

An Innovative Youth Led Research Project

Teenage Kicks



"To support and encourage young people to be active participants in shaping their futures"



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Teenage Kicks



Introduction

Limerick Youth Service launched its' Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010 entitled "Celebrating Young People", setting out the road map for the organisation into the next decade. The plan evolves around valuing young people and empowering them to advocate on their own behalf. Teenage Kicks is a clear example of how Limerick Youth Service in co-operation with Vodafone Ireland Foundation supports young people to deliver on these values.

The project involved over fifty young people directly, with many more contributing as interviewees and participants in project led activities. The findings will be useful in many ways to Limerick Youth Service in guiding us to develop appropriate support services based on what young people want and for future projects, the information will be invaluable. These findings will contribute to Limerick Youth Service developing appropriate support services based on what young people want in the future.

Due to the success of the Teenage Kicks project, Limerick Youth Service will continue to promote youth led programmes in its structures and will support and promote the implementation of this practice with partner organisations. Doing this in a meaningful way involves recognising and nurturing the interests and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for them to become involved in decisions that affect them at all levels. This is essential to the future of young people as active citizens and indeed to democracy in Ireland.

I would like to acknowledge Vodafone Ireland Foundation's contribution and support for this project. Especially I would like to thank all those young people who involved themselves and who have shown us that with support their voices are reasonable and sensible and we should never fear creating the platforms from which those voices can be heard.

Catherine Kelly
Director
Limerick Youth Service

Executive Summary

Welcome to Teenage Kicks – an innovative, youth-led community research project which explores the theme of Active Citizenship. Supported by Vodafone Ireland Foundation, the project worked with young people who wanted to improve their own communities.

In order to achieve this, the aims of Teenage Kicks were to:

- » Develop the research skills of young people.
- » Promote active citizenship.
- » Model genuine participation and advocacy in working with young people.

The method used to develop and deliver the project was one of action research. The young people involved in the project participated as co-researchers. The professionals working with them took on roles as advisors and enablers rather than as

project leaders. This participative approach ensured that the young people would have a genuine sense of ownership of the project.

Limerick Youth Service and Vodafone Ireland Foundation were very impressed with the manner in which the young people took the action research project on board. A number of key issues for youth emerged. By allowing the young people dictate the parameters of the projects, the outcomes very much reflect their needs and desires.

This research project established a clear demand for a city centre based youth café in Limerick. Young people requested a space to meet and socialise, on their own terms. As the next step, the research group proposes that a city centre youth café be set up. It is also hoped to use the research outcomes to contribute towards the policy development in local, regional, national governments and statutory authorities.

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Background to the Project

In order to ensure that the young people would adopt a leading role within the project, the parameters initially set for the project were deliberately quite broad. The initial phase of the project was developed in a manner to enable the young people themselves to identify needs within their own communities and explore possible responses to these needs.



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Stage 1: Convening the 'Research Group'

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The first step involved convening a group of young people aged between sixteen and eighteen who were willing to commit time and energy developing and implementing the project. A series of exploratory 'briefing and listening' sessions were organised. Youth workers facilitated the sessions with the group and were available to help solve any issues, which were identified having first established boundaries, ground rules and general good practice.

A significant finding was that young people were interested in their communities and issues which affect

them, but a majority of the group felt they did not have the skills or the resources to implement change. Of the fifty young people involved, fifteen of them expressed an interest in further participation with this project.

As a result of these sessions, it was clear that training and support was essential as the group was diverse with different levels of understanding, capability and educational attainment. Training was carried out with smaller groups focusing on skills development and confidence building to ensure all participants felt competent in contributing fully to the process.

Stage 2: Defining the 'Research Question'

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Issues which emerged as being of most importance to young people included:

- » The need for dedicated youth spaces
- » The desire for skateboard parks
- » The issue of a growing drug culture among young people


The next step for the research group was to look at this range of issues and to collate them into a meaningful research question that might be addressed in their work. The most important issue for many young people was the lack of an appropriate platform where they could voice these issues and effect change.

Initially, it was envisaged that the project would produce three separate deliverables:

1. A youth-led community research programme.
2. A publication on the research.
3. An associated seminar or other event.

The group identified a very innovative way of conducting the research that would feed into these deliverables. An awareness-raising event was staged which explored a wide range of the issues identified as being of concern to their peers. It was felt that a youth café was an appropriate forum in which young people could voice some of their concerns.

The scope of the project then became the piloting of the youth café idea, incorporating workshops, awareness raising, information provision, discussion and gathering of opinions. It was agreed that fun and entertainment would be an integral part of the café.



"Great stuff, body lounge, good idea dealing with important issues, great smoothies. Workshops very interesting. Highlights: slam poetry 'n united bible studies. Cooking great fun. Didn't learn how to cook any better, but had a lot of fun. Had a brilliant two days... A+ top marks."

Stage 3: Implementing the Project - 'Teenage Kicks'

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Once the research area had been identified, the project developed quickly. The weekend of August 17th – 18th 2006 was chosen for the event to take place at Limerick Youth Service's premises in the city centre. The project adopted the name 'Teenage Kicks'. While serving as a taster for a youth café, Teenage Kicks also included a range of workshops and discussion fora.

A number of tasks were completed to ensure a successful project, including the following:

- Workshop Facilitators:** Facilitators for the workshops were chosen and invited by the young people.
- Event Promotion:** The group ensured that 'Teenage Kicks' received significant media attention with advertising and publicity in local press and media, while also being promoted through the youth clubs supported by Limerick Youth Service.
- Design and Development of Research Tools** One of the project objectives was to pilot the use of new technology as an information gathering and communication tool amongst the young people. A local company, Infotext, supplied software that would facilitate the use of text messaging as a research conduit. This software was used as an 'opt-in' service for attendees in both the promotion and evaluation phase of the programme.
- Reaching and Surveying the Target Group:** The Teenage Kicks events served as a means of bringing together a sample population from the target group of young people. The research group carried out a survey of those attending to identify what participants would like to see in a youth café. Participants were able to sign up to post event SMS research questionnaires to enable feedback to be gathered in a youth friendly manner.

'Teenage Kicks' main objective was to be a research project while remaining fun, engaging and varied to involve all participants. Events aimed to include this with the following:

- Slam Poetry:** This was an interactive group session on the writing and performance-style jewellery of poetry. It explored contemporary, rap and Shakespearian-type poetry, fusing interrelated styles, formats and structures.
- Music:** A range of workshops covered areas such as song writing and arranging, live performance, recording, production, management and the business side of music.
- Body Lounge:** The Body Lounge provided a space that allowed young people to reflect upon positive body image. It included interactive workshops exploring nutrition, fashion, body types and sexual health. Young people from the research group designed the Lounge to be a relaxed space with beanbags, lamps and colourful topic-related posters. Freshly made smoothies were prepared and provided by the group.
- Music Journalism:** The session included a brief history of music journalism and also a 'day in the life' presentation from a working music journalist published at local and national level. The workshop looked at reviewing albums and interviewing artists from home and abroad. A range of music genres, styles, profiles and backgrounds were covered.
- Basta Youth Collective:** A brief history and open discussion was facilitated by a young people's DIY collective. The workshop covered areas such as non-profit event management, independent and non-corporate associated arts and performance, and examined linking and supporting the growth of similar collectives at local, national and international level.
- Histrionics:** This was an interactive workshop on the history of an independent youth theatre group, created and operated by young people on a DIY context, -young people undertaking the writing, directing, performing, producing and facilitating of their own plays.
- Ready Steady Cook:** Based on a TV cook show scenario, young people took time out to make the most of the ingredients available, preparing and cooking for each other between workshops. This break provided a light and enjoyable atmosphere bringing yet more colour and adventure to the proceedings.
- Photography:** This session was broken into two parts where young people took in some related history together with useful tips on equipment and interactive demonstrations on both basic and advanced techniques. Creative and contemporary works of the facilitator were exhibited and discussed. On the second day of the session, the group got to frame their own works and reflect on and discuss the finished pieces.

Survey and Responses

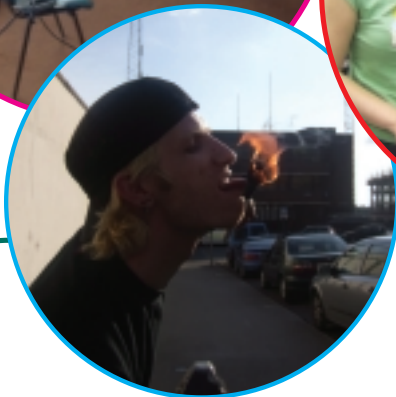
Active research was the core of the project, everyone who attended 'Teenage Kicks' was asked to fill out a survey and evaluation form, which asked if they thought the day was a success, what interested them most and what they would like to see in a future youth café. The texting software was used to invite responses and comments on the day and replies were overwhelmingly positive. 'Teenage Kicks' was a hit with the young people and it was seen as an event organised by and for themselves. Samples of the responses are provided below.



"Heya! I thought the workshops were brill, met so many great people and found out that there's so much more to Limerick than meets the eye!

The slam poetry was definitely my favourite, so much fun, hope to do it again some time! Thanks for an amazing few days, luv n bubbles, em"*

"Loved the workshop... Cooking was my favourite. I love cooking, but it's not normally a thing I do with my friends. Even the seriously music people enjoyed the cookery workshop, keep up all the good work! Teenage Kicks every month?!" "I'll be there."



Teenage Kicks



Project Outcomes, Findings and Recommendations:

The project specifically identified the need for youth facilities in Limerick. Young people have called for places that are not associated with alcohol or *"identifiable groups"*, a place where they would be able to mix on their own terms with their peers.

The research found that negative stereotyping exists with regard to young people in Limerick. Responses to the survey included comments in relation to there being a *"Street corner culture"*, *"nowhere to hang out"* and *"no city based clubs"*. The group felt the best way to address these issues was through the establishment of a youth café which would serve as a venue with a positive image that the young people could identify with as their own.

Core principles for a youth café were established as a place:

- » Where young people are actively involved in making decisions for themselves
- » That is open to all
- » That is independent
- » That is youth-led and youth run.

From the Perspective of Limerick Youth Service:

Limerick Youth Service is committed to involvement in innovative youth-led research programmes. This model of research could be used by other Youth services and youth workers as part of a wider youth participation agenda. Using the method of active research young people are at the core of programme planning and decision-making.

The youth led research programme had useful outcomes. It raised awareness among adults of youth participation and youth advocacy issues. It also enabled young people to influence their peers understanding and awareness of responsible citizenship. The promotion of youth participation, the positive image of young people and the youth friendly nature of the project were significant outcomes from the project.

As with all research projects, constant challenges arose that needed to be addressed. Project revision and re-evaluation led to more focused appraisals and a greater understanding for all the partners and participants. Perceived weaknesses were translated into challenges and opportunities for young people and their supporters.

Limerick Youth Service will continue to build on the piloted model of research. The experiences of this project will act as a template to enhance co-operation between the corporate sector and the youth work sector. It is also hoped to use the research outcomes to influence the policy makers in local, regional, national governments and statutory authorities.

Opportunities created by the project were both challenging and exciting and Limerick Youth Service looks forward to engaging further with young people in working for their communities and their empowerment.

Lessons Learned:

- » In the programme, Young people played a **leadership role** supported by youth workers and professional consultants.
- » Teenage Kicks gave **a real voice to young people** on issues of importance to them.
- » The programme enabled young people to take the lead in information gathering that looked at how **communities can be more responsive to all young people's needs**.
- » The information gathered can now be used to **act as an influence for change in thinking and action, for other young people and policy makers**.
- » Youth led approaches ensure that programmes **are youth centred** and enable support staff to plan **with** young people not **for** them.
- » Youth led research is increasing in popularity internationally and now serves as a **vehicle for empowering youth and helping to shape social interventions that seek to reach young people**.

From the Young Researcher Perspective:

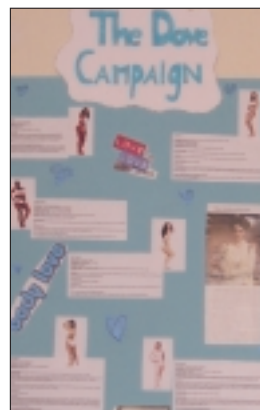
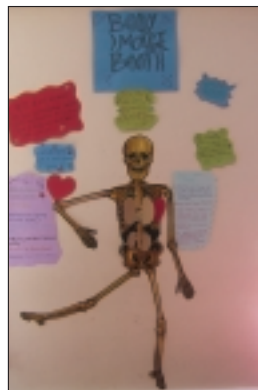
Focus on: The Body Lounge

Our role in Teenage Kicks was to promote a healthy safe image. We researched different areas of healthy living and positive body image to create the Body Lounge. The Body Lounge was a room that we filled with information about healthy living, pictures of celebrities that encourage an unhealthy self-image, facts about how people's lifestyles contribute to their self-esteem and overall health. We had a game where participants looked at pictures of different celebrities and had to guess if they were underweight or normal weight. There was a comment wall where people could write what they thought determined a good-looking boy or girl. We also had a CDROM from BodyWhys that had information on eating disorders and keeping your body working right. It also had a section about how models in magazines are airbrushed. People are able to see the before and after photos of the models. This was very popular.

We think that Body Lounge was a huge success and that people who came into the room were very interested in the information and games. We really learnt a lot about ourselves and about having a healthy lifestyle. We really got our point across that celebrities are not always what you think and that they are not always great role models. People liked that the Body Lounge was informative, but also fun. There wasn't anyone lecturing us. People were free to walk around the room and read the information for themselves and they could ask questions if they wanted to.

We think that the Body Lounge will contribute to the Youth Café because we can have someone come in to do workshops on healthy living and a positive image. It will also promote awareness of how important it is to take care of your body and your mind. The youth café can also provide healthy snacks to encourage nutrition.

By: Catriona Chawke, Geraldine Murphy, Sarah Tubridy



The Next Step:

It was established through this research project that there is a clear demand for a city centre based youth café in Limerick. Young people are crying out for a venue to meet and socialise away from the public gaze and on their own terms.

As the next step, the research group proposes that a city centre youth café be set up. Young people should be involved from the start in the planning and running of it. The research has shown that involvement by young people at the initial stage gives them ownership and a sense of purpose.

Conclusions

Teenage Kicks provided an innovative youth-led model of research. It directly involved young people in decision-making, focusing particularly on their feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. The project represents a positive example of young people organising and running a programme for themselves. It has given the participants the capacity for further learning opportunities and action to support their local communities. This marks a significant step in what will be a lengthy journey for Limerick Youth Service to fully engage with and empower young people in the development of the organisation.



The Policy Context - Young People As Active Citizens

The National Children's Strategy, Ireland (2000) has as one of its' main goals "giving children a voice". Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child embodies what is regarded as the most innovative features of the Convention, the child's right to participate in all matters that affect him / her including life within the family, school and society. The National Children's Strategy states that "Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (Government of Ireland, 2000). This goal clearly reflects the intent of Article 12 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Youth Work Act (2001) provides for the establishment of new local structures Local Voluntary Youth Councils (representative of local youth organisations) and Youth Work Committees (sub-committees of the V.E.C.'s), will be the main focus for the organisation of youth work in the future. The changes in government constitute an important opportunity to develop real participation in governance at a local level that could have significant influence on enhancing young people's interests. There is however a critical gap in the infrastructure that will have a serious influence in the participation of youth interests. Without a planned systematic engagement enabling the participation of youth interested in the new structures, the voice of youth will be disadvantaged and the emerging structures will become all the poorer. Participation of young people in local structures, such as youth organisations is essential to the future of civil society and democracy in Ireland.

The National Youth Work Development Plan (2003 – 2007) research based on consultation with relevant stakeholders highlights a number of key issues, such as participation rates in youth work continue to be higher in the younger age groups and that young people continue to be in a small minority in decision-making structures in youth organisations, while also states that the absence of opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making may be a significant reason why they cease to participate in youth work. The final goal in the National Youth Work Development Plan focuses on mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards and suggests the establishment of a youth research programme and a youth research fund. This type of provision would significantly contribute to the area of youth participation by providing essential data and research on the issue. It can be further strengthened if it is youth-led.

Youth participation should be an integral part of youth services. It can involve many components from youth-led research programmes such as Teenage Kicks, advocacy, volunteering, peer helper roles to community work and educational opportunities.

Youth-led research provides a forum and opportunity for young people to have input regarding their interests and needs reflected in the programme planning. It also encourages them to be at the centre of any decision-making that will affect them and shape the services that are provided to them.

The youth-led research can develop into advocacy programmes with young people and staff being role models who positively promote themselves in everything they do. The need for young people to learn about advocacy, their rights and how to exercise rights appropriately and effectively, and how to speak out about the issues that matter to them often happens during and after youth led research programmes.

Volunteer opportunities play an essential role in the healthy development of young people as active citizens. Young people can be involved in simple tasks such as the upkeep of a building to media engagements, community outreach and education, or agency events and programmes. Offering volunteer opportunities or work placements, service providers demonstrate trust and instil in young people a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Peer support and education practised informally and formally within youth programmes helps young people find a sense of support and belonging with peers that compliments services and programmes alike. Young people feel a sense of safety and unconditional acceptance amongst those with similar experiences and backgrounds.

Limerick - Young Person Statistics:

10,372 (19.2%) people in the fifteen to twenty-five age group in the City of Limerick

29,186 (24%) people in the twelve to twenty-five age group in Limerick County

(Limerick County includes the highly populated suburbs of Limerick City (Dooradoyle, Raheen and Castletroy)

Source: CSO Census Figures 2002

Change in youth population figures in Limerick City & County:

Most recent figures indicate a change of population in Limerick city of - 2.7%. This shows a loss of 1,463 people between the 2002 and 2006 Census, while the County of Limerick showed an increase of 10,022 (8.3%).

Source: CSO Census Figures 2002

School Leaving and Participation:

Twenty-six point nine per cent of those aged fifteen or older indicated their education ceased before or at fifteen years of age.

2002 Census figures show that 30.9% of the population of Limerick City has attained an upper secondary education compared to 32.0% in the County. This attainment falls to 22.8% on average for five seriously disadvantaged communities and as low as 16% in one of these communities - St. Mary's.

Primary	33	City Primary Schools	Total Pupils:	6,808
	116	County Primary Schools	Total Pupils:	13,578
Secondary	16	Second level schools City	Total pupils	7,856
	20	Second level schools County	Total pupils	6,941

There are ten pupils out of a national total pupil number of 85 from Limerick placed in special schools for young offenders.

Source: Department of Education Statistics, CSO Census 2002, PAUL Partnership.

Youth Led Research Outcomes:

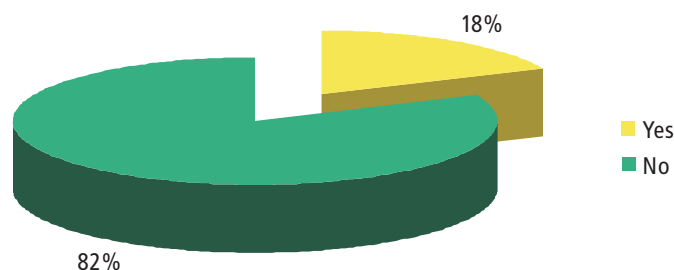
According to the Limerick Youth Service / Vodafone Ireland Foundation research project conducted by young people, the following results were found.

Do you think there are adequate activities for young people living in Limerick City and the surrounding areas?



Despite the range and number of youth organisations, sports clubs and youth clubs, when surveyed, 73% of young people said there are not adequate facilities. This could reflect a lack of awareness of the opportunities in existence, that clubs are not strategically placed, or even that the range of programmes on offer may not suit the target group or fail to appeal to what young people are asking for.

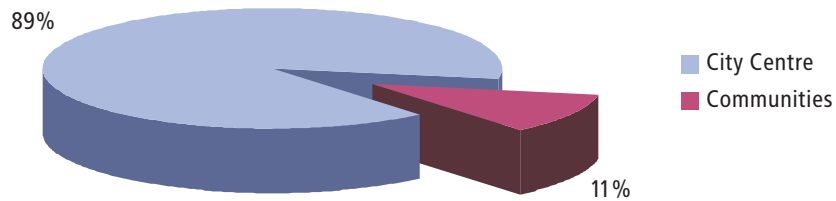
Do you think that there are places for young people to go no matter what their interests?



This highlights the need for involvement of young people in the development and planning the programmes and services within their community. The majority of young people do not feel that there is a place for them to go if they aren't interested in a particular activity e.g. sports, music. There is no place for them to just 'hang out'.

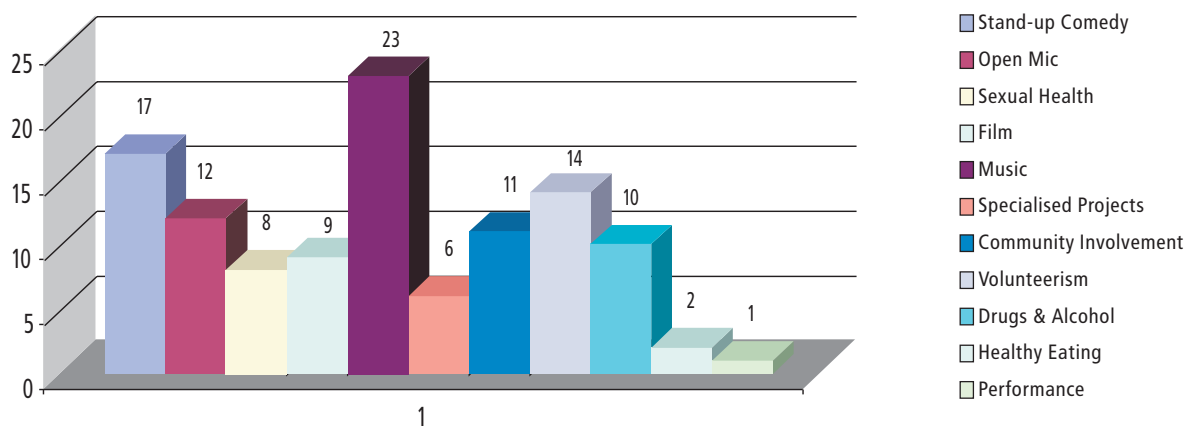
The research focussed on Youth Café / Youth Spaces and asked.

Where would you like a Youth Café to be located



This statistic reflects young peoples desire for a youth café that is accessible, open, and central. Other models need to be examined throughout the country.

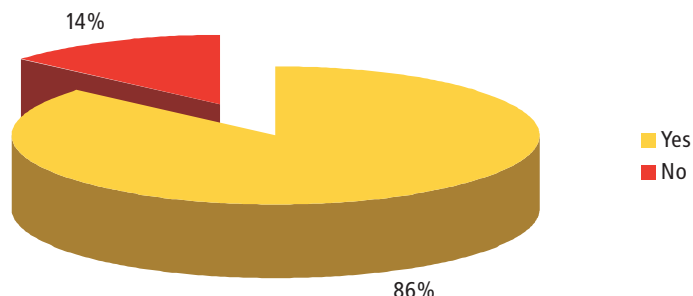
What would you like to see in a Youth Café



The range of programmes or options, highlight a diverse interest of young people, from educational work, to fun and recreational activities.

Youth Led Research Outcomes

Do you think that youth participation and youth-led programmes are valuable?



Responses included the fact that youth participation gives youth a chance to express their feelings towards certain issues, gives people a chance to meet new people and stay out of trouble, provides a forum so people won't always feel controlled by adults and gives young people a sense of responsibility and importance. Young people believe that these programmes are valuable because they develop leadership skills and friendships. Also mentioned were that they give people a voice, they bring together and develop the youth in the community, it makes them feel at home and youth led programmes help young people to learn about life.

Included on the survey was, *"what kind of youth led programmes or projects would you be interested in participating in or facilitating?"*

Responses varied with the most popular being the youth café; to sports clubs, Dail ná nÓg, special events, formal social groups, youth fora, trips and debating. This provided great evidence and insight into the strong interest of the young people surveyed to become active members of a youth participation programme and or strategy.

Any youth café should provide young people with empowering information, technological skills, and events that allow them to display their creativity and improve their ability to deal with adult life experiences. The youth café should become a youth operated, adult mentored youth programme that provides young people with opportunities to improve their lives through education programmes, self-development activities, and health based wellbeing experiences.

What is a Youth Café?

A youth café unlike a typical café provides, a unique location and forum for communication, information and entertainment. The provision of a comfortable meeting space is the answer to an increasing demand by young people from sixteen to eighteen years of age in Limerick. Young people want access to a space for meeting in comfortable settings, an alcohol and drug free environment, youth friendly information, at a cost they can afford and in such a way that is accessible to them, opportunities to display their talents, and times that suit their availability.



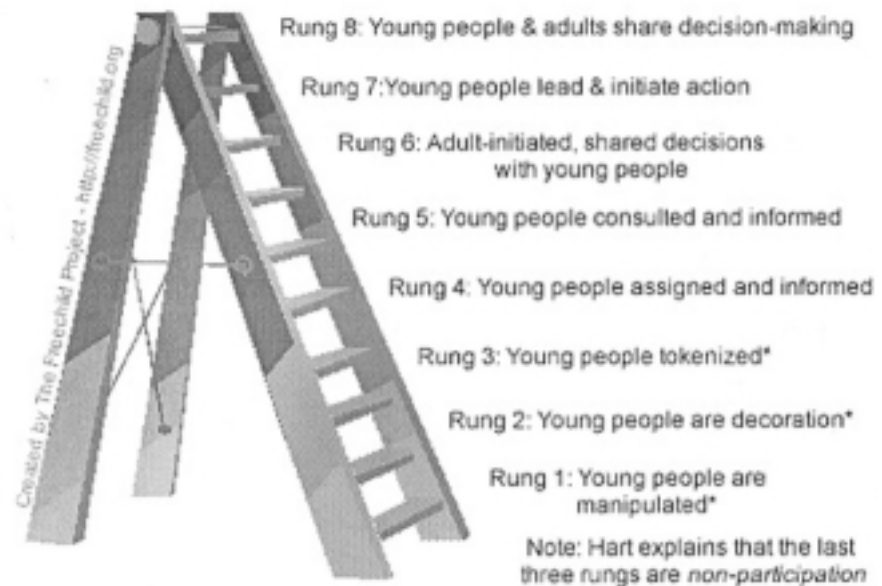
Youth Led Research Outcomes

Youth Participation

Youth participation in decision-making is not a new concept, nor is there any exact science to successful youth / adult partnerships. Youth participation strategies can incorporate a number of tools to ensure many opportunities for our young people and advisors to work together as opposed to the "adults working for young people approach".

Roger Harts' Ladder of Participation is an accepted model that can help guide the development of youth participation and a youth advisory committee while it welcomes and relies upon the guidance and wisdom of adults as a professional support role or volunteer supporters.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Harts ladder shows the difference between tokenistic involvement and the real youth participation when working with a mixed group of adults and youth.

The adult's view of youth participation can be measured as the number and frequency of activities. This, however, does not necessarily mean that participation is taking place. Quantity does not always equal quality. Thus, when an adult agency holds meetings in the youth centre but the decisions have already been made elsewhere, the participation is "token" and not of "real" quality. Youth participation becomes even more difficult if the organisation and its people have a certain culture or work within a system that is prejudiced against participation. In order to work with young people successfully one must look at and tackle the existence of adultism. Adultism refers to all of the behaviours and attitudes that flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people, and are entitled to act on behalf of young people without their agreement.

Increasing the involvement of young people in the work of the organisation or the group will have implications for how these structures operate and it is essential that the work practices ensure the safety and well-being of the children and young people at all times. In line with the organisation's child protection policy the following issues may need to be considered: ratios of young people to adults, informing parents and guardians of the work, travel and transport arrangements, issues of confidentiality, and clarity on how any information collected from young people will be used to ensure that while transferring power safety and welfare is upheld.

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