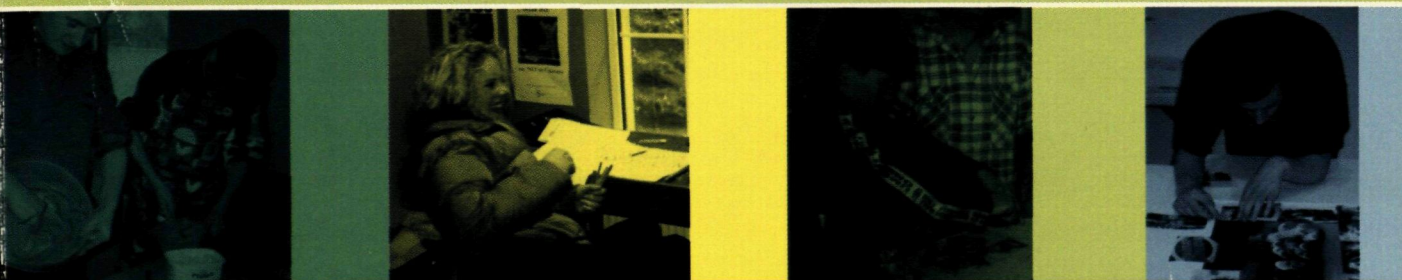


A Learning Experience



Case Studies on Local Integrated Strategies to Tackle Educational Disadvantage

Stephen Rourke

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Stephen Rourke

Combat Poverty Agency
working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Minister's Foreword | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| The Context | 5 |
| Integrated Responses to Educational Disadvantage | |
| An Overview of the Case Studies | 9 |
| Descriptions of the Case Study Projects | 29 |

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Minister's Foreword

I welcome the publication of this study on integrated responses to educational disadvantage based on the experiences of eight local projects in Ireland. The collaboration between the Combat Poverty Agency and the Employment Youthstart National Support Structure, together with the action learning experiences of the local projects highlighted in this report, bring a wealth of professionalism and expertise from a variety of different perspectives to bear on the issues of how best education and training providers and other agencies can be more responsive to the needs of young people at risk.

Youthstart is an EU-wide Community Initiative aimed at supporting the integration into society of young people at risk. The Combat Poverty Agency is a statutory body that works towards the prevention and elimination of poverty, social exclusion and inequality in Ireland. Both agencies are involved in funding and supporting projects which are strategic in nature, which test new approaches to the delivery of services in partnership with a range of agencies both nationally and internationally, and which are designed to inform future policy and practice in critical areas of human resource development and social inclusion. The presentations in the report on the experiences of key projects have proved the value of this approach. They point up the critical importance of agencies working together in a consortium of interests whose collective expertise and resources can address the needs of the target group in an integrated way.

The study plays an important role in Irish research in documenting the rationale for integration, and the factors which can promote or inhibit good inter-agency partnerships. It is well known that children's development reflects both their characteristics and capacities and their interactions with peers, family, school and neighbourhood as well as with the broader environment. The quality of

these interactions can determine whether a child realises his/her potential, so we must, through partnership, support change in the surrounding environment (school, home, community) so that the interaction is positive and caring. No discipline can do this alone.

Working in a collaborative way with a range of agencies and groups, each with their own expectations and culture, is not easy, especially when organisations are traditionally structured, focusing on internal, hierarchal rather than external, lateral relationships. For success, it is necessary for networks of consortia to negotiate new relationships to improve the scope for shared objectives and agreed actions, and this can be a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. It is only through allowing time for the sharing, communication and development of trust and mutual respect and understanding, and through a preparedness to be open and flexible, that real collaboration can take place.

The study highlights the critical importance of involving young people and their parents in decision making, of having a family focus and a shared vision as to the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the consortia, along with a framework which integrates an in-school and out-of-school response. A key focus on a learner-centred approach, on transition points such as the transfer from primary to second level, flexible curricula, summer programmes, homework clubs and additional supports are features of the projects selected.

The report is a critical input in informing future policy and practice in addressing disadvantage, and will do much to enhance our understanding of how best to achieve an integrated response.

Micheál Martin, T.D.

Minister for Education and Science

Introduction

In 1998 the Combat Poverty Agency and the Employment Youthstart National Support Structure came together to produce case studies on initiatives which demonstrate good practice in developing integrated responses to educational disadvantage. Through their respective roles and the work that they are involved in, both agencies are committed to developing innovative responses to the issue of educational disadvantage. This includes influencing educational policy and practice to respond effectively to the needs of those who experience educational disadvantage and drawing on the experience and lessons from existing and former interventions.

Four of the case studies selected are based on initiatives which were funded under the first round of the Employment Youthstart Initiative. All of the case studies seek to illustrate good practice issues as well as to draw out policy lessons. They reflect key themes and issues which have emerged in both the experience of the Youthstart Initiative projects and in the work of the Combat Poverty Agency, particularly through its Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. These themes include transitions (eg. from primary to secondary school or from junior to senior cycle); integrated actions/models; pathways/progression routes; home/school/community linkages; curricular reform and provision for groups of young people with particular needs.

In addition, the case studies identify issues which will be familiar to others involved in promoting and supporting integration as well as highlighting the factors which influence it.

It is anticipated that the case studies will be of relevance to all who are seeking to develop integrated approaches to educational disadvantage. In particular, they are likely to be of interest to both the projects and support staff involved in the 8-15 year old Early School Leaver Initiative developed by the Department of Education and Science and the initiative on educational disadvantage which is currently being supported by the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in the border counties. Both of these initiatives aim to test out models for the development of integrated area based co-

ordination of services for young people at risk of early school leaving. They will also be of interest to the area-based partnerships supported by Area Development Management Ltd, which have a particular focus on promoting integration and which employ education co-ordinators supported by the Department of Education and Science.

The publication is particularly timely in a context where there is a government commitment to tackling educational disadvantage, which is a key theme of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), and which is evidenced also in the establishment of a new Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science. It is likely also that educational disadvantage will be a key issue in the new National Development Plan which is currently in preparation.

The development of this publication has been managed and overseen by a steering committee comprised of staff from the Combat Poverty Agency and the Youthstart National Support Structure. The main author is Stephen Rourke, who provided technical support to the initial data collection process, summarised the full case studies and wrote the overview contained in sections 1 and 2 which draws directly from the case study material. William Peters and Kirsten Byrne were responsible for writing the full case studies, drawing on written material which was made available by the projects and interviews with project promoters and personnel. The Youthstart National Support Structure and the Combat Poverty Agency would like to acknowledge the professionalism and commitment brought to the work by Stephen, William and Kirsten. We would also like to warmly thank all of those involved in the eight projects who gave generously of

their time and insights.

The full case studies, which were summarised for the purposes of this publication, will be held by the project promoters and by the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Youthstart Support Structure and may be made available on request.

Combat Poverty Agency

Employment Youthstart National Support Structure

October 1999

The Context

1.1 THE FOCUS

There has been an increasing focus on the issue of educational disadvantage in recent years, and a recognition of the need to develop strategies both to retain young people within the formal education system and to provide developmental support to young people who have left school at an early age with no/minimal qualifications. A number of initiatives and programmes have been developed working with potential early school leavers (within the school environment) and actual early school leavers. These programmes focus on co-ordination and integration, based on a clear understanding that effective strategies to counter educational disadvantage are likely to involve a number of different players: young people, parents, schools/teachers, youth services, community development projects, etc. One-dimensional approaches (involving only one organisation or agency) are likely to be limited in their impact. Multi-dimensional approaches, with a range of different organisations and players working together in the best interests of young people, are much more likely to be effective and sustainable into the future.

1.2 COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY AND THE NATIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURE OF YOUTHSTART

The Employment Youthstart National Support Structure – hereinafter referred to as ‘Youthstart’ and the Combat Poverty Agency – have a particular interest in, and commitment to, the development of innovative responses to the issue of educational disadvantage. One of the key strategic objectives of the Combat Poverty Agency is to achieve *a coherent and planned public policy on child poverty*. Within this strategic objective a primary goal is to *complete the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage (and to transfer and promote policy recommendations and learning from the Programme and related work on educational disadvantage to relevant policy makers and policy bodies)*. The primary role of the National Support Structure is to provide advice and guidance to the 24 projects which are receiving support through the Youthstart strand of the



EU EMPLOYMENT Initiative. This strand is particularly concerned with the integration of young people under the age of 20 into the labour market. Youthstart projects target young people who have left the education system early, who are unqualified or poorly qualified and are therefore disadvantaged in relation to the labour market. A key element within the approaches being promoted through Youthstart relates to the need for integrated and co-ordinated strategies – one of the criteria for inclusion in Youthstart is consortia linkage (i.e. to bring together and represent individuals, groups and organisations who impinge on the target group involving an appropriate mix of voluntary, statutory and private-sector personnel.)

Therefore, the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Support Structure of Youthstart both have a particular interest in countering educational disadvantage (in school and out of school); and in developing integrated strategies which are focused upon potential early school leavers and young people who have already left the formal education system.

1.3 CASE STUDIES ON INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

The Combat Poverty Agency and the National Support Structure of Youthstart decided that it would be useful to produce a number of case studies on integrated responses to educational disadvantage. These case studies would serve a number of purposes:

- They would educate and inform people about the types of integrated strategies which are being developed by local projects and initiatives.
- They would help to highlight the issues which need to be taken into account when developing integrated approaches (i.e. clear and agreed objectives and goals, systems for information flow and exchanges of experiences/knowledge, the allocation of time for integrated strategies).

- They would draw together material which demonstrates good practice in relation to integrated responses to educational disadvantage.
- They would draw out policy lessons from the experiences of local projects – these policy lessons should be of interest to policy makers who are involved in the development of different programmes and initiatives aimed at tackling educational disadvantage.

In selecting the projects to be profiled in the case studies, the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Support Structure of Youthstart were conscious of the need to strike a number of appropriate balances:

- Between key themes (i.e. transitions – Primary/Secondary, Junior/Senior Cycle; integrated actions/models; pathways and progression; home, school, community linkages; curricular reform; provision for groups with special needs e.g. Travellers, young people with disabilities).
- Between urban and rural projects.
- Between statutory and voluntary-led initiatives.
- Between large scale projects and smaller initiatives.
- Between in-school and out-of-school initiatives.
- Between initiatives where there was a previous history of working together and newly formed initiatives that did not have such a base to build upon.

A total of eight projects were selected for inclusion in the case studies process. The eight projects are as follows:

- **The LEBO Project**, promoted by Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project in Dundalk.
- **Deis na Gaillimhe**, promoted by City of Galway VEC.
- **Jobstown Education and Training Strategy**, sponsored by a consortium of educational and youth organisations working in Jobstown, Tallaght, Co. Dublin.
- **Kilkenny Youthlynx**, promoted by Kilkenny Community Action Network (KCAN).
- **Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project**, sponsored by a consortium of educational and youth interests working in Moyross, Limerick city.
- **North Mayo Schools Project**, sponsored by Foroige in a number of schools in the North Mayo area.
- **Second Chance Early School Leavers Project**, sponsored by a consortium of educational and youth interests working in Tipperary town and its environs.
- **Youth Employment Support Project**, promoted by the Tallaght Partnership in the Tallaght area of County Dublin.

The production of the case studies involved a combination of interviews and consultations with people closely involved in the individual projects and analysis of written documentation which had

INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES

been produced about the projects (e.g. evaluation reports).

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report, on the experiences of the projects profiled in the eight case studies, is divided into two distinct sections:

- An overview and analysis of the main outcomes and learning which have emerged through the work of the eight projects, specifically in relation to the issue of integrated responses to educational disadvantage (Section 2).
- A description of the work and activities of each of the eight projects profiled in the case studies (Section 3).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the document will consider the main outcomes and learning which have emerged from the experiences of the eight projects, in relation to the issue of integrated approaches and integrated responses to educational disadvantage. It will address these outcomes under the following headings:

- Benefits of integrated responses to educational disadvantage.
- Factors and strategies which support the development of integrated responses.
- Factors which act as barriers/blockages to the development of integrated strategies.
- Other issues to be taken into consideration when developing integrated strategies.

2.2 BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED RESPONSES

- 1 **A wider range of services can be offered.** A number of the case studies emphasised the value and importance of adopting an integrated approach towards the issue of educational disadvantage. The sponsors of individual projects felt that they were able to provide/offer young people a wider range of supports and services than would have been possible if the project/initiative had only involved one sponsor or organisation. Particular reference was made to the ways in which integrated responses enhanced the learning, the analysis and the perspectives of the various agencies and organisations which were represented on individual consortia or project teams.
- 2 **Awareness of a range of approaches.** Providers and delivery agents at the local level learned more about different approaches towards child development and youth development. There were particularly valuable exchanges of information, insights and experiences between in-school educational providers (i.e. teachers) and out-of-school educational providers (i.e. youth workers, community development workers, project





workers). There has been an increase in awareness about the ways that different strategies (in-school and out-of-school) can complement each other and can be used together in the best interests of children and young people.

- 3 *There is a greater understanding about the multidimensional needs of many young people*, and the fact that multidimensional needs/problems require multidimensional solutions. In situations where young people have a whole range of needs and concerns, one specific intervention might not be adequate or appropriate - what might be required is a more integrated and holistic approach involving a range of different agencies and organisations. The experience of the projects profiled in the case studies would suggest that organisations are able to provide a more comprehensive and meaningful response to the needs of young people if they are working co-operatively together rather than working in isolation. Co-operative and collaborative strategies enable the participating organisations to compile a more accurate picture of the needs and circumstances of individual young people; and to devise responses which are both appropriate and effective.

The partnership approach to planning and implementation was a key strategy employed by the project. The key assumption with this type of approach is that as a result of the combination of ideas and resources, an initiative will be more successful. One of the perceived successes of the project was the common focus of the schools and the partnerships involved. They all had a role to play and acted as a collective group. The setting up of this group was 'breaking new ground' but it was seen to be a positive action. It worked extremely well on a professional footing.

North Mayo Schools Project.

'...as a result of the combination of ideas and resources, an initiative will be more successful.' North Mayo Schools Project

Inter-Agency work is inherent in almost all of the actions. It is clear that this emerged as a fundamental part of the District Approach policy adopted. There appeared to be mutual learning on all sides. The youth view met the formal education view and each group had a reason for being, so firstly they had to recognise the aims of other groups and find the common objective. It was felt by members of the Board that this worked very well. Over time relationships were developed and strengthened. They managed to set up some very effective interventions as a joint process. These were quite small in nature but important in terms of the learning and knowledge that resulted from this information flow.

Deis na Gaillimhe

- 4 *Relationships were developed.* A number of the projects built upon and consolidated relationships which had already been developing in local areas between various agencies and organisations. Many of these linkages had been informal and were based on bilateral one-to-one arrangements between individual organisations. The projects profiled in the case studies presented new opportunities to strengthen these relationships and to involve a number of other organisations and interests who had not previously been involved in integrated responses to the issue of educational disadvantage. To a large extent the projects helped to formalise relationships and to develop a structure within which a range of organisations and agencies could collaborate around a particular work programme and a clear set of objectives and goals. The projects were a practical demonstration of the desire of

organisations and agencies to engage in integrated strategies, and enabled these organisations to move on from a theoretical or abstract understanding of the benefits of closer co-operation and integration to participation in a process which involved direct work and interventions with groups of young people within particular areas. This type of progression, from the conceptual to the practical, brought into sharper focus the benefits of integrated responses; and the structures and procedures which needed to be put in place to enable the optimum outcomes and results to emerge from the work of the eight projects profiled in the case studies.

From the time the application was made for Youthstart funding the team were afforded the opportunity to develop the project, to outline a number of objectives and to develop a series of actions which could realise these objectives. The Youthstart funding allowed the project to forge even closer links with the schools, the Probation and Welfare Service, the North-Eastern Health Board, Louth Youth Federation and the local community. However, it is important to remember that the context for further integration was already in place. What the Youthstart funding allowed was the development of this process, to the point that each agency is now able to say that if funding were to become scarce the links between the agencies are so strong that they would continue to work together to deliver an integrated service.

LEBO



In relation to the overall District Approach aim of the project, the feedback was also encouraging. It was pointed out by a Board member that, whilst the relationships would have been there beforehand, the project was the mechanism they used, and the catalyst to formalise what was being done informally.

Deis na Gaillimhe

There is also a recognition that it is important to sustain and build upon the strengthened relationships that have developed through participation in the projects profiled in the case studies. Virtually all of these projects are time limited in relation to their funding arrangements e.g. the projects funded through Youthstart operate within a two-year funding agreement. Whilst it is the hope of the project sponsors that their projects will be mainstreamed and receive ongoing/continued funding, this type of positive outcome is not guaranteed. Indeed, the experience of the projects profiled in the eight case studies suggests that a significant proportion of projects will end when the current funding ceases. In this context, there is a need to ensure that the relationships and integrated strategies that have been built up during the lifetime of a particular project will be sustained beyond completion of the individual projects.

Many of the partners felt that the length of time committed to the project was insufficient. However there is a realisation that human and financial resources would have made any more time impossible. However, they felt that the project had achieved a good deal in that time and a second round of the project was feasible. They felt that they had learned from the first project especially in the area of consolidating their efforts and resources. One of their greatest successes was in working together, completing a project and ready to do it all again.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

‘...a programme that cannot adjust quickly to the responses of its target group is a programme that fails to meet the needs of that group.’ **Second Chance Early School Leaver Project**

2.3 FACTORS WHICH SUPPORT INTEGRATED RESPONSES

The After Care element of the programme is just one of the ways that the project continues to support the young people after they have left. When the young people return to school there is a strong commitment on the part of the team to keep in contact with them through the team's work in the school. 'The House' continues to be a place that young people who have been through the programme visit.

LEBO

- 1 ***Organisations are flexible and adaptable.*** New strategies and approaches to dealing with problems which are often cyclical and inter-operational will require innovative and creative approaches. Organisations which participate in consortia or project teams that are set up to tackle the issue of educational disadvantage within local areas should be prepared to consider new types of interventions and new ways of engaging with the main target groups i.e. young people and their parents. The needs of these target groups will differ from area to area, and this diversity should be reflected in the kinds of responses which are developed by local consortia and project teams. The experience of the projects profiled in the case studies would suggest that participating organisations and agencies should be prepared to adapt traditional procedures and work practices, in order to provide a meaningful response to the needs of potential early school leavers and young people who have already left school at an early age with minimal qualifications. The organisations which participate in integrated responses should also aim to adopt an open-ended and person –

centred approach to the needs of young people, an approach which is not overly constrained by time limited projects or programmes.

The Second Chance Project was able to show that a flexible approach to dealing with educational disadvantage can be a productive approach. The participating agencies have learned from the pilot project that a programme that cannot adjust quickly to the responses of its target group is a programme that fails to meet the needs of that group. By developing activities that allow the young people and their parents to have a sense of ownership over the process of education Second Chance has managed, despite limited funding, to address the needs of these young people. From the outset the consortium said that the project was a process as much as a product and that through its actions it would learn, assess, adjust and implement. This continuous learning process is what defines the project as flexible. The success of this flexibility is seen in the results which were achieved.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

- 2 ***The respective roles and responsibilities of the organisations and agencies are reasonably clear.*** Difficulties often emerge when organisations are unclear and uncertain about their roles, and what they are expected to contribute to the operations of the consortia or project teams. Therefore, it is both useful and important to set some time aside at the start of the process to work through issues relating to individual responsibilities, structures and relationships between the various partner organisations and agencies. Working in partnership can be a difficult and complex process,



especially for organisations who do not have a tradition of participation in co-operative or collaborative arrangements. This process can be more complex when the partnership involves organisations from different sectors – schools, youth groups, statutory agencies etc. Opportunities need to be created for these organisations to get to know each other and to understand some of the limitations or constraints which restrict their capacity to take on new challenges (which might involve changes in work practices or being asked to undertake additional work within an existing over-stretched workload). Hence the need to be clear, at the outset, about the anticipated functions of individual organisations; and the capacity of these organisations to play a full and effective role in the ongoing development of individual consortia and project teams.

Due to the fact that the Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project had been in existence for almost five years at the time it received the Youthstart funding it was well known in the estate. For that reason some parents felt they could approach the project directly to have their child 'enrolled' in the project. However, the team encouraged the parents to work through the established channels, e.g. the schools, the Probation Service and the Health Board. This reduced the possibilities of the project having major difficulties with service providers and from providing a service beyond its remit. It meant that the relationships between the various service providers was flexible but defined.

LEBO

3 ***The management and organisational structures are workable.*** These structures should aim to strike the appropriate balance between the optimum levels of participation from all relevant organisations on the one hand and ensuring that the overall process does not become too time consuming or cumbersome on the other hand. The case studies alluded to the difficulties which can be caused if the appropriate balance does not exist within the operations of individual consortia or project teams. Some case studies referred to the problems caused by organisations feeling that they were not full or equal participants whilst other case studies mentioned the difficulties caused by the number of meetings which participating organisations were expected to attend. The primary challenge, in this regard, is to devise an organisational *modus operandi* which ensures that all participating organisations have regular opportunities to input into the development of integrated projects in a manner which is time efficient and does not place too many demands on the personnel representing individual organisations.

The Steering Committee was the policy-making body of the project. It comprised some twenty members with representatives from each of the project partners. Meetings of this committee were convened at least six times a year. There were four parents sitting on this committee and they shared responsibility for representing parents' views and ensuring that parent needs were recognised and met. As the Steering Committee was so large, it proved quite cumbersome to operate. Subsequently, it was deemed necessary to set up an Executive

Committee, which was a smaller committee that had one representative from each of the partners. This committee met on a weekly basis and these six to eight people effectively ran the project. The meetings of these partners were considered to be very efficient. Its function was to interpret and implement existing policy and to identify areas where new policy might be required. All decisions were a matter of collective responsibility and all actions and decisions proposed were subject to ratification by the Steering Committee. They worked on a rotating chair basis and Board members involved in this research said that everyone involved felt they had a task to achieve and they set about it.

Those interviewed from the project agreed that the issues surrounding the extensive Steering Committee and the subsequent difficulties in arranging meetings and arriving at decisions were successfully overcome by the setting up of the Executive Committee. This they regarded as a lesson for the future. Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project.

4 ***Relationships at the operational as well as organisational levels are considered.*** Mechanisms should be devised through which staff from different agencies and organisations involved in integrated strategies are presented with the opportunity to find out more about the work of the other partners' organisations and to get to know their counterparts who are working within these organisations. Involvement in partnership or integrated arrangements can often be a daunting prospect for staff members – they do not know what to expect from these arrangements and they



are not sure how they will relate to staff from different sectors/organisations with whom they will be expected to work in a close and co-ordinated manner. In this context, it is important that relevant staff personnel (as well as members of management committees and steering committees) are presented with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the integrated project and with the staff of other organisations represented in the consortium or partnership.

These staff will usually have primary responsibility for the delivery of the integrated initiative, and they need to be knowledgeable and comfortable about the integrated actions which are to be delivered within their own area.

The secondary teacher involved at that stage is now Co-ordinator of the JETS. He worked with the young people while they were still in St Thomas Senior National School. He was able to engage the young people by helping with the homework club from mid-April until June 1997. This allowed him to get a sense of what the young people were like and for him to become more familiar to them. This type of interaction also involved the secondary teacher helping the young people with their work in school and gave him a chance to talk to the other teachers in St Thomas's. This type of inter-school information exchange would prove very useful once the young people had made the transition to Jobstown Community College. It would also build on the strong relationship which existed between both schools. To compliment this information exchange, weekly meetings were organised between the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators, the schools and the JETS Co-ordinator to prepare for the transition. As well as these provisions, young people who had made the transition to the community college were invited to talk to the JETS class about what it was like to be in secondary school.

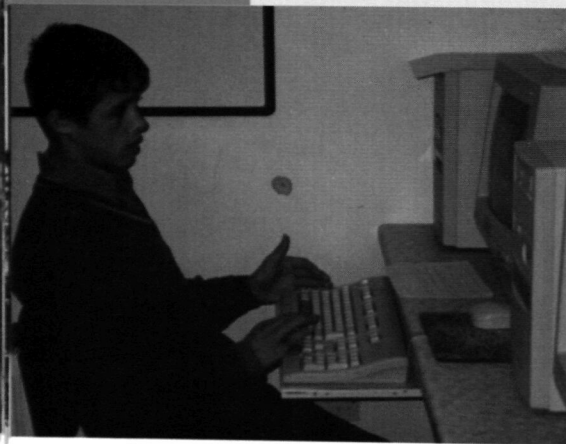
Jobstown Education and Training Strategy

One of the key challenges for projects which tackle educational disadvantage is the development of relationships between various providers within the formal and non-formal education sectors.

The staff of the Youthlynx project clearly identified the importance of engaging teachers from the formal education system and securing their active support and encouragement for the project. In December 1996, 17 of the teachers went with the Youthlynx staff on a teambuilding outing to Cork. This was organised by Youthlynx in an attempt to build stronger relationships between the team and the school. This social event proved to be very beneficial. The teachers began to explore the work that was being done by Youthlynx and were able to ask questions and air concerns in a relaxed and non-threatening environment. The team felt that for the first time the teachers began to appreciate the work of Youthlynx. They felt that this appreciation grew out of a respect for the amount of trust that the team had managed to create between themselves and the young people. Some of the teachers expressed surprise at just how much the Youthlynx team knew about the young people in relation to their home and school situation. In turn the team were able to describe to the teachers the ways in which they had built this trust through outreach work, i.e. visiting the homes of these young people, and also by providing safe space in which they were able to explore and discuss their needs and concerns.

Kilkenny Youthlynx

- 5 **A co-ordinator is employed.** The experiences of the projects profiled in the case studies would suggest that the employment of a co-ordinator can significantly enhance the operations of consortia and project teams which are involved in integrated responses to educational disadvantage. A co-ordinator can help to ensure that all the organisations and agencies participating in the consortium or project team are kept fully informed of all relevant developments. He/she can help to support the work of the various committees which might be set up by the consortium or project team. He/she can also follow through on recommendations or action points which have been agreed by the consortium or project team. Integrated responses need to be resourced on account of the additional work which is involved in co-ordinating activities between participating organisations and agencies. It would be difficult to undertake this additional work in a voluntary capacity, especially when members of the consortium or project team are already overstretched carrying out other tasks associated with their own job. The employment of a paid staff can help to ensure that people are not being asked to do too much in a voluntary capacity. More importantly, it helps to ensure that actions are implemented and it enhances the prospects of effective information flow and good communications between the partner organisations involved in individual consortiums or project teams.



The present Co-ordinator and the previous Co-ordinator are teachers and both agree that a project such as JETS, that is school based, really needs a Co-ordinator who is a teacher, but the type of teacher needs to be chosen carefully.

If parents are marginalised as some of the parents of the JETS class would be then it is more difficult to liaise with them – for that reason the Co-ordinator of the project needs to do a lot of outreach work. This work builds a profile of the needs of the parents and ultimately allows them to engage more effectively with the school. This type of support is not a function of schools and therefore it was felt that this would have to be a specific role for the Co-ordinator.

Jobstown Education and Training Strategy

The individuals who made up the team were able to draw from a number of different professional backgrounds and experiences. The different skills of the various team members allowed the team to engage different people at different levels. This meant that the overall team possessed a wide variety of skills which allowed the project to develop in a way that it may not have had there been just one project worker. Again this reflects the ability of projects to have a greater impact when they have increased human resources, and when due regard is given to the professional backgrounds of members of staff.

Kilkenny Youthlynx

The project ran for one academic year without a paid co-ordinator. During this period the efforts of the various consortium members were consolidated and their ability and willingness to work together was strengthened. As the project enters its second round it is still without a full time member of staff whose sole responsibility would be Second Chance. For the consortium this has real implications. It means that they do not have somebody who has the time to find badly needed additional funding.

It also means that they do not have the capacity to take on additional tasks/work. One of the key complaints that came from parents was that they felt that they were not kept informed of their child's progress. In order for this to happen on a regular basis more reports would have to be kept and once again this would require more time. All of these additional tasks point to the need for a full time member of staff.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

- 6 *The participants are fully committed. Integrated responses to educational disadvantage require a strong commitment from all the organisations and agencies represented on the various consortia and project teams which have been set up to progress different initiatives. The case studies referred to the way that integrated strategies tend to be most effective when representatives from the participating organisations and agencies are fully involved/engaged – they attend all the meetings, they are prepared to take on responsibility for the implementation of various tasks, they are prepared to be innovative and to take risks within their own organisations. Conversely, consortia and project teams are most at risk and weakest when there is no significant level of interest or involvement from the organisations who are members of the individual consortium or project team. Integrated responses to educational disadvantage require the full and active participation of all relevant organisations within the areas where educational initiatives or projects are being developed. Particular reference was made in a number of case studies to the role of the Department of Education and the Vocational Education Committees - there is a sense that*

support, encouragement and endorsements from these organisations can be of significant importance in raising the profile of particular initiatives and in helping to ensure that these initiatives are fully supported by individual schools and youth organisations.

There is a strong commitment in CDYCP and in the LEBO project to an integrated approach to educational disadvantage. Key to the success of this approach are strong formal links between agencies. The agencies involved in the project are:

- **Louth Youth Federation**
- **North Eastern Health Board**
- **The Probation and Welfare Service**
- **Garda Síochána**
- **O'Fiaich College**
- **County Louth VEC**

LEBO

As a 'lead agent', the VEC adopted a key role in decision making and implementation. During interviews with members of the Board it was agreed that to some degree or another it was necessary to have a lead agent. The development of the VEC as a lead agent was said by one to have been a 'logical progression' as they were the one body who would be talking to schools, to youth and to community.

Deis na Gaillimhe



- 7 **Involving young people and their parents.** Rather than young people and parents being objects and recipients of actions that have been designed and developed by others, they should be more directly involved in the operations of projects which are set up to counter educational disadvantage within local areas. A number of the case studies referred to the ways in which they succeeded in involving young people and parents in the organisation and management of various projects and initiatives, e.g. through consulting young people about the types of activities in which they would like to participate, through reserving places for parents on the management committees of integrated projects, through involving young people and parents in review and planning meetings. The case studies reflected a view that integrated responses to educational disadvantage are ultimately more sustainable and more valuable if they engage young people and parents as active participants at all stages in the lifespan of individual projects and initiatives, i.e. at the planning stage, at the implementation stage, and at the evaluation and review stage.

To this end they endeavoured to ensure that each parent and young person understood what the project involved. It was explained that parents also had to work to support their children in the project. This helped to form closer relationships between the young person, the family, the team and the other agencies while reinforcing the notion that parents have a lot to contribute to the ongoing development of their children.

LEBO

One of the key issues which is central to projects which have a youth or community focus is the question of ownership. This is directly related to issues of participation. Very often a project's success can be measured in terms of how it enables the target group to feel that they have real and sustainable contributions to make to the planning and progress of a project. It is

'...the target group feel that they have real and sustainable contributions to make to the planning and progress of a project' Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

obvious from the design of the Second Chance Project that inputs from the young people were always welcome and in many instances their reactions and recommendations helped to modify and progress the project. This is evident especially in the social skills and group work section of Second Chance and is reflected in the young peoples evaluation of that part of the programme. They said that they learned a lot from this section and found it stimulating. They also felt that it was an opportunity for them to say what they thought and not feel that they would be chastised for their opinions. The sections of the project where the young people felt they had a greater input into its design were also the sections where attendance was the highest.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

The success of the model is partly due to its modular approach which included an induction period. Developing a sense of process and of pace are crucial to the success of the model. The project also used real participatory methodologies in its design, making sure that the young people were fundamental in the evaluation of the project but also ensuring that two of the young people sat on the management committee. This had the additional benefit of helping the young people to realise that these management committees were not simply the people who had all the money but were a group working within their own constraints.

Youth Employment Support Project

2.4 FACTORS WHICH ACT AS BARRIERS OR BLOCKAGES TO INTEGRATED RESPONSES

- 1 *Lack of continuity and consistency.*

Another issue arose from the fact that the teachers in the school were not fully accommodating towards the Project. A Board member suggested that a 'bottom-up' approach is necessary to achieve this. Without the support of the whole teaching staff, it is very difficult for the project to run smoothly. Aside from any other difficulties, the time constraints arising from the changeover of staff every year and the subsequent requirements of training in new teachers to the running of the Project were considerable. This was a feature due to the children moving from teacher to teacher each year. It was suggested therefore that it would be beneficial, if not a prerequisite for the Project, that a selected cohort of teachers would be guaranteed to stay with the classes for the entire project life. After all, without the total commitment of the teacher, the project cannot achieve its objectives.

Moyross Intervention Educational Pilot Project

A number of the projects profiled in the case studies referred to the difficulties caused by changes in personnel within the organisations and agencies represented on individual consortia and project teams. The changes resulted in an ongoing process of familiarisation and induction, with new members needing to be educated about the function, purpose and operations of the individual projects and initiatives. There was a view that projects to counter educational disadvantage are likely to be more effective and beneficial if the



same personnel are involved in the management, organisation and delivery of these projects. It takes time to build up a common understanding and sense of purpose amongst members of individual consortia and project teams – this process will be less coherent and more disjointed if there are constant changes amongst the people empowered with responsibility for both the overall organisation and the direct delivery of projects and initiatives which are set up to counter educational disadvantage within particular areas and communities. Where possible, project sponsors should try to ensure a guaranteed or minimum level of commitment from the organisations and agencies involved in consortia and project teams, and from the individuals who have been nominated to represent these organisations and agencies.

An integrated response to educational disadvantage is not simply a product, it also has strong process elements. This process has to be maintained and can suffer when neglected. Youthlynx is committed to establishing and maintaining integrated responses to educational disadvantage. However this commitment has to be reconciled with an equally strong commitment to providing a service to/with the young people, who are the focus of the intervention. The problems that face these young people need to be met with a combination of service provision and advocacy. These necessities coupled with the maintenance of an integrated response place considerable demands on the human resources of the project.

Kilkenny Youthlynx

- 2 **Short-term funding.** Virtually all of the initiatives detailed in the case studies were funded for a limited period of time (generally 2 – 3 years). The extent to which these projects have subsequently been mainstreamed is disappointing, and a number of the project promoters have expressed some frustration that the time and energy which they invested have

‘ An integrated response to educational disadvantage is not simply a product, it also has strong process elements.’

Kilkenny Youthlynx

not produced significant long-term results. There is a sense that the impact of the pilot projects will be limited unless there is a strong commitment from relevant agencies and organisations to mainstreaming their more positive outcomes. There was a view that pilot projects would be stronger and more self-assured if they were given reasonable indications at an early stage that the relevant organisations would be committed to supporting them in the long-term. Furthermore, the promoters/sponsors will be more inclined to become fully engaged if there is a strong likelihood of this support.

3 Lack of Parental Involvement.

One of the most difficult tasks for projects which set themselves the goal of tackling educational disadvantage is to engage parents. The consortium of ‘Second Chance’ felt that the very fact that they were able to get all of the parents to attend the initial meetings with their child was in itself a huge achievement. There are many barriers that prevent parental participation. These include a lack of a ‘contact’ within the project with whom they might liaise with or look to for information. The ‘Second Chance’ project was fortunate in that such a person already existed in the town in the form of the Community Social Worker. This person and her organisation, Muintir na Tire, had a long and reputable history of community development within the town. This helped to establish the type of relationship between project and family that contributes to the success of any project.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

Whilst the project sponsors tried to create the space and the opportunities for parents to become actively involved in the projects, there was a poor level of participation and take-up from parents. The reasons for these disappointing outcomes include the parents’ own negative experiences of the educational system and their concerns in relation to the contributions which they were able to make to the work of management committees and project teams. It should be noted, however, that a number of projects profiled in the case studies did have some success in engaging with parents. It is important to reflect on the strategies and approaches devised by these projects to encourage greater parental involvement, and to identify ways in which these strategies might be translated to other projects and initiatives. The participation of parents in projects to counter educational disadvantage is of central importance, and all efforts should be made to build upon the achievements of those projects who have succeeded in attracting a relatively high level of parental involvement.

The Youthlynx team made a conscious effort to support parents in their decision to approach various agencies who might be able to provide help and/or advice. This involved supporting parents as they approached agencies such as FÁS, Money Advice and Budgeting Services, the Health Board, the Vocational Education Committee etc. Although the Youthlynx team acknowledged that a lot more work needed to be done with parents they felt that, given the time constraints, they had begun to form trusting relationships with parents. The team have concluded that in projects to develop



integrated approaches to tackling educational disadvantage the more investment there is in parents the greater the positive outcomes for the young people.

Kilkenny Youthlynx

Generally there has been a favourable response from parents. The evaluation report documents instances where parents have said that the JETS project has helped their children but has also been a support to them. However not all parents are involved to the same degree. Those parents whose children are at the greatest risk of leaving school are the same parents who need the greatest support, unfortunately they are also the parents who have the least involvement with the project. One of the ways in which the need of the JETS parents is being addressed is through the employment of a Parent Support Worker. This post was created in September 1998 and is being supported by Barnardos. It is a part-time post and he or she will work in conjunction with the new Co-ordinator. The post is especially important in light of the fact that the new Co-ordinator also teaches part time (11 hours) at Jobstown Community College, and therefore greater demands are placed upon his time. The Parent Support Worker will help parents actively engage in the development of their child's education.

Jobstown Education and Training Strategy

2.5 OTHER ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 *Relationships must be formalised.* A number of the case studies referred to the way in which good working relationships had developed between individuals involved in the various consortia and project teams. There was some concern, however, that these relationships were based primarily on the goodwill and commitment of individual personnel rather than on strong inter-agency linkages – if these individuals moved on and left the consortium or project team, would the relationships between the various organisations and agencies still endure? A key challenge is to try and ensure that integrated and co-ordinated responses to educational disadvantage are incorporated into the normal

'...parents whose children are at the greatest risk of leaving school are the same parents who need the greatest support...' Jobstown Education and Training Strategy

work practices and policies/priorities of relevant organisations and agencies – this type of approach should be structured into the systems and procedures of these organisations and agencies, rather than being largely dependent on the identity and personality of the person who is nominated to represent their organisation on various consortia and project teams. Integrated responses to educational disadvantage should be an organisation priority, and should be based primarily on structural alliances rather than strong personal relationships.

The relationship between Louth Youth Federation (LYF) and the CDYCP is very close. This is due partly to the strong relationship which exists between the Director of LYF and the project team. The LYF were the support agency for the CDYCP when it was first set up in 1990, and the relationship has continued to grow and strengthen. The evaluation report does recommend that both the LYF and the CDYCP remain cognisant of the fact that the relationship which exists between them is as much personal as structural, and that they both need to be aware of that fact.

One of the key concerns expressed in the evaluation report relates to the nature of the relationships which exist between the agencies and the project. It was felt that many of the relationships which exist are based on personal rather than on structural arrangements. However this is seen as an opportunity for further development and not always as a barrier to future co-operation, especially in light of the fact that all agencies expressed a positive attitude toward the LEBO

project. A key objective for the Second Chance project (which followed on from the LEBO and is operational in 1998 and 1999) is to develop the relationships with the various providers and to enhance the process of integration between the formal and informal education sectors.

LEBO

- 2 *Clear goals must be set.* The experiences of the projects profiled in the case studies would suggest that most of the difficulties and problems emerged when the participating organisations did not have a clear/agreed vision of what the projects hoped to achieve, how they were going to be structured/organised and how they intended to deliver the various project actions. Therefore it is imperative that members of individual consortia and project teams set some time aside at the start of the process to formulate a detailed project plan which would address issues like the project priorities, key target groups, roles and responsibilities, management and organisation, delivery of project actions. In the absence of this type of agreed project plan, there is a real danger that different partner organisations will have different interpretations and understandings of the purpose of the project and how the project will be managed/implemented. In devising integrated responses to educational disadvantage, it will be necessary to allocate a reasonable amount of time at the start of the process for planning purposes – in addition to helping the partner organisations formulate well structured and comprehensive project plans, this planning phase will also provide an opportunity for the participating organisations to get to know each other and to strengthen relationships within the consortium or project team.



use of an inter-agency approach in tackling any problem has many advantages but it also has many constraints. For example the project planning stage has to be more inclusive and participatory. This means that the views of more people are heard and that there needs to be a longer planning period. The involvement of many agencies has intrinsic organisational problems centring on co-ordination of meetings and the establishment of common goals. It was felt by both the Co-ordinator and the second level teacher that there was an underestimation of the level of time and commitment that the project would demand, consequently the planning or pre-development stage of the project was deemed to be quite short. Almost from the beginning these limitations were reflected in the operations of the project.

Jobstown Education and Training Strategy.

- 3 **Integrate minority groups.** Research would suggest that groups like Travellers, people with disabilities and young mothers experience particular difficulties in progressing satisfactorily through the education system. In this type of context, integrated responses to educational disadvantage should ensure that the educational needs of minority groups are fully considered when setting up projects and initiatives which are targeted both at potential early school leavers and young people who have already left school at an early age. Young Travellers, young people with disabilities and young mothers will often require additional or special supports if they are to remain within the education system or if they are to be provided with opportunities to re-access or to re-enter education. Project sponsors should pay particular attention to the needs and circumstances of young people from minority groups when they are devising local projects and local initiatives; and try and ensure that representatives from these minority groups are included in consortia and project teams which are established at the local level.

One of the objectives of YESP was to include minority groups like young people with disabilities, young Travellers and young mothers. The project realised that a clear effort would have to be made to form links with various groups if these young people were to be included in a meaningful way. To that end links were formed with local Traveller Training Workshops and Traveller support groups, and the project also held meetings to explain to the wider Traveller community what the project was about. Meetings were also held with the National Rehabilitation Board and other organisations that work with young people with disabilities. These meetings had the dual purpose of informing these organisations of YESP and making the project team aware of the main issues involved in working with young people with disabilities. Through links with the youth service and with local young mothers groups YESP was able to explain the programme to young mothers.

Youth Employment Support Project

- 4 **Information must be shared.** It is important that new and longer established projects have the opportunity to link into the experiences of other projects which have been developing integrated responses within their own areas. A number of project sponsors felt that a significant amount could be learnt through this type of process, and that it would decrease or minimise mistakes or misunderstandings taking place within individual

consortia and project teams. The experiences of the eight projects profiled in the case studies would suggest a considerable store of experience and knowledge is being accumulated in relation to integrated responses to educational disadvantage - it is important that mechanisms are devised for the sharing and dissemination of these local experiences. This particular publication by the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Support Structure of Youthstart represents one way of disseminating these experiences to a wider audience of practitioners and policy makers - other dissemination mechanisms should be developed in the future which would aim to inform local projects and influence mainstream policy (about the benefits and advantages of promoting integrated responses to the issue of educational disadvantage).

One of the primary aims of the project is to disseminate information which will inform mainstream policy development. It was decided at the planning stage that this will be executed by:

- **The presentation of written information and evaluations to policy makers.**
- **Staff and management participating in seminars and workshops which present the learning of the project.**
- **Management reporting to statutory bodies, local development organisations and the community sector.**

Jobstown Education and Training Strategy.



Although the consortium members from Tipperary have said that the model they have used is local and needs based, they also said that individual members of the consortium acquired information from projects ranging in distance from North and South Tipperary to North Mayo. In fact members of a Youthstart project in North Tipperary did attend a number of the consortium meetings and continue to attend consortium meetings as the consortium makes plans for a second round of 'Second Chance'.

Second Chance Early School Leaver Project

DESCRIPTIONS OF CASE STUDY PROJECTS

3.1 LEBO PROJECT: COX'S DEMESNE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

Introduction

The Cox's Demesne Youth and Community Project is located in a local authority housing estate (Cox's Demesne) in Dundalk, County Louth. The project was set up in 1991 to respond to the needs of the young people on the estate. Originally the CDYCP was under the umbrella of the Louth Youth Federation (LYF) and continues to be an affiliate of that organisation. The project has been funded in the past by the EU Horizon programme, the North-Eastern Health Board and the Probation and Welfare Service. The project made a successful application to the EU Youthstart programme in 1995 and was funded by Youthstart for the duration of the LEBO project.

Aims of project

The overall aim of the LEBO project was to provide an innovative programme for potential and actual early school leavers (12-16 year-olds), to enable them to make choices regarding:

- Returning to full-time education.
- Remaining within the education system.
- Accessing vocational training.

A core programme built around personal development was implemented to help the young people make choices about the future in an informed and responsible way.

Management and Staffing

The management committee of the CDYCP had overall responsibility for managing the LEBO project. The committee comprised 10 people: 5 local residents, one representative of the Probation and Welfare Service, one from Louth Youth Federation, one from the North Eastern Health Board and two members of staff. There were 5 full-time members of staff on the LEBO project, one co-ordinator and 4 project workers.



Target Groups

It was decided, when compiling the action plan, that the project would target disadvantaged young people aged between 12 and 16 years old. These young people would be either early school leavers or likely to become early school leavers. By the time the project received Youthstart funding, it had already built up very close working relationships with the Probation Service, one of the local secondary schools (O'Fiaich College) and the North-Eastern Health Board. These agencies referred young people to the project; and the project team, through their strong links in the local community, were also able to identify young people who would benefit from targeted interventions.

During the course of the project there were between 10 and 12 young people engaged in it. However, these were not always the same young people. The project had a policy of 'moving on' the young people and helping them to make the transition into formal education, training or employment – whichever option was most suitable for them. As these young people moved on others were given the chance to participate in the programme.

The Programme

(i) 'The House' programme

'The House' programme was the main part of the overall Youthstart Project. It had five elements:

- **Personal Development.** This was one of the core components of the project. It was built around weekly group work sessions, building relationships of trust between the young people themselves and between the young people and staff. The sessions were a safe space in which the young people could talk openly about experiences in their lives. For group work, the young people were divided into three groups, two young males and one young females.

- **Vocational Skills.** The vocational skills programme was designed not only to improve the job skills of the young people but also to increase their levels of self-esteem and confidence. In the same way that the personal development programme sought to improve the young person's sense of self worth and increase his/her ability to make informed choices about her/his own future, the vocational skills programme sought to enable the young person to work effectively as an individual and also as a member of a team. For that reason the vocational skills programme and the personal development programme were complementary.

The programme developed activities around the following work areas:

- Building and restoration work
- Organic farming
- Ceramics
- Running a coffee shop
- Computer skills
- Skin Care
- Cooking
- Video skills
- Flower arranging
- Welding
- Motorbike mechanics
- Woodwork

- **Leisure/Sport Activities.** The kind of activities that were organised during this part of the programme included:
 - Gymnastics
 - Swimming
 - Sailing for one week during the summer
 - Pitch and Putt
 - Outings, which included weekend trips and day trips.

- **Literacy/Numeracy Programme.** This was a direct response to the literacy and numeracy difficulties experienced by many young people involved in the project. When designing this programme, staff were careful to develop a method of teaching that would engage the young people using techniques such as writing out the names of car parts, of song lyrics, doing crosswords, filling out application forms and reading for pleasure.
- **After Care.** This intervention project was set up to provide support for young people as they left the full-time programme. The young people met each alternate week for group work and every other week for leisure activities. By the time the young people reached After Care they were used to the dynamics of group work and were therefore quite comfortable with this format.

(ii) Programme in O'Fiaich College

O'Fiaich College provided a special class for the project participants which lasted for about three hours each day. During these hours the school provided tutoring in the following areas:

- Art
- Home Economics
- Computer skills
- Maths
- English
- Metalwork
- History
- Woodwork
- Geography

Tutoring was provided for all the young people who chose to sit the Junior Certificate. In 1996 two young people succeeded in this examination and in 1997 the number increased to three. At the



beginning of the 1997-98 school year it was agreed that all project participants would be registered for the Junior Certificate whether or not they were attending school.

(iii) *Transnational Partnership*

The groups involved in transnational exchange activities with Cox's Demesne were located in Spain (the Basque region), Germany and Austria. The exchanges took place in 1997, and many of the young people in the project were involved in travelling abroad. The time abroad offered opportunities for the project team to work with the young people in a way that was not possible when they were at home. It was the experience of the team that the young people seemed to 'open up' a lot more when they were away and issues emerged which might never have done at home.

Project Outcomes and Results

Of the 30 young people who participated in the project in 1996-97, 11 have remained with the CDYCP. The status of the remaining 19 young people is as follows:

- 2 have returned to full-time education.
- 6 have secured employment.
- 1 has secured an apprenticeship.
- 3 have accessed Youthreach.
- 1 has accessed a place in the Community Training Workshop.
- 1 is in residential care.
- 3 are in custody.
- 3 have not progressed.
- 1 died.

'One of the key challenges for projects which tackle educational disadvantage is the development of relationships... within the formal and non-formal education sectors.' *Kilkenny Youthlynx*

3.2 DEIS NA GAILLIMHE: CITY OF GALWAY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Deis na Gaillimhe project is one of the 20 Irish projects funded under the first round of the Youthstart strand of the European Union (EU) Employment Initiative. This pilot project focused on the prevention of early school leaving in a number of Galway city schools and communities. It began in 1995 as a consortium of interested organisations who came together to form an integrated response to the needs of young people considered potential early school leavers. The central idea of the project is that interventions to counter educational disadvantage should involve co-operation and co-ordination between various providers and should, in particular, involve the community as a key partner.

Aims of project

The Deis project aimed to create a District Approach to the prevention of early school leaving in Galway City. Central to this idea is co-operation between the various providers both statutory and voluntary, and the co-ordination of services within a given district. Working in this way, the project aimed to encourage an increased targeting of services towards priority clients. An early document, the Operational Plan, was developed by the Board in 1996 and clustered the actions of the project around 6 main areas:

1. Potential early school leavers.
2. Parents and families of early school leavers.
3. Schools and teachers.
4. Services – community based.
5. Early school leavers; and
6. All other actions.

Management and Staffing

The project was underpinned by a Consortium, and the Board was constituted from its members:

The Consortium was made up of:

- Galway City VEC (the lead organisation).
- The Project's eight schools.
- Three youth organisations.
- Three community-based organisations.
- A Western Health Board (WHB) sponsored Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP).
- An Garda Síochána.

The Board was made up of:

- The Project Director (CEO of Galway City VEC).
- The Project Chairman (Chairman of Galway City VEC).
- Four community representatives.
- Two representatives of youth organisations.
- A representative of employers in Galway City.
- A representative of the Western Health Board (WHB).
- Two representatives of the schools (one primary and one post-primary).

As the lead organisation, the Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) was responsible for the general direction of the project and the CEO of the VEC took on the role of Project Director. In addition to the project's Board, there was a subcommittee made up of the principals from the participating schools and another dealing with the Youth and Community aspect of the project. There was also a subcommittee in place to work on the project's Operational Programme.



The project was staffed by a team of four people - the project co-ordinator, a primary school link teacher, a post-primary school link teacher and a youth worker. This team was also supported by a full-time administrator.

Target Group

Deis na Gaillimhe worked with 8 city schools, 4 primary and 4 post-primary. The breakdown was as follows:

Primary – 1 mixed and 3 single-sex
(2 girls, 1 boys).

Post-primary – 2 mixed and 2 single-sex
(girls only).

Three communities were specifically targeted by Deis for support. Population sizes varied. Early school leaving was considered to be an issue of prevalence in each of these areas. The main mechanisms implemented by Deis for recruitment and selection onto the programme were as follows:

- A number of children were identified in discussions between link teachers and school staff about attendance.
- A higher level of awareness of the project in the schools and an increase in the numbers of teachers in the project led to more children being identified.
- A number of children were targeted from new admissions to the project schools. In total, the target group for the project consisted of approximately 300 pupils.

The Programme

The programme for the Deis na Gaillimhe project comprised 14 elements:

- **Identification of potential early school leavers.** The main activity under this heading was the implementation and analysis of research. Using the information gleaned, the project was able to

generate a full analysis of the extent and nature of problems in schools. This was important in terms of identifying the target group for the project.

- **Transfer of information and tracking of pupils in transition.** The project operated on two levels with respect to this relationship. Firstly, it took on the task of ensuring the transfer of the full cohorts of children from the project primary schools. This tracking process was carried out in different ways by the various primary schools e.g. through sending a transfer letter to secondary schools with a list of children who nominated the school in question as their intended destination. Secondly, the passing on of sensitive information concerning individual children was undertaken, by appointing transition co-ordinators in each of the project's schools, and the development by the project of its own information card on the targeted pupils.

- **Monitoring attendance of potential early school leavers.** Attendance monitoring consisted of two strands, the first being research focused and the second on developing a sustainable mechanism to ensure that poor attendees did not become early school leavers. Attendance was checked on a term basis and the team devised a short report covering the key issues of the relationship between patterns of attendance and school leaving. In addition, the team developed a "Protocol of Attendance", outlining a series of steps to encourage attendance to be followed by the schools, in conjunction with the Gardaí.

- **Neighbourhood survey of early school leavers.** This element of the project was aimed at making links between the schools and the community. The underlying rationale was to document the views of

those under the age of eighteen, indicating their reasons for leaving school, at what stage they left, and the outcomes of this decision. A simple questionnaire was administered by community workers in their localities and, in all, 37 young people were interviewed.

- **Back-up services available to potential early school leavers.** Research was undertaken and indicated the level of take-up of existing back-up services for each child on the Deis list. This yielded some interesting results:
 - 43% had used the services of remedial teachers.
 - Home School Community Links co-ordinators had contact with 63% of the children.
 - 20% were involved with the Western Health Board's Neighbourhood Youth Projects.
 - 12% had been cautioned under the Juvenile Liaison Officers scheme.
 - One-third had come to the attention of the School Attendance Officer.
 - Roughly one-quarter of those in primary school had no contact with in-school services with a corresponding figure of one-eighth at post-primary.
 - 7% were involved in homework groups.
 - Almost one-fifth were on the books of the Department of Education's Schools Psychological Service.
 - Only 15% of post-primary school children in the target group got support from the Career Guidance service (however, prior to Junior Certificate, this lower level of interaction would not be unusual).



- **Groupwork in Schools.**

Primary: The general approach taken in the primary schools with regard to groupwork was quite varied. Overall, the main group activities which took place at primary level were part of the transition programme. The link teacher was involved in a number of initiatives. A groupwork approach using the 'Circle Time' methodology devised by Jenny Mosley was also put in place.

Post-Primary:- At post-primary level, certain children needed additional non-academic inputs to support them through the school day. The project aimed to develop such interventions for these children. Developing and implementing group work within schools also involved enhancing the skills of school staff, supporting existing links between schools and outside school agencies (youth work projects, Neighbourhood Youth Projects), and creating new ones.

- **The Transition Programme.** The transition of children from primary to post-primary school was identified as a significant potential point of intervention in the prevention of early school leaving. Difficulties are often encountered in making the adjustment between primary and secondary school and, in recognition of this, the project focused on transition issues in its identification, tracking and monitoring work. Furthermore, the development of a specific programme to assist children transferring to post-primary school took place. The 'OK Let's Go!' programme was intended to address the fears of young people at three points in the process of transition: during sixth class, during the summer months between leaving primary school and starting secondary school and on entry to second-level. The Programme was written up by staff members and was published to fill a gap in the documentation available on transition.

- **In - and out-of-school programme.** The development of a specific programme involving schools and outside agencies reflected a desire specifically to target at-risk children in the second year of post-primary, using a combination of supports within the school

'The staff of the Youthlynx project clearly identified the importance of engaging teachers and securing their active support for the project.' Kilkenny Youthlynx

day and outside school activities, such as music/dance, clay-modelling and jewellery making. These encouraged good school attendance on the days that the project was operating. This programme was a further development in the project's groupwork efforts.

- **In-Career development for teachers.** The form that the in-career strategy took was two courses for primary teachers. Both courses involved seminars and workshops in the different areas and both were partially delivered by national and regional experts, with a further contribution by Deis staff and Board members. By bringing teachers from the project schools together, there was an opportunity for discussion and raising awareness of the problem of early school leaving. This also provided an opportunity to inform teachers of the project's response as well as providing information and skills to the course participants.

- **Service information actions.** The project played a small but significant role in the areas of awareness and information sharing. The first action was the development of a directory of all services in Galway City for children in the project's target group. The second involved running short sessions in a number of schools, providing staff and community based professionals with the opportunity to share information about services provided.

- **Code of Good Practice for Homework Support Groups.** A directory of community based groups involved in some sort of homework support was created, which was then circulated to all of the project schools. The project's youth/community worker had the responsibility of devising a

document based on a series of consultations and meetings which would set out a specific Code of Practice. Included in this were ideas on:

- Definitions of homework.
- Involvement with schools.
- Involvement with parents.
- Forms of provision.
- Policy, procedures and rules.

- **Parental Involvement.** Parents were involved to a small extent in the project's groupwork activities in schools. Another area in which there was some limited input was in the area of transition. The GAP (Growth and Partnership) programme involved direct parental inputs.
- **Peer Education.** This involved identifying and training those who had left the formal education system in previous years as mentors to those in the project's target group. A small number of peer educators was recruited.

- **The Link Teacher Service.** The link teacher service represented the operational spine of the project in relation to actions involving the schools. In addition to direct intervention, the link teachers also played a key role in programme development and research that was undertaken during the course of the project.

Project Outcomes and Results

- 200 children were directly involved in groupwork activities in schools. This groupwork provided them with a series of different supports in a school situation which was potentially difficult for them to handle without assistance. Feedback from groups was positive.



- The "OK, Let's Go" document is an extremely important output of the project. It highlights transition between primary and post-primary as an issue worth considering by teachers and others working in related areas. Feedback from this document has been very positive and thus it is seen to be a very worthwhile initiative.
- A total of 36 teachers were involved in the in-career development courses provided. The subsequent summary documents provided an additional resource for schools. Interviews conducted with those who took part in the training sessions highlighted the value of this area of work.
- Homework Support. The project carried out work in two respects in this area. The first was the directory of homework providers made available to the schools and the second document was the 'Code of Practice', which provides a resource for homework providers in the project's communities.

3.3 JOBSTOWN EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGY

Introduction

The Jobstown Education and Training Strategy (JETS) is an integrated inter-agency response to educational disadvantage in the Jobstown area of west Tallaght in County Dublin.

Aims of project

The primary aim of the JETS is to seek to develop a model framework through which schools, families, pupils, community organisations and state bodies will effectively work together:

- to decrease the levels of educational disadvantage
- to improve retention in the formal school systems
- to intervene in the cycle of poverty and its links to education

It is also the aim of the project that its 18 selected students will stay in the school system and complete their Junior Certificate. Through the project it is hoped that pupils will benefit from a

needs-based, extended curriculum and supports comprising educational, recreational service, psychological and family support interventions.

The project, which began in 1996, supports 18 young people as they make their way from sixth class in St Thomas Senior National School to completion of their Junior Certificate in Jobstown Community College in June 2000.

Management and Staffing

One of the specific objectives of JETS is to *'develop an integrated approach between formal and informal systems in order effectively to respond to the problem of early school leaving'*. (From Project Development Plan). The agencies that have come together to form this integrated response include: Barnardos, Jobstown Community College, South Dublin Chamber of Commerce, St Thomas Senior National School, the Tallaght Partnership and Youth Horizons. At the time that JETS began in 1996 each of these organisations was already engaged in direct service provision to young people in the Jobstown area.

A co-ordinator was employed by the project in July 1996 to work directly with the young people.

The co-ordinator also had responsibility for:

- Monitoring progress.
- Liaising with the management committee.
- Integrating the work of the delivery agents within the project.
- Helping in the dissemination of learning that emerges from JETS.
- Continuously engaging parents in an effort to help them become more actively involved in their child's education.

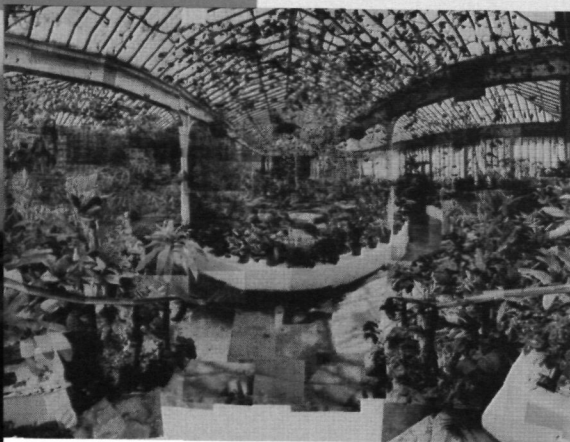
- Keeping reports.

Target Group

The JETS class was made up of 18 young people, 9 male and 9 female. They were chosen from 156 pupils of the fifth class in St Thomas Senior Primary School in Jobstown. Out of an identified 32 young people at risk of early school leaving 18 were chosen to participate in the JETS class. The young people were chosen in consultation with the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator, the school principal, teacher counsellor, remedial teachers and other members of the teaching staff.

The class did not represent one particular type of young person but instead the various types of young people at risk of early school leaving. This means that many of the JETS class

- were of mixed academic ability
- were withdrawn whilst others exhibited aggressive behaviour inside the classroom
- had a record of erratic attendance and poor punctuality
- showed an increasing level of absenteeism as they progress through school
- exhibited low rates of participation in school activities
- had older brothers and sisters who had left school without any qualification
- were academic underachievers or had academic difficulties
- were recognised to have low self-esteem
- had poor social skills
- had prematurely assumed adult responsibilities
- were thought to be at serious risk of early school leaving



The Programme

- **Pre-development Stage.** The preparatory work for the project was carried out by the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators for St. Thomas Senior National School and Jobstown Community College. As a result of their negotiations and experiences a project plan was developed and finalised by early 1996. This plan outlined the way in which the project would progress. The project formally began in June 1996 - by this stage the young people had been chosen and Barnardos had agreed to work with them in a summer project.

- **The first Summer Project (1996).** This first part of the project was designed to ease the young people into the JETS, to assist in team building, to help the young people to get to know each other and also some of the people they would be working with in the following years.

During the summer project the young people were involved in a number of activities which included drama, art work, horse riding and a variety of outdoor pursuits. The project ran from 4th July to 1st August 1996. In many respects the summer project was able to compensate for the lack of pre-development time with the young people. It allowed them to develop relationships in a non-threatening non-school environment.

- **Sixth Class in St Thomas National School.** The project began its second phase in September 1996 with the return to school. At this point the JETS class were about to begin their sixth year in St Thomas Senior National School.

One particular teacher was assigned specifically to the JETS class while they were in 6th class. The amount of time he had to familiarise himself with the project plan was quite short, and this had an initial impact on his understanding of the JETS project. It was his job to teach the class of 18 up until 2.40 p.m. each day and to supervise the after school activities. These continued until 4.15 p.m., and included sport and homework support. One of the

issues that was paramount in the planning of the JETS was the problems that young people encounter as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. In an effort to minimise the difficulties of this transition a specific strategy was developed. An element of this strategy was familiarising the JETS class with Jobstown Community College, its pupils and the teacher who would be responsible for the class once they arrived in the school.

- **The second Summer Project (1997).** Having completed their time in St Thomas Senior National School it was agreed that a second summer project would provide continuity for the programme and help identify any problems that might hinder a successful transition from primary to secondary school. During the second summer project Barnardos were able to build on the success of the previous year while simultaneously addressing the new difficulties. Unlike in the first year, some of the young people were involved in the planning of the summer project. This addressed Barnardos' concern around the young people identifying their own needs. This second summer project included interaction with other young people - this helped to integrate the class into a wider peer group and went a long way toward combating an isolationism which may have been attached to the idea of a class like JETS. It also allowed the other young people to understand what JETS was about and this helped to eradicate any stigma the programme might have had amongst young people in Jobstown.

- **First year in Jobstown Community College.** It was agreed that once the 18 young people had made the transition to Jobstown Community College they would stay together for a core group of subjects and would mix with other students for optional subjects. The secondary school teacher who had worked with the young people in primary school and during the second summer project taught four of these core subjects.

Team teaching is an important element in the JETS second level structure, with the young people receiving additional support in subjects like English from the JETS Co-ordinator. Supports were also available for after-school activities: Youth Horizons, a youth-development organisation in Jobstown, works with the young people for three afternoons each week. This work includes help with homework but also aims to bring out the latent talents that many of the young people have. Youth Horizons encourage the young people to develop their skills and build on their interests. It also provides practical skills training in areas such as computer literacy. The Youth Horizon activities involve parents and teachers especially around the area of homework assistance.

- **The third Summer Project (1998).** The summer project for 1998 was organised by Youth Horizons. It began the day that school ended (in June 1998), and involved a three week activity block. Week one brought the young people to Shielbaggan Adventure Centre in Wexford, where they went canoeing, wind-surfing and orienteering. Week two was a week of arts and crafts and in week three the young women went to the Helen Jordan School of Dancing while the young men played



soccer and other sports. Each week ended with a day trip and the entire summer project ended with an evening in Dublin where the staff and young people had a meal and then went to the cinema.

Project Outcomes and Results

- The JETS class are now in their second year in Jobstown Community College. During their time with the project many of the young people have made significant progress. Many of their parents feel that without JETS their children would have already left the formal education system with nothing else to go to. The fact that all 18 children are still at school is a significant achievement when one considers that the JETS class were chosen because of the likelihood of them becoming early school leavers.
- However not all of the JETS class are progressing at the same rate. There are a small minority of the young people who are more and more likely to leave the programme. This issue has been identified by the Co-ordinator and measures are being taken to address the causes of the problem. These causes include association with an older peer group, late night activity and a high degree of tolerance on the part of the parents to the negative behaviour of their children. The relationships built between the Co-ordinator, the young people and the home are now being tested. It is important to remember that it is because of these relationships that any dialogue is taking place. Without them it is highly likely that the young people in question would have already left school.

3.4 KILKENNY YOUTHLYNX: KILKENNY COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

Introduction

Kilkenny Youthlynx is an integrated inter-agency approach to counter educational disadvantage in Kilkenny City. It is based on a partnership between community development organisations, statutory agencies and education/training providers. By creating this partnership the project seeks to establish new ways of

...the more investment there is in parents
the greater the positive outcomes for the
young people...'

Kilkenny Youthlynx

building strong relationships between the home, the school, and the community in an effort to improve the participation of young people in school and in the Community Training Workshop. The project described in this case study was one of twenty Youthstart Projects which participated in the first round of the Youthstart strand of the EMPLOYMENT Initiative.

Aims of project

The overall aim of the project was to develop a model of intervention for young people who were in serious danger of leaving the vocational education and training systems without any formal qualification. The project sought to initiate the first step in a 'comprehensive pathway approach' to support for a group of young people as they made their way through the education and training systems and into employment. The Youthlynx approach was informed by community development principles and methodologies, which included a belief in, and commitment to, enabling people to work for change through developing participatory methods and partnership arrangements. This process aims to allow people to articulate their own needs, and influence the dynamics of the wider society.

Management and Staffing

The agencies which made up the consortium of Kilkenny Youthlynx are:

- Kilkenny Community Action Network.
- Community areas of Hebron Park, Newpark Close and Bishop Birch Place.
- Kilkenny City Vocational School.
- Kilkenny Employment for Youth.
- Loughboy Area Resource Centre.

- Ossory Youth Services.
- South Eastern Health Board.
- St. Canice's Community Action.

A Youthstart management committee was put in place to oversee the development of the project. It comprised representatives from each of the consortium agencies. This committee had responsibility for the overall management of the project. Sub-committees were put in place to assist in financial and human resource management. The Youthlynx staff team consisted of a project co-ordinator, a community youth worker, a community support worker, a school/workshop project worker and a community arts worker. A part-time administrator and a secretary were also employed to provide administrative support.

Target Groups

There were two distinct target groups for the Youthlynx project.

- The first group of 22 young people were in their first year at Kilkenny City Vocational School (KCVS) in 1996. The Youthlynx participants came from two of the three first year classes of KCVS. The young people were all identified by the school as potential early school leavers and had a wide variety of problems. The criteria used to make this identification included:
 - Learning difficulties.
 - Disruptive behaviour in school.
 - A history of early school leaving within the family.
 - Emotional difficulties.



- The second group were in Kilkenny Employment for Youth (KEY) a Community Training Workshop in Kilkenny City, and were all over 15 years of age. This target group was originally intended to comprise 10 young people from the same five disadvantaged areas as the school based group. However, this group changed regularly reflecting the intake of trainees. Throughout the two years of the programme 26 young people were engaged in this section of the project. The behaviour of this group can be characterised by:
 - Some aggressive behaviour towards each other and to teamstaff.
 - Use of offensive sexual language.
 - Interruptive behaviour during project work.
 - Disengagement from some of the activities.
 - Some involvement in drug and alcohol misuse.

The Programme

In order to take account of the distinct needs of the two target groups, two programmes were developed, one for the young people still in school (the school-based programme) and one for the young people engaged in training (KEY-based programme): The school-based programme aimed to provide support to the targeted group of young people up to the completion of their Junior Certificate. The ultimate hope was that they would then complete their second level education and make a successful transition into further education, training or employment. The main activities within the school based programme were as follows:

- **The Summer Project.** The Summer Project in 1996 helped to establish ground rules and to set standards for the project. During the summer the young people became involved in a lot of creative activities. One of the team members had been involved in youth work in Kilkenny for 20 years and this gave the project a lot of credibility in the community and amongst the parents of the young people. By the end of the first summer programme the teachers had a clearer understanding of the project, what it was trying to achieve and how it was going to be organised.

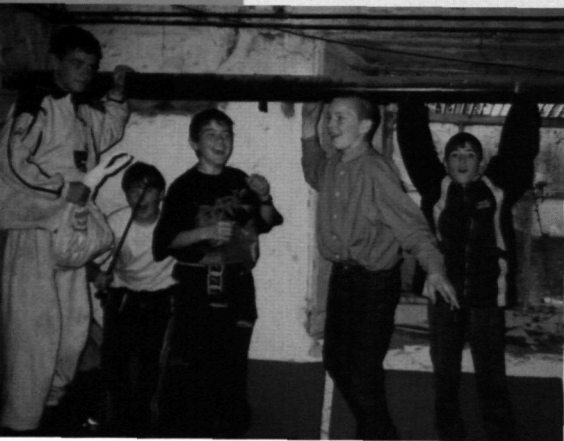
- **Group Work.** The project initially worked with the young people in two groups of ten for the 1996-97 year - however, due to teacher cutbacks the groups had to be amalgamated in September 1997. By this time three of the original target group had left school. The philosophy behind the group work sessions was based on 'building trusting relationships'. This group work was organised for two afternoons each week and consisted of crafts, drama, discussions and games. Other activities included evaluation of activities, planning day trips, overnight trips, e-mailing transnational partners and planning for a parents' day. As the young people moved into their Junior Certificate year, a need was identified for more academic support. A Homework Club was established in September 1997. It was staffed by a teacher and two members of the Youthlynx team.

- **The Transnational Trips.** Seven young Finnish people and three facilitators from the partner project in Finland visited Kilkenny in March 1997 (and took part in the St Patrick's Day parade in Kilkenny City with the young people from Kilkenny). Subsequently, seven of the Kilkenny young people took part in a visit to Finland for one week in June 1997. During that time they engaged in arts projects and learned about a different culture, language and society. These young people had to earn the right to go to Finland (through regular and consistent participation in the project) and were involved in the planning, budgeting and design of the trip. The trip was seen to be useful in increasing the self esteem, confidence and negotiation skills of the young people.

- **Other Activities.** The young people formed a Christmas Craft Co-operative. During the life of this co-operative they produced crafts including Christmas cards and decorations and were involved in selling their produce around Kilkenny. They also engaged in outdoor pursuits, including canoeing and horse riding. The young people played an active role in designing and organising these activities.

- **The KEY-based programme.** Each Wednesday afternoon a 2-hour group work session was organised for the young people. A number of activities were organised for this time, including projects designed to increase self esteem, build trusting relationships and improve social skills. All of these activities were designed with a fun dynamic in mind. Due to the characteristics of these young people it was decided that time needed to be given to developing a way in which they might effectively communicate with each other. Therefore they were encouraged to debate, getting them to work together in teams and to articulate their views and opinions in an organised way. They responded well to this format and they had a real input into the planning and evaluation of these sessions.

Trips were organised on a relatively frequent basis at the beginning of the programme. However as the young people became more comfortable with the team and with each other the need for these 'group building' trips was not as great. As the project progressed the time allotted for trips was used instead for drama and other group work. Within the KEY programme there was a strong



commitment to artistic activities, partly because these were popular with the young people and partly because the methodologies underpinning community arts were especially suitable for working with these young people. It allowed the young people to explore issues around drug and alcohol misuse, violence, trust and relationship building.

Project Outcomes and Results

In aiming to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Youthlynx two assessment sheets were given to project staff and two teachers in April 1996 and February 1997. These sheets were designed to measure five areas:

- Attendance
- Decision Making
- Behaviour
- Responsibility taking
- Social Skills.

There were marked improvements in all of these areas. One of the key findings of these reports was that for those young people who had not completed the programme, 'school' as it is currently defined may not be the most appropriate place for them. This highlights the need for alternative programmes to engage young people with specific needs.

Of the original group of 22 in the school based programme nine have left school. There are a further two who have ceased to have contact with Youthlynx. The project did not have permission to continue to work with one person and another made a decision to leave. However, the progress of the nine young people who left school was monitored until February 1998. The young people who have remained in school are doing well and they have all completed their Junior Certificate.

'All decisions were a matter of collective responsibility and all actions and decisions proposed were subject to ratification.' *Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project*

3.5 MOYROSS INTERVENTION EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

Introduction

The Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project (MIEPP) was a five-year action research initiative in Moyross, Co. Limerick at the primary school level. It began in September 1990 and was launched officially in November 1991. The project aimed to bring about sustainable improvements in the educational attainment of the children involved by devising, implementing and evaluating a curriculum with a pronounced academic emphasis. The project adopted a multidimensional approach to the intervention by involving representatives from the statutory, community and educational agencies to share its direction and management. Intervention assistance was provided for the first four years of the children's school lives, from reception through to first class, with parental support and involvement being fostered and maintained throughout.

Main Objective of project

The main objective of the project was to 'prevent incipient learning failure in the target classes by devising, implementing and evaluating a curriculum with a high academic content tailored to meet the children's educational needs'. The project was modelled upon various other projects, primarily the Dublin-based Rutland Street Project. Results from research carried out in America and England in relation to time allocated to various subjects and curricular content were also taken into consideration.

Management of the project

A multidimensional approach was adopted within the project. The project began as a small group in Mary Immaculate College, supported by the Curriculum Development Unit in the college. This small group decided at a very early stage that there would need to be a number of partners and wide acceptance of the project for it to work successfully. In addition to Corpus Christi National School from where the target group would be taken and the parents of participating children, other statutory, community and educational partners were involved. The City of Limerick VEC was involved in recognition of the potential of their initiative. FAS also came on board at this early stage. The Moyross partners were the people involved in the community leadership aspect. The MIEPP was sponsored by the Department of Education and Model Action 16 of the EU Poverty 3 Programme.

The initiative was ambitious in that it required the integrated co-operation of a number of key partners. Management of the Board was shared by representatives of all the partners involved and comprised a steering committee and an executive body. The project executive was a representative body comprising participants nominated by Mary Immaculate College, Corpus Christi School, parents of participating children, providers of adult education for parents of participating children, PAUL (People Against Unemployment in Limerick), and the Education Officer from the MIEPP.



Target Groups

Based in the Corpus Christi National School, the project targeted 75 infants who began their schooling in September 1991. Intervention assistance was provided for four years, from infants, through first class.

Board members stressed the importance to parents of the success of this project. They felt that it was important to make parents aware of the importance of education, and of their importance to their child's education. Thus, the project aimed to act as a catalyst to heighten parents self-confidence in this regard. Parents were encouraged to become involved in the school on a rota basis from the very initial stages of the project. This helped them to become more relaxed in the school environment. During the second year, the afternoon enrichment lessons offered parents the opportunity to become more involved in their child's education.

The Programme

The MIEPP response to the growing concern surrounding the multifaceted issue of educational disadvantage was *"the introduction of a deliberate dual approach, targeting teacher/curriculum and parent/community development simultaneously, with a view to consolidating the efforts of the disparate groups towards effective, positive change."* (From evaluation report)

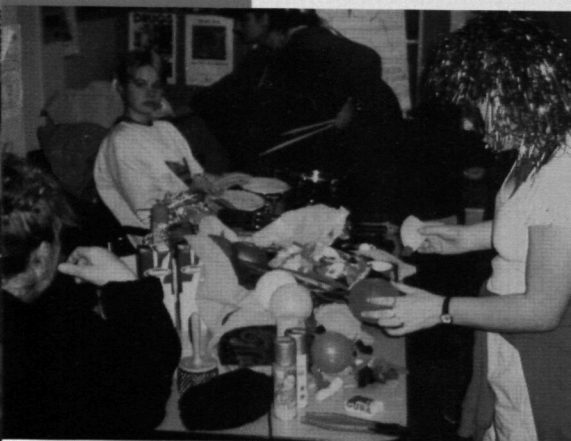
(i) School-directed interventions

Given that the project was primarily a school-based education initiative, much of the intervention was incorporated into the children's school day. This necessitated an 'open-door' policy to allow for the involvement of participants' parents. This 'open-door' policy demanded more than the provision of a parent room in the school, coffee mornings and parent-teacher meetings. Over the four-year life of the project, a number of key measures were developed:

- The adaptation of the curriculum timetable. It was considered necessary to change the standard infant timetable in order to introduce a curriculum with a pronounced academic focus tailored to meet the needs of the children involved in the project. During the initial two years of the project, this involved reducing the period of time allocated to teaching Irish and other subject areas in order to facilitate the teaching of the English language, reading, maths and the hands-on consolidation of basic skills. When the children's competencies of these key curriculum areas were strengthened, increased instructional time was spent on the teaching of Irish in order to prevent future difficulties in the subject.
- The reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio. It was also agreed that the pupil-teacher ratio would have to be reduced from the initial high of thirty-five to one which would effect the optimum implementation of the intervention curriculum.
- The introduction of a diagnostic-prescriptive teaching model based on regular standardised and criterion-referenced testing and mastery learning techniques. The MIEPP employed both formative and summative evaluation strategies. This involved the setting up of a control group and the project intervened with every child who was enrolled in the first year of the project. Various tests were administered at pre-decided times during the project. Curriculum intervention strategies were revised constantly in light of test indications and teachers' observations.
- The extension of the school-day by one hour to facilitate a remediation process. The school day was extended by one hour to facilitate the introduction of afternoon enrichment sessions for parents and children involved in the project. Each child was invited to attend one session per week in the company of a parent or a member of the extended family. In the initial stages, the child could not attend without the presence of a parent or guardian. However, over time, it was apparent that the children who needed the intervention most were losing out as their parents were not attending. Thus, with parental permission, these children were allowed to attend in the company of another adult. These classes were organised, researched and taught by the education officer, with assistance from the resource teacher. The classes afforded the targeted children the opportunity to explore further an aspect of the curriculum introduced during the course of the school day.
- The increase of classroom resources to facilitate hands-on experiential learning and the consolidation of basic skills. It was agreed from an early stage that the participating children would be provided with a wide range of educational resources given their experience of disadvantage. Such resources were used to support the teaching by encouraging active discovery learning techniques and independent thought in the children.

(ii) Home-directed interventions

More active involvement by the parents and families of these children targeted was seen to be crucial to the success of the project. These



interventions sought to develop and extend, where possible, existing programmes and networks to enrich the parent's potential to influence their children's experiences and life chances. Parental involvement in the MIEPP operated on a number of levels with parents' commitment varying depending on their individual circumstances and needs. Five types of parental involvement can be identified:

- **Committee representation.** Parents were proportionally represented at all levels of management (including steering committee, executive and home-school liaison groups) to ensure their active involvement in making decisions..
- **Active participation in the educational process.** Parents actively supported the learning process through their involvement within the classroom and outside it, both as teacher's aids and in yard supervision. They also attended school-organised trips as helpers.
- **Attendance at afternoon enrichment classes.** The majority of parents regularly attended the teacher-parent-child afternoon enrichment sessions. These classes raised the parents' awareness of their duty to their child as primary educator, whilst emphasising the need for them to work in co-operation with the teacher.
- **Enrolment and participation in adult education classes.** Parents were invited by the home-school liaison officer to attend adult education classes which were aimed at their self-improvement. Courses offered covered a wide range of interests. The school identified areas in which the parents may have required assistance, and the VEC organised courses to deal with this.
- **Participation in the communication network.** Efforts were continually being made to involve parents in the home-school links, school-community links, college-school and inter-class communication networks to facilitate the exchange of resources

and ideas whilst encouraging sustainable mutual support systems among the participating partners.

Project Outcomes and Results

Key achievements of the intervention programme included:

- The active involvement of parents of participating children in the planning, organisation and delivery of the intervention programme.
- The provision of afternoon parent-child enrichment classes.
- The development of home-school-community liaison systems to harness broad support for the intervention initiative.
- The inclusion of representatives from statutory, community and educational agencies towards the development of a partnership approach to the project's management and direction. This was particularly evident in the working relationships between the school and the VEC.
- The adaptation of the curriculum timetable.
- The reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio.
- The introduction of a diagnostic-prescriptive teaching model based on regular standardised and criterion referenced testing.
- The extension of the school day.
- The introduction of speech therapy in the school.
- The increase in classroom resources and, hence, hands-on experiential learning and the consolidation of basic skills.
- Results of comparative test scores indicated improvements in performance in key curriculum areas by children in the intervention classes. Significantly, this applied across the range of abilities in the target classes and included those who registered lowest on the standardised tests.

3.6 NORTH MAYO SCHOOLS PROJECT

Introduction

The North Mayo Schools Project started out as the combined ideas of the area manager for Foroige and a remedial teacher who was working in a Ballina school. The need for action was initially established as a result of a Western Health Board survey which concluded that half of fifteen year olds living in one major feeder estate to the local secondary school were out of the mainstream educational system. On meeting, these two people discovered that they had shared views on the issue of early school leaving and the potential for particular types of intervention to combat it. Thus, they decided to work together to do something in this regard. Another school principal became involved and funding applications were made to various organisations.

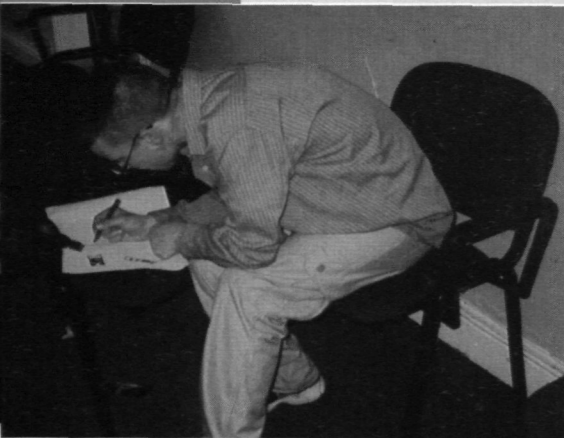
Aims of project

The North Mayo Schools Project was structured around two broad aims:

- To develop and test a range of interventions with, and supports for, potential early school leavers which were likely to facilitate their continued involvement in and optimum benefit from school; and
- To provide information to all Local Partnerships on effective interventions in the prevention of early school leaving.

The first of the aforementioned aims related directly to the operational life of the project, whereas the second involved a dissemination of learning from the project which was to take place after the implementation of the programme.

According to the original Operational Plan, it was anticipated that as a result of participating in this



- programme, the majority of participants would:
- improve their academic performance in school,
 - reduce significantly their absenteeism from school,
 - remain in school for a greater number of years than could be originally anticipated by the school authorities,
 - develop their level of personal effectiveness in the areas of technical competence, intra-personal competence and inter-personal competence,
 - obtain a recognised certificate in one outdoor pursuits discipline; and
 - participate in at least one out-of-school youth/community activity.

Management and Staffing

Area Development Management (ADM) offered support to Foroige as a 'Selected Organisation' to pilot the project within the Meithael Mhaigheo catchment area. A third school from the VEC sector was included in the project and a consultative group or Board was established. The project Board was made up of;

- The principals from the three participating schools.
- Meithael Mhaigheo's education co-ordinator.
- The area manager for Foroige.

Overall responsibility for managing the project lay with Foroige's Area Manager. The day-to-day running of all aspects of the project was the responsibility of a project officer.

Target Groups

The project targeted a mixed group of participants made up of:

- Young people at serious risk of leaving school early, (Target Group 1)
- Those for whom the risk was not as great but who would benefit from assistance, (Target Group 2) and
- A subgroup for whom the project was intended to be beneficial but whose main role was to prevent stigmatisation and offer leadership to others. (Target Group 3)

This approach of working with a mixed ability group represented the first key strategy of the model which was developed. In total,

'The partnership approach to planning and implementation was a key strategy employed by the project.'

North Mayo Schools Project

43 young people from three schools participated in the North Mayo project, in two mixed gender groups of 15 each and one group of 13 girls. One of the mixed groups was of third (Junior Certificate) year pupils and one was of fourth (pre-Leaving Certificate) year pupils. The girls' group was chosen from that school's cohort of second year students. 17 of the participants were described as being in target group 1 (serious risk), with 18 in target group 2 and the remaining 8 being in target group 3. The groups were identified based on teachers and the school principal's knowledge of local families and the early school leaving patterns of older siblings. Another criteria was a record of poor academic achievement. However, the young peoples' project was very sensitive to stigmatisation. This was reflected in the schools' decision to interview all students in the year.

Immediately upon her appointment, the project officer introduced the project to all students in the school year. It was presented very positively as an opportunity for the young people to be exposed to a range of interesting and exciting activities which would support them during the school year. All students were invited to apply for admission to the project. All participants involved, including those most at risk of early school leaving, were eager to take part in the project.

The Programme

(i) In-school components

- **Personal Effectiveness Training.** The personal effectiveness training focused on the areas of communication, assertiveness, self-esteem, teamwork, goal setting and decision making.

Target outcomes were set for the child in each area.

- **Leadership Project.** The leadership project was primarily aimed at enhancing leadership and teamwork skills. It is therefore related to the personal effectiveness training component of the programme. Overall, this component proved to be very successful as measured by the fact that all of the target groups took part in at least two such projects over the year. Examples of projects included making and installing recycling bins in the school, the production of crafts made available for sale at Christmas, an artistic mural and a sponsored charity walk.
- **Remedial Teaching.** It was recognised that for an impact to be made on school performance, some pupils would need extra numeracy and literacy support. A series of specific objectives were thus devised. These were that the students should improve their performance in school, become more confident in approaching and dealing with specific subject areas and develop greater self-esteem as a result of their participation in the programme. In total, 13 of the project participants were identified as requiring this additional support. The selections were made by the school principals, and support offered for one hour per week over a twelve week period. Outside teachers were employed to provide this additional support.

- **Career Counselling.** This was intended to offer special inputs to help participants assess their strengths, develop an understanding of the requirements of their career choice and devise a plan to achieve it. This was identified as one of the



main areas in which the aims of the project were not achieved. This was due to time constraints, but is still felt to be an important part of such a project.

(ii) Out-of-school components

- **Outdoor Pursuits.** This represented the main component of the out-of-school programme and included:

- Learning to swim, lifesaving and canoeing and receiving a recognised certificate for these achievements.
- Participating in sports activities with the group outside of school.
- Developing personal and collective responsibility in the group.
- Developing greater self-esteem.

The rationale for this aspect of the programme was to offer a balance to the discussion-based groups in school and to involve the young people in healthy outdoor activities. It also provided each participant with a sense of achievement and accomplishment as they received a certificate in recognition of their efforts. Over the year, all three groups participated on certified eight-week canoeing courses. In addition, one group took part in another ten-week course, with half of the group learning life-saving and the other half learning to swim. The other two groups participated in an orienteering activity. By the end of the year, 70% of the group had received a certificate in one outdoor pursuits discipline, whilst 26% had received two such certificates.

- **Community Action Project.** This project enabled participants to make a positive and practical contribution to the development of their local communities, and in doing so, work with adult volunteers outside the school. They involved such activities as helping out with the Tidy Towns competition and doing various horticultural and painting jobs. There were specific objectives for the young people:

- To plan and implement at least one project within their local community

- To work with volunteers to complete the project
- To develop greater self-esteem

- **Summer Programme.** The Summer Programme was the final element in the out-of-school strand of the project. While it was originally planned to take place for a number of hours per week for six weeks, this was revised to take place on a full-time basis over a number of consecutive days. One implicit objective was for the summer programme to be a means by which the project would be brought to a close in a positive way. It was also seen as a method of keeping in contact with at-risk members of the group over the summer and thus increasing the likelihood of their returning to school the following September. The Summer Programme also had a number of other clearly defined objectives. On completing the programme, it was anticipated that students would have:

- participated in at least three different Outdoor Pursuit activities;
- developed greater self-esteem;
- participated in an Outdoor Pursuits residential programme;
- developed their technical, intra-personal and inter-personal skills including their ability to exercise personal responsibility, work as a team member and engage in collective action; and
- made constructive use of free time during summer months.

Two parts of the summer programme took three days, while the other took five days. Attendance by the target group was said to have been poorest in this programme. The primary reason given for this was the fact that some of the students had secured summer jobs from which they could not

get time off.

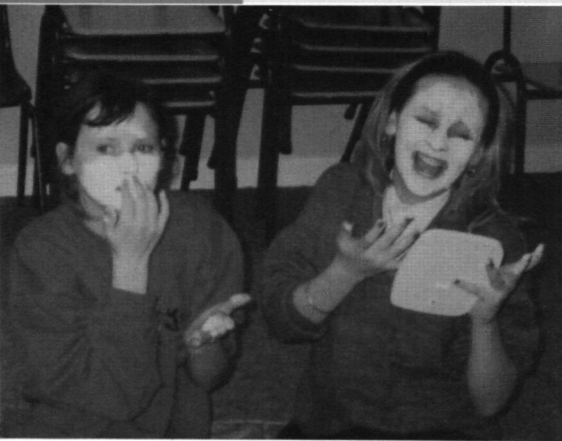
(iii) **Additional component**

- **Mentoring Programme.** The mentoring element of the project was adapted from another project model. A mentor is a responsible adult who acts as a positive role model - befriending, encouraging and motivating individual pupils. This person will not attempt to be a teacher or a substitute parent or social worker. He/she should however, listen to the pupils, discuss relevant issues and possible solutions to problems, whilst encouraging pupils to improve their attendance and achievement. In total, 11 mentors worked with the project.

Project Outcomes and Results

- The project performed very well in relation to the objectives which it set itself. The vast majority of what was planned was successfully implemented and each of the project components formed a valuable part of the overall model. One clear aim of the project was to heighten attendance and minimise absenteeism from school. Attendance for six members of target group 1 improved significantly during the year of the project's life. However, it disimproved for four members of this group. However, whilst this aim was not fully reached, the project did make its most important achievement in relation to its objective of encouraging the young people to remain in school. Apart from one young person, all pupils returned to their respective schools for the new school year.

- In one of the project schools, all students who took part are now back in full-time education, eighteen months after the project end. All are enrolled in



transition year having obtained their Junior Certificate. All 45 pupils involved with the project have remained within the formal education system.

3.7 SECOND CHANCE EARLY SCHOOL LEAVER PROJECT

Introduction

The Second Chance Early School Leaver Project is an integrated inter-agency response to educational disadvantage in Tipperary Town and its environs. The pilot project, which involved a range of academic, personal development and social skills interventions, ran from November 1997 to May 1998.

The co-ordinator of Tipperary town's Youthreach programme had begun to notice an increase in the number of young people under fifteen years of age seeking admission to the programme. Given the entry requirements of that programme these young people were not eligible for admission. However, this observation, was one of the starting points for the formation of a consortium that might address the problem.

Aims of project

The primary aims of the project were to work with young people who had left school early but were too young to avail of training schemes or take up full-time employment and to get the targeted group of young people back into school or into a position where they would be able to access mainstream training schemes.

The strategy devised to provide pathways to training schemes or back into full-time education included social skills, group work, tuition in English, Mathematics and Science, computer training, drama classes, arts and crafts and a selection of outdoor pursuits.

Management and Staffing

The agencies involved in the project were:

- Cashel and Emly Youth Service.
- Knockrawley Resource Centre.

- St. Ailbes secondary school.
- Tipperary Community Council (Muintir na Tire).
- Youthreach.

As a result of an initial meeting in October 1997 the six agencies decided to develop a structure that allowed them to deliver an integrated service to the young people deemed to be most in need of their attention. A management and co-ordination structure was put in place which consisted of representatives from each agency, who were also the project workers with the participating agencies. It was decided that the Youthreach representative would co-ordinate the services provided, while the Health Board worker co-ordinated the committee. As the project developed these two co-ordinators and a representative from the Youth Services met weekly to assess and monitor progress. The project itself did not employ any staff.

Target Groups

The participating agencies identified a group of young people who were likely to benefit through special intervention. This identification resulted from the various agencies' familiarity with these young people, many of whom were known to more than one agency. However, it soon became apparent that because of transportation problems the target group would have to be limited to Tipperary town. After much consultation the consortium identified 11 young people with whom they would work. Meetings took place with each of the young people and their parents where they were told what the project involved.

Features that characterised some of the participants on the project included:

- Unstable family backgrounds with, in some

cases, the young person not having lived in the one locality for very long

- Psychological problems
- Constant suspension from school
- Mixed academic ability
- Difficulty in communicating with others
- Limited ability to work in a group
- Aggressive behaviour

It should be stressed that not all of these characteristics applied to all of the young people.

The Programme

There was a shared perception amongst the consortium members that the programme would have to be structured but flexible. All of the members realised that one of the reasons why the young people could not participate fully in the formal education system was because of their inability to remain in a structured, controlled environment. If an activity was not successful in engaging the young people it was dropped and replaced by an activity that would engage them. In this way the project was characterised by active and on-going learning.

All of the members from the participating agencies were involved in choosing and designing the 'menu' of activities. This 'menu' comprised the following elements:

- **Four and a half hours of schooling** for three days per week in English, Maths and Science. This tuition was provided by teachers from St. Ailbes' secondary school. The school principal of St. Ailbes' was involved in the project from the beginning, having recognised the project as a response to a problem that his school had



identified. He realised that to tackle the problem from within the school system would require additional and specialised teachers. However, he agreed to make some of his teachers available to teach Maths, English and Science.

- **A Homework Club** which met for 45 minutes to work on set homework. Originally one teacher ran the homework club. After some time it was decided to alternate the club between teachers.
- **Two and a half hours of social skills and group work** provided by Cashel and Emly Youth Service. The sessions included working in groups around issues that the young people encountered on a week to week basis such as substance abuse. The young people had a large input into the design of the programme and many of them felt that it was of benefit to them. The group had an opportunity each week to talk about their week, what was going on in their lives. This was a safe space where the young people felt comfortable. This group work also provided an opportunity for the project personnel to help the young people with their communication skills, and to help them engage successfully with each other in a group situation.
- **Seven hours of outdoor pursuits, computers and catering** provided by Youthreach. The catering sessions were particularly popular because they yielded instant rewards – you could eat the food that you prepared. In the arts and crafts sessions the young people made crafts and later had an opportunity to sell them. This section of the project was relatively popular because it was flexible and it adjusted to the needs of the young people on a day to day basis.
- **One and a half hours of mixed activities** were provided by the Youth Service in partnership with Knockrawley Resource Centre, until the latter was forced to withdraw from the project due to human resource pressures within that organisation.

Project Outcomes and Results

The groups/agencies in the consortium had always known that it would be difficult to measure the success of the project. For them the very fact that they were able to engage these young people and their parents was in itself a success. Each agency representative had an understanding of what success would look like for them. However this measurement was never documented and a formal set of 'performance indicators' was never put in place.

There were, however, some indicators of success and achievement. These included individual young people being able to:

- demonstrate an improvement in their self esteem to the point where they were able to attend classes when they knew that they might be the only one there.
- make decisions without being overly influenced by their peers.
- complete tasks on their own.
- engage in a full conversation.
- relate to others.
- arrive on time or early.

Of the four young people who left the project before it had ended one was forced to do so because of transportation difficulties. Of the seven who completed the project, two are now attending Youthreach, two have returned to school, one is seeking employment and waiting for a place on a Youthreach programme, one is waiting to re-enter school and the position of the other one is unclear. By May of 1998 four of the seven who completed the project were in training or in education.

3.8 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROJECT:

TALLAGHT PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

The Youth Employment Support Project (YESP) was a Youthstart (Round One) project in Tallaght, County Dublin. It was in operation from the beginning of 1996 to the end of 1997. The project worked with 31 young people aged between 16 and 20, of whom approximately half were young mothers, young Travellers or young people with disabilities.

Aims of the project

The project was set up to develop progression routes for young people who had left school early and had already participated in labour market provision. The overall aims of the project were:

- To inform and raise the consciousness of the relevant agencies regarding the development of appropriate mainstream provision for this category of young people.
- To identify successful training and guidance systems.

Management and Staffing

In 1995 the Tallaght Partnership received notification that it had been successful in its application to the Youthstart strand of the European Union EMPLOYMENT programme for project development support. This approval allowed the Partnership company to produce a development plan involving a consortium of representatives from statutory agencies and the community/voluntary sector. The agencies included:



- Barnardos
- Tallaght Centre for the Unemployed
- Community Training Workshops
- Tallaght Youthreach
- Killinarden Youthreach
- Tallaght Youth Service
- Probation and Welfare Service
- Voluntary community leaders
- Schools

Target Groups

Initially, the project sponsors decided to target 25 young people who could benefit from the range of interventions to be provided by the YESP project. The programme started with the recruitment of 15 young people, who had either left school early or almost immediately after completing their Junior Certificate. Of the initial 15 young people there were 7 male and 8 female participants. During 1996 and 1997 a total of 31 young people participated in YESP, 17 female and 14 male. The young people ranged in age from 16 to 20. Approximately half of the young people were from the three specific target groups for the project i.e. young mothers, young Travellers and young people with disabilities.

The young people became participants on the programme through a number of channels:

- Community Workers.
- Probation and Welfare Service.
- Social Workers.
- Teachers.
- Youth Service.

The Programme

The programme for the YESP project comprised four main elements: the induction phase, the individual support phase, the transnational partnership and the mentoring programme.

(i) The Induction Phase

The project began for the young people with an induction phase in June of 1996. This phase lasted six weeks. The idea was to take two groups of about 15 young people who would stay with the project for approximately nine months. During the induction phase the young people were introduced to the project components. This was complemented with a number of activities which included:

- Away Trips
- Photography
- Computer Training
- Workshops
- Drama
- Writing Skills
- Hill walking

These activities were designed to stimulate and challenge the young people. It was also an opportunity to build strong relationships between the staff and the young people. These activities were the beginning of an on-going process of relationship building. The idea behind this induction phase was that it would focus on the individual as part of a group. There was a negotiation process between the team and the young people which resulted in the establishment of ground rules. These 'rules' were guidelines which encouraged participation and challenge in a safe and respectful way. This phase resulted in the young people feeling able to commit to the project and that this was a process that was not only going to benefit them but one to which they had a lot to contribute. Additional elements of the induction phase included:

- **One-to-One Meetings.** These meetings were organised to allow the young person to meet with a staff member once every ten days. These meetings took stock of the young person's needs as they developed, and gave the young person an opportunity to set new targets and challenges for him or herself. They also enabled the young person and the staff member to build stronger relationships.

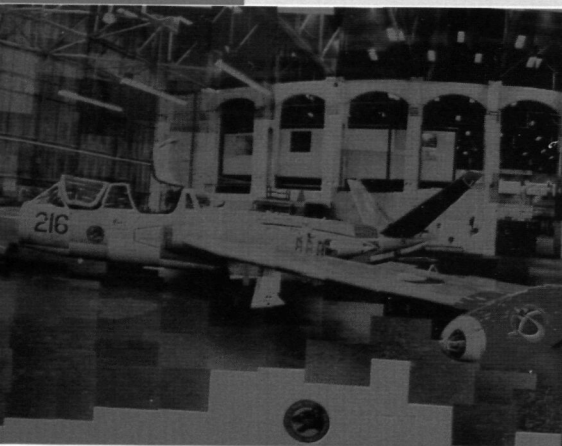
- **Group meetings.** These meetings were organised once a week and gave the young people an opportunity to talk together about what was going on in their lives. These sessions were facilitated by one of the team members, and were also designed to help develop the confidence and communication skills of the young people.

The induction phase culminated in the production of individual plans built around the needs and aspirations of the various young people and reflecting the difference in their backgrounds. This was seen as a positive development in that it reflected difference and did not push the group to develop homogenous progression routes.

(ii) The Individual Support Phase

The second phase set a target to provide supports for the needs of the young people as individuals while acknowledging the need to work as a group. The second phase was the beginning of the realisation of the individual plans. YESP provided support to the young people to achieve in a number of different ways. Some of the progression routes that the young people set for themselves included:

- The Leaving Certificate.
- NCVA Foundation-Level Modules.



- City and Guilds Qualifications.
- Accreditation from the Order of Malta.

Work placements also formed an integral part of the YESP project. The work placement was an obvious progression from the other elements of the programme. It afforded the young people the opportunity to use some of the skills they had learned and to develop new ones. The team put a lot of work into securing placements for the young people. The placements were in the areas of interest to the individual young people. The range of work experience included:

- Childcare
- Catering
- Mechanics
- Office Work
- Youth Work
- Receptionist

Staff were instrumental in negotiating terms and conditions with the host employer of the work placement. They helped set learning goals for the young people and intervened if there was any confusion over duties or responsibilities. The staff continued to support the young people while they were on placement.

(iii) *The Transnational Partnership*

YESP, as a Youthstart project, had partners in Germany, France and Sweden. These partnerships afforded an opportunity for staff and young people alike to learn from projects in other countries. This learning was achieved through an examination of models of work and a general information exchange. It was also executed through transnational visits. During the life of YESP a number of these visits took place. There were two trips to Sweden (The Urkraft Project). These trips combined an exploration of Swedish culture as well as some work experience. The experience and learning from the trip was complemented by follow-up communication between the young people and their Swedish counterparts through e-mail. The young people also participated in the

organisational elements of the project including the planning and preparation stage.

(iv) *The Mentoring Programme*

A mentoring programme was devised to support the individual young people and encourage them to complete the programme. Mentors were chosen on their ability to communicate with the young people and to help them to learn about the world of work. The mentors chosen represented a good cross section of the community and guidelines were developed to help them understand their role and how they should relate to the young people on the project. Staff were able to match mentors and young people because they knew both well.

Project Outcomes and Results

Of the 31 young people who were involved with the project in 1996-1997:

- 8 are involved in further training
- 8 are in employment
- 6 are trying to access training, education or employment
- 3 are involved in education programmes
- 2 are travelling with their families
- 2 left the project for personal reasons
- 2 were asked to leave for disciplinary reasons

The evaluation report on the project states that 'The placement outcomes in June of 1998 (i.e. 76% of those who completed the project and are still living in Tallaght area have secured further training, education or employment) would suggest that the developmental approach which underpinned the YESP has been effective and successful'.

The Combat Poverty Agency and the Employment Youthstart National Support Structure are committed to developing innovative integrated responses to educational disadvantage. *A Learning Experience* looks at the work of eight projects which tackled the problem of early school leaving at a local level, using their experiences to reflect current good practice on integrated strategies and to draw out policy lessons for the future.

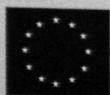
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