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Youth Club Outcomes in Foróige Volunteer-led Youth Clubs

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An Exploratory Study of Youth Club Outcomes
in Foróige Volunteer-led Youth Clubs

Research Report

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on behalf of

Foróige's Best Practice Unit

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Executive Summary

This research study was conducted to explore what role Foróige clubs may play in contributing towards what can be broadly termed 'youth development', including social, psychological/emotional and general life skills. This study should be viewed as an exploratory one focused on testing out youth development measures at club level. It provides a snapshot of members of the same clubs at two points in time to assess what aspects of youth development are consistent or different in their responses. It analyses patterns, differences and changes across clubs over two time periods, the start and end of the year, offering signposts about how clubs maybe contributing to members' development and the differences among youth in a range of areas.

The study employed a mixed methods approach of quantitative and qualitative instruments to research the topic. A small sample of Foróige Youth Clubs participated in completing questionnaires at the beginning and end of the club year. Surveys of members, focus groups with members and interviews with leaders were conducted for this research. Nine clubs returned questionnaires for 118 members for Survey 1, completed in September/October 2010. At the second survey stage at the end of the year (May 2011), six of the same clubs returned questionnaires for 71 club members. The sample sizes for both periods are sufficient to conduct multivariate levels of analysis and tests of statistical significance.

Based on a thorough review of the youth development literature, both tested and newly designed measures were used to develop a survey instrument containing reliable and valid measures. The measures of youth development include: Problem Solving-Cooperation; Goal Setting-Planning; Self Regard; Self Efficacy; Community Awareness-Connectedness; Self-reported changes; Well Being; Social Support; School Liking and Academic self-rating. Additional measures were included in the study at the end of the year on youth club atmosphere and climate.

The overall picture emerging from this study shows that youth development measures among club members were more positive at the end of the club year than at the start. These improved scores help validate the work of youth clubs in promoting young people's social, psychological/emotional and general life skills. When young people themselves were asked directly how well they have done since joining their youth club, a positive picture also emerges.

Self-reported changes among members show that approximately two thirds to three quarters of respondents felt that they fared better on these youth development measures as a result of being a club member. Importantly, the overwhelming majority of members at the end of the club year said they enjoyed being in their club.

What is particularly noticeable is the impact that club involvement appears to make in promoting a stronger sense of 'Community Awareness-Belonging' among members. This includes a variety of items, such as how strongly youth feel part of their communities, how well they know others to how actively they partake in and think about their communities. The importance of this for youth has been underscored through various studies that show the positive relationship between these features and young people's well-being, health and academic achievement. In the present study, we can see that in comparing the start and end of the year, club members scored much better on 'community awareness-belonging'.

More detailed analysis shows that the main influences affecting how strongly members feel this 'community awareness-belonging' are their gender (girls do better), their problem solving-cooperation characteristics and their sense of self regard. This improved sense of 'community awareness-belonging' is likely to be attributed to the way clubs are actively involved in community-voluntary activities, such as charity fund raising, clean up days, environmental improvements, etc. This is linked of course to problem solving-cooperation which are key to any of the projects, activities or trips that young people decide to do collectively over the club year. Such activities can create a sense of responsibility and pride in their achievements and are likely to promote a sense of self regard; a factor which is also related to general well being.

In their self-reported changes, what is particularly striking is the high proportion of club members who felt a greater sense of enjoyment working with peers their own age as a result of being in the club. Being able to work with others in a problem solving capacity is a core skill which young people report they have gained from being in their club.

This study also highlights that friendships are significant for why young people join and return to clubs; in other words, they are involved because their friends are there or had asked them to join or because they wanted to make friends. In the absence of social outlets and as a safe retreat from family and school, it is important to affirm that club activity fulfills a very important role and need in the lives of youth each week, even if it is less than a couple of hours involvement.

Related to this is the kind of club climate/atmosphere that young people experience when they get involved each week. What makes a good climate or atmosphere points to several aspects: club participation and fairness; support-help from peers and leaders and feelings of belonging and acceptance. This study asked the members about their experiences of each of these. It appears that younger members experienced a more positive sense of club participation and belonging, which tends to be somewhat lower among older teenagers. This is an indication perhaps that younger members are less accustomed to such aspects compared with other parts of their lives and therefore feel more strongly about these. These factors are important for future attraction and retention of youth, and strongly implicate leaders in promoting these characteristics in their clubs.



1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Foróige, one of the longest established organization for youth in Ireland, adopts a range of principles that it views as critical to the outcome of its work in the area of youth development, viz. that young people can be supported to be resilient, self-reliant, confident, can take charge of their lives and be connected to their community. The broader research literature indicates that participation in community activities and formal youth groups plays an important contributory role in the positive development of many adolescents. Involvement in formal activities in groups and clubs, especially where meaningful relationships can be developed with peers and adults outside the family and school, has potential for improving a range of positive youth outcomes – physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional and social (Eccles and Gootman 2002) – and social well-being (Albanesi et al., 2007). Participation in community activities has been shown to lead to such outcomes as: improved academic performance during school, and improving the likelihood of college attendance (Eccles & Barber, 1999); stronger school engagement (Brennan et al., 2007; Lamborn, Brown, Mounts, & Steinberg, 1992); hopefulness (Search Institute 2008) and reinforcing positive social values (setting an example) (Youniss & Yates, 1997). A range of factors have been reported by youth as influencing their need for and willingness to participate, including: feelings of efficacy (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002; Dukakis et al 2009); connectedness, i.e. the need to be valued and taken seriously by others in the community (Barnett & Brennan, 2006; Flanagan & Van Horn, 2001; Dukakis et al 2009); increasing their own self-esteem, and having a responsibility towards society by performing a public duty (Independent Sector, 2001). Despite the range of findings emerging internationally, there is a notable dearth of evidence in the Irish context surrounding the nature of developmental activity carried out by organizations such as Foróige. The current study aims to redress aspects of this research gap in the case of one leading youth development organization.

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway was commissioned by Foróige Best Practice Unit to carry out an exploratory research study to explore a range of ‘youth development’ outcomes, including social, psychological/emotional and general life skills, among Foróige club members. What this study provides is a snapshot of members of the same clubs at two points in time to assess whether

the outcomes of involvement at club level are consistent or different in their responses. The research is not designed to measure the contribution made by any single factor, such as club membership, to youth development, which is shaped by many factors. It is an exploration not of individual level changes but an analysis of patterns, differences and changes across clubs over two time periods, the start and end of the year. This research is exploratory because there is no existing data available in Ireland at club level regarding outcomes of involvement; and it aims to inform future research design for the organization. Analysis



at this level therefore offers scope for highlighting factors worthy of further consideration and possible programme development by Foróige. The core question informing the exploratory research can be stated as: What are the similarities and differences among Foróige club members in terms of selected youth development outcome measures?

The study employed a mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative instruments to research the topic. A small sample of Foróige Youth Clubs participated in completing questionnaires at the beginning and end of the club year. Members were asked the same standard questions at both times, with additional questions asked of members at the end of the club year about their views of the climate of the club and their own subjective assessments about how much they felt they had changed as a result of being in the club. Focus groups and interviews with leaders were conducted as part of the triangulated approach.

Volunteer led Youth Clubs are the backbone of the organization, which has also in recent years developed a number of structured programmes within clubs, projects and schools, such as Big Brother Big Sister Programme and the Albert Schweitzer *Leadership for Life* Programme. The principle of the club structure is based on a participative youth-adult partnership, providing a strong voice for youth to influence the nature of the clubs of which they are members. Typically, members come together once a week for a short period where, in the presence of adult supervision, they decide the kinds of activities they wish the club to engage in. The age range catered by clubs is 12 to 18 years, while the size of clubs can vary including those which may have a handful of members. Clubs are distributed across every city, town and village in Ireland, albeit given Foróige's rural roots, there are far more clubs that have emerged outside of the main urban centres.

1.2 Structure of the Report

The remainder of the report is divided into five sections. The next section provides a literature review of youth work and youth development, to capture the wider context within which youth club activity has emerged. Section three provides a description of the study, namely the research design, instruments and measures used, and an overview of data analysis. Section four presents the findings in three sections: the sample description; the results of analysis of variance tests used to identify key differences in the dataset and the multivariate analyses conducted. The section includes an analysis of members' self reported changes on the key measures and results of analysis on their sense of club climate. This is followed by a presentation of a qualitative section which helps to contextualize, elaborate upon and corroborate some of the previous results presented. The final section draws together the main conclusions from the research evidence.



2. Youth Clubs and Youth Development in Context

2.1 Introduction

As part of the community based youth development sector, youth clubs provide perhaps the most typical or generic out-of-school venues serving a universal population of young people. The youth club model is also one of the oldest forms of out-of-school interventions catering to young people's free time (Staunton 1997). They occupy the cornerstone of what can be described as 'open access' or universal youth provision, fulfilling key policy objectives around active citizenship, aspiration and achievement, enablement and protection (Merton et al 2004). Youth clubs are non-formal sites through which activities engage and are directed towards young people, in ways that typically mix structured programmes of learning with more self-directed, autonomous interaction among peers. Like other forms of association, youth clubs exist to provide an 'everyday' yet distinct social milieu that fulfill positive functions of social interaction and engagement, very often in the absence of opportunities elsewhere in young people's lives. They can be also be viewed as potentially promoting youth 'development' by providing opportunities to harness and strengthen personal life skills and social assets through interaction and participation (Mincemoyer and Perkins 2005). This is in line with definitions of youth work such as that articulated in Ireland's Youth Work Act (2001), which indicates that youth work "means a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is – (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organizations" (Government of Ireland, 2001, para.3, p. 7). The National Youth Agency (NYA) in the UK also articulates that "Youth work helps young people learn about themselves, others and society, through informal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenge and learning" (cited in Adams, 2010, p.6).

In this section, youth clubs are discussed in the context of what they fulfill in young people's lives. Youth clubs are viewed in this report as part of the broader spectrum of out-of-school community-based programmes for youth. With the exception of a recent research study of youth work in Ireland (Devlin and Gunning, 2009) there is relatively scant research evidence about the nature of youth clubs, especially those similar to that which Foróige provides. However, the wider literature on youth programmes and

development can help frame our understanding about why youth clubs occupy a significant space and what they do for young people. The next section offers an overview of what is understood as the purpose of structured out-of-school youth programmes and activities. This is followed by a review of what outcomes can be expected from engagement. The nature of club/programme settings in terms of the critical ingredients of club atmosphere and activities are then outlined. This is followed by an examination of research on community connectedness and social support for youth and how clubs can be viewed in light of these dimensions.

2.2 Youth Clubs and Programmes – Purpose

Increasingly linked to concepts of positive youth development, organized out-of-school activities can potentially provide a range of features to attain certain positive outcomes for young people, including: opportunities to interact and have fun with peers and friends; opportunities to develop and practice skills or competencies; supervision and guidance from adults; engage in challenging and interesting tasks and a chance to attain a more meaningful practice of ‘citizenship’; and engage in forms of ‘identity-work’ and belonging (Fredricks, Hackett & Bregman 2010; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003; Eccles and Gootman 2002; Hall et al 1999). Youth programmes can also be viewed in terms of the ‘informal’ education or learning dimension that they create, which is something that youth value themselves (Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Perkins et al, 2007; Quinn 1999).

Youth development programmes have a number of general characteristics: intentional in teaching new skills and offering a means to practice these (Quinn 1999: 98). There is a focus on ‘normal’ development and socialization while recognizing the need for ongoing support and opportunities that challenge youth (Roth and Brooks-Gunn). The ‘active ingredients’ that community programmes can potentially offer young people in promoting their participation and development have been synthesized as follows:

- safety – physical, psychological, emotional safety to come together;
- appropriate structure – clear, consistent rules, limits and expectations;
- supportive relationships – warmth, closeness and connectedness;
- opportunities to belong – coming together creates connections irrespective of social divisions;
- positive social norms – rules of behavior, expectations, values;
- support for efficacy and mentoring – supporting autonomy, making a difference and meaningful challenges;
- opportunities for skill building – to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social skills;
- integration of family, school and community efforts – building coordination, communication and synergy across different influences on youth (Eccles and Gootman 2002; Institute of Medicine National Research Council, 2004).

Recognition of the challenge of attracting and retaining young people in club activity has foregrounded the issue of participation in clubs in several recent studies (Perkins et al 2007; Quane and Rankin 2006; Van deWalle et al 2011; Anderson-Butcher et al 2003). In a wide variety of contexts, including among ethnic minority youth, reasons for participating in community based youth programmes revolves around a variety of factors, but the most typical reason for involvement is that they provide safe, alternative spaces or ‘sanctuaries’ for youth to be themselves (Halpern et al 2000; Perkins et al, 2007; Carruthers and Busser 2000).

2.3 Outcomes for Youth

Youth development programmes can be examined in terms of three defining characteristics: i. goals; ii. Atmosphere; and iii. activities (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The capacity of structured out-of-school activities and programmes to provide a more developmental function has become increasingly recognized, albeit the capacity to demonstrate outcomes is made difficult because of changing membership and attendance (Merton et al 2004, p.118). This feature has become particularly pronounced in recent years. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) cite the Networks for Youth Development (1998) definition of youth development programmes as those which generally help participants to develop “competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills, and become healthy, responsible, and caring youth and adults” (cited p.171).

There are of course various measures to operationalise such competencies and skills. One American derived set of measures are known as the five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connections, Character and Caring/Compassion. Taking these as the basis of programme goals, Roth and Brooks-Gunn note that few programmes which they examined in the United States attempt to tackle all characteristics, and most were really attempting to promote competencies. The five Cs refer to the following characteristics:

- Competence – measured as social (e.g. communication, conflict resolution), cognitive (e.g. decision making, academic (e.g. grades, attendance) and vocational (e.g. work habits, career choice);
- Confidence – measures self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, self-regard;
- Connections – relationship bonds with others and institutions, such as school;
- Character – described as “respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity” (Lerner et al, 2005, p.23).
- Caring and compassion – this refers to young people’s sense of empathy and capacity to identify with others (Lerner et al 2005; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Eccles & Gootman 2002).

In Roth and Brooks-Gunn’s review of youth development programme evaluations, the ones that could be more accurately described as youth development programmes were more successful in developing competencies, confidence and connections (2003, p.180).

Another set of measures of life skills have been developed in the United States to examine the long standing 4-H programme (e.g. Astroth 1996; Fox et al 2003; Mincemoyer and Perkins, 2005). In Astroth's research (1996), 4-H members gained skills around decision-making, responsibility, interpersonal skills, an ethic of service, and getting along with others. The type of club climate is likely to influence the extent to which these developed, such that members of autonomy-oriented clubs did better than clubs where more control is exerted by leaders. A study of former members (Fox et al 2003) found that they attributed improvement in life skills, from sense of responsibility, communication, leadership and other technical characteristics, to their involvement in 4-H. More recently, Mincemoyer and Perkins (2005), as part of 4-H National Life Skills Evaluation System, identify five core life skills and associated measures to examine 4-H programme. This system enables practitioners to measure changes in lifeskills of participating youth in the following areas: decision-making, critical thinking, communication, goal setting and problem solving. Their research found that changes were evident in young people's abilities in these areas.

While optimistic about the role of programmes in promoting positive development among youth, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) warn that they should not have unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve for young people. Possibilities are best where there is an increased suite of options to all youth in all communities, based on principles and practices of positive youth development.

2.4 Nature of Club Setting – Atmosphere and Activities

Astroth (1996) in his examination of the outcome of club involvement makes a significant point that leadership and club climate are both critical factors that need to be included when measuring the effect of club involvement on young people. He notes:

“Many studies have failed to detect benefits for youth who participate in nonformal youth programs because they’ve ignored what we know about human development. Human development (often called human ecology) says we have to pay attention to the quality of the environment in which people live and participate. Therein lies the key.”

In his study, the results proved best in clubs where autonomy and order were encouraged amongst young people rather than clubs where leaders were more concerned with record keeping, cutting out noise and playfulness and focusing on project completion for the sake of getting things done.

For a club to be an inviting space means that the club setting and atmosphere are critically important in both attracting and retaining young people (Dukakis et al; 2009). Clubs are meant to be safe environments where members feel that they belong. The atmosphere or tone of a programme should be based around hope, attentiveness, cultural appropriateness, clear rules, as well as choices and responsibility afforded to youth (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p. 172; Carruthers and Busser 2000). These features place an onus on adult leaders in terms of their support, responsiveness and capacity to relate to youth. Research by Halpern and colleagues (2000) in the United States found that the two most

typical reasons that attracted and retained young people in their neighbourhood youth programmes were the physical and psychological sense of safety created with friends and the positive relationships with adult staff. Carruthers and Busser (2000) point to the significance of a nurturing environment to create a sense of belonging and family-like connectedness for young people, especially those living in adverse circumstances.

Larson et al (2005) examine some differences and challenges between programmes which are 'youth driven' or 'adult driven' in their orientation. Both styles offer distinctive outcomes for youth development, with the former providing a greater sense of ownership, sense of empowerment as well as planning, leadership and teamwork skills. Adult driven programmes can help in honing the talents of youth more directly. Their study identifies the importance of understanding the nature of youth-adult relationships within programmes. How adults involved in programmes relate to young people, their demeanour, attitudes, and sense of caring and recognition they offer are key to the atmosphere or climate within programmes. Roth and Brooks-Gunn note five particular ones: encouraging supportive relationships with adults and between peers; empowering youth, e.g. defining useful roles, self-determination and developing future goals; communicating expectations about positive behaviour; providing opportunities to be recognized and rewarded; and providing services that are durable and stable (p.175). In their review of proxy measures of atmosphere, Roth and Brooks-Gunn suggest that many programmes fall short of achieving the full gamut of these characteristics. The authors' view is that programmes adopting a stringent test of youth development programmes would mean they should last at least a school year in order to provide a developmental and empowering atmosphere; they should be geared around skill enhancement; offer meaningful engagement and which broaden young people's worlds. They maintain that "the atmosphere, rather than the opportunities provided by program activities, differentiates successful youth development programs from other successful programs for youth" (p.180).

Roth and Brooks-Gunn suggest that more effort should be made to evaluate the quality of the atmosphere in youth development programmes, as well as the kinds of opportunities provided while participating (p.180). They recommend the need for more data within evaluations or research studies about such items as sense of safety, belonging, adult social support, participation in decision-making, and leadership possibilities.

Although clubs can provide a range of leisure activities and opportunities for fun, there is some question as to how challenging activities are for young people within programmes (Fredricks, Hackett & Bregman 2010; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003). Roth and Brooks-Gunn question the extent to which so called 'youth development' programmes in fact provide scope to build skills, "engage in real and challenging activities, and broaden their horizons" and the degree to which they enhance supports in other aspects of a young person's life, namely family, community or school (p.176). While most programmes in their review entail building some form of competence, most did this through a proscribed curriculum. In their view, this "runs counter to the promise of youth development programs to provide both formal and

informal opportunities for youth to develop and nurture new skills in real and challenging ways” (pp. 176-7). A minority of programmes based the possibility of skill building around new encounters or experiential challenges. Around half of their sample had a focus on changing parenting skills, while a small proportion attempted to tackle the institutional levels of school or community.



2.5 Youth and Community Connectedness

Youth clubs should also be viewed in terms of what they accomplish for young people in the context the communities in which they live. For a short period of time each week, attending a club means occupying a space beyond the home where young people meet their peers in safe environment. Research reveals the general phenomenon of young people actively cultivating local spaces beyond the home which are safe to occupy in the context of their fears about risks and vulnerabilities (Harden 2000). Young people in communities of disadvantage often mention the community as the most negative aspect of where they live because of the dearth of affordable and accessible facilities, the feeling of their neighbourhoods being unsafe and the stigma attached to some areas with a poor reputation (e.g. Panelli et al 2002). It appears that a young person’s age also has a bearing on the relationship to neighbourhood or local public space. Younger adolescents tend to report higher levels of support, activity, and friendships in their neighbourhood than older ones (Pooley et al, 2002, p.10). As a space within their communities, clubs can be viewed as fostering the relational aspects of young people’s lives in a safe and ordered environment, where such opportunities for support, activity and friendship coalesce. They constitute a type of micro-community of young people.

Clubs can also be seen in the context of generating connectedness to a young person’s wider community. Many Foróige clubs engage in activities which involve interactions with members of the wider community. Recent work has described such aspects of connectedness as ‘social capital’ within communities which are seen as key to the creation of well-being and health among young people (Jack 2000). Social capital can be viewed as both the value of an individual’s social relationships, which can provide benefits, and as a quality of groups, networks, institutions, communities, and societies. Trust, safety, support networks and information are all viewed as constitutive ingredients (Ferguson 2006). Morrow (1999) suggests that face-to-face encounters are needed to foster feelings of trust, belonging and mutual support. Perkins et al (2007) note that young people involved in youth programmes value the chance to do something positive for themselves and their communities, particularly acting as role models for younger members.

2.6 Youth and Social Support

Friends as we know provide a significant source of network membership, especially in adolescence, when friendships typically provide tangible help and advice after parents.

The opportunity to mix with peers in smaller, safer and more relaxed environments is a feature of attraction to club activity (Fredricks, Hackett & Bregman 2010). This opportunity can also provide young people with academic and a range of social support, including advice and esteem (Fredricks, Hackett & Bregman 2010). The formation and development of friendships in youth clubs has been studied by Loder and Hirsch (2003) among African-American girls in Boys and Girls Clubs in the US. The clubs were significant in forming close friendships and fostering positive values in deprived unsafe neighbourhoods. As a counter space to school and their difficult community circumstances, the clubs played a critical role in the girls' lives. Most girls were drawn to the club and remained members because their friends were involved, underlining the importance of peers for sustaining club activity: "as girls' experiences at the club appear to be influence to a substantial extent by the peer context, the strength and stability of peer relationships can make or break club programs" (2003, p.10).



3. The Research Study and Methodology

In this section, the methods and data collection process is first described. This is followed by a detailed overview of the measures and scales used in the surveys. Finally, a note is made of the analytical procedures conducted.

3.1 Methods & Data Collection

The research approach and objectives were agreed with a research steering committee comprising Foróige staff. For this exploratory study, the main data collection instrument was a survey of a sample of club members, supplemented with a small number of interviews with young people and adult leaders. Survey data collection took place at the beginning of the club year in September/October 2010 and again at the end of the club year in May 2011 for the same clubs and at approximately the same time for each club. A database of club names was provided by Foróige and from this database, twelve clubs were randomly selected for inclusion in the exploratory study. Since club selection was undertaken at the start of the club year, there was some uncertainty regarding whether clubs would restart and the numbers involved. Regional Youth Officers were first contacted by telephone and email to seek the agreement from clubs to participate and to distribute and return questionnaires for those clubs who agreed to be involved. This data collection method was deemed the most appropriate and time/cost effective means of reaching this population. All clubs contacted agreed to participate and Regional Youth Officers suggested the likely number of members based on the previous year. From the twelve clubs that were originally selected, one club did not restart and was therefore eliminated from the study. It was not replaced given the time which had elapsed.

An information sheet was sent to club members and parents/guardians providing background information about the research. Questionnaires were administered to members and collected by adult club leaders. At the end of the club year, questionnaires were sent directly to Adult Club Leaders who distributed and returned the questionnaires on behalf of members. All clubs that participated in the study were offered a cheque of fifty euro as a token of appreciation for their involvement. Of the eleven clubs at the start of the year, nine clubs returned questionnaires for 118 members for Survey 1. At the

second survey stage at the end of the year, six clubs returned questionnaires for 71 club members. Several attempts were made to request clubs to return questionnaires from the same members who completed the first survey. The sample sizes for both periods are sufficient to conduct multivariate levels of analysis and tests of statistical significance.

The use of quantitative methods for the enquiry was the best choice so as to standardize questions and data collection for the range of clubs involved and the two time periods. In addition, three focus group discussions were conducted at three separate clubs. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were undertaken with five adult club leaders to elicit their views on some of the topics.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

The research study applied to the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee for Ethical Approval which was granted. The application indicated that the research would be conducted in the appropriate manner as outlined by the Children First guidelines on child protection. In addition, the following procedures were followed to ensure child safety:

1. All interviews and questionnaire completion would take place in the presence of other participants or in a supervised area.
2. An adult leader was on-site during all data gathering stages.
3. All parents/guardians were informed of what participation in the research entailed and of potential risks prior to obtaining consent.
4. Participant consent and guardian consent were obtained prior to inclusion of participants in this study.

To ensure confidentiality, participant names were not requested in any data gathering. Participants are referred to by a number only in all presentations, transcriptions, discussions and publications of the research data. Questionnaires were kept in a secure location; while questionnaire results, transcripts of interviews and focus groups were stored on computer which is password protected and to which only the researcher has access.

3.3 Research Limitations

The surveys at both time periods were carried out with the same clubs, but unfortunately there was a notable drop in the number of clubs completing the survey at the second time period. Numerous attempts were made to encourage clubs to return completed questionnaires of the same members at the end of the year to compare changes. Some replacement of members occurred in the second survey (n=22) albeit comparisons between these replacements and non-replacements shows there were no statistically significant differences on key variables. No individual level changes in development indicators can be directly elicited but what we can see are aggregate differences between members of the same clubs at two distinct time periods.

3.4 Measures

Based on a thorough review of the youth development literature, both tested and newly designed measures were used to develop a survey instrument containing reliable and valid measures. This literature and previous research aided in operationalising the variables and measures used. Through this review and the identification of tested measures, a survey instrument was developed which contained reliable and valid measures. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient scores were computed for each of the scales in the survey to measure how consistent the questions were in measuring a particular scale. Higher scores suggest that a scale is internally consistent and the items making up a scale fit together. These are reported below and the high scores in each case suggest that the measures show strong reliability. The following section describes the measures used in the survey, and the various scales developed.

3.4.1 Members' Characteristics

Attributes of the club members included in this study include gender (male/female); age (in years and months); residence (urban (towns and cities) vs. rural (countryside, villages, on farms); length of time in the club (first time attenders; one year in the club; two years; three years; more than three years).

Four scales were developed (Problem Solving-Cooperation; Goal Setting-Planning; Self Regard; Self Efficacy) from the responses of members to a wide range of statements. The same response options were asked for each of these statements, ranging from: A. 'not at all true'; B. 'a little true'; C. 'pretty much true'; D. 'very much true'.

3.4.2 Problem Solving and Cooperation

In this measure, developed from the California Healthy Kids Survey (California Department of Education, 2009), members were asked to respond to nine statements, which read as follows:

(1) 'I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine'; (2) 'I enjoy working together with other people my age'; (3) 'I can work out my problems'; (4) 'I know where to go for help with a problem'; (5) 'I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them'; (6) 'I work hard at solving what's causing my problems'; (7) 'When I need help, I find someone to talk with'; (8) 'I solve problems to the best of my ability'; (9) 'I am effective at solving the cause of my problems'.

The Cronbach's alpha for the sample was 0.828.

3.4.3 Goal Setting – Planning

Six items, adopted and adapted from the California Healthy Kids Survey (2009), were included in this scale, and stated as follows:

(1) 'I have goals and plans for the future'; (2) 'I plan to graduate from secondary school'; (3) 'I plan to go to continue my education after secondary school'; (4) 'Having goals makes my life more enjoyable'; (5) 'Goals are important to me'; (6) 'I prefer to set my own goals'.

The Cronbach's alpha score was: 0.805.

3.4.4 Self-Efficacy

This scale adopts some of the questions from the California Healthy Kids Survey (2009):

(1) 'I can do most things if I try'; (2) 'There are many things that I do well'; (3) 'I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do'; (4) 'When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed'.

In this case, Cronbach's alpha was 0.733.



3.4.5 Self-Regard

Five statements, again adopted from the California Healthy Kids Survey (2009), form the basis of this scale, as follows:

(1) 'I stand up for myself without putting others down'; (2) 'There is a purpose to my life'; (3) 'I understand my moods and feelings'; (4) 'I understand why I do what I do'; (5) 'Overall I have a lot to be proud of'.

The Cronbach's alpha was 0.645.

3.4.6 Community Awareness and Connectedness

This scale was developed by Furco, Muller and Ammon (1998) from their Civic Responsibility Surveys in the United States. There were six response options for these questions which ranged from 'strongly disagree'; 'disagree'; 'slightly disagree'; 'slightly agree'; 'agree'; 'strongly agree'. The ten statements were as follows:

(1) 'I feel like I am part of a community'; (2) 'I pay attention to news events that affect the community'; (3) 'Doing something that helps others is important to me'; (4) 'I like to help other people, even if it is hard work'; (5) 'I know what I can do to help make the community a better place'; (6) 'Helping other people is something everyone should do, including myself'; (7) 'I know a lot of people in the community, and they know me'; (8) 'I feel I can make a difference in the community'; (9) 'I try to think of ways to help other people'; (10) 'Everyone should pay attention to the news, including myself'.

The Cronbach score was 0.912.

3.4.7 Self-Reported Changes for Scales

For the previous five scales (Problem Solving-Cooperation; Goal Setting-Planning; Self Regard; Self Efficacy; Community Awareness-Connectedness), members were asked in Survey 2 to indicate how much they felt they had changed or not by being a club member. The same statements were asked in each case and the response options for these self-reported changes were: (1) 'Is less true for me now

because I'm at the club; (2) 'No change for me'; (3) 'Is more true for me now because I'm at the club; (4) 'Is much more true for me because I'm at the club'.

3.4.8 School Liking

This measure was taken from the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey, and asks the members to respond to the following question: "How do you feel about school at present?". The response options were:

(1) 'I like being in school'; (2) 'I like it a bit'; (3) 'I don't like it very much'; (4) 'I don't like it at all'.

3.4.9 Academic Self-Rating

Also adopted from the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey, this asks the members to respond to the following question: "How well do you feel you are doing in school?". The response options were:

(1) Mostly As; (2) Mostly Bs; (3) Mostly Cs; (4) Mostly Ds; (5) Mostly Es and Fs.

3.4.10 Well Being Scale

How often you have felt like this the past few weeks – ordinal scale: never; sometimes; often; almost always

(1) 'I like the way things are going for me'; (2) 'My life is going very well'; (3) 'I would like to change many things about my life'; (4) 'I wish I had a different kind of life'; (5) 'I have good life'; (6) 'I feel good about what's happening to me'.

Analysis indicated that when the third statement is removed, the Cronbach's alpha reached a more acceptable level of reliability of 0.645. Therefore, the well being scale comprises five items.

3.4.11 Social Support

The study makes use of the Social Provisions Scale which is a social support assessment tool that comes in two versions (general and source specific version), measuring perceived availability of social support by type and quantity of support (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Dolan, 2006a, 2006b). Each question is scored individually by simply allocating each of the three possible responses a value as follows: No=1; Sometimes=2; Yes=3. All items were included individually in the analysis.

Friends: A composite measure of friend support was calculated using the following variables: (1) 'Are there friends you can depend on to help you?'; (2) 'Do you feel your talents/abilities are recognized by your friends?'; (3) 'Is there a friend you could trust to turn to for advice?'; and (4) 'Do your relationships with your friends provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness?' These items were included in a summative scale, which reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.745.

Parents: A composite measure of parental support was calculated using the following: (1) 'Can you depend on your parent(s)/guardian to help you?'; (2) 'Do you feel your talents/abilities are recognized by your parents?'; (3) 'Could you turn to your parent(s)/guardian for advice?'; and (4) 'Do your relationships with your parent(s)/guardian provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness?' These items were included in a summative scale, which reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84.

Siblings: A measure of sibling support included: (1) 'Can you depend on your brother(s)/sister(s) to help you?'; (2) 'Do you feel your talents and abilities are recognized by your brother/sister?'; (3) 'Could you turn to your brother(s)/sister(s) for advice?'; and (4) 'Do your relationships with your brother(s)/sister(s) provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness?' These items were included in a summative scale, which reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.877.

Other adult: A measure of other adult support included: (1) 'Can you depend on another adult to help you?'; (2) 'Do you feel your talents and abilities are recognized by another adult?'; (3) 'Could you turn to another adult for advice?'; and (4) 'Do your relationships with another adult provide you with a sense of acceptance and happiness?' These items were included in a summative scale, which reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.848. This scale was only computed for Survey 1.

3.4.12 Club Climate-Atmosphere

In Survey 2 only, members were asked to respond to fifteen statements about the club with which they were involved. These statements are adapted from similar questions used in the Health Behaviour in School Age Children concerning school. The response options were: 'not at all true'; 'a little true'; 'pretty much true'; 'very much true'. These fifteen statements can be divided into three sub-headings: Club Participation and Fairness; Club Support-Help and Sense of Club Belonging:

Club participation and fairness

1. I am encouraged to express my views and ideas in the club
2. My ideas or suggestions were adopted in the club
3. Different views and ideas are generally welcomed in the club
4. The rules in the club are fair (The Cronhach's alpha score for these four items was 0.747).

Club Support-Help

1. Other young people in the club are kind and will help you out
2. The adults in the club will help you out
3. There are people in the club who encourage me
4. There is someone in the club who I can depend on for help if I need it

5. There is someone in the club who recognizes my talents and abilities
6. There is someone in the club who I can turn to for advice if I need it
7. There is someone in the club who provides me with a sense of happiness and acceptance (The Cronhach's alpha score for these seven items was 0.837).

Sense of Club Belonging

1. I feel I belong at this club
2. My club is a nice place to be
3. Others in the club accept me as I am
4. My club is viewed positively in the community (the Cronbach's alpha score for the four items was 0.744)

3.5 Analyses

All analyses were conducted in SPSS version 18. Included were univariate and bivariate analyses and data screening (not shown) which identified differences between members and selected subgroups. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences in results across the two time periods as well as differences between sub-groups. ANOVAs are conducted where at least one variable is continuous. Initial analysis and data management set the stage for more in depth multivariate analysis, which involved separate linear regression models of particular variable combinations.

Regarding the analyses, there are some distinctions to be made in terms of numbers included in the analyses. With the ANOVA analysis it is possible to analyse all cases together at times 1 and 2 (n=182). However, ANOVAs are presented for both time periods to allow comparison of changes. In conducting the multiple regression, only time 1 (n=118) and time 2 respondents who did not complete the survey at time 1 (n=22) are included for greater predictive power. To avoid a type of double counting of similar responses, those who filled out a questionnaire at both times are excluded (n=44) since their scores could skew results in answering too similarly at both times. The sample size for the regression analyses is therefore 140.



4. Results of Exploratory Data Analysis of Key Measures

4.1 Introduction

In the first part of this section, a profile is presented of the samples of youth club members who participated in the study at the two different time periods. The composition is presented in terms of gender, age, residence, length of time in club and club sample size. The second section presents the results of the analysis of the measures used using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which measures the statistical differences between scores. A multiple regression analysis is presented of two key conceptual areas – Community Awareness/Belonging and Well Being. The third section provides an overview of the members’ perceptions of the changes or otherwise they feel on each of the items of the scales, which was asked of members only at the end of the club year.

4.2 Sample Composition

Table 4.1: Gender Composition of Samples

	Survey 1		Survey 2	
	n	Valid %	n	Valid %
Girls	68	59.1	49	72.1
Boys	47	40.9	19	27.9
Total valid	115	100.0	68	100.0
Missing	3		3	
All	118		71	
Average age	14.8 years		15.0 years	
Age range	11.5-17.7 years		11.75-18.5 years	

As table 4.1 indicates there is a more balanced gender breakdown of the sample in Survey 1, of approximately 60 percent girls and 40 percent boys. A smaller proportion of boys are represented in Survey 2 of just over one quarter boys. The average age of the sample respondents in both surveys is approximately the same, at 14.8 and 15 years respectively. The age range of respondents is similar at both times, although age range extends to 18.5 years in the second sample.

Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the respondents' residence. In both surveys the respondents are predominantly rural with 74.9 percent of survey 1 and 63.6 percent of survey 2 residing in either a village, a home in the countryside or on a farm.

Table 4.2: Residence of club members

	Time 1		Time 2	
	n	%	n	%
a city	16	13.8	10	15.2
a very large town	4	3.4	2	3.0
a town	9	7.8	12	18.2
a country village	41	35.3	22	33.3
a home in the countryside	34	29.3	14	21.2
a farm	12	10.3	6	9.1
Total	116	100.0	66	100.0
Missing	2	3.4	5	
Total	118		71	

Table 4.3: When members joined the club

	Survey 1		Survey 2	
	n	Valid %	n	Valid %
First time attending	29	25.0	24	34.3
1 year ago	42	36.2	-	-
2 years ago	27	23.3	29	41.4
3 years ago	12	10.3	6	8.6
more than 3 years ago	6	5.2	11	15.7
Total Valid	116	100.0	70	100.0
System	2		1	
Total	118		71	

Table 4.3 indicates that a quarter of the sample at Survey 1 and over one third of the sample at Survey 2 were first time attenders at their clubs. In Survey 1, 36 percent had joined a year previously while almost a quarter were attending the club for approximately 2 years. In survey 2 the proportion of those attending for two years was 41.4 percent. [the option of responding as 'one year ago' to the question in survey 2 was not given to avoid confusion around start of the year since in the club calendar members typically join in September of any particular year].

The number of respondents to the surveys by club varies from 6 to 25 at time 1 and from 7 to 17 at time 2 (table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Club type and sample sizes

Location	Time 1 n	Time 2 n
A	19	15
B	15	-
C	9	-
D	25	17
E	8	11
F	12	11
G	10	9
H	14	7
I	6	-
Total	118	69

4.3 ANOVA Analysis of Scales

The various scales developed in the surveys were analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests on a range of variables. ANOVAs compared the scores on the various scales according to the following factors: time (start and end); gender; location (city, rural, town); age (less than 14.7 years and over 14.7 years); and individual clubs. Given the relatively small sample sizes, the factors which provide the most reasonable way to present the analysis are time and gender. Analyses were conducted on all the other factors and none provided a statistically significant difference to results. In the case of some other factors in the second survey, age appears to make a difference in terms of club climate, which is reported later in this section. The tables present some analyses of the overall group together at times 1 and 2 as well as the differences between times 1 and 2.

Table 4.5: Mean scores overall on various scales on all respondents at time 1 and 2 (n=182)

Scales	Boys	Girls
Problem-Solving-Cooperation	25.9	27.7*
Goal Setting	19.8	19.7
Self Efficacy	12.8	12.5
Self Regard	15.4	15.5
Community Awareness-Belong	43.3	46.9**
Well-Being	13.7	14.0
Friend support	10.8	11.1
Parent support	10.3	10.7
Sibling support	9.0	8.7

*p<.05; p<.01

When we look at the overall sample of members by gender at both points in time, 'Problem solving-Cooperation' and 'Community Awareness-Belonging' emerge as significantly different, with girls

scoring a higher mean. Further analyses of the overall sample was conducted against such factors as age (less than and older than 14.7 years), location (city, suburban, rural), and length of time in the club (first time attenders, 2 years, 3 years, 3 years or more). Only in the case of length of time in the club do we find a significant difference ($p < .01$) in relation to 'Community Awareness-Belonging', with first time attenders showing higher scores to those in the club for 2 years. This of course may reflect a particular cohort in the sample who have self-selected into Foróige clubs given their already positive sense of community awareness.

Table 4.6: Mean scores overall on various scales at Survey Times 1 (n=117) and 2 (n=65)

Scales	Time 1	Time 2
Problem-Solving-Cooperation	26.8	27.5
Goal Setting	19.6	19.8
Self Efficacy	12.5	12.7
Self Regard	15.5	15.6
Community Awareness-Belong*	44.5*	47.3*
Well-Being	13.8	14.0
Friend support	11.0	10.9
Parent support	10.5	10.6
Sibling support	8.6	9.0

* $p < 0.05$

Analyzing the mean scores across both time periods, the overall majority (eight out of nine in total) of youth development measures among club members were higher, and thereby more positive, at the end of the club year than at the start. What is particularly noticeable is the impact that club involvement appears to make in promoting a stronger sense of 'Community Awareness-Belonging' among members. This scale is notable for its statistically significant increase in score ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4.7: Mean scores by Gender on Various Scales at Survey Times 1 and 2

Scales	Survey 1		Survey 2	
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl
Problem-Solving-Cooperation*	25.3*	27.8*	27.3	27.6
Goal Setting	19.8	19.7	19.9	19.6
Self Efficacy	12.6	12.5	13.4	12.4
Self Regard	15.1	15.7	16.2	15.3
Community Awareness-Belong**	41.5**	46.8**	47.9	47.0
Well-Being	13.5	13.9	14.1	14.0
Friend support	10.8	11.1	10.7	10.9
Parent support	10.1	10.8	10.7	10.6
Sibling support	8.8	8.5	9.5	8.9

* $p < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$

In the case of gender, we can see that a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) appears in the case of 'Problem Solving-Cooperation', with girls scoring a higher mean value. A statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) is also apparent in the higher scores of girls compared with boys in relation to 'community awareness-belonging'. 'Self Regard' and 'Well Being' also score higher among girls albeit no statistically significant difference arises. At survey 2, boys show noticeably higher scores in relation to the two scales which showed significant differences at the start of the year. Any statistical difference disappears at the time of survey 2. On four of the scales (Goal Setting, Self Efficacy, Self Regard, Community Awareness Belonging) boys show higher mean values than girls, despite no statistical difference arising. When ANOVA tests are conducted for boys and girls separately to compare scale changes at time 1 and time 2, the only scale to indicate a statistically significant difference is increased 'community awareness' among boys ($p < .05$).

In relation to social support in both surveys, girls show higher mean values in relation to friend and parent support but not for sibling support.

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4.8: Separate multiple regression models of 'Community Awareness-Belonging' and 'Well Being'

	Community Awareness-Belonging		Well-Being	
	Overall model	Reduced overall model	Overall model	Reduced overall model
	Standardised Regression Coefficients			
Gender	.260**	.244**	.069	
Age	-.004		-.225*	-.206**
Time Involved	-.020		.024	
Location	-.016		.069	
School performance	.037		-.053	
Problem solving-cooperation	.199	.231*	.023	
Goal setting	.067		.122	
Self efficacy	.070		-.015	
Self regard	.227*	.280**	.277*	.335**
R2	.252	.282	.12	.15
Cases	117	117	117	117
*significant at the .05 level			**significant at the .01 level	

To gain a more detailed understanding of the influences on this key measure of 'Community Awareness-Belonging' a multiple regression model was conducted. In multiple regression, a set of independent or predictor variables are analysed together to evaluate each independent variable in terms of its predictive power, over and above that provided by all the others. regression a number of times, eliminating the insignificant variables on each occasion and retaining the key predictive ones until all analyses are conducted. The regression model used only included variables that made sense to what might be

plausible variables to help understand the concepts being examined (as indicated in the table). In the reduced model, SPSS undertakes the regression several times. At each separate run it eliminates the least significant variable; runs it again; further eliminates the next least significant variable and so on until the most significant variable remains. By eliminating variables that are not significant at each stage ensures that the remaining variable is one with truly significant predictive power. The final reduced model is therefore a realistic explanation of factors shaping the conceptual area we are interested in because it keeps in check that variable which consistently remains significant throughout. . In the case of the above table, separate regressions were conducted, first for 'Community Awareness-Belonging' since it emerged as an important area of change from time 1 to time 2. Second, 'well-being' was examined as it is clearly an important conceptual area for youth development.

In the table we can see that three variables retain the most statistically significant predictive power in our measure of 'Community Awareness-Belonging': 'Gender', 'Problem solving-cooperation' and 'Self regard'.

In analyzing the R square value of .282, this means that the three variables taken together help explain 28% of the variance in our conceptual measure of 'Community Awareness-Belonging'. In other words, being a girl, having higher scores on 'problem solving-cooperation' and 'self regard' are three significant variables that help predict higher scores on this conceptual measure.

In the case of 'Well Being', two variables reach statistical significance in predicting how young people in this study score in this area. Both 'Age' and 'Self regard' together account for 15% of the variation on 'Well Being'.

4.5 School Liking and Academic Self Rating

The following tables highlight how members feel about school and how well they feel they are achieving academically. Table 4.9 shows a statistically significant difference between boys and girls, with girls indicating a stronger liking for school. In table 4.10, while statistically not significant, girls continue to express a stronger liking for school.

Table 4.9: School liking of members at Survey 1

	Boys n (%)	Girls n (%)	Total n (%)
I like being in school	14 (30.4)	35 (52.2)	49 (43.4)
I like it a bit	15 (32.6)	20 (29.9)	35 (31.0)
I don't like it very much	3 (6.5)	7 (10.4)	10 (8.8)
I don't like it at all	14 (30.4)	5 (7.5)	19 (16.8)
	46	67	113

*chi square p<0.01

Table 4.10: School liking of members at Survey 2

	Boys n (%)	Girls n (%)	Total n (%)
I like being in school	5 (27.8)	26 (53.1)	31 (46.3)
I like it a bit	8 (44.4)	12 (24.5)	20 (29.9)
I don't like it very much	1 (5.6)	6 (12.2)	7 (10.4)
I don't like it at all	4 (22.2)	5 (10.2)	9 (13.4)
Total	18	49	67

(not significant, chi square test)

In terms of academic self rating, again there is a statistical difference ($p < 0.01$) between boys and girls, with a higher proportion of girls reporting their grades as mostly As and Bs. At survey time 2, there are no statistically significant differences emerging which must be viewed in the context of the small number of male respondents in the second survey.

Table 4.11: Academic self rating at Survey 1

	Boys n (%)	Girls n (%)	Total n (%)
Mostly As	5 (12.2)	12 (20.7)	17 (17.2)
Mostly Bs	17 (41.5)	38 (65.5)	55 (55.6)
Mostly Cs	16 (39.0)	5 (8.6)	21 (21.2)
Mostly Ds	1 (2.4)	1 (1.7)	2 (2.0)
Mostly Es and Fs	2 (4.9)	2 (3.4)	4 (4.0)
Total	41	58	99

$p < 0.01$, chi square test

Table 4.12: Academic self rating at Survey 2

	Boys n (%)	Girls n (%)	Total n (%)
Mostly As	7 (43.8)	13 (31.7)	20 (35.1)
Mostly Bs	3 (18.8)	17 (41.5)	20 (35.1)
Mostly Cs	5 (31.3)	8 (19.5)	13 (22.8)
Mostly Ds	1 (6.3)	1 (2.4)	2 (3.5)
Mostly Es and Fs	0 (0)	2 (4.9)	2 (3.5)
Total	16	41	57

(not significant, chi square test)

4.6 Analysis of Self-Reported Changes

At time 2, respondents were asked to reflect on how much, if at all, they felt they had changed as a result of being a member of the club. Respondents were provided with statements for the same measures used for problem-solving/cooperation, goal setting, self-efficacy, self-regard and community attachment-belonging. Four response options were provided in each case: less true, no change, more true, much more true. Tables 4.13 to 4.17 outline the percentages associated within each scale. In interpreting the percentages, it is worth noting that it is only among nine respondents who consistently indicated 'no change' across all the questions.

Table 4.13: Problem Solving and Cooperation

	Less true	No change	More true	Much more true	Total n
	%	%	%	%	N
I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine	1.6	23.8	42.9	31.7	63
I enjoy working together with other people my age	1.6	24.2	24.2	50.0	62
I can work out my problems	1.7	38.3	33.3	26.7	60
I know where to go for help with a problem	3.2	25.8	35.5	35.5	62
I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them	3.3	44.3	24.6	27.9	61
I work hard at solving what's causing my problems	-	42.6	31.1	26.2	61
When I need help, I find someone to talk with	1.7	35.0	33.3	30.0	60
I solve problems to the best of my ability	1.6	34.4	36.1	27.9	61
I am effective at solving the cause of my problems'	1.6	35.5	35.5	27.4	62

Of all the items, 'Enjoying working with other people my age' is the statement with the highest percentage (50%) of respondents suggesting it was 'much more true' as a result of being in the club. This increases to almost three quarters when those who felt it was 'more true' are included. For all statements the majority felt they had changed positively on each of the items asked. Statements where a higher percentage of members felt no change are 'I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them' (44.3%) and 'I work hard at solving what's causing my problems' (42.6%).

Table 4.14: Goal Setting – Planning

	Less true	No change	More true	Much more true	Total
I have goals and plans for the future	3.2	30.2	28.6	38.1	63
I plan to graduate from secondary school	1.6	33.9	22.6	41.9	62
I plan to go to continue my education after secondary school	6.5	37.1	22.6	33.9	62
Having goals makes my life more enjoyable	4.7	31.3	23.4	40.6	64
Goals are important to me	1.6	28.6	39.7	30.2	63
I prefer to set my own goals	1.6	34.4	24.6	39.3	61

For all items within this scale, the majority of respondents felt they had changed in their perspectives as a result of being in the club. The item where least change is noted is ‘plan to continue education after secondary school’ (37.1%). Three respondents (6.7%) felt it was less true as a result of being in the club.

Table 4.15: Self-Efficacy

	Less true	No change	More true	Much more true	Total
I can do most things if I try	-	37.1	27.4	35.5	62
There are many things that I do well	1.6	32.3	40.3	25.8	62
I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do	1.6	30.6	32.3	35.5	62
When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed	1.6	34.9	28.6	34.9	63

The responses to the items in this scale are quite consistent across the four items. Between 63% and 75% felt a positive change in all items, while no change was felt among 37.1% in the case of ‘I can do most things if I try’.

Table 4.16: Self-Regard

	Less true	No change	More true	Much more true	Total
I stand up for myself without putting others down	1.6	30.2	31.7	36.5	63
There is a purpose to my life	-	34.9	30.2	34.9	63
I understand my moods and feelings	-	33.9	27.4	38.7	62
I understand why I do what I do	3.2	31.7	28.6	36.5	63
Overall I have a lot to be proud of	-	24.2	40.3	35.5	62

Similar to the previous scale of ‘self-efficacy’, most responses (between 75% and 65%) indicate they had experienced positive change in perspectives as a result of being part of the club. The highest change item occurs for the statement ‘Overall I have a lot to be proud of’, where three quarters of respondents indicate it was more or much more true as a result of club membership.

Table 4.17: Community Awareness and Connectedness

	Less true	No change	More true	Much more true	Total
I feel like I am part of a community	-	26.7	33.3	40.0	60
I pay attention to news events that affect the community	-	29.7	37.5	32.8	64
Doing something that helps others is important to me	-	31.3	28.1	40.6	64
I like to help other people, even if it is hard work	3.2	28.6	25.4	42.9	63
I know what I can do to help make the community a better place	1.6	35.5	33.9	29.0	62
Helping other people is something everyone should do, including myself	1.6	31.7	30.2	36.5	63
I know a lot of people in the community, and they know me	1.6	28.6	30.2	39.7	63
I feel I can make a difference in the community	3.3	29.5	34.4	32.8	61
I try to think of ways to help other people	4.8	27.0	31.7	36.5	63
Everyone should pay attention to the news, including myself	4.7	31.3	26.6	37.5	64

Among the items in this scale, there is again consistency in the percentages of respondents who felt they had changed on the statements. Three statements in particular are noteworthy in the proportion of members who felt that it was now much more true:

“I like to help other people, even if it is hard work” (42.9%); “Doing something that helps others is important to me” (40.6%); and “I feel like I am part of a community” (40%).

4.7 Club Climate

The following tables analyse the results from Survey 2 of respondents’ experiences of three sub-measures of club climate: participation, support and sense of club belonging. Table 4.18 assesses the difference in mean scores between members aged less than 14.7 years and those more than the average age. Both ‘participation’ and ‘sense of club belonging’ show statistical significant difference ($p < 0.05$) with younger members reporting higher mean scores. In addition, younger members report a higher sense of club support, although no statistically significant difference emerges.

Table 4.18: Mean scores by Age of Club Members

Scales	Less than 14.7 years		More than 14.7 years	
	Mean	n	Mean	n
Club Participation*	13.4	26	12.0	38
Club Support	24.3	26	22.7	37
Sense of Club Belonging*	14.8	26	13.5	37

*p< .05

The following table analyses whether the length of time that respondents are members of their clubs has any bearing on the club climate scales. In all cases, members who report that they are two years in the club have lower scores than both first time attenders and those in the clubs for three years or more. In the case of both club support and sense of club belonging a particular statistically significant difference exists between first time attenders and those in the club for two years. It appears that first time attenders feel particularly positive experiences about the clubs which seems to wane somewhat for those a year longer in the club, whose enthusiasm is less pronounced.

Table 4.19: Club Climate Scales by length of time in the club

		n	Mean
Participation	this is my first time attending	23	13.0
	2 years ago	25	11.6
	3 years ago	5	14.0
	more than 3 years ago	10	13.6
	Total	63	12.6
Club Support**	this is my first time attending	22	24.7
	2 years ago	25	21.4**
	3 years ago	5	24.4
	more than 3 years ago	10	25.3
	Total	62	23.5
Sense of Club Belonging**	this is my first time attending	22	14.8
	2 years ago	25	12.9**
	3 years ago	5	14.8
	more than 3 years ago	10	15.1
	Total	62	14.1

p<0.01

Finally, table 4.20 shows that that vast majority (70.3%) of members enjoyed all aspects of the club, while 28.1 per cent indicated they enjoyed some. Only one member felt she did not enjoy the club that much. Only seven members (9.9%) indicated they had difficulty attending the club, mostly because the timing clashed with other activities they were involved with.

Table 4.20: Enjoyment rating of members at survey 2

	n	%
Enjoyed all	45	70.3
Enjoyed some	18	28.1
Didn't enjoy that much	1	1.6
Total	67	100.0



5. Qualitative Findings

5.1 Introduction

While the survey data specifically construct measures of youth development, the focus group discussions with club members help to corroborate, elaborate on and contextualise some of this data. In these discussions, members provide examples of how problem-solving, cooperation/teamwork and goal setting are core elements of what they do at the clubs. However, one of the most obvious attractions of clubs is the social element of being together with friends and doing activities together.

5.2 Friendships and Activities

In the survey data, the overriding reason for new club members to get involved and existing members to return to the club is the friendship element. This is also very apparent from discussions in the focus groups. When asked why they liked coming to the club, members of Club F, based in an urban community, suggested the following:

Participants:

- 1) I don't know why I come here. It is just something to do, you know.
- 2) To hang around with my friends. Get away from your parents.
- 3) I come here to talk to my friends. Getting away from your parents and that's basically it.
- 4) I like to come here because it is a good craic. It is just a place where you can go for 2 hours and just do what you want.
- 5) The reason I come here..it is something to do, you get to meet your friends, have some craic and after we make arrangements for a weekend
- 6) I am only here for [friend's name]...meeting up with friends
- 7) I come here to see [adult leader's name] every week...It is good because you have to come down and hang out together. When it is warm and not dark we are usually outside, but when we are not outside we are inside and then we are in a safe environment and then it breaks the week as well.

Being in a safe environment, away from family surveillance, allows members the freedom to interact with peers. The clear social element of mixing with friends or finding new friends is also captured by members of Club E who describe the interactive element:

Participants: ...it's just Foróige teaches us how to get along with other people...and then we meet other people as well like every Monday we have disco and you can see people from other Foróige groups, all different groups, we all get together and become friends, you meet your friends so it's good.

One adult leader of a club described the club as a chat room for its members, who were primarily girls of a younger age. While there were few structured activities engaged in, the leader felt that the club offered a supportive environment for youth to air their problems as well as catch up with friends each week out of the reach of parents. As she describes it:

"I think it's nice that just say they had a bad day in school and they know they can ask us and they know we're there to help them and we're not going to criticize them in any way, you know, just sit down and try and iron out their problems.."

However, the social element of meeting up or making new friends is complemented by the opportunity to engage in focused activities or organising events. In the survey at time 1, newcomers and existing members were asked to identify their main reasons for joining. Of the 114 responses to this question, 73 (64%) made explicit reference to the significance of their friends, with the remainder referring generally to 'having fun' or engaging in action projects. Some comments included:

"all my friends were going so I decided to come to see if I liked it and I did so I kept coming".
"allows me to meet my primary school friends, allows me to express my opinions and to learn key life skills like organizing events and fundraising".
"because I like having a place to hang out with my friends and not spend money".

All respondents in the survey at Time 2 were asked to comment on what they enjoyed most about the club during the year. This is outlined in table 4.21.

Table 4.21: What members enjoyed most (time 2)

	Number of mentions
Trips/outings	20
Activities - projects	16
Meeting friends or new people	15
Committee role	2

The most common aspect of the club mentioned by twenty respondents are the day/overnight trips organised during the year. Young people also mention outings to the cinema or activity centres as an enjoyable feature. The second most common mention of what was enjoyed most are activities/projects which include: dancing/discos; cooking; arts/crafts; painting murals; talent shows; tree planting and sports tournaments. Fifteen mentions were made regarding the social aspect of meeting friends or making friendships. Two respondents highlighted their committee role as the most enjoyable.

5.3 Goal Setting, Problem Solving and Cooperation

Goal setting is key to any of the events, activities or trips that young people decide to do collectively over the club year. Having a sense of responsibility and ownership over the nature of what members do are also ingredients valued by young people. As explained by a girl in focus group E:

because I have so much fun here. Even though I have ups and downs, I have fun here..we argue a lot, but in the end of the day we do what we want to do.

Part of being a club member means being in a position to put forward ideas about what activities, events or projects that can be collectively developed and cooperating through consensus. The following example is provided by the participants in club E, located in a housing estate in a midlands town:

Interviewer: Ok, so you mentioned before that first you decide what you are going to do and how do you delegate the roles? Do you know what I mean?

Participants: Yes, we come together and we say: what do we want to do? And then we put down 5 things and then we just choose, we decide a particular thing we want to do and we do it. And then everybody finds something to do. But everybody is involved. For example in cooking, we decide who will bring what, who is going to wash, cut the vegetables, boiling the rice...everybody has their individual role (focus group club E).

The participants went on to discuss how team work played a key part of the interaction that makes involvement in the club worthwhile. In describing an event where they performed a dance routine with other club members, they describe the positives of collective effort:

Participants: .. When we had to do the dance... The song was not really correct but we still did it that it was good. We still did it. Nobody dropped out. Just show you how to be a team member. What a team is about.

Interviewer: so nobody dropped out..

Participants: Nobody! You know we were a team, we got support and everything and it was really good. Everybody enjoyed it. Even though we messed up sometimes, but we still enjoyed it.

The nature of activities that members can engage in is also influenced by the nature of the space in which the club is held. One adult leader described how they hired a room to run the club but that they had no sense of ownership over it since it was a general room owned by the local church and used by the community. In this sense they were highly restricted in what they could do with the room and sort of the investment they could make in it, even if they had funds available to them. For instance, they could not paint the walls or undertake activities that might appeal to youth.

In clubs E and F, it is clear that participants enjoyed the responsibility over decision making and the development of plans. However, a different experience was described by new members of club D, who felt that they had few opportunities to decide what they would like to achieve in the club and the activities they could pursue. Some felt that the adults did not trust them to take responsibility for organising events or activities. The group complained about not having a youth committee where they could present ideas and to organise activities effectively but acknowledged that plans were beginning to emerge for the formation of a committee for the following year and they seemed determined to be proactively involved. Their experience however was stated in the following way:

If we would like to do something and we say it to [name of adult leader] like or any other leaders can we go next week or so...they would not answer. They would be “no we are not going. Or next time. Or next year”. Organise it. They do not let us. But if we tend to organise it then they just would not listen to us. When we mentioned ‘stay awake’ night, they were like we are not staying awake with you. When all those other leaders in [a different] Foróige club did it with them. It was for charity as well like.

While the group enjoyed the club and had much respect for the main organiser, the group was critical of having no input to generating ideas or making decisions. Plans they had for holding discos, attending interclub events, raising money for the club all seemed to be sidelined and ignored, according to the group. The group mentioned that any of the events they hear about are found out from Foróige members in other clubs who they attend school with:

A friend of mine is like organising for her Foróige to go to that beach party .. and she has to take the names and stuff like that. And she is organising the stuff but..I doubt we would be allowed. If we say to [organiser], she would say that we do not have a say, that they have to pay what we do. She does not trust us at all. Yeah, she actually does not trust us. We are teenagers, but we are not bad...

Members acknowledged that the club is quite large and that there is only a small number of volunteer adults, with their own time pressures. However, this was one reason why they felt they could be afforded more responsibility to undertake activities they have decided among themselves. Some of Group D was critical of the approach of adult leaders whose involvement they felt was unenthusiastic and more

like 'babysitting' them than proactive engagement. They expressed discontent that some leaders didn't know their names after a year of being in the club and rarely looked liked they enjoyed coming to the club. When asked what a youth leader's role should be, a member of the group commented:

Help us, with our ideas. Communicate with us. Ask us how we are. Ask us what to do for the year. Just talk to us. Get to know us or something.

The members wanted to involve more adults from the community with a strong interest in particular activities and who could demonstrate skills to them. One adult leader from a different club however noted the general difficulty in recruiting adult volunteers as leaders given the time commitment involved, which meant not just the club time each week but undertaking training on a number of weekends in the year which adults must commit to.

In the survey at time 2, when asked to comment on what was least enjoyed, some of the comments refer to the meetings and the level of organisation of the committee. Seven separate comments referred to the length of meetings, for example 'I didn't like the long dreary meetings' (girl) or 'meetings dragging on and on' (girl). Comments referring to the committees included:

'nights that nothing happened, the committee was also very unorganised' (girl)

'when the younger members started first and were annoying, committee were not great' (girl).

'trying to get the younger members of the club organised into committees' (girl)

While problem solving and collective participation are valued among young people, it is the effectiveness of this process that is also noteworthy. Some youth may also not like formal structures. It is worth bearing in mind however that the formation of committees may be difficult where there are primarily younger club members. One adult leader interviewed indicated that most of her club was made of 12 to 13 year olds and this was a responsibility she felt you couldn't give to young people of that age. This position would appear contrary to the notion of youth participative structures but clearly age is a factor worthy of further consideration in terms of when such forms of participation are and can be expected and encouraged within clubs.

5.4 Confidence

A sense of achievement is key to developing confidence in young people and providing a sense of self-efficacy and regard about what they can do. Again, this was elaborated upon by the participants in focus group club E:

Interviewer: you mentioned you learned dancing with Foróige. And what did you learn something else (addressing one female participant)?

Female participant: Being more confident with myself. Because before I joined Foróige I was very nervous talking in group like this, but after two years I've been more confident with myself. Now I can talk to different people...

Similarly in the survey data at time 2, when asked what their best achievement was as a club member, several specifically highlighted changes in their confidence, for example:

'I have more confidence at what I do' (girl)

'I overcame my shyness and now I have more friends' (girl)

'my social skills improved as I am not as shy anymore' (boy)

5.5 Community Contributions

As outlined earlier, community awareness-belonging appears to be more pronounced at the end of the club year. In the survey, when asked what they felt the club's best achievement was during the year, while some noted the sense of achievement in their project work, working as a team, or planning events and trips, several respondents highlighted the contributions they made to community or voluntary activity:

'raising a lot of money for different charities and going away on trips' (boy)

'it raised a lot of money and helped out in the community' (girl)

'doing lots of community projects and raising money for collection' (girl)

'succeeding in cleaning the church and beaches well' (girl)

Others mentioned cleaning up the estate, cleaning the church and beaches, planting trees and flowers, painting murals, and taking part in awake-a-thon to raise funds for a cause. In the first survey 42 out of 118 members (35.6%) indicated they were involved in community or voluntary activity. In survey 2, the total number of respondents is smaller (n=65) but 46 (64.8%) members said they were involved in such activities. The range of organizations or groups volunteered with is between one and five in survey 1 and between one and three in survey 2.

In one of the focus groups, the participants identified the types of activities which demonstrated the kind of voluntary contribution towards others in their communities:

Interviewer: Would you get involved more into the other community activities if you could? Out of Foróige, if you had a possibility?

Participants: Well, last week or so we went to done a walk for...but that was still in the club...it was with a club but it has nothing to do with the club..... It was a sponsored walk for people and their families who commit suicide, like helping them and counseling and stuff and also that was voluntary, it was not a part of the club, you just do it if you want and in the end there was a walk in (name of) park at 2 o'clock in the morning and it was suppose to symbolise the night time and when its darkness you are grand then. So we all do that (Club F).

Some longer term members of Group F also outlined how they had visited primary schools in their locality, giving presentations on bullying and facilitating discussions about how to combat the problem. Group E discussed how they held a fun day at the centre where the club is held and enjoyed getting together and chatting with others from different housing estates in the area.

One adult leader however mentioned that it was very difficult to attract boys to the club and the membership was primarily younger girls around 12 to 13 years. In her view, there are other attractions which compete for boys' time particularly, namely GAA sports and soccer. A younger profile in a club can also be off putting for older teenagers. Two boys the survey mentioned lack of club members as the least enjoyable aspect of their clubs.



6. Discussion & Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Youth work activity, described and defined in a variety of ways, attempts to make an impact on young people's developmental capacities and to support their transition to adulthood in an enabling way. The aim of this exploratory study is to gauge how members of Foróige clubs fare on a range of youth development indicators and to assess what factors among youth influence how well they fare. While individual level changes are not captured in the level of analysis applied, some definitive patterns emerge which help to distinguish where youth tend to differ and converge in their responses.

6.2 Interpreting Results and Changes

In capturing changes among club members, the analysis shows that almost all measures were higher at the end of the club year compared with the beginning, although the differences between both times were not statistically significant in all cases except one. It is encouraging however to see that members appear to be more positive on these measures at the end of the year, at which stage it is likely that they will have acquired opportunities and experiences that will have improved their perceptions of these measures. What is particularly noteworthy is the degree of statistical difference in scores on 'Community Awareness-Belonging' between the start and end of the year. This measure emerges as a distinctive category where particular influence appears to be exerted in the club year. Both boys and girls showed improved scores, but on closer examination we see that gender exerts a particular influence on 'Community Awareness-Belonging', with girls faring better overall on their score levels. This is noteworthy in the light of a previous very large scale study in Ireland (McGrath and NicGabhainn 2007) which showed that girls feel less sense of safety and trust in the spaces available to them at community level and are more inclined to feel that there are fewer opportunities for recreation where they live. The findings of community awareness and belonging among this sample may suggest that these particular female youth members have a particular positive orientation from the beginning and maintain higher scores over time. Both boys and girls in the clubs improve on this measure over time but from the outset girls have higher scores. From a future research point of view, it is worth examining more closely whether clubs provide particular meaning for girls in forging a sense of safety and belonging.

Looking at the relationship between measures, 'Community Awareness-Belonging' is also influenced by 'Problem-Solving/Cooperation' and 'Self Regard'. Actions within club activity to encourage and foster these two conceptual areas among members should most likely activate stronger 'Community Awareness-Belonging'. This finding helps affirm one of the key strengths of Foróige, which is this support for connectedness between youth and community.

6.3 Self-Reported Changes

The proportion of self-reported changes noted amongst young people, albeit based on a relatively small sample, is a positive affirmation that being a club member has made a difference to their lives. Across all statements concerning the key measures, approximately two thirds to three quarters of club members affirmed that being a club member had made these positive features of their lives more true for them. What is particularly noteworthy in one of the scales is the high proportion of club members who felt greater enjoyment working with peers their own age as a result of being in the club. This confirms what we know about the improved interaction among youth which club activity focuses upon. Being able to work with others in problem solving capacity is a core skill which young people report they gain by being in a club. In the qualitative aspects of the study, friendships are significant for why young people join and return to clubs. In the absence of outlets and as a safe retreat from adult, particularly parental surveillance, club activity fulfills a very important role in the lives of youth.

6.4 Club Climate

As discussed in the literature, club climate is an obvious critical ingredient in terms of what young people gain from a club. It is also key to the retention of young people. It appears from this sample that younger members have a more positive orientation towards a sense of club participation and belonging, which tends to be somewhat lower among older teenagers. The sample reflects particular enthusiasm among new, younger members who significantly differ to those in the club after two years, in terms of feeling supported and a sense of belonging. This is an indication perhaps that younger members are less accustomed to such aspects compared with other parts of their lives and therefore feel more strongly in these terms. Club climate was captured in some of the qualitative aspects of the research. While many affirmed the cooperation and contribution they make in setting goals, solving problems they have identified and the gains they make from this, one set of focus group respondents reminds us that not all members feel they are recognized as responsible and active citizens. The attitude as they present it is one of adult control rather than member participation. These perceptions alert us to the importance of adult leaders in setting the climate of a club as one which promotes participation, is supportive of youth needs and fosters a sense of belonging (see Larson et al 2005). Being able to recruit voluntary adult leaders however can pose a problem for clubs in the first place.

In addition, the committee role is an important one for young people but depends on age, interest in formal structures and how effectively a committee is organized. The finding that club enthusiasm appears to wane after a period of time involved in a club is one which alerts us against taking for granted

the ongoing involvement of members. As members grow older, there are competing claims on their time as well as changing preferences for how they spend their time. How to retain members and involve them in empowering ways in planning activities are critical questions for the organisation. As a complex issue, a more detailed and larger study in the future is needed to help better capture this relationship between club membership and meaningful involvement among young people.

6.5 Quality of Measures Used and Limitations

Attempting to definitively capture the concept of youth development is a difficult prospect and there are different possibilities in how these same conceptual measures can be operationalised. New and existing measures used in this study did, however, show high scores of reliability. The measures included in the study are recognized as reflective of important concepts for young people's developmental capacities in a non-academic sense: Problem-Solving/Cooperation; Goal Setting; Self Regard; Self Efficacy; and Community Awareness-Belonging. A range of other features are also included including: School Liking, Academic Self-Rating, Social Support and Well Being. Each conceptual area showed high Cronbach Alpha scores which suggest that they each measure has been meaningfully constructed and can serve as clear measures for further studies in this area.

This study should be viewed as an exploratory one focused on testing out youth development measures at club level. It provides some signposts about how clubs maybe making an impact on young people's lives and the differences among youth in terms of how impacts occur. It is not possible to see whether club members do any better or worse than the general youth population who are not club members nor is it clear if individual level changes occur. More longitudinal and comparative studies would help to clarify the picture much further and would need to incorporate other factors which may influence young people's development, such as family life, socio-economic background, other forms of engagement and participation, and so on.

6.6 Conclusion

In summary, the research offers an initial, relatively comprehensive framework and potential set of measures for future effort to document changes in youth development among Foróige club members. At club level, the findings in this report are encouraging in that they suggest considerable self-improvement on key measures as self-reported by members. Comparisons of two time periods (start and end of club year) suggest that key scores among members show improvement at the end of the club year, with a distinctly increased measure of 'community awareness-belonging'. The findings also help inform our understanding that club members can be differentially affected in terms of change, drawing attention to the role of such variables as gender, age and period of involvement in influencing perceptions and experiences of members. Attention is also directed towards interactions of variables in influencing measures of positive youth development. It is envisaged that these findings can help to support, inform and shape Foróige's future research efforts in this area.



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