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## Our Views Anybody Listening: Researching the Views and Needs of Young People in Co. Kildare

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# OUR views anybody listening?

Researching the views and needs  
of young people in Co. Kildare

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*January 2006*



Kildare  
Youth Services  
Youth Work Ireland

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\* Community Training Centres are operated by FÁS nationwide and Youthreach Centres are operated by the VEC. Both provide education and training for early school leavers and other out of school youth. The generic term 'CTC/Youthreach' shall be used throughout this study to refer to participants drawn from the CTC Centre in Newbridge and the Youthreach Centres in Leixlip and Athy.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the results of a survey of 988 adolescents in Co. Kildare, carried out between December 2004 and February 2005. The sample was drawn from First Year, Third Year and Sixth Year students in 25 of the 29 secondary schools in the County and participants at the three CTC/Youthreach Centres\* in Co. Kildare. The research was commissioned by Kildare Youth Services and the aim was to give young people a voice in the provision of services; specifically, to explore and identify what young people have to say about community facilities, leisure activities, worries and concerns and sources of support. Central to the research design was the commitment by KYS that

1. young people have an opportunity to express their own opinions and beliefs,
2. direct feedback from young people inform service provision,
3. service provision be evidence-based, and
4. service provision be needs-led, rather than service-led.

The emergence of the children's rights movement is briefly described, particularly Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. That is, the right of children to express their views on all matters affecting them, and for these views to be given due weight, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. In Ireland, such a commitment is found in the National Children's Strategy. The first goal of the Strategy is that 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. The National Children's Office in Ireland is the primary agency for increasing and enhancing the participation of young people in civic society and policymaking. Some recent research conducted by Foróige and the National Youth Federation examining the views/needs of Irish adolescents is described.

Traditionally, academic disciplines concerned with young people have focussed on delinquency, early school leaving, alcohol and drug use and other problematic behaviours. This has tended to give a distorted view of the reality of young people's lives. The present study does examine topics which can be problematic (such as bullying and sex education, for example) but it also includes a focus on non-problematic life-style issues such as recreational behaviour, daily activities and sources of well-being.

The majority of respondents (82%) live with both their parents; 13% have parents who are either divorced or separated. The population was primarily Irish; non-Irish respondents were primarily from the UK or US with a small proportion coming from Africa (0.8%) or Eastern Europe (0.8%).

Not surprisingly, given the developmental norms of the adolescent years, a favoured activity amongst respondents is 'hanging out with friends.' Over half the sample spend between five and fourteen hours per week with friends. Only 3% spend no time

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each week with friends. About a quarter watch over 10 hours a week of TV/DVDs/Videos; the remainder spend much less time than this watching TV. Entertainment technologies (such as the Internet and Play stations) are also popular, but there is a sizable minority (31%) who spend no time each week on these activities. A small number (4%) report spending very large amounts of time per week (15+ hours) on entertainment technologies. There is a decline in such activity throughout the adolescent years. This presumably reflects the decreasing attraction of computer games for many people, as they get older.

A quarter of the sample spends no time each week in active sport. This is more pronounced amongst girls, where 34% spend no time engaged in active sport, compared to 21% of boys. There is a decrease in time spent on active sport as young people progress through adolescence. Twelve percent of the sample is involved in Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs (21% of First Years compared to 4% of Sixth Years). Thus, we again see the pattern of decreased involvement in organised activities through the teenage years. Almost 40% of the sample reports some weekly involvement with music, drama or singing and 25% report spending time each week in voluntary work outside the home. Just over half the respondents report no involvement in paid work. A minority (10%) work more than 10 hours per week in paid employment.

Half of the sample never take alcohol. However, 17% report drinking alcohol 'often' or 'so often I worry' (this increases to 39% of male 6<sup>th</sup> Year students). Bearing in mind this is a self-report study, relatively low numbers of participants reported using other drugs, including steroids, mushrooms, LSD, ecstasy, cocaine and prescription tablets.

While some bullying in school is experienced by one-third of the sample, only 4.8% report 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of bullying. Interestingly, this remains steady for boys throughout the school years (5-6% of boys in all years report 'a lot' of bullying), while it decreases for girls (from 8% of first Year females to 2% of Sixth Year females).

Participants are most likely to go to a close friend or their mother for help with a problem. Fathers and siblings are also important sources of social support. Boys are more likely to report not going to anybody with a problem than girls.

Respondents report that they feel relatively well informed about fitness and leisure, healthy eating and alcohol/illegal drugs. However, approximately a third of respondents feel they do not have enough information about suicide awareness, gay/lesbian/bisexual issues, mental health issues and divorce/separation.

Overall, seven out of ten respondents describe themselves as 'very happy' or 'happy most of the time.' Just over 6% are 'sad a lot of the time' or 'very unhappy.'

The situation with regard to Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is mixed. Almost 80% have received classes of RSE, but only a third found them 'very helpful'. About half found them 'ok' and 16% found them unhelpful. Twenty-nine percent of the sample reported that their parents had never discussed sex with them. Fifty-five

percent reported their parents had ‘mentioned it once or twice,’ and 16% indicated that their parents had mentioned it many times.

‘Failing exams’ and ‘being bored/having nothing to do’ are the most common concerns experienced by this group of young people – 20% and 30% of respondents worry ‘often’ about these two issues, respectively. Unhappiness with physical appearance is also a widespread concern, as are boyfriend/girlfriend problems, and not feeling a part of a group. Young people also report worrying about their parents or guardians. Almost a third (32%) worry ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ about their parents/guardians not getting on; 17% worry about their parents/guardians separation or divorce; 13% worry about a parent/guardian’s drink problem and 11% worry about a parent/guardian’s mental health.

When asked to identify priorities for government action, the most consistent response was having ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out’, followed by sports facilities, cinemas, nightclubs, swimming pools and other recreational facilities.

The responses of the young people in this research provide clear indications for future action by educators, service providers and policy makers. Some priority areas for action are suggested below:

**Recommendation one:** That all young people are actively involved in the development and delivery of services, amenities, policies and decision making that affects their lives, including the education, social and community spheres.

**Recommendation two:** Physical education should be resourced to meet the express needs of young people (both genders) in school. A general ‘retreat’ (particularly by girls) from physical education as the adolescent years progress should be recognised and counteracted. Alternatives to outdoor team-sports have the potential to include young people currently not participating in school sport programmes. For example, dance, yoga, gymnastics, athletics, swimming. The habits one learns in adolescence are carried through to adult life. Directors of CTC/Youthreach Centre could explore ways of tackling the low levels of physical activity amongst the young people in their care. One possibility might be the integration of participants with the PE programmes in neighbouring Secondary schools.

**Recommendation three:** The importance of music in the lives of young people should be recognised by all who work with adolescents. Large numbers are actively engaged with music, drama or singing each week and listening to or playing music is a very common way of coping with ‘feeling down.’ It is recommended that service providers fully utilise this avenue of working with young people as it is attractive to the target audience and also offers opportunities for artistic expression and creativity.

**Recommendation four:** While half of the respondents are not engaged in paid employment, a small number of young people are being exploited by employers, thus jeopardising their educational, social and physical development. Such employers should be actively targeted by labour inspectors. Heavy engagement at a young age with paid employment is not compatible with full-time schooling or training.

**Recommendation five:** Aspects of alcohol use amongst older adolescents in Co. Kildare are quite worrying. In spite of this, one in five respondents say they do not have adequate information about alcohol/drug use. In conjunction with their local public health professionals, schools and youth services should further promote sensible and healthy attitudes to alcohol use. Each School and CTC/Youthreach should have a highly visible ‘stand’ with posters and leaflets about the dangers of alcohol and drug use. This would act as a gateway for youth services and schools to work in partnership towards the provision of talks, seminars, focus groups and other activities.

Significant numbers of young people choose not to drink alcohol. Models and programmes need to be developed which support young people to make informed, responsible choices regarding alcohol, alongside harm-reduction models of intervention.

**Recommendation six:** Approximately one-third of respondents reported being affected ‘a little bit’ by bullying in school and about 5% reported being affected ‘quite a lot or a lot.’ This represents an unacceptable level of bullying and should be tackled by the implementation of clear anti-bullying policies and procedures in all schools and CYC/Youthreach Centres which involves young people in a continuing process of review and planning.

**Recommendation seven:** The findings highlight the oft-cited reluctance of boys to seek help with their problems from friends, relatives or professionals. Teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers and others working with boys should stress, perhaps even more so than they do for girls, the availability of appropriate support services. Whilst boys may seek support less, the results show that they are vulnerable to the same anxieties and the same inappropriate coping strategies (for example, use of drugs/alcohol; deliberate self-harm) as girls.

**Recommendation eight:** It is often said that we live in an ‘information society’ surrounded by all we need to know about any given topic. However, the average young person may not have ready access to quality information about various topics that may impact on his/her life. Respondents report not having enough information about, amongst others, suicide awareness, gay/lesbian/bisexual issues, mental health issues, divorce/separation or young people’s rights. Clearly, adolescent-friendly information about these topics is not reaching young people. Public health professionals could play a role in designing appropriate ‘Social Issues’ displays that should be permanent exhibitions in schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres.

As per Recommendation five above, there is a need for schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres, along with Youth Information Centres and other service providers, to work in partnership to make information accessible to young people. ‘Information,’ in and of itself, can only have a certain impact. Information provision should be a starting point for supporting and consulting with young people using, for example, work-shops, youth fora and focus groups.

**Recommendation nine:** Most young people in Co. Kildare are not receiving satisfactory Relationship and Sexuality Education, either in school or outside of school. Almost a quarter of respondents had received no RSE education at all. Of

those that have received RSE, very few found them ‘very helpful.’ Both primary and secondary schools should ensure that Stay Safe and RSE programmes are made available to students, by trained and enthusiastic instructors. This research shows that large numbers of parents in Co. Kildare are not engaging with their children on the topic of relationships and sexuality in a meaningful way. School-parent associations need to acknowledge and support the primary responsibility of parents in this area.

**Recommendation ten:** The most frequently cited concern is ‘being bored/having nothing to do.’ Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited priority for ‘government action’ is for ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out.’ In other words, amenities for young people are sorely lacking in Co. Kildare. In addition to structured activities such as sports, scouts etc., older adolescents in particular need space for unstructured or loosely structured activities with lower levels of adult monitoring. Youth clubs and Youth Services, in particular, should increase the provision of adolescent-friendly services, open to all young people in the community.

**Recommendation eleven:** Young people have highlighted the importance of parents in their lives for socio-emotional support and resilience. They have also indicated that they worry about their parents’ relationships and well-being. Given this reality for young people, it is imperative that youth services include parent support as part of their overall package of services for young people.

**Recommendation twelve:** The final recommendation is more general; that is, adults should recognise that the overwhelming majority of young people are hard working, fun-loving, sociable, family-centred, fair-minded, socially aware and thoughtful (just like most of the rest of the population). Teachers, youth-workers and other professionals that work with young people should strenuously counteract the pervasive negative coverage of young people, particularly in the print media. It is hoped that this report goes some way towards describing the day-to-day lived reality for young people.

### Conclusion

The researchers acknowledge that policies and legislation are in place for many of the recommendations above to be implemented, but what is lacking is a resource commitment to meeting the needs of young people in Co. Kildare. Additional resources should be provided for:

- Schools (through the Department of Education and Science)
- Family support and counselling (through the Health Services Executive)
- Youthwork services (as envisioned in the National Youthwork Development Plan).

This will contribute towards positively shaping happier, more able, confident young people who will be the adults of tomorrow.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kildare Youth Services (KYS) is a voluntary organisation that provides a range of community-based services to young people in a number of settings throughout Co. Kildare. These include a Youth Counselling Service, the Naas Child and Family Project, the Tracking and Mentoring Project, the Youth Information Service, Community Youth Projects, support for new youth clubs, training courses and information days, an equipment and resource library and youth development and art programmes.

Kildare Youth Services is a member region of the National Youth Federation, which is made up of 21 member regions nationwide.

The Board of Directors of KYS commissioned this research project to examine the views and needs of young people in Co. Kildare.

### 1.1 The aims and objectives of the research

The purpose of the research is to give young people a voice in the provision of services to them in Co. Kildare; to explore and identify what young people have to say about community facilities, leisure activities and sources of support. Central to the research design was the commitment by KYS that

1. young people have an opportunity to express their own opinions and beliefs,
2. direct feedback from young people inform service provision,
3. service provision be evidence-based, and
4. service provision be needs-led, rather than service-led.

This commitment to research and evaluate KYS service provision and youth needs is contained in the KYS Strategic Plan 2002-2006 (KYS, 2001). Specifically, a research and policy organizational objective is to “research and evaluate KYS’s service provision and youth needs in the county on an ongoing basis” (KYS, 2001, p. 16).

## 1.2 The structure of the report

The first part of this report examines the inclusion of young people and their views in service planning as an aspect of the Children's Rights movement. Secondly, the research methodology is described. In part three the results of data collected from 966 first, third and sixth year school pupils and 22 CTC/Youthreach<sup>1</sup> participants throughout Co. Kildare are presented. Finally, key features from the data are highlighted, with recommendations on the implications for the provision of services.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Training Centres are operated by FÁS nationwide and Youthreach Centres are operated by the VEC. Both provide education and training for early school leavers and other out of school youth. The generic term 'CTC/Youthreach' shall be used throughout this study to refer to participants drawn from the CTC Centre in Newbridge and the Youthreach Centres in Leixlip and Athy.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND YOUTH CONSULTATION RESEARCH

### 2.1 Introduction

The following material describes some of the important children's rights developments that have facilitated the development of 'youth consultation' research and practice in recent years.

Historically, children and young people have been the passive recipients of guidance and services from their elders. They had little input to policies and decisions that affected every aspect of their lives, from clothes, to food, to schooling. However, the views of young people are increasingly solicited/main-streamed by service providers, schools and policy makers in many Western countries.

This process of inclusion has paralleled the emergence of adolescence as a distinct phase of life. Conger (1991) describes the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the "era of adolescence", an era that has evolved due to the social and economic changes arising from industrialisation and capitalism in Western Europe and the United States. Prior to the industrial revolution and widespread schooling, there was little opportunity for a "youth culture" to emerge. However, increasing segregation of adolescents from adults, the growing complexity of work, and the need for prolonged education facilitated the creation of adolescence as a distinct phase of life - not a child, but not an active, adult part of the workforce either. In such a way, youth, or adolescence, became a distinct phase of life in between childhood and adulthood. Of course, all societies acknowledge a transition between childhood and adulthood. Modern, complex societies differ from earlier societies because the distinction between adolescents and adults is not demarcated by a single widely-practiced rite of passage; instead the transition to adulthood is marked by protracted schooling/training and the (relative) delay in assuming adult roles such as work and parenthood.

The evolution of a youth culture was accelerated after World War Two, particularly in the United States. The appearance of the part-time job gave young people a disposable income. A youth culture or specific 'identity' (with distinctive clothes, hairstyles, music etc.) emerged. Indeed, the term "teenagers" was coined only in 1941 (Bryson, 1994). By 1955, US teenagers were buying 40% of all radios, records and cameras; more than 50% of all movie tickets; and even 9% of new cars. They were worth \$10bn a year. This process has continued apace. The entertainment

industries are largely youth-focussed to tap into this style/fashion/identity driven disposable income.

### 2.1.1 The emergence of an identifiable, distinct ‘youth culture’

The process of increased participation in the labour market (primarily in low paid, part-time, service sector jobs) has increased dramatically for Irish adolescents in the last 15 years. From a position where few employment opportunities beyond baby-sitting or grass-cutting existed, we have moved to a position of widespread employment of school-going adolescents. The result is a youth population with dramatically increased spending power relative to their counterparts of 15 years ago.

However, the increasing attention being paid by service providers and policy makers to the views of young people has not come about because of their increased spending power. Rather, a significant process of recognition of children’s rights has taken place. Many commentators date this to the 1979 United Nation’s Year of the Child and, ten years later, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (a ‘child’ is defined as any person below 18 years). Unlike UN Declarations, the Convention becomes law in those countries that ratify it. Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, thus binding Ireland to its articles in international law.

## 2.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been the most significant event for children’s rights internationally since the children’s rights movement of late nineteenth century Britain, spearheaded by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (RSPCC).

Essentially, it is an international Bill of Rights for children (Hamilton, 2005). The Convention operates on the principle that there are universally accepted pre-conditions for any child’s harmonious and full development. The Convention is an unprecedented attempt to collect in one document the minimum rights of all children in the world. The Convention recognises that children have needs and human rights that extend far beyond basic concepts of protection: children are recognised as having a full range of civil, economic, social, cultural and political rights. Specifically, the Convention has 54 articles detailing the individual rights of any person under 18



years of age to develop to his or her full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect, exploitation or other abuses. Each child has the right to life; to a name and state; to a freedom from discrimination of any kind; to rest and to play; to an adequate standard of living; to health care; to education; and to protection from economic exploitation and work that may interfere with education or be harmful to health and well-being.

The view that children have rights of their own, rights that transcend the family setting, is a new idea. Unlike earlier statements of children's rights, such as the 1924 League of Nation's Declaration and the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the 1989 Convention is liberating as well as protective. The Convention is unique in that it allows for the child's *own wishes and opinions* to be expressed and given careful consideration. As stated in Article 12:

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all the matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UN, 1991, p. 20).

The Convention is overseen by the process whereby each State is required to present a National Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. This has had a real impact on policy in Ireland. For example, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended in 1998 that Ireland prepare a comprehensive National Strategy for Children. Previously, in 1997, the Government indicated that it had no immediate plans to draft a National Children's Strategy. However, as noted by Hayes (2004)

“in October 1998 the Minister for Health and Children announced ... that, in response to the UN Committee recommendations, his department was coordinating the production of a National Children's Strategy. An interdepartmental group was established in 1999 and the Strategy was published in November 2000” (Hayes, 2004, p. 52).

### 2.3 The National Children's Strategy

There are three National Goals in the National Children's Strategy (2000):

Goal 1 - Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Goal 2 - Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will be benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.

Goal 3 - Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

The first goal of Ireland's National Children's Strategy (2000) echoes a key principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – that children will have a say in matters that affect them in accordance with their age and maturity. As noted in the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007,

“... put forward to achieve this goal are the establishment of a National Children's Parliament [Dáil na nÓg] and an Office of Ombudsman for Children. Additional measures under this goal will include a review of existing arrangements at local level, particularly with respect to County and City Development Boards to ensure that children's views are obtained in formulating and implementing their Economic, Social and Cultural Strategies (Department of Education and Science, 2003, p. 7).

Thus, involving young people in discussions and policy making is a central feature of important documents such as the UNCRC and the National Children's Strategy and is an important fundamental principle for policy makers and service providers.

#### 2.4 Are the views of young people important?

In a culture which often requires obedience, discipline and even subservience from children, it is not surprising that it can be a considerable challenge for adults to listen to young people in an open and respectful way. The education system, for example, demands long hours of attention from children and young people in increasingly regimented, teacher-led environments. Quiescent compliance and obedience is required. Outspoken, restless children are punished. Discipline is very important in the classroom. This is not completely surprising, given the demands placed on teachers where set syllabi must be covered in a finite time period, and where class ratios of 1:30 are normal.

Is it important for adults to listen to the views of young people? Yes. Not only is it in accord with the values of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but it can also be pragmatic and useful. Ruddock, Chaplain & Wallace (1996), for example, detail the central role of students in developing school improvement strategies. They found that students were capable of producing analytical and constructive observations about the barriers to learning in the school environment and conclude schools “do not adequately take account of the social maturity of young people, nor of the tensions and pressures they feel as they struggle to reconcile the demands of their social and personal lives with the development of their identity as learners” (p. 1).

Whilst these comments relate to the secondary school sector in the UK, such conclusions also ring true for many services dealing with adolescents in Ireland. Both the resistance of grown-ups to listen to children, and the insight that can be gained from doing so, is illustrated by Davie (1996):

“Adults who are brought, perhaps reluctantly, to the point of consulting children are often so impressed by children’s responses that there is an irreversible conversion to the practice” (p. 9).

As we have previously noted, the importance of listening to children and young people is emphasised in the National Children’s Strategy (2000) which clearly states the need to give children a voice in matters affecting them. In *Hearing Young Voices* (2002), Karen McAuley of the Children’s Rights Alliance, and Marian Brattman of the National Youth Council of Ireland, argued that involving children requires more than merely paying lip-service to the Strategy. Their work highlighted the need to involve children and young people in decisions about what constitutes ‘consultation’, and discussed the importance of using accessible language and providing the support that children need in order to become partners in policy formation. For example, fifteen young people were consulted by the Eastern Health Board’s *Forum on Youth Homelessness* and their views informed the Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001). Also, the National Economic and Social Forum talked with a group of early school leavers in 2001/2002, and fed their views into policy recommendations to Government.

With a view to facilitating the involvement of children and young people, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) established a Children’s Consultation Unit in 2002, supported by the National Children’s Office, to provide support and training for professionals involved in consulting children and young people. In addition to training, the Children’s

Consultation Unit offers an event management service to organisations wishing to consult with children. It also offers training to schools on the establishment of School Councils and has developed a Schools Council Training Pack.

Hayes (2004) further describes the trend towards inclusion of children in policy/services development in Ireland:

“A number of different associations have held forums to access children’s views on different issues, including the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC), which hosts regional Children’s Forums annually, and the National Youth Council of Ireland’s youth parliament. In addition a number of local communities and partnerships have specific projects which give voice to children on issues of importance to them such as play space (Dublin North Inner City) and creativity in the classroom (Dublin Canal Community Partnership)” (p. 49).

Hayes (2004) details the consultation process with children that was adopted for the development of the National Children’s Strategy itself. Consultation with children took three forms; (a) publication of notice inviting children to make submissions on being a child in Ireland (b) visits to 10 schools by the Minister of State for Children (c) in-depth consultations with children conducted by 10 children’s agencies. In total, submissions were received from 2,488 children. The results of the consultation process were published by the National Children’s Strategy in September 2000:

“The summaries received from the different consultations represent a diversity of issues of interest to children. They include such key themes as Play and Leisure, The Environment, Social Issues, Having a Say, The Right to a Good Life and Expectations for the Strategy” (Hayes, 2004, p. 54).

The Education Act (1998) contains provisions for the establishment of student councils in post-primary schools, to represent students’ views and give them a voice in the affairs of the school. By 2004, a majority of secondary schools had such student councils (561 out of 744). However, only a very few such Student Councils are represented on School’s Board of Management (National Children’s Office, 2005).

The National Children's Office (NCO) is a main 'driver' behind increasing and enhancing the participation of young people in civic society and policy making. The NCO website ([www.nco.ie](http://www.nco.ie)) details a range of child and youth participation projects:

- Comhairle na nÓg;
- Dáil na nÓg;
- Dáil na bPáistí
- The Student Council Working group
- Guidelines on participation by children and young people
- Establishment of an NCO Child and Youth Forum
- Supporting the Young Social Innovators Exhibition
- Supporting RTE News2Day
- Involving children/young people in the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children
- Involving children/young people in the development of a code of children's advertising
- Involving children/young people in the Children Conference on adolescent health and service planning

#### 2.5 The National Youth Federation position on participative youth work

The principle of participation is firmly embedded in the approach to youth work advocated by the National Youth Federation (of which Kildare Youth Services is a member). The NYF (2003) *Policy framework for the delivery of youth services* states that truly participative youth work needs to be underpinned by a number of assumptions. For example, young people have skills, understanding and ability and young people have the right to be heard, to control their lives, to define what is important to them and to take action on issues that affect them. The importance of involving young people in the youth work process is highlighted below:

“As a society we are not good at involving young people in decisions that impact on their lives such as education, housing, health, relationships, sex, parenthood or career, despite the knowledge that decisions are most effective if all the stakeholders are involved in the process. Youth work, through providing opportunities and support for young people can significantly support the democratisation of young people's lives and supports the development of active citizenship” (National Youth Federation, 2003, p. 11).

### 2.5.1 An example of some recent youth consultation research

As previously noted, there have been a number of creative and imaginative research projects which have sought to amplify the voices of children and young people in their work. One such project was carried out recently in Tallaght, Dublin (Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative, 2005). In this project, the techniques of process drama were utilised to interact with 140 children in 5<sup>th</sup> class in seven primary schools across Tallaght West. The result is a series of recommendations and proposals as to how the neighbourhoods can be made better places to live, as prioritised by the child participants. These include increased opportunities for recreation, (playgrounds, parks, swimming facilities) better safety and protection for children (from joyriding, vandalism, groups of young people hanging around and, sometimes, bullying younger children), a cleaner environment, better housing and the need for a fair and happy school environment.

The value of such child-centred research is noted in the conclusion of the report:

“Their [children’s] recommendations demonstrate the children’s maturity, and their valuable contribution deserves to be heard by adults. It is striking that in their own unique ways, their insights into life in Tallaght West does not largely differ from that of their adult neighbours. They understand the roles to be played by themselves and others so that the variety and quality of life for the children and adults in Tallaght West can improve” (2005, p. 31).

### 2.5.2 What are the views/needs of Irish adolescents?

Foróige, the national voluntary youth organisation, conducted a nationwide consultative process with young people and youth workers to explore “the views of young people on a range of matters covering their desired relationships with peers, adults and the community; the personal abilities and qualities they wanted to develop and their hopes and fears for the future” (Foróige, 1999, p. iii). In total, 1,150 people were interviewed in focus groups; Foróige members, adult leaders, professional staff, community members and parents. A limitation of this study is that the number of respondents to each of the questions is not reported. For example, when asked ‘what are your fears for the future’, 38% of respondents said ‘Death of a loved one.’ The sample size for this question is not reported, so only the proportion of respondents’ answers, relative to other answers is available.

Nonetheless, interesting trends emerge. Young people have a strong desire to be involved in the community. When asked what they would like most in their relationships with the community, 37% said 'to be more involved'. Thirty two percent wanted better local facilities and a further 32% wished for the community to be more friendly to young people.

The importance of friendship for young people is highlighted. When asked 'what would you most like in your relationships with other young people', 41% said 'friendship' (having friends they can rely on and confide in, friends they can talk to easily and friends that will stand up for them). A further 38% mentioned being able to trust friends.

In terms of hopes for the future, 47% wished 'to get a good job', 28% mentioned marriage and 26% mentioned 'passing exams' and 'being good at school.'

As noted in the Foreword

“Perhaps the most striking finding is the heartfelt cry for support in constructing supportive, intimate relationships with other youth as well as with adults in the difficult transitions faced by youth. The construction and maintenance of intimate, supportive, mutually respectful peer friendships, familial and other youth-adult relationships is the central concern ... The ability to both be listened to and to listen and respond supportively to others appears to be important, but also difficult to achieve. More fundamental existential concerns also are present not far below the surface; the worry about alienation and death is surprisingly alive. But also equally surprising is the wish to get involved, to participate actively in the construction of a more supportive human community. It is as if the means or social instruments to achieve such a wish are surprisingly absent in most of their communities” (p. iii).

Further,

“Young people want, among other things, to be respected, to establish friendships, to be listened to, to be trusted, to be able to relate to and confide in adults and to play a far greater role in the community and be recognised for doing so. They want their

relationships with other young people, with adults and with the community to be mutually beneficial. In other words they want to give as well as to receive” (Foróige, 1999, p. 18).

These extracts highlight the centrality of ‘relationship building’ in quality youth work.

In September 2003, TNS mrbi surveyed 1000 15-24 year olds nationwide. The findings covered a range of topics and were published in a series of articles in the Irish Times in September 2003. The poll examined young people’s views and experiences of media consumption, diet, politics and religion. The centrality of parents and family in young people’s lives was highlighted. When asked to identify, unprompted, those they admire most, the largest category was parents, mentioned by 35% of respondents. By comparison, Nelson Mandela was spontaneously mentioned by 4% of respondents. Thus, it is very hard to compete with the admiration young people have for their parents!

In 2004, the National Youth Federation polled 1014 adolescents nationwide. The poll sought to identify how young people view politics and to highlight issues that are of concern to them. When asked to rank issues by importance, Health was ranked first, followed by Family. As the report notes, “the ranking of Family is consistent with other research of young people.” This is an important point as young people’s rebellion against family and quest for autonomy is often exaggerated.

## 2.6 Shifting the focus from ‘youth problems’

As elsewhere in Europe, the academic community, policy makers and the popular media in Ireland have tended to focus on the problematic aspects of young people and their lives; alcohol and drug use, early school leaving, early sexual behaviour, pregnancy, STDs, delinquency. Indeed, the origins of academic Youth Studies after the Second World War is characterised by a heavy focus on gangs, delinquency and troublesome youth. As noted by Skelton and Valentine (1988):

“Adolescents began to be treated as a problem for society after the Second World War, during a period in which young men, in particular, were gaining cultural and economic independence from their family of origin. Academic study of ‘youth’ as a distinctive social category became established during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States and Britain. The history of academic research about youth cultures reflects and reinforces the public condemnation



of working class adolescents. Academic interest in teenagers was born within criminology, fuelled by moral panics concerning the nuisance value of young people on the urban streets of Western societies. Thus, the research into youth groups was marked by a preoccupation with delinquency and associated with the study of so-called 'condemned' and 'powerless' groups in society such as the working class, migrants and the criminal" (Skelton and Valentine, 1988, p. 10).

In the Irish context, Hennessy and Hogan (2000) reviewed all published work on developmental psychology, with 'adolescence' as a key search term, in the previous 25 years. What is notable is the general dearth of work until the late 1980s. Overall, output has increased dramatically, albeit from a very low base (from 3 publications a year in the mid-1970s to 23 per year in the mid-1990s). Consistent focuses include the impact of the Northern 'Troubles' on children's development and young people's drug usage. Also fairly well represented are behaviour disorders such as depression and educational work looking at correlates of school children's IQ.

This, of course, is partly a product of the age-old tension between the established and the up-coming generation, the former viewing the latter as troublesome, poorly disciplined and even dangerous. Sociologists have long highlighted the never-ending series of moral panics about young people and their behaviour, be they teddy boys, boot boys, punks, hippies or, more recently, goths (Cohen, 1973; Collins et al., 2000; Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hebdige, 1979; Miles, 2000; Thompson, 1998).

There is nothing new in this. Indeed, Plato objected to various aspects of young peoples' behaviour. He advised against allowing the young drink alcohol, for "fire must not be poured on fire." He also described young people as argumentative - "in their delight at the first taste of wisdom, they would annoy everyone with their arguments." Aristotle, too, found adolescents to be "passionate, irascible and impulsive." Also, in regard to sexual desire, "they exercise no self-restraint."

In contrast to the focus on 'youth problems', the more normative aspects of the lived experience of young people in Ireland have received little attention. In their review of published academic work on adolescence, Hennessy & Hogan (2000) conclude with a call for a national longitudinal study that will address many of the gaps in our understanding of the experiences of Irish children and adolescents:

"The most notable absences from research in child psychology in Ireland are nationally representative longitudinal studies. With recent dramatic social changes, including

legislation on divorce, a booming economy, increasing cultural and ethnic diversity and new legislation acknowledging children's rights, the need for such studies is now clear" (Hennessey and Hogan, 2000, p. 115).

Although such a longitudinal study is a commitment in the National Children's Strategy (and is now at an advanced planning stage), there remains considerable scope to widen our understanding of children's lives.

The present study does examine topics which can be problematic (such as bullying and sex education, for example) but it also includes a focus on non-problematic life-style issues such as recreational behaviour, daily activities and sources of well-being.

Whilst it is understandable that service-providers will focus on the areas of greatest need, it will also be illuminating to examine the more day-to-day aspects of young people's lives not least to counterbalance the impression of wild hedonism associated with young people in the popular media. A research report published by Foróige (1999) suggests that society has lost touch with the young and tends to categorise young people according to simplistic stereotypes, with an emphasis on sexual activity and drinking. It is suggested

"Society needs to develop a view of the mass of youth as individual persons who are members of families – sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; people who are friends and confidants of others, people who are concerned with the present and worry and hope about the future; people who want to be involved in the community and play their part in the work of society; people who enjoy healthy fun and frolics appropriate to their age; people who ponder serious matters of great concern to themselves and their society; people who know the reality of pressure and stress; people who sometimes make mistakes and do what is wrong and people who need the guidance and leadership of adult society" (Foróige, 1999, p. 19).

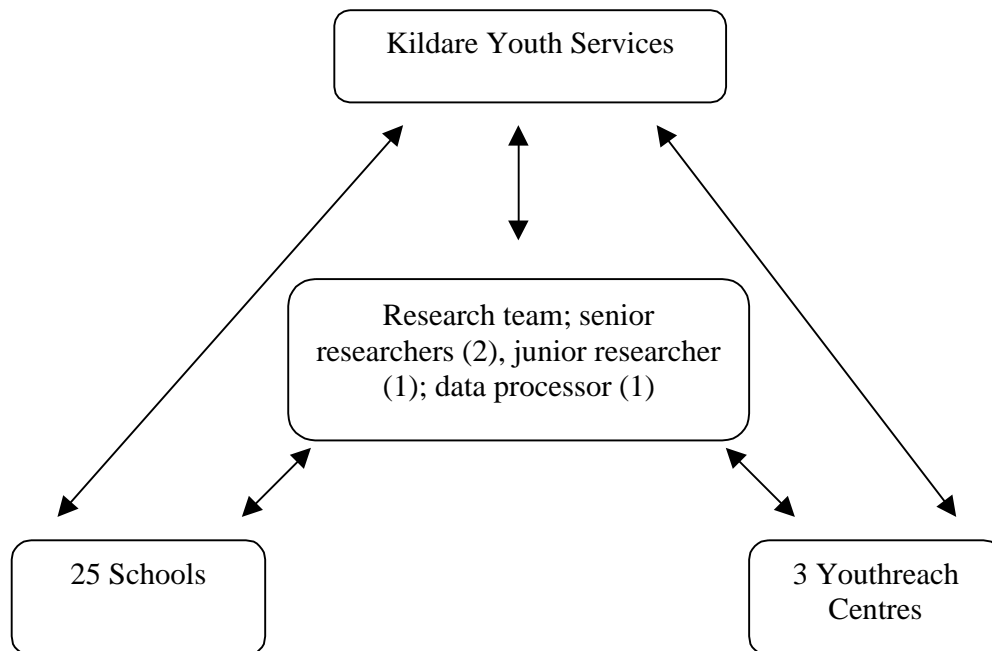
What are the issues that effect and concern young people most? We know what 'youth issues' concern adults most – alcohol abuse, drug use, early sexual activity and pregnancy. But are these the same concerns that young people have in their daily lives? The fact is, we know less about the normative lived experience of adolescents in Ireland today (for example, friends and relationships, past-times, school experience) than we do about selected 'problem' issues.

The questionnaire used in this study (see appendix 2) was designed to elicit data on a range of issues pertinent to young people. It included a number of opportunities for respondents to describe, in their own words, their views on certain issues. The methodology below describes the rationale for including topics in the study.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research involved the distribution of a questionnaire to first, third and sixth year students in 25 schools, and participants in three CTC/Youthreach Centres, in Co. Kildare. These Centres, operated by FÁS and the VEC, are alternative education/training centres for young people who have left the secondary school system.

This represents all of the CTC/Youthreach Centres in the County and 86% of secondary schools (25 out of 29). In total, 988 respondents completed the questionnaire; 966 school pupils and 22 CTC/Youthreach participants. Below, the design of the questionnaire is described and the procedure for data collection is presented, including particular ethical and methodological issues.



**Figure 1: Diagram of communication between KYS, research team and Schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres**

#### 3.1 Questionnaire design

The design-phase of the questionnaire was concerned with two main issues. Firstly, the language used in the research instrument should be familiar to young people and developmentally appropriate. This presented a challenge as the questionnaire was to be used across a target sample of first, third and sixth year students. Furthermore, the service needs and life experiences of young

people in late adolescence are very different from those in early adolescence. This challenge was addressed in two ways. Firstly, the questionnaire was repeatedly drafted by a range of professionals with extensive experience of working with adolescents, such as counsellors, teachers and youth workers. As well as being reviewed internally by staff in KYS, the questionnaire was also circulated to Youth Services staff of member Youth Services of the National Youth Federation elsewhere in the country. This resulted in many helpful observations about the appropriateness of language to be used. The second strategy employed to ensure the language used in the questionnaire was maximally accessible was the Pilot Study. The Pilot Study was conducted with a first year (n=30) and a sixth year (n=19) class to ensure the full age range of respondents was surveyed. All instances where the phrasing of questions was potentially ambiguous and where greater clarity was required were noted. For example, a question asking students to describe their “perfect” weekend did not specify when the weekend begins. This was altered to specify that the weekend begins on Friday afternoon after school. Also, ‘boyfriend or girlfriend’ was added to the list of people a student might talk to if they have a problem.

The second main concern in questionnaire design was to ensure that the key question areas were being addressed; that is, views of young people on social and personal issues, services and community facilities, leisure pursuits and interpersonal relationships.

We were conscious of the particular issues that KYS were keen to explore and we were also mindful of earlier studies where information about young people’s lives had been conducted. We did not wish to replicate areas of study which have been quite comprehensively surveyed in recent times (for example, alcohol use). Instead, we wished to concentrate on other aspects of young people’s lives in Ireland which have not been the focus of much study. Below, the rationale for selecting questions for inclusion in the questionnaire is described. A number of open-ended questions were included to attempt to capture qualitative material which does not readily lend itself to ‘tick-box’ answers.

<b>Key question areas</b>	<b>Rationale for question inclusion</b>
'Details about your life'	One of the goals of the National Children's Strategy is to better understand the lives of children. This section seeks to gather data on respondents' personal, social and entertainment lives. This material is placed early in the questionnaire as it is non-threatening and is concerned with enjoyable activities, such as sport and music.
Alcohol and drug use	A number of studies have shown escalating levels of alcohol/drug use in Ireland. To what extent is this an issue for young people in Co. Kildare?
Bullying	Schools can take progressive steps to reduce the climate for bullying in schools. It will be important to know of schools where this is a significant problem.
'Somebody to talk to'	Questions were included about who young people go to if they have a problem so as to get an insight to the support network available to young people.
Health and well being	There are growing concerns about increasing obesity levels amongst Irish children. In addition, there are longer established concerns about high levels of youth suicide and low levels of awareness of physical and mental health issues. Public health interventions stress the need for easily available, age-appropriate information on these issues for children and young people. Do young people in Co. Kildare have access to this information?
Sex education	The Crisis Pregnancy Agency notes the on-going numbers of young people with unexpected pregnancies and the dramatic growth in Irish people seeking abortions in the UK each year. Central to tackling issues of sexual health and well-being is the extent to which young people are informed and educated about their bodies and their sexuality in an age appropriate way. What role do schools and parents/guardians play in providing sex education for young people?
Discrimination	Increasing numbers of immigrants are presenting at secondary schools in the County. What do we know about how well they are integrating and the levels of discrimination they experience?
General	The questionnaire concludes with some open-ended questions that allow respondents to answer in more detail. For example, 'What gives you most happiness in your life at the moment?', 'What would you describe as your greatest concern/worry in life at the moment?' and 'If the Government made you in charge of deciding what all young people in your area need, what 3 things would be top of your list?' Such questions are in accord with KYS's commitment under '2012', the Kildare County Development Board Strategy.

**Table 1: Key question areas and rationale for inclusion**

## 3.2 Ethical considerations

All research with young people must be cognisant of ethical issues, such as the granting of consent and issues of respect and confidentiality. Research should be informed by recognised ethical guidelines, such as those enshrined in the Helsinki Principles. The procedure described below adhered to the ethical principles of the Psychological Society of Ireland's Code of Professional Conduct. The research design was approved by the Dublin Institute of Technology Research Ethics Committee in October 2004.

### 3.2.1 Consent

Prior to questionnaire distribution, a letter was sent to the parents of pupils informing them of the nature and purpose of the research (this is described in greater detail in the Procedure, below). This letter invited those parents/guardians of young people aged less than 18 years who wished to withhold consent for their child to be involved in the study to indicate this on a 'cut-away' slip and to return this to the School Liaison Person (see appendix 3). This ensured that on the day of data collection the School Liaison Person was aware of the parents' decision and the particular student was asked to do homework or study while the questionnaire was being completed by his/her classmates. In total, nine students were excluded from the study in this way. A further 18 were excluded for various reasons. Three students decided not to hand up their completed questionnaires; two students elected not to participate; three were excluded as they could not be sure their parents had received the letter; ten students from one school were excluded as it was not possible to conveniently communicate with their parents (who live overseas).

In addition to parental/guardian consent, the informed consent of the young people themselves was obtained. This was achieved by asking each student to complete a consent form before completing the questionnaire (see appendix 4). On this, they indicated that the purpose of the research had been explained to them, that they understood participation was voluntary and confidential and that they had had an opportunity to ask questions. On signing this consent form, it was removed from the questionnaire and collected separately to preserve questionnaire anonymity.

### 3.3 Procedure

Data collection took place between November 2004 and February 2005. The procedure from first contact with Schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres to the data collection process is described below.

#### 3.3.1 First contact with School Principals

In the first instance, a letter was sent by Kildare Youth Services to each of the School Principals in County Kildare (n=29) and Directors of CTC/Youthreach Centres (n=3). This letter explained that the purpose of the research was to give KYS an insight into the challenges, hopes and needs (social and personal) of young people so as to inform its work and the work of other agencies in the County. Each Principal was asked to nominate a School Liaison Person from amongst the teaching staff to liaise with the researchers and to oversee the survey process in the school. Twenty-five schools agreed to participate and four declined as it felt students would be too busy to give up a class period.

#### 3.3.2 First contact with School Liaison Persons

A letter detailing the procedure to be followed for data collection was sent to each of the designated School Liaison Persons (see appendix 5). This letter contained directions for the posting of letters of explanation to parents (see appendix 3) and the arrangements for the distribution of the questionnaires. A copy of this letter to the School Liaison Person was sent to the School Principal, along with a copy of the questionnaire to be used. This was done to keep Principals abreast of developments and also to provide him/her with copies of the questionnaire in case parents made direct contact with him/her with questions.

#### 3.3.3 Letter of explanation to Parents/Guardians

As the researchers did not have access to home contact details of students from the selected classes, the School Liaison Person was responsible for arranging this. Thus, the letter to parent/guardians outlining the purpose of the research was sent to the School Liaison Person in each school, along with blank stamped envelopes. He/she arranged for addresses of



parents/guardians to be fixed to stamped envelopes, using the school's database, and for these to be posted to parents/guardians.

In addition to describing the research, this letter to parent/guardians explained the process they should follow if they wished to withhold consent for their child to participate. Specifically, they were asked to sign a statement contained at the bottom of the information Letter and to return this to the School Liaison Person.

For those who consented to their child being involved in the research, no further action was required. Contact details of the researchers were provided and parents/guardians were invited to ring with any queries.

### 3.3.4 Selection of participating classes

Two classes from each of the participating schools were randomly selected. This was achieved as follows:

Students from first, third and sixth year were the targets of this study. On the basis that classes are streamed, three categories of class for each of the three years was created. Specifically, 1<sup>st</sup> year top, 1<sup>st</sup> year middle, 1<sup>st</sup> year lower; 3<sup>rd</sup> year top, 3<sup>rd</sup> year middle, 3<sup>rd</sup> year lower; 6<sup>th</sup> year top, 6<sup>th</sup> year middle, 6<sup>th</sup> year lower. On the basis that two classes were to be surveyed in each of the 25 schools, this sequence was repeated until it contained 50 entries. In schools where streaming is not employed, 'top' was taken to mean the first of the classes in alphabetical order. So, for example, if a given school groups 1<sup>st</sup> year students into '1 Ash', '1 Oak' and '1 Willow', the 1 Ash group are the '1<sup>st</sup> year top.'

Two of these nine categories of classes were selected at random and applied to the list of participating schools (which had also been listed randomly). The selected classes were then notified to the School Liaison Persons.

## 3.4 Training for researcher

Data collection was carried out by a PhD candidate in the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology. She holds a degree in liberal arts and a Masters in Criminology (for the Pilot Study and two other schools, data collection was conducted by one of the Senior

Researchers). A training session was conducted with the researcher, including procedure, protocol, ethical aspects of the research and issues in researching adolescents.

### 3.5 Questionnaire distribution

The Researcher liaised with the School Liaison Person and agreed a time for the questionnaire to be distributed. Upon arrival in the School, the researcher noted any 'Withholding of consent' slips that had been returned to the School Liaison Person. Such students were allowed to do homework or other quiet reading activity while the questionnaire was being distributed.

Students were briefed by the researcher. This included a description of the research and of KYS; reassurance that the process was voluntary and confidential; and an opportunity to ask questions. Finally, students were asked to sign the DIT Research Ethics Consent Form which fronted the questionnaire. This allowed participants to indicate that they had been briefed about the study, understood its purpose, understood that they could withdraw at any time, and understood that their responses would be anonymous (see appendix 4). On signing the consent form, participants removed it from the questionnaire and it was collected separately by the researcher.

Each questionnaire was allocated a unique 4-digit identification number. A codebook was generated indicating the code range for each class/school.

### 3.6 Method of data analysis

Completed questionnaires were scanned to Remark Office. The resultant data file was converted to an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 11) file, which was used for data analysis.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

This section of the report will present the findings from the survey. Demographic characteristics of the sample will first be described. Results will be presented in the order in which survey items occurred. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.0. Total numbers responding to any one item may vary across the results, as a small number of participants left questions blank as they completed the surveys. In no instance does this 'missing data' amount to more than 6% of the data. Percentages reported are percentages of responses to individual items, unless otherwise noted.

### 4.2 Demographics of the sample

Young people aged 11 to 24 participated in the research. The average age of participants was 14 years old (see Appendix 6 for the age distribution of the participants).

Just over 54% of the sample was male (n=511) and 45% of the sample was female (n=434). A small number of participants (n=43) chose not to indicate their gender. Table 2 below details the number of young people in each year and in CTC/Youthreach centres that completed the survey.

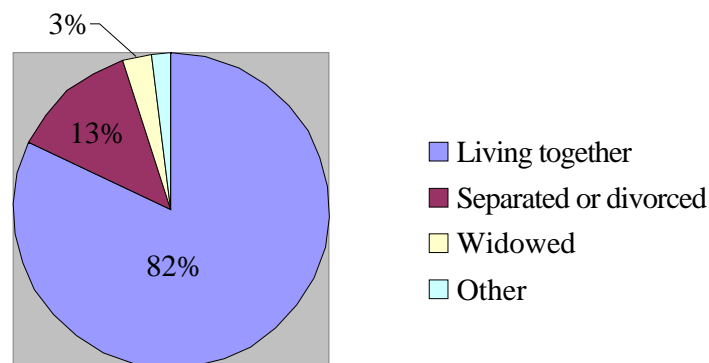
Year	Number		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	217	164	23%	17.4%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	184	106	19.5%	11.2%
6 <sup>th</sup> Year	103	149	10.9%	15.8%
CTC/Youthreach	7	15	.7%	1.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>54.1%</b>	<b>45.9%</b>

**Table 2: Sample by year in school or CTC/Youthreach Centre (n=945)**

#### 4.2.1 Parents' Marital Status and Respondents' Ethnicity

Respondents were asked to describe the marital status of their parents. The majority (82%) reported that their parents were living together (married or unmarried). Thirteen percent indicated that their parents were separated or divorced. The remaining 5% lived in homes with a widowed

parent (3%) or a different domestic arrangement (2%). Figure 2 illustrates the family composition of the sample.



**Figure 2: Family composition reported by participants**

Young people were also asked to identify their ethnicity/nationality. As expected, the majority (93%) reported that they were Irish/Irish Traveller. Table 3 (below) illustrates the ethnic background of the young people who participated in the research.

Ethnicity/National Origin	Number	Percent
Irish	911	92.2
Irish (Traveller)	8	.8
African descent	8	.8
Eastern Europe	8	.8
Other	37	3.7
TOTAL	972	98.3

**Table 3: Ethnicity/nationality of participants (n=972)**

Of the participants who identified as ‘other,’ the majority were of British or American nationality. Sixteen participants (1.6%) did not indicate their nationality.

### 4.3 Daily Lifestyle

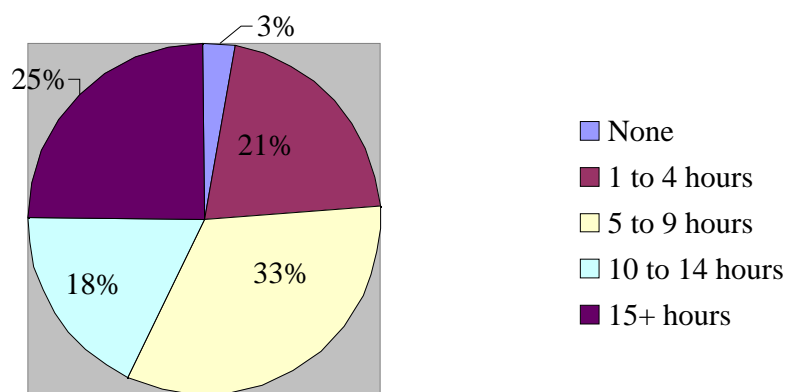
Young people were asked to provide information about how they spend their time during a normal week. Specifically, they were asked about the amount of time they spend doing common tasks and activities. Results indicate that young people report spending the most amount of time ‘hanging out’ with friends, followed by homework and watching television (see figures 3-12 below). The majority of the participants indicated that they spent no time in organised activities like Scouts,

Guides or Youth Clubs (85%) or in music, drama or singing (62%). Thirty-one percent stated that they spend no time using computer games, the internet or Play station, but males were significantly more likely to report spending at least one to four hours interacting with computers ( $\chi^2 = 176.5$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Twenty-six percent of respondents reported that they spend no time engaged in active sport and, statistically, females were more likely to spend no or less time in sport ( $\chi^2 = 77.6$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Eighty-three percent of the participants indicated that they went to school five days a week. The following series of pie charts illustrates the way the participants reported that they spent time on a weekly basis. In each case, responses for the sample as a whole are presented, followed by a more detailed breakdown by year in school.

#### 4.3.1 Time spent hanging out with friends



**Figure 3: Time spent weekly hanging out with friends**

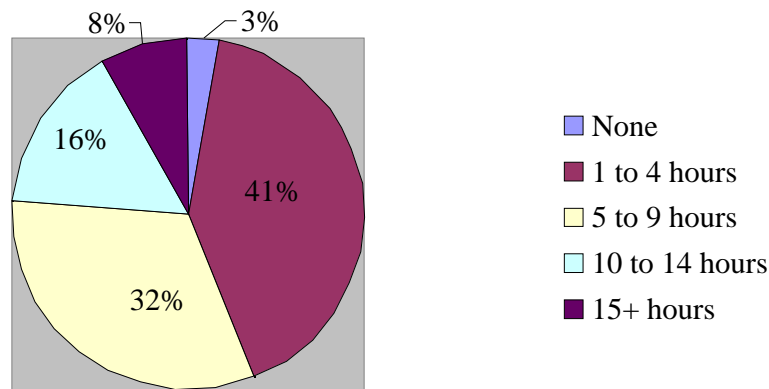
As can be seen from Figure 3 above, participants reported spending significant amounts of time ‘hanging out’ with their friends. Only 3% of all respondents reported that they spent no time with friends. Twenty-one percent reported spending one to four hours per week with friends, 32% reported spending five to nine hours per week with friends, 18% reported spending 10 to 14 hours and the remaining 25% reported that they spent more than 15 hours per week hanging out with friends. The table below details the responses to this item for participants in different years of education.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	5%	3%	<1%	0%
1 to 4 hours	24%	16%	24%	5%
5 to 9 hours	31%	35%	32%	36%
10 to 14 hours	15%	19%	22%	32%
15+ hours	24%	27%	22%	27%

**Table 4: Time spent weekly with friends by year in school and CTC/Youthreach (n=970)**

#### 4.3.2 Time spent weekly watching DVDs/Videos/TV

Figure 4 below illustrates that the majority of the participants report spending at least some time each week watching TV/DVDs/videos. A combined total of 24% watch TV/DVDs/Videos for more than ten hours per week.



**Figure 4: Time spent weekly watching DVDs/Videos/TV**

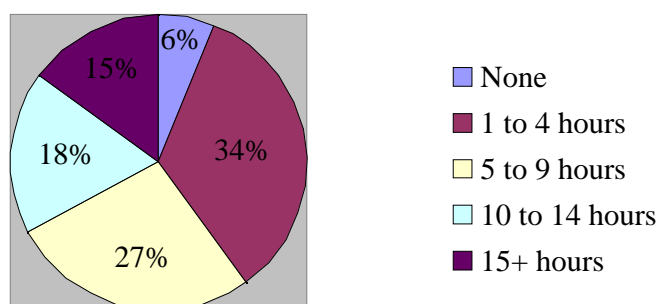
The table below provides further information about how much time young people in the different years surveyed spend in this activity.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	4%	2%	2%	0%
1 to 4 hours	52%	36%	34%	18%
5 to 9 hours	28%	33%	34%	36%
10 to 14 hours	9%	20%	22%	23%
15+ hours	7%	9%	8%	23%

**Table 5: Time spent weekly watching DVDs/Videos/TV and year of participants (n=978)**

### 4.3.3 Time spent weekly doing homework

As can be seen from figure 5 below, participants reported spending varying amounts of time doing homework.



**Figure 5: Time spent weekly doing homework**

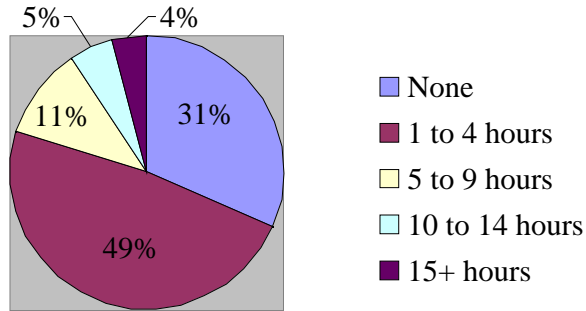
The table below provides further information and indicates that, as expected, the proportion of young people spending more than 10 hours a week on homework increases significantly through the school years, from 20% of First Years to 56% of Sixth Years.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year
None	2%	13%	6%
1 to 4 hours	47%	32%	16%
5 to 9 hours	30%	27%	22%
10 to 14 hours	11%	21%	26%
15+ hours	9%	7%	30%

**Table 6: Time spent weekly doing homework and year of participants (n=954) (Participants in CTC/Youthreach centres were not asked this question, as homework is not a practice in these Centres)**

### 4.3.4 Time spent weekly using entertainment technology

Participants were also asked about their use of ‘entertainment technologies’, such as the Internet, Play Stations etc. Perhaps surprisingly, penetration of these technologies is not absolute. Almost one-third of participants report spending no time each week using the internet, Play Station or other computer games.



**Figure 6: Time spent weekly using entertainment technology**

Almost one-half (49%) spend at least one to four hours per week interacting with entertainment technology. Gender differences in the use of entertainment technology were reported previously. Table 7 below provides more information about young people’s self-reported use of these kinds of technology.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	30%	24%	42%	38%
1 to 4 hours	52%	47%	44%	47%
5 to 9 hours	11%	14%	8%	9%
10 to 14 hours	3.5%	8%	4%	5%
15+ hours	3.5%	6%	2%	0%

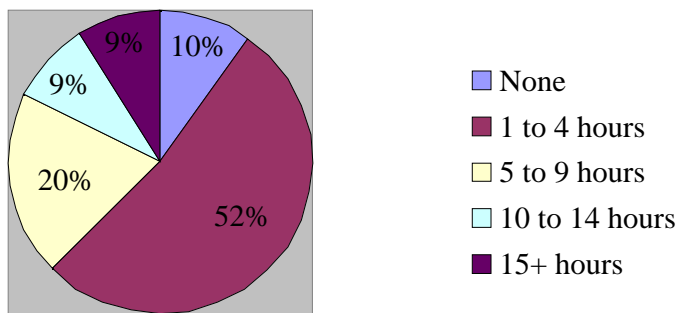
**Table 7: Time spent weekly with entertainment technology and year of participants (n=979)**

As we can see, the most marked age difference is the increase from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year in those who report no involvement in various computer games (from 30% of First Years to 42% of 6<sup>th</sup> Years).

#### 4.3.5 Time spent weekly talking to parents/guardians

Respondents were also asked about time spent talking to parents/guardians. Figure 7 below illustrates that although 10% of the young people surveyed report that they do not talk with parents/guardians on a weekly basis, over one-half spend at least some time (one to four hours) talking to their parents/guardians each week.





**Figure 7: Time spent weekly talking to parents/guardians**

Table 8 below provides more information about participants' responses to this item.

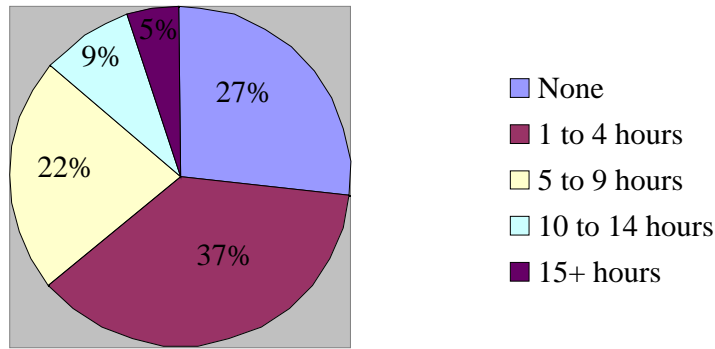
Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	10%	13%	7%	14%
1 to 4 hours	55%	56%	47%	36%
5 to 9 hours	19%	17%	24%	18%
10 to 14 hours	7%	8%	12%	9%
15+ hours	8%	6%	10%	23%

**Table 8: Time spent weekly talking to parents/guardians and year of participants (n=966)**

#### 4.3.6 Time spent weekly in active sport

Figure 8 below indicates that over one-fourth of the young people in the sample spend no time engaged in active sport each week. Gender differences in the area of participation in sport have been noted previously, but are worth highlighting – 34% of females spend no time in active sport each week, compared to 21% of males. At the other end of the spectrum, while 21% of males spend 10 hours or more each week involved in active sports, only 7% of females do so.

Looking at both genders together, slightly more than a third report spending 1 to 4 hours doing active sport each week, while almost a fourth report spending an amount of time in active sport that would meet health guidelines.



**Figure 8: Time spent weekly in active sport**

Table 9 below provides more information about participants' reported sports activity.

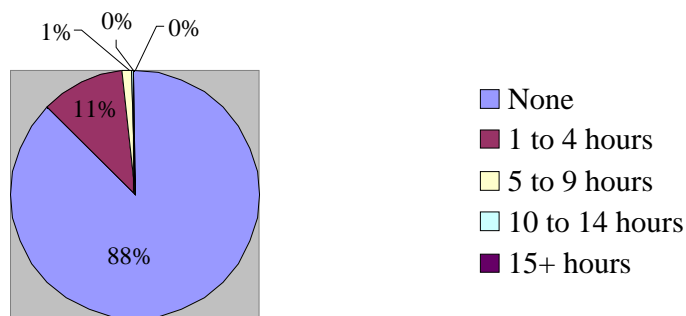
Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	19%	26%	38%	50%
1 to 4 hours	36%	39%	36%	41%
5 to 9 hours	25%	20%	19%	9%
10 to 14 hours	14%	7.5%	5%	0%
15+ hours	6%	7.5%	2%	0%

**Table 9: Time spent weekly in active sport and year of participants (n=975)**

There is a clear decrease in time involved in active sport as young people progress through adolescence. By 6<sup>th</sup> Year, 38% of respondents report no involvement in active sport each week.

#### 4.3.7 Time spent weekly in Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs

As can be seen from Figure 9 below, the majority (88%) of the sample does not report spending time in Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs.



**Figure 9: Time spent weekly in Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs**

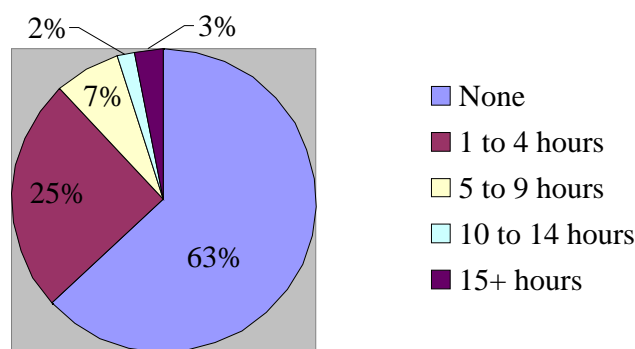
Table 10 below illustrates the educational level of those participants who report participation in these activities. One in five First Year pupils (21%) report some involvement in Scouts/Guides/Youth Club activities each week. This decreases to 4% amongst Sixth Year pupils. Thus, we again see the pattern of decreased involvement in organised activities throughout the teenage years.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	80%	89%	96%	86%
1 to 4 hours	18%	11%	3%	4%
5 to 9 hours	2%	<1%	1%	10%
10 to 14 hours	<1%	<1%	0%	0%
15+ hours	0%	0%	0%	0%

**Table 10: Time spent weekly in Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs and year of participants (n=969)**

#### 4.3.8 Time spent weekly on music, drama, or singing groups

Figure 10 below shows that almost two-thirds of participants (63%) report no weekly involvement in music, drama or singing groups. However, one-fourth report spending one to four hours per week engaged in these activities. A minority (12%) are more heavily engaged, spending more than five hours per week involved in music, drama or singing.



**Figure 10: Time spent weekly on music, drama, or singing groups**

Table 11 below provides more information about young people's participation in the Arts.

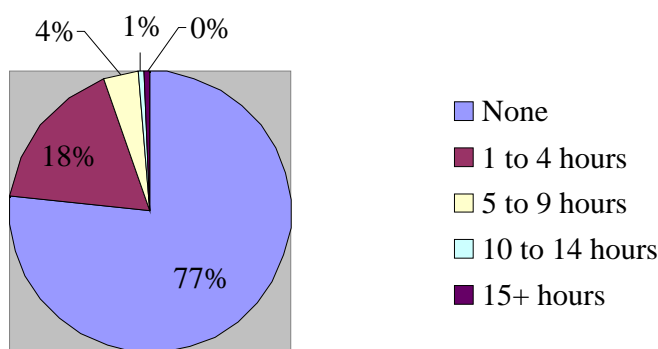
Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	57%	69%	65%	82%
1 to 4 hours	32%	19%	22%	0%
5 to 9 hours	8%	7%	7%	0%
10 to 14 hours	2%	2%	3%	9%
15+ hours	1%	3%	3%	9%

**Table 11: Time spent weekly in music, drama, singing and year of participants (n=970)**

As we can see, respondents of all ages report considerable involvement with music, drama and singing; 43% of First Years have some weekly involvement, as do 35% of Sixth year Pupils. Interestingly, those heavily involved (10-14 hours and 15+ hours per week) in music, drama or singing increases from First year to Sixth Year indicating, perhaps, involvement in formal study for a minority of students. We shall see later (Table 27) that listening to and playing music is the primary strategy young people use when ‘feeling down.’

#### 4.3.9 Time spent weekly in voluntary work outside the home

More than 75% of the sample indicate that they do no voluntary work outside the home. Of those who report volunteering, the majority of them spend between one and four hours per week in voluntary work.



**Figure 11: Time spent weekly in voluntary work outside the home**

Table 12 below illustrates that there is little difference among the years in amount of time spent in voluntary work.

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	70%	80%	86%	86%
1 to 4 hours	24%	14%	11%	14%
5 to 9 hours	5%	3%	2%	0%
10 to 14 hours	1%	2%	0%	0%
15+ hours	0%	1%	1%	0%

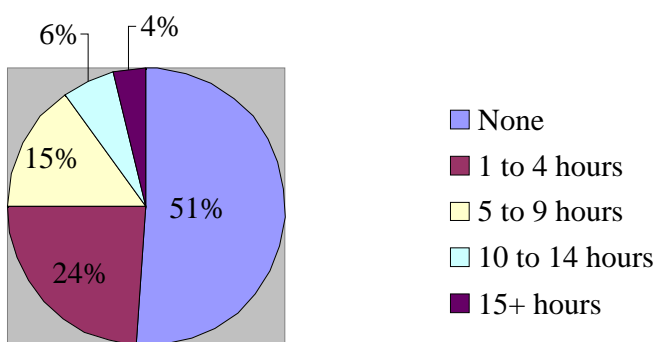
**Table 12: Time spent weekly in voluntary work and year of participants (n=963)**

Considerable numbers of respondents report some weekly involvement in voluntary activities. Amongst First Years, almost one in three (30%) devote time to voluntary activities each week. Respondents were not asked to specify what type of voluntary work they engaged in, but the question did specify ‘voluntary work outside the home.’

Again, we see the pattern of disengagement as respondents progress from First year to Sixth Year. While 30% of First Years report some level of voluntary work, this decreases to 14% by Sixth Year.

#### 4.3.10 Time spent weekly in paid work

This pattern is not replicated when it comes to paid employment. As can be seen from Figure 12 below, just over half the participants report that they spend no time in paid employment each week. Nearly one-fourth of participants report spending one to four hours each week working. A minority (10%) work more than 10 hours per week in paid employment.



**Figure 12: Time spent weekly in paid work**

The table below provides further detail about participants' involvement in paid work:

Time Spent	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3rd Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Year	CTC/Youthreach
None	52%	51%	51%	27%
1 to 4 hours	34%	22%	14%	14%
5 to 9 hours	11%	17%	17%	36%
10 to 14 hours	2%	8%	8%	23%
15+ hours	1%	2%	10%	0%

**Table 13: Time spent weekly in paid work and year of participants (n=971)**

Interestingly, the proportion of respondents who do not work in paid employment remains the same (approximately 50%) throughout the teenage years. However, there is a significant increase from First to Sixth Year in the proportion of respondents more heavily involved in paid employment (1% of First Years are employed for 15+ hours per week, compared to 10% of Sixth Years). Also, we can see that CTC/Youthreach participants are more heavily involved in paid employment compared to their school-going counterparts. It is important to note, however, that CTC/Youthreach participants may categorise their attendance as 'work' as they receive an allowance for attendance.

#### 4.4 Use of Alcohol and Drugs

Although the focus of this study was not drug use, drugs nevertheless are a fact of daily life for some young people and the extent of a young person's drug use arguably impacts on the needs of that person. For this reason, participants were asked how often they used a number of commonly available drugs. The results are presented in Table 14 below.

Drug/Frequency of Use	Never	Sometimes	Often	So often I worry
Alcohol *(n=982)	48%	35%	14.7%	2.3%
Tobacco (n=964)	78.8%	5.8%	4.9%	10.6%
Cannabis (n=967)	90.6%	6.0%	1.9%	1.6%
Ecstasy (n=959)	97.5%	1.5%	.4%	.6%
Solvents (n=967)	97.2%	2.0%	.4%	.4%
Other (n=741)	95.4%	1.9%	.9%	1.8%

\*Group sizes vary due to response rate.

**Table 14: Reported drug use among respondents**

These results indicate that tobacco is the substance causing the greatest amount of concern for this group of young people. Also of concern are the 17% of young people drinking alcohol ‘often’ or ‘so often I worry,’ given that mental and physical health risks associated with alcohol are greater the earlier one starts drinking. Slightly less than half of the sample reported that they never drank alcohol. The majority of these abstaining 471 young people are in 1<sup>st</sup> year while the majority of those drinking ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ are in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year.

Relatively low numbers of participants reported using other drugs and very low numbers expressed concern about their use of these drugs. It must be remembered that in self-report research, the validity of data about illegal activities can be called into question. However, at face value these data indicate a low level of illegal drug use among the young people of Co. Kildare. The small number of young people who reported the use of ‘other drugs’ reported using steroids, magic mushrooms, LSD/acid, cocaine, amphetamines, and prescription tablets. The tables below further explore the use of drugs reported by young people of different age groups and genders.

Drug by use	Never		Sometimes (once or twice a month)		Often (once or twice a week)		So Often I worry	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Alcohol	80%*	85%	19%	13%	.5%	2%	.5%	.6%
Tobacco	93.5%	92%	3%	5%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Cannabis	98%	100%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Ecstasy	99%	100%	.5%	0%	0%	0%	.5%	0%
Solvents	97%	100%	2%	0%	.5%	0%	.5%	0%
Other	96%	98%	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	0%

**Table 15: Self-reported use of substances for young people in 1<sup>st</sup> Year (n=381; males=217, females=164) \*Thus, 80% of all male 1<sup>st</sup> years (n=217) Never take alcohol**

Drug by use	Never		Sometimes (once or twice a month)		Often (once or twice a week)		So Often I worry	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Alcohol	37%	34%	41%	51%	18%	14%	4%	1%
Tobacco	78%	65%	4%	11%	5%	5%	14%	19%
Cannabis	85%	88%	10%	7%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Ecstasy	98%	97%	1%	2%	.5%	1%	.5%	0%
Solvents	94%	97%	4%	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Other	93%	96%	2%	1%	1%	0%	4%	3%

**Table 16: Self-reported use of substances for young people in 3<sup>rd</sup> year (n=286; males=180, females=106)**

Drug by use	Never		Sometimes (once or twice a month)		Often (once or twice a week)		So Often I worry	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Alcohol	12%	15%	49%	54%	30%	30%	9%	1%
Tobacco	71%	73%	6%	9%	7%	7%	16%	11%
Cannabis	79%	87%	12%	11%	4%	0%	5%	2%
Ecstasy	92%	97%	4%	2%	1%	0%	3%	1%
Solvents	95%	100%	2%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%
Other	93%	94%	4%	4%	2%	0%	1%	2%

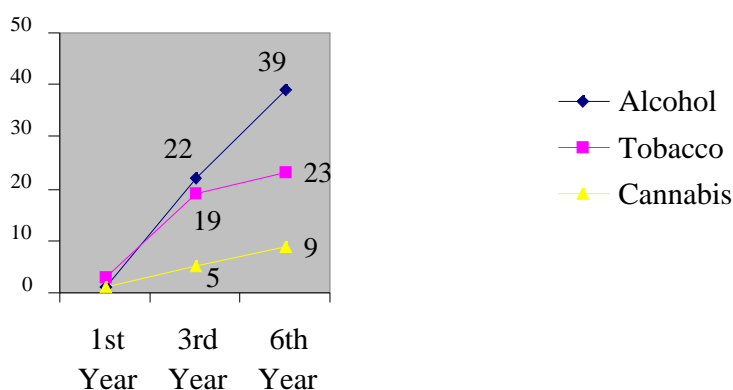
**Table 17: Self-reported use of substance for young people in 6<sup>th</sup> year (n=252; males=103, females=149)**



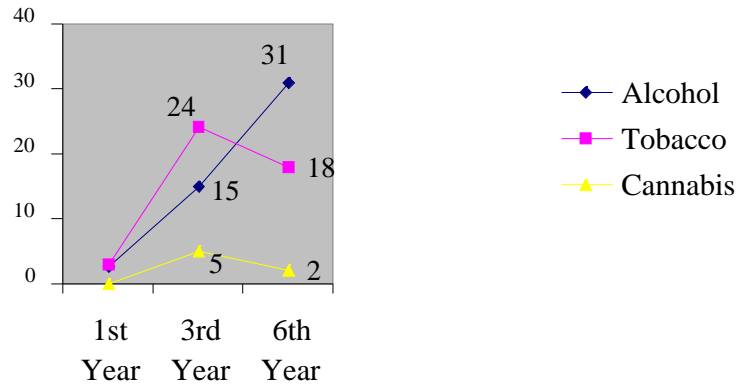
Drug by use	Never		Sometimes (once or twice a month)		Often (once or twice a week)		So Often I worry	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Alcohol	0%	7%	57%	13%	43%	67%	0%	13%
Tobacco	14%	0%	0%	0%	57%	13%	29%	87%
Cannabis	57%	73%	29%	7%	14%	20%	0%	0%
Ecstasy	86%	87%	0%	13%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Solvents	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	75%	100%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

**Table 18: Self-reported use of substance for young people in CTC/Youthreach centres (n=22; males=7, females=15)**

The series of Tables above illustrate a clear increase in drug use of various kinds throughout the adolescent years. For example, amongst females the proportion reporting that they ‘often’ (once or twice a week) take alcohol increases from 2% in First Year, to 14% in Third Year, to 30% in Sixth Year. The numbers of respondents who report that they take a substance ‘So often I worry’ also increases with age. The charts below combines the proportion of respondents who report taking alcohol, tobacco and cannabis ‘often’ and ‘so often I worry’, and compares the responses between First, Third and Sixth Years. For presentation purposes, the responses of males and females have been presented separately.



**Figure 13: Percentage of male respondents, by Year, who report taking substances ‘often’ and ‘so often I worry’**



**Figure 14: Percentage of female respondents, by Year, who report taking substances ‘often’ and ‘so often I worry’**

These figures are a concern as they indicate relatively large numbers of both male and females in late adolescence who are concerned about their own use of various chemical substances.

#### 4.5 Bullying

Young people were asked to provide information about the role that bullying plays in their daily lives. Bullying was defined on the survey as ‘slagging, name calling, teasing, false rumours, being hit, etc.’ Table 19 below presents the results for participants’ experiences of bullying both in and outside of school or a CTC/Youthreach centre.

Does bullying affect your life...	In school or CTC/Youthreach	Out of school or CTC/Youthreach
Not at all	61.7%	76%
A little bit	33.4%	19.3%
Quite a lot or a lot	4.8%	4.6%

**Table 19: Participants’ experiences of bullying (n=983)**

It can be seen from the table that the majority of young people did not report that they experience bullying. However, approximately one-third of the participants in the study reported being affected ‘a little bit’ by bullying in their schools or CTC/Youthreach centres. Almost one-fifth (19.3%) reported being affected ‘a little bit’ outside their schools or CTC/Youthreach centres. Smaller numbers reported that bullying affects their lives ‘a lot’ or ‘quite a lot’. The following

table provides more information about bullying in the lives of male and female participants in differing educational settings.

Does bullying affect your life...		In school or CTC/ Youthreach		Out of school or CTC/Youthreach	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1 <sup>st</sup> year students	Not at all	54%	54%	76%	71%
	A little bit	41%	38%	17%	24%
	A lot	5%	8%	7%	5%
3 <sup>rd</sup> year students	Not at all	70%	56%	82%	65%
	A little bit	27%	36%	15%	26%
	A lot	3%	8%	3%	9%
6 <sup>th</sup> year students	Not at all	67%	67%	81%	81%
	A little bit	27%	31%	15%	18%
	A lot	6%	2%	4%	1%
Students in CTC/Youthreach Centres	Not at all	100%	93%	86%	72%
	A little bit	0%	7%	14%	24%
	A lot	0%	0%	0%	4%

**Table 20: Experiences of bullying further explored**

#### 4.6 Social Support

Participants were also asked about sources of social support. Participants were provided with a list of persons to whom one could go for help with a problem, and asked to indicate how often they would talk to them. Table 21 (below) illustrates the results for the sample as a whole. Categories have been ranked by those most likely to ‘often’ be used as a source of support.

Source of Support	Never	Sometimes	Often
Close friend/peer	11.0%	44.0%	45.0%
Mum	17.2%	48.1%	34.7%
Dad	36.5%	45.9%	17.5%
Sibling	44.2%	38.4%	17.5%
‘Other’	81.3%	7.0%	11.7%
Grandparent	75.1%	20.8%	4.1%
Aunt/uncle	76.5%	20.0%	3.5%
Guardian/foster parent	92.2%	6.3%	1.5%
Guidance counsellor	92.5%	6.4%	1.1%
Youth worker	96.5%	3.0%	.5%
Nobody	15.9%		

**Table 21: ‘Somebody to talk to’: Participants sources of social support**

The majority of participants reported that they talked to close friends of their age and their mothers most often. The centrality of parents, siblings and close friends as sources of social support is clear from Table 21. Participants reported that when they have problems, they seek help from friends and family members much more often than professionals. When the data are divided by gender, males are consistently statistically more likely to indicate that they do not seek support from these listed persons, and they are statistically significantly more likely to report that they do not talk to anyone about their problems ( $\chi^2 = 3.5$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .03$ ). Approximately 2/3 (64.4%) of those who reported that they chose not to talk to someone about problems are male. Participants who indicated they talked to ‘other’ sources of support most often indicated talking to a boy- or girl friend. Table 22 details the differences between male and female responses to this part of the survey.

Source of Support	Never		Sometimes		Often	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Close friend/peer	16%	5%	55%	30%	29%	65%
Mum	24%	9%	49%	48%	27%	43%
Dad	33%	45%	45%	44%	22%	11%
Sibling	50%	38%	36%	40%	14%	22%
Aunt/uncle	79%	72%	18%	23%	3%	5%
Guardian/foster parent	91%	93%	8%	5%	1%	2%
Grandparent	76%	74%	19%	22%	5%	4%
Guidance counsellor	92%	92%	6%	7%	2%	1%
Youth worker	96%	97%	3%	3%	1%	0%
Other	87%	72%	6%	8%	6%	20%
‘I choose not to talk to someone about my problems.’	Male		Female			
	64%		36%			

**Table 22: ‘Somebody to talk to’: Participants sources of social support, by gender**

It is interesting to note respondents’ preference for their same-sex parent; 43% of girls ‘often’ talk to their mothers if they have a problem, compared to only 27% of boys. On the other hand, 22% of boys will talk to their fathers if they have a problem, compared to only 11% of girls.

#### 4.7 Access to Information

The young people who participated in the study were asked the degree to which they felt they received adequate information about issues relevant to their lives. Their responses are detailed below.

Issue	Yes, plenty of information		No, not enough information	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Suicide awareness	18%	13%	36%	37%
Gay/lesbian/bisexual (GLB) issues	17%	15%	37%	32%
Mental health issues	15%	14%	37%	33%
Divorce/separation	19%	18%	34%	29%
Depression	21%	16%	33%	30%
Sexuality	25%	22%	28%	24%
Young people's rights	26%	0 %	27%	28%
Travel	26%	25%	27%	22%
Careers/education	31%	29%	23%	18%
Relationships	32%	25%	21%	22%
Alcohol/illegal drugs	35%	29%	19%	18%
Healthy Eating	38%	32%	15%	14%
Fitness and leisure	40%	32%	14%	14%

**Table 23: Do young people feel they have enough information?**

Table 23 ranks responses by topics about which respondents feel they do not have enough information. A lot of young people reported that they do have access to information about healthy eating, fitness, drugs, careers, relationships, and travel. However, significant numbers of respondents reported that they do not have enough access to information about divorce/separation, mental health, gay, lesbian, bisexuality issues (GLB), depression, suicide and the rights of young people.

#### 4.8 Level of contentment

Young people were asked how happy they feel most of the time. Table 24 below provides information about their responses to this item.

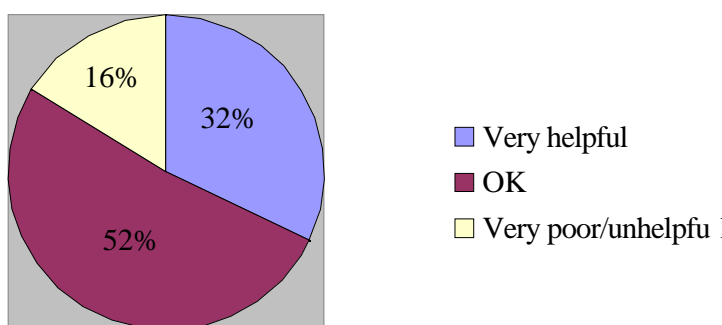
Response	Total
‘Very happy’ or ‘happy most of the time’	68%
Average: sometimes happy, sometimes sad	17.8%
‘Sad a lot of the time’ or ‘very unhappy’	6.4%

**Table 24: ‘How do you feel?’: Young people’s subjective well-being**

The majority (67.7%) of young people who took part in the research reported that they feel ‘very happy’ or ‘happy most of the time’. Table 24 illustrates that male participants are slightly more likely to report being ‘very happy’ or ‘happy most of the time,’ (38.7% as compared to 29%). Approximately 18% of respondents reported feeling a more mixed subjective level of happiness (‘average: sometimes happy, sometimes sad’). Forty-two participants, or 6.4%, indicated that they felt consistently sad or unhappy. In this small sub sample of the group, the genders were roughly equally represented. Twenty-three were male and 19 were female.

#### 4.9 RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education)

Participants were asked about their experiences of relationship and sexuality education. The majority of them (770, or 78.9%) reported that they had received classes about sex education in school. They were asked to rate the degree to which they found these classes helpful. Of the 770 who had received RSE, thirty-two percent stated that they found the classes ‘very helpful,’ 52% stated that they found them ‘ok,’ and 16% found them unhelpful. Figure 15 below illustrates the participants’ descriptions of their RSE experiences in school.



**Figure 15: Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in school**

Participants were also asked about sexual education outside of the school environment. Only 9% of the sample (or 88 young people) reported that they had experienced sex education outside of school. Of those 88 respondents, 37.5% found the classes ‘very helpful,’ 40.6% found them ‘ok,’ and 21.9 found them ‘unhelpful.’

Young people’s ideas about what would improve RSE classes were sought in an effort to understand what their needs are in relation to RSE. Although some participants did not seem to take this item seriously (i.e., made suggestions meant to be humorous), there was a suggestion that RSE classes should be offered on a more frequent basis.

Twenty-nine percent of the sample reported that their parents had never discussed sex with them. Fifty-five percent reported their parents had ‘mentioned it once or twice,’ and 16% indicated that their parents had mentioned it many times.

#### 4.10 Experiences of Intolerance/Being Judged

Young people were asked about the degree to which they feel they are judged or treated badly because of ‘who they are.’ Table 25 below illustrates their responses.

Do you feel judged...?	
Yes, a lot	9.7%
Sometimes	28.6%
No	61.8%

**Table 25: Experiences of Intolerance**

#### 4.11 What makes you happiest?

Participants were asked to describe ‘what gives you the most happiness in your life at the moment?’ Thirty-three percent of participants listed spending time with their families in response to this item and 49% listed spending time with their friends. Other responses included participating in sports (18%) and music (6%). Ten percent of the young people surveyed listed relationships as a source of happiness.

#### 4.12 Concerns of Young People

Respondents were further asked to describe their greatest concern/worry in life at the moment. This topic was presented as an open-ended question. Approximately 20% of participants did not list any concerns. The most common response was exams, which was listed as a concern by 38% of the participants. Five percent of the young people listed health problems among family members as a concern. Other concerns listed included family problems, problems with friends, and issues related to ‘fitting in’.

It is important to note that the prevalence of ‘exam concern’ may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that 542 of the 988 respondents were in an exam year (Third year or Sixth Year). Also, questionnaires were distributed between December (Christmas exam time) and February (approaching ‘mock’ Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Examinations).

Participants were also asked to indicate the degree to which they encountered each of a list of common issues faced by young people. Responses are detailed in Table 26 below. As there is not large variation in the proportion of young people who say they worry ‘often’ about various issues (less than 7% for most issues), the table is ranked according to topics about which respondents ‘sometimes’ worry.

Issue/experience	Never	Sometimes	Often
Failing exams	31%	49%	20%
Being bored/having nothing to do	23%	47%	30%
Not liking your physical appearance	38%	44%	18%
Girl- or boy-friend problems	44%	42%	14%
Not being part of group	63%	31%	6%
Parents/guardians not getting on	68%	25%	7%
Suicide of someone you know	76%	20%	4%
Being involved in crime	80%	16%	4%
Fear of pregnancy	79%	15%	6%
Leaving school	83%	13%	4%
Parent/guardian separation or divorce	82%	12%	5%
Parent/guardian with drink problem	87%	9%	4%
Parent/guardian with depression or other mental health problem	89%	8%	3%
Being gay or lesbian	93%	4%	3%

**Table 26: Issues faced by young people**



These data mirror the qualitative data, which suggest that concerns about ‘failing exams’ and ‘being bored/having nothing to do’ are the most common concerns experienced by this group of young people – 20% and 30% of respondents worry ‘often’ about these two issues, respectively. Unhappiness with one’s physical appearance appears to be more common than the qualitative data indicated. Having relationship problems, and not feeling a part of a group are also common concerns as indicated by these data. Young people also report worrying about their parents or guardians. Almost a third (32%) worry ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ about their parents/guardians not getting on; 17% worry about their parents/guardians separation or divorce; 13% worry about a parent/guardian’s drink problem and 11% worry about a parent/guardian’s mental health. It is important to note that this question facilitated multiple responses.

#### 4.13 Preferred supports

The survey also asked young people to list the kinds of supports they would like to have in order to deal with their concerns. Nine percent of participants listed support for study/exams. Support from family (5%), from friends (5%), and from teachers and guidance counsellors (10%) were also listed. Five percent wrote that less pressure, more encouragement, and assistance with stress management would be helpful. This was an open-ended question which was left unanswered by most respondents.

#### 4.14 Coping strategies

Young people were asked about what they did when they were feeling ‘down’. Specifically, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they engaged in listed coping strategies. Their responses are detailed in Table 27 below. Again, so as to emphasise those strategies most frequently utilised, responses are ranked by the ‘often’ response.

Strategy	Never		Sometimes		Often	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Listen to/play music	111	31	175	120	204	215
Talk to friends	98	22	270	147	117	198
De-stress with exercise/sport	139	133	177	158	171	74
Pray	265	158	168	160	45	43
Write in journal	442	237	30	97	13	34
Use alcohol or drugs	379	290	79	64	27	13
Deliberate self harm	431	317	43	42	12	9
Seek professional help	418	320	63	42	8	6

**Table 27: Coping strategies used by young people**

As we can see, listening to and playing music are by far the most widely reported remedies for dealing with feeling down, used ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ by 714 of the 988 respondents.

We have seen earlier that many participants indicated that they use alcohol or drugs, at least occasionally; it is of concern that 183 respondents (19%) report ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ using alcohol or drugs to cope when feeling down . Also of concern, 105 respondents (or, 11%) deal with feeling down by ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ engaging in self-harm.

#### 4.15 Recommendations to the Government

Participants were asked to list three things they would prioritise if the Government made them in charge of deciding what young people in Co. Kildare need. This was an open-ended question and responses were collapsed into categories, making every effort to preserve the language with which young people spoke about their priorities. Table 28 below summarises the needs listed by young people.

Priority/Need	Number	Percentage
Somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out	245	24%
Sports facilities	241	24%
Cinemas	187	19%
Night clubs/discos	143	14%
Improved shopping facilities	144	14%
Swimming pools	117	12%
Recreational facilities (i.e., snooker, bowling, etc)	102	10%
Youth centres/clubs	97	10%
Leisure centres/gyms	69	7%
Youth friendly cafés	32	3%
Playing fields	32	3%
Skating facilities	52	5%
Playgrounds	27	3%
Music facilities	17	2%
Social/personal education	23	2%
Counselling	17	2%

**Table 28: Priority needs for young people in Co. Kildare**

As we can see, the most consistent response was ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out.’ Such respondents did not specify a particular location or activity. Smaller numbers of respondents were more specific with their suggestions, for example, 32 respondents (or 3%) mentioned youth friendly cafés. We must interpret this table with caution, as the non-explicit response of ‘somewhere to go’ may mask or hide young people’s needs. So, for example, it would not be accurate to conclude that only 10% of respondents indicated an interest in Youth Centres or Youth Clubs. Such facilities could also meet the need of the large number of respondents looking for ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out.’

#### 4.16 Visions of the Future

Finally, the young people who participated in this research were asked to indicate how they felt about their future. They were asked to indicate if their vision for their own futures was positive or negative. Sixty-six percent responded that they felt positively about their futures, 7% indicated that they felt negatively, and 21% indicated that they did not think about the future. Six percent chose not to respond to this item. The responses are detailed in table 29 below.

	Males	Females
Positively	68%	71%
Negatively	7%	9%
Never think about it	25%	20%

**Table 29: How would you describe your vision for your future?**

Differences between males and females were not significant.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

In this final part of the report, key features from the data are highlighted, with commentary on the implications from the provision of services. The main findings are presented and summarised and recommendations arising from the results are presented.

### 5.2 Demographics

The forthcoming 2006 Census of population in Ireland will provide detailed information on the demographics of young people in Co. Kildare. It is widely acknowledged, at least anecdotally, that there have been significant changes in the County since the 2001 census, in terms of ethnicity and family makeup.

The results of this random selection of 988 adolescents throughout Co. Kildare show that 82% of respondents have parents who are living together (whether they be married or not). The parents of 13% of the sample were separated or divorced. A further 3% of parents were widowed and 2% had a different domestic arrangement.

Ninety-three per cent of the sample gives their ethnicity/national origin as Irish. Less than one percent (0.8%) of the sample is of African descent, and a further 0.8% are of Eastern European descent. Of the remaining 3.7%, the majority are from the United States or the United Kingdom.

### 5.3 Daily Lifestyle

Not surprisingly, given the developmental norms of the adolescent years, a favoured activity amongst respondents is 'hanging out with friends.' Over half the sample spend between 5 and 14 hours per week with friends. Only 3% spend no time each week with friends.

Respondents also spend significant amounts of time each week watching TV/DVDs/Videos (presumably some of this is done in the company of friends). While 3% spend no time at this activity, nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) spend 10 or more hours per week watching TV/DVDs/Videos.

Entertainment technologies (such as the Internet and Play stations) are also popular, but there is a sizable minority (31%) who spend no time each week on these activities. A small number (4%) report spending very large amounts of time per week (15+ hours) on entertainment technologies. There is a decline in such activity throughout the adolescent years. This presumably reflects the decreasing attraction of computer games for many young people, as they get older.

Almost all respondents report spending time talking to their parents/guardians each week, although 10% reported spending 'no time' talking to parents/guardians.

A majority (73%) of respondents spend at least some time each week involved in an active sport. Given the presence of Physical Education in schools, it is perhaps surprising that 27% report no involvement in an active sport each week. At the other end of the spectrum, 14% of respondents spend 10 hours or more per week involved in active sports. Also of note is the decline in involvement in active sports throughout the adolescent years.

Twelve per cent of respondents had some weekly involvement in organised activities such as Scouts/Guides/Youth Clubs. Such involvement is primarily amongst young (First Year) respondents. Only 4% of 6<sup>th</sup> Years report any involvement in such activities. Perhaps such a decline in participation is due to the developmental norms of adolescence, whereby young people are increasingly attracted to non-adult organised activities. If so, it is certainly a challenge for youth service providers to offer activities which will appeal to older adolescents.

One area that offers such potential is the arts, which appeal to the creative urges of young people. The results show that one-quarter of respondents report weekly involvement in artistic activities such as music, drama or singing groups. A minority (12%) are more heavily engaged, spending more than five hours per week involved in artistic activities.

However, there is still time left for homework which, nor surprisingly, increases as they progress through school. While very few (10%) of First Years will spend more than 10 hours per week on homework, a majority (56%) of Sixth Year students report spending more than 10 hours a week on homework.

A considerable number of respondents (23%) carry out voluntary work outside the home. Engagement in voluntary activity decreases thorough the teenage years, from 30% of First Year students to 14% of Sixth Year students.

There is a much greater involvement with paid employment. Just under half (49%) of the respondents are in paid employment. Nearly one-fourth report spending one to four hours each week working. A minority (10%) work more than 10 hours per week in paid employment. Involvement in paid employment is considerably higher amongst CTC/Youthreach participants, which may be part of the CTC/Youthreach Programme.

#### 5.4 Alcohol and drug use

Slightly less than half of the sample reported that they never drank alcohol. These were primarily First Year students. More worryingly, 17% of respondents drink alcohol 'often' or 'so often I worry' (this increases to 39% of male 6<sup>th</sup> Year students).

Tobacco and alcohol were the substances most commonly used. Small numbers of respondents reported using 'other drugs' such as steroids, magic mushrooms, LSD/acid, cocaine, amphetamines, and prescription tablets.

The findings on drug and alcohol use are broadly in line with those reported in the 2003 'sweep' of the ESPAD (European Schools Project on Alcohol and other Drugs) (Council of Europe, 2004) which found that Ireland is ranked as the highest among the 35 European countries in terms of the number of adolescents who regularly binge drink and second highest in reported regular drunkenness. Also, frequent episodes (three or more times in last thirty days) of heavy drinking (called binge drinking and defined as five or more drinks in a single occasion) are common among one-third of girls and boys in Ireland, ranking 1st among European students.

#### 5.5 Bullying

The majority of young people did not report that they experience bullying. However, approximately one-third reported being affected 'a little bit' by bullying in their schools or CTC/Youthreach centres. Smaller numbers (approximately 5%) reported that bullying affects their lives 'a lot' or 'quite a lot'.

## 5.6 Social support

Respondents were asked who they go to discuss things if they have a problem. The results show that 45% 'often' go to a friend (35% 'often' go their mother and 18% often go to their father).

Few respondents report going to a professional with their problems. Only 1% 'often' go to a guidance counsellor if they have a problem; 0.5% 'often' go to a youth worker.

Males are much more likely than females not to talk to anybody about their problems.

## 5.7 Access to information

Respondents reported a serious lack of information about certain pertinent topics. For example, over a third of respondents reported that they did not have enough information about mental health issues, gay/lesbian/bisexual issues, or suicide awareness. About a third did not have enough information about depression or divorce/separation issues and about a quarter did not have enough information about sexuality or relationship issues.

## 5.8 Level of contentment

Are the young people of Co. Kildare happy? Two-thirds describe themselves as 'happy most of the time' or 'very happy'. About 6% are 'sad a lot of the time' or 'very unhappy.'

The most common sources of happiness are 'spending time with friends' (mentioned by 49% of respondents) and 'spending time with family' (33%).

## 5.9 Relationships and sexuality education

A majority of respondents (79%) had received classes about sex education in school, however they reported they were not particularly useful; thirty-two percent stated that they found them 'very helpful,' 52% stated that they found them 'ok,' and 15% found them unhelpful. Thus, only 246 respondents from a sample of 988 have had 'very useful' or high quality sex education in school.



Is the comprehensive, high quality sex education that young people need being provided in the home? Apparently not; 29% of the sample reported that their parents had ‘never’ discussed sex with them and 55% reported their parents had ‘mentioned it once or twice.’

#### 5.10 Worries, concerns and coping strategies

The primary worries reported by the sample are ‘failing exams’, ‘being bored’, ‘not liking your physical appearance’, ‘girlfriend/boyfriend problems’ (noted by 56% of respondents) and ‘not being part of a group.’

What do young people do when they are feeling down? The most widely used strategy (used ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ by 714 of the 988 respondents) is listening to music or playing music. More worryingly, 11% of respondents deal with feeling down by ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ engaging in self-harm. Both males and females reported similar levels of self-harm.

These findings are strikingly similar to a study of almost 4,000 teenagers, aged 15 - 17, in the Southern Health Board (SHB) area, which found that one in 10 Irish teenagers deliberately harm themselves. However, the latter study found that girls were three times more likely than boys to harm themselves (National Suicide Research Foundation, 2004).

#### 5.11 Priorities of young people – government take note!

Participants were asked to list three things they would prioritise “if the Government made you in charge” of deciding what young people in Co. Kildare need. Top of the list, mentioned by 24% of respondents, was ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out’ and similar responses.

Sports facilities were also mentioned by 24% of respondents. Also mentioned were cinemas (19%), night clubs/discos (14%), better shopping facilities (14%), swimming pools (12%), youth centres/clubs (10%).

These responses echo those from previous studies in Co. Kildare where a primary concern of young people is ‘boredom’ and ‘nothing to do.’ It is worth emphasising that ‘being bored’ is reported as being a major concern and ‘having somewhere to go’ is considered a high priority

need. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, almost all of the suggestions for ‘priority action for government’ concern facilities for physical/social/recreational activity.

### 5.12 Conclusion and Recommendations

This report is the first study of its kind in Co. Kildare. It gives an overview of the activities, views and needs as reported by a random selection of 988 school pupils and CTC/Youthreach participants. The results show that young people are highly sociable and the greatest sources of happiness are spending time with friends and family. Parents/guardians, siblings and close friends are the most significant sources of support for young people. Significant numbers are involved in organised physical activities, the creative arts and voluntary work. Respondents are very focussed on schoolwork and failing exams is the most commonly cited worry. Two thirds of the sample is positive about the future and only 7% feel negatively about the future.

There are some areas for concern. Drug/alcohol use is widespread and a significant number of young people report using drug/alcohol as a means of coping with ‘feeling down.’ Whilst most respondents have had some ‘Relationship and Sexuality Education’ (RSE), they found it to be of limited use. Many have received no RSE at all. Many respondents felt they did not have enough information on issues such as mental health, suicide, gay/lesbian/bisexual issues and divorce/separation. A significant minority (approximately one-third) worry about their parents/guardians not getting on and about a quarter worry about the suicide of somebody they know.

As with any sample of almost 1000 people, the results reflect a diversity of views and needs. The responses of the young people in this research provide clear indications for future action by educators, service providers and policy makers. Some priority areas for action are suggested below:

**Recommendation one:** That all young people are actively involved in the development and delivery of services, amenities, policies and decision making that affects their lives, including the education, social and community spheres.

**Recommendation two:** Physical education should be resourced to meet the express needs of young people (both genders) in school. A general ‘retreat’ (particularly by girls) from physical

education as the adolescent years progress should be recognised and counteracted. Alternatives to outdoor team-sports have the potential to include young people currently not participating in school sport programmes. For example, dance, yoga, gymnastics, athletics, and swimming. The habits one learns in adolescence are carried through to adult life. Directors of CTC/Youthreach Centre could explore ways of tackling the low levels of physical activity amongst the young people in their care. One possibility might be the integration of participants with the PE programmes in neighbouring Secondary schools.

**Recommendation three:** The importance of music in the lives of young people should be recognised by all who work with adolescents. Large numbers are actively engaged with music, drama or singing each week and listening to or playing music is a very common way of coping with ‘feeling down.’ It is recommended that service providers fully utilise this avenue of working with young people as it is attractive to the target audience and also offers opportunities for artistic expression and creativity.

**Recommendation four:** While half of the respondents are not engaged in paid employment, a small number of young people are being exploited by employers, thus jeopardising their educational, social and physical development. Such employers should be actively targeted by labour inspectors. Heavy engagement at a young age with paid employment is not compatible with full-time schooling or training.

**Recommendation five:** Aspects of alcohol use amongst older adolescents in Co. Kildare are quite worrying. In spite of this, one in five respondents say they do not have adequate information about alcohol/drug use. In conjunction with their local public health professionals, schools and youth services should further promote sensible and healthy attitudes to alcohol use. Each School and CTC/Youthreach should have a highly visible ‘stand’ with posters and leaflets about the dangers of alcohol and drug use. This would act as a gateway for youth services and schools to work in partnership towards the provision of talks, seminars, focus groups and other activities.

Significant numbers of young people choose not to drink alcohol. Models and programmes need to be developed which support young people to make informed, responsible choices regarding alcohol, alongside harm-reduction models of intervention.

**Recommendation six:** Approximately one-third of respondents reported being affected ‘a little bit’ by bullying in school and about 5% reported being affected ‘quite a lot or a lot.’ This represents an unacceptable level of bullying and should be tackled by the implementation of clear anti-bullying policies and procedures in all schools and CYC/Youthreach Centres which involves young people in a continuing process of review and planning.

**Recommendation seven:** The findings highlight the oft-cited reluctance of boys to seek help with their problems from friends, relatives or professionals. Teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers and others working with boys should stress, perhaps even more so than they do for girls, the availability of appropriate support services. Whilst boys may seek support less, the results show that they are vulnerable to the same anxieties and the same inappropriate coping strategies (for example, use of drugs/alcohol; deliberate self-harm) as girls.

**Recommendation eight:** It is often said that we live in an ‘information society’ surrounded by all we need to know about any given topic. However, the average young person may not have ready access to quality information about various topics that may impact on his/her life. Respondents report not having enough information about, amongst others, suicide awareness, gay/lesbian/bisexual issues, mental health issues, divorce/separation or young people’s rights. Clearly, adolescent-friendly information about these topics is not reaching young people. Public health professionals could play a role in designing appropriate ‘Social Issues’ displays that should be permanent exhibitions in schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres.

As per Recommendation five above, there is a need for schools and CTC/Youthreach Centres, along with Youth Information Centres and other service providers, to work in partnership to make information accessible to young people. ‘Information,’ in and of itself, can only have a certain impact. Information provision should be a starting point for supporting and consulting with young people using, for example, work-shops, youth fora and focus groups.

**Recommendation nine:** Most young people in Co. Kildare are not receiving satisfactory Relationship and Sexuality Education, either in school or outside of school. Almost a quarter of respondents had received no RSE education at all. Of those that have received RSE, very few found them ‘very helpful.’ Both primary and secondary schools should ensure that Stay Safe and RSE programmes are made available to students, by trained and enthusiastic instructors. This research shows that large numbers of parents in Co. Kildare are not engaging with their children

on the topic of relationships and sexuality in a meaningful way. School-parent associations need to acknowledge and support the primary responsibility of parents in this area.

**Recommendation ten:** The most frequently cited concern is ‘being bored/having nothing to do.’ Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited priority for ‘government action’ is for ‘somewhere to go/something to do/a place to hang out.’ In other words, amenities for young people are sorely lacking in Co. Kildare. In addition to structured activities such as sports, scouts etc., older adolescents in particular need space for unstructured or loosely structured activities with lower levels of adult monitoring. Youth clubs and Youth Services, in particular, should increase the provision of adolescent-friendly services, open to all young people in the community.

**Recommendation eleven:** Young people have highlighted the importance of parents in their lives for socio-emotional support and resilience. They have also indicated that they worry about their parents’ relationships and well-being. Given this reality for young people, it is imperative that youth services include parent support as part of their overall package of services for young people.

**Recommendation twelve:** The final recommendation is more general; that is, adults should recognise that the overwhelming majority of young people are hard working, fun-loving, sociable, family-centred, fair-minded, socially aware and thoughtful (just like most of the rest of the population). Teachers, youth-workers and other professionals that work with young people should strenuously counteract the pervasive negative coverage of young people, particularly in the print media. It is hoped that this report goes some way towards describing the day-to-day lived reality for young people.

## Conclusion

The researchers acknowledge that policies and legislation are in place for many of the recommendations above to be implemented, but what is lacking is a resource commitment to meeting the needs of young people in Co. Kildare. Additional resources should be provided for:

- Schools (through the Department of Education and Science)
- Family support and counselling (through the Health Services Executive)
- Youthwork services (as envisioned in the National Youthwork Development Plan).

This will contribute towards positively shaping happier, more able, confident young people who will be the adults of tomorrow.

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## Appendices

- Appendix 1: About the researchers
- Appendix 2: Questionnaire used in the study
- Appendix 3: Letter to parents/guardians
- Appendix 4: Participant consent form
- Appendix 5: Letter to School Liaison Persons
- Appendix 6: Age distribution of research participants

## Appendix 1: About the researchers and the CSER

Dr. Kevin Lalor is Head of Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology.

Dr. Katie Baird is formerly of the Department of Social Sciences, DIT and is currently Senior Clinical/Counselling Psychologist at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin.

The Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) is a research and policy analysis body, located within the Faculty of Applied Arts at DIT, which conducts research into social and educational issues. It has a well-established track record of research on social and educational policies and practices including work patterns and family structures, early childhood education and care, social /alternative care, juvenile justice, contemporary youth and children and the information society. Recent work includes:

Hayes, N, & Bradley, S, & Newman, C (2005)	An Accessible Childcare Model	The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)
Seymour, M. & Costello, L. (2005)	A Study Of The Number, Profile And Progression Routes Of Homeless Persons Before The Court And In Custody	Probation and Welfare Services
Ryan, L, Hanlon, N, Riley, L., Warren, A. (2004)	The Impact Of Placement In Special Care Units Settings On The Well Being Of Young People And Their Families	Special Residential Services Board
CSER (2003)	Garda Youth Division Project Guidelines	Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
Riordan, S. in association with Ryan, L. (2002)	Final Evaluation Report of the Teen Parents Support Initiative	Department of Health & Children
Cadwell, L. (2002)	Crime Prevention Directory	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Kerrins, L. (2002)	Evaluation of Childcare Network Loch Garman	Childcare Network, Loch Garman
King, D. (2002)	Parents, Children and Prison: Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Childcare	Combat Poverty Agency
CSER (2001)	A Study of Participants in Garda Special Projects	Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform.
Hayes, N. and Kernan, M. (2001)	Seven Years Old: School Experience in Ireland – National Report of the IEA Pre-Primary Project	Dublin: CSER, DIT
CSER (2001)	Evaluation of St Benedict's Child and Family Project	Northern Area Health Board, Child and Family Project Leader and Advisory Group (Internal Report)
King, D. (2001)	Unaccompanied Minors: An Information Booklet	Barnardos
Riordan, S. (2001)	Supporting Parents. A study of Parents Supports Needs	Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs, Families Research Unit
Warren, A., Fulham, S and Bronagh, G. (2000)	An Evaluation of 'The Grove' Through Care Unit	Finglas Child and Adolescent Unit

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire used in the study

### Background information

**Q1. Age:**      12        
                    13        
                    14        
                    15        
                    16        
                    17        
                    18        
                    19     

**Q2. Gender:**    Male        
                          Female     

**Q3. Are your parents/guardians:**

living together (married or unmarried)   
separated/divorced                              
widowed       
Other      (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4. Which of these best describes your background?**

Irish       
Irish (Traveller)                                 
African origin                                     
East European origin                           
Other      (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**Details about your life**

**Q5.** In the past seven days, roughly how much time have you spent at the following activities (in total)?

	None	1-4 hrs	5-9 hrs	10-14 hrs	15+ hrs
Q 5.1 Watching TV or videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.2 Computer games PlayStation or internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.3 Talking to parents or guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.4 Hanging out with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.5 Active sport (eg GAA; athletics)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.6 Scouts/Guides/youth club	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.7 Music, singing or drama group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.8 Voluntary work (outside the home)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.9 Paid work (eg, supermarket, baby-sitting, grass cutting)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q 5.10 Homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q6.** In a normal week, how many days do you attend school:

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q7.** What is your idea of a “perfect” weekend? Describe the main activities in your ideal weekend (starting on Friday afternoon after school).

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**Alcohol and drug use**

**Q8.** Describe how often you take the following, if ever

		Never	Sometimes (1 or 2 a month)	Often (1 or 2 a week)	So often I worry
Q8.1	Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8.2.	Tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8.3	Cannabis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8.4	Ecstasy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8.5	Solvents (eg, gas, glue)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8.6	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	(please specify:)	_____			

**Bullying**

Bullying can include slagging, name calling, teasing, false rumours, being hit etc.

**Q9.** Does bullying in school affect your life?

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Quite a lot
- A lot

**Q10.** Does bullying outside school affect your life?

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Quite a lot
- A lot

### Somebody to talk to

**Q10.** It can be helpful to talk to someone who will listen to us when we have a problem. How often do you talk to each of the following when you have a problem?

	Never	Sometimes	Often
Q 10.1 A close friend, my own age	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.2 My mum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.3 My dad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.4 A brother / sister	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.5 Aunt/uncle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.6 Guardian / foster-parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.7 Grandparent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.8 Guidance counsellor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.9 Youth worker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.10 Other (Please specify)_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 10.11 I choose not to talk to someone about my problems		<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

**Q11.** We all need information to help us make good decisions. In your school or community environment, do you feel you have enough information about the following issues:

	Yes, plenty	No, not enough
Q11.1 Healthy eating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.2. How to keep fit/leisure/sport	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.3 Alcohol/illegal drug use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.4 Divorce/separation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.5 Mental illness issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.6 Gay/lesbianism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.7 Sexuality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q11.8 Depression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11.9	Suicide awareness	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Q11.10	Careers/education	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Q11.11	Relationships	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Q11.12	Travel	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Q11.13	Young people's rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q12.** How would you describe how you feel most of the time?

- Very happy
- Happy most of the time
- Average: sometimes happy, sometimes sad
- Sad a lot of the time
- Very unhappy

**Q13.** Have you ever received classes about sex education **in school**?

- Yes
- No

Q13.1 If 'Yes', how would you describe these classes?

(If 'No', please skip to Q14).

- Very helpful
- Ok
- Very poor/unhelpful

Q13.2. What would you do to improve them?

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**Q14.** Have you ever received classes about sex education **outside school** (eg, youth club, health clinic, information service)?

Yes

No

Q14.1. If 'Yes', how would you describe these classes? (If 'No', please skip to Q15).

Very helpful

Ok

Very poor/unhelpful

Q14.2. What would you do to improve them?

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**Q15.** What about at home? Have your parents/guardians ever discussed sex education with you?

Never

Mentioned it once or twice

Many times

**Q16.** Do you ever feel that you are being judged or treated badly because of who you are;

Yes, a lot

Sometimes

No

Q16.1. If you answered 'Yes' or 'Sometimes', please give an example:

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**Q17.** What gives you the most happiness in your life at the moment?

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**Q18.** What would you describe as your greatest concern/worry in life at the moment?

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**Q19.** What kind of support could be helpful to you in dealing with this?

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**Q20.** If a problem is really getting you down, how often do you:

		Never	Sometimes	Often
Q 20.1	Talk to friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.2	Listen to/play music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.3	Look for help from a professional such as a teacher, doctor, counsellor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.4	Deliberately hurt yourself, such as cutting or scratching yourself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.5	Write in a diary or write poetry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.6	Take drink/drugs to try to forget your worries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.7	Pray	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 20.8	De-stress with sport/exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q21.** If the Government made you in charge of deciding what all the young people in your area need, what 3 things would be top of your list?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Q22.** The following are common issues that people your age might encounter.

Please indicate how often you are affected by these issues:

		Never	Sometimes	Often
Q 22.1	Not being part of gang/group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.2	Physical appearance (eg, spots, too short, too tall, too fat, too thin)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.3	Fear of pregnancy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.4	Parent/guardian separation/divorce	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.5	Parents/guardians not getting on	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.6	Parent/guardian with a drink problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.7	Parent/guardian with depression or other mental illness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 22.8	Suicide of somebody you know	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.9	Being gay/lesbian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.10	Dropping out of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.11	Failing exams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.12	Being involved in crime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.13	Being bored/having nothing to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q 22.14	Girlfriend/boyfriend problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q23.** Overall, how would you describe your vision of your own future?

Positively

Negatively

Never think of it really

**Thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire.**

## Useful Contacts

Alcohol & Addiction	South Western Area Health Board	Tua Nua, Kildare Town	045-521220
	Al Anon	Parish Centre, Newbridge	045-431394 01-8732699
	Community Addiction Service	Health Centre, Newbridge	045-446350
	Cuan Mhuire	Cardington Athy	059-8631493
Bereavement	Kildare Suicide Support Group		045 895620
	Samaritans	3 McElwain Tce. Newbridge	045-435299 1850-609090
	Console	Aspect Hse, 5 Whitehorn Grove, Celbridge,	01-6375203 1800-201890
Careers	FAS	Georges Street Newbridge	045-431372
Counselling/Support	KYS Naas Child & Family Project	New Row, Naas, Co. Kildare	045-898623
	Rainbows	Sheila Sullivan, Newbridge	045-434349
	Rainbows	Maureen Ryan, Naas	045 879952
	KYS Youth Counselling Service	Canal Stores, Basin St. Naas, Co. Kildare.	045-856968
	Social Work Department, Naas	Naas	045-882400
	KYS Tracking & Mentoring	1 Griffith Rd. Curragh, Co. Kildare	045-442989
Information	Kildare Youth Service KYS	Canal Stores, Basin St. Naas, Co. Kildare.	045-897893
	Citizens Information Centre	Parish Centre, Newbridge	045-431735
National Support Services	ALBA-Survivors of Sexual Abuse	2 McElwain Terrace, Newbridge	1800-234112
	Alcoholics Anonymous	109 St. Circular Rd. Leonards Corner, D/8	01-4538998
	Aware Defeat Depression	72 Lr. Leeson St. D/2	01-6617211
	Bodywhys - Eating Disorders		01-2834963
	Gamblers Anonymous	Carmichael Hse. Brunswick St. D/7	01-8721133
	Gay Switchboard		01-8721055
	Gingerbread Irl-One Parent Families	29/30 Dame St. D/1	01-6710291
	National Lesbian & Gay Federation	6 South William St. D/2	01-6710939
	Narcotics Anonymous	4-5 Eustace St. D/2	01-8300944
	CURA		01-16710598
	Childline		1800-666666
	Children at Risk (Sexual Abuse)		1890-924567
	National Drugs		1800-459459

### Appendix 3: Letter to parents/guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Kildare Youth Services (KYS) is a voluntary organisation that provides a range of community-based services to young people in a number of settings throughout Co. Kildare, including a Youth Counselling Service, Youth Information Service, Community Youth Projects and a mentoring programme for early school leavers.

KYS have commissioned research to examine “The needs of young people in Co. Kildare.” Approximately 1400 secondary school students shall be selected from a random sample of 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year students from all 28 secondary schools in the County and Youth Training Workshops. The research is being conducted by Dr. Kevin Lalor and Dr. Katie Baird of the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology. The purpose of the research is to gather young people’s own views on the things that are important to them.

The class your child is in has been randomly selected in this process and his/her class shall be surveyed in the coming weeks. The questionnaire is anonymous and contains questions on sport/leisure, health and well being, bullying, alcohol/drug use, relationship/sex education and a series of general questions aimed at examining the main views/opinions of young people.

We are confident that this research project will improve youth services in Co. Kildare. This will benefit young people, their parents and the community at large. However, should you **not** wish for your son/daughter to complete this questionnaire, please indicate below by writing your child’s name in the blank space and return this letter to \_\_\_\_\_ . Alternative study arrangements shall be made for him/her during the class period when the questionnaire is distributed and collected. Should you have any queries about any aspect of this research, please contact one of the researchers (Dr. Kevin Lalor, 01-4024163; Dr. Katie Baird, 01-4024229).

Thank you,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Liz O’Sullivan, Regional Director, Kildare Youth Services.

.....✂.....

As parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ [child’s name], I **Do Not** wish for him/her to complete the KYS questionnaire on “The Needs of Young People in Co. Kildare.”

## Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Researchers:	<b>Dr. Kevin Lalor, Dr. Katie Baird, Ms. Kalis Pope.</b>	
Institute:	<b>Department of Social Sciences, DIT</b>	
Title of Study:	<b>Researching the needs of young people in Co. Kildare.</b>	
<b>To be completed by students:</b>		
Have you received enough information about this research?		YES/NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this questionnaire?		YES/NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?		YES/NO
Do you understand that you do not have to take part in this research?		YES/NO
Do you agree to take part in this research that will be written as a report?		YES/NO
Have you been informed that this consent form will be private to the researcher?		YES/NO
Signed _____	Date _____	
Name in Block Letters _____		
Signature of Researcher _____	Date _____	

**Please note:**

- The researcher concerned must sign the consent form after having explained the project to the subject and after having answered his/her questions about the project.

## Appendix 5: Letter to School Liaison Persons

**Re.: Researching the needs of young people in Co. Kildare**

**CC: Your School Principal**

Dear

You have been nominated by your Principal to be a liaison person for a research project titled, "Researching the needs of young people in Co. Kildare." The research has been commissioned by Kildare Youth Services (KYS), which is a voluntary organisation that provides a range of community-based services to young people in Kildare.

Approximately 1400 adolescents shall be randomly selected from all 28 secondary schools in the County and Youth Training Centres. The research is being led by Dr. Kevin Lalor and Dr. Katie Baird of the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology. The fieldwork shall be conducted by Ms. Kalis Pope, a PhD candidate at the same Department. The purpose of the research is to gather young people's own views on the things that are important to them.

The role of the School Liaison Person is to coordinate the data collection in his/her school by liaising with the researchers. It is intended to have all data collection completed by the end of November 2004.

Events shall happen in the following sequence:

- A sample of 1<sup>st</sup> year, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year classes from each of the 28 secondary schools in Co. Kildare shall be randomly selected.
- A letter outlining the purpose of the research will be sent to the parents/guardians of each child in that class (please find copy enclosed). As the researchers do not have access to student postal addresses, copies of the letters shall be sent to the School Liaison Person. You will be asked to arrange for addresses of parents/guardians to be fixed to stamped envelopes, using the school's database, and for these to be posted to parents/guardians. KYS shall post these stamped envelopes to you in the coming weeks. **Please note carefully the date on which you post them to parents/guardians.**
- The letter offers parents/guardians an opportunity to withhold their consent to allow their child to complete the questionnaire.
- As the named co-ordinator in letters sent to parents/guardians, you may receive queries from them. A copy of the questionnaire will be sent to your Principal to help you deal with any such queries.
- You shall be contacted by Ms. Kalis Pope to agree a class period when the questionnaires shall be distributed.
- The question shall be distributed during the selected class period. Together with a briefing for students, this should take 30-35 minutes. The School Liaison Person should note any 'Withholding of consent' slips that have been returned to the School.



If there is anything you are unsure about, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Kevin Lalor (01-4024163), Dr. Katie Baird (01-4024229) or Ms. Kalis Pope (01-4024268).

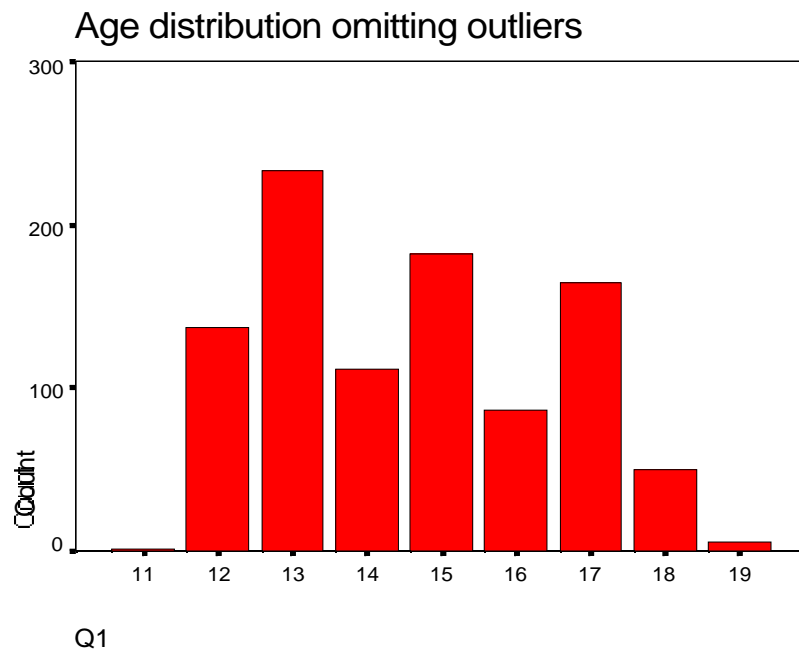
A copy of the final report shall be made available to your school early in 2005. Thank you very much for your assistance,

Yours sincerely,

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Kevin Lalor, PhD  
Katie Baird, PhD  
Kalis Pope

## Appendix 6: Age distribution of research participants



## Offices and Contacts

### KILDARE YOUTH SERVICES – CENTRAL OFFICE

Canal Stores, Basin Street,  
Naas, Co Kildare  
Tel: 045 897893  
Fax: 045 897966  
Email: [yic@kys.ie](mailto:yic@kys.ie)  
[reception@kys.ie](mailto:reception@kys.ie)

- Naas Youth Project
- Youth Information
- Counselling

### NAAS CHILD & FAMILY PROJECT

1 New Row, Naas, Co. Kildare.  
Tel: 045 898623  
Fax: 045 898623  
Email: [ncfp@kys.ie](mailto:ncfp@kys.ie)

### NEWBRIDGE YOUTH PROJECT

Lower Eyre Street, Newbridge,  
Co Kildare.

Tel: 045 435672  
Fax: 045 435639  
Email: [newbridgeyp@kys.ie](mailto:newbridgeyp@kys.ie)

- Youth Project
- Counselling

### LEIXLIP YOUTH PROJECT

Mill House, 66 Main Street,  
Leixlip, Co Kildare.

Tel: 01 624 5749  
Fax: 01 624 5749  
Email: [leixlipyp@kys.ie](mailto:leixlipyp@kys.ie)

- Youth Project
- Counselling

### ATHY YOUTH PROJECT

9 Priory Court, Athy,  
Co Kildare.

Tel: 059 863 8989  
Fax: 059 863 2100  
Email: [athyyp@kys.ie](mailto:athyyp@kys.ie)

- Youth Project
- Counselling

### THE CURRAGH YOUTH PROJECT,

1 Griffith Road, Curragh Camp,  
Co. Kildare.

Tel: 045 442989  
Email: [curraghyp@kys.ie](mailto:curraghyp@kys.ie)

- Youth Project
- Counselling

### KILDARE YOUTH PROJECT

Unit 1&2 Fairview  
Kildare Town, Co Kildare.

Tel: 087 1254897  
Email: [kildaretownyp@kys.ie](mailto:kildaretownyp@kys.ie)

- Youth Project
- Tracking & Mentoring
- Counselling

## Youth Clubs

Kildare Youth Services also supports youth clubs on an outreach basis through the provision of training, advice, information and programme support.

In 2006 the following youth clubs were affiliated to Kildare Youth Services:

- Bishopsland Youth Club
- Confey Music Club
- Celbridge Youth Drama
- Clane Youth Club
- Genesis Youth Club
- Kilcock Youth Club
- The Mill Youth Club
- Sallins Youth Club
- Y2K Youth Club
- Naas Club 4U
- Teen Spirit
- Leixlip Club 4U
- Newbridge Resource Centre Ltd

For further information contact K.Y.S. Central Office in Naas @ 045 897893