

## 1. Introduction

This consultation process was carried out with young people between the ages of 13-18 years across the county of Tipperary between January to May 2016. The purpose of this consultation was to give voice to young people surrounding their experiences, in line with the *National Outcomes* for Children. The data then, will be used to shape Tipperary's CYPSC plan for the coming years. This report illustrates the results of the consultation process.

### 1.1 Tipperary County – An Overview

Tipperary is the largest county in the Republic of Ireland, with an overall population (according to the latest CSO data) of 158, 754. The number of young people in the 13-18 years' age bracket, which is the context for this particular consultation, is 12, 753.

Tipperary is generally a county of two halves, the North and the South. The most heavily populated youth areas of South Tipperary are Clonmel, followed by Carrick-on-Suir. The most heavily populated youth areas for North Tipperary are Nenagh, followed by Thurles.

<b>Highest Youth Populated Areas – South Tipperary</b>				
<b>Area</b>	<b>0-7 years</b>	<b>8-18 years</b>	<b>19-24 years</b>	<b>Total</b>
Clonmel	1981	2372	1337	5690
Carrick-on-Suir	658	889	439	1986
Tipperary	584	651	409	1644
Cashel	549	469	295	1313
Cahir	430	245	245	920

<b>Highest Youth Populated Areas – North Tipperary</b>				
<b>Area</b>	<b>0-7 years</b>	<b>8-18 years</b>	<b>19-24 years</b>	<b>Total</b>
Nenagh	1047	1056	567	2670
Thurles	846	1037	626	2509
Roscrea	679	812	405	1896
Ballina	436	407	90	933
New Port	334	246	75	655
Templemore	177	290	142	609

The vast majority of people residing in Tipperary are of traditional Irish descent. However, census figures illustrate that Tipperary is becoming a multicultural and diverse place to live. In both South

and North of the county, the numbers of people from the United Kingdom, Poland, Lithuania and other EU 27 countries have increased in the past number of years. Notably since the Census of 2011, Tipperary has become home to a number of Syrian refugees, who have been resettled in both Thurles and Clonmel. Population projections also suggest that the number of both Asian and African people within Tipperary county will increase twofold in the coming years.

There are 1150 members of the Travelling community residing in County Tipperary. The number of Travellers in the county has grown more than five times faster than the non-Traveller population in the past few years. 546 of these Travellers live in the South of the county and 604 live in the North. *Out of the 546 Travellers in South Tipperary, 142 are young people aged between 10-24 years.* Clonmel has the highest number of Travellers in South Tipperary while Cahir and Fethard has the highest concentration of Travellers per head of population. The overall Traveller population in South Tipperary has increased by 30% from 2006 to 2011. Out of the 604 Travellers living in North Tipperary, 221 are between the ages 10-24 years. Nenagh has shown the biggest increase in the number of Travellers, growing from 25 to 72, from 2006 to 2011. Young Travellers account for 36.6% of the Traveller population in North Tipperary. 84% of the Travelling community within Tipperary are unemployed.

Unemployment is a worrying issue in Tipperary. The highest rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment are concentrated in the towns of Nenagh, Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Thurles, Tipperary town, Roscrea, Cashel and Cahir. The highest levels of youth unemployment are occurring in and around the areas of Templemore, Borrisokane, Newport, Littleton, the Slieve Felim area and Lorrha/Rathcabin in the North of the county, and in Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Glengoole in the South.

The areas within Tipperary county that have been categorised, according to the Trutz Haase deprivation index, as most disadvantaged are Tipperary town, Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Glengoole, Finnoe and Mullinahone. At a small area level, parts of Nenagh, Templemore, Roscrea, Thurles, Cashel, Littleton, Killenaule, Templederry, Ardfinnan, New Port and Borrisokane also feature as areas of high deprivation.

## **1.2 Tipperary's Children and Young Person's Services Committee**

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every country in Ireland. They follow local authority (city and county council) boundaries and plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people aged between 0 – 24 years in their geographic area. They are the strategic interagency structure that brings together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services for children, young people and families in the county / local authority area. Their role is to enhance interagency co-operation and to realise the five National Outcomes for children and young people, as set out in '*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*', the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014 - 2020.

The central purpose of a Children and Young People's Services Committee is to ensure effective interagency co-ordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people in its area. Tipperary's CYPSC was established in 2015 and operates at a countywide level,

incorporating both the North and South of the County. Prior to this, there had been a CYPSC established in the South of the County but no equivalent in the North.

In preparation for Tipperary's CYPSC plan, a consultation process was undertaken with young people aged 13-18 years and led by Youth Work Ireland Tipperary. This consultation examined life as a young person within Tipperary and was shaped by the *Five National Outcomes for Children*, which underpins all of the work of the CYPSC. Parallel processes have taken place with young people aged between 4 and 12, as well as agencies in the county.

The five national outcomes for children, as utilised in this consultation process, are;

- Active and Healthy
- Achieving in all Areas of Learning and Development
- Safe and Protected from Harm
- Economic Security and Opportunity
- Connected, Respected and Contributing to the World



### 1.3 Terms of Reference

The purpose of this consultation process was to capture the views and experiences of 13-18 year olds within County Tipperary. The consultation process took the form of both questionnaires and focus groups. Crucial to this research, was to ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable young people was heard. To do this, the views of young people were captured from:

- Both urban and rural settings
- Both North and South of the county
- A range of socioeconomic backgrounds
- A range of cultural backgrounds
- A range of abilities

### 1.4 Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and thank the numerous young people who took part in this study. We appreciate your time and you sharing your experiences so freely with us. We would also like to thank the staff and teachers at the schools who facilitated the study and also the staff and volunteers of community and voluntary groups who participated in this research.

Lastly, we extend thanks to the CYPSC, who assisted this project. Particular thanks to Ruairi O' Caisleain, CYPSC Coordinator and Cora Horgan, CEO Youth Work Ireland Tipperary who were the points of contact for this research.

## 2. Consultation Process

### 2.1 Research Questions

Data collection for the study involved:

1. School and Community based questionnaires
2. School and Community based focus groups
3. An online questionnaire

The consultation questions for both the questionnaires and the qualitative focus groups mirrored each other and were constructed and informed by the National Outcomes for Children as detailed in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014). The questions also took account of the consultation taking place with 4 -12 year olds to ensure a flow between the two pieces of work.

The questions asked of the participants were:

#### Active and Healthy

- What are the three biggest health concerns for young people in Tipperary?
- What changes/initiatives would be useful for tackling these concerns?
- What types of physical activity do you do? How many times per week? Are you involved in team sports? Why/ why not? (Is gender an issue here?)

#### Safe and Protected from Harm

- What are the three most common things that make young people in County Tipperary feel unsafe or scared?
- What are young people's three biggest stresses/worries?
- What could be done to protect young people's mental health in Tipperary?

#### Achieving in all Area of Learning and Development

- What are the three most common challenges young people face in school?
- What could be done to made school a good experience for all young people?
- Does a young person's background effect how they get on in school? (Ethnic background, gender, social background etc.) How?
- What could be done to stop young people dropping out of school?

#### Economic Security and Opportunity

- What makes it hard for young people to get a job in Tipperary?
- What are the money worries for young people in Tipperary?

- What could be done to make sure that all young people in Tipperary have the same chance at getting jobs in the future?

### Connected, Respected and Contributing

- Is your voice opinion listened to in your community? How?
- Do you think all young people in your community are treated equally? Explain?
- What could be better about being a young person in Tipperary?

## 2.2 Participant profile

Approximately 300 young people who took part in the consultation process. 7 of these young people were outside the age range 13-18 years. These particular 7 young people are in the age category 18-24 years. However, their data was included as they spoke of their school experience and particularly around the issue of economic opportunity and security.

*Surveys:* There were a total of 208 surveys completed as part of this consultation. 58 were completed online and the remainder were carried out by the researcher in schools and community groups.

- Cahir Youth Project,
- Templemore Youth Project
- Thurles Youth Project
- Cashel Youth Project
- Tipperary Town Youth Project
- Littleton North Tipperary Traveller Youth Project
- Scoil Cormaic Cashel
- Colaiste Mhuire Thurles
- Scoil Ruain Killenaule,
- Colaiste Chluain Meala Clonmel
- Gaelcholaiste Cheitinn Clonmel.

A world café style consultation was carried out with Tipperary's Comhairle na nOg and also at a mental health event held in St. Ailbe's School, Tipperary. These consultations would have included a cross-section of young people from across the county who were attending these county events, and would have allowed for a range of socio-demographic backgrounds to be included, reflecting the general school-going youth population of the county.

Focus groups were then carried out with the following:

- TAR Garda Diversion Project Tipperary Town
- The Edge Garda Diversion Project Carrick-on-Suir
- Two groups from Littleton North Tipperary Traveller Youth Project
- Youth Work Ireland's LGBTI youth group

- Cappawhite Youth Reach
- Ferryhouse Residential School Clonmel
- 2020 Activation Programme Thurles,
- Syrian Refugees through North Tipperary Leader Partnership,
- Alternative Learning Programme Youth Work Ireland Tipperary

<b>Organisation/Audience</b>	<b>Group Profile</b>	<b>Participation Type</b>
Online Survey Through Survey Monkey	Countywide survey aimed at capturing the views of young people from a range of backgrounds.	Survey
Cahir Youth Resource Centre – Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service	Two groups from this organisation took part in the survey. Both groups were mixed gender and came from a range of varying background types.	Survey and Focus Group
Templemore Youth Project – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Special Project for Youth (SPY) The project caters to a range of young people from a number of varying social, economic and cultural backgrounds	Survey and Focus Group
Littleton North Tipperary Traveller Youth Project – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	This is a Traveller youth project set in Littleton, County Tipperary. The participants were all male and while the majority consisted of Travellers, settled members of the Littleton community also participated.	2 x Focus Groups
Thurles Youth Project – Youth Work Ireland Thurles	Special Project for Youth (SPY). The project caters to a range of young people from a number of varying social, economic and cultural backgrounds	Surveys
Cashel Youth Project – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	A HSE funded project set in Cashel town. The project caters to a range of young people from a number of varying social, economic and cultural backgrounds.	Surveys
Tipperary Town Youth Project	Special Project for Youth (SPY) The project caters to a range of young people from a number of varying social, economic and cultural backgrounds	Surveys

Scoil Cormaic Cashel	This group consisted of a group of young males, approximately between the ages of 15-17. Scoil Cormaic is a Special Needs School in Cashel.	Surveys and unstructured discussion
Colaiste Mhuire Thurles	Co-Educational DEIS School in Thurles town.	Surveys
Scoil Ruain, Killenaule	Co-Education Deis School in Rural Area	Surveys
Colaiste Chluain Meala Clonmel	Co-Educational Deis School in Clonmel Town	Surveys
Gaelcholaiste Cheitinn Clonmel.	Co-Educational Irish language school in Clonmel Town	Surveys
Comhairle na nOg	Representation from all over Tipperary – variety of young people and backgrounds.	World café type survey
Mental Health Consultation in St. Ailbe's School Tipperary	Open to all teenagers – cross section of society and varying backgrounds.	World Café Style Feedback
TAR Garda Diversion Project – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Young people involved in the criminal justice system	World Café Style Feedback
The Edge Garda Diversion Project – Waterford and South Tipperary Youth Service	Young people involved in the criminal justice system	Focus group
LGBTI group – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Young people who identify as LGBTI or are supporters of LGBTI young people.	Focus Group
Syrian Resettlement Project – North Tipperary Leader Partnership	Two young males of Syrian descent living in Thurles town.	Focus Group
Cappawhite Youth Reach	Young people who have left mainstream schooling and are now finishing their education in Youth Reach. Mixed gender group.	Focus Group

Ferryhouse Residential School	Residential school operated by TUSLA. This group consisted of males who had difficulties in mainstream schooling and have been placed in a residential schooling unit.	Focus group
2020 Activation Programme Thurles – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Group of young people of mixed gender partaking in an activation programme. These young people have faced difficulties at school and in gaining employment.	Focus group
Alternative Learning Programme – Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	A group of young people facing challenges in traditional schooling.	World Café Style feedback.

### 2.3 Limitations

The following were limitations to the consultation process

- Timeframe – researcher could only give ten hours per week to this project.
- Availability and accessibility of young people

## 4. Consultation results

### 4.1 Outcome 1: Active and healthy, physical and mental well-being.

Outcome 1 examines the health of young people in Tipperary, in terms of both their physical, emotional and mental health. Through this consultation, the most pressing health concerns for Tipperary's young people were identified. In order of priority, these issues emerged as drug use, youth mental health and concerns around obesity and fitness levels. 'Real life' education emerged as the most consistent suggestion by young people to increase their overall health. This corresponds with Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014) key priority that young people themselves should be active agents in shaping and protecting their own health and wellbeing.

The key areas of need are identified as follows-

- Drug Use
- Youth Mental Health
- Obesity and Fitness

#### Drug Use

*"Like if your friends are there at the back smoking a joint and they're like ah here, take a pull, you're gonna take it if you want to chill with your friends".*

Drug use, including alcohol and smoking, has been identified as the number one health issue facing young people in County Tipperary. In terms of substances, cannabis, cocaine and alcohol emerged as the drug of choice for Tipperary's youth. A general sense of acceptance around cannabis use was evident among participants with some claiming there were no health issues related to using the drug.

Worryingly, those involved with substance use were more worried about how to afford drugs than the effects drugs have on the body. Focus group participants in two regions spoke of feeling panic when they have woken up after a 'session' and have scored drugs on 'tick'. They then have to work out a way to pay back the money owed or face the consequences of a beating. *"When the dealer's there and you're drunk and you wake up in the morning and you're after getting about three bags of coke and owe like €300 and you think how am I going to get this money".* The young people told us that drugs are only *"a phone call and a five-minute walk"* away and that 'tick' is readily available to them. This can create other problems such as having to sell items from home to make up the money when the dealer wants it.

Some of the focus group participants also touched on the idea of addiction, and in particular addiction to cannabis. This was interesting as many of the drug users questioned saw no harm in cannabis but later revealed a dependence upon the drug. *"The last thing on my mind at night is how am I going to get weed the next day".* Concerningly, users also revealed connections between starting out on weed and progression onto harder drugs. *"Your tolerance is going to go up eventually*

*where you're going to be smoking 4 or 5 joints here a night and that's where you start upgrading. To acid or e's or whatever like".* Participants also linked cannabis use to their ceasing of sporting and community activities, with many revealing they had quit extracurricular activities once they discovered cannabis. *"If you had it all day like, you'd rather stay and smoke it".*

Speaking of alcohol, young people also revealed the dangerous positions they sometimes put themselves in. Some of the group shared stories of injuries received while intoxicated such as cracked ribs, fractured eye sockets and falling out of a window. Respondents also reported stealing alcohol from shops as they are too young to get served, using fake IDs and drinking outside in fields. One particular respondent had had a friend pass away from complications related to alcohol abuse. *"Before he turned 20, he died"*, and knew another who had overdosed on ecstasy tablets. Worryingly, these drastic consequences appeared to do little to deter other young people from continuing to abuse both drugs and alcohol.

A call for real life education around substance and alcohol use surfaced through the consultation. Increased awareness of and knowledge around these issues will equip young people with the skills to make informed decisions surrounding their own substance use.

### **Youth Mental Health**

*"Anxiety, everyone is so anxious. There's a lot of anxiety. People don't want to talk about it. Depression as well".*

Mental health emerged as the second most pressing health issue facing young people in Tipperary, and both depression and anxiety were frequently mentioned as the most common mental health concerns experienced by young people. Young people also spoke of how they felt that females were more likely to talk to people about their feelings, while males tend to have more trouble expressing themselves. *"Men are too proud to talk. They will hold it all in and then they just break one day"*. There were also suggestions that men are more likely to see suicide as an option than their female counterparts as they often haven't the tools needed to deal with life situations.

In terms of what causes young people to have ill mental health, the answers were varied. Some stated that young people are under a lot of pressure to know exactly what they want to do with their lives while others saw unemployment, drug and money issues as major factors. Among mainstream young people, life stresses included self-image, peer pressure and making and maintaining relationships.

Many of the focus group participants had experiences of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and spoke of their frustration at long waiting periods to be seen by mental health professionals. *"You would be waiting six months to see them. The only way you are going to get to see them is if God forbid you end up in hospital"*. Others felt that services treated them as children and spoke to their parents before they spoke to them.

When asked, 'what could be done to improve the mental health of young people?', the main things suggested were increased real life education around mental health, youth friendly services, free/affordable counselling and drop in/easy access services. It was argued that young people need

to feel comfortable in order to be able to trust the service and fully open up about their feelings. Generally, it was stated that mental health services would work better if they were less formal, not in medical centres but in places like youth services where young people already felt relaxed and at ease. *"I know a lot of people who have gone for counselling and they felt like they were being put in front of a judge"*. A drop in service was also recommended as those with anxiety felt that the time spent sitting in a waiting room only fuels the anxiety they are already feeling. Lastly, participants discussed how they found once off workshops on mental health of little benefit. *"I don't see the point in a two-day workshop say. You get a piece of paper and that's the end of that. There's never any follow up"*. It was advised that mental health education would have more benefits if it was an ongoing process with time allocated to it every month instead of once off initiatives.

### **Obesity and Fitness**

*"I have just seen an ad on Facebook for a €1 burger and a €1 can of coke, but if you want to buy a salad it's €5. Where's the balance there?"*

The third area of health related issues is the area of obesity and fitness. Obesity was the ranked as the area of most concern here, with a lack of healthy food intake and engagement in physical activities also key considerations.

In general, when asked about engagement in physical activities, there was only an extremely small minority of young people who did no weekly exercise. The majority reported doing physical activity between 2-3 times per week with GAA, soccer and walking being the most popular activities. However, the majority of young people who partook in focus groups were not members of team sports and mainly exercised alone. Gender arose here as an issue for young females and fitness. One group of young women stated that once they became adolescents and became interested in their appearance, their involvement in sports ceased. *"You become more noticeable of yourself. Skin, spots, make up. A girl is not going to go into a gym with a load of fellas"*. Suggestions to tackle this issue included girls only sessions at the gym and classes like Zumba put on locally for young females.

A disparity also surfaced between areas of plentiful leisure and fitness facilities and areas where facilities are scarce. Speaking to the North Traveller Youth Project in Littleton, the young people felt there was a real lack of sports facilities for them to use. They expressed a need for a soccer pitch in the village and outside gym equipment that are often standard in other areas. None of the Project members took part presently in team sports with some feeling that they wouldn't be wanted on local teams. *"If I did go down, they wouldn't want me to join but they would have to let me"*. Another issue around sports involvement was also raised by a young transgender male. This particular male wants to be involved in sports but is finding issues arising relating to his biological gender. *"I tried to go to handball but they won't let me train with the boys. I won't be allowed do the competitions or anything"*. This was also proving an issue for this male in school as often the males and females in the class do different P.E activities. Despite seeing himself as male, he is enrolled in the school as a female which has proven difficult during P.E class. Young people also spoke of how finance can be a barrier to participation in sports. It was felt that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often can't afford the expenses associated with sport such as equipment, clothing, cost of getting to matches and membership fees.

Proposals to decrease obesity levels and increase fitness included increased time for fitness within the school timetable and more fitness facilities available to all young people. However, the most proposed method of tackling obesity is more education around healthy eating and food choices for young people.

#### *Summary findings under Outcome 1*

- Drug use as a health issue requires a focus on and in particular at present cannabis, cocaine and alcohol need particular focus.
- Young people still are not aware of the effects substance abuse have on their health.
- Depression and anxiety are the key mental health issues
- Boys are more likely to be at risk than girls in terms of their mental health issues
- Mental health services would work better if they were less formal, not in medical centres but in places like youth services
- A drop in service was also recommended
- Once off workshops on mental health of little benefit - mental health education would have more benefits if it was an ongoing process with time allocated to it every month instead of once off initiatives.
- Gender as an issue for young females and fitness.
- A disparity between areas of plentiful leisure and fitness facilities and areas where facilities are scarce
- Feeling of exclusion of some young people in terms of participation in team sports.

## **4.2 Outcome 2: Achieving in All Areas of Learning and Development**

Outcome 2 is concerned with ensuring that all young people are achieving in all areas of learning and development. Therefore, this outcome is particularly focused on the education system and how this is experienced by various groups of young people. At a general level, stresses relating to school and education were examined. School was then also examined in relation to how some of the more vulnerable groups of young people progress to school and what experiences cause school to be a struggle.

The key areas of need are identified as follows:

- School stress
- Discrimination
- Early school leaving

### **School Stresses**

*“There is a lot of pressure put onto pupils to receive good grades and if they are struggling many feel too intimidated to ask for help”.*

When questioned about the challenges that face young people in school, the most popular answers were exams, bullying, homework, finding and keeping friends and feeling pressured to do well. Consequently, when asked the question, 'what makes young people feel unsafe or scared?', the single most frequent answer was that young people are most scared of failing their exams. Responses illustrated the pressure felt to obtain high grades and to be an "A1 student". However, people believe that school should also focus on teaching them life and social skills. There were also high instances of respondents saying that they feared school in general; showing that school can be the biggest area of unease in a lot of young people's lives. It also emerged that some young people struggle to balance their academic lives with their extracurricular activities. To respond to stresses around exams, it was recommended that schools change to a continuous assessment model of education.

### **Discrimination**

*"If they come from certain areas of cultures like the Travelling community they are looked down on and the teachers and students are hard on them".*

70% of survey respondents believe that a young person's background directly effects their school experience. This view was also firmly supported through the responses of focus group participants. Speaking to young Travellers about this issue, it was evident that they feel that membership of the Travelling community has a detrimental effect on their school experience. The young Travellers expressed that they feel targeted before teaching staff get to know them and feel labelled as trouble makers from the get go. *"Teachers think that being a Traveller he is not going to study...not going to do well and give the school a bad result...so let's just kick him out now and not get ourselves into any bother"*. Obviously different schools had differing relationships with Traveller students with some Travellers reporting positive experiences with teachers. *"My school is great. They don't treat me any different"*. However, by and large the feeling emerged that Travellers aren't fully accepted into school life, by both staff and other students. Worrying stories were re-laid where young Travellers felt unwanted by the school, were frequently left sitting out of classes, experienced racist language and felt judged based on who their relatives are.

Interestingly, when speaking to two young Syrian males who recently came to live in Tipperary, their experience of school has been extremely positive. *"In school everything is good. Everything good, no problems"*. They reported receiving support of school staff and said that students have been welcoming and friendly. The only issue for them has been the language barrier, as they are only learning English for the past 5 months. *"Language sometimes very difficult. Irish people speak so fast"*. They also reported receiving vast amounts of supporting settling into their new school lives and reported forging friendships easily.

Of the 70% of survey respondents that stated that a young person's background shapes their school experience, the reasons given could be categorised into four main areas; discrimination based on a person's social background and family history, discrimination based on ethnicity or culture, young people with issues at home can struggle in school or misbehave as a form of lashing out or some young people receive no support at home and this in turn can lower a young person's potential.

## Early School Leaving

*"It is always about college. There are more options than college".*

When exploring what steps could be taken to prevent early school leaving, survey respondents suggested changing the school atmosphere by making it a welcoming place for all, by making lessons exciting and by having more supports available within schools for young people who are struggling. However, it was the focus group interviews with young people who have left mainstream school to attend more targeted services such as Youth Reach and the Ferryhouse Residential School that offered glimpses into the aspects of school life that lead to certain young people feeling isolated or excluded.

Participants expressed that they felt that teachers were more concerned with students who received high grades and had plans to go to college. *"They spent more time with the people that want to go to college. They could say 'alright maybe college is not for you, let's try another road'".* This results in certain young people feeling unworthy or isolated and feeling that there is no support for them and no one to help them plan for their futures. Participants shared the opinion that teachers should also pay attention to students who may not have the ability to get straight into college courses from the CAO. They expressed that teachers should help them to research the differing ways of getting the profession they want and not focus solely on those who are academically high achievers. It was stated that everything is targeted towards the CAO points system, whereas some young people could benefit from guidance towards apprenticeships, PLCs and other progression routes.

The format of learning that takes place in school was also a further reason linked to early school leaving. Focus group participants shared how they had difficulties absorbing information in class, found it hard to keep up and this could result in embarrassment and frustration. *"There are other ways to learn, not everything has to be done through a book".* Young people felt that teaching methods need to be varied in order to cater for all learning styles and expressed that sitting down and taking information in does not necessarily work for all people. Some felt that they learn better visually, when they are shown something rather than expected to read about it. Shame also emerged throughout the conversations as an emotion felt by the young people when they struggled to understand concepts or keep up with the rest of the class. Young people particularly hated when teachers would ask them questions in front of their classroom peers and they wouldn't know the answers. *"When they know you don't know the answer and they ask you in front of the whole class just to embarrass you. She's there looking down at you and it could be the slowest question in the whole of Ireland but you still don't know the answer".* Overall it appeared that young people wanted teachers to get to know them and their individual strengths and focus on these rather than their downfalls. One respondent stated that they got expelled because of destructive behaviour but revealed that all she really wanted was some attention and help off the teacher.

Varying types of schools were involved in this study and it appears that the suggestions young people have for improving our mainstream schools are initiatives and actions that targeted schools such as Youth Reach, Ferryhouse residential school and also Scoil Cormaic's special needs school have already adopted. Students in Scoil Cormaic are generally happy with school and find the workload acceptable. This results from the school tailoring the curriculum to individual students.

This was also the case in Ferryhouse residential school where the school day is tailored to individual needs and not all students do a full 9-4 day. *“The day was too long. Like in here I have 6 classes a day”*. Youth Reach already operates a continuous assessment model of education which has been suggested for mainstream schools. Young people in alternative schools also reported receiving frequent one-to-one support from staff, having positive relationships with the teaching staff and also having opportunities for support within the school day as needed.

#### *Summary findings under Outcome 2:*

- School can be the biggest area of unease in a lot of young people’s lives. It also emerged that some young people struggle to balance their academic lives with their extracurricular activities
- The young Travellers expressed that they feel targeted before teaching staff get to know them and feel labelled as trouble makers from the get go
- Teaching methods need to be varied in order to cater for all learning styles and expressed that sitting down and taking information in does not necessarily work for all people
- young people wanted teachers to get to know them and their individual strengths and focus on these rather than their downfalls
- the suggestions young people have for improving our mainstream schools are initiatives and actions that targeted schools such as Youth Reach, Ferryhouse residential school and also Scoil Cormac’s special needs school have already adopted

### **4.3 Outcome 3: Safe and Protected from Harm**

Outcome 3 explores the areas of young people’s lives that can cause a young people to feel unsafe, scared and unprotected. Particular interest here was given to groups of young people who are already considered vulnerable due to their personal circumstances. This corresponds to the governments priorities as defined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014) where it is stated that specific groups of young people face higher risks and need additional supports and protection. Similarly, consultation results for this section highlighted that already vulnerable young people are engaged in risky behaviours that place them increasingly further from protection from harm.

The key areas of need are identified as follows-

- Bullying
- Involvement in ‘risky’ behaviour
- Feeling unsafe in local area

#### **Bullying**

*“Many of my friends say that Tipperary is very homophobic and that people say and throw things at them while walking and stuff”*

After school, bullying surfaced as the most frequent answer to what makes young people feel scared. Answers reveal that bullying is occurring in a number of places including cyberspace, however, school appears to be the most frequent venue for this behaviour. Focus group participants provided an in-depth exploration of bullying and many reported either experiencing it or witnessing it frequently within their schools. *"You see it every day. There is always someone shouldering or pushing around someone"*. This regularity has prompted young people then to feel as if they have to prove themselves in order to avoid being a target for bullies. *"In our school you have to be able to stand up for yourself. It's a dog eat dog world. If you back down, you are going to be hounded"*. Unfortunately, not all young people have developed the ability to 'stand their ground' and reported suffering at the hands of bullies and ultimately either left or changed schools to escape the persecution. The bullying itself ranged in methods from verbal abuse to isolation, with violent incidents recounted by some participants. *"When I got home my eye and face were swollen and Mam rang the principal"*. Worryingly, another participant told how the bullying was so severe that she considered suicide an option. *"I took a load of tablets one night. I didn't go to school for ages after. Then one girl turned around and said 'it's a pity you didn't take more"*.

Young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) also reported experiencing bullying based on their attendance at a Special Needs School. They felt they were often targeted based on their special needs and are labelled as 'Dumbo's' by other young people.

### **Involvement in Risky Behaviour**

*"Drugs has gotten the best of people like"*.

Focus group sessions highlighted the worrying fact that some of Tipperary's youth, particularly those who are already considered vulnerable, are engaged in 'risky' and criminal behaviour. Many reported that underage smoking and drinking are regularly occurring, with some young people also using substances. It was revealed that many underage drinkers are frequenting fields and free houses, but some are gaining entry to pubs and clubs with fake identification. Worryingly, young people felt that peer pressure or trying to fit in with the crowd were key factors influencing young people in terms of drug and alcohol use. *"If your friends are going off with drugs, you're thinking you're gonna have to do drugs now to be friends with them"*. A further distressing trend emerged in two focus groups where young people mentioned getting into debt over drugs and the threat of violence that would then face them. Both groups reported similar situations of accepting drugs when they were inebriated and then waking up the following morning owing more money than they could afford. *"They offer it to you on tick and you're not thinking. Then you wake up the next morning and thinking what did I get last night and how much is that gonna cost me"*. When questioned about what happens if people can't clear their debts, it was revealed that 'a beating' is often delivered to those owing the money. In general, owing €50 was seen as acceptable as this would cover just getting one bag of cannabis on tick. However, debts can develop quickly for frequent users with one young person reporting owing up to €1300 before.

Criminal behaviour, often relating to substance use, also emerged among some of the focus group participants. Young people reported robbery from shops to get alcohol, violence towards teaching staff, handling stolen goods, selling cannabis and criminal damage but were not deterred by the

threat of incarceration in a juvenile detention centre. One young male, who is facing the possibility of a custodial sentence explained his feelings on detention. He had witnessed friends and family members already go to jail and had heard from them that it wasn't too bad and that you could still get drugs inside. This particular male had already been placed into residential care and expressed his feelings that prison wouldn't be a shock to him as he was already used to being confined. *"It wouldn't be that bad for someone who has been in residential care already because we know what it feels like to be away from home. But for somebody who has been with their family all their lives. That would hurt like"*.

Sexual health also became apparent as an area that some young people are putting themselves at risk in. Many young people felt that real life sex education is missing from schools and as such young people are not informed of the risks and safe practices. Many felt that the education received in the school curriculum is biology based and hasn't moved with the times. It was expressed that often LGBT young people feel left out of sexual health lessons as LGBT sex is frequently not a topic on the programme.

### **Feeling Unsafe in Local Area**

*"There is a certain group of teenagers, in every school and town, that our parents warn us about; the stereotypical – and I hate this word, 'scumbag' group."*

Through the survey responses, participants revealed that certain fears exist for young people in their own local areas. 'Certain' types of people and behaviours cropped up frequently here. There were extremely high responses showing young people fearful of drug users, being the victim of crimes and getting attacked. Discrimination also featured among the responses with a small but significant proportion of young people stating they felt scared of 'certain' groups of young people and Travellers. This could perhaps suggest that there is still a divide and lack of understanding between Traveller and non-Traveller Tipperary youth.

Young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) also communicated feeling fearful in certain situations. They reported feeling uneasy in new situations and stated that this can be an issue if they want to join clubs or activities outside school. Ideally, this fear could be lessened if they were given a one-to-one introduction to new services initially and then introduced to the group dynamic at their own pace. It was also suggested that there needs to be a Transition programme implemented in Tipperary for young people with Special Educational Needs leaving school. This can be a fearful time for some young people and a Transition programme would support young people during this time.

While conducting focus groups with the North Tipperary Traveller Youth Project in Littleton, it transpired that some members feel unsafe in their local area. The teenagers revealed how their community house had been burnt to the ground and how they felt that drugs had affected their community. *"Littleton is a mini Limerick. Limerick is a black spot and Littleton is a black spot too"*. They said that robbery has become a massive issue in the area and that people don't feel safe and protected. The Garda do patrols of the area but the young people questioned reckon that the robbers know when the Garda do their checks. The young people are calling for cameras in the area and have been looking for them for up to two years now. *"Cameras have to be put up in the village. I*

*could break in next door tonight and get away with it".* The group also shared how Halloween can be a particularly testing night in the area. They recalled how ditches were lit on fire and missiles thrown at Garda cars when they arrived. One of the young people stated that he had sat Halloween night with a gun ready, for fear that someone would enter or attack his property. *"I sat in my house all Halloween night sitting on the couch with a gun. That's a fact. I used to go to Nenagh on Halloween to a friends but I stopped when things started to go bad. Someone had been aiming at our house. Taking stuff out of the yard".* The group were particular distressed about the burning of their community house and how they know have nowhere to call their own. They said this had a negative effect on their mental health as they once had someplace they felt belonged to them but now they are sharing the facilities of the local hall.

### *Summary findings for Outcome 3*

- After school, bullying surfaced as the most frequent answer to what makes young people feel scared.
- Bullying is occurring in a number of places including cyberspace, however, school appears to be the most frequent venue for this behaviour.
- Young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) also reported experiencing bullying based on their attendance at a Special Needs School.
- The bullying itself ranged in methods from verbal abuse to isolation, with violent incidents recounted by some participants
- Risky behaviour most relates to
  - o Criminal behaviour, often relating to substance use,
  - o Sexual behaviour
- There were extremely high responses showing young people fearful of drug users, being the victim of crimes and getting attacked.
- There is still a divide and lack of understanding between Traveller and non-Traveller Tipperary youth.
- There needs to be a Transition programme implemented in Tipperary for young people with Special Educational Needs leaving school.
- In Littleton, it transpired that some members feel unsafe in their local area - young people are calling for cameras in the area and have been looking for them for up to two years now

## **4.4 Outcome 4: Economic Security and Opportunity**

Outcome 4 is concerned with the economic security and future job opportunities and progressions for Tipperary's youth. In particular, the consultation examined areas of money worries for young people and the barriers that young people feel are in the way of their employment. As Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014) places particular emphasis on young people who grow up in marginalised communities, the consultation also made concerted efforts to ensure that the voices of the most marginalised are included here.

The key areas of need are identified as follows-

- Money worries
- Barriers to employment

### **Money Worries**

*“There are money worries for young people as they want to have the best clothes and phones to fit in”.*

Young people were asked about the money worries that face them and the majority stated that their money worries were related to being able to attend events with friends, buy clothes, have phones and be able to afford the same things that those in school have. In this way, access to money can be linked to young people’s sense of self, self-image and ideally fitting in with those around them. A smaller proportion of survey respondents showed an awareness of the recession and the pressure parents felt paying bills and mortgages. Young people also spoke of money worries relating to the futures in terms of attending college, moving out of home and getting a car.

A small minority of young people, although worth noting, said that their money worries related to survival by buying the basic necessities and also needing money to pay for drugs. Participants on a youth employment and training programme conveyed how their money stresses are related to bills and security. They spoke of wanting to move out of their family homes but how financially that was largely impossible. *“If you had a secure job for a while then you could make a break for it. It’s hard to get fulltime work. Once something is set in concrete then you can start making a break for it”.*

The Syrian young people questioned feel that Ireland is a very expensive place, particularly in relation to their home country. In particular, they were worried about the price of insurance in Ireland should they wish to start driving.

### **Barriers to Employment**

*“I believe it is hard for young people to get jobs in Tipperary as there are very few jobs available and those that are often go to older, more experienced people”.*

The vast majority of young people felt that it was difficult for young people to secure work in Tipperary and there were a number of reasons for this answer. There were of course, structural issues to be considered here as many young people said that the transport links between rural areas and retail hubs are often substandard and not practical. They also felt that many businesses in Tipperary have either shut or scaled back in recent years meaning employment opportunities are very few.

Through focus groups, it was also disclosed that some young people felt that their reputations might prevent them from gaining employment. *“I’ve got ten charges and another three pending”.* In some cases, young people had constructed their reputations based on their own actions such as involvement in criminal activity and simply felt that employers would not trust them. However, there were also instances where young people felt judged based on assumptions of what they would be like as an employee based on discriminatory views. This was particularly felt by some members of

the Traveller community. *“It depends on your background. If I was going for a job and he was going for a job, they would look at me sooner cause he’s in the Traveller community. It’s always the same.”*. The young people questioned who had attended numerous schools and were now part of a residential school felt similar. They expressed that once people saw on their CV’s that they went to a residential school that employers would already make a judgement upon them and generally refuse to employ them.

Gaining the appropriate qualifications to be able to compete with other jobseekers was also an issue here. This was a worry for people in both a Youth Reach and Special Needs School where they complete Fetac Modules rather than the traditional leaving certificate. *“There are so many degrees now. Only the best get the jobs”*. This is obviously an issue for early school leavers also as competition in the jobs market reaches fever pitch.

Conversing with a group of older young people, aged 18-24, they shared how the experience of constant rejection for work can be debilitating and ultimately led young people to quit the search for work. *“I got nothing. There was a job going for a cashier and I went for it. It would knock your confidence in fairness”*.

The issue of securing work also came up in relation to Transgender young people. One transgender male explained that *“it’s hard to find a job when you have to explain to them that this is the name I go by. It says on my birth certificate a completely different name but I go by this identity. As wages are often related to PPS numbers, this issue can be uncomfortable for transgender young people to even secure a part time job.*

#### *Summary Findings:*

- Money worries were primarily related to being able to attend events with friends, buy clothes, have phones and be able to afford the same things that those in school have
- A small minority of young people, although worth noting, said that their money worries related to survival by buying the basic necessities and also needing money to pay for drugs
- transport links between rural areas and retail hubs are often substandard and not practical
- some young people felt that their reputations might prevent them from gaining employment
- the experience of constant rejection for work can be debilitating and ultimately led young people to quit the search for work

## 4.5 Outcome 5: Connected, Respected and Contributing

Outcome 5 is concerned with ensuring that all young people play a full role in society and have the ability within themselves to influence their own lives and communities. Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014) recognises that some young people face challenges and discrimination which can alienate them from their wider communities. For this reason, particular attention has been paid to including the voices of those who are most marginalised and to giving these young people the opportunity to have their opinions heard and more importantly, listened to.

The key areas of need are identified as follows :

- Discrimination
- Young people with special education needs
- LGBT
- Young Travellers

### **Discrimination**

*“Young people with disabilities, different nationalities and Travellers are treated differently”.*

Survey respondents were asked if they felt that their voices are listened to in their communities. 24% of respondents said no, 17% said yes and the other 59% were unsure. Of those who said they did feel listened to, youth clubs, school councils and other youth participation structures such as Comhairle na nOg were frequently mentioned. Of those who felt unlistened to, the majority feeling was that young people are simply not listened to in the same urgency as adults. This was also the sentiment that emerged through focus groups.

21% of respondents felt that all young people in their communities are treated equally while 58% disputed this. The other 21% were unsure. Generally, it was apparent that the young people that are believed to be treated differently are those from the Travelling community, those from different backgrounds and cultures to traditional Irish, those with disabilities and those who come from economically disadvantaged areas. It was also revealed through focus groups, that generally, those who could already be seen as vulnerable youth, felt isolated from their communities and that their opinions were not wanted and would not be listened to. *“Once they ask you where you’re from. If they roll their eyes at you then that’s it”.* Other people also believed that their viewpoint would be discounted by adults but were aware that some of their own choices have effected how people in their communities feel about them. *“I’ve a bad reputation down there...robbed the off-licence, breaking toy shop windows. Hanging around with people who robbed houses.”*

### **Young People with Special Educational Needs**

*“We want to go up town by ourselves at breaks”.*

Young people from the special needs community were very concerned with having their own independence during their teenage years. They can at times, be labelled by other young people in a negative way and feel that sometimes they are judged due to the fact that they attend a special needs school. It was explained that because the special needs school operates along the same timetable as Primary Schools and doesn’t close for Summer holidays at the same time as mainstream secondary schools and the young people often feel that it’s extremely obvious to other young people that they have special needs. They also find it stressful at times that they are accompanied uptown at lunch by a teacher as again, they feel this draws attention to the fact that they don’t

attend a mainstream school. Young people who attend special needs schools can also feel alienated from their home communities and find themselves with limited friends in their local areas. This is because many young people travel to attend their special needs school and as such build up friendship groups within school but outside the school day find they have few friends in their local area. There is also a noticeable rural/urban divide existing for young people with special needs. Often young people in urban areas find themselves with a wealth of leisure and social opportunities but young people in rural areas, particularly those with special needs who may find socialising in new environments difficult, are left alienated and alone after school and at weekends.

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI)**

*"[I feel] not accepted, alienated, like I am a lesser person than everyone else".*

Through questionnaires, the suggestions arose that LGBTI young people do not always have their voice heard and are not always fully accepted by their communities or their schools. Some young people reported that LGBTI young people can have a hard time in school, can be bullied over their sexual orientation and that LGBTI young people are forced to answer queries about their sexual identities that can make them feel uncomfortable or exposed. Speaking then, to young LGBTI people during a focus group, they revealed that sometimes school can feel like an arena that is emotionally unsafe for them. *"Nobody means anything but everyone takes the piss out of you. Some people take it way too far"*. These occurrences have left LGBTI young people feeling isolated and exposed in their peer communities. They have called for more awareness around differing gender and sexual identities to prevent this reoccurring in future.

During focus groups, a young Transgender male also spoke about his experiences of life as Transgender. This young person, has in the recent past, made the decision to live his everyday life as a male, despite being biologically born a female. However, societal structures and regulations are proving an obstacle in allowing this person to live the life he wants. Involvement in sport within his community has firstly proved a difficulty. *"Clubs and general society don't really consider me a male. They acting like I'm a black person and I can't go on the white team"*. As sports clubs and schools generally refer to a young person's sex as defined by their birth certificate, this leaves Trans young people in a precarious place. Although Ireland has passed the Gender Recognition Bill, for most young people they have to wait until they are 18 for legislative changes to grant them permanent transition to the gender they chose. This leaves young Trans people isolated from community structures such as sports. It can also put Trans young people in dangerous situations as referring to birth gender can potentially out someone who has chosen to keep their transition a secret. Again, there was a call for widespread education around LGBTI, and in particular, the Transgender experience. This young person felt that while schools may educate young people around sexuality and being homosexual, there is little covered about being born Transgender. *"Imagine if you were born in a body you felt wasn't yours and then nobody would respect your choice to try to change it"*. Ultimately, young Trans people are living a struggle to inhabit the gender they want, in a society that prevents them from living as their true selves.

## Young Travellers

*"I wouldn't say I will get a job over being a Traveller".*

The young Travellers that took part in this consultation shared feelings that they are discriminated against and judged because they are members of the Traveller community. They expressed how in their own areas, the community was generally connected but Travelers were often left out of the mix. A sense of victimisation also surfaced as they told stories of times where they had been blamed for things in their local area that they hadn't done. *"A couple of months ago my own Traveller cousins got blamed for something and it turned out they didn't actually do it. Heard them all saying a few weeks later who actually done it, but no one came back to us"*. They spoke of being easy targets for crimes or trouble in their own area, particularly those to do with robbery and allowing their dogs to roam freely. These incidents have created a perception among young Travellers that they are not trusted or wanted in their communities.

The young Travellers were also clear in stating that racism is still an issue in contemporary Ireland. It was felt that while racism is seen by many as a negative thing, racism against Travellers is still widely accepted. *"If I was to go out there now and call a black person a 'nigger' I would be in trouble. If I was to go out though and call a Traveller a 'knacker' nothing would be done"*. Worryingly, the young Travellers questioned didn't feel that there was much that could be done to change people's attitudes towards Travellers. *"To be honest with you. It will never stop"*. They told stories of experiencing discrimination on their doorsteps, from both adults and other teens and also stories of unfair treatment within the education system. Some of the respondents actually reported being victim to or witnessing racist remarks being passed by teaching staff. They are convinced that teachers are more willing to help settled young people and have very little belief or see no future prospects for Traveller youth. *"If I put my hand up, the teacher will go to the settled lad first and then come to me"*. The Travellers also reported that their own culture and lifestyle is not reflected in the materials and textbooks used in schools. They stated that other groups with distinct cultural backgrounds and practices are represented in school but that Traveller culture is largely invisible.

Looking towards the future, some suggestions were presented in order to encourage more young Travellers to be connected and contributing to their communities. Further awareness and visibility around Traveller culture was called for and the young people also suggested a countywide platform for young Travellers. They proposed bringing young Travellers together from across the county to discuss issues pertaining to Travellers. *"Get groups of Travellers together. More people will understand how people are feeling and how they don't feel"*. Lastly, the young Travellers proposed the establishment of an investigation panel to examine reported incidents of racism against Travellers within the school system.

### **Summary Findings for Outcome 5:**

- Of those young people who felt they were listened to, youth clubs, school councils and other youth participation structures such as Comhairle na nOg were frequently mentioned
- Generally, it was apparent that the young people that are believed to be treated differently are those from the Travelling community, those from different

backgrounds and cultures to traditional Irish, those with disabilities and those who come from economically disadvantaged areas.

- Young people who attend special needs schools can also feel alienated from their home communities and find themselves with limited friends in their local areas.
- There is also a noticeable rural/urban divide existing for young people with special needs
- LGBTI young people can have a hard time in school, can be bullied over their sexual orientation and that LGBTI young people are forced to answer queries about their sexual identities that can make them feel uncomfortable or exposed.
- There was a call for widespread education around LGBTI, and in particular, the Transgender experience - while schools may educate young people around sexuality and being homosexual, there is little covered about being born Transgender.
- There is a perception among young Travellers that they are not trusted or wanted in their communities.
- It was felt that other groups with distinct cultural backgrounds and practices are represented in school but that Traveller culture is largely invisible.

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