout Ireland and several areas, including a number of 'urban blackspots' and 'remote rural areas', have suffered spatial inequalities in terms of social and economic distribution (Fahey and Williams, 2000). Research has shown that while urban local authority tenants have high levels of neighbourhood problems and fewer employment opportunities than others, patterns of disadvantage in terms of social class, education, labour market disadvantage and single parenthood are similar in rural and urban locations (Nolan et al., 2000).

As stated earlier, the localities selected for study have been designated as disadvantaged under the RAPID programme, which incorporates both rural and urban areas. Communities in these areas tend to have high concentrations of low-income families, families tend to live in a poor physical environment as local authority tenants with poor infrastructure and, in general, tend to experience isolation from wider society. Such areas may experience high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, drug misuse and vandalism and often suffer intergenerational educational disadvantage. Whilst all of the four areas included in this study share certain similarities in terms of disadvantage they are also quite diverse. In this section we provide a brief profile of each of the areas selected for study. The information on each individual area was drawn from a number of sources including data from the 2002 Census, local RAPID co-ordinators, local partnership reports and local city and county council websites.

Area 1: Inner-City Dublin

This inner-city area has a long history of social problems including high unemployment rates, low levels of educational attainment and a large percentage of single parent households. Data from the 2002 census show a total population for the area of 12,976. Built in the 1940s as part of the slum

clearance effort by Dublin Corporation, the locality has a number of large local authority flat complexes in a relatively small geographical area. The level of educational disadvantage in this area is high and fewer than 2 per cent of the residents have a third-level qualification. Furthermore, an analysis of early school leaving in the area showed that there are exceptionally high levels of early school leaving and school absenteeism (Rourke, 2001). The area is predominantly working class and unemployment rates have remained consistently higher than the national average.

The heroin epidemic of the 1980s was devastating to this particular community and an embedded drugs culture still prevails in the area. Due to the seriousness of the local drug problem, the area was designated for inclusion in the Local Drug Task Initiative (1996). A Methadone Clinic and Treatment Services are also situated in one of the flat complexes.

Dublin City Council is planning a major physical, economic and social regeneration of the area, including the demolition of at least two of the major flat complexes. As part of the regeneration process, the Council has installed playgrounds in two of the flat complexes, an all-purpose football pitch in one flat complex and a leisure complex for the benefit of all local communities. While this initiative is broadly welcomed, the process of regeneration and renovation is often a slow one, with many of the local authority tenants continuing to reside in run-down, bleak environments. One of the service providers (sp) who works with young people in the inner city described the neighbourhoods where the study respondents live:

Some of the flat complexes they are just so run down, they're bleak, they're dreary, they're scary. There is nothing attractive about them, there are very little green spaces there is very little going on for young people (sp, inner city).

Area 2: Suburban Estates

These two neighbouring local authority estates were developed in the 1970s in order to cope with the housing needs of the wider District Electoral Division (DED) area. Data from the 2002 census show that the area has a total population of 3,659, of which 1,808 are male and 1,851 are female. Census data also inform us that educational attainment is low, with 16 per cent of the area's young people ceasing their formal education before the age of 15 years. The unemployment rate for the area is 42 per cent and many households are reliant on social welfare payments as their main source of income (Codan, 1999). When these estates were developed there was little or no infrastructure and few services were available to local residents.

Since the initial developments, one of the neighbourhoods has become the largest local authority housing estate in the country. However, community development and service provision have not grown in equal measure to the number of dwellings. A local community survey conducted in 2003 highlighted a significant increase in the reported incidence of anti-social behaviour,

including the presence of drugs – particularly heroin – vandalism, joy riding and graffiti. There are also few or no adequate resources available to young people in the area, and this need was clearly recognised and identified by a local youth worker:

They're going out and burning things, robbing cars and all that, if they've nothing to do they'll find it, you know, they'll find something to do and unfortunately sometimes it turns violent. They're off around the estates, they slag whoever they can, they see a car that they'd like to rob ... I know that sounds negative, I know that sounds really, really negative, but I think it's a consequence of having nothing to do. Somehow it manifests itself in anti-social behaviour, it does, definitely (sp, suburbs).

Like many suburban communities, this area largely escaped the heroin epidemic of the 1980s. However, a decade later, the sale and use of heroin and other illicit drugs became a more common occurrence. The area now has a high prevalence of heroin use and a Local Drugs Task Force was established in 1997 to help to combat the drug problem there. Adults in the local communities and indeed professionals on the ground are acutely aware of the consequences of a lack of amenities and facilities for young people. In an effort to address this problem, a number of agencies and community services currently operate in the area. However, they tend to operate independently, with little formal networking or integration between services. Two of the most recent leisure and recreational developments in the area have been the renovation of the local community rooms and the installation of a new leisure complex.

Area 3: Large Town

In relation to the operation of the RAPID programme in larger towns, the focus is generally on specific areas within the towns. The neighbourhoods identified for inclusion in this study were urban locations within the town which had a total population of 15,926, of which 7,739 are male and 8,197 are female (Census, 2002). In urban communities within the town, unemployment remains high and long-term unemployment is a serious issue; educational attainment is low, with only a minority (2,600 or 16.3 per cent) of the town's population classified as attending third-level education.

Census information also shows that the vast majority of people in full-time or part-time work are involved in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual labour. The participants lived in local authority estates experiencing similar social problems to Dublin inner-city and suburban communities. Differing patterns of housing tenure exist throughout the town, with nearly one-third of the overall population renting from the local authority. Problems such as long waiting lists for housing, crime and illicit drug use are prevalent in some of the local housing estates. The town has in fact been portrayed as a 'heroin black spot' by the local and national media.

In line with regeneration under the RAPID programme, some of the estates are undergoing renovation and development.

Area 4: Small Town

In terms of the RAPID programme, a whole town approach is adopted for each small town but the greatest emphasis is given to areas of concentrated disadvantage within the town. Research suggests that much of rural poverty in Ireland today is a product of development trends and policies. Rural poverty is not confined to farmers; landless groups in rural areas have been heavily dependent on employment provided mainly by multinational industries (Murray and Greer, 1993). The total population at the time of the 2002 census was 4,964, of which 2,445 are males and 2,519 are females. The total population in the 0-14 age group is 1,044 – about 21 per cent of the total population. Census figures also indicate that unemployment rates are low. However, a significant number of the town's population currently find employment in the surrounding towns and cities.

Many small rural towns are experiencing a drop in their populations and this small town is no exception. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) has outlined measures aimed at revitalising declining towns. These measures include encouraging new housing developments, and developing infrastructure and public transport networks. One of the more recent developments in the town has been the introduction of a new cultural and entertainment centre. The centre comprises a theatre, two cinemas, an art gallery, a tourist office, a gift shop, an internet café and a family (genealogical) research unit.

The Study's Young People

Age and Gender

A total of eighty young people were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups, for the purpose of this study. Forty-three young people participated in focus group discussions and thirty-seven were interviewed individually. The study sample included forty-two young women (52.2 per cent) and thirty-eight young men (47.5 per cent). Table 1 provides the breakdown of the sample by age, gender and geographical area of residence.

Table 1: Breakdown of Study Participants by Sampling Criteria

Age	Gender	Location
12-15 Years N = 45	Female N = 42	Inner-city N = 21
16-18 Years N= 35	Male N = 38	Suburbs N = 20
		Large Town N=19
		Small Town N = 20

Study participants were aged between 12 and 18 years. Forty-five people (56 per cent) of the young were aged between 12 and 15 years and the remaining thirty-five (44 per cent) were aged between 16 and 18 years. Twenty-one of the young people resided in inner-city Dublin, twenty lived in a suburban area, twenty of the young people resided in a small rural town and nineteen in a large provincial town. The age composition of the study's young people is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Breakdown of Participants by Age (N=80)

Years	No	%
12	3	3.8
13	17	21.3
14	11	13.8
15	14	17.5
16	22	27.5
17	10	12.5
18	3	3.8
Total	80	100.0

Family and Living Situation

Fifty-six of the young people lived with both their parents and twenty lived with one parent, usually their mother. Two resided with their grandparents, one lived with an older sister and one young woman was a single parent cohabiting with her partner who was in prison at the time of interview.

No formal measure of socio-economic status was used during data collection. However, the young people were asked for information on the current occupational status of their parents or guardians. Nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of the participants reported that their fathers were in full-time employment and 76.3 per cent of mothers were also in full-time employment. Of the young people themselves, 36.3 per cent were working part-time, i.e. in the evening time, at weekends or both, as well as attending school; 6.3 per cent were attending Youthreach; and 2.6 per cent were unemployed.

School History

The vast majority of the study's respondents – seventy-two (90 per cent) – were attending school. The remaining eight respondents (10 per cent) had left school between the age of thirteen and fourteen and were contacted with the assistance of local youth workers. All of the young people had completed primary school and the eight early school leavers had attended second-level school for a period of at least one year. Over a quarter (36 per cent) of the young people had been suspended from school, with a smaller number (n=16) reporting multiple suspensions; six of the young people stated that they had been formally expelled from school. This suggests that this particular subgroup of young people had difficulty conforming to school rules and discipline and

exhibited behavioural problems that contributed to suspensions and expulsions.

The majority of the young people we interviewed were acutely aware of the importance of formal educational qualifications and they viewed success in school as critical to their future employment and labour market opportunities. Many described the importance of 'at least having the Leaving', and most stated a commitment to completing second-level education. A small number of participants expressed a desire to go on to third-level education. One young man (ym) had a novel perspective on how to retain young people in school beyond the Junior Certificate:

I think from about fifth year onwards if you're staying on to do your Leaving that maybe there should be some sort of a grant made available to young people ...like an opportunity to get you to stay on in school (ym, small town, age 16).

The most vulnerable group within the Irish labour market and those most prone to unemployment or minimum wage employment are young people who leave school early and/or those who leave school with few or no formal qualifications (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). This group of young people are disproportionately drawn from socially and economically deprived urban and rural areas. Research shows that early school leaving is a process that develops over time and that there are a series of events and circumstances that contribute to this process (Boldt, 1994). The majority of the study's early school leavers left school due to behavioural and/or academic difficulties and, whilst the decision to leave school seemed to be an appropriate one at the time, some regretted this decision. One young woman (yw) who was expelled from school told us of her desire to return to education but felt that this was unlikely because of past behavioural problems:

Like I did want to go back to school but the school wouldn't take me. I'd love to like but its just getting to do it, like how would I do it like, who do I go to and stuff like that. I'd love to have a tutor and go to school and all that, but I know I wouldn't get back into the school so obviously I'm not going back to school (yw, suburbs, age 15).

The desire to return to education was a common theme among the vast majority of the early school leavers we talked to. In another account the young mother we interviewed told how she left school during her pregnancy and how her return to formal education after the birth of her daughter was unsuccessful. However, she hoped that an opportunity to return to school would present itself some time in the future:

I only started it [Junior Cert.] and then I got pregnant and I had to leave. Like they asked me to come back like but I never went back ... well I went back when my daughter was one and I wasn't ready at that time, I

couldn't get me head down. I'm ready now like but I don't know if they'll [school] take me, so we'll have to see (yw, suburbs, age 18).

Research suggests that teenage parents represent a particularly vulnerable group within the educational system (Mc Cashin, 1997). Consequently, several initiatives, including the Teenage Parents Support Initiative, have been put in place to help to ensure that young parents receive the support and assistance they need to continue their education. Such initiatives have been working well in local communities and in one of the schools the Home–School Liaison Officer (HSLO) reported on the importance of such initiatives:

We're [the school] linked into a project, we work with one of their workers and she works with teen mums in the area. We've had a number of kids here who I can honestly say that only for the support they get from her wouldn't have completed their Leaving Cert ... I mean there are very few kids now that we'd lose because of pregnancy and its absolutely brilliant (sp, inner city).

In summary, the vast majority of the study's respondents are still in formal education, with only a minority being identified as early school leavers. Those respondents who remained in school reported no major behavioural or academic difficulties, although a small number did report multiple suspensions. The participants were acutely aware of the need for formal educational qualifications vis-à-vis entry into the labour market. Many of the study's early school leavers expressed regret about leaving school early and a desire to return to formal education.

Community Training Workshops

As discussed above, success in school can have long-term implications for young people's labour-market and life opportunities. Five of the young people we interviewed were attending FÁS-funded Community Training Workshops (CTWs). Participants in the study viewed their involvement in the programme as not only a way of learning a skill, but also as a means of keeping them out of trouble. One young woman told of how she was referred to FÁS by her Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO):

Me JLO went down and he was talking to her [FÁS Manager] and she said I should go down ...I haven't been in trouble since.

[What do you do in FÁS ?]

I'm doing a woodwork course, but you do gardening and you do computers and catering and all different kind of things (yw, suburbs, age 15).

Attendance at CTWs also provided young people with an opportunity to engage in physical and sporting activities. One young man told us how participating in physical exercise helped him to avoid regular drinking with peers.

In FÁS I'm busy nearly every day, like I go hill walking and all.

[Do you like hill walking?]

Yeah, that's what helps me like. I don't go drinking or anything because I'm busy at FÁS like, I go hill walking, gorge walking an all that (ym, suburbs, age 18).

The majority of the young people attending FÁS indicated that their attendance helped them to 'stay out of trouble' at least for the duration of the training course. Others reported that they 'got into trouble' when they left FÁS for the day usually because there was 'nothing else to do'. In general, the young people viewed their attendance at the CTW as a way to keep busy, a way to 'keep them out of trouble' but not as a way of continuing with or furthering their education or acquiring qualifications. At the time of interview most were content to continue with the training provided in the CTW but they appeared to have given little or no consideration to what their future prospects might be when this period of training was over.

Involvement in Part-time Employment

During the interview we asked the young people if they worked outside school hours. As the interviewing process occurred during the school year we were interested in their level of involvement in part-time employment and their rationale for labour-market involvement. We also wanted to establish the impact of part-time employment on free-time and leisure possibilities.

Table 3: Breakdown of Study Participants by Part-Time Employment (N=29)

Age	13-15 Years, N = 7	16-18 Years, N = 22
Gender	Female, N = 12	Male, N = 17
Location	Inner City, N = 7	Suburbs, N = 6
	Large Town, N = 4	Small Town, N = 12
No. of Hours	4-6 Hours, N = 7	7-10 Hours, N = 9
	11-15 Hours, N = 7	16-20 Hours, N = 6
Type of Work	Services Sector, N = 22	Law Office, N = 1
	Babysitting, N = 4	Farm Work, N = 1

Table 3 indicates that, out of a sample of 80 young people, more than one-third (n = 29) were working part-time as well as attending school at the time of interview. This number does not include those young people who were attending FÁS community training workshops. Most who worked part-time were between the age of 16 and 18 years. No major gender differences are evident from the reports of part-time employment. Table 3 also indicates that the largest number of young people working and attending school live in the small town area (n=12), with almost twice as many young people from this study site reporting that they worked part-time compared to the other three geographical areas.

In general, the young people worked between four and twenty hours per week, usually in the evenings or at weekends. The vast majority of the young people (n=22) worked in the services sectors: retail outlets, cleaning, lounge work in local pubs and working in a local snooker hall. Four of the young people did babysitting for family and/or friends, one worked in a local law office and one of the young men worked on a family-owned farm.

Reasons for Part-Time Employment

Many of the young people took up part-time work as a means of generating income to support their weekend leisure activities and to purchase clothes and mobile phone credit. A number stated that they did not want to be a financial burden to their parents but they did want to be in a position to support a 'lifestyle' that centred largely on consumer commodities. A few young men reported in a focus group (fg) discussion that they were employed to clean the local school during out-of-school hours. They worked on average a total of nine hours a week, primarily 'for the money' but also because it 'gives you something to do'.

[What do you work at?]

R1: I work cleaning the school, with Joe and Martin.

[How many hours a week do you work?]

R1: Ten or something.

R2: It's an hour and fifteen minutes on Monday to Thursday and four hours on Friday, so it's nine hours a week.

[Do you like it?]

R2: It gives you something to do and it's money in our pocket at the end of the week.

R3: Yeah, but if they brought in cleaners they'd have to pay them more. The cleaners wouldn't do the work we have to do, it's terrible ... the toilets ... sometimes you nearly get sick (fg, ym, suburbs, age 15-16).

These young men did not consider that working part-time might affect their study time or their overall school performance. Their view of part-time work was seen in pragmatic terms, as a way of making money and keeping themselves busy during out-of-school hours. The young men did not consider working part-time to be an erosion of their free time; instead, it was regarded as taking up time that would otherwise be spent doing little else.

Working part-time strictly to support lifestyle choices was a theme to emerge strongly from the data. The money earned from part-time employment was spent on clothes, cosmetics and as a means of financing free-time activities:

I work maybe one or two evenings during the week and on Saturday. Like the money pays for trips to the gym and nights out. Like if you go out on a Friday night it'd be €10 to get into a club and I suppose you'd

spend another €20 or so on drink, it all depends (yw, small town, age 17).

I got a job with me uncle doing napkins for a hotel and that was grand. It gives me a bit of money but most of that goes on credit for me phone (yw, inner city, age 16).

To summarise, the vast majority reported that their school experiences were positive and a small minority found the experience challenging and difficult. The accounts we received from early school leavers strongly suggest that they regretted leaving school early. The young people who attend CTWs reported positive experiences within their training programmes. The trend towards part-time work appeared to begin in mid-adolescence, and was considered necessary to maintain certain lifestyle choices. The accounts given by the young people demonstrate a perceived necessity to work part-time in an effort to support lifestyles preferences, to allow the scope to purchase leisure activities such as attending the gym, to finance a night out and indeed to allow a modicum of financial independence.

Young People's Views on the Social Environment

In general, irrespective of the geographical location in question, young people reported on the undesirable characteristics of their social environment such as exposure to, and involvement in, illicit drug use and anti-social and criminal behaviour:

There's nothing else to do so I smoke a bit of hash, get stoned, have a laugh ... we end up getting in fights, we end up in trouble, like smashing things, robbing things, that's what its like ... we're bored of sitting around doing nothing (yw, suburbs, age 15).

There are lots of break-ins ...there's no crime as in bank robberies but there is lots of breaking into houses. Like we have two locks at home and mum always locks it at night time. There's been three break-ins in my street (yw, small town, age 17).

Sometimes the gangs that come in like they do be drinking and smoking, abusive and everything. They're not even from the area, they come down to their friends and stuff and just drink around (yw, inner city, age 14).

Reports of anti-social behaviour generated by non-residents were common. Interestingly, these reports were not confined to one particular research site and occurred across all four geographical sites.

People come up here from other areas and start things like ... they fight with people from around here (yw, large town, age 13).

They (outsiders) go around robbing cars, mopeds and mugging people an' all. I wouldn't even mind but they don't even live here (ym, suburbs, age 15).

In the suburban estate where renovation and development were taking place under the RAPID programme, some of the young people expressed concern about the quality of the physical environment and the effects that this had on their day-to-day lives. The following excerpt from a focus group conducted with a group of young women highlights the problems associated with the development of a large green field in the area. The young women have little or no concept, information or understanding in relation to why the development is taking place; to them it is just a major inconvenience to residents and an eyesore:

[What is your opinion on living here in your estate?]

R1: I think they're fucking up the area.

[Who is?]

R1: All the councillors and that.

R2: You can't walk anywhere. There used to be a big field and now all you have where the buggies are, you have to drag them through muck.

R3: The councillors, they get a big digger and they dig wherever they like. Like they dig a hole and they don't follow up on it and then they drive all over the field and leave big tracks, muck tracks and everything. It's awful. (fg, yw, large town, age 13-15).

In the small town, an important element contributing to the young people's perception was that of employment opportunities. The young people reported that many local people have to travel outside the town to find employment and that this has consequences for the local economy. The young people were highly critical of this situation and apportioned blame to government policies and also to local businesses, which they perceive as protecting their own interests to the detriment of the wider community. The following excerpt was taken from a focus group discussion with five young men from the town:

R1: I don't believe this town is ever going to take off like, it seems to be falling down.

R2: The town is always left behind, the other places in the county are booming at the moment, like the town next to us they've been getting everything, they've almost every major fast-food restaurant and a good lot of brand name shops as well.

R3: That's because all the chippers in town all came together and bought up buildings so that the likes of McDonald's couldn't come in.

R1: See that's why the town is getting left behind. Like I'd say nearly 80 per cent of the people in the town have to work outside the town (fg, ym, age 15-16).

However, it would be wrong to assume that the interviews we conducted with the respondents focused only on the negative aspects of life in the areas. When asked what they liked best about their area of residence, the young people invariably talked about their peers and the importance of friendships. They also sometimes mentioned some positive changes that have taken place in their communities over time. In the small town, for example, the cultural and entertainment centre was seen as a positive development by the young people we interviewed:

The Centre came in now and that's fairly big because before that we used to have to go to the next town to go to the cinema. There's the theatre there and there's Art and Culture and all that, that I wouldn't be too much into now (ym, age 15, small town).

They were also aware of changes for the better in relation to the drugs trade:

Well to be honest there was loads of drugs coming in and out years ago. There's still a bit like but the committee are sorting that out (ym, inner city, age 13).

The vast majority of the young people described strong attachments to their communities despite the negative characteristics they simultaneously described. At times, they gave contradictory accounts of life in their communities. On the one hand, they reported that they did not like living in the area while, on the other hand, they frequently stated that they would not like to move. Others had difficulty articulating what it was they did not like about their neighbourhoods:

I don't really like the area, I don't really like the place to be honest.

[What is it about the area that you don't like?]

I don't know, I don't really like the place ... I don't know. I like me friends though ... I don't particularly like the area. It's not that bad though (ym, inner city, age 14).

[What's it like living in your area?]

It's sort of quiet and sometimes it can be noisy. I don't really like it. I don't know like it's not hell, it's alright (yw, large town, age 14).

The young people were also acutely aware of the negative perceptions of 'outsiders' who, they believed, held negative views of the area where they lived, and of its residents. This often resulted in a further sense of

marginalisation and stigmatisation among many of the young people and several expressed resentment of these outside misconceptions:

If you say you're from the town like they'd (outsiders) be taking a step back. It's not very popular to say you're from the town, you're seen as a tough person (yw, small town, age17).

Like I think that people think that everybody here is real bad and that the place is dirty an all that, but it's not true. Like they say 'oh they're horrible flats' and they think everyone is looking for trouble, but it's not true, like they don't know us like (ym, inner city, age 14).

I don't know like ... it makes you feel different compared to everyone else ... because they think they're better than us because just the name of where we live, we're always getting called scumbags (yw, suburbs, age 15).

Yeah, like they call us knackers, they say the town is full of knackers and we're not like, you know. Like this would be people that don't even know us like (ym, large town, age 16).

The young people were extremely 'clued in' to the unsavoury reputation of their communities and the negative image of the people who live within these neighbourhoods. This increased the sense of isolation and marginality, which is exacerbated by the continued negative outside perceptions of their areas.

Summary

The vast majority of the study respondents lived in large local authority housing estates and in local authority flat complexes. A minority of the young people lived in privately owned homes and these were largely concentrated in rural areas. When asked about the provision of free-time and leisure amenities available in their area the young people's accounts revealed a conspicuous lack of social amenities within their neighbourhoods and towns. The most common response among the participants was 'there's nothing to do' and this was the response across all four geographical locations.

The young people reported that there were few or no amenities for teenagers and this led to reports of boredom, which in turn sometimes led to involvement in anti-social behaviour. 'Outsiders' negative perceptions of the young people and the areas in which they live appear to reinforce a sense of isolation and marginalisation among many of the study's participants.

CHAPTER SIX: FREE-TIME AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Introduction

International research has highlighted how youth from low-income backgrounds are disadvantaged with respect to their participation in leisure activities. Reasons that have been suggested for this situation include expense and a lack of recreational amenities in the social environment. Research has also shown that teenagers often pursue activities which include experimenting with alcohol and tobacco and that they prefer to do so away from the watchful gaze of authoritative adults (Hendry and Kloep, 2003).

In this chapter we examine the importance of free time to the young people in this study. We pay particular attention to the availability of structured leisure activities in the four selected geographical areas and levels of involvement by the young people. We also explore with the participants their engagement in casual leisure activities such as 'hanging around'.

Importance of Free Time

The value and importance of the young people's free time was apparent throughout the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Two main themes emerged from the young people's narratives in relation to the meaning they attached to free time. The first theme centred on the contrast between free time and other activities (such as going to school) that were obligatory. In particular, a number of the young people highlighted the stress and pressure they experienced at school and how they valued their leisure time in terms of opportunities for relaxation and rest, and respite from school-related pressure that it offered:

It's [free time] very important. You need to kinda relax, you know the way you can be kinda stressed in school, well not stressed but, you're always under pressure because we get these monthly assessments and they get sent home and everything so you're constantly trying to keep up with the work and things like that, so you need time to relax and unwind after the week in school (yw, small town, age 16).

Within this theme, free time was valued as an opportunity to exercise some choice over how time was spent, whether this involved spending time alone, or with friends. Despite complaints of boredom or of there being little to do in their free time, the young people could exercise choice, albeit within limited constraints, over how and with whom to spend free time:

You need to have space to do what you want to do, no rules or anything (ym, suburbs, age 18).

A second theme that emerged was concerned with free time as a context for the development of peer relationships and friendships. Within this theme free time was valued as a chance to spend time with friends and to keep each other informed about what was happening in each other's lives. It was also seen as an opportunity to make new friends:

I think it's very important to socialise, important that you're not hanging around on your own and people make friends. Like in the leisure centre, people meet new people, so I think it's very important (yw, small town, age 13).

Involvement in Structured Activities

International literature defines structured leisure as having regular participation schedules, adult-led activities and an emphasis on skills development (Hendry et al., 1993; Coatsworth et al, 2005). Involvement in structured leisure activities is perceived to be particularly important since it provides young people with opportunities to explore and develop their autonomy and identity. Through participation in structured leisure activities young people acquire knowledge of their social environment, practise social skills and explore a variety of family, peer and community roles (Hendry et al., 1993). Structured leisure activities are promoted as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour as they take up a large percentage of the free time available to young people.

In this section we provide an overview of young people's participation in structured leisure activities. We identify structured activities, based on consultation with youth workers, under three broad categories: community-based clubs, mainstream youth groups and 'at risk' youth groups.

- Community-based clubs including activity-based clubs and sports groups. These are clubs which are organised and staffed by local community volunteers; the cost of attendance is minimal and they take place in local community rooms/centres. Activities include sports and arts and crafts.
- Mainstream youth groups. These generally receive government funding through various government departments and are staffed by professional youth workers
- 'At Risk' youth projects. These are also government funded and target young people who are vulnerable to drug involvement, early school leaving and/or those who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Table 4: Involvement in Structured Leisure by Geographical Location

Clubs	Geographical Area	Members
8	Inner-City Dublin	14
2	Suburban Estate	10
4	Small Town	8
4	Large Town	3

Table 4 indicates that all four geographical areas had some form of structured activities. However, not all of the young people we interviewed were aware of the existence of such activities and very few of the study respondents were members of clubs. The inner-city area provided the highest number of reported clubs (n=8) and a corresponding level of membership. Both rural areas provided an equal number of clubs (n=4), with varying levels of take-up by the young people. The area with the lowest level of reported clubs (n=2), with a high level of participation, was the suburban estate. The young people reported that many of the clubs targeted a younger age group and that the cut-off age was usually thirteen years. Consequently, there was little or no provision for any young people above that age.

Community-Based Clubs

Structured leisure activities that are community or school-based are usually free of charge, or the payment involved is nominal. Community-based clubs offer activities such as homework clubs, computer clubs, local football teams and dance clubs. School-based activities are, in the main, orientated towards sports, particularly for young men, and include Gaelic football, hurling, soccer, rugby and basketball. Community-run activities usually occur once a week and take place in local community centres or halls, which are in many cases in need of serious renovation.

Community response to the need for recreational outlets for young people is often the only provision available. These clubs fund-raise within the community and/or a nominal fee is charged for attendance. Our data revealed that attendance at local clubs can leave young people frustrated with the quality of the services provided and, although the financial cost is minimal (less than €1), the young people complain of a lack of value for money:

At Mary Byrne's she's pure robbery that woman ... it would be like fifty cents and she says it's to buy things, but you come back the next week and it's the same thing. Like if you're looking for colouring pencils and there's none she'd say 'well sit there and do nothing', you'd have better fun sitting on the steps outside. I wouldn't mind but you pay your money to do this (yw, large town, age 13).

This account reveals, to some extent, the inadequacy of many such local community clubs. This is not due to a lack of commitment or effort on behalf of the local volunteers who run the clubs but rather to a lack of funding and experience. These factors also have a bearing on the state of the premises where activities take place. Local people are very committed but may lack training and support; they are not always well informed about how to provide a service that meets the expectations of the young people who attend and this gives rise to dissatisfaction. The exceptions are the annual summer projects, which are organised each year, usually in the month of August.

Summer Projects

Participation in summer projects was generally age-specific, attracting mainly young people in early adolescence (12-14 years):

Every year like we have a summer project and we go to Skerries, and the beach an' all and we have competitions and games an all (yw, inner city, age 12)

There does be trips an' all, we do whatever. At the end of August like for three weeks they have a big festival, you know, bouncey castles, candy floss all that. It goes on for days it does (ym, inner city, age 14).

Once young people have progressed into mid-adolescence, they tend to move away from many structured activities, including summer projects which they considered to be 'for babies' and younger teenagers. The following excerpts are taken from an individual interview with a 15-year-old girl and a focus group with 15 and 16-year-olds from the suburban site:

[Did you join the summer project?]

No it's only for babies ... for younger kids really. Like now I like to go off and do me own stuff, know what I mean? (yw, inner city, age 15).

R1: I used to go to the summer project but not any more like but it did like, the summer project used to be very good.

R2: It's for the younger kids really. They say you can go up until you're sixteen but you wouldn't see many 16-year-olds going. If they were doing a trip to Clara Lara or somewhere like that I might go but other than that I wouldn't bother (fg, suburbs, age 15-16).

Summer projects seem to be very much an urban phenomenon and the rural areas did not appear to have an equivalent. The young people we talked to in the large town reported that a carnival comes to the town every year but this is usually in March or April and coincides with the Confirmation of young people in the town. The following excerpt was taken from a focus group conducted with five 13-year-old girls:

[Can you tell me a little bit about the carnival?]

R1: The carnival is brilliant, they come here every year.

[When does it come?]

R2: Well they come down sometime during April. When the Confirmations are on like, so that they can get the money off them like.

R3: Yeah, they come for two or three weeks like but that's not long enough because they're getting so much money off us like they could do a few more days.

R1: Yeah it would be deadly if they had it every single day like ... and we could go down there every day.

[Would that not be a bit expensive if you went every day?]

R5: Well normally it's €2 a ride and to get on everything. Like they have the Bumpers, the Waltzers, the Wall of Death and the Rave Wave.

R2: The Rave Wave is brilliant and like when it's coming to the end like they only charge €1 so it's grand like, and sure if you have no money you can still go down there with your friends like (fg, yw, age 13).

In this account the girls drew attention to the fact that the Carnival comes to the town at a time when certain young people will have access to 'Confirmation money'. Yet, this realisation did not hamper or impede their enjoyment and the girls expressed their desire to have the Carnival stay for a longer period. In other words, they were willing to pay to have somewhere enjoyable to go, and even if they could not afford the rides the Carnival site was still a place to hang out and meet friends. Expenditure was secondary to the benefits of having a central meeting place that offered variety from 'hanging around' the estates.

Sports Clubs

International research has found that there are substantial health benefits to be gained from physical exercise. Accepted international standards recommend that people should aim to achieve at least thirty minutes of moderate activity for a minimum of five days a week as a good basis for good health (Fahey et al., 2003). With this in mind, we asked the study participants about their involvement in sporting activities. In the small rural town, involvement in sporting activities was through membership of sports clubs and teams. Membership fee was usually €20 a year and this went toward the cost of insurance and transport costs involved when playing 'away' matches. Most of the young men we interviewed were members of a sports club. They spent the majority of their free time training for or taking part in football, hurling or soccer matches. The clubs also arranged trips away for the young people:

[Are there any youth clubs or groups in the area?]

Sports clubs yeah, there's loads of sports clubs.

[What sports do you play?]

Hurling, football, soccer, basketball ... they're great like. The club I go to for hurling and football they bring us on a lot of trips. They brought us up

to Dublin to watch Compromise Rules. It was great, we met a lot of Australian people (ym, small town, age 13).

The majority of the clubs were organised and run by volunteers from the town and this continued support and commitment on the part of local residents is vital to the existence of the clubs. The clubs tended to be centrally located and the furthest the young people had to travel was usually a ten-minute walk. However, the young people pointed to some difficulties associated with lack of adequate playing fields for training and the time commitments of the local volunteers:

I'm in a Gaelic club just up the road there and a hurling club. I play soccer in the town and I play rugby with a club just about ten minutes outside the town. We have training pitches but there's no lights so we can't train in the evenings and sometimes the trainers can't make it because they have jobs, so (ym, small town, age 15).

The above quote highlights the tenuous nature of community-run groups, which very much depend on the commitment of local community volunteers for their existence. The young people recognise and acknowledge the contribution of local volunteers and this is reflected in their dedication and commitment to the sports clubs in the town:

They're really good, the people that run the clubs like. In the winter they take us to the complex and let us play indoor hurling so it's very well organised.

[Is there anything about the club you'd change if you could?]
New jerseys, the old ones are woolly and when you wear them they tickle you (laughs) (ym, small town, age 14).

Young Women, Sports and 'Body Image'

As discussed previously, levels of participation in sports clubs in this small town was high, at least among the young men we interviewed. The young women we talked to were not as inclined towards involvement in sports clubs, which appeared to cater for the needs of young men to a greater extent. Although the young women were less likely to engage in sports than their male counterparts, some were involved in school-based sporting activities:

I'm on the basketball and hockey teams in school but like I'm kinda rare because none of my friends they wouldn't be interested in sports ... I think though, I think people should encourage sport a lot more in girls (yw, small town, age 17).

A lack of interest in sporting activities was not the only reason why some young women declined to become involved in physical activities especially in an open arena such as the gym. For many of the young women we interviewed, 'body image' played a significant role in their reluctance to engage

in physical and sporting activities. Body image is a matter of some concern and can prove a major constraint to the participation of young women in sports. It is also a major issue for adolescent girls and research shows that many teenage girls are unhappy with their physical appearance. This situation is very often perpetuated by unrealistic body ideals portrayed in the popular mass media (Shaw, 1991, Paxton et al., 1991).

Young women who are self-conscious about their physical appearance often limit their participation in sports, especially in public places, in an effort to avoid embarrassment. The vast majority of the young women we talked to told of the pressures of having to look a certain way, often citing the difficulty of conforming to the 'Barbie Doll' image. They were also very self-conscious about exercising in public, particularly if they were 'overweight' or felt that they did not conform to an idealised body image:

I don't like doing sporting activities as I have a weight problem, and I don't enjoy sports as a result. I don't like people to look at me ... I don't like exercising in front of other people. I don't find, any bit of sweating and exercising in front of other people, I don't find any of that attractive, I don't find it attractive (yw, small town, age 15).

The reluctance among young women to take part in physical exercise was not specific to the small town site. Young women from the other three research sites also reported a reluctance to participate in sport, including PE in school. One girl told us how she often feigned illness to avoid taking part:

I never did it [PE]. I'd say I was sick or something an all, so I used to just sit down and watch them (yw, suburbs, age 15).

This finding conforms to the international literature, which suggests that young women who are self-conscious about their appearance may limit their participation in some physical activities to avoid embarrassment. Public embarrassment affects both the frequency and quality of female participation and enjoyment of many sports and physical activities. In terms of the existence of the provision of mainstream youth clubs in the town, the young women reported that there was a youth club but they weren't sure where it was located and they had limited information on the activities it offered. The follow excerpt was taken from a focus group conducted with young women from the town:

[Are there any youth clubs in the town?]

R1: There is yeah, down on ... I don't know what street it's on but, there is one.

[Do any of you go there?]

R2: Don't know very much about it to be honest.

R3: I think people can come in from wherever they want to. I think so but I'm not sure though.

R1: I think there's one machine like but I don't think there's a pool table.

R4: There's information on things. When I went there, there was posters all over the walls. I don't really know that much about it but there was a lot of adults in there (fg, yw, small town).

The description provided was of a youth information centre and not a youth club, at least not one where young people can come together to take part in activities. This form of youth club did not seem to exist in the small town or, if one did exist, the young people we interviewed were not aware of it.

To summarise, community responses to the need for recreational outlets for young people are very often the only provision available and this was certainly the case for the young people we interviewed. However, due to a lack of funding much of the equipment in local community-run clubs is very basic. Our data revealed that attendance at many local clubs can leave young people frustrated with the quality of the service provided and, although the financial cost of attendance is minimal (less than €1), the young people complain of the lack of value for their money. Participation in sports was determined to a greater extent by gender than by geographical location or indeed age, with young men reporting a far greater uptake in sporting activities and sports club membership. For many of the young women participation in physical activities and/or sport was something to be endured and avoided rather than enjoyed.

Mainstream Youth Clubs

The youth workers who operate in the four site areas readily acknowledge the lack of free-time and leisure facilities and amenities for young people in their areas. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that setting up a youth club is the remedy to this situation. The provision of premises in which to conduct a youth club is merely an initial step. The youth workers must then inform the local community of the existence of the club. This often involves canvassing door to door in an effort to recruit young people. Young people who have problematic relationships with authoritative adults often meet this attempt at recruitment with suspicion. One youth worker described her attempts to engage with local youth:

[Did you target a specific group of young people?]

Yeah, I set out to target those kids that are hanging around every night. The ones that are in your face. I've done outreach work where I've walked around the estate and there's gangs of girls and boys drinking and talking and I'm saying we're doing youth groups or whatever ... but it's been very hard to target them.

[So how did you eventually get them on board?]

I bribed them loads (laughs). I started ordering pizzas and told them to follow the smell ... and I'd stand outside and have a chat with them and just try and coerce them into coming in (laughs) (sp, suburbs).

The above quote does a lot to dispel the notion that the needs of young people can be catered for by providing a service or, indeed, by responding in a particular way to a perceived need. This youth worker was ultimately successful in encouraging young people to attend the group. Nonetheless, she admits that she continues to struggle to engage the young people in discussion and participation and notes how difficult it is for the young people to maintain eye contact when talking with her. She feels confident that the situation will improve 'once the trust is there'. In general, the young people who attend the club enjoy their time there and reported that it was 'better than hanging around':

[What kind of things do you do here in the club?]

We do relaxation and we go to the cinema and we go out bowling or something like. Then some days we sit down and listen to music and tell stories and stuff like that.

[Do you enjoy it?]

Yeah, it's a great laugh it is. I don't know just being here and being around everyone (laughs).

Whilst it is clear from this account that there is a range of activities and events organised for the young people, one young man we talked to focused on what he was not allowed to do in the club, placing an emphasis on the rules and codes of behaviour in the club:

[Can you tell me a little bit about the club and what you do there?]

Yeah, it's good, it's better than doing nothing, standing outside like a fool, standing around corners or something. I suppose it's like anywhere really, any other building, no drinking, no smoking, good behaviour and not speaking bad language. A bit like school really (ym, suburbs, age 18).

The initial reluctance on the part of the young people to be part of the club or, indeed, to take part in structured leisure activities would seem to indicate that there is a certain level of mistrust among some young people towards adults. Indeed it may be that the young people have had problematic relationships with what they perceive to be authoritative adults. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, the relationships between some of the participants and school staff have been less than ideal. This is reflected in the fact that some of the young people we interviewed had multiple suspensions or were expelled from school. Some of the young people also had conflictual relationships with parents:

Like they're [parents] saying to me well you're this and you're that and like I'm arguing with them because of what I'm doing and what like I'm getting meself into like, so they're like arguing with me all the time. As I start getting into trouble an all they're looking at me as well as a scumbag (yw, suburbs, age 15).

Research has shown that young people living under circumstances of family conflict may experience anger, which in turn may increase their likelihood of engaging in anti-social behaviour (Aseltine et al., 2000; Sigfusdottir, et al., 2004). Compas and Hamman (1994) suggest that a persistently sad or angry young person, overcome with feelings of worthlessness or pessimism, may be prone to outbursts of anger and can become involved in fights in social arenas such as school and have difficulty complying with societal rules and regulations.

However, not all youth clubs/groups encountered the same difficulty with recruiting young people as this particular youth club and it may well be that this problem is specific to this particular area. This, once again, highlights the fact that young people are not a homogenous group and that specific social problems relate to specific geographical areas. The provision of structured leisure activities in the inner-city site varied depending on which of the flat complexes the young people lived in.

Overall provision of structured leisure was more developed in this site than in any of the other three. There could be a variety of reasons why this is so, including a response to the devastation visited upon these communities during the heroin epidemic of the 1980s. Research clearly demonstrates that drugs were easily available and widely used in inner-city Dublin communities (Mayock, 2000) and estimates from the late 1990s indicate that inner-city Dublin localities had the highest number of opiate users in the Dublin metropolitan area (Comiskey, 1998). As a consequence and as a possible reaction to this situation, community activists began looking at ways to engage the young people in positive activities and away from risky behaviour. However, provision of structured leisure activities remains sporadic. One of the youth workers in the field provided an insight into the overall provision of structured leisure in this area:

There are those areas that are well catered for, then just around the corner in one particular area there is a summer project and that's all ... and sure at this age they're too old for the summer projects, besides I really don't think the older ones would buy into it anyway (sp, inner city).

However, there is a variety of clubs and groups available to the young people and, importantly, they cater for a variety of different age groups. Provision for a younger age group revolved around after-school groups and homework clubs with an activities component built in:

Well there's more clubs to go like for kids my age. There's the homework club and that's for people in 6th class [primary school] but like you go out with them as well, like to the pictures and for instance I'm going ice-skating next week (yw, inner city, age 12).

Like they have a club that I go to and like every few months they bring you out somewhere, or they do have homework clubs and a computer club where you make, eh, you know like CDs or something like that, that you can go to every Tuesday night (yw, inner city, age 14).

Well I have an arts group I go to every Wednesday, there's like a café for the youth every Monday night and Tuesday night. There's a drop-in on a Monday night and you can go in there and play games or whatever ... there's computer classes where you can go on the internet, you know, play games on the internet an all that (ym, inner city, age 15).

There's a computer club there is, there's day care centres, there's the Teen Club. Then there's a new young man's group starting up for us, there's Brazilian martial arts, there's the youth club and you pay a tenner for the whole year and they bring you on trips, say to places like Trabolgon (ym, inner city, age 16).

Youth clubs are available (most nights) to the young people in the inner-city site and many have opening hours that extend to late evening. Our data also suggest that once the clubs closed many of the young people were at a loss to know what to do with their free time. The young people, particularly the young men, appeared to have difficulty in finding alternative and constructive means of occupying themselves. Many of the young men bemoaned the restriction of club opening hours:

Yeah, like there's clubs on most nights but they're only on for an hour and then you're just sitting around, everyday there's nothing to do, like in the evening you're just sitting around, what the fuck is that, you know (ym, inner city, age 15).

Overall, provision of mainstream youth clubs and groups varied from site to site. The main beneficiaries and indeed participants in the clubs tended to be younger (12-14 years), where provision in the form of after-school and homework clubs was available.

'At Risk' Provision

The positive impacts of youth clubs for youth who are 'at risk' are well documented (Furlong et al., 1997). Research evidence suggests that such programmes offer a sense of community, promote self-confidence and self-esteem, offer positive role models and provide opportunities for positive leisure activities. Three of the sites (the inner-city site, the suburban site and the large town site) had groups and clubs that specifically targeted 'youth at risk'.

We're funded to work with the most 'at risk' young people in the community. The core of our work is about trying to reach the ones that are gonna end up on drugs, the ones that are dropping out of school

early, the ones who are in the criminal justice system. We do that in a variety of different ways and we use a variety of different programmes to do that. We also do the more 'normal' sort of educational, sexual health programmes, stuff like that, social development skills, so that's what we're doing (sp, inner city).

To the best of our knowledge, this type of provision did not exist in the small town site. Youth clubs/groups for the 'at risk' youth cover a broad range of activities from the provision of informal leisure pursuits to preventative work with young people who are vulnerable to drug involvement, interventions for early school leavers and programmes that target young people who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system. One such set of initiatives is Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs).

Participation in the GYDPs is voluntary and the primary target group is young people who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system and are considered 'at risk' of remaining in the system. The GYDPs included in this study have as the primary aim the engagement of young people in alternative constructive activities to assist them to develop their full potential:

The main thrust of the job would be to work with young people that are within the juvenile system. Either they would have been JLOd (Juvenile Liaison Officer) or they are on the verge of being JLOd and our job would be to try and divert the young people away from juvenile crime (sp, suburbs).

We provide a range of programmes to young people who are experiencing difficulty in the home, school and social situations and work with those who are involved in crime (sp, large town).

Following the referral of a young person to the project a programme is designed based on individual needs. The needs of the young people who are referred to such projects are more intensive and specialised than mainstream youth work can cater for and the programme also involves participating in leisure activities:

We do like, like you have a choice of bowling or snooker or go up to the golf course or go up to the leisureplex and all that. Or you can make the odd activity like every two weeks or go canoeing, absailing or rock climbing and that (ym, suburban, age 14).

The projects also offer the young people the opportunity to continue their education and a number of them reported that they had completed at least two Junior Certificate subjects while attending the project. One issue on which all of the service providers were agreed was that the exclusion or expulsion of young people from the service was to be avoided. Even in the most extreme circumstance the workers employed conflict resolution to deal with extreme behaviour and potentially conflictual situations:

Well I'll tell ya I'm working in this game for 23 years and I've never barred a young person ever. I might ask a young person to leave, like I'd say 'I'm not able to handle you at this moment, come back tomorrow,' and that's the policy and the message within the project. You'd only put down limitations if someone was violent but we never bar anyone (sp, inner city).

In summary, our data indicate that there are differing levels of 'at risk' provision in the four geographical areas. In general, irrespective of age or gender, young people unanimously reported a glaring lack of social and recreational amenities available to them. This is arguably a less than ideal situation in areas where there is little or no positive stimulation in the social environment and where there is a tendency towards risk behaviour, including alcohol and drug misuse.

Leisure Complex Facilities

The sites selected for study are designated as disadvantaged, and so they have been targeted for regeneration and revitalisation. Many of the young people made reference to the changes in their communities due to regeneration and in fact the process has attracted some private enterprises that have set up leisure complexes in the areas. However, what began to emerge from the data was that while, in theory, leisure complex facilities were installed for the benefit of the local community, a large number of young people living in these areas were excluded or barred from using the premises. The following quote from a focus group discussion with five 15-year-old female respondents helps to highlight this issue:

[Do you ever go to the leisure complex?]

R1: Yeah, there's one up the road but we're not allowed into it.

R2: You have to be over 18.

R1: Yeah, but like it was supposed to be built for us years ago and we're not allowed do anything in it and that'd be the only thing I'd be interested in going to.

[So who actually uses the complex then?]

R3: People that aren't even from the area, like there's all different people from everywhere that goes.

R1: It's an open place like, but they should at least let the people from the area go as well ... do you know what I mean (fg, yw, age 15).

There's a gym up there and it was set up for us, and now if we want to go to in sometimes he doesn't even let us ... they say 'oh no, we've booked it out for adults' but it was set up for us, not for adults (ym, large town, age 16).

This exclusion from using the locally-based facilities available in the leisure complex was more prevalent in the inner-city and suburban sites and larger town than it was in the small rural town. The young people from the small town made good use of the facilities and amenities the complex made available to them and often the lack of finance was the only reason for not availing of what was on offer. The older participants in the study, many of whom earned money by working part-time on weekends or in the evenings, pursued this more commercial type of leisure:

... the complex is very good as well, the sports complex, it's really well equipped and there's every thing you could want there, you know? There's the swimming pool and myself and two of my friends have started going to step aerobics and that.

[How expensive is it to go to the sports complex?]

It's not that affordable, it's like a fiver an hour ... but I work in the local shop on Saturdays and like it's not much but at least I don't have to be going to my parents for money (yw, small town, age 17).

Overall, in terms of the leisure complex the frequency of usage by the participants was determined by the availability of the premises after adults and club bookings were accommodated. The irony of this situation was not lost on the young people involved and in many ways accentuated their sense of marginalisation and exclusion.

Unstructured Leisure Activities

During interview we asked the young people to tell us about their unstructured leisure activities. The young people made a very clear distinction between this 'unstructured' free time and more 'structured' leisure activities. 'Unstructured' free time meant not being at school, at work, or attending youth groups or sports clubs. For younger respondents (12-14 years), single-sex peer groups were the norm, while mixed-group gatherings were more prevalent among older teenagers (15-18 years). Those young people who were involved in romantic relationships were more likely to spend most of their free time with their boy/girlfriends:

[Who do you spend most of your free time with?]

Mostly my boyfriend, like on the weekends mostly on Saturday's we'd go to the cinema. Or we'd go the pub and stuff. Although I never have to buy a drink or anything, my boyfriend buys all that for me (laughs) (yw, small town, age 17).

I go out with me fella and like he does be with his friends and like his friends have girlfriends and I do be with them and just go off with them like. We go down to the local park and just sit in there on the swings, just sit in there. Then I always just walk around to the shop, like every

day I nearly do that, just walk around to the shop for a little walk (yw, inner city, age 17).

For the majority of the younger teenagers, a preferred way to spend their free time was visiting friends in their homes. Young people 'hung out' in their bedrooms, where the young men generally played computer games on a Playstation or X box while the young women preferred to listen to music, talk or watch television. All of the young people had televisions in their bedrooms and the vast majority had a Playstation or a PC. The participants who shared a bedroom with a sibling usually had agreements about the use of this space and, if it was occupied the young people opted to 'hang around' on the street:

Yeah like me friends come over all the time ... me da works in the markets and he brings me home games for me Xbox. I have a load of games and like me friends come and play. The most I'm allowed in me bedroom is three people (ym, inner city, age 13).

Apart from the time spent in their bedrooms with friends, young people did not usually opt to spend their free time indoors in their own homes. Time spent with parents and siblings was seen as more of a duty than a chosen way to spend free time and it usually occurred when the young people came in at night-time and watched television with their parents:

[Do you spend much free time with your parents?]

When I was a kid I used to. Some weekends I used to go the pictures with me da. That was years ago though, you grow out of that stage (ym, suburbs, 15).

The amount of time the young people spent with family was largely determined by age. The younger the participant the more likely he/she was to spend time at home with parents and siblings. This time involved watching television, going on a Sunday outing and/or, in the case of the young women, going shopping with their mothers. As the young people moved towards mid-adolescence they generally spent more time with their friends and the peer group assumed a more important role in their social lives:

[Who do you spend your free time with?]

R1: My friends.

R2: Friends, yeah.

R3: Most of my free time is spent with my friends (fg, ym, small town, age 16-17).

Time with friends was usually spent 'hanging around' outdoors. The young people tended to 'hang around' adjacent to, or in, the housing estates where they lived. Ways identified in which the young people spent this unstructured time included going shopping and going to the cinema. However, the main feature of unstructured free time was what the young people referred to as 'hanging around'.

[What is your favourite way to spend your free time?]

Hanging around with me friends

[When you're hanging around with your friends what do you do?]

What do we do? We just go over to the playground really and that's it.

Yeah, just go over to the playground an that (ym, inner city, age 13).

We just go over across the road and there's a green ESB box and we sit on it and talk. That's all we do (yw, large town, age 13).

'Hanging Around' on the Street

Although young people's relationships with parents determine long-term preferences, attitudes and values to a considerable extent, during adolescence it is often relationships with friends that cause most concern and that pre-occupy the thoughts of young people as they grow up (Shucksmith et al., 1993). Research also suggests that the use of the street for free-time activities is often the only option for young people living in socially and economically deprived areas (Morrow 2001; Matthews et al., 2000).

The high visibility of young people hanging around can bring them to the attention of neighbours and law enforcement agencies. This is the case whether or not the young people are engaged in anti-social behaviours. Many of the young people we interviewed told how the Gardaí or local residents in their neighbourhoods frequently asked them to 'move on'. A number felt that they were targeted unnecessarily by the Gardaí:

[What type of thing do you usually do when you're hanging around with your friends?]

I don't know, just walk around but you get stopped by the Guards nearly every five minutes and get searched and all that.

[Does that happen a lot?]

Yeah, cause you're with a group, they think you're causing trouble and we don't be (ym, suburbs, age 14).

R1: Like I'd be out with me friends and we nearly got arrested a few times like. It's very hard, you know, cause you can't even mess in this town cause it's very easy to get arrested like. I find that anyways. If I'm down the street like they're [Gardaí] all over me like and I don't know why. I must have that look or something.

R2: Yeah, yeah there's no denying that now ... I don't go out as much as I used to, you know, I try to stay away from all that.

R3: I don't want to be going out and getting made a show of either. It happened to me a few times so I don't really go out anymore, I stay in an awful lot, it's better (fg, ym, large town, age 15-17)

The accounts above suggest that these young men do not fully understand the reasons why they are approached and stopped by the Gardaí. According to the young men they are simply walking around or, as one boy suggests, he 'must have that look'. Our data revealed that the majority who reported being stopped and searched by the Gardaí were young males from the suburban large town sites. However, one young woman from the inner-city site told us how her boyfriend is frequently stopped and searched by the Gardaí. She believes this is because of the way he looks and particularly because of the way he dresses:

Me fella he got stopped loads of times ... he wears a hat, you know a baseball cap, he gets stopped and they search him, looking for something on him and he's not even like that. Like one night he was walking me home and we passed the Garda station and they were staring over at him and me. Then they came over and start telling him to empty his pockets and take his shoes off, you know, to check his shoes. I was like 'would yis leave him alone, there's nothing wrong with him, he's not doing anything' and one of the Guards start giving out to me and telling me to shut up an all and I was like 'oh my God'. I wouldn't mind but there's even worsen ones out there than that (yw, inner city, age 17).

In general, the young people were compliant following their encounters with the Gardaí and they either 'moved on' when asked or made their way home. However, some of the young people we talked to, particularly a number of young women from the suburban site, had extremely problematic relationships with the local Gardaí. These young women reported that the Gardaí frequently stopped them because they were 'known' to them. This experience of being stopped and searched generally occurred after they had been drinking and sometimes resulted in them being taken to the local Garda station:

I don't know really, it's like you have nothing to do all day and then you just go out and the Guards just pick on ya all the time. I do be with me friends and like they just call us over and they do be like 'what are yous doing down here?' And even if you say nothing they still take ya to the station.

[What happens when they take you to the station?]

They put you in a cell for about six hours and then they drive ya home (yw, suburbs, age 15).

There'd be me and me friends and we go into town and like we'd be drinking and out of nowhere the Guards stop us. They pick on us, they tell us to get out of town, they tell us we're scumbags and we shouldn't be around the town and blah, blah blah.

[How do you feel about that?]

I don't know, like the Guards putting us down like saying 'yis are scumbags' and we say right we'll show them who's scumbags. Like we aren't and I know I'm not scum but it's the way they put it. Like I don't know it's just ... I don't know it's mad I don't know ... there's nothing else to do and so we do be drinking and getting into trouble. That's it, that's what it is. We're bored of sitting around and doing nothing (ym, suburbs, age 15).

Although these accounts were not a general trend among the young people in the study, the experience of 'being bored' and having 'nothing to do' was a major source of concern among some of the young people and it appeared to be a factor which brought them into contact with the Gardaí on one or more occasion.

'There's Nothing to Do'

The vast majority of the young people reported that there was 'nothing to do' on the estates where they lived apart from 'hang around' with their friends. This in itself was problematic because residents of the estates where the young people lived complained about noise and other disturbances:

At night time there's a lot of teenagers hanging around cause there's nowhere to go so you're literally outside their houses [neighbours] and you'll be talking and whatever and they come out and roar at you to move away. Then when you move away someone else will say the same thing and if you don't move or get cheeky with them they just keep roaring (yw, large town, age 16).

Overall, the young people understood why their neighbours do not want them 'hanging around'. They were aware that they 'shout' and 'make noise' and that this situation is likely to upset local people, especially if they have young children. However, for the young people, there were few or no alternatives 'to hanging around'. A considerable number reported that moving to another part of their estates was simply not an option. Many others described what they termed as 'dodgy' areas in their neighbourhoods, that is areas where they felt unsafe due to the presence of gangs, drug taking and/or alcohol consumption. As a consequence the young people preferred to avoid these areas:

The other side of the town like, up near the hills, you wouldn't go up there like, it's rough, you know to stay away from those areas (yw, small town, age 17).

You wouldn't go down some of the lanes cause there'd be fellas down there drinking all day. We went down there one time and they saw us and ran after us and we just ran away (ym, large town, age 13).

I wouldn't hang around in the flats across the road, it's a very unfriendly place to be honest with ya. The young fellas that live there, like you walk

around there and they just start fights for nothing like, you know (ym, inner city, age 14).

Well to be honest everywhere around here is kinda dodgy but we still do it like cause there's nowhere else to go (yw, suburbs, age 15).

The young people were knowledgeable about the geographies of their areas and knew there were risks associated with hanging around in certain localities within their neighbourhoods. As a consequence, they avoided these particular areas. However, as the latter account illustrates, there are certain estates in which all of the 'hanging around' areas are considered to be 'dodgy'. Unfortunately, due to a lack of viable alternatives, the young people we interviewed had little option but to hang around and socialise with their peers in these same areas.

Alcohol Consumption and Illicit Drug Use

Chosen locations for 'hanging around' differed, however, depending on the activity. For example, if young people wanted to drink or smoke they almost always did so away from adult surveillance. Alcohol consumption and illicit drug use took place in a number of outdoor locations, most frequently in a nearby field or green site. As the young people moved through mid-adolescence and beyond, alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug consumption usually began to play a more central role in their social lives. The consumption of alcohol combined with illicit drug use, was in many ways a dominant feature of young people's accounts of how they spent their free time.

Over the past two decades, statistical data relating to alcohol consumption among Irish school-going youth suggest greater experimentation with alcohol and an increase in risky drinking patterns, including drunkenness and 'binge' drinking (Mayock, 2004). Concern over the relatively new phenomenon of 'binge' drinking is growing, a fact reflected by the public discussions, media reports and research papers on the topic (Furnham, 2004).

Over half of the young people we interviewed (54 per cent) drank alcohol and on average they had their first alcoholic drink at the age of 13 years. The preferred alcoholic drinks among the young women were alcopops (25.6 per cent). Budweiser and Cider (21 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, were the drinks of choice for the young men. The young people drank alcohol at least once a week, mostly at weekends, and alcohol was usually consumed in the company of friends. The most popular location for the consumption of alcohol was in a friend's house or on the street:

[What's your favourite way to spend your free time?]

The best thing is when we're all in the field and we get drunk and just stand around. It's the same every weekend cause like there's nothing else to do (yw, suburbs, age 15).

Reported alcohol consumption levels were similar across the four sites, with the young people (male and female) reporting that they drank, on average, seven alcoholic drinks on a typical night out. A small percentage of the young people (15.3 per cent) were admitted to pubs or clubs and this usually heralded the end of 'street' drinking and occurred when the participants 'looked old enough' to be served in pubs and/or clubs. These licensed premises are well known to the young people as a 'safe bet' for buying and consuming alcohol and, according to some young people, the Gardaí frequently raided them:

[Where do you go if you want to drink?]

R1: There's this pub in the town like, it's been closed down once or twice like, the Gardaí raided it like.

R2: One or two weeks ago there was this fella and he was mad drunk and he knocked a table. He knocks all the drinks off someone's table and they fell all over somebody's girlfriend. Yer man dragged him outside and kicked the head off him.

R3: Yeah, but it's calmed down a bit like now, like it's not as much but, like I know other pubs as well like where fellas in my year they're getting served. I don't know, I think it's great the way the pub owners can get away with it.

R4: Like the town is a fairly rowdy town in the last couple of months. It's gone really rowdy like. I don't know, I won't go out drinking anyway, it's dangerous, I get drunk at home (fg, ym, large town, age 15-17).

Young people we interviewed who stated that they abstained from alcohol and drug use, presented a different profile to that of their alcohol-consuming and drug-using counterparts. They tended to be younger (12-14 years), they were involved in structured activities and they were more involved in sports and/or indoor leisure. A number stated that they were 'too young' to drink but they did not rule out drinking at some time in the future. This younger age group also tried to avoid places in their neighbourhoods where groups gathered for the purpose of consuming alcohol:

Well we don't really go down by the football pitch because there's all drunkards and druggies down there and there does be loads of fighting an all (yw, inner city, age 13).

This use of the football pitch for reasons other than football encroached on the space available to the younger people in the neighbourhood. Older groups of youth usually occupied the football pitch at the weekend, leaving it free as a meeting place for young people during the week. Outdoor or 'knacker'² drinking was more prevalent among participants who lived in urban and suburban localities:

² 'Knacker drinking' refers to the consumption of alcohol in an outdoor setting, usually a public park, laneway or street corner.

The best thing is when we're all in the field. Like we go there drinking on the weekends and we do have a game of football an all. It's great when we're all together and we're not fighting an all (ym, large town, age 15).

Drinking was largely a weekend activity and, for many of the young people, alcohol consumption was strongly connected to illicit drug use. Research has found that Irish school-goers are among the most drug-experienced youth populations in Europe (Hibell et al., 2000). Nearly one-fifth of the young people we interviewed reported using illicit drugs, and cannabis was cited as the drug of choice. This activity was more common among the study's older participants (15-18 years) and the average age of first use was between the age of thirteen and fourteen years. The level of cannabis use was highest among suburban youth, with both young men and young women reporting that they 'smoke hash' at least once a week, usually at weekends:

[How do you spend your weekends?]

Just hanging around talking with me friends. Like we'd just be standing around and having a few cans just talking and smoking, like I smoke a bit of hash, get stoned and have a laugh. That's all there is to do. There's nothing else to do, they have nothing for us (yw, suburbs, age 17).

This drug-use behaviour was especially common amongst the young people who worked part-time. Young people who did not work were supported by their parents and given pocket money at the end of each week. The study's non-users of alcohol and illicit drugs usually spent their pocket money on trips to the cinema, mobile phone credit and clothing.

[What do you spend your pocket money on?]

Clothes sometimes, different things, sometimes I go the cinema or something (ym, large town, age 14).

Overall, this group of young people regarded their alcohol consumption and drug use as 'recreational' and to a large extent weekend socialising with friends in an indoor or outdoor setting revolved around alcohol and drug consumption. They also reported that drugs were easily accessible in the social settings where they 'hung around' with friends.

Summary

Several trends are apparent from the data on structured and unstructured free-time and leisure activities. Practically all of the young people reported that there are few social amenities available to them in their social environments and that local recreational facilities were inadequate or non-existent. The vast majority of the young people spent most of their free time in the company of friends and 'hung around' on the street. Young people's accounts of how they

spend their free time and with whom indicate that the peer group featured prominently.

For younger participants, free time was usually spent indoors playing computer games, watching television and listening to music. The younger teenagers were also more inclined to spend a significant amount of their free time with their families. For the older teenagers, free time spent with friends was an outdoor activity and, for the vast majority it involved drug and alcohol consumption, particularly at weekends. This outdoor drinking and drug use frequently resulted in them engaging in some level of unruly behaviour, which in turn brought them into conflict with neighbours or into contact with the Gardaí.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FREE-TIME AND LEISURE NEEDS: VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we provided an overview of how the study participants spend their free time and with whom. We outlined the availability of structured leisure amenities in each of the four research sites, as well as the young people's membership of, and engagement in, youth and sports clubs. We also described how young people spend their unstructured free time and the behaviour and activities they engage in when 'hanging around' with friends. In this chapter, we explore the opinions and views of the young people on the free-time and leisure facilities that are needed in the four geographical areas.

Throughout the analysis, we pay particular attention to young people's perspectives on ways to address the distinct lack of social and recreational facilities in their neighbourhoods and we present their suggestions for rectifying and improving the current situation. They drew attention to the need to consider age and gender, the provision of safe spaces and the differing needs of rural- and urban-based dwellers, in developing new facilities or improving existing provision.

Addressing Age and Gender Needs

Respondents from all four geographical areas recognised a need to provide different and separate facilities for different age groups. The younger teenagers felt that their needs were very different to those of older youth and that therefore different responses in terms of the provision of leisure and free-time activities were required:

They need more clubs and stuff and to do more stuff with us ... like not mix the young ones in with the older ones 'cos that just annoys everyone.

[What age do you consider to be younger and older?]

Twelve to fourteen and maybe fifteen is young but sixteen and seventeen and that is too old. Like sometimes the older ones do come into our club and they do be messin' an' all 'cause they're not really interested in it and like we do be serious and want to do it (yw, inner city, age 14).

Our data suggest that the young people moving through mid-adolescence had a very different set of requirements to those of their younger counterparts. For example, the younger age group placed an emphasis on the installation of

playgrounds and park areas, whereas the older age group focused on more commercial leisure activities such as snooker halls and youth cafés.

Another theme to emerge strongly from the data was that the young women had very different free-time and leisure requirements to those of their male counterparts. The majority of the young women identified the need for drop-in centres, a youth café and youth discos:

There should be somewhere for young people to go cause there's a lot of space around here where they could put a community hall. It'd be great to have like a drop-in-centre where you could go to play snooker and game machines and maybe even a little shop. A disco would be great as well (yw, large town, age 15).

In contrast, the majority of the young men identified the need for more sports facilities, including the installation of modern football pitches, preferably with astro turf surfaces, bowling alleys and snooker halls:

[What do you think is needed in the area?]

Well more football pitches for a start and they should have all-weather surfaces you know like astro turf ... they should just bring in more facilities like a bowling alley and a snooker hall, you know, just somewhere where people can go (ym, small town, age 14).

When we asked the young people if there was space available within their areas to build new leisure facilities (such as drop-in centres) they clearly identified unused fields and other green areas. The young people reported that currently these areas were simply used for dumping goods and/or as places where young people 'hang around' for the purpose of drinking alcohol and using drugs:

R1: There's a place up there where you could put a snooker hall or a swimming pool and that would make a big difference. Up there like it's just a dump, there's nothing there, it's just grass, like they could build something up there.

R2: Yeah, it'd be just something to do like, somewhere to hang out or play pool or a games of darts.

R3: There's nothing going on up there only gangs hanging around drinking and doing drugs. It could be a hang-out spot for us so that we don't have to be outside. Like it is, it's a perfect size for a snooker hall or something.

R1: Yeah, cause like when people are bored they just start trouble especially around the estates (fg, ym, suburbs, age 15-16).

Young people's accounts demonstrate an awareness of the importance of the provision of adequate leisure facilities and amenities if the cycle of involvement in anti-social and criminal behaviour is to be broken. Furthermore, their accounts reveal that many young children living in their neighbourhoods, some

as young as five years of age, were beginning to emulate elements of the anti-social behaviours that many teenagers engage in:

Like they need to put in a park or a playground or something for the kids and they need to do it now. You do see kids over by the shops throwing rocks at the buses and they're only little fucking five year olds.

[Why do you think they do that?]

Cause they have nothing else to do ... I mean they probably see the bigger lads doing it and think we'll show off and do what they're doing. I think they're just doing it for the fun, you know, to get a chase off the bus drivers (ym, suburbs, age 14).

My little brother he's only three years of age and he's already cursing. He's picking it up off the bigger ones ... he's getting violent too. My mam has to keep him in the house now everyday like (yw, large town, age 15).

I'd like to see them build something for the kids so that the next generation have something to do and they don't start getting into trouble (ym, inner city, age 15).

In general, the young people we interviewed all wanted more adequate and age-appropriate recreational and leisure facilities in their areas. The data also reveal the necessity for immediate intervention if anti-social behaviour is to be reduced in the future.

The Importance of 'Feeling Safe'

As discussed above, older teenagers had a different set of wants and needs to their younger counterparts. The young people were unanimous in their desire to see the creation of youth-friendly clubs, cafés and discos. Similarly, they expressed a need for the provision of an area (such as a town square) or a local premises (such as a drop-in-centre) that was off-limits to adults, where they could go to 'hang around' with their friends. However, when young people talked about the provision of 'youth only' facilities and amenities, accounts were similar in the emphasis they placed on personal safety:

I'm talking about somewhere for young people to go, you know, like a youth café, somewhere that's not expensive, where you could go and hang out with your friends and play a game of pool. There's nowhere that you can go and just sit down, nowhere that could be considered safe (yw, small town, age 15).

It'd be nice to have somewhere to go like a café or somewhere you could sit outside. That would be nice and it'd be better than loitering around. It'd be nice to be away from the crowd that are drinking and

doing drugs, somewhere safe to go with your friends where you can just sit and chat (yw, large town, age 17).

In many cases young people expressed concern for their safety within the immediate neighbourhood and there were many reports of muggings and 'being chased' by gangs. This account from a focus group conducted with young men highlights the dangerous situations young people can inadvertently find themselves in:

R1: The problem around here is that half the time you can't even walk up the road without getting mugged. My two friends got mugged for their mobile phones, it's ridiculous.

R2: Yeah, sure I was just walking down a lane and these two lads hopped on me. They were asking me for hash and I didn't even answer them. I just kept walking on and then I heard footsteps behind me and before I could turn around one of them hit me across the head and I fell down.

[What happened after you fell?]

Well a man who lives in a house in the laneway he came out and the lads ran off, and he said to me 'are you alright?' and I said 'yeah' (fg, ym, suburbs, age 15-16).

Although this disturbing account was not a general trend among the participants in the study, the number of reports of being mugged or chased indicated that the young people considered the risk of being attacked to be high. The random nature of violent incidents was also a source of major distress for those young people, who never fully understood why they were singled out:

About two weeks ago I was walking home by myself and about twenty lads started chasing me. I was just walking out of the cinema and loads of them started chasing me and I just started to run.

[That must have been really frightening]

It was, it was really scary. I don't walk by myself much anymore. I'd be kinda afraid to.

Interestingly, none of the young people involved in these incidences reported them to the Gardaí. When we asked them why they told us it would be 'a waste of time', 'not worth the bother' and that the Gardaí would not believe them or would be reluctant to intervene.

Existing Facilities and Amenities – Suggestions for Improvement

As documented in the previous chapter, some youth groups and sports clubs were available to the young people across the four research sites. A further

analysis of the data revealed an acute awareness among the young people of the inadequacies of the existing facilities and amenities available within the social environment. During interview the young people proposed a number of suggestions on ways to improve and upgrade existing local amenities such as local sporting facilities, especially the local football pitches:

I'd like a new pitch because the pitch we have is very bumpy out there and you could fall and break a leg or something (ym, large town, age 13).

The number of local football pitches in each of the four areas was in most cases limited to one. This provision is small when account is taken of the number of young people living in each area. In general, local football pitches tended to be over-used during the daytime hours and under-utilised during the early and late evening. This under-utilisation occurred primarily because of a lack of outdoor lighting or spotlights, which rendered the pitches unusable after dusk and nightfall. The young men involved in sports described to us how over-use can damage the surface of the pitch:

The football pitch that we have is years old, its like a sand pitch and I'd like to see them get a new one, you know, like an astro turf one (ym, inner city, age 16).

This over-use, coupled with a general lack of maintenance, means that the pitches are not always playable. As a result the young people often have to use indoor facilities, which for many are too expensive:

Like there's too many people using the pitch for training like and it's really bad for the pitch, it's in bits like. Like we could train in the sports complex but you have to pay for that ... I'd like them to buy lights for our pitches instead, that's really important like cause then we could train in the evening (ym, small town, age 13).

One service provider suggested that we should follow the model of many major European cities and install football pitches and basketball courts in every local neighbourhood:

If you go to Europe right, and I've noticed this from travelling on public transport, every half mile or so you'll see basketball courts, football courts. From the outskirts of the cities all the way into the city centres you'll see pitches littered the whole way in. It's gas, you know, because we think we're fucking great because we have one decent football pitch between a few flats complexes (sp, inner city).

Due to a lack of adequate locally-based facilities and amenities, young people frequently had no option but to use commercial leisure and sporting facilities. This situation can be exclusionary on a number of levels, not least because of the expense. The cost of hiring a football pitch or basketball court in a sports

centre was often far beyond the financial means of the young people in this study. Indeed, they often gave accounts of how they come together to pool their financial resources in an effort to access these commercial sites:

There's football pitches but you have to rent them out and like they're €20 for an hour and a half. Sometimes like twenty of us will get together to hire one out but like you can't always get twenty people, you know like (ym, large town, age 15).

Young people who worked part-time were more likely to pursue commercial forms of leisure. Expensive forms of commercial leisure were not always a viable option for others who depended on pocket money from parents. The expense associated with commercial leisure highlights the need for improved and youth-friendly local provision in each of the four geographical areas.

The young people also reported on the under-utilisation of many existing community centres located in their neighbourhoods. Some suggested that, instead of demolishing existing centres, such structures could be renovated and extended so that community centres would be used to their full advantage:

I think they could change the community centre, like put another storey on you know for places to go. I don't think that'll happen though, well not for a few years anyway (ym, inner city, age 15).

However, a number of the young people reported that after the renovation of some community centres, these buildings frequently became off-limits for local youth:

A drop-in centre would be good here like you know just a meeting room with snooker tables and you know Playstations. These rooms [community centre] are never used and they're always empty but like young people from around here aren't allowed use them.

[Why not?]

Because like the people that run them, they're all poshies like and they only have singing and piano lessons here and we're not allowed go cause we're all scumbags according to them (ym, suburbs, age 14).

This account is supported by one of the youth worker operating in the suburban area. He reported that many local youth are excluded from community buildings because the local management committee members often perceived them as 'problematic youth'. He had negotiated with committee members for the formulation of an inclusive and youth-friendly policy and suggested that young people need to be made feel welcome and that local committees should strive to foster a sense of ownership of community property among local youth. However, it appears that this effort to negotiate with the committee members met with only limited success:

There's a couple of things right, we have the biggest leisure complex around and the problem is that young people that live in the direct area don't feel welcome there and the majority are barred. The other thing is the community rooms, the people who are running them have to have a broad-minded approach to young people. There's no point in having nice-looking stuff if the kids can't use it. They'd be better off in here having a cup of tea and a game of pool rather than sitting in the field drinking and doing drugs. Unfortunately that doesn't happen (sp, suburbs).

Rural and Urban Concerns

The rural youth included in this study reported on how their isolated settings created a distinct set of problems from those experienced by their urban counterparts. Many of the young people living in rural towns reported that some free-time and leisure facilities were located just outside town and were therefore only accessible by public transport or by car. This in itself presents its own set of problems due to transport costs and/or depending on parents to transport the young people by car:

Like it's hard if you want to go somewhere outside the town, like if you want to go swimming or even play a game of tennis they're all outside the town. The only way to get there is if your parents drive you but sure that's not always possible (yw, small town, age 12).

The dependency on adults for transport severely reduces opportunities to engage in leisure activities beyond what is available in the town. This situation was one that the majority of rural youth viewed as extremely unsatisfactory and in need of urgent attention:

I think there should be more to do in the town like cause everything is kinda outside the town. Like I'd like for there to be a swimming pool in the town cause the nearest one is like two miles away and you can't always get there (ym, large town, age 16).

Another major need identified by the young people was a basic lack of information on what is available for young people in their areas. During interview a number of the young people reported that in all probability there were more leisure facilities available to them but that they weren't aware of their existence:

I think to tell people there's more, like tell people there's more. Like there probably is clubs on and I don't know about them, like let people know there's things going on. You know things like the after-school club and activities and everything (yw, inner city, age 17).

I do think there has to be something set up for young people to go to and maybe more emphasis on clubs and more information. People should know more things, there's nothing really even in school that tells you about outside things like, or even when you go out of school what are you going to do like. There's nothing to do (yw, small town, age 17).

'There's Nothing to Do' – Proposed Solutions

'Having nothing to do' was perhaps the most commonly used phrase during interview, and emerged as the most prominent source of concern and complaint among the young people. Of considerable significance is that young people were acutely aware of the opportunities for engagement in anti-social behaviour brought about by hanging around and being bored:

Like it's stupid right, like in the summer they have on clubs for when the kids aren't in school. They say it's to keep us out of trouble, from getting in robbed cars, robbed motor bikes but then what are we meant to do in the winter? Are you meant to get in robbed cars every day in the winter and then when the summer comes just stop? (ym, inner city, age 13).

As an alternative to hanging around and getting into trouble, one young man highlighted the advantages of having a broad range of leisure activities available to young people:

Well they should try to get a swimming pool and a snooker hall an all. There should be loads of extra stuff for us to do.

[Do you think that would be a good thing for young people living in the area?]

Yeah, because everyone would be having more fun like instead of hanging around drinking and doing drugs or whatever. They'd be having fun, you know what I mean. Like having somewhere to go and having something to do, well it keeps people off the street and it keeps them out of trouble. At least they'd have somewhere to go (ym, inner city, age 15).

Some of the service providers also highlighted issues that were similar to those identified by the young people. For example, one school principal in a rural area felt that young people were more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour because they had weak and underdeveloped social lives. The lack of alternative viable leisure activities meant that young people had nothing to do and this made them more susceptible to drinking and drug use:

I'm just saying that any interventions of resources and providing them with opportunities for them to even get involved in sports or to go swimming would work if they had discount rates. I don't know it would seem to me that we have to get them out of the habit of hanging around

street corners and mixing with a crowd who are into drugs or having cider parties. That to me is less likely to happen if there is something else, something affordable for them to do (sp, small town).

In addition to providing positive alternatives to engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour, another youth worker identified the provision of adequate free-time and leisure activities as an antidote to depression and lack of self-esteem which, she feels, is often the precursor to involvement in alcohol and drug use:

The main risk, as I see it, to young people around here is a total lack of self-esteem and depression. I see it all the time. Look, it can't be good for anyone's soul to be standing around having nothing to do, so they drink cans and smoke hash because that's their only option. That's what they do. When they're drunk or stoned they become more aggressive towards society ... there's so many of them suffer with depression, there really is (sp, suburbs).

Our data highlight a general dearth of opportunities for the young people to engage in positive leisure activities. Access to existing facilities and clubs in the area was severely constrained by a lack of information on what is available in the four areas; poor service provision and the cost of participating further restricted and reduced young people's involvement in clubs, sporting activities and other leisure pursuits.

Involving Young People in Decision Making

The inclusion of young people in local facilities and decision-making processes is important to the success of any local community venture. Meaningful consultation with young people in the regeneration of their areas may go some way to lessen the sense of isolation from the wider community, which is experienced by some local youth. It would also be useful to keep young people informed of the changes that are taking place in their communities and the rationale behind some of the decisions being made by adults, many of which may be incomprehensible to a lot of young people.

Many of the young people interviewed knew of the existence of a residents committee in their areas. However, they felt no connection with these committees, and felt that adults in the area had their own agenda and that the needs of young people were frequently overlooked. For example, one boy told us how an existing leisure activity in the area had been demolished to make way for a new apartment complex:

There's a place across the road an all and it used to be a pool hall. There used to be amusements and a pool hall but that got closed down and they're making new apartments out of it now. That's just stupid, that

is. Why couldn't they build it back up, or do something? (ym, inner city, age 13).

This young person did not understand why an existing leisure provision was demolished when there was clearly a lack of leisure facilities in the area. In general, the young people reported that local residents committees never consulted them in any meaningful way and that, when young people did voice their opinions, adults usually did not listen:

That's always the way, they [adults] just don't listen. You say something to them and it's in one ear and out the other (ym, inner city, age 15).

In general, young people articulated a need to include young people in decisions regarding the provision of leisure and free-time facilities and amenities. They viewed themselves as the experts in this particular area and believed that the reason why a lot of local provision is inadequate is because adults assume that they know what young people require:

I mean if you spend so much money on setting something up wouldn't you expect that it should be something that young people would want. I mean why bother spending half a million on an art gallery that no young people are interested in ... look if you're not going to be asked your opinion it's just like you're being ignored (yw, small town, age 15).

Yeah, there's no point in putting something in if young people aren't interested cause it'll just go to waste. You have to talk to kids first to see if it's what they want (yw, suburbs, age 18).

Practically all of the young people we talked to told us that there were little or no opportunities for them to voice their views and opinions to local residents committees; they were seldom asked by adults in the community for their views on the changes taking place in the social environment due to regeneration. In general, it was the role of service providers to represent the views of the young people. Some of the service providers were members of local development committees and therefore had direct input into the proposed plans for regeneration.

[Are the young people involved in the regeneration negotiations?]
Well I think we fulfil some of that function and at different critical points. For example we would have a session for the young people and we'd ask the architect along to explain the models, and the changes that are taking place and we'd take feedback from them in relation to that (sp, inner city).

The service providers generally agreed that if regeneration was to be successful, it is imperative that local youth are involved in the consultation process. They suggested that local residents committees and outside professionals (such as planners and architects) need to listen to the needs of

young people, involve them in the process in a meaningful way and develop a sense of ownership of local facilities among young people:

Look, let the kids design their own things. Let them talk about it and just listen to them, really listen to them, otherwise there's no point. Get them involved from the beginning and they'll respect the place. There's no point in trying to give them something they don't want because they just won't give a shit, they're going to break the windows, wreck it and set it on fire (sp, suburbs).

The majority of service providers reiterated this pessimistic reason for the need to include young people in the decisions that will impact on their social environment. Ultimately, they are the professionals working in close proximity with local youth and they have an in-depth understanding of their needs in relation to the provision of leisure and recreational facilities and amenities.

Summary

Across the four sites, young people were unanimous in their desire to see more recreational and leisure facilities in their local areas. It became apparent that their needs varied according to gender and age. Their suggestions were varied and wide-reaching and ranged from youth discos, youth cafés and drop-in centres to bowling alleys, swimming pools and gaming arcades. The young people also proposed the upgrading and utilisation of facilities that are already in existence in their areas. In general, local football pitches tended to be under-utilised for a number of reasons including inadequate playing surfaces and a lack of outdoor lighting. In agreement with the views of the young people, service providers were critical of the condition and indeed the availability of local sports pitches. Age was a factor for many respondents who placed emphasis on having separate facilities, which are age-appropriate.

Finally, the young people felt that they were not being listened to by local residents committees and wanted to be consulted on the development of youth facilities. Overall, they felt that their needs and wants were ignored and that adults placed little value on their views and opinions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In the preceding chapters of this report we presented the design, methodology and findings of a study of the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland. National and international literature on how young people spend their free time and the extent of their participation in leisure and recreational activities was also reviewed. The young people and service providers who participated in the study live in four separate geographical areas designated as disadvantaged under the RAPID programme.

In total eighty young people and seven service providers were interviewed through focus group discussions and individual interviews. These individual interviews and focus group discussions yielded qualitative data that were analysed and presented as findings in previous chapters. In this chapter the findings are discussed and recommendations are made regarding the provision of free-time and leisure facilities for young people and the policy implications arising from the research.

This overview of the study findings concentrates on the following areas: young people's views on their social environment, young people's involvement in structured and unstructured activities, factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the choices young people make about how they spend their free time. The overview also incorporates age, gender and geographical issues.

Social Environment

As outlined in previous chapters, four localities were selected for inclusion in this study and they included urban and rural areas designated as disadvantaged under the RAPID programme. The first aim of the study was to describe the physical and social environment that characterise the areas where the young people live. This aim was accomplished by asking the young people a series of questions designed to reveal their views on their neighbourhoods. In general, the young people described strong attachments to their neighbourhoods. Of particular importance were the friendships they had developed and maintained with other young people from the area.

However, when it came to relationships with adult residents many young people felt ignored and excluded, particularly by members of community development groups. Their accounts revealed that young people were never consulted or included in any meaningful way in the regeneration process that is ongoing in their areas. In general, it was service providers, many of whom are members of local development committees, who represented the young people at development meetings. Our findings suggest that there are no

mechanisms in place to facilitate consultation with young people regarding the changes taking place in the physical environment. This exclusion has fostered a sense of resentment among the young people and in many instances has had a detrimental effect on how young people and adult residents relate to each other.

Irrespective of geographical location the young people's accounts concentrated on the undesirable characteristics of their social environment such as exposure to public drunkenness, the use and sale of illicit drugs and other anti-social and criminal behaviour. The young people were also acutely aware of the negative view that many 'outsiders' have of their neighbourhoods. During interview the young men and women reported that such criticisms were unjustified and based upon opinions that were ill-informed. In general, the young people reported that they gave little credence to 'outside' negative perceptions and indeed in many instances dismissed them completely. However, they were extremely conscious of the fact that living in 'disadvantaged' areas made them different and increased their sense of social isolation.

Our data demonstrate a concern among some of the young people in relation to their personal safety, particularly when 'hanging around' certain areas in their neighbourhoods. The young people gave accounts of some of the dangerous situations, including encounters with gangs of drunken youths and being mugged for mobile phones. The random nature of violent attacks was a huge source of concern and distress for the young people involved. However, they seldom reported such incidents to the Gardaí because they felt it would be a waste of time, that they would not be believed or that there would be a general reluctance on behalf of the Gardaí to intervene.

These accounts highlight the oftentimes problematic relationship that some of the study's participants had with local Gardaí. The young people reported that their encounters with Gardaí were often confrontational and they gave accounts of petty harassment by some members of the Gardaí. However, such encounters were sporadic and were more prevalent in the suburban and urban areas.

The findings of the study underscore the sense of isolation and marginalisation experienced by the study's young people, often due to the negative public image of their social environments. They also demonstrate the problematic relationships that exist between many of the study's young people and authoritative adults. This situation is less than ideal considering the social problems that exist in the four geographical areas, i.e. low educational attainment, high unemployment rates and increasing levels of exposure to alcohol abuse and the sale and use of illicit drugs. These findings represent a challenge, not only for how service providers and/or indeed policy makers conceptualise young people's free-time and leisure needs but also for local residents and development committees to ensure the inclusion of young people in any consultation regarding their leisure and recreational needs.

Involvement in Structured Activities

Constructive organised activities are widely accepted as a good use of a young person's free time because they provide valuable opportunities to acquire and practise specific social, physical and intellectual skills and because involvement in such activities establishes a supportive social network of peers and adults (Eccles et al., 2003; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). The second and third aims of the study were to explore how the young people spend their free time: their involvement in structured leisure activities and the meanings they attach to their chosen leisure activities. In order to do this the young people were asked about their involvement in structured leisure activities and about how they spent their unstructured free time.

A significant number of the young people we interviewed attended and participated in structured activities in their areas. The majority of these activities were community-based clubs or groups organised and staffed by local community volunteers. These clubs, whilst providing a valuable outlet for young people, tended to be under-funded and lacking even basic leisure equipment. Community-based clubs are also heavily reliant on the voluntary commitment of the local people to staff the activities and indeed for their continued existence. Our data suggest that attendance at many community-based clubs can be a frustrating experience for the young people. They reported that while they appreciated having a club, the lack of organisation and structured activities was disappointing.

Mainstream youth groups, mainly in the urban and suburban localities, were staffed by professional youth workers. Unlike community-run activities, these groups receive government funding, are well equipped and provide a higher level of satisfaction to the young people who attend. Mainstream youth clubs offer a variety of activities to young people, which include trips to the cinema, relaxation classes and a safe place to 'hang out' with friends. Some youth workers we interviewed told us of the difficulties they encountered when attempting to recruit young people into the groups. They described mistrust among the young people towards them and how they often had to employ creative means to 'lure' young people into membership. Our data show that the inner-city area provided the highest number of youth club/groups – eight in total – whereas the suburban area had the lowest number of reported structured leisure activities, a total of two.

'At Risk' Provision

Youth projects that target 'at risk' youth offer more intensive and specialised support to young people than more mainstream youth clubs. These projects offer the young people the opportunity to continue their education and to participate in a number of structured leisure activities. Our findings demonstrate that there was a high uptake among the young people who attend to avail of the opportunity to complete their education. All of the projects operate a policy of non-expulsion. In other words, they all operate a policy of conflict resolution in place of excluding or barring young people from the

projects. The policy operates in such a way that rather than ask the young people to leave permanently they are given a 'cooling off' period and are then free to rejoin the club and take part in all activities.

According to the service providers we interviewed, the policy is working effectively and they have seen major improvement in the behaviour and attitudes of their members. The policy of non-exclusion is regarded by service providers as essential to the overall success of the 'at risk' youth clubs because they believe that long-term intervention is required when working with the young people who attend these projects.

Involvement in Unstructured Leisure Activities

International research suggests that 'hanging around' on the street in the company of peers continues to be the preferred activity of young people (Colozzi and Giovannini, 2002; Furlong et al., 1997). The combination of the street as an independent space away from adult society and the opportunities it affords for the socialisation of young people highlights the perception of the street being an autonomous space that young people can establish for themselves. One of the main findings of this study was that for the majority of young people their preferred free-time activity was 'hanging around' on the street with friends. During interview the young people reported that the places they hung around were on the estates where they live and that this level of 'visibility' brought them to the attention of their neighbours and the Gardaí.

The young people acknowledge that their presence on the street can cause annoyance or disturbance and they were frequently met with requests to 'move on'. However, for many of the young people, 'moving on' was not always an option as they felt unsafe in other areas within their neighbourhoods. This finding highlights the difficulty experienced by the study's respondents in relation to accessing public areas within their neighbourhood and, in particular, a space where they can hang around with friends without causing disturbance to their neighbours.

Our findings also suggest that as the young people moved through mid-adolescence, alcohol and drug consumption began to play a more central role in their social lives. This involvement in alcohol consumption and drug use renders the young people vulnerable to the possible misuse of both substances. Indeed, their behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol and drug use revealed a lack of awareness of the potential risk and harm associated with such misuse. This finding highlights the vulnerability of young people to substance abuse and underscores the importance of alerting young people to the risks involved in the abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs. The young people attributed their engagement in what can be considered anti-social behaviour to the lack of leisure and recreational amenities in their social environment.

Factors that Facilitate and/or Inhibit Free-Time and Leisure Choices

The fourth aim of the study was to identify factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the choices young people make about how they spend their free time. Our data suggest that specific factors impinged upon young people's leisure choices, not least of which was a lack of leisure facilities in their neighbourhoods and/or financial constraints. Analysis of the data shows that commercial leisure was pursued by the young people from their mid-teens onwards when there was a tendency to move away from structured leisure pursuits towards more commercial forms of leisure activities and/or when they took up part-time employment. This finding conforms to the international literature, which suggests that highly differentiated patterns of leisure activities are dependent on age (Zeijl et al., 2001).

Our findings demonstrate that whenever possible the young people engaged in a number of commercial leisure activities, for example going to cinema or visiting the local gym or leisure complex. However, access to this commercial form of leisure was limited due to the cost involved. A significant number of the young people received 'pocket money' from their parents each week. However, in many cases the amount was not sufficient to cover the costs involved.

In the course of the interviews the young people told us that they were often barred from the local leisure complex. They provided a variety of reasons, including the leisure complex operating an over-18 years of age policy and the financial costs involved. The exclusion of local youth from an area-based leisure complex limits the choices available to young people regarding their free time. In many cases the leisure complex is the only locally-based recreational amenity. Therefore exclusion from the premises means that the young people have to access amenities outside their neighbourhood. This involves the use of transportation, public or otherwise, and ready access is not always available. Consequently, the young people depend on their parents or other adults for their transport needs and this dependency is not satisfactory for the young people.

The feeling among the majority of the young people was that their exclusion from the leisure complex was a deliberate strategy on behalf of the management. Our data also suggest that this accentuated the sense of social exclusion among the study participants. The service providers we interviewed were in broad agreement with the young people on this issue and reported that they were present on occasions when young people were refused admission.

Age-Related Issues

In the course of the interviews with the young people it became apparent that there were age-related differences in terms of free-time and leisure requirements. The young people recognised and indeed identified the need for separate and different leisure and recreational provision for different age groups. Our data demonstrate that the younger age group (12-14 years) spent

more of their free time engaged in structured leisure activities, e.g. sports clubs or youth groups. We also found that young people in this age category were more likely to spend a substantial amount of their free time with parents or siblings. This finding stands in sharp contrast to the leisure patterns of the older teenagers (15-18 years) who in general spent the majority of their free time involved in outdoor leisure activities, e.g. hanging around on the street with friends, and they were also less inclined to spend time with family members.

The young people's accounts demonstrated a desire for separate premises and facilities related to age. The younger teenagers reported that they often felt intimidated by older teenagers, particularly if attending the same clubs and/or groups; they reported that the older teenagers did too much 'messing' in the clubs and that this ruined the younger teenagers' enjoyment. On the other hand, older teenagers did not want to attend clubs or groups where younger teenagers were because they considered them to be immature. The older teenagers did not want to 'mix' with the younger teenagers because they found them to be too annoying. In terms of provision of leisure and recreation facilities, the younger teenagers required more in the way of playgrounds and park areas, whereas the older teenagers required places where they could 'hang around' with friends, e.g. snooker halls and youth cafés.

Interestingly, the majority of the young people we talked to, regardless of age, gender or geographical location, reported the need for the provision of adequate play facilities for children who live in their neighbourhoods. The young people gave accounts of children emulating the negative behaviour engaged in by many teenagers who live in the area. Some of the examples provided were throwing stones at buses and displaying violent behaviour. They viewed the provision of play facilities as an immediate necessity if the cycle of involvement in anti-social behaviour is to be broken or at least curtailed.

Gender Issues

When analysing the data, careful consideration was given to the different free-time and leisure requirements of the young women and men. The data revealed some differences in relation to gender requirements. For example, our findings show that the study's young men were more likely to be members of sports clubs than young women. Our data also indicate that the provision of community sports clubs was more prevalent in rural settings than in urban areas and that the level of involvement in sport among our male participants was high. These findings are positive, as previous research has shown that engagement in sporting activities has beneficial outcomes in terms of the general fitness levels and well-being of the young people involved (Fahey et al., 2005). Interestingly, our data demonstrate that the level of participation and interest in sports among the young men declined as they moved into mid-adolescence.

Our findings suggest that the high drop-off level in sports among mid-adolescent males may be attributed to their engagement in part-time

employment. Part-time work, coupled with the amount of time spent in school, limits the amount of free time available to young people to engage in sports or to pursue other free-time and leisure activities.

Only a minority of the young women we interviewed participated in sports. Indeed the majority of the study's young women articulated a lack of interest in sport and physical exercise in general. During the course of the interviews the young women gave accounts of how sports clubs in their areas were geared specifically towards young men and that there was little or no attempt by organisers to recruit young women into the sports clubs. Our findings suggest that a lack of interest in sports was not the only reason for young women not participating in sports clubs and also indicate that body image was a significant barrier to young women's participation in sports.

These findings are consistent with the findings of Shaw (1991) and Paxton *et al.* (1991) which found that young women who are self-conscious about their physical appearance often limit their participation in sports in an effort to avoid embarrassment. This finding highlights how a negative body image impacts on the levels of female participation in sporting activities. This in turn has implications for the well-being of young women in terms of their physical fitness levels and their susceptibility to obesity.

Geographical Issues

The data indicated a variety of differing needs in terms of geographical location. It was apparent from the analysis of the data that in the inner-city research site the overall provision of structured leisure activity was more developed than in the other three sites. In the inner-city area there is a variety of youth clubs/groups which cater for different age groups. These included a youth café, a teen club, an arts group and a computer club. This level of provision did not exist in the other three geographical areas, where clubs/groups were sporadic. As discussed earlier, this high level of provision in the inner-city area could be related to measures put in place as a result of the difficulties experienced by many inner-city Dublin communities during the heroin epidemic of the 1980s and the embedded drugs culture that prevails in such communities.

Our findings indicate that rural youth have significantly less access to mainstream youth clubs than their urban counterparts. Our findings also show that rural youth have to travel outside their town to access many structured leisure activities. This provides its own set of challenges for the young people in rural areas, particularly in terms of transportation. The young people reported that they were dependent on adults to transport them to and from leisure facilities and activities. The dependency on adult for transport severely reduces opportunities for the rural young people to engage in leisure activities. This finding highlights the need to develop leisure and recreational facilities locally as the current situation is extremely unsatisfactory for young people living in rural areas.

Our findings demonstrate the many inadequacies of the sporting facilities available to the young people, regardless of geographical location. The data revealed that in some areas the young people did not have a local football pitch. In the areas that did have a football pitch our data also show that over-use has damaged the surface of the pitches and often renders them unplayable. These findings should be of interest to city and local councils in the four areas, as they reaffirm the need to develop appropriate sports facilities locally, which could include football pitches with multi-purpose, all-weather surfaces.

• **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Direct consultation with young people should become a priority when designing or planning any services or leisure facilities for young people. Consultation processes should be accessible, flexible and sensitive to the needs and

Arising from the findings of our study, we have identified the following broad policy recommendations in relation to the free-time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged areas.

Young People and Social Environments

The findings of this study have demonstrated the critical importance of consulting with young people in a meaningful way with regard to their free-time and leisure needs. With this in mind we recommend the following:

- Young people should be specifically targeted by local authority representatives and local development committees to facilitate their full participation in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods. requirements of the young people involved.
- Creative means should be used to engage the young people, technical language or jargon should be kept to a minimum, and consultation should take place in informal settings. These settings might include premises which house existing youth projects and local drop-in centres.
- Youth workers working in local communities should be utilised to facilitate the participation of young people in any consultation process and to ensure that the needs and requirements of the young people are adequately met.
- Free-time and leisure provision should not be generic but should rather be based on established need in each community. Therefore, it would be undesirable to adopt a 'one fit for all' policy in relation to free-time and leisure provision.
- An evaluation of the risks that the social environment poses to young people in terms of exposure to anti-social and criminal behaviour should be undertaken in an effort to minimise the detrimental effects on local youth.

Community-Based Free-Time and Leisure Activities

Based on the findings of this study it has been concluded that there is a distinct lack of free-time and leisure facilities and amenities within each of the four geographical areas. Consequently, some committed local residents have provided structured leisure activities for young people. The activities usually take place in local community centres, many of which are in need of renovation and, due to a lack of funds, basic equipment is at a minimum. In light of these findings we recommend that community-run clubs should receive the support necessary to improve the service they offer. This could include the following:

- The use of community rooms or buildings free of charge
- Ongoing training for local volunteers to include advice on the organisation of activities, training in youth work and training in the management and day-to-day running of youth clubs
- Financial support to acquire the equipment necessary to offer the young people a wide range of activities
- The establishment of links with more mainstream youth groups as a support and back-up to local initiatives
- Promotion of a greater awareness at both local and national level of the value and benefits derived from community-based youth clubs.

With regard to existing mainstream and 'at risk' youth clubs we recommend that there is a need for the following:

- Greater stability in long-term funding for youth clubs
- Additional training and support to be made available to youth workers operating in disadvantaged areas, in an effort to increase staff morale
- Resources to enable the recruitment of additional youth workers into these areas
- Youth clubs to build and develop links with other professionals and organisations operating in the area in an effort to adopt a holistic approach to the services they provide.

Unstructured Free-Time and Leisure Activities

Our research has shown that the majority of the study's respondents preferred to spend their free time 'hanging around' on the street with friends. Our findings provide ample evidence that in a street setting the young people are exposed to a variety of anti-social behaviours and are rendered vulnerable to engagement in alcohol consumption and illicit drug use. The exclusion of local youth from privately-owned leisure complexes is also a matter for concern. Therefore it is with a sense of urgency that we recommend:

- The installation of recreational amenities in local communities that are community owned and are free of charge. These could include sports facilities, drop-in centres and youth cafés

- The establishment of ‘youth areas’ within the local community where young people can hang out safely, without disturbing other residents. Informal youth areas have been introduced into many communities and local parks in parts of the UK and have been operating successfully
- The introduction of more community Gardaí in an effort to promote a better understanding between local youth and local Gardaí
- The installation of new football pitches, where over-use has made pitches unplayable, and the installation of multi-purpose, all-weather surfaces with lighting.
- The requirement for privately-owned facilities such as leisureplexes to make their amenities available at a reduced cost to local youth.

Future Research

This study sought to provide a fair and accurate representation of the young people’s views and experiences regarding their free-time and leisure requirements. The research makes no claims regarding the generalisation of its findings to all young Irish people regarding free-time and leisure needs. However, it can be seen as a starting point as there are relatively few studies of the free-time and leisure needs of young people in Ireland. There is a lot to be gained from further in-depth study of young people and their free-time and leisure needs, not least of which is an understanding of the challenges many socially and economically disadvantaged youth encounter on a day-to-day basis in their social environment. There is also clearly a need for further study of specific issues including the different age, gender and geographical requirements of young people.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, our findings highlight a distinct lack of social and recreational amenities available to the study’s young people, regardless of age, gender or geographical location. At a general policy level, the findings from this study have implications for other social policies, including housing policy and transport policy. The findings show that young people are quite ‘expert’ when it comes to identifying and articulating the free-time and leisure needs that exist in their neighbourhoods. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the success and effectiveness of any new youth policy initiative requires a meaningful communication between policy makers, service providers and young people.

Bearing this in mind, policy makers should strive to avoid stereotypical assumptions about the requirements and needs of young people living in disadvantaged areas. Young people are a diverse social group whose attitudes, behaviours and expectations vary widely. Therefore, it is vital that policy makers have an in-depth understanding of the local circumstances and situations young people encounter and experience in their day-to-day lives.

There is a great deal to be learned from the accounts provided by the young people who participated in this study and it is our hope that this report will contribute to a more rounded understanding of the free-time and leisure needs of young people in Ireland.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnett, J.J. (1999). Adolescent Storm and Stress, Reconsidered, *American Psychologist*, 54(5): 317-26.

Aseltine, R.H., Gore, S. and Gordon, J. (2000). Life stress, anger and anxiety, and delinquency: An empirical test of general strain theory, *Health Society and Behaviour*, 41: 256-75.

Biddle, S.J.H., Gorely, T., Marshall, S.J., Murdey, I. and Cameron, N. (2003). Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviours in Youth: Issues and Controversies, *Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*, 124(1): 29-33.

Boldt, S. (1994). *Listening and Learning. A Study of the Experiences of Early School Leavers from the Inner City of Dublin*. Dublin: The Marino Institute of Education.

Boldt, S. and Devine, B. (1998). Educational Disadvantage in Ireland: Literature Review and Summary Report, in Boldt, S., Devine, B., MacDevitt, D. and Morgan, M., *Educational Disadvantage and Early School Leaving*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

Burke, S. (1999). *Youth as a Resource: Promoting the Health of Young People at Risk*, Dublin: Department of Health and Children.

Caldwell, L.L. and Darling, N. (1999). Leisure Context, Parental Control, and Resistance to Peer Pressure as Predictors of Adolescent Partying and Substance Use: An Ecological Perspective, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31(1), 57-78.

Coatsworth, J.D., Hiley Sharp, E., Palen, L.A., Darling, N., Cumsille, P. and Marta, E. (2005). Exploring Adolescent Self-Defining Leisure Activities and Identity Experiences Across Three Countries, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 29(5), 361-70.

Colozzi, I. and Giovannini, G. (2003). *Young People in Europe: Risk, Autonomy and Responsibilities*. Italy: FrancoAngeli s.r.l.

Comiskey, C. (1998). *Estimating the Prevalence of Opiate Use in Dublin, Ireland 1996*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.

Compas, B.E. and Hamman, C.L. (1994). Child and Adolescent Depression: Covariation and comorbidity in development, in Haggerty, R., Sherrod, L., Garmezny N. and Rutter, N. (eds), *Stress, Risk and Resilience in Children and Adolescence: Processes, Mechanisms, and Interventions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Corrigan, P. (1979). *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*. London: Macmillan.
- Cullen, B. (2000). *Evaluating Integrated Responses to Educational Disadvantage*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Daly, M. and Leonard, M. (2002). *Against All Odds: Family Life on a Low Income in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- de Róiste, A. and Dinneen, J. (2005). *Young People's Views about Opportunities, Barriers and Supports to Recreation and Leisure*, Dublin: National Children's Office.
- Drudy, S. and Lynch, K. (1993). *Schools and Society in Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Dublin City Council (2004). *Policy on Children's Play*, Dublin: Dublin City Council.
- Eccles, J.S., Barber, B.L., Stone, M. and Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular Activities and Adolescent Development, *Journal of Social Issues*, 59: 865-89.
- Fahey, T. (1999). *Social Housing in Ireland: A Study of Success, Failure and Lessons Learned*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Fahey, T. and Williams, J. (2000). The Spatial Distribution of Disadvantage in Ireland, in Nolan, B., O'Connell, P.J. and Whelan, C., *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Fahey, T., Layte, R. and Gannon, B. (2003). *Sports Participation and Health Among Adults in Ireland*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Fahey, T., Delaney, L. and Gannon, B. (2005). *School Children and Sport in Ireland*, Dublin: Economic and Research Institute.
- Fitzgerald, M., Joseph, A.P., Hayes, M. and O'Regan, M. (1995). Leisure Activities of Adolescent Children, *Journal of Adolescence*, 18: 349-58.
- Furlong, A., Cartmel, F., Powney, J. and Hall, S. (1997). *Evaluating Youth Work with Vulnerable Young People*, Glasgow: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Furnham, A. (2004). Binge Drinking: Causes, Consequences and Cures, in McLachlin, M. and Smyth, C. (eds), *Binge Drinking and Youth Culture: Alternative Perspectives*, Dublin: The Liffey Press.
- George, R.M. and Chaskin, R.J. (2004). *What Ninth Grade Students in the Chicago Public Schools do in their Out of School Time*, Chicago: Chapin Hall Centre for Research, University of Chicago.
- Hendry, L.B., Shucksmith, J., Love, J.G. and Glendinning, A. (1993). *Young People's Leisure and Lifestyles*, London: Routledge.

Hendry, L.B. and Kloep, M. (2003). Young People, Unprotected Time, and Overprotected Contexts: Resources, Challenges and Risks? in Colozzi, I. and

Giovannini, G. (eds) *Young People in Europe: Risk, Autonomy and Responsibilities*, Italy: FrancoAngeli s.r.l.

Hibbell, B., Andersson, B., Aldstrom, S., Balakireva, O., Bjarnasson, T., Kokkevi, A. and Morgan, M. (2000). *The 1999 ESPAD Report: Alcohol and Other Drug Use Among Students in 30 European Countries*, Stockholm: Council of Europe, Pompidou Group.

Larson, R.W. and Verma, S. (1999). How Children and Adolescents Spend Time Across the World: Work, Play and Developmental Opportunities, *Psychological Bulletin*, 125: 701-36.

Living in Ireland Survey, 2001. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

Mc Cashin, A. (1997). Employment Aspects of Lone Parenthood in Ireland, Dublin: Department of Social Studies, Trinity College.

Mahoney, J.L. (2000). School Extracurricular Activity Participation as a Moderator in the Development of Anti-Social Patterns, *Child Development*, 71: 502-16.

Mahoney, J.L. and Cairns, R.B. (1997). Do Curricular Activities Protect Against Early School Dropout? *Developmental Psychology*, 33: 241-53.

Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative Researching*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Matthews, H., Limb, M. and Taylor, M. (2000). *The Street as a Third Space in Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*, London: Routledge.

May, T. (2001). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mayock, P. (2000). *Choosers or Losers? Influences on Young People's Choices about Drugs in Inner-City Dublin*, Dublin: The Children's Research Centre, Trinity College.

Mayock, P. (2004). Binge Drinking and the Consumption of Leisure, in McLachlan, C. and Smyth, C. (eds) *Binge Drinking and Youth Culture: Alternative Perspectives*, Dublin: The Liffey Press.

Mayock, P. and Byrne, T. (2004). *A Study of Sexual Health Issues, Attitudes and Behaviours: The Views of Early School Leavers*, Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

Morgan, D.L. (1997). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications Inc.

Morrow, V. (2001). Networks and Neighbourhoods: Children's and Young People's Perspective, in *Social Capital for Health Services*, London: HAD.

Murray, M. and Greer, J. (1993). *Rural Development in Ireland: A Challenge for the 1990s*, London: Macmillan.

National Children's Office (2000). *National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives*, Dublin: National Children's Office.

National Children's Office (2004). *Ready Steady Play: A National Play Policy*, Dublin: National Children's Office.

Nolan, B., O'Connell, P.J. and Whelan C. (2000). *Bust To Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Office of the Minister for Children/Department of Health and Children (2006). *Report of the Public Consultation for the Development of the National Recreation Policy for Young People*, Dublin: OMC/DEHC.

O'Sullivan, E. (2001). *The Children Act 2001*, Dublin: Department of Social Studies, Trinity College.

Paxton, S., Wertheim, E., Gibbons, K., Szmukler, G., Hillier, L. and Petrovich, J. (1991). Body Image Satisfaction, Dieting Beliefs, and Weight Loss Behaviours in Adolescent Girls and Boys. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 20: 361-79.

Ridge, T. (2002). *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a Child's Perspective*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Roberts, K. and Parsells, G. (1994). Youth Cultures in Britain: Middle Class Take-Over, *Leisure Studies*, 13: 33-48.

Rourke, S. (2001). *Early School Leaving in the Canal Communities Partnership Area*, Dublin: Canal Community Partnership.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997): *Sharing in Progress*, Dublin: NAPS.

Shaw, S. (1991). Body Image Among Adolescent Women: The Role of Sports and Physically Active Leisure, *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 16: 349-67.

Shaw, S.M., Caldwell, L.L. and Kleiber, D.A. (1996). Boredom, Stress and Social Control in the Daily Activities of Adolescents, *Journal of Leisure*, 28: 274-93.

Shucksmith, J., Hendry, L., Love, J. and Glenndinning, T. (1993). The Importance of Friendship, *Research in Education*: 52.

Sigfusdottir, I.D., Farkas, G. and Silver, E. (2004). The Role of Depressed Mood and Anger in the Relationship Between Family Conflict and Delinquent Behaviour, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33(6): 509-22.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques for Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, London: Sage.

Valentine, G., Skelton, T. and Chambers, D. (1998). Cool Places: an introduction to youth and youth culture, in Skelton, T. and Valentine G. (eds) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture*, London: Routledge.

Watson, D., Whelan, C.T., Williams, J. and Blackwell, S. (2005). *Mapping Poverty: National, Regional and County Patterns*. Dublin: Economic and social Research Institute.

Whyte, J. (1995). *Changing Times, Challenges to Identity: 12 Year Olds in Belfast 1981 and 1992*, Avebury: Aldershot.

Wyn, J. and White, R. (1997). *Rethinking Youth*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Zeijl, E., DuBois-Reymond, M. and Te Poel, Y. (2001), Young adolescents' leisure patterns, *Society and Leisure*, 2: 379-402.

Zelden, S. (2002). Sense of Community and Positive Adult Beliefs Toward Adolescents and Youth Policy in Urban Neighbourhoods and Small Cities, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 31(5): 331-42.