

Current Steps and Future  
Horizons for CASPr:  
Review of CASPr North-East  
Inner City After Schools Project

Jo-Hanna Ivers, Valerie McLoughlin  
& Dr. Paul Downes

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# Executive Summary

CASPr (Community Afterschools Project) is a community development agency whose overall mission is to counter educational disadvantage in Dublin's North East Inner City in order to contribute to the elimination of poverty in their community. This review seeks to assess the quality and effects of CASPr's work on children, parents and the local community, in order to guide CASPr's future work and offer independent examination of CASPr's activities.

A review of the profile of the area of North East Inner City Dublin clearly indicates the area's need for such a project, while international and Irish research illustrates the potential social and economic gains of investment to prevent early school leaving. Furthermore, based on international and Irish research on afterschool projects, it is evident that the potential benefits of such projects are with regard to a number of dimensions. These dimensions include afterschool projects to modify the impact of poverty, as a protective factor against early school leaving, as a space to foster social skills and social support for positive mental health in contexts of psychological stress. The potential benefits according to research is also with regard to helping overcome pupil fear of failure, to develop a positive climate of self-directed learning which can also impact on a child's language development and safety. Research further emphasises the potential of the Arts in afterschool projects, as well as its role in offering supports for parents minding children, while being cognisant of the importance of staff quality in producing better outcomes for children at risk of social exclusion.

This evaluation of CASPr consisted of focus groups, individual interviews and qualitative questionnaires. Focus groups involved children currently attending the after school programme, a group of early school leavers currently attending a local alternative education programme and Home-School Liaison teachers. 26 individual interviews with children currently participating in CASPr were undertaken, approximately one quarter of the total sample of children attending CASPr. These interviews were based on an adaptation of indicators of satisfaction with a service adapted from McKeown et al (2001). 7 individual interviews with parents of children currently using the service took place, while 6 individual interviews with current CASPr staff were undertaken. 10 past participants of CASPr's training programme provided questionnaire responses.

It is evident from the sample that there is a high level of satisfaction among the children attending CASPr, with strong staff-pupil relations and a high level of trust between staff and service users. The fact that there is minimal staff turnover in CASPr is an important factor attributable to such individual and community trust. Key benefits of CASPr highlighted in children's and parents' responses were with regard to the development of social skills in the children, availability of nutrition, and opportunity for hope in the children's lives - to counter attitudes of fatalism that can lead to disengagement from the school system and engagement in risk behaviours such as substance abuse. The children valued the activities that the project offered, particularly those that take place off site such as swimming, visits to the park, and overnight trips to the Cavan Centre. Similarly the children placed value on the opportunity to spend time with friends, particularly the younger children. Parents felt that there were few safe supervised places for children to interact in their community and CASPr provides such a safe space. Academic improvement was cited by some children and parents though not by school representatives. Another key feature emerging from responses is the role CASPr plays in providing social and emotional support, including ongoing support over time. The wide referral process of CASPr and its engagement with key target groups including children with parents experiencing intergenerational drug use, and ethnic minority children in the area, indicate that one of its key strengths is its community outreach dimension of being known by word of mouth in the area as a community based and community led service for groups that may be reluctant to engage with other services. A number of children perceived that the activities offered by CASPr are 'babyish' which illustrates the need for more scope for children's voices regarding the activities CASPr engages in.

A range of recommendations to build on CASPr's strengths and to further develop the project are offered. These include amending CASPr's name to give full justice to the wide scope of its holistic intervention as not only an afterschool

project, but also as a support project for children and parents, as well as being a lifelong learning project. Therefore it is recommended that CASPr become CASSPr, Community Afterschools and Support Project. The project can also build on its strengths to develop its life skills, local heritage, lifelong learning and Arts dimensions, while also facilitating more capacity for children's voices and collaboration between schools and the after school project. In the medium term, it may also consider harnessing its key role in the community as an organisation trusted by local people, to engage further in providing emotional and family support services. Further strategic investment and goals include continued professional development of its staff and outreach coordination.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the parents, children, young people, staff and past trainees of CASPr as well as the teachers and Home-School-Liaison teachers of the participating schools for their time and contribution, without which this report would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the Board of Management of CASPr for their cooperation throughout.

# Authors

Lead researcher: **Jo-Hanna Ivers BA (Psych) H Dip (Stats) MA** is a research consultant. Her research interests include Addiction, Educational Disadvantage and Inequality. She has worked as a Rehabilitation Integration Worker in the Addiction Services, Rehabilitation Team in the HSE and in a community based rehabilitation programme for eight years, as well as being a researcher in the Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Trinity College Centre for Health Sciences.

**Valerie McLoughlin** works in administration and research in the Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Her research interests include social inclusion with an emphasis on lifelong learning.

**Dr. Paul Downes** is the Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre and Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology) at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.



# Glossary of Abbreviations

ASPs	After School Projects
CASPr	Community Afterschools Project
CE	Community Employment
CRAGA	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DICP	Dublin Inner City Partnership
DEds	District Electoral Divisions
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DSCFA	Department of Social Community and Family Affairs
ECDL	European Computer Driving License
EDC	Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
ESRI	Economic Social Research Institute
FÁS	Fóras Aiseanna Saothair – National Training and Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HSE	Health Service Executive
JEDI	Joint Education Development Initiative
JI	Job Initiative
LDTF	Local Drugs Task Force
NCI	National College of Ireland
NEICD	North East Inner City Dublin
NESF	National Economic Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OMCYA	Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PESL	Prevention of Early School Leaving

PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) Programme
QDOSS	Quality Development of After School Services
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# Section I

## Terms of reference



The objective of this review is to assess the quality and effects of the North Inner City Dublin Community Afterschools Project's (CASPr) work on children, parents, Community Employment and Job Initiative adult participants and the local community, in order to:

- Guide CASPr's future work
- Offer independent examination of CASPr's activities.

The final report will include the following:

- Description of the project
- Description of the evaluation process
- Consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- Assessment of the area's need for the project
- Review of international and national research on the potential benefits of afterschool projects
- Assessment of indicators of participation in the project (Structural and Process Indicators)
- Assessment of indicators of outcomes of the project's work (Outcome Indicators)
- Conclusions and recommendations

The Mission Statement of CASPr is as follows:

"CASPr is a locally managed community development agency whose overall mission is to counter educational disadvantage in Dublin's North East Inner City in order to contribute to the elimination of poverty in our community".

Their specific objectives are:

- To eliminate early school leaving among children;
- To provide accredited training and educational opportunities for adults experiencing educational disadvantage from our community;
- To enhance opportunities for learning, development and well being among children and adults in our community; and
- To work in collaboration with organisations committed to the elimination of poverty and disadvantage in order to improve the physical, economic and social environments of the North East Inner City.

**Figure 1. Description of the project: CASPr**

Location	Head Office: Portland Square Project sites: Seán McDermott Street Mountjoy Square
Origin	The CASPr Project began in 1995 in response to a local need in the North East Inner City Dublin area. With the support of FÁS, CASPr developed a Community Employment scheme for parents in North East Inner City Dublin to deliver an after-schools project in their own community in a local national school
Participating schools	Rutland Street National School Gardiner Street National School Marlborough Street National School O'Connell's National School  Children from Rutland Street and Marlborough Street attend the Seán McDermott Street project; children from Gardiner Street and O'Connell's NS attend the Mountjoy Square project. Currently 103 children attend both clubs and 12 in the Crèche
Number of staff	There are currently 53 staff working in CASPr.
CASPr works with children referred from the following sources:	Parents Schools Other community agencies
Lifelong Learning focus	Under the auspices of the Dublin Institute of Technology, CASPr provides its trainees with certification, offering Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accreditation at levels 3, 4 & 5.

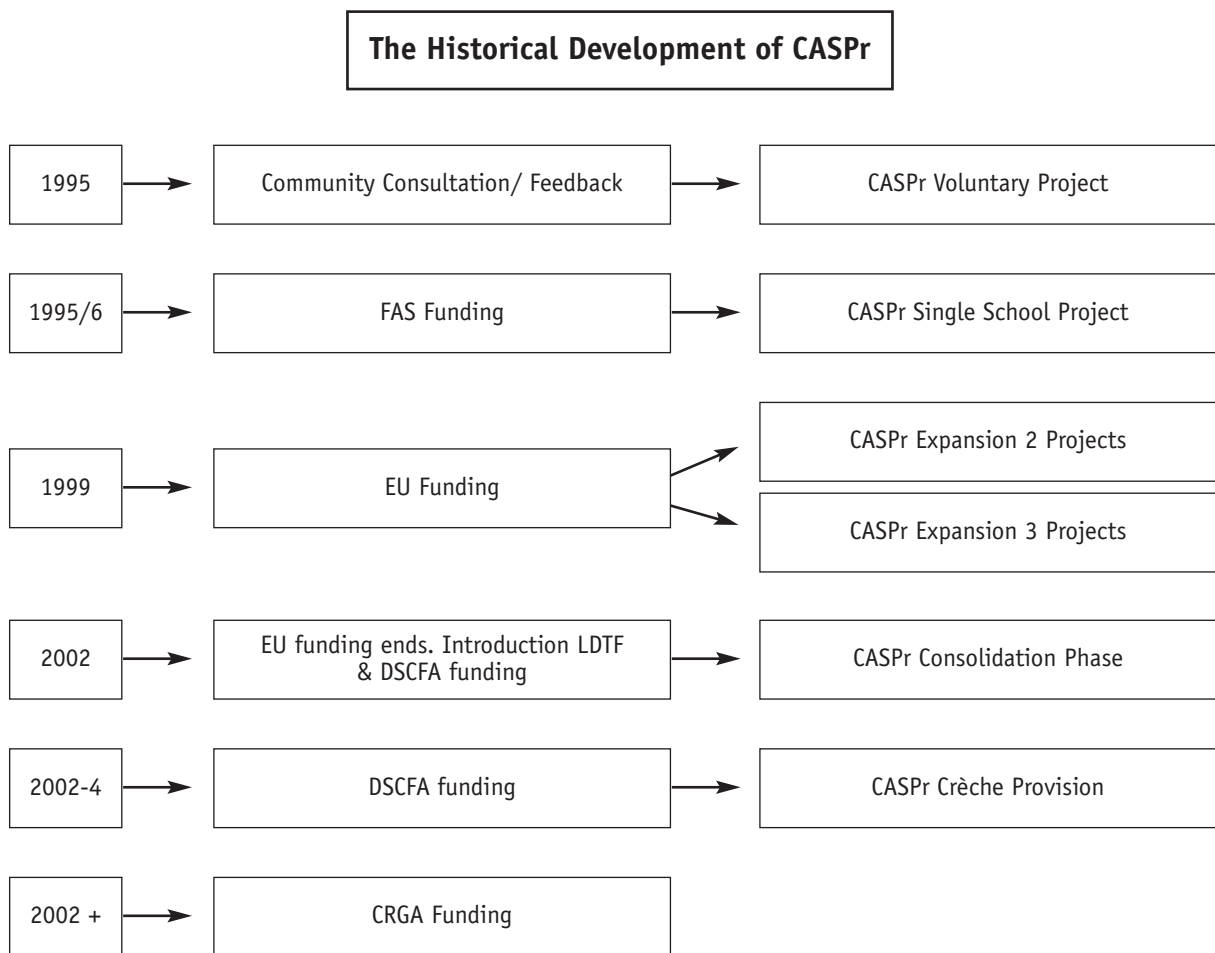
## Historical roots of CASPr in the local community

The historical development of CASPr is embedded in the local community (Shanks 2004). Local concerns regarding child development and education first gave rise to a FÁS funded youth project. The Matt Talbot youth project began in 1970. It provided local children with an opportunity to participate in recreational activities including residential trips. Following this, local activists, recognising that primary schools in the area lacked resources, began consultations with all of the relevant stakeholders, which included: parents, teachers and other professionals working in the area. Thus a voluntary after school project was launched. A committee of representatives of local agencies and community members was formed to manage the project. It included: parents, teachers, welfare officers, youth workers and representatives from the Eastern Health Board (now the HSE), the Society of St Vincent de Paul and FÁS.

The organisation began as a voluntary community group and became a limited company in 1996. The first premises were located on Buckingham Street, from which the group coordinated an after schools project to serve the needs of children from Rutland Street National School, their parents and children of the trainees of the project, all of whom were local parents. Consequently CASPr commenced serving 40 children.

From the outset CASPr began with the recognition of three key components: (a) local consultation, (b) including parents in the provision of after school activities for their own children and (c) viewing families and the community as indivisible. However, some limitations of trainees’ literacy and numeracy were recognised, and it was decided to offer training and educational programmes. This gave way to the need for further training and certification, which remains a cornerstone of CASPr. Along with the help of the Local Partnership a feasibility study was carried out, which, resulted in CASPr securing statutory and voluntary funding for its first CE Scheme in 1995. A voluntary contribution from the society of St. Vincent de Paul and local benefactors then helped to secure EU funding under the Integra Employment Initiative. This gave the project the recognition it needed. By 1997 through adaptability and innovation CASPr doubled its Community Employment scheme.

**Figure 2. Historical Development of CASPr**



Source: Shanks (2004)

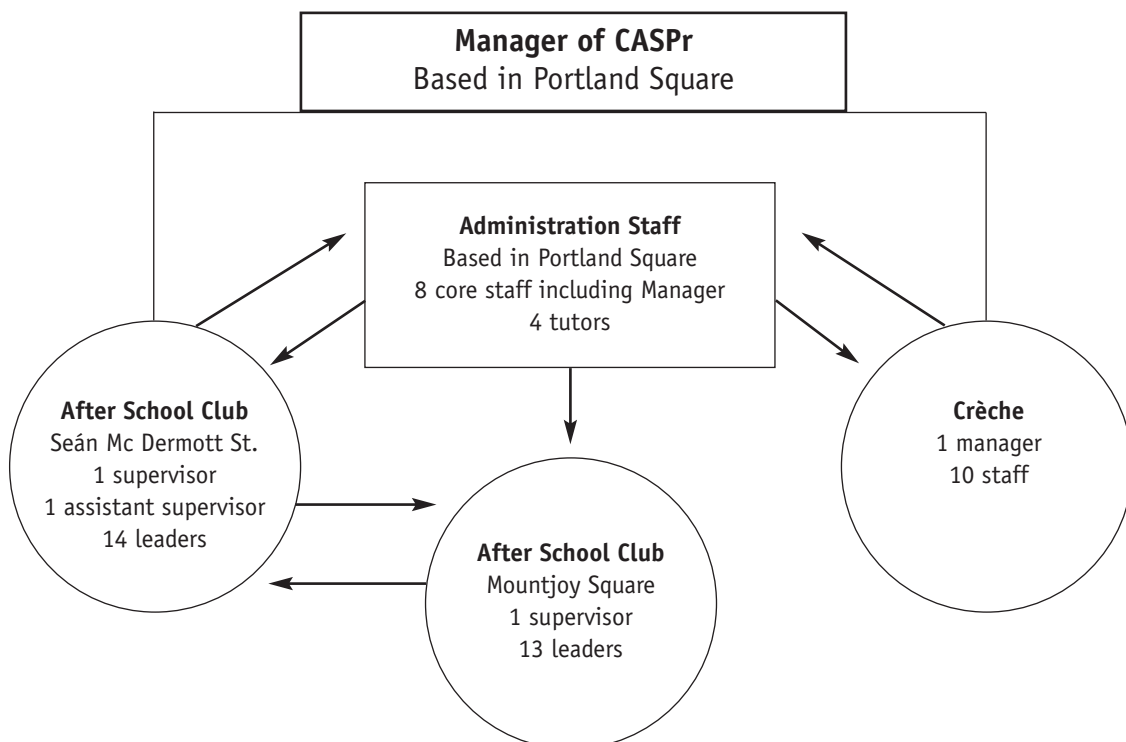
With the highest levels of unemployment in the country in North East Inner City Dublin, CASPr provides these local communities with employment, training and educational qualifications, while the project aims to impact on children's well-being and education thereby offering increased opportunities for the next generation of parents. 100% of CE staff work in CASPr where their CE job is to work in the Crèche or after school and to train up as a qualified childcare worker as they do so. All the staff are Garda vetted. CASPr has and maintains a Child Protection Protocol that fully complies with HSE guidelines, which is regularly reviewed and updated, and which all staff receive training in as part of their employment induction programme. The after school projects are run by local people and offer a service four afternoons a week. They provide more than homework support; the after schools curricula include other educational and recreational provision aimed at holistic pro-social development of the children such as weekly swimming trips, trips to beaches, parks, the zoo, museums, bowling, 'Quasar', and the cinema. Also provided are day trips to Newbridge and the Animal Rescue Centre, tennis, guitar lessons; parents' mornings, library visits and health & nutrition.

### Target groups: A focus on the most in need in the local area

The Project is open to all children within the community attending first to sixth class in a number of local schools. However, children that are deemed 'most in need' in the community are also centrally targeted by the project. The managers of each after school club meet with the schools at the beginning of term to discuss the potential referrals. The referrals take place through a range of sources, including parents and other community agencies. The two Project Supervisors for the after schools liaise every day as they are based in Head Office each morning, and spend afternoons on site at the after schools. The full staff meets weekly at Head Office on Friday mornings. Individual files are maintained for each child. In addition, CASPr maintains individual files for each CE participant. Files are maintained as long as a child or CE participant are engaged with CASPr and for six years after they leave, at which point they are destroyed

Approximately 35 of the children attending CASPr are ethnic minority or International children. 17% of the children attending CASPr are from families experiencing substance abuse. Apart from children leaving when their family moves away, all of the children who start after schools continue with CASPr until the end of 6th class.

Figure 3. Structure of CASPr



**Figure 4. Funding of CASPr<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Cost of the After Schools Service</b>				€492,000.00
Cost of training				€48,000.00
Cost of Administration				€126,000.00
<b>Cost of After School Service per child</b>		Assumption 110 children		
Per Annum	€4,472.73			
Per Week	€86.01			
Per Day	€17.54			
<b>Cost of training per Participant</b>		Assumption 40 participants		
Per Annum	€1,200.00			
Per Week	€23.08			
Per Day	€4.71			
<b>Admin Costs</b>				
Per Annum	€126,000.00			
Per Week	€2,423.08			
Per Day	€345.21			

<sup>1</sup> Figures supplied by CASPr Board of Management

# Section II

## Profile of Community Needs in North-East Inner City Dublin



The CASPr project works within the North East Inner-City Drugs Taskforce (NEICD). This is an area with high concentrations of social exclusion and with a history of intergenerational drug use; it is an area which suffered badly from the heroin epidemic in the early to mid 1990s. Although substantial regeneration took place in the late nineties and continued up until recent years, problems of poverty and crime still persist at the highest levels in this area.

CASPr caters for schools in the North East Inner City of Dublin and children who attend are in the main from the neighbourhoods of Summerhill/Seán McDermott Street and Gardiner Street. Its catchment area also includes the Mountjoy and Ballybough wards, hosting the largest concentration of local authority housing in Dublin. CASPr's administration offices are located in Portland Square. There are two project centres, one on Seán McDermott Street and one in Mountjoy Square.

The following profile of Dublin North inner-city was adapted from the Dublin Inner City Partnership Strategic plan 2001-2006 *Achieving Equality, Overcoming Exclusion*, its 2004 Implementation Plan and Haase's 2008 commissioned study on Dublin's inner city. The statistics where possible have been updated using Census Data, Central Statistics Office, 2006. The 2006 Census statistics are the most up-to-date data, currently available.

The inner city contains the largest scale and most acute levels of concentrated poverty and deprivation in Ireland. The intensive economic growth and investment in urban renewal that has occurred in the city centre over the past decade has exacerbated the divisions between wealth and poverty in the inner city. While the local residents and community



have derived benefit to some extent from this investment in terms of employment and infrastructure, nonetheless there remains a significant challenge to alleviate the most acute poverty and to achieve the levels of social inclusion that a developed European city requires (Dublin Inner City Partnership Strategic plan 2004-2006: p 3). Other aspects of the North East Inner City area are as follows:

- The population of the NEICD area is roughly 34,000, depending on whether 9 or 11 DEDs are included.
- 34% are non-Irish Nationals. (Haase & Pratschke 2008)
- The percentage of lone parent households as a percentage of all households with children is 55%. (Haase & Pratschke 2008).
- Based on the Live Register returns for February 2009, the unemployment rate has risen *nationally* to over 10 per cent (CPA 2009).
- In the NEICD area the unemployment rate as reported in the 2006 census is 14.5%. (Haase and Pratschke 2008) These figures are obviously higher again in 2010 given the current recession.
- The scale of heroin abuse remains highest in the State (DCIP 2004).
- One third of the Dublin North Inner City population has a third level education qualification, however, an estimated 3% of Dublin North Inner City Local Authority tenants progress to third level (DCIP 2004)
- The literacy problems of this population are widespread with 63% of second level students behind the national average reading age. (DICP 2004)
- Twenty percent of primary school pupils in this area qualify for special needs (DICP 2004).
- There is a major lack of recreational facilities for young people in the area. (DICP 2004).

### Population of North East Inner City 1996-2006: Diverse Ethnicity as an Emerging Theme

The population of the area has been dropping significantly since the 1960s. The north inner city's population decline began in the 1940s (see Table 1.3 of McKeown 1991) up until 1991 when it started to rise again. This coincided with rebuilding in these communities. From 2001 to 2006 the population rose in seven of the District Electoral Divisions and fell, very slightly in two of them. The population of Dublin North Inner City has increased by 9.7% between the last census in 2002 and the latest in 2006.

In 2002 the government sponsored development programme RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) described the area in the following way:

*'The Area is characterised by social exclusion, multi-dimensional deprivation and generational educational under-achievement. High levels of unemployment, dereliction, physical neglect, drugs, environmental decay, pollution, a poor infrastructure, a poor standard of housing, lack of recreational facilities and spaces to play, are prevalent throughout the Area.'*

**Figure 5. Census of population NEICD – 9 DEDs**

District	2002	2006	Actual Change	Percentage Change
Ballybough A	3,368	3,617	249	7.4%
Ballybough B	3,009	3,212	203	6.7%
Mountjoy A	3,242	3,976	734	22.6%
Mountjoy B	2,725	3,456	731	26.8%
North City	3,942	3,667	-275	-7.0%
North Dock A	1,287	1,208	-79	-6.1%
North Dock B	3,628	3,700	72	2.0%
Rotunda A	4,199	4,712	513	12.2%
Rotunda B	1,752	2,149	397	22.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,905</b>	<b>33,823</b>	<b>3,103</b>	<b>9.7%</b>

Source: ICON 2007 / Census 2006 census

**Figure 6. Census of population NEICD - 11 DEDs<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Total population</b>	35,159
<b>Population change 1996-2006</b>	+9,345 [+39.98%]
<b>Number of lone parent households</b>	2,000
<b>Non-Irish Nationals</b>	12,272 [34%]
<b>Unemployed</b>	2,564 [14.5%]
<b>% of population whose full time education has ceased and who have no formal education or primary education only</b>	20.89%

Source: Haase &amp; Pratschke 2008/ Census 2006 Enumerative Areas

One of the significant changes in recent years is the increase in the international population living in the inner city communities. In the north inner city more than 50% of the population is now ethnically international. Based on the information provided in the 2006 census, 61% of the population in the NEICD area is Irish, with the remaining 39%, including 1.6% from the UK, 6% from Poland, 1% Lithuanian, 8.6% from the rest of the EU and 17% from the rest of the world. It should be noted that almost 4% did not state where they were from. The majority is ethnically White, and there are very few Travellers living in the area, only 48. Of the information provided, it would suggest that 20% of the population is ethnically White (international), 2% are ethnically Black, including Black Irish, and 9% are Asian including Asian Irish. It is notable that a significant 7% did not state their ethnic background. Due to the fears and complexity around asking these types of questions, this 7% are more likely to be from minority communities rather than the White Irish majority population.

### **Beyond 'Educational Disadvantage': Socio-economic barriers for the participation of inner-city youth in education**

The dangers of school failure and alienation from the school system have been recognised by research regarding the strong correlation between early school leaving and drug misuse (National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008; Morgan 2001; Downes 2003). The Education Act (1998) refers to educational disadvantage as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools." (1998: 32 [9]). 'Educational Disadvantage' refers to a situation whereby individuals in Irish society derive less benefit from the education system than their peers. This manifests most notably in poor levels of participation and achievement in the formal education system (Combat Poverty, 2003) Given that education may be the main route to success for young people from Dublin's north inner-city, it is important that the educational opportunities afforded to this group of individuals are considered.

Educational disadvantage is closely associated with poverty. A substantial volume of research indicates that individuals from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and communities are more likely to underachieve in the education system than their peers from higher income backgrounds (Kellaghan, et al 1995; Boldt et al 1998; Smyth 1999 and Smyth & Hannon 2000). Educational disadvantage is also considered to be a key factor that preserves inter-generational poverty (Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage, 2003). The term 'educational disadvantage' has been criticized as being a negative labeling of individuals and communities (Spring 2007; Derman Sparks 2007; Downes & Gilligan 2007), based on a deficit model that underplays the potential strengths of both. It is a language used to describe people in a language which is not used by the people themselves in their own self-description.

Education and related qualifications determine to a large extent the life opportunities of people. In a recent Irish study, Smyth & McCoy (2009) argue from a policy perspective that there is a 'minimum standard of education' i.e. a threshold, beneath which an individual's 'life-chances are adversely affected' (p.1). A threshold they set is the Leaving Certificate; this according to Smyth & McCoy (2009) is the 'minimum' to access further training/education and high quality employment. Individuals who leave the formal education system with few or no qualifications are at a disadvantage, their personal and social development is curtailed and they are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion (Johnston, 1997). It has been suggested that an estimated 1,000 pupils in Ireland do not transfer annually from primary to post primary education (NESF, 2002). Furthermore it was estimated during 2006 in Ireland that 2,400

<sup>2</sup> As Figure 5 and including Drumcondra South and North Dock C

young people left the formal education system with no recognised qualification. 10,600 leave after the Junior Certificate but prior to the Leaving Certificate. In addition, research indicates that it is people living in poverty who constitute the majority of those who do not benefit fully from education. For example the NESF (2002) note an over representation of individuals from unskilled and working class backgrounds among those leaving the education system with little or no qualifications. Both national and international research has identified a strong association between students from low income inner-city backgrounds and low educational attainment. Tormey (2007) suggests that the effects of poverty on education are direct and immediate.

As is evident from the current research, when consulted, working class students not only want, but aspire to complete school and also potentially enter third level education. Downes & Maunsell (2007), in their study of early school leaving among working class youths in South Dublin inner city, found that approximately 90% of fifth year students aspired to complete second level education. Moreover, in two primary schools there was a 100% response rate from pupils indicating that they wanted to stay on at school until Leaving Certificate (see also Downes, Maunsell & Ivers, 2006). These figures demonstrate an intention of these working class children as early as primary level to stay on until Leaving Certificate, suggesting that it is clearly the norm for working class pupils in Dublin's (South) inner city to aspire to do their Leaving Certificate.

- In comparison to the other three quadrants of DICP's area, the north east inner-city:
- Has the second highest population with no formal or primary education.
- Has the second highest population of school leavers 15 years or younger.
- Has the highest rate of unemployment.
- Has the largest population of people age 14+.

The issue is not that people from working class backgrounds do not value education, but rather that education comes at a cost that is too high and sometimes at the expense of other family members, as Ivers (2008) has highlighted from qualitative research on 'fear of success' in North Inner City Dublin. The cost of education, coupled with the potential loss of earnings, is a luxury that many parents in low income families cannot afford (Ivers 2008). This is an issue that has many intricacies. The decision on whether a child of working age in a low income family can remain in school and progress to third level will have a lasting effect, not just on the child, but on the child-parent relationship, the community they live in and society at large.

# Section III

## Profile of Economic Benefits in Preventing Early School Leaving: Potential Cost of Early School Leaving



Research commissioned by Barnardos and published by the ESRI in May 2009, outlines, under three dimensions – unemployment, health and crime - the potential cost of early school leaving in the Irish context. These are as follows:

**Figure 7. Potential Cost of Early School Leaving**

Outcome:	Unemployment
Potential cost:	Welfare payments <sup>3</sup>
Estimates:	The early leaver group spends 14 months longer unemployed than those with a Leaving Certificate – cost €12,300 per early leaver <sup>4</sup>
Outcome:	Unemployment
Potential cost:	Income tax foregone <sup>5</sup>
Estimates:	Estimated difference in life-time earnings between the early leaver and LC Groups of €84,500 <sup>6</sup>
Outcome:	Crime
Potential cost:	Cost of imprisonment and other services <sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Using the Living in Ireland data on the proportion of time in unemployment and assuming a 40 year working life

<sup>4</sup> Allowing for costs of €204.30 per week (Jobseeker's Allowance), on the basis of current prices

<sup>5</sup> Using National Employment Survey data and assuming a working week of 35 hours and a working life of 40 years

<sup>6</sup> Allowing for a tax rate of 20 per cent results in a tax revenue loss of €17,000 per early leaver.

<sup>7</sup> A prison place cost €97,700 per annum in 2007

**Figure 7. Potential Cost of Early School Leaving** cont'd

Estimates:	The potential difference in crime costs between early leavers and LC leavers amount to just under €280 million nationally <sup>8</sup>
Outcome:	Lone parenthood
Potential cost:	Welfare payments <sup>9</sup>
Estimates:	Differential cost of €4,000 per female early leaver <sup>10</sup>
Outcome:	Health
Potential cost:	Utilization of health services
Estimates:	The above analyses indicate poorer health and higher levels of GP utilization among early leavers <sup>11</sup>

Source: Smyth and McCoy 2009

The majority of studies in this area have examined returns for higher levels of educational completion in terms of individual income and returns to the state regarding tax revenue. For example, the OECD (2008) estimates that there is a return of 8% for men and 9% for women who complete the Leaving Certificate or PLC course compared with those who complete only the Junior Certificate. The public returns for men and women are 7% and 5%, respectively. However, it is evident that the returns on education apply not only to income and tax revenue.

Temple and Reynolds (2007) have noted that despite differences in the regions, participants, time, and exact nature of intervention, the principle of return on investment, particularly in early childhood intervention, holds across international studies. There has been no cost-benefit analysis of interventions in Ireland, due to the unavailability of systematic information on the costs associated with early school leaving on a range of outcomes, as well as a lack of information on the unit cost per intervention. However, Smyth and McCoy (2009) provide cost estimates on a range of outcomes per early school leaver as follows:

- Welfare payments – €12,300 per annum over the life course of one early school leaver.
- Tax foregone – €17,000 per annum over the life course of one early school leaver.
- Lone parent welfare payments – €4,000 (per female) per annum over the life course of one early school leaver.
- Health services – greater expenditure, but not quantified.
- Crime – €280 million per annum for the State.

A 2009 EU commission document shows that research over the past decade has produced ample evidence that the monetary and non-monetary prosperity of individuals is related to their level of education and training. Education yields substantial returns to the individual in terms of earnings and employability and significant gains in economic growth and wider social benefits.

Given that most European countries have virtually universal enrolment in primary and lower secondary schooling, policies that increase the quality of schooling in terms of pupils' cognitive and non-cognitive skills may bring considerable benefits in the long run. Evidence shows that the quantity and, especially, quality of schooling, measured in terms of student performance on cognitive achievement tests yield substantial payoffs on the labour market for the individual and society alike (Wößmann 2002).

In general, there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and employment rate. Yet, employment rates for the population with low level of education are significantly different among EU countries. The overall tendency is clear across European countries - the higher the educational attainment is, the higher the employment rates.

The job crisis is particularly worrying for young people. Typically 15 to 24 years old (and to a lesser extent 25-30 years old) face higher unemployment rates than older workers. For the EU-27 as a whole, the economic crisis is taking its toll and those with lower education level within this age group are assuming the highest cost. In effect, the unemployment rate of 15-24 year olds with low educational attainment is 5.3 percentage points higher in the first quarter 2009 than in the same period of 2008, while the same rate increased by 3.6 percentage points for the medium educated and 2.9 for the highly educated. (EU 2009)

<sup>8</sup> For males aged 21 to 30 years, estimated imprisonment rates of 46.6 per 1,000 early leavers and 1.6 per 1,000 Leaving Certificate leavers. Assuming that each of those committed spends one year in prison, this can be taken as a conservative estimate as it does not allow for greater recidivism among the less explained group or for the costs of Garda and probation services and the costs of property crime.

<sup>9</sup> Source used QNHS data for 25-34 year olds to estimate the likelihood of being a lone mother. Assumption is that this entire group is on welfare payments and, following Morgenroth (1999), taking the conservative assumption that lone parents will be drawing down payments for 4 years.

<sup>10</sup> With weekly rates of one parent payments being €204.30

<sup>11</sup> No estimate of the differential costs has been conducted for Ireland. However, Nolan (1991) and Layte and Nolan (2004) show that a relatively high share of health expenditure goes on lower income groups

The EU (2006) commission document describes how in 2001 the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning produced two research reports on the positive social effects of learning on crime and on health (depression and obesity), the latter based on information from the latest UK national cohorts. The first report on crime estimates that if 1% of the population who only had GCSEs<sup>12</sup> gained an A Level<sup>13</sup> or equivalent qualification, and that those who went on to study A levels were replaced by individuals studying GCSEs who previously had no qualifications, the benefit to the UK economy would be between £80 million and £500 million per annum. Assuming a straightforward linear extrapolation, a 5 point increase would bring between £400 million and £2,500 million extra. The second report on health and obesity concludes that if educational interventions reduced depression amongst women and enabled 10% of depressed women who do not have qualifications to progress to a Level 1 qualification, economic benefits of between £6 million and £34 million per year would result. If educational interventions raised 50% of women with mental health problems and no qualifications to Level 1 academic qualifications, the benefit would be between £300 million and £1,900 million per year (EU Commission, 2006).

Individual productivity is very difficult to measure, but one means to estimate the productivity loss attached to early school leaving is to estimate the extra earnings that early school leavers would have earned had they stayed in education (Brunello and Comi, 2004). A viable quantified estimate of the cost of early school leaving suggests that if all early leavers completed upper-secondary education, total productivity would increase by 1.4%. This calculation assumes that earnings per hour are on average equal to productivity, and that the 77 out of 100 young Europeans who completed upper secondary education in 2005 have productivity – or earnings per hour – equal to 100. By comparison, estimates suggest that the average productivity of each early school leaver is 6% less (i.e. 94) than for those who complete upper-secondary education. Therefore, the 23 out of 100 Europeans who do not complete upper-secondary education cost the European economy productivity losses of about 1.4 percentage points each year (EU Commission, 2006).

Inequity in education contributes to poorer health for excluded individuals, with early school leavers in the US having a life expectancy that is 9.2 years shorter than high school graduates. Early school leavers also have higher rates of cardiovascular illnesses, diabetes and other ailments, and require an average of \$35,000 in annual health-care costs, compared with \$15,000 for college graduates. Indeed, health-related losses for the estimated 600,000 early school leavers in the US in 2004 totalled at least \$58 billion, or nearly \$100,000 per student. In addition, the net present value of improving the educational achievement of all these early school leavers by one grade would have been a \$41.8 billion reduction in health-related costs.

By combining a range of these costs from the US (including income tax losses, increased demand for health-care and public assistance, and higher rates of crime and delinquency), the EU Commission obtain a global estimate for the average gross cost over the life time of one 18-year-old who does not complete post-primary school of approximately \$ 450,000/350,000 Euro (EU Commission, 2006).

The research examined in this study looks at both a national and international context of after school projects (ASPs). Williams and Collins (1998) noted that 9.6% of children in Ireland between the ages of six and twelve are attending after-school care on a daily basis. In the United States, 44% of children with working parents have no adult care after school and research shows that low income children are more likely than their affluent peers to be left unsupervised for long periods. The figures from the United States suggest participation rates at ASPs of low income children somewhere between 10% and 30%. Halpern (1999) outlines four driving factors behind the interest in ASPs for low income children:

- Lack of safety in public streets and parks
- Stressful and unproductive for children to remain alone after school
- Extended learning opportunities
- Gaining access to extracurricular activities that are available to their more advantaged peers.

A range of other key issues emerge from international and Irish research in relation to afterschool projects, with a particular focus on contexts of social exclusion. These issues to be further examined include the following areas:

- I. After school to modify the impact of poverty
- II. After school and early school leaving
- III. After school and social skills
- IV. After school and social support for positive mental health in contexts of psychological stress

<sup>12</sup> General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) are national single-subject examinations taken at the end of compulsory education, usually at the age of 16.

<sup>13</sup> General Certificate of Education Advanced-level examinations (GCE 'A-levels') are post-compulsory education, single-subject examinations, which may be studied in any combination. Courses normally last two years and most students take the examinations at age 18.

- V. Afterschool and overcoming fear of failure
- VI. After school and positive climate
- VII. After school and self-directed learning
- VIII. After school and language development
- IX. After school and safety
- X. After school and the Arts
- XI. After school and supports for parents minding children
- XII. After school and staff quality

## I. After school to modify the impact of poverty

Poverty impacts on children significantly in that it causes psychological distress to parents, which in turn affects children and it also limits material resources available to them (Posner and Vandell 1994). Young people who grow up in poverty are more likely to suffer chronic health problems, be exposed to violence, receive a poor quality education and live in a dangerous neighbourhood. Low income children are also less likely to have significant adults in their lives (Miller 2003). In Ireland, children account for nearly 40% of all those in consistent poverty. This has an affect on their mental and physical health, education and living conditions. In 2007, according to the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 7.4% of all children under 17 were living in consistent poverty and 19.9% were at risk of poverty. UNICEF (2000) outlined the following increased risks to low income children:

- Poor educational attainment
- Single parenthood
- Time spent in prison
- Poor quality employment
- Child abuse
- Youth Homelessness

Moreover, Friel & Conlon (2004) emphasise ‘food poverty’ in an Irish context which they define as ‘the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet and the related impacts on health, culture and social participation’. They observe that ‘food insecurity and inadequate diet are central to the experience of poverty.

In a 2007 study by Downes and Maunsell, pupil responses from 5th and 6th class in all the participating schools in South West Inner City Dublin revealed extremely high levels of variation across schools regarding pupil hunger in school affecting their learning – as well as exceptionally high levels of responses in two schools (33%) stating that they were either often, very often or every day too hungry to do their work in school. These differences between primary schools in South West Inner City ranged from 6% to 33% of pupils stating they were either often, very often or everyday too hungry to do their work in school.

In Blanchardstown RAPID area primary schools, Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) observed the following findings: In response to the question: ‘How often do you feel too hungry to do your work in school?’ 43 out of 230 6th class pupils across the 4 schools indicated that this was either often, very often or every day.

In other words:

- approximately 18% of the 6th class pupils attending school on the given day stated that they were either often, very often or every day too hungry to do their work in school
- This figure was notably higher in 3 of the 4 schools where 21%, 25% and 25% of pupils stated that they were either often, very often or every day too hungry to do their work in school.
- The fourth school had a noticeably lower figure, though it is still a sizeable proportion of 11%.

Of the 43 pupils in total who stated that they were either often, very often or every day too hungry to do their work in school:

- 29 indicated that they were from Ireland and 14 indicated that they were international pupils<sup>15</sup>
- 25 indicated that they participated in no afterschool club or extracurricular activity, while 18 participated in at least one such activity

Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) conclude that: “It is worth noting that each of these schools has a breakfast club. The question arises as to whether 6th class pupils may feel that these clubs are only for younger pupils”. (p 23)

<sup>15</sup> From a range of countries rather than any predominant ethnic group of foreign nationals

In their 2008 Annual Report, Barnardos recognise that living in poverty affects every facet of children's lives and this can impact on them for a lifetime. One of the impacts of poverty for children means that they are excluded from doing things that are considered normal in society because of inadequate income in the household, such as many of the extracurricular activities offered in ASPs. ASPs are seen to be a way of offsetting the negative effects of poverty, family distress and violence in children's lives (Posner and Vandell 1994).

## II. After school and early school leaving

Research suggests that advantages of State after school programmes are more apparent in contexts of disadvantage (Posner & Vandell 1994; Hennessy & Donnelly 2005) as low income children can access the extracurricular activities commonly available to middle class children. Morgan (1998) cites a U.S. study by Beacham (1980), which found that over 60% of early school leavers were not involved in any extracurricular activities during their high school years – a level which is significantly higher than any estimates of the overall number not participating in such activities. This study arguably has much relevance also to the primary school context.

Participation in even one extracurricular school activity is associated with a reduction in rates of early school leaving, particularly for high-risk youth (Mahoney & Cairns 1997). Mahoney (2000) defines participation as one or more years of involvement in the extracurricular activity and states:

The participant is attracted to the activity and is likely competent in that area or may even excel. Unlike preventive interventions that attempt to correct academic or social deficits by remedial work, extracurricular activities may foster a positive connection between the individual and school based on the student's interests and motivations. The specific activity pursued may be less important than the act of participation itself (p.503)

Kellaghan et al (1995), commenting on the experience of U.S prevention of early school leaving schemes, emphasise that:

success in one kind of target domain may have a snowball effect on other kinds so that the net beneficial effect may be greater than predicted for any one domain (p.90)

## III. After school and social skills

In the United States, Posner & Vandell (1994) surveyed four types of after school care, formal after school care, mother care, informal adult supervision and self care with a total of 216 children. They documented extensive positive effects for low income children. These positive effects were associated with better grades and conduct in school as well as better peer relations and emotional adjustment. Moreover, Posner & Vandell (1994) revealed that low income children in formal ASPs were exposed to more learning opportunities than those children in the other forms of care. They also spent more time participating in activities such as music and dance which would not have been available to them had they not been in formal ASPs. It was noted that less time was spent watching TV and engaging in unstructured activities in the locale and more time in enrichment activities than other children. There was a positive correlation between the children's academic and conduct grades and the time spent in a one to one academic situation with an adult, and a negative correlation between their academic and conduct grades and the time spent in outdoor unorganised 'hanging out' activities.

In the Irish 2002 survey undertaken by the St. Vincent de Paul, members of the organisation, families they assisted and teachers were questioned as to their past experiences, current difficulties and future hopes. Responses to the provision of educational supports elicited a high ranking from teachers and parents for Homework and After School Clubs with parents acknowledging the benefit of After-School Clubs to the well being and educational development of their children.

In the North Inner City context, Ivers (2008) has also observed the key role of even one friend in providing the support and motivation for staying on at school until Leaving Certificate. The opportunity for establishing meaningful friendships through CASPr offers not simply the capacity for developing social skills but also the chance to express these skills through expanded social relations and friendships that can serve potentially as a protective factor against early school leaving. This opportunity for making friendships is also an important issue for children from ethnic minority backgrounds in the area, quite apart from wider social cohesion goals of enhanced opportunity for contact and cooperation between the established communities and the 'new' Irish.



#### **IV. After school and social support for positive mental health in contexts of psychological stress**

There is a clear relationship between poor mental health and indicators of social exclusion such as low educational attainment, low income, unemployment, and drug-taking (Department of Health and Children, DHC, 2009; Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, DCRGA, 2009; NESF, 2007). It is notable that physical and mental health were the two key topics for discussion for Dáil na nÓg at its 2009 delegates' meeting (Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, OMCYA, 2009).

The benefits for mental health in having even only one person to confide in is well recognised for the general population (Levitt 1991; Antonucci 1990). The importance of just one figure, such as a teacher, as a source of emotional support for children and youth at risk is evident from international research. Werner & Smith (1982) noted from their longitudinal study that in circumstances of poverty and/or family instability:

Without exception, all the children who thrived had at least one person that provided them consistent emotional support – a grandmother, an older sister, a teacher or a neighbour

In the U.S context, it has been observed that natural mentors or non-parent, non-peer support figures may contribute to the psychosocial adjustment of high risk youth (Cowen & Work 1988; Galbo 1986; Garmezy 1985). Yet in Northern Ireland, Caul & Harbison (1988) found that “more than half the pupils” identified as consistent school absentees “felt they had no one with whom they could discuss” their dissatisfaction with school. An important aspect of drug prevention programmes in the Irish National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 is to:

seek to strengthen resilience amongst young people in or out of school by fostering positive stable relationships with family or key community figures especially in the early years...

Such a role in helping prevent the build up of emotional stress in the child does require the teacher to be comfortable in a listening role and with adopting a strengths based focus which has been advocated elsewhere in the Irish childcare system (McKeown et al 2001) It is also well recognised that a vital feature of drug use prevention is the development of social and emotional skills (Morgan 2001).

Child-centered research across a range of DEIS schools in Dublin in recent years has highlighted the neglect of children's needs for emotional support and for someone to confide in (Downes 2004, Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007; Downes 2008; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Seminar 2010) The importance of mental health in the context of disadvantage was reflected in the Barnardos' 2007 Childlinks issue which was solely dedicated to the issues of mental health. This was also discussed at the January 2010 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Seminar in Tallaght by the key note speaker, Dr. Tony Bates.

Nolan et al (2003) refer to the danger of 'fatalism' at a community level within Corduff, Blanchardstown, that 'nothing can be done'. Fear of failure is an example of fatalism at the level of the student's experience of school (see also international research on fatalism and risk behaviour, Kalichmann et al 2000, Downes 2003). Afterschool projects can serve as a protective factor against the development of such fatalism whether the fatalism is internalized by the child with regard to his or her self-image in general or concerning his or her school performance in particular.

That early school leaving is a mental health issue is evident from Kaplan et al's (1994) North American study of 4,141 young people tested in 7th grade and once again as young adults. They found a significant damaging effect of early school leaving on mental health functioning as measured by a 10-item self-derogation scale, a 9-item anxiety scale, a 6-item depression scale and a 6-item scale designed to measure coping.

#### **V. After school and overcoming fear of failure**

A wide range of educational theorists and educational psychologists recognise the danger of labelling students as failures (e.g. Merrett 1986; Glasser 1969; Warnock 1977; Handy & Aitken 1990; Casby 1997; Kellaghan et al 1995; MacDevitt 1998; Kelly 1999) with the consequent knock-on effect of early school leaving. In the words of Kellaghan et al 1995:

A first influence [on early school drop out] is school failure. While there may be occasions when young people who are doing well may leave school, the vast majority will have had a history of doing badly. The issue of school failure is intimately related to the breadth/limits of the curriculum. With a broader curriculum, there is a greater chance

of achieving success in some domains, while a curriculum which is based on academic learning only will ensure success only for those with an academic aptitude (p.92)

After school projects are seen as places where you don't do things 'wrong'. Rourke (1995) highlights the positive effects of an afterschool project in Blanchardstown with regard to the benefit of helping students overcome fear of failure or being ridiculed. This role of afterschool projects is in encouraging pupils to try, as often through anticipation of failure the pupil stops trying and disengages from school.

## **VI. After school and positive climate**

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that children availing of after school programmes derive many social and emotional benefits particularly in the context of disadvantage (Halpern, 2000). Rosenthal and Vandell (1996) reported that child-staff ratio, centre size and staff education are important influences on the provision of quality ASP. Vandell et al, (1997) in their survey of 150 children in ASPs, reported a positive emotional climate in the ASP was associated with the children having fewer behaviour problems at school. Moreover, they concluded that more highly structured ASPs were associated with children having fewer behaviour problems, better grades and better work habits in their grade school classrooms.

In their study Pierce et al., (1999) employed an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to ascertain whether positive ASPs had an effect on child adjustment in the first grade classroom. They hypothesised that the more positive the ASP experience the more positive the adjustment in school. They found this more evident in boys. Similarly, Rosenthal & Vandell (1996) found boys are less 'satisfied with provisions for autonomy and privacy than girls' and children in the higher grades reported receiving 'less emotional support from staff'. In contrast, Hennessy & Donnelly (2005) found that there was no 'striking difference' between the genders as to the satisfaction of either the services or the activities offered.

## **VII. After school and self-directed learning**

Halpern argues that the role of ASPs should be less geared towards 'academic remediation' and more towards self-directed, experiential learning with an emphasis on enjoyment (Halpern, 2000 p 186). Several strategies can be employed to ensure that pupils feel that they have more control and power in the school environment. Increased opportunity for pupil control and power can:

- bring benefits to mental health
- bring benefits to pupil motivation and learning (Glasser 1969; Deci, Nezlek & Sheinman 1981; Flink, Boggiano & Barrett 1990; Ryan & Grolnick 1986; Deci & Ryan 1992; Ryan & Stiller 1991; Amabile 1986)
- give expression to UN rights of the child to be consulted on issues regarding their own welfare.

Central to the new Irish revised primary school curriculum (1999), constructivist theories of education (Vygotsky 1978; Berk & Winsler 1995; Glasser 1969, 1986; von Glaserfeld 1995) emphasise the active role of the student in his/her own learning and the need to have control within his/her learning environment. Afterschool projects offer the opportunity for such active learning on behalf of the pupil.

## **VIII. After school and language development**

The NESF report on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion (2009) recognises the importance of afterschool projects and community based approaches to language learning and literacy. The need for improved language development was a central issue raised across schools in Ballyfermot (Downes 2004) and Blanchardstown (Downes, Maunsell and Ivers 2006).

Vygotsky's developmental theory of language gains through facilitating interaction with more competent others within a 'zone of proximal development' highlights the potential benefits of social interaction in afterschool projects for language growth. A Vygotskian peer learning approach to language development, though not without criticism (Downes 2009a), is a central assumption of group work in the new revised primary curriculum (1999). From the perspective of afterschool projects, language growth can occur both from more linguistically competent adults and from peers, in informal social interaction

## IX. After school and safety

Halpern (1999) states that most ASPs share similar structures including homework assistance, food, free play time, arts and crafts and trips away from the centres. However, despite similarities in content and structure, Halpern (1999) noted that there are differences in focus and emphasis. Some ASPs emphasise school work, others recreation and play. Some see themselves as protecting children from consequences of 'hanging out' in difficult neighbourhoods, others as offering culturally enriching activities that low income children would otherwise not have access to. . Availability of ASPs during the summer holidays also has a positive impact on children's safety.

## X. After school and the Arts

McNeal's (1995) study in a US context examined whether certain types of extracurricular activities were more influential than others in preventing early school leaving. From a database of over 20,000 high-school students, it was found that participation in activities such as sports and fine arts significantly reduced the risk of early school leaving, whereas participation in academic or vocational clubs were seen to have less effect. The beneficial effects of sport and fine arts remained even when important factors like race, socio-economic status, gender and ability were controlled.

In the Irish context, the QDOSS network (Downes 2006)<sup>16</sup> recognises that the Arts help with personal expression to overcome fear of failure concerning academic issues.

Key challenges include questions such as how widely is the key potential resource of creative and visual arts used in school and Out-of-School Services for emotional expression and development, as well as in developing self-esteem, problem solving and conflict resolution skills and how widely is drama, as well as other artistic media, employed as part of an integrated approach to developing literacy skills in after school projects.

## XI. After school and supports for parents minding children

Hennessy and Donnelly (2005) working with an Irish sample of children accessing after school programmes reported that parents felt homework clubs gave them more free time and helped them by providing assistance with homework. Moreover, Hennessy and Donnelly report that parents 'particularly value social opportunities'. Mulkerrins (2007), within an Irish context, discusses the lack of consultation between schools and working class homes. She found that many working class parents did not see themselves as having a part in the school system. Rather, they and, very often, the school viewed them as merely consumers in receipt of a service, which was being provided by the school.

Rourke's (1995) evaluation of the PESL Programme (now Oasis) in Blanchardstown also highlighted the importance of developing the quality of interaction between parents and young people, as well as teachers:

The PESL programme can only be truly effective if it also impacts on the quality of interaction between the parents/teachers and the young people. Hence the importance of involving parents and engaging the active support of teachers. Unless this happens the programme is unlikely to achieve more than providing the young people with some diversion and alternative activities for a couple of hours each week'. Need for 'a wider package or approach, involving teachers and parents (p. 21).

In addition Vandell, et al (1997) found the parents of younger children found the ASP more beneficial as it gave them more time for themselves, while parents of children across a range of ages acknowledged that homework assistance and supervision of their children are major benefits of ASP. Hennessy & Donnelly (2005) report that parents 'particularly valued the educational' aspect, whereas in general the children valued the activities clubs offered, while older children in particular enjoyed the time and chance to 'hang out' with friends.

## XII. After school and staff quality

Graham (2006) states that as the demand for ASP increases and as the need for such services has increased, the need to have skilled and knowledgeable staff working in these settings has become apparent. It is recognised that 'high-

<sup>16</sup> QDOSS is a network that comprises a range of stakeholders who share different perspectives, expertise and a common aim. QDOSS members include: Barnardos, Border Counties Childcare Network, Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Foróige, Limerick City Childcare Committee, National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, PLANET, School Completion Programme, Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Trim and Ballivor Community Childcare, and Youth Work Ireland. The central aim is to enhance and develop the field of Out-of-School services to influence and enable positive educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage

quality staff will produce a high-quality programme and conversely, low-quality staff will produce a low-quality programme' (Musson, 1999:213). According to Meagher-Lundberg and Podmore (1998:10), 'the most important ingredient of quality school-age childcare which meets the needs of children is the on-site adults'. Practitioners who perhaps have been working with younger children require appropriate training to work with the older age groups. Training, both informal and accredited, has been inconsistently available around Ireland and it has in the main been comprised of single vocational modules. The modular approach has served as a stop-gap in the absence of a full, sector specific programme.

Currently, there is an expectation that a module can fulfill the training needs of those working with school age children. Childcare awards currently available under FETAC Level 5 are tailored to the birth to 6 years age group and while there is some overlap in age and content, there are a number of factors to be considered which are specific to school age.

Halpern (1999) states that there is substantial agreement about the qualities that, collectively, constitutes "good enough" ASPs. Structural indicators include:

- adequate number of staff
- adequate level of staff literacy
- adequate facilities and equipment
- nutritious food.

Process indicators would include

- warm and supportive staff
- flexible and relaxed curriculum
- predictable environment
- opportunity to explore ideas
- feelings and identities
- avenues for self expression
- exposure to one's heritage and the larger culture
- time for play and fun.

An interesting feature of Halpern's staff quality framework is the focus on social, emotional and relational qualities and skills of staff. This is an important focus to be held throughout in any discussion of staff quality, in an Irish context regarding afterschool projects.

QDOSS (Downes 2006) highlights the need for staff continuity and working conditions that help provide sustained relationships over time. QDOSS also emphasises the importance of self evaluation as a process for management and staff to clarify what the service is aiming to achieve; to focus on the quality of all aspects of their service and reflect on current practice and provision. It is important in identifying and celebrating areas where the provision is good and needs to be maintained, and in identifying and prioritising areas which need to be improved. Information, training or resource needs along with plans for development are all part of the professional development and QDOSS recognises that self-evaluation is a systematic process involving all management, staff, parents and children.

Furthermore, QDOSS recognises the cyclical pattern which involves design, implementation, evaluation and modification. A key question which arises is the professional development of staff to undertake such evaluations.

# Section IV

## Methodology



A key objective of this review is to assess the quality and effects of CASPR's work on children, parents, adult participants (CE and JI participants) and the local community, in order to:

- Guide CASPR's future work
- Offer independent evaluation of the potential benefits of CASPR's activities.

To this end, the study examined the views of Dublin north inner-city children and adults accessing the services of CASPR, i.e. the service users, as well as the views of service providers, including local teachers.

Following such principles of examining the views of service users is consistent with Quinlan's (1998a) employment of child and youth centered research on the Early School Leavers project of Blanchardstown Youth Service and Keating's (1999) evaluation of the Fastrack to Information Technology (FIT) initiative in Blanchardstown. In contrast, Burtenshaw Kenny Associates' (2005) evaluation of the cross border elements of the Joint Education Development Initiative, JEDI, did not interview any of the service users and was limited to service providers.

The theoretical approach adopted in the current study is both process and outcome driven, as well as involving structural indicators. This wider focus on three types of indicators and benchmarks for progress tends to be neglected in much national and even international research on after-school projects but is a feature of the comparatively recent framework of the UN Rapporteur on the international right to health (see Hunt 2005, 2006). In the Irish context, it has been recommended by the QDOSS network (cf. Downes 2006) to examine afterschool projects through the lens of these three kinds of indicators, a recommendation reiterated more generally for examination of interventions designed to overcome social exclusion in education (Downes & Gilligan 2007). At an international level, Downes (2007) has applied these structural, process and outcome indicators to examination of early school leaving in Estonia. Moreover, Downes, Zule-

Lapimaa, Ivanchenko & Blumberg (2008) have adopted this framework for developing indicators to human trafficking in the Baltic States, and Downes (2010) employs a similar framework of indicators in examining access to education and lifelong learning across 12 European countries, as part of European and national strategies to overcome social exclusion.

Data collection was carried out through:

- focus groups
- Individual interviews
- qualitative questionnaires

Factors influencing the choice of methodology include the need to draw on the experiences of young people and adults accessing the services of CASPr within their community - to 'give voice' to participants' experience (Downes, 2003). The analytical approach employed was phenomenological. Phenomenology is based on the idea that experience, rather than simply factual content, reflects situations (Van Manen, 1990). A client-centered methodology was used with participants, echoing the approach employed with a similar sample in Dublin West by Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006). The participants were told from the outset of data collection that:

- they were not being judged;
- there were no right or wrong answers;
- every effort would be made to guarantee confidentiality of their answers;
- they could, at any time, refuse to answer a question or stop completely;
- their answers would not go beyond the researcher.

The research was guided by a list of well recognised ethical principles. Respect and honesty to all participants was achieved by respecting the right of a participant to withdraw at any time and be aware of their right to do so, answering questions about the research honestly and using pseudonyms on the written transcripts. Pseudonyms were also used in the data analysis. The raw data will be destroyed one year after the publication of the study. Parental consent was obtained by CASPr for the participating children and the children were also given the choice whether or not to engage with the review. They were informed that they could withdraw at any stage and did not have to answer any question they did not wish to answer. See Appendices for copies of informed consent letters and plain language statement.

## Focus Groups

Employing focus group research draws upon key respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences in order to facilitate the questions for the main data focus, the interviews. Focus group research elicits reactions by means of a dynamic that is not present in other methods. Unlike other methods, such as interviews, focus groups allow the researcher to elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. In addition, focus groups enable the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time. Focus group research includes as many perspectives as possible, seeking to explore attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences, (Denscombe, 2000, p.115) regarding the focus of the inquiry. These attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences, may be partially independent of the group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering. Moreover, Morgan (1988) asserts that the value of focus group research is the interaction it yields between the different members of the group (see also, Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). This interaction between participants emphasizes their view of the world, the language they use and their values and beliefs about a situation. This interactive factor also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences (Gibbs, 1997).

Three focus groups were held, comprising:

- Children currently attending the after school programme (ASP);
- A group of early school leavers currently attending a local alternative education programme;
- Home-School Liaison teachers.

The first two of these focus groups were used to determine questions for the main data focus, the interviews. This approach treats people not simply as objects of research but also as subjects, within an emancipatory research framework. The focus groups took place in January, April and May 2009 respectively.

## Interviews

Cohen and Manion (1980) explicate the value of interviews as a research technique. They propose that it is one of the more comprehensive methods, affording the researcher the opportunity to 'ask questions, probe and explore' as a result

of direct interaction in the interviews. This type of interview involves asking open-ended questions and probing, wherever necessary, to obtain rich purposeful data. In the main, it can be stated that interviewing as a research method provides a means of engaging with an individual at a level that may not be achieved by other methods. Moreover, Gray (2004) argues that an interview is the best form of research if the study is largely exploratory and involves examining feelings or attitudes. The use of this exploratory methodology allows the researcher to

- adjust later questions
- clarify issues
- follow new lines of inquiry
- probe for detailed information.

It allows deeper understanding of participants' beliefs, values, views and meanings, eliciting rich, detailed, qualitative data and it helps the researcher to understand participants' personal experiences and how these have been shaped. The study employed the guided approach as a framework for interviews. When employing this approach for interviewing:

- A checklist was prepared to address the relevant topics to be covered;
- A series of semi-structured, open-ended questions, around key issues, topics and themes which emerged from focus groups, were prepared in advance, (see Appendix A);
- The interviewer was, nevertheless, free to explore, probe and ask follow-on questions, where necessary.

Wenden (1982) formulated a checklist as a basis to interview participants. She asserts that the general interview guide approach is useful as it 'allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters of the study' (p 39).

- 26 individual interviews with children currently participating in CASPr were undertaken. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland, highlights that children and young people have a right to be consulted and to have their voices heard in matters related to their own welfare (see also the National Conjoint Child Health Committee Report 2000 on direct consultation with young people).

The aim of the interviews with the children was to gauge how effective the programme is concerning:

- social support (as measured by an adaptation of Mc Keown et al's 2001 indicators previously used by Downes, Maunsell & Ivers, 2006);
- academic achievement;
- improvements in social factors (through Halpern's 2000 indicators).

- Time/sampling/sampling logic:

- The criterion used for sampling was that of time, i.e., a dateline sampling procedure involving those service users who were attending the service at a given point in time;
- The time criterion employed was that the service users began attending the service before October 2008;
- A sampling logic of maximum variation (Miles & Huberman 1994; Downes & Murray 2002) included a request for a proportion of service users (within the sample) to be representative of international pupils, as well as including responses from both genders;
- It is not being claimed that the chosen sample contains two other types of sampling outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994), namely, homogenous or *necessarily* typical case i.e., the normal/average client availing of CASPr.

- 6 individual interviews with current staff, including two senior project workers, were undertaken. The aims of the interviews with the current workers were fourfold:

- To obtain the experience of the service from the service providers' perspective;
- To gauge how effective they believed the service was being delivered;
- To examine the detailed range of perceptions of issues and problems with the day to day delivery of the service to local children, as all of the staff had received their training at CASPr;
- To seek to gauge how effective the training given to staff was when delivering the service.

- 7 individual interviews with parents of children currently using the service took place. The aim of this was:

- To find out what difference participation in the project makes to them, their children and their home lives.

- 10 qualitative questionnaires were employed with the past participants of the training programme. The aim of this was twofold:

- To track past participants of the training programme;
- To gauge the impact, if any, the training they received had on their life and their employability.

Every effort was made to administer the questionnaires on the premises of CASPr in the presence of members of the research team. However, due to other commitments not all of these training participants were available to attend, and thus it was decided to post the questionnaires to their homes with a return address to the research team. Two participants completed them in CASPr while seven completed them off site. There were no refusals from any children or adults.

## Participating schools

Rutland Street NS; Gardiner Street NS; Marlborough Street NS; O'Connell's NS.

- Four individual interviews with class teachers took place
- Four individual interviews with HSL teachers took place

The aim of these interviews was:

- To get teachers' views on the effects of participation in CASPr for children, families and the schools.

## Data analysis

To enhance validity, a summary of the main points was given at the end of all three focus groups and participants were asked if it was an accurate portrayal of what had been discussed. An idiographic approach to analysis was adopted (idiographic analysis focuses on a complete, in-depth understanding of the meaning of contingent, accidental, and often subjective phenomena). Each transcript was examined in detail. Patterns in the data were then clustered into themes and sub-themes. The themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they formed a coherent pattern and recoding took place where necessary. The texts and emerging themes were reviewed by the researcher. A triangulation method was then utilized. Any differences in interpretation by the researchers were resolved through discussion. In reporting the results, the identities of the participants have been anonymised and participants have been given a pseudonym.

## Assessment of indicators of participation in the project (Structural and Process Indicators)

### Structural Indicators

Number of services/centres  
 Number of clients/children  
 Number of staff  
 Number of trainees  
 Staff turnover

### Process Indicators

Engagement with the service  
 Quality of relations between staff and children

## Assessment of indicators of outcomes of the project's work (Outcome indicators)

Academic performance<sup>17</sup>  
 Care  
 Nutrition  
 Collaboration with parents  
 Collaboration with schools and other services  
 Fear of failure  
 Development of initiative

<sup>17</sup> Including homework completed/ declared statements from children-teachers/completed homework as motivation for school attendance



## Limitations of the Study

The limited timeframe of the study meant that it was not possible to take a developmental focus on individual children to chart their progress over time through their participation in CASPR (see Kelly 1999, Downes 2003, on the importance of ipsative assessment where a pupil's performance is compared with their previous performance). Moreover, a control group of comparable pupils was not included in this evaluation.

It is recognized that a focus on outcomes is of particular difficulty where there is a complex system of environmental interventions and factors (Downes 2007) and any gains in an outcome dimension such as academic performance or school attendance may be attributable to school based factors as much as after-school project effects. A unidirectional input-output approach to evaluating afterschool projects ignores the key role of supporting and necessary conditions for the afterschool 'input' to have causal efficacy (Downes 2007).

While some of the questions adopted were frequently reproduced verbatim from McKeown et al (2001), it needs to be acknowledged that the much smaller sample size per project and non-random sampling in our study requires caution with regard to any direct comparison with McKeown et al's results. Furthermore, a limitation of our study is in the relatively small sample size being adopted in those interviewed. The sample is , however, approximately 25% of the children attending CASPr.

Another limit to the review is that the study did not engage in a financial audit of the service.

# Section V

## Results



The first section of results reports quantitative findings compiled on the basis of a revised framework of Mc Keown et al's (2001) contemporary family support analysis, as previously used by Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) with a similar sample, and Halpern's (1999) framework of qualities that, collectively, constitute good quality after school services. The second section reports findings from the qualitative interviews and focus groups with: children, parents, staff, past trainees, early school leavers and teachers

### Section One

The following results were compiled on the basis of a revised framework of Mc Keown et al's (2001) contemporary family support analysis:

1. Level of Client Satisfaction with Local Services
2. Engagement with the service

Based on Halpern's (1999) framework of qualities that, collectively, constitute good quality after school services, the following issues were examined:

1. Nutrition
2. Collaboration with the schools
3. Social Support
4. Collaboration with parents
5. Academic performance/homework completed
6. Development of initiative/leadership
7. Transitions

The data was analyzed and is presented under these nine discrete themes. Interviews included all of the relevant stakeholders; Hennessy & Donnelly (2005) highlight the importance that each group of stakeholders will have a different and possibly unique view of a service.

## Level of Client Satisfaction with Local Services

**Table A**

How frequently are the following statements true?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	No Answer
I was made to feel welcome by CASPr	19	1	3	2	1
I was listened to by CASPr	17	4	5	-	-
I was understood by CASPr	17	2	6	1	-
I enjoy coming to CASPr	20	2	4	-	-
Staff in CASPr genuinely care about you	19	2	4	-	1

- It is evident from the results above that there is a high level of satisfaction with CASPr among the children.
- This high satisfaction level applies to both male and female service users as there was no noticeable gender differences observed.

This was also noted by Hennessy and Donnelly (2005) who found that there was no 'striking difference' between the genders as to the satisfaction of either the services or the activities offered.

As may be seen from the figures below children also reported high levels of satisfaction with the staff of CASPr.

**Table B**

Statements about quality of staff	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	No Answer
Staff in CASPr know how to respect people	17	4	4	1	-
You are treated fairly by CASPr	16	5	5	-	-
Staff in CASPr are very good at what they do	22	2	2	-	-

- "Yes there's always a leader to give us help" (M, 9)
- "They [the leaders] get along with us mostly - if we're sad they come to us"(M,9)
- "They take care of us - they don't let us go out in the rain" (M, 9)

However a small number of children stated:

- "Some leaders don't [genuinely care about you]" (F, 8)
- "Sometimes they [the leaders] are not a bit fair" (F, 9)
- "Sometimes they [leaders] don't treat me fair" (M, 9)

## Perceived Changes to Child's Life

The majority of children (21 out of 26) interviewed perceived that their life had changed for the better, while 1 child said her life had changed for the worse (see below).

**Table C**

Influence of the project	Much better	Better	Same	Worse	Much worse
How has life changed since coming to the project/club	10	11	4	1	-

- "Life is good - we go loads of places" (M, 6)
- "More friends to play with" (M, 6)
- "Better; all my friends like me" (M, 6)
- "Better - 'when I'm at home I don't really have anything to do' (F 9)

- "Changed because you sometimes go home and be bored- but now I'm happy and not bored" (F, 10)
- "Better – they bring you on outings and swimming" (M, 10)
- "Better – let you go on trips if you're good" (M, 8)
- "Better – made new friends in the club". [sometimes he feels he is not being treated fairly] (M, 9)
- "Better – I have more friends" (F, 8)
- "Good" (M, 7)
- "Same - I didn't even change a bit" (F, 8)
- "Very good – they take care of us – they don't let us go out in the rain" (M, 9)

This individual response is of concern:

"Worse – I only come because [friend] is here / cos I don't really like that; leader always roars at me" (F, 8)

In addition the majority of participants (22 out of 26) also thought that their schoolwork was much better or better since coming to the project, while four said it had stayed the same.

**Table D**

<b>Influence of the project</b>	<b>Much better</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Worse</b>	<b>Much worse</b>
How has your school work changed since you came to CASPr	13	8	5	-	-

Four children explained their answers:

- "Much better, because after school I had nothing to do and my Mam put me in" (F, 9).
- "Better because if you were at home you would just play and at the homework club you do activities and stuff like that and get help with the homework" (F, 9).
- "I'm very improved at school" (M, 9)
- "I've gotten more smarter" (M, 10)

**Table E**

<b>Personal impact of participant attending a service</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
The project/club been good for me	20	4	2	-

**Table F**

<b>General impact of helpfulness of the project on other areas of life</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Bad</b>	<b>Very bad</b>	<b>No Answer</b>
Helpfulness of the project/club with difficulties at school	15	7	3	-	-	1

***Have you noticed any changes in your child since coming to the project? If yes, what kind?***

The majority of the parents (6 out of 7) said that they had noticed a positive change in their child since coming to the programme:

- "Maybe she is more confident, what would be good too is the kids out of the other class, they would be in there so she would, I think she would find it more capable of dealing with, you know say she would be in first class and there would be other ones that are in second class, she would interact more with them, good ways and bad ways, she would have her little problems, but she is learning how to deal with them because they are all sort of together"(Parent 5).
- "Ah yes definitely, she is much better with the little ones" (Parent 1).
- "Yes she's starting to mix more" (Parent 3).
- "He's not as cheeky" (Parent 4)

However, one parent said:

- "I did notice a change, but it's not to do with the project, she's getting cheekier, I think she's at that age" (Parent 2).

## Engagement with the service

QDOSS recognizes the central importance of social and emotional criteria for the needs of children and young people in the referral process and the importance that Out-of-School services provide an environment to feel and be safe, develop their own thoughts, explore feelings, learn to develop friendship, learn how to handle interpersonal conflict and that children and young people are given time to relax and play. These were central in the responses across all of the interviews.

### Social opportunities

The results of the study indicate that parents and children place a high value on participation in the project. Parents placed value on the social opportunities for their children and the educational support that their children gain from attending the project as well as other opportunities that children might not have if they were not attending CASPr.

- “She gets to meet other kids. We live on a main road so she has nowhere to play when she goes home” (Parent 1).
- “The trips, she’s mad about the trips and the summer project” (Parent 2).
- “He meets other children and it helps his English” (Parent 6).

This was echoed by the teachers in their interviews who also valued the social aspect as was judged by their answers to the following question.

### *What is the major advantage of having a child go to or attend CASPr?*

- “Socialising with other children, I find that really important for the kids because as much as there are things missing it’s really this that’s really important because otherwise they are stuck in the flats” (HSL Teacher 1).
- “Social network, socially the needs of safe place, the time given to them by an adult, and the range of activities” (Teacher 2).
- “The social aspect then, it’s just kids maybe that are not going to get that...maybe with a specialised background. Some children from other countries as well who would be very isolated” (Teacher 3).
- “ the only alternative for them if they don’t attend CASPr is to play with the traffic because I think the parks are very small and there is nowhere else for them to go, unless they go up town” (Senior Project Worker 1).

### Free time for parents

In addition, the parents valued the free time, by providing assistance with homework and offering peace of mind regarding the care of their children. This supports the earlier findings of Hennessy and Donnelly (2005) working with an Irish sample of children accessing after school programmes who reported that parents felt homework clubs gave them more free time and helped them by providing help with homework. Moreover, Hennessy and Donnelly 2005 report that parents ‘particularly value social opportunities’. These findings were echoed by the current sample:

- “I also have a three year old and it gives me time with her, I think that’s very important” (Mother 4).
- “I find it great it means I can go to work and I know she not just stuck in the flats” (Mother, 2)

### Expectations of the project

All of the parents interviewed appeared to have a clear understanding of what the children did at CASPr; in one parent’s voice:

- “The main thing is they get the homework done which is brilliant and they go on great trips, they go to St. Anne’s park and they go out to the aquatic centre, they do actually lots of things, it’s actually brilliant”.

Upon analysing the children’s interviews it was clear there existed age-related expectations of the project. Three of the children said that their friends from outside the project thought that the project was:

- “For babies” (M, 8)
- “For little babies” (F, 7)
- “Stupid and for babies” (F, 9)

Age-related differences underline the importance of providing children with developmentally appropriate activities and acknowledging in the provision of services that children’s needs and preferred activities are age-related, as previously found by Donnelly & Hennessy (2005).

***If I asked you what would it be like for you if you could no longer come to CASPr? Would it be much better, better, the same, worse or much worse?***

**Table G**

much better	better	the same	worse	much worse	Don't know
-	2	7	7	9	1

Some participants elaborated:

- "Worse – wouldn't get your homework done" (F, 8)
- "Worse cos it's very exciting" (F, 10)
- "It would be worse cos I'd be in the flats doing nothing" (F, 10)

One parent illustrates the clear loss for the child:

- "It wouldn't make a difference to me really, well it would have when I worked but it would be for her, with the homework and I find her communication is great with other kids and I think she can actually do her homework with all these children around, if you know what I mean, so that's good to be able to do that at her age, she would be at a loss I would find. She would only come home and look at, be on the internet or look at the telly for the two hours she could be in the club, so to me it would be a loss to her socialising as well. I think their social skills mean more to them really than anything" (Parent 1).

### **Relations at CASPr**

The need for a child to have just one person, whether a friend or family member or a member of the community they live in to whom they can turn during difficult times is of utmost importance, particularly during adolescence (Gilligan, 1982; Taylor et al 1995). It is well recognised that trust and communication with just one significant other is key for positive mental health for those at risk of socio-economic disadvantage (Levitt 1991; Antonucci 1990). The majority of children (n=19) interviewed said that they would turn to a staff member, at CASPr if they had a problem.

Half of the children (n=13) interviewed had at least one sibling that attended the project before them, thus CASPr may represent somewhere that they go to, a place that their siblings went before them a familiar and consistent place.

When asked what their friends thought of CASPr almost two thirds of the participants responded positively (n=16).

Some elaborated:

- "Great" (n=2)
- "Very good" (n=6)
- "Good" (n=1).

Some further elaborated their positive remarks:

- "They say ah cool it's brilliant it looks fun" (M, 9)
- "They think it's still good" (F, 10)
- "Think it's good" (M, 10)

Others said:

- "They don't like it" (F, 9)
- "They think I should quit it/they think it's boring/they are jealous" (M, 8)
- "They don't care" (M, 9)
- "They don't know but I say it's good" (F, 8)
  
- "No friends outside of club" (M, 7)
  
- "They wait at home for me" (F, 6)
- "Never asked them" (M, 6)
- "They think it is fun" (M, 6)
- "D (8) my ex-friend [sic] and A (9), my friend, were here but they quit cos they thought it was crap" (F, 7)
  
- "Say nothing about the club" (F, 6)
- "Nothing" (F, 6)

The majority of children interviewed said that they made new friends when they came to CASPr - in the voice of one child:

- "I met L and now she's my best friend, cos I see her the most" (F, 9)

**Table H**

<b>How well do you think the project/ club works with young people</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>good</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Bad</b>	<b>Very bad</b>	<b>No Answer</b>
	19	4	1	-	-	2

#### **What is the perceived uniqueness of CASPr?**

- "This project is established so it's well known, that's the first thing and I would imagine because its home grown people know about it started off in the community so it's a community" (Club Manager 1).
- "we run a service that makes a difference, we can see the difference but I definitely think that the input has to be obviously from the workers as well because they feel that they own this and that's rightly so, that's what kind of keeps the service going because it's a community service but I do think one of the driving things would be our chairman". (Senior Project Worker 1)
- "I'd say we are focused. I think there is a means to an end with whatever CASPr does, and this probably seems very biased but I believe that the chairman up here is very visioned, very pragmatic and he is this type of man that sees things, that doesn't just say it, it happens, and it happens with his support and I think that's what sets us apart, his involvement would set us apart as well". (Senior Project Worker 1)

## **Nutrition**

The need for a child to have at least one hot meal a day is well recognised within the literature (Barnardos 2008; Downes et al, 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007; Combat Poverty 2006). Over one quarter of Children (n=7) interviewed in the current study indicated that they preferred the days that the hot meals were served, as opposed to the days when sandwiches were offered. In addition, one child, when asked what was your favourite thing about CASPr responded "The food" (F, 7) and another said "making rice krispie cakes" (F, 6)

In addition, one of the parents, when asked what they valued about the programme noted

- "The fact that they are fed, cos my little one won't come in for her dinner once she's out". (Parent 3).

In addition, cooking was a favourite activity for half of the children. QDOSS in their 2006 Agenda for Development stressed the importance of continuity with regards to nutrition and called for the development of a strategy of cooking skills for pupils. QDOSS also highlighted the need for a State strategy to build kitchens in all new school buildings and after school provision to develop kitchen facilities in existing facilities.

Moreover, cooking facilities were mention by two staff members when asked if you could change one thing about CASPr what would it be,

- "the cooking facilities (in Mount joy Square).
- "the Kitchen" (in Mount joy Square).

## **Collaboration with the schools**

The majority of teachers and HSL teachers (N=7) were very happy with the existing level of dialogue between the school and CASPr as illustrated by the following:

- "Yes I could honestly say I've got a good relationship with CASPr. They've been very good to me in terms of when I've asked for support for parents. I would say that they've been very open to me and open to us and getting support" (HSL Teacher 1).

#### **How can CASPr improve their relations with families?**

- "I don't know. The guys [CASPr] are really clued into the needs of the families, they know them so well" (HSL Teacher 2).

- “They are doing all they can I think, maybe something practical like running courses for parents” (HSL Teacher 1).

***What can be done to improve partnership?***

- “I would love to be able to say to one of the teachers, come on over and we have four kids who need extra help with reading and I would want the teacher to come up as part of the team of my staff, not separate because I believe that the only way that we are ever going to keep the community on board is making sure that they are part of it and its not having the teacher up there and the girls down here there would have to be a partnership” (Senior Project Worker 1).

***What changes if any would you like to see take place in local schools?***

- “I would love the local schools to be able to say to us, we will give you a teacher to support our staff and guide them and to build a relationship with the children, that’s what I would love, to be able to come over and our staff not feel anyway undermined, it’s about teamwork” (Senior Project Worker 1).
- “I would imagine that in an ideal world because schools close at 2.30 every day and they being empty, that if they let us use those for after school activities. In the area we wouldn’t have the problem of premises and every child would get an opportunity to go to an afterschool club. That’s a big issue because those buildings are totally empty and we struggle with the buildings, we have two but we could fill another two quite easily” (Senior Project Worker 2).

**Need for Improved Targeting of Pupils at Risk of Early School Leaving**

***How in your opinion can local schools better accommodate the needs of at risk of early school leaver pupils?***

- “By identifying them as soon as possible and by homing in to all the agencies that are around here, because I don’t believe any of us can do it on our own, we all need each other and an example would have been developing a childcare protocol and we have because there is so much work being done, was being done informally on the ground and great work, but I believe if we work as an integrated approach and we can identify kids very quickly and put the supports in, in order to support them asap”. (Senior Project Worker 2)
- “Like I said those building are empty after 2.30, open the doors, pool resources, that’s the answer open the doors!” (Senior Project Worker 2).

The need to establish an integrated response to such children at risk is crucial. CASPr has been involved in an initiative, the Young People at Risk Initiative (YPAR), since its inception in 2004.<sup>18</sup> In particular CASPr has been an active core agency involved in the development of the YPAR Protocol. The Protocol is a formal agreement between local agencies who agree to coordinate their services to support specific children at risk and their families.

***If you could change one thing about the school system what would it be?***

Three of the five (Early School Leaving) participants that took part in the focus group spoke of the need for teachers to treat them fairly:

- “That the teachers treat us fair”
- “To get them [teachers] to play fair”
- “To respect us and like ‘D’ says, be fair with us”

US adolescents cite a sense of isolation and lack of personally meaningful relationships at school as equal contributors to academic failure and to their decisions to drop out of school (Institute for Education and Transformation 1992; Wehlage & Rutter 1986). Meier (1992) cites personalized, caring relationships with teachers as a prerequisite for high school-level reform. It is noteworthy that all, bar one, of the children attending CASPr felt that they were treated fairly by the staff. However, this perception of that child and views that a staff member ‘roars’ at her needs to be addressed by the CASPr team and staff to ensure that a relational environment is consistently maintained. The theme of interpersonal relations as key to staying on at school was recently emphasised in the ESRI report, *No Way Back* (2010).

<sup>16</sup> YPAR seeks to promote interagency working locally. It is an interagency initiative made of representatives of agencies from both the statutory and voluntary sectors in the north east inner city. It aims to establish appropriate interagency structures and mechanisms to co-ordinate, integrate services and share resources to support children and families at risk



## Social Support

As noted earlier, the need for a child to have just one 'significant other' - a friend or family member or a member of the community they live in - that they can turn to is of utmost importance, particularly during adolescence (Gilligan, 1982; Taylor et al 1995).

When asked, ***If you had a problem would you go to someone at CASPr*** most of the children said "yes" or "sometimes" with one child saying "no".

One participant elaborated "ye I'd go to my leader cos she listens to me" (F, 9).

Emotional security, i.e. the need for continual support, is paramount for young people growing up in areas affected by socio-economic disadvantage in Ireland (Downes, Maunsell and Ivers 2006, Downes and Maunsell 2007).

### ***If you needed help would you go to the staff at CASPr?***

Most of the respondents, 25 out of a total of 26, said yes.

Some elaborated:

- "Yes, [leader] and my aunty [who also works in the project]" (F, 6)
- "Yes - I'd just say [leader] could I have help" (F, 9)
- "Yes to ... [leader]" (F, 8)
- "Yes I would always" (M, 9)

One of the children during the course of her interview said:

- "They don't hear me when I talk to them. They [the leaders] always talk to each other". (F, 9)

While another said:

- "They [the leaders] get along with us mostly - if we're sad they come to us" (M, 9)

Over a quarter of the children interviewed (n=7) had in fact turned to the staff at CASPr for help. It was evident from the past participants that CASPr operates an open door policy as is shown in the responses to the same question. Furthermore some trainees (n=2) said that they had turned for help to the staff at CASPr in the past six months, despite having left the project up to four years ago. This was also echoed by the staff:

- "they would still call me sometimes, they live in the area so we would meet on the street and I would meet for a coffee and if I can help it doesn't mean Oh sorry you no longer work for us, I cant.. You know so I would still link in with the people so it's very much on going" (Senior Project Worker 2).

### **Providing continual stable figures**

It is notable that CASPr has quite a low turnover of staff particularly over the past five years. An important aspect of drug prevention programmes in the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 is to "seek to strengthen resilience amongst young people in or out of school by fostering positive stable relationships with family or key community figures especially in the early years..." (p.98). However, in contrast with the relative stability of the salaried staff, turnover is an in-built feature with CE workers, who get a maximum of 3 years with the project funded by FÁS.

## Collaboration with parents

Vandell et al (1997) reported that the parents of younger children found the after school project (ASP) more beneficial as it gave them more time for themselves, while parents of children across a range of ages acknowledged that homework assistance and supervision of their children are the major benefits of the ASP. Similarly, Hennessy & Donnelly (2005) report that parents 'particularly valued the educational' aspect. In this current study all of the parents that were interviewed said that they were happy with the existing level of dialogue between themselves and CASPr. Moreover, when asked if they were happy with the service that their child received at CASPr all of the parents said yes. The following illustrates this:

- "Yes absolutely, we'd both be lost without them [CASPr]" (Parent 2).

In addition, teachers also noted the value of participation:

- "I think if they are happy in their relationships down there, you know they get on with the staff and that their parents get on with the staff. Parents are what keep the kids in CASPr if they are getting on with the staff, that's magic!" (Teacher 2).

Moreover, all of the parents interviewed, when asked if they had a problem would they speak to someone at CASPr, responded with "yes".

One parent said:

- “Yes, absolutely sure I have and they were great, they got me the help I needed” (Parent 3).

In addition all of the parents had a positive referral experience, when asked how they found the process, responses included:

- “Fine, I was told about the service by the school I applied and he was in, it was great” (Parent 5).
- “It was fine, very quick” (Parent 2).
- “The girls were great; I had another child in there before so it was grand” (Parent 4).
- “Good yeah great” (Parent 3).
- “I was surprised at how quick they were” (Parent 1).
- “They were so good to me” (Parent 6).

Moreover, when asked: ***Can you imagine what it would be like if your child could no longer come to the project,*** parents responses reflect the immediate impact this would have on them and their children:

- “Awful” (Parent 5).
- “Terrible, I don’t know what we would do” (Parent 3)
- “I would be lost” (Parent 1).
- “He would be so sad” (Parent 6).
- “I would have to stop working” (Parent 2).
- “Don’t say that! I don’t know what I’d do” (Parent 4).

At the project sites, 40 out of 50 of the parents regularly talk to the staff about their child’s progress, and engage in Parent Coffee mornings and Information Sessions. The Crèche staff said that all 16 of their parents engage in this way. Overall, that is 96 out of 116 family groups. Eight of the staff of CASPr have children in the Crèche and/or after schools.

## **Academic performance/homework completed**

***How you think your school work has changed since you started at CASPr, would you say it’s much better, better, the same, worse or much worse?***

Almost all of the children interviewed perceived a difference in their school work since coming to CASPr; much better (n=14) or better (n=8) while four said their school work had stayed the same. Three explained their response further:

- “Much better, because when I go home my little sisters do be all around me” (F, 6).
- “I’m very improved at school” (M, 9)
- “I’ve gotten more smarter” (M, 10).

While another participant stated:

- “It’s better because I won student of the month” (F, 10).

However, one child said:

- “[When I do homework] they tell me the answers but they [the leaders] are [sometimes] wrong. When I do me homework the teacher corrects them wrong”. (F, 9).

This raised the issues of ensuring that the staff are trained to let the pupils engage in the reasoning process for their homework and not just to provide the ‘answer’.

Teachers also spoke of the benefit of homework support when asked about the advantages of having a child attend CASPr:

- “Some parents are fantastic at doing the homework with the kids, really supportive, others are not and so the kids don’t get that support” (HSL teacher 1).
- “They [the children attending CASPr] come into school happier as they have their homework done which makes all the difference” (Teacher 4).

It is noteworthy that none of the teachers mentioned academic benefits of attending CASPr. Each of the teachers was explicitly asked if he/she had noticed a difference in school work of the children in their classrooms that attended CASPr, against those that did not attend. All of the teachers said no, they did not notice a difference in schoolwork. Moreover, they expressed concerns around the standard of homework as this may be inconsistent across projects depending on the level of literacy of the leader assigned to a child.

## Development of initiative/leadership

The following section examines the impact of the training initiative for adult learners.

### ***How do you feel the experience of working in CASPr changed your life?***

The majority of past trainees were working in a related field (n=6) and also a larger majority (N=8) said that they had grown in confidence, and n=2 stated that they had been given the opportunity to act as role models to their children and or friends.

## Challenging fatalism

Interestingly one third of the women (n=3), when asked what they had gained from being at CASPr stated that CASPr gave them 'hope'.

- "Hope for me and my son"
- "A bit of hope, that I could do something"
- "A job, the feeling that there was hope for me"

### ***How has your life changed since leaving CASPr?***

The majority of the past participants of the trainee programme (n=8) noted better job prospects, and broader opportunities available to them.

Others spoke in terms of personal identity:

- "much improved, I am buying a house now that would have never happened, without the job [CASPr] it's got me out of the inner-city out of the rut (F, age 27, past trainee).
- "Changed big time, more money, grown as a person, more confident" (F, 30 past trainee)

Moreover when asked ***what progress have you seen occurring in the area compared to five years ago***, the Senior Project Worker 2 had this to say:

- "The progress I've seen is the confidence in the young girls coming through here, definitely coming to train and they are very confident about their work and their handwriting, five years ago you had to hold somebody's hand walking through the door they would be that nervous but the confidence, I've seen the confidence across the way".

## Transitions

Transitional periods are often a difficult time for students particularly the transition from primary to secondary school. This is further exacerbated by educational disadvantage where resources and supports are limited (O'Connor, 2002). While CASPr does not cater for children beyond sixth class there are a number of young people that 'drop in' for individual support.

When asked, ***if they could change one thing about CASPr what would it be***, one parent said: "the age they leave at, my little one left in 5th and then the next year she went to secondary and she was lost" (Parent 4).

When asked ***what could be done to keep young people in school?***

- "Well I think the first thing it would do would be develop relationships between teachers and parents, that's the first thing, the second thing, yes of course because I would hope that eventually, you know at the end of the day that we have a centre of excellence particularly for children, all the children who come here are definitely going to go on to secondary school because they have the capability of doing it and they are supported in every way to get them there, you know that's what I would want" (Senior Project Worker 1).

Moreover, two of the early school leavers responded:

- "Have more places like this to support kids".
- "Yeah somewhere that will look out for you".

In addition one person spoke of her returning to education as part of the training programme:

- "God, I couldn't have done it without [leader] she helped me every step of the way if it was left to me I would have jacked it in but she was there all the time encouraging me, you know" (current staff member and past trainee).

# Section VI

## Key Findings

- The results of the study indicate that the overwhelming majority of parents and children place a high value on participation in the after-school project. Parents particularly valued the social opportunities for their children. The opportunity to spend time with friends in a safe place, an opportunity that they would not get if they stayed at home, as parents felt that there were few safe supervised places for children to interact in their community. Parents also believed that the project allowed them free time, and helped them by providing assistance with homework and offering peace of mind regarding the care and safety of their children. When parents were asked to reflect on how it would be for them if their child could no longer attend CASPr, perceived effects appeared to be direct and extensive in nature.
- The children valued the activities that the project offered, particularly those that take place off site such as swimming, visits to the park, and overnight trips to the Cavan Centre. Similarly the children placed value on the opportunity to spend time with friends, particularly the younger children. Moreover, the children's ratings of their project, as measured by an adaptation of Mc Keown's 1999 indicators, previously used by Downes, Maunsell & Ivers, 2006, were all very high, suggesting that they were generally very satisfied with the service they were receiving. The children's enjoyment of their experiences in the project was also mentioned by a number of the parents as an important feature of the service.
- The fact that referrals take place through a range of sources, including local parents, schools and other community agencies is a significant strength of CASPr in reaching those children who need the support the most. In contrast, Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) highlighted the narrow solely school based referral process of an afterschool project in a School Completion Programme in the Blanchardstown area. A profile of potential early school leavers in that area revealed that most were not attending any afterschool project.
- This referral process in the CASPr project is to be commended as it amounts to an outreach dimension to reach those who may be potentially alienated from the 'system', including the school system (see also NALA 2008 on the importance of word of mouth rather than traditional informational approaches in reaching those with highest need, including literacy problems).
- An additional positive feature of this wide referral process, beyond simply a school based referral, is that it offers more potential for reaching withdrawn children and not simply those exhibiting what is termed 'externalising' problematic behaviours in school. International and national research highlights that teachers tend to overlook the needs of the more withdrawn children with 'internalising' problems (Doll 1996; Downes 2004), such as depression, anxiety disorders, somatic disorders. Children with such internalizing problems are as much at risk of early school leaving as those with externalizing problems. As the interviewed NEPS psychologist in Blanchardstown noted in Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) report:
 

'Quiet ones don't get referred from school, same level of issues going on at home but they bottle it up, just as destructive for a young person' (p34).
- In the main, teachers' evaluations of children's time at CASPr were positive. They highly rated socio-emotional development, the fact that the project offered a safe and pleasant place to be and provided parents with a positive model of accessible and inexpensive pastimes. However, they did express concerns around the standard of homework as this may be inconsistent across projects depending on the level of literacy of the leader assigned to a child. In addition the need for more consistency regarding regular meeting and feedback sessions was also expressed. There is a clear need for collaboration between schools and CASPr. Traditionally these were viewed as separate services,

serving the same group, however, there currently exists an opportunity for real collaboration rather than merely contracting out afterschool services. Tett et al's (2001) discussion of collaboration between schools and community agencies in tackling social exclusion contrasts collaboration with simply 'contracting out' interventions and describes collaboration in terms of to 'develop, manage, deliver, fund and evaluate' activities.

- The relations and interactions among staff and children in the club were, also, given high ratings. These findings are supported by earlier findings of Rosenthal & Vandell (1996) who reported that children's ratings of their childcare programmes were related to staff-child interactions. The perspectives on after-school care explored in the current study can also be compared for shared priorities in service provision. Interviews with parents and children highlighted many of the same aspects of the club as valuable or enjoyable, e.g. the opportunities for social activity and to do things you would not normally do at home, such as go on outings.
- During the interviews it became apparent that there were age-related differences in experiences and expectations of children. Over half of the children interviewed said that their friends from outside the project thought that the project was "babyish". When asked if they thought it was babyish half of the children said that they sometimes thought it was. It is vital that after school services provide children with developmentally appropriate activities acknowledging children's needs and preferred activities. Clubs need to provide a sufficient range of activities to appeal to the age range of children that they are serving, as previously found by Hennessy & Donnelly (2005).
- CASPr is quite a unique project for a number of reasons, namely: its organic approach to the community, the provision of a continuum of care while the low turnover of staff ensures that the child has continual stable figures in their lives. Moreover, it is evident that CASPr supports the family not just the child in a practical and relational way.
- All of the children said that their school work had become much better or better since coming to the programme, although this was not mentioned by the teachers. Parents agreed that the homework is an important part of the services provided. Children's interviews suggested that many of them valued the activities available in the Clubs, particularly the overnight and week away to Cavan. These in turn were also valued by parents. CASPr runs a Summer Project at both ASPs which include day-trips and weekends away at the Cavan Outdoor Pursuits Centre. This trip was considered one of the best things about CASPr by those children who had been on it.
- It was evident from the findings that CASPr has a vital role to play in Dublin North East Inner City where they serve as an important link between families and schools. The Project is open to all children within the community attending first to sixth class. This is a strength in that it is a general non-stigmatizing service but also can cater for those who are most in need, including families experiencing intergenerational drug use. It offers children a safe environment in which to learn new skills, to spend time with friends and develop new relationships; moreover the project plays a valuable supporting role for families in their community.
- A key theme which emerges from some of the parents' voices is that CASPr gives them 'hope'. This is reiterated by the consistent communication from the children that the trips to a variety of places were extremely enjoyable and gave them something to look forward to. In other words, CASPr is providing a buttress against fatalism, the feeling that nothing can be done, which has already been highlighted as being a risk factor for drug use and other self-destructive behaviours and behaviours harmful to others.

# Recommendations:

## Building on Strengths and Areas for Development

### **Holistic Intervention**

It is evident from the range of participants interviewed that CASPr goes beyond the current role of 'afterschool programme'. CASPr has evolved into a holistic community development programme, serving the needs of children, parents, families, schools and the community at large, providing emotional, social and practical support to each service user, while engaging in training and education programmes. Thus, CASPr would benefit greatly by a reframing to encapsulate all the work that the programme engages in - emotional support, family support, and peer training, after schools club and so on.

Incorporating leadership training skills, peer mentoring and promoting active decision making into their programme would benefit the children at all levels. However, the older children that remain at CASPr until fifth and sixth class would greatly benefit from these skills prior to entering secondary. Both peer mentoring and leadership training have yielded excellent results with groups experiencing social exclusion in the US (see also Murphy 2007 on peer mentoring approaches at primary level in a DEIS school in Tallaght).

CASPr is therefore emerging as a project engaging with at least three levels – afterschool projects, including emotional and social support, a family support project and a lifelong learning community project and resource. To give recognition to this wider brief, it is recommended that CASPr slightly amend its name to CASSPr – Community After-School and Support Project.

### **Life Skills**

Life skills could be further developed in the form of cooking, health and nutrition lessons by making these a part of the core programme. These are vital skills for all children, however, they are particularly valuable skills to acquire in traditional 'disadvantaged' areas where poverty is perpetuated (Combat Poverty, 2006). QDOSS, in their 2006 Agenda for Development, state that among current challenges with regard to nutrition is the need for the development of a strategy of cooking skills for pupils and to maximize parental involvement in targeted life skills training for children and young people. Taking into account that half of the children surveyed stated that cooking was their favourite activity, programmes should be put in place to facilitate both children and parents to enhance their knowledge of nutrition, cookery and awareness of the link between good nutrition and other life factors. Both clubs would also benefit from support to upgrade their premises and acquire the equipment necessary to offer children a wide range of age-appropriate activities.

### **Local Heritage**

In order to address the current gap in age-appropriate activities CASPr needs to go beyond homework and incorporate children's interests, for example, local history, personal heroes and promoting group projects. There is plenty of scope within both project sites to develop team based learning. In addition, there is ample scope for a possible collaboration between CASPr and National College of Ireland (NCI) in the area of digital and media studies. Devising a clear strategy around age appropriate team based learning would greatly benefit the programme. The QDOSS Agenda for Development, (Downes 2006), section 5, offers clear guidelines around developing 'pride in local heritage'.

## Arts

While CASPr encourages music and the visual arts this is currently delivered on an ad hoc basis. However, with partnership, CASPr could embed these into the infrastructure of the programme. There is a need to develop a strategy to further integrate music and the Arts into the programme for all children attending the project, for developing emotional expression skills, overcoming fear of failure for community wide development

## Children's Voices

Some of the trips and themes to engage pupils at risk of early school leaving could build on the declared interests of the children more explicitly, and may also be guided by accounts of other primary school children who are sufficiently alienated from the school system to state that they do not wish to stay on at school until Leaving Certificate and yet have clear views on what they would like to learn (see Appendix D for an account of this in the Blanchardstown context from interviews by Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006).

## Lifelong Learning

There is an increasing emphasis in an EU context on the importance of the recognition of prior learning and integration of pathways from non-formal and informal learning to the formal educational system (Maunsell, Downes & McLoughlin 2008). It is suggested that CASPr build upon the informal and non-formal learning in the local community it serves to strengthen pathways to recognition of the distinctive local knowledge and community awareness of many parents and adults in the area, including those working currently and recently with CASPr. CASPr could explore ways of fostering strategic links with third level educational institutions in order to help develop such recognition of prior learning of members in the community.

Development of a community leadership strategy to offer explicit community leadership accreditation is a concrete way in which CASPr can further promote the recognition of prior learning. A further issue here is the opportunity for CASPr to target parents from ethnic minorities in the area for leadership training and involvement in the afterschool project (see also QDOSS on this feature, Downes 2006).

As a second strand to engaging local parents, CASPr could have two or three revolving placements per year for parents who are involved in the school that could attend CASPr as homework assistants, the outcome of which is threefold

- the parents gain experience of the labour market;
- they offer a service to the community;
- they get a foundation in childcare that they may wish to continue professionally.

## Collaboration between Schools and After School Project

Downes & Maunsell (2007) found that at present some schools tend to 'contract out' (Tett et al 2001) afterschool project work rather than closely collaborate with afterschool projects. There is a clear need for collaboration rather than a simply contracting out in order to implement a strategic approach to school completion across schools, afterschool projects and other local services. The obvious paths for this increased coordination, as part of a more strategic collaboration between schools and afterschool projects, are the School Completion Programme Committees, supported also by Dublin Inner City Partnership and the Local Drugs Task Force. While Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) found that school completion often miss those most at risk of early school leaving, it cannot be assumed that this is also the case in the North Inner City context.

There is a need to develop a working protocol between both project sites and each of the schools, to include:

- sharing of information;
- confidentiality;
- setting up of consistent/regular meetings to inform the work with families;
- develop a collaborative strategy between CASPr and the schools that will monitor the progress of children, and provide feedback on positive and negative outcomes of each other's work. The schools are in the best position to help monitor the effects of CASPr on academic outcomes for children. With the use of a standardized instrument and regular assessment this could be achieved.

In addition, CASPr should assign each child/family a key worker from its staff at the beginning of term for the academic year, in order to aid the lines of communication and maintain consistency. In order to ensure consistency a representative from both project sites could make a presentation in the relevant school at the beginning of the school year to parents of junior infants regarding the services that they offer.

In order to promote a consistency across both project sites there could be sharing of resources/expertise between CASPr and the schools that they serve. For instance, teachers could train the homework club staff in effective techniques for homework completion. During the interviews with teachers it was suggested that the teachers could offer short training/guidance sessions to staff on the project on how to efficiently use the assigned homework time, thus offering more consistency and uniformity to the service delivered to each child.

Sharing resources was mentioned by staff and teachers as a way of saving money and maintaining good relations between services. The use of school premises to host sessions for the children and parents, and the sharing of expertise to up skill workers in homework skills would greatly enhance the work that is done by CASPr and could be negotiated with local schools.

## **Emotional and Family Support**

The need emerged for external supervision for staff working with the children and dealing with families. Currently the staff does have access to and does avail of counselling from a local community counselling service when needed. However, given that this facility is available, coupled with the sensitive nature of the cases, perhaps a more formal arrangement could be made between CASPr and counselling services to provide therapeutic supervision on a more regular basis.

There is a need for increased staff training/professional development and recruitment to facilitate development of emotional expression and language skills, conflict resolution and mediation skills, drug prevention approaches building on social and emotional skills, including self-assertiveness and fostering of identity to resist peer pressure.

A related issue here for CASPr to engage with in the future is that of bullying prevention approaches, whether the bullying occurs in the school or community environment. Downes (2004) observed a direct link in some accounts of children and young people in Ballyfermot, Dublin, between nonschool attendance and being bullied at school. CASPr may be in a position, with further professional development of its staff, including CE workers and future staff, to lead a community strategy for bullying prevention among children and young people (see also Downes 2009 on the need to go beyond simply school based approaches to bullying prevention).

In giving more emphasis to this aspect of emotional and social support which is already strongly present in CASPr, its staff is engaging in at least two levels of a) mental health promotion and b) stress prevention. A further question arises as to whether CASPr can in the medium term evolve into participating at a further level of therapeutic support, whether at individual or family level (see also Downes 2003a on the role of the primary teacher as an agent of mental health promotion and stress prevention, but not as a therapist). A particular benefit of this is the trust CASPr has established as a community based and community led service. This trust can help in outreach to families who may be less willing to engage with other services.

The high level of community credibility and trust which it is evident that CASPr has managed to obtain allows for this social and emotional support dimension to its afterschool project (see also the QDOSS network agenda for development, Downes 2006, on the importance of a social and emotional support dimension for out of school services). It is clear that this key strength needs to be built on in the future development of CASPr. In doing so, the finding that children and families tend to turn first to their friends and to each other rather than typically to teachers or other professionals (Downes 2004; Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006; Hibernia Consulting for Ballymun/Whitehall Area Partnership 2009) invites a focus on building up the resources of children and families. Children and families can be envisaged as a fairly tight-knit network of relations in the North Inner City Dublin Area. Therefore, they could develop their capacities for providing each other with social and emotional support. CASPr has potentially a key role to play in this emotional support capacity building in the area in the future.

It is recognized that emotional support capacity building is a potentially important feature in general of community based and community led projects which have gained high levels of local trust. Given this, it must also be acknowledged that the very term 'community' refers to quite different networks of relation and separation in different areas of even the same city. For example, the research of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, has



observed that the traditionally 'disadvantaged' Dublin contexts of Ballyfermot, Blanchardstown and the Dublin 8 South West Inner City area have quite different levels of cohesiveness, division and anonymity specific to these areas. Thus, for example, some areas of Blanchardstown are constituted by new estates with little tradition of a sense of community, while the admittedly much older area of Dublin 8 is still associated with significant territorial conceptions and an absence of a unifying area-wide identity. In contrast, Ballyfermot is quite a settled area, with relatively more community cohesiveness and sense of identity. Against this backdrop, a feature of the North East Inner City area is one of particularly strong cohesiveness, including a wider network of interconnections of family and friends across different apartments and houses in the area. With this quite tight-knit sense of community relation, an increased opportunity arises for CASPr to lead and develop emotional support capacity building across networks of families and friends. In other words, with the right emotional supports provided through CASPr, the resources and skills of children, parents and friends in the North East Inner City area can have particular impact in developing a response to emotional and social needs as a protective factor against early school leaving. This approach is also consistent with McKeown et al's (2001) emphasis on building on strengths, whether at an individual, family or community level (see also Ryan 2004 on building on community strengths in the context of Ballymun).

- The distinctive community-based and community-led features of CASPr offer a potential that can be further harnessed. As the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) states:

The Educational Disadvantage Committee recognises that the problem of educational disadvantage cannot be solved in mainstream school-based educational programmes alone...the committee proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework. (p.4)

A community framework and vision is also centrally recognized by the National Economic and Social Forum report (2009) on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion.

## Professional Development of Staff

All of the staff working at CASPr undertake FETAC-accredited training in Childcare and our Training Centre continues to meet FETAC's Quality Assurance standards. The FETAC modules that are being taught at present are:

- Child Development Level 5
- Early Childhood Education Level 5
- Working in Childcare Level 5
- Caring for Children Level 5
- Communications Level 5
- Work Experience Level 5
- Intercultural Studies Level 5
- Occupational First Aid Level 5
- Caring for Children Level 4
- Child Development & Play Level 4
- Caring for Children Level 3
- Child Development Level 3
- Living in a Diverse Society Level 3
- Personal Effectiveness Level 3
- Various Computer Modules 3/4/5 / plus ECDL

There is as a need for increased staff training/professional development and recruitment to enhance the role of the Arts (e.g., music, drama, visual arts, digital learning) in promoting emotional expression as well as social and communicative skills. While these goals are realisable in the short to medium term, a more long-term goal would be capacity building to enhance the skills of staff at integrating arts based approaches with literacy approaches (see also NESF 2009). However, it is recognized that this is a complex area even for qualified teachers. Both clubs would benefit particularly from the provision of ongoing training for staff.

## Outreach Coordination

It was evident from the interviews with parents that CASPr reaches groups that are not accessing any other services. The project is doing well to target those at risk by building on this strength to further develop outreach and devising a specific strategy to target those most at risk. There is a need to develop stronger links with the Education Welfare Officer, while strengthening the current links with Home School Liaison Teachers.

Although CASPr does offer a peer education service, there is a cohort of parents who still do not access the service. As a strategy of empowering parents is one of CASPr's stated goals, engagement in the form of short, non-threatening courses in, for instance, flower arranging, practical classes and relaxation, personal development could be offered.

CASPr has always acknowledged and supported families of both CE participants and the families of children who attend the after schools that are in particular difficulty. It has done this by engaging an Outreach Development Worker since 1998.<sup>19</sup> Individual children's needs are also supported within the afterschool through specific programmes where appropriate. However, CASPr does not have the potential at present to expand its services beyond the Training Centre, Crèche and after schools.

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<sup>19</sup> The Outreach Worker's overall job description is to:

- Work (individually or in groups) with participants (children, adults and families) who are experiencing difficulties in their personal or family life or with their health;
- To assist children and parents to access services, supports etc. as required i.e. counselling, family support services, and treatment programmes;
- Accompany and advocate on behalf of participants to agencies, services etc. if they require such support; and
- Work with the Project Co-ordinator and the teams to put in place policies (including Child Protection Policies) regarding the identification, management, and support of participants who are at risk.

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# Appendix A

## Questionnaires

### 1. Focus group of past attendees of CASPr now in Secondary school

- How long is it since you have been at CASPr?
- What did you do at CASPr?
- When did you leave?
- Why did you leave?
- Would you have stayed if you could have? (If reason outside of their control).
- What did you enjoy most during your time at CASPr?
- What did you enjoy least during your time at CASPr?
- What, if anything, do you miss most about being in CASPr? the programme?
- What are you doing now?
- Do you receive support from any other agency, with your school work?
- If yes, what type?
- How often
- What did you gain from being at CASPr?
- What was the transition from primary to secondary like?
- How do you feel that the support in CASPr helped you with this transition?
- My time at CASPr was good for me? Always often sometimes or never?
- How has your life changed since leaving CASPr?
- What did you gain at CASPr that has stayed with you today?
- What would you have liked to have got from the programme that you didn't?
- What could be done differently?
- How many times have you returned to CASPr since leaving?
- Why?
- If you needed help would you go to the staff at CASPr?
- Why?
- What advice would you give to someone thinking of attending CASPr in the near future.

### 2. Senior Project Worker 1

- What are your sources of funding?
- Is your funding provided as core funding or programme funding or community? strand?  
Core = for the whole service and long-term, programme = for each particular programme in your service, community strand = short-term and largely unstable]
- How many staff does CASPr employ and what are their roles?
- How many service users do you have annually?
- What are the key goals of CASPr?
- Is there a high turnover of staff for your service?
- Why/Why not?

Are you happy with the space in your building for your service?

What other infrastructure needs is not being met, if any?

What is the age profile of your client group?

What is the gender profile of your actual clients and your target group ?

What type of work does your service engage in: Please circle as many as are appropriate: INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, FAMILY, and COMMUNITY WORK

What strategies, if any, do you provide for outreach to potential service users? How do local people find out about your service?

What procedures exist (e.g., regarding recruitment, Board of Management) to facilitate ownership of your service by the local community?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and schools? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and local schools?

Do you take referrals from local schools?

Are any of your services at weekends or during the summer months?

Do you have a waiting list and what procedures govern giving priority to particular clients?

What incentives do you provide for engaging people in adult education services (if you provide them)?

What are your priority needs for expansion of your service?

What gaps do you perceive in the area for support services?

What gaps do you perceive in the area for supports targeting children at risk of school nonattendance and early school leaving?

Are there any good practice examples from your service which could be transferable to other services?

What are the 5 priority needs/problems of your clients?

What is it that separates CASPr from other services in the area?

What do you imagine it would be like for the community if your service did not exist?

What changes, if any, would you like to see take place in local schools?

How in your opinion can local schools better accommodate the needs of at risk pupils/students?

How in your opinion can local schools extend parental involvement in their children's education?

What progress do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

What deterioration do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

Would your service be interested in engaging in preventive approaches in partnership with schools to target at risk pupils? What other supports would be needed for this?

What are the distinctive features of working in this area compared to other areas ?

What percentage of your service users are a) members of the Travelling community or b) foreign nationals?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and other local service? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and other local services?

### **3. Senior Project Worker 2**

How long have you been at CASPr?

What are the three key aspects of your role?

Are you the only family support worker?

How long have you been in this position?

How many children/families do you typically have per annum?

How many families do you currently have on your caseload?

How exactly do you reach most at risk in the community, what is the strategy.

What type of issues do they present with?

How are children/families referred to the service?

How long do these families stay with you?

What are the 5 priority needs/problems of the families you see?

What do you imagine it would be like if your role did not exist?

**Family:**

How are the relations between CASPr and the family?

What if anything, could be done to improve this?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and families of the children attending CASPr? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and families of the children attending CASPr?

How are the relations between CASPr and the schools?

What could be done to improve this?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and schools?

Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and local schools?

Would your service be interested in engaging in preventive approaches in partnership with schools to target at risk pupils? What other supports would be needed for this?

What changes, if any, would you like to see take place in local schools?

How in your opinion can local schools better accommodate the needs of at risk pupils/students?

How in your opinion can local schools extend parental involvement in their

Children's education?

**Local services:**

How are the relations between CASPr and other services in the local area?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and other local service? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and other local services?

**Internal Relations:**

Do you receive adequate support to carry out your job?

Do you receive adequate supervision for the issues that are presented with in your role as a family support worker?

Are there adequate child protection polices put in place?

In your opinion, is the staff at CASPr adequately trained to do their job?

In your opinion, is the staff at CASPr adequately supervised?

Does training continually occur?

If not, why?

What incentives are provided for staff engaging in further education?

What are your priority needs for expansion of your service?

**Gaps in service provision:**

What gaps do you perceive in the area for support services generally?

What gaps do you perceive for supports targeting children at risk of school nonattendance and early school leaving?

What progress do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

What deterioration do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

What are the distinctive features of working in this area compared to other areas?

Finally, if you had the provision to change one thing what would it be?

**4. Current Workers in CASPr****Profile Worker:**

How long have you been at CASPr?

What is your role?

How long have you been in this position?

How many service users do you have per annum?

When is the last time you engaged in Education?

What was the award you obtained?

Work of the project:

What is the age of your client group?

What is the gender profile of your actual target group?

What is the turnover of staff at CASPr like?

How adequate do you find the service provided by CASPr? Is it Very adequate, Adequate, Inadequate?

How are children referred to the service?

What strategies, if any, do you provide for outreach to potential service users?

How do local people find out about your service?

Which, if any, of your services available after 8pm, at weekends or during the summer months?

Do you have a waiting list and what procedures govern giving priority to particular clients?

What are the 5 priority needs/problems of your clients?

What percentage of your service users are a) members of the Travelling community or b) foreign nationals?

External Relations

### **Schools:**

How are the relations between CASPr and the schools?

What if anything, could be done to improve this?

What type of work does your service engage in: Please circle as many as are appropriate: INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, FAMILY, and COMMUNITY WORK

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and schools?

Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and local schools?

Would your service be interested in engaging in preventative approaches in partnership with schools to target at risk pupils? What other supports would be needed for this?

What changes, if any, would you like to see take place in local schools?

How in your opinion can local schools better accommodate the needs of at risk pupils/students?

How in your opinion can local schools extend parental involvement in their Children's education?

### **Family:**

How are the relations between CASPr and the family?

What if anything, could be done to improve this?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and families of the children attending CASPr? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and families of the children attending CASPr?

### **Local services:**

How are the relations between CASPr and other services in the local area?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of dialogue/partnership between your service and other local service? Why/Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increased partnership between your service and other local services?

### **Internal Relations**

In your opinion, are staff adequately trained to do their job?

In your opinion, are staff adequately supervised?

Does training continually occur?

If not, why?

What incentives are provided for staff engaging in further education?

What are your priority needs for expansion of your service?

**Gaps in service provision:**

What gaps do you perceive in the area for support services generally?

What gaps do you perceive in order to support and targeting children at risk of school non attendance and early school leaving?

How in any way is CASPr attempting to address these gaps?

**Physical/location**

What progress do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

What deterioration do you see occurring in the area compared to 5 years ago?

What are the distinctive features of working in this area compared to other areas?

Is the service adequately located for the areas that it serves?

Are you happy with the space in your building for your service?

What if any, other infrastructure needs are not being met?

Finally, if you had the provision to change one thing what would it be?

**5. Past participants of the training course**

How long is it since you have been at CASPr?

What did you do at CASPr?

How long were you in this position?

Why did you leave?

What did you enjoy most during your time at CASPr?

What did you enjoy least during your time at CASPr?

What level of FETAC training did you reach? Level      1          2          3          4          5

What are you doing now?

What did you gain from being at CASPr?

"My time at CASPr was good for me?" How true is this sentence on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being 'never good' and 3 being 'always good'.

How has your life changed since leaving CASPr?

What did you gain at CASPr that has stayed with you today?

What would you have liked to have gotten from the programme that you didn't?

Did you feel you receive adequate training in order to do your job? Did feel you receive adequate supervision in order to do your job?

What could be done differently?

How many times have you returned to CASPr since leaving? Why?

If you needed help would you go to the staff at CASPr? Why?

**6. Children currently attending CASPr****Profile:**

Age:

Gender:

What school do you attend?

**Experience of the Programme:**

What do you do at CASPr?

What is your most favourite thing about CASPr?

What is your least favourite thing about CASPr?

What do you enjoy most at CASPr?

How long have you been coming to CASPr?

**Personal Relations**

Do your friends from school or where you live come to CASPr?

Do you have any friends at CASPr?

Have you made new friends in CASPr?

What do your friends (at home) think about you going to CASPr?

What does your family think of (you going to) CASPr?

**Relations at CASPr**

The staff at CASPr make you feel welcome: Always, Often, Sometimes, or Never

The Staff at CASPr are there for you: Always, Often, Sometimes, or Never

The Staff at CASPr listen to you: Always, Often, Sometimes, or Never

The Staff at CASPr genuinely care about you: Always, Often, Sometimes, or Never

**Influence of CASPr**

How has your life changed since coming to CASPr?

Would you say it's: Much better, Better, The Same, Worse or Much worse

How has your school work changed since you came to CASPr?

Would you say it's: Much better, Better, The Same, Worse or Much worse

How well do you think the programme works with young people: Very well, Well, Alright or Not Well?

The project has been good for me: Always, Often, Sometimes or Never

**Changes/ Suggestions**

What sort of things could CASPr do differently?

If you had the power to change one thing about CASPr what could it be?

What do you imagine it would be like if you could not come to CASPr?

Would it be: Much better, Better, The Same, Worse or Much worse

Are there things that don't happen at CASPr that you would like to see happening?

**7. Parents of children currently attending CASPr**

Do you have a child on the programme at present? How many?

How long have they been at the service?

How did you find out about CASPr?

What sort of things do they do at CASPr?

How do you imagine it would be if they could no longer go to CASPr?

If you or your child had a problem, do you feel you could go to someone at CASPr?

Does your child receive support from any other agency with their schoolwork? If yes, what type? How often?

My child's time at CASPr was/is good for them: Always Often Sometimes Never

Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour since coming to the project? If yes, what kind?

Have you noticed any changes in your child's school work since coming to the project? If yes, what kind?

What would you say your child has gained since coming to CASPr?

What changes could CASPr make to better serve children in the area?

How are the relations between yourself and the staff at CASPr?

What, if anything, could be done to improve this?

Are you satisfied with the existing level of contact between yourself and CASPr? Why? Why not?

What obstacles exist, if any, to increase a partnership between yourself and families of CASPr?

Is there anything does not happen at CASPr that you would like to see happening?

Is the service adequately located for the areas that it serves?

Are you happy with the service that is provided to your child?

Finally, if you could change one thing about CASPr, what would it be?

# Appendix B

## Letter of Consent



**1 Portland Square Dublin 1**  
**Ph 8366364 / 8560561**  
**Fax 8363832**  
**E-mail caspr @ iol.ie**

Dear Parent / Guardian,

The Community After Schools Project are evaluating CASPr.

One very important aspect of this work is to understand and know how the children attending the project feel about the club. In order to do this we hope to interview a number of children so that we can have their personal views and opinions about the project, e.g. what they like or dislike. None of the children will be named in the evaluation however, their views and opinions and will be reported in the finished document. We would be grateful if you would sign this letter giving permission for your child to participate.

Signature: Parent/ Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Yours Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ann Carroll  
Project Manager



# Appendix C

## Plain Language Statement

We are carrying out research to evaluate the CASPr project. As part of this study we will be talking to children, past trainees, teachers and staff at the CASPr project about their experience of the project.

Should you (or your child) take part in the study, they will be required to take part in a face-to-face interview with the researchers. Interviews should last no longer than 1 hour. Participants can leave at anytime. Interviews will take place on the premises of CASPr. There are no risks involved in taking part the study. Every effort will be made to respect participants' identity. Participants' real names will be changed. The information that is collected will be analysed by researchers. The raw data will be destroyed one year after the publication of the study.

# Appendix D

Accounts from children in Blanchardstown who state that they do not intend to stay on at school until Leaving Certificate about what they would like to learn in school (Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006).

- Interviewed Afterschool Project Representatives such as those from School Completion Projects have stated that they operate a policy of combining target group children with non-target group children (see also Rourke 1995 on PESL now Oasis). They also state that it is frequently harder to get attendance at afterschool projects from the targeted children. While this is a common problem that afterschool projects may not reach those children who are most at risk<sup>20</sup>, the following responses from this at risk group (who state they do not want or do not know if they want to stay on at school until Leaving Certificate) indicate a range of activities they would wish to do:

What activities would you like to do after school if it was possible?

12M 'Play football'  
 12M 'Fishing'  
 13M 'Fly jets'  
 M 'Metal work or fixing computers'  
 11M 'football and basketball'  
 12M 'football'  
 12M 'football'  
 11 'Swimming'  
 11M 'art'  
 12M 'play football'  
 F 'dancing'  
 12F 'Drama club' would like to do in school  
 12M 'Computers and science'  
 12M 'Gardening'  
 12M 'Fix things'  
 11M 'Swimming'  
 12F 'Volleyball, girls football and handball'

Significantly only two of these pupils indicate outright resistance and hostility to engagement in any afterschool project:

11M 'nothing because I wouldn't want to stay in school any longer'  
 12M 'Smash the window'

- The theme of the need to bring in more opportunities for practical skills into the school day also clearly emerges from this group, as they indicate a range of interests in learning some of which the school environment could seek to engage with as part of commitment to a learner-centered approach:  
 'What would you really like to learn in school that you don't already learn?'

12M 'How to hack into systems'  
 12F 'lots and lots of things'  
 12M 'Driving'

<sup>20</sup> This was also noted by one teacher in a questionnaire response:

13M 'I would like to learn more about art'  
12F 'I would like to learn swimming in school'  
M 'Metal work and computer work (more computer work)'  
12M 'football'  
12M 'football in the school'  
12M 'basketball'  
12M 'sex education'  
11M 'about sweets'  
11M 'learn about mechanics and all about cars'  
12M 'How to fly an airplane'  
12M 'sex education'  
11 'swimming'  
11M 'I would like to learn to be a wrestler'  
F 'swimming'  
12M 'home economics'  
12F 'German'  
12M 'Well. I would like to learn about Ireland'  
13F 'Spanish'  
12M 'Gardening'  
12M 'I would like to learn more English'  
11F 'How to cook'  
12M 'I would like to learn woodwork'  
11M 'Science'

# Notes