



# YOUNG VOICES – HAVE YOUR SAY

'Young Voices – Have Your Say' was a series of regional consultations with young people on how they can be more fully included in society. 'Being included in society' means feeling like you are an important part of and involved in the world around you, for example, with your family and friends or in your school, area and clubs. The 'Young Voices – Have Your Say' meetings were part of a European programme called 'Structured Dialogue', which gave young people all over Europe a chance to influence decisions that affect their lives. The consultations in Ireland were conducted by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

At the consultations, young people used some very creative materials and ways of working to discuss a number of questions in workshops, including:

- What does 'being included' mean?
- What **stops** young people being included?
- What are the **times in a young person's life** when they are most at risk of being left out?
- What **groups of young people are most at risk** of being left out?
- What **helps** young people feel more included?
- What do young people get from **being involved in clubs and activities**?
- How could these activities be **better** and what **new ideas** do you have for clubs and activities?

The main things that young people said at the meetings are in this leaflet.

## WHO TOOK PART?

A total of 239 young people took part in three events, held in Sligo, Cork and Dublin. 57% of those who took part were female and 43% were male. 73% were under 18 years of age and 27% were over 18. All of the young people who took part are involved in clubs or activities, such as youth clubs, Comhairle na nÓg, sports or arts clubs, advocacy groups or other youth organisations like the Scouts. 28 youth leaders also took part in the meetings.

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# YOUNG VOICES

Have Your Say

## WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID AT THE CONSULTATIONS

What does  
'being included'  
mean?

- Being respected
- Accepted and loved for who you are
- Being treated equally
- Equal access to and funding for education
- A sense of belonging
- Having your voice heard and opinion valued
- Someone to talk to
- Being supported
- Meeting new people and making friends
- Working as part of a team
- Feeling welcome

What  
stops young  
people being  
included?

- Bad relationships with parents, friends and peers
- Discrimination
- Stereotyping
- Bullying
- Racism
- Lack of facilities
- Lack of information on existing facilities
- Lack of transport
- Cost of activities
- Lack of work

## WHAT DOES 'BEING INCLUDED' MEAN AND WHAT STOPS YOUNG PEOPLE BEING INCLUDED?

The young people had a lot of very different ideas about what 'being included' means and what stops young people being included. The main ideas that came up when these questions were being discussed, under the headings of 'family and friends', 'education', 'in your area', 'clubs and activities' and 'work', were:

“I want to be seen as a valuable member of the family unit and be included in decision-making.”

“I just want to be loved and accepted the way I am.”

## IN YOUR AREA

- Being consulted for your opinion
- Being treated the same as older people in the community
- Getting involved in community events, volunteering and helping neighbours
- Getting to know your neighbours
- Having proper transport
- Having a **sense of belonging** and feeling part of the community
- Having a fun and safe place to hang out with friends
- Having good basic facilities in the community, e.g. a bank, library, chemist, dentist

“No more ‘us and them’: young people heard and welcomed as constructive members of the community.”

“Always having that one person to talk to.”

“Being treated like everyone else.”

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- Being **respected** and not being treated like a child in the family
- Being **accepted and loved** for who you are
- Having a **safe** space to be yourself
- Having **a say** and being included in decisions being made
- Having **someone to talk to** and rely on, especially when there are problems
- Able to speak openly and honestly
- Being **listened to**
- Being **supported**, especially when you are feeling down
- Being invited to and included in events and activities, including social media

What does ‘being included’ mean?

## WORK

- Being treated equally regardless of age, gender, sexuality or race
- Fair wage and reward
- Having **equal opportunities for training and promotions**
- Being trusted and given responsibility
- Being involved in decision-making
- Working as part of a team
- Being valued and respected for what you bring to the workplace

# YOUNG VOICES

## Have Your Say

### EDUCATION

**Equal access to and funding for education** for young people from different social classes

**Equality** - No racism, bullying, discrimination or judgement of young people, regardless of their sexuality, race, religion or background

**A broader curriculum** and more subject choices

Make the curriculum relevant to real job opportunities and real life by reviewing outdated rules, encouraging individuality and thinking for yourself

New learning and teaching methods that suit everyone and not just the people who are academic

Equality being displayed in the curriculum, e.g. teach about Traveller culture in history and LGBT issues in SPHE

Opinions on curriculum and teachers being taken into consideration

**Having a voice** on important things in school, e.g. through Student Councils or young people on Boards of Management

Being **treated fairly by teachers**

Getting support, encouragement, guidance, mentoring and motivation from teachers

**Freedom of expression** and identity, e.g. wearing make-up/earrings/piercings

“A boy and a boy or a girl and a girl should be able to go to the Debs together.”

“Education should be free from religion – completely secular.”

### CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES

A sense of belonging and feeling welcome

Being consulted, listened to and involved in decision-making on activities in the club

Being treated equally, without being judged, discriminated against or bullied

Meeting new people and making friends

Working as part of a team

Having fun

Having trained leaders and good adult role models

“Your opinion matters within the club.”

“Stereotyped because of your identity.”

“Not being able to talk to TDs and local councillors. They don't listen to young people and get their views.”

“Your interests may not be met and if not, you are excluded, e.g. there is a GAA club in my town plus two pubs – what is for me?”

“Unemployment can cause a person to lose self-worth and begin to lose hope.”

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS

**Negative relationships with parents** because of lack of trust, communication, respect or support

**Negative relationships with friends or peers** because of peer pressure, alcohol and drug misuse, or having different values, beliefs and interests

**Discrimination**, e.g. being judged and treated differently because of the way you look or because of your sexual orientation

Not accepting individuality

Strict rules

Poor parenting skills

Addiction problems

Lack of understanding about mental health issues

Family expectations, traditions and religious customs

Money problems

## IN YOUR AREA

**Stereotyping of and discrimination** against young people by older people, the media and the Gardaí

Bullying

**Lack of facilities**, especially a place to hang out

Lack of variety or choice of activities

Lack of information on facilities and services in the area

Not being consulted by community leaders or TDs for opinion

**Rural isolation due to lack of transport**

Peer pressure to drink, take drugs and get involved in crime

Mental health issues

## WORK

**Lack of work for young people** and lack of opportunities to gain experience

Lack of opportunities to get the necessary education, qualifications and skills

Discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion, mental health and criminal record

Lack of transport

Lack of confidence

## EDUCATION

**Bullying** by other students because of race, looks, religion and sexuality

### Racism

Discrimination and lack of understanding of sexuality, e.g. religion class, which is compulsory, teaches that 'being gay is wrong'

**Bad teachers**, e.g. too strict and controlling, lazy or disinterested

Lack of support

**Cost** of third-level education, e.g. college registration fees

**Cost** of schools, e.g. school trips and grinds

Not valuing or trying different ways of learning

What stops young people being included?

"Not being encouraged or inspired in school."

## CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES

**Bullying** and cliques: "If a group is well established, young people can assume it is closed off to new members"

Not being made to feel welcome – because of sexuality, social background, cultural differences or simply because people do not say 'hello'

Structure and hierarchy of club can be intimidating

Range of activities is not wide enough and there is too much focus on sports

**Lack of advertisements for clubs/facilities that do exist**

**Cost** of activities, e.g. membership, trips and equipment

Lack of confidence and self-esteem

Rural isolation due to lack of transport

"Many think that those with a disability can't participate in clubs/activities."

"Not getting a 'hello' when you go to a club, not being made feel you are part of a club."

# TIMES IN THEIR LIVES WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MOST AT RISK OF BEING LEFT OUT

The young people felt that there are a number of different times when they are at risk of being left out, including:

## Starting primary school:

Very young children are meeting new teachers, making new friends and some are leaving parents for the first time. At a time when children are developing physically, mentally and emotionally, it may also be the first time that they feel left out, e.g. in the playground.

## Starting secondary school:

New subjects, new people, new teachers, not knowing anyone, adapting to new schools and systems – all make this a challenging time.

## Teenage years:

Puberty, discovering sexuality and identity, starting relationships, break-ups, falling out with family, peer pressure, alcohol and drugs, bullying and being judged – all these things can make the teenage years very difficult.

## Transition year:

An 'in-between' stage and starting social life.

## Exam time (especially Junior and Leaving Certificate exams):

Pressure from parents, pressure to get points, stress and a sense of failure.

## Starting college:

Lack of grants for third-level education, new relationships, thinking about the future, leaving home and becoming independent.

Discovering sexual orientation

Leaving home

Any period of transition, e.g. leaving school early

# GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST AT RISK OF BEING LEFT OUT

The young people felt that any young person who is 'different' at all or part of a smaller group is at risk of being left out.



The main groups of young people that participants thought were at risk of being left out include:



- ➔ LGBT young people
- ➔ Young mothers and lone parents
- ➔ Migrants and young people from ethnic minorities, including young Travellers
- ➔ Young people whose first language is not English
- ➔ Young people from both upper and lower social classes
- ➔ Unemployed young people
- ➔ People who have no money
- ➔ Young people living in rural areas, including farmers
- ➔ Academically gifted young people and non-academic young people

- ➔ Young people with no education or poor literacy/numeracy skills
- ➔ Early school-leavers
- ➔ Young people with poor social skills
- ➔ Young people with physical or mental disabilities or with learning difficulties
- ➔ Young people with financial pressures
- ➔ Young people in the care system, e.g. fostered children
- ➔ Young people under 18 who come to the country without a parent (unaccompanied minors)

- ➔ Young people with addiction problems or from families with addiction problems
- ➔ Young people who do not drink alcohol
- ➔ Homeless young people
- ➔ Young people in the justice system
- ➔ Young people who are very religious or from a 'minority' religion
- ➔ Young people who are not on social media and those who 'can't handle social media comments'
- ➔ Adult children living at home

Examples of the kinds of young people who are 'different' who might be left out include:



- ➔ Red heads
- ➔ Emos
- ➔ Swots
- ➔ Goths
- ➔ Hippies
- ➔ Preps
- ➔ People who have a stutter or lisp or speak with a different accent
- ➔ People who are obese or skinny
- ➔ People who wear glasses, have skin problems or with braces

# THINGS THAT HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL MORE INCLUDED

The participants also came up with a number of things that help young people feel more included, such as:

*“Feeling like you are part of something important.”*

Support from family, friends, teachers, people in the community or the GP

*“Help groups and talks on drugs and alcohol help to make better life choices.”*

Buddy systems, e.g. ‘Big Brother/Big Sister’ or buddy systems at school

Having ‘someone’ to talk to

Hobbies, e.g. music

Membership of groups, e.g. youth groups, sports teams, drama groups, Comhairle na nÓg

Building self-confidence and self-esteem

**THINGS THAT HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL MORE INCLUDED**

Youth services for specific groups of young people, e.g. young Travellers, LGBT young people, Garda Diversion projects

Parenting programmes, training and supports

Educational supports, e.g. literacy and numeracy classes, English classes and homework clubs

Being treated equally and with respect

Having a say in how clubs and activities are run

Talking to a guidance counsellor

Counselling

*“Meeting new people who are more open-minded and accepting of who you are as a person.”*

*“Having a say in how things are run boosts confidence.”*

# WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET FROM BEING INVOLVED IN CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES?

Young people get a huge amount from being involved in clubs and activities. In addition to the vast array of practical and useful skills that they learn at clubs, people feel that clubs help them to discover who they are, **'what they want from life'**, and to accept themselves for who they are by building self-confidence and self-esteem.

In addition, young people feel that clubs **'give you an opportunity to talk to people you wouldn't talk to otherwise'**, resulting in respect, tolerance and acceptance of others and their differences. The participants discussed this question in the groups they were representing, including Comhairlí na nÓg and other youth advisory groups, youth clubs and youth cafés, arts and culture groups, sports groups and special 'interest' groups on bullying, LGBT, mental health, migrants and Travellers. The main things that participants said they got from being involved in each of these clubs and activities are listed on pages 9-11.

## YOUTH GROUPS AND CAFÉS

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Find out more about who you are, who you want to be, what you are good at and how to improve
- Realise your potential: *'Reach for the stars'*
- Confidence, e.g. build your social skills, happy with your body image, get involved in consultation events and *'speak up'*
- Chance to make new friends
- Learning and trying new things
- Not all about *'academic smarts'*: Discover new talents
- Safe place for young people
- Getting out into the community, making a difference and being involved
- Development of leaders for the community

### SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- Learn respect for the opinions of others
- Helps you to understand that everyone is different – there is no one way to be
- Communication with other people
- Confidence
- Social skills
- Developing your interests and personal development
- Being friendly
- Support and friendship when you are going through a bad time
- Practical skills, e.g.
  - interview skills
  - cooking (everyone needs to eat)
  - using your initiative
  - planning and organising skills

### FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- Having someone to talk to
- Sharing problems takes the weight off your shoulders, lets you know you are not alone
- Not afraid to say what you feel
- Being able to be yourself and understood
- Feeling accepted in the club and included in the group
- Feeling more confident
- Learn to be responsible as a team player
- Make new friends
- People value your thoughts and opinions and try to action it

# ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM GROUPS

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Empathy and understanding: Ability for social engagement, e.g. conflict resolution and problem-solving
- Self-directed learning and critical thinking: Questioning everything and learning outside of school

## SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- Ability to influence issues that affect young people
- Building relationships with adult leaders and peers: Having a network of support and 'one good adult' to talk to
- Tolerance and acceptance

## FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- Acceptance and sense of belonging, alongside awareness of diversity
- Builds self-confidence and positive mental health

# ARTS AND CULTURE

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Positive experience, enjoyable and fun
- Finding yourself
- Self-awareness
- It gives you the self-confidence to believe in yourself and accept yourself
- Meeting new people from different backgrounds

## SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- Creativity
- Different way of looking at things
- Better problem-solving skills: Using both sides of brain
- Self-respect and respect for others

## FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- Being part of a community of interest
- Safe space to be yourself
- Team-building
- *'We would not feel as close without the opportunities made possible by support and sustained funding.'*

# SPORT

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Happiness from doing something you love
- Make new friends with people who have the same interest
- Builds character

## SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- To push yourself to your limits
- Getting fit and healthy
- Builds confidence and to stand up for yourself
- Leadership

## FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- Lap of town when you win (receiving recognition from your community)
- Get to know more people
- Same interests as others
- Teamwork

# COMHAIRLE NA NÓG AND YOUTH ADVISORY GROUPS

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Confidence-building: You gain public speaking skills and learn how to express your opinion
- Meeting like-minded people
- Making people feel happy about themselves
- Making a difference/doing something good/helping others
- Feeling of accomplishment
- Learning the importance of paying attention
- Food

## SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- Communication skills, including public speaking and listening to others
- Interpersonal skills
- Confidence to talk in front of others and to say what you want
- Bravery to be yourself
- Leadership skills
- Being responsible for and representing other people
- First aid training
- Committee skills

## FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- Having your voice heard
- Feeling you have a say in the local community
- Knowing that your opinions are listened to and respected: What you say matters
- Having ideas acted upon
- Breaks down social barriers between young people
- Confidence
- You feel included as people vote for you: You are elected

# INTEREST GROUPS (bullying, LGBT, mental health, migrants' rights and Travellers)

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and HAPPINESS

- Feeling safe
- Educate yourself
- Helps with future problems
- Maturing and understanding yourself, expressing yourself and feeling it is OK as you are
- Being involved in the group contributes to you being more accepted and respected
- Develop new friendships

## SKILLS and EXPERIENCES NEEDED FOR LIFE

- Knowing there is always someone you can talk to
- Being aware of your own mental health constantly
- Learning to express your opinions without fear of being judged
- Broad education, which gives you the chance to learn more about your own culture and to learn to take responsibility for your decisions

## FEELING MORE INCLUDED

- The feeling of being loved and accepted for who you are
- Being treated equally, enabling you to practise your own culture in different environments
- Meeting people in similar situations
- Young people can acknowledge their feelings/ideas with trained professionals
- Support

# HOW COULD THESE ACTIVITIES BE BETTER? WHAT NEW IDEAS DO YOU HAVE FOR CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES?

Again, participants had very diverse views on what could improve the activities, as well as new ideas for clubs and activities. Some of the most popular ideas include:

→ Have a youth advisory group in every club

→ More opportunities to take the lead in activities

→ Consult with members of the club on what activities they like best and make sure everyone has a say in the running of the club

→ More welcoming, especially towards new members

→ Have clubs for people at an earlier age and have activities for older young people (aged 18-22)

→ More opportunities to 'experience the world outside the youth club' and to interact with other community groups

→ More interaction and meetings between groups (especially Comhairli na nOg)

→ More training for young people, especially on practical life skills and life choices

→ Having a safe space where you can talk about and get support on issues, e.g. disability, sexual health and sexual orientation

→ More trips away because they help people form bonds and feel included in a group

→ Have a broader range of activities, with better equipment and facilities

→ Better advertising of groups, activities and opportunities for young people

→ Increase funding

"Give young people with low confidence levels a greater role in the club to help them thrive."

"To have somewhere we can drop in, we have nothing ... and we are not old enough to go out."

"Improve facilities for young people that are not just sports-related. People have different interests!"

# YOUTH WORK AND ACTIVITIES: WHAT YOUTH WORKERS HAD TO SAY

The 28 youth workers who were at the meetings were also asked 'What is working in your youth service?' and 'What needs to be improved?' Here is what they said:

## What is working in your youth service?

- ➔ 'Child Protection' guidelines, making sure that young people are kept safe
- ➔ Having set rules and ways of doing things in place, e.g. an anti-bullying policy
- ➔ Training courses for youth workers so that they are more skilled at helping young people on a wide range of topics, e.g. sexual or mental health, sexuality or bullying
- ➔ Including people from different backgrounds, e.g. young Travellers or migrants
- ➔ Run programmes that benefit young people, e.g. gaining skills, self-confidence and becoming more tolerant of people who are different to them
- ➔ Asking young people what they think and involving them in planning activities
- ➔ Having a Youth Advisory Group or Youth Council in the service

## What needs to be improved?

- ➔ Sharing information and communication between different youth services
- ➔ Having more specific training on things such as alcohol and drug abuse, LGBT issues, Traveller culture, migrants' rights and disability awareness
- ➔ Funding for training courses and more staff
- ➔ Having a wider range of activities
- ➔ Better links with schools
- ➔ Better access to youth services, e.g. longer opening hours, better transport and better advertising
- ➔ Activities need to be more youth-led since even though young people have a say in activities, final decisions are often made by the Board, management or youth leaders

## WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue will look at all of the main points from these meetings held in Ireland, as well as the main points from meetings held in the European Union's other 26 Member States. Based on this information, they will decide on the themes for discussion at the EU Youth Conference being held as part of Ireland's Presidency of the European Union in March 2013.

The outcomes of the discussions at the EU Youth Conference – where one young person from each of the meetings in Cork, Dublin and Sligo will represent your views – will be part of a larger report on **Including young people** and will also be part of an **EU Council Conclusions** (a type of 'pledge' to take action) on Social Inclusion.

