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# The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café – An exploration of young people’s experiences of participating in an open access Youth Café

Michelle Foley

**CARL Research Project**



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<b>Name and year of course:</b>	Master of Social Work 2014
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CARL seeks to:

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- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers ([www.livingknowledge.org](http://www.livingknowledge.org)).

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## **Abstract**

The study explores the experiences of young people participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café, Moyross, Limerick. Youth cafés are a model of universal youth work provision which seek to facilitate an open access safe space for young people to hang out. There is limited Irish research available regarding the perspectives of young people on youth work services. This study examines relevant literature and data from semi-structured qualitative interviews with seven young people participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify important themes emerging from the young people's experiences. The findings suggest that young people have many positive experiences within the café in relation to participation, relationships and the open access nature of the café. The findings also demonstrate that participation has had positive impacts on the young people's lives.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Title

*“The 4th Corner Youth Café – An exploration of young people’s experiences of participating in an open access Youth Café”*

### 1.2 Introduction

This chapter will aim to provide an introduction to the research. An agency profile of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café will be provided. The research rationale, aims and objectives will be outlined. The key terms from the study will be defined and finally a chapter outline will be provided.

### 1.3 Agency Profile: The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café

The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café is run by Limerick Youth Service (LYS). LYS was founded in 1973 and is a member of Youth Work Ireland. The aim of LYS

*‘is to advocate on behalf of all young people in Limerick, regardless of background, ethnicity, economic status or locality, whilst empowering and encouraging them to take a lead role in shaping their own futures and that of their communities’ (Limerick Youth Service, 2014a, p. 1)*

It works with over 3000 young people annually through a range of intervention projects, youth clubs and youth cafés. It also works in partnership with a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café was founded in 2008. The café provides an open access space for young people and aims *‘to promote the personal, social and educational needs of young people on the Northside of Limerick City’* (Limerick Youth Service, 2014b, p. 1). The youth café works with young people between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. It is facilitated by one youth worker and a number of volunteers.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner is located in Moyross on the north side of Limerick City an area characterised by high levels of disadvantage (Hourigan, 2011). Following many years of serious social

problems and high profile criminal activity Moyross had been designated a as regeneration area under Limerick Regeneration (Limerick Regeneration Agencies, 2008). There are a number of youth work based projects in the area the majority of which are based on targeted interventions. The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café is unique as it is the only universal youth service in the area.

#### **1.4 Research Rationale**

This research study is to be undertaken in collaboration with Limerick Youth Service (LYS) as part of the UCC Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative. Limerick Youth Service has identified engaging in research in general as an objective that will contribute to innovation within the service (Limerick Youth Service, 2012). The service has identified a need to research the experiences of and outcomes for young people who participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café. This research will be used to inform, practice and to evidence the young people's perspectives and possible impact of engaging with the service. This research may also be utilised by the service to inform future funding applications.

Personally I have two reasons for undertaking this research study. The first is that on hearing about the CARL projects and the rationale behind them I felt that they were more ethical and had an element of social justice to them. For these reasons I felt that undertaking a CARL project was in line with my own value base. The second reason for undertaking this research is that I have worked with disadvantaged young people in the past and found this to be very rewarding work. This work has left me with a keen interest in young people and particularly those who are disadvantaged.

There is limited Irish research on youth work services from the perspective of the young people themselves (Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011). I feel that given the participatory values espoused by the sector that it is important to undertake research which listens to the young people themselves.

## 1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine young people's perspectives of participating in the 4th Corner Youth Café and the impact it has on their lives.

The objectives of the research are:

- To examine why young people become involved in the service.
- To gain an understanding of what contributes to young people continuing to engage with the service.
- To examine what impact the service has had on young people's lives.

## 1.6 Research Questions

1. How do young people come to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café?
2. What have been the young people's experiences of attending the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café?
3. What has contributed to young people continuing to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café?
4. Has participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café had significant impacts on the young people's lives?

## 1.7 Defining the Terms

### 1.7.1 Young Person

In youth work a young person is defined as aged between ten and twenty-five years old.

### 1.7.2 Youth Café

A youth Café is described as

*a safe, dedicated, quality meeting space for young people ranging in age from 10 to 25 years. It is determined by young people for young people, in partnership with adults in the locality. (Forkan et al, 2010, p.2).*

Youth Cafes can be categorised into three main types (see *figure 1*). The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café can be located within type 3 in that in addition to offering an open access space it also offers services targeted to meet the varying needs of the young people.

<b>Types of Youth Café</b>	
<b>Type 1</b>	A place or space to simply ‘hang out’ with friends, to chat, drink coffee or a soft drink, watch TV or movies, surf the Internet, etc.
<b>Type 2</b>	All the above but also with the inclusion of entertainment or leisure services chosen by the young people themselves, together with information on State and local services of interest and relevance to young people.
<b>Type 3</b>	This is perhaps the ideal model and the one that should be aimed for in the medium to long term, where all the above activities and facilities are augmented by the actual provision of services targeted directly at young people. This can include education and training, healthcare (both physical and emotional) and direct targeted assistance.

*Figure 1- Types of Youth Café (adapted from Forkan et al, 2010, p. 2)*

### **1.7.3 Open Access**

The term open access is used to describe youth work projects which any young person can access, it is defined by,

*engagement by young people which is not dependent on their coming with a specified label attached to them personally – other than, of course, that of ‘young person’; engagement which does not hinge on eligibility criteria; engagement which is voluntary and which allows considerable (though of course not total) discretion about what facilities they might use and which programmes they might wish to join once they have decided to engage. (Davies and Merton, 2009, p. 10)*

### **1.7.4 Participation**

Participation in youth work denotes more than a young person attending a youth service.

Participation in the context of youth work is understood as ‘*the collective involvement and engagement of young people in social, political and economic life*’ (Seebach, 2008, p.37).

Participation in youth work can be viewed as an activity in which ‘*the involvement of young*

*people results in an impact on a process, influences a decision, or produces an outcome'*  
(Checkoway, 1998: 770, cited in Seebach, 2008, p. 37)

## **1.8 Chapter Outline**

*Chapter Two: Methodology.* This chapter examines the participatory approach to the research study and discusses the adoption of a qualitative interpretivist perspective. An outline of the research methods employed in the study are provided. Issues relating to ethical considerations and limitations of the study are addressed.

*Chapter Three: Literature Review.* This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the research study. Literature relating to youth work and young people's experiences of it is examined. Policy influences are also examined.

*Chapter Four: Research Findings.* This chapter presents and analyses the research findings through the use of thematic analysis. The presented data is analysed in relation to relevant literature.

*Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations.* This chapter concludes the study by summarising the key research findings. Recommendations are offered in light of the findings. The limitations of the study and the relevance to social work are discussed and final reflection on the research process offered.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research study. An agency profile has been provided. Key terms have been defined and the aims and objectives and a rationale for the study have been outlined.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion on the participatory approach to the research study and the adoption of a qualitative interpretivist perspective. Research methods, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are addressed.

### 2.2 Participatory Research

This research is participatory in nature as it has been conducted as part of the UCC CARL initiative. The participatory research approach is described by Park (2001) as '*action-orientated research activity in which ordinary people address common needs arising in their daily lives and, in the process, generate knowledge*' (Park, 2001, p. 83). Participatory research methods have been strongly influenced by the work of Freire who viewed the knowledge gained through transformative pedagogy, experimental learning and participation as key to empowering the oppressed to bring about structural change in society (Freire, 1970, cited in (Özerdem, Bowd, and Getachew Kassa, 2010).

The participatory approach differs from the majority of other research approaches in that values utilising the non-academic local knowledge of people themselves as a means for addressing local problems (Özerdem, Bowd, and Getachew Kassa, 2010). In this sense the participants rather than the academic researcher are viewed as the experts. The role of participants is central to the research process (Park, 2001). This research was designed and research questions arrived at in collaboration with Limerick Youth Service. The study was concerned with the experiences of the young people attending the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café and the findings are based on their experiences and their knowledge of their lived realities. In this sense the research views the young people as the experts. Park (2001, p. 83) argues '*putting participatory research on an epistemological grounding forces us to think of community ties and critical awareness as well as objective understanding of reality, as forms of knowledge*'.

Participatory research can be useful to the community involved in the research (Killett, 2006). An important feature of this research is that as a CARL project and in keeping with the participatory research approach the findings will be presented to Limerick Youth Service and the participants.

### **2.3 Theoretical Perspective**

A qualitative approach was taken to this research study. *'Qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena within their social worlds'* (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 3). This approach was underpinned by a theoretical perspective of interpretivism. Interpretivism seeks to better understand the social world of the participants and capture the subjective meanings participants apply to their own world (Carey, 2009). As this study sought to gain an understanding of the views of the young people participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café a qualitative approach underpinned by interpretivism was viewed as appropriate.

### **2.4 Research Methods**

#### **2.4.1 Literature Review**

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken in relation to youth work and young people's participation. Literature was sourced through conducting searches on academic databases featuring publications related to the social sciences, youth work and social work, generic internet search engines and the UCC Library catalogue. Search terms utilised included, youth work, Youth Cafés, youth work values, young people's perspectives, youth policy, Youth Work Act 2001, youth participation, targeted youth work, universal youth work and volunteerism. The literature review was essential to making sense of the research findings.

### ***2.4.2 Sampling***

Purposive sampling was the method of sampling employed in this research. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to strategically sample participants that are relevant to the research questions being posed (Bryman, 2012). Research participants were selected based on attending the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café and being over eighteen years of age. It was decided to limit participants to those over eighteen years of age due to the ethical complications of interviewing those under eighteen. Limerick Youth Service acted as gatekeepers as they identified potential participants based on the above criteria and asked them if they wanted to participate in the research. Seven young people agreed to participate and as they were all included in the study further sampling methods were not employed. In this way the young people's participation in the research was voluntary.

### ***2.4.3 Data Collection***

Data was collected from seven young people through semi-structured interview (see appendix 1 for interview guide). Semi-structured interviews are congruent with an interpretivist approach (Carey, 2009). Semi-structured interviews can be guided by the concerns of the respondents rather than just attending to the concerns of the researcher (Green, 2005). As the purpose of this research was to elicit the views of the young people attending the youth café semi-interviews were identified as the method of data collection as they gave the young people the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences. In addition the semi-structured design of the interviews while addressing topics pertinent to the research questions also allowed for flexibility to discuss issues the young people brought up. This approach also allowed for questions posed to be adapted as required to reflect the level of understanding and vocabulary of respondents (Green, 2005). Interviews were conducted in the office of the youth café as it was a private space within the cafe where young people could talk openly. It was decided to conduct interviews within the café as it was a familiar and comfortable space for the young people and it would be unfair to expect the young people to travel to an



alternative venue. In addition the café worker was on site to offer support to the young people if required.

#### **2.4.4 Data Analysis**

Three interviews were transcribed in full with the remainder summarised and the salient parts transcribed. The method of data analysis employed was that of thematic analysis. '*Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Themes emerging from the data were identified and utilised to inform the findings.

#### **2.5 Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations set out by the School of Applied Social Studies (2012), of respect for dignity and human rights, avoiding harm, consent, research with marginalised groups, confidentiality and privacy, integrity of research have been adhered to in the design and implementation of this research project. It had initially been proposed to interview young people under eighteen years of age but on considering the ethical issues particularly issues relating to capacity to give informed consent it was decided to limit the sample to those over eighteen years of age. While it was not envisaged that the interviews would cause distress to participants the café worker was available to support the young people if required.

Brydon-Miller (2009) argues that adherence to the ethical guidelines of organisations does not take into account broader ethical and moral implications of research such as who owns the research results, how the research is made available to the public and how the research contributes to the welfare of the community. As this research is part of the CARL programme it takes these factors into consideration in that the research and its results are 'owned' by both Limerick Youth Service and myself as the researcher and will be made available to the public online. The research can also be utilised to contribute to the development of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café.

### ***2.5.1 Consent***

All the participants voluntarily consented to participating in the research study. All participants were aged over eighteen and so had the capacity to consent. All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form (see appendix 2) prior to the interviews. To ensure the young people understood what they were consenting to the café worker and I read through these with the participants and explained them in simple language to allow for any literacy issues. I emphasised to the young people that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the interview and for up to two weeks following the interviews.

The research study was explained to the participants and they were given the opportunity to ask questions prior to the interviews taking place. They were informed that the research will be available online and that the results will be made available to them and to Limerick Youth Service.

### ***2.5.2 Confidentiality***

Issues and limitations relating to confidentiality were explained to the participants prior to interviews taking place. It was explained that while data would be anonymised that they could be potentially identified by LYS staff. In addition it was explained that all data relating to them would be stored electronically in a secure e-mail account and would not be retained on recording devices.

### ***2.5.3 Ethical Approval***

Limerick Youth Service approved this research as part of the CARL programme. The research project received ethical approval from the MSW course team following submission of the MSW Ethical Review Screening Form.

## **2.6 Limitations of the Study**

The small scale of the study limits the research findings. The sample was limited to participants over eighteen who have all attended the café for a number of years and therefore

did not represent the views of younger participants or those whose engagement is more recent. All participants were male as there are no females over the age of eighteen attending the café. This limits the findings to that of a male perspective only.

There was a technical issue with the recording of one interview. The entire interview was not recorded and some data was lost. However, the recorded data was included in the findings.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the participatory approach of the study and the adoption of a qualitative interpretivist perspective. The study's research methods were outlined and issues relating to ethical considerations and limitations of the study are addressed.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to critically engage with the literature relevant to the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café and the young people who participate in it. The concept of youth work will be explored, through offering a definition of youth work and examining its values and principles. The influence of social policy on funding and shaping of the youth work sector will be critically appraised. The debate surrounding universal and targeted provision will be critically engaged with and the Youth Café Model will be analysed. Youth participation and research containing young people's perspectives on youth work will also be examined.

### 3.2 The Concept of Youth Work

Youth Work as a concept is difficult to define (Jenkinson, 2000; Smith, 2003; O'hAodain, 2010a, Powell *et al*, 2010; Dickson *et al*, 2013). Ireland is unique in that it is one of a small number of countries which defines youth work in legislation (Devlin, 2010). The Youth Work Act 2001 defines youth work as ...

*' ... 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 organisations'* (Youth Work Act 2001, section 1(3)).

This definition is viewed as generally consistent with the views of stakeholders and policy approaches (Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Devlin, 2010). It also reflects key components of youth work practice such as the educational and developmental nature of the work, voluntary participation of young people and predominantly voluntary sector provision (Department of Education and Science, 2003; Devlin, 2010).

Spence (2007) argues that definitions such as that offered by the 2001 Act are inadequate in depicting the evolving nature of youth work practice, as they are bound to the historical and organisational context they were designed in. Devlin (2010) however views this definition as

'*unfinished*' in that legislation can be amended over time and notes that both the current and preceding definition (Youth Work Act 1997, sec 2) has remained largely consistent with the historical devolvement of youth work's core features. Youth work's core values are '*empowerment, equality and inclusiveness, respect, involvement of young people in decision making, partnership and voluntary participation*' (Kiely, 2009, p. 12). These values are seen to distinguish it from the formal education system and other more controlling approaches to intervention such as social work (ibid.).

The principal objective of youth work is the non-formal and/or informal education of young people distinct from the formal education system and with a focus on the development of the whole person (Jenkinson, 2000; Department of Education and Science, 2003; Devlin, 2010). While activities engaged in and the methods employed by youth workers can vary greatly, there is a shared focus on process (Jenkinson, 2000; Department of Education and Science, 2003; Dickson *et al*, 2013). Process is '*... the ongoing educational cycle of experience, observation, reflection and action*' (Department of Education and Science, 2003, p. 13). This process of learning occurs through the content of the programmes, the participation of young people in taking responsibility and decision making and the relationships developed between the young people themselves and with the workers (Hurley and Treacy, 1993). Key to engaging young people in this process is the voluntary nature of participation (Devlin, 2010). The role of the youth worker as educator in facilitating this process warrants a high level of skill which has contributed to the professionalisation of the sector (Department of Education and Science, 2003; Seebach, 2008). The youth worker's role

*'is to create relationships of trust and respect with young people and work with them in ways that combine enjoyment, challenge and learning. Successful outcomes will largely be dependent on the relationship between the youth worker and the young people.'* (Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 2005, p.13).

The relationship as a base for working with young people in youth work practice can be seen to be in congruence to relationship based practice in social work. This approach utilises the relationship between the worker and service user as a means to channel interventions (Ruch, 2010).

### **3.3 Youth Work Policy**

Similar to other social professions such as social work, the origins of youth work can be found in the philanthropic movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which developed as a response to social problems resulting from industrialisation and urbanisation (Kiely and Kennedy, 2005; Devlin, 2010; Powell *et al*, 2012). Youth work in Ireland developed largely in a voluntary nature with limited state involvement until the 1970s (Kiely and Kennedy, 2005; Devlin, 2010). The period from the 1970s to the 1990s saw increased state involvement in the development of youth work policy much of which was never implemented due to lack of resources and political will (Kiely and Kennedy, 2005; O'hAodain, 2010a).

The publication in 1984 of the National Youth Policy Committee Final Report, also known as the Costello Report, is still considered a significant policy development in that it set out a framework for the establishment of a national youth service (Department of Education and Science, 2003; Kiely and Kennedy, 2005; O'hAodain, 2010a). In addition the Costello Report is regarded as significant in that it acknowledged societal inequalities and in line with the Critical Social Education Model, viewed youth work as having a role in empowering and engaging young people to become critical participants in society (Treacy, 2009). The Critical Social Education model is rooted in conflict theories which view society as inequitable and young people as victims of these injustices (Hurley and Treacy, 1993). Youth work from this perspective seeks to make young people critically aware of their social situation in order to

motivate them to seek change in the structural institutions of society and enhance personal development for the young people involved (ibid).

The Youth Work Act 1997 gave youth work a legislative footing for the first time. However, the Act was deemed inoperable and was replaced with the Youth Work Act 2001 (O'hAodain, 2010a). While the Act bestows responsibilities on the State to develop and provide services these are ‘*subject to caveats such as “as far as is practicable” (Section 8(1)), and “within the financial resources available” (Sections 8(c) and 9(a))*’ (cited in Jenkinson, 2013, p. 6).

The National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 set out key development areas for youth work in Ireland (Department of Education and Science, 2003), many of which have been not been achieved due to lack of resources (Devlin, 2008; Powell, *et al*, 2010; Leahy and Burgess, 2011). The plan is outdated as it set in the context of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Powell *et al* (2012) argue that poverty and unemployment need to be included in the discourse on the effects of postmodern change on Irish youth.

The integration of Youth Affairs into the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was seen as positive in terms of the having the influence of a junior Minister for the sector (Powell, 2010). The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for Youth Work introduced in 2010 provided a common framework for youth work organisations to assess their practice (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2010). This can be viewed positively as opportunity for youth work to demonstrate the difference it makes in young people’s lives (Jenkinson, 2013). However there is a danger that this may become a bureaucratic tool tied to targets, outcomes and funding and be incapable of measuring core youth work values such as the relationship between the young person and the worker (ibid.).

### **3.4 State Funding of Youth Work**

Public funding of youth work continues to appear disjointed despite the creation of the DCYA. The majority of public funding comes from the Department of Children and Youth

Affairs (including the National Lottery), the Health Service Executive and the Irish Youth Justice Service, with some funding available from other sources (Indecon, 2012). In addition to being dispersed across different government departments funding streams within each department are divided into various grants and other supports (ibid.). Funding is on an annual basis and not guaranteed which can impact on service delivery and continuity (Bane, 2009; Powell *et al*, 2010). The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner is Youth Café is funded by Limerick Regeneration which has been integrated into Limerick City Council. It has funding for one staff member and is supported by volunteers.

While state funding of youth work has increased over recent decades the majority of funding has been directed towards targeted services for young people viewed as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at risk’ (Kiely, 2009; McMahon, 2009; O'hAodain, 2010a; Jenkinson, 2013). While funding increases have been welcomed by the sector concerns have been expressed as to the impact this has had on universal provision (Jenkinson, 2013). The issues of targeted and universal provision will be discussed in section 3.5.

There has also been a marked change in the nature of State funding of youth work,

*... characterised by a movement away from innocuous patron towards hard-nosed purchaser; a move from ‘here is some support to help you do what you do’ to ‘here is what we are in the market to buy’ (McMahon, 2009, p. 111).*

The powerful position of the State as a principle source of funding allows it to influence the sector and impact the autonomy of voluntary youth work organisations (Doorley, 2003; McMahon, 2009; Kiely, 2009). This has resulted in organisations adapting to meet tendering process requirements and steering their work towards those deemed ‘at risk’ (Kiely, 2009; McMahon, 2009).

The current economic climate has seen funding for youth work decrease by thirty percent since 2008 (Cunningham, 2012). This has had an impact on services meeting the needs of



young people (Jenkinson, 2013). These cuts are in the context of increasing numbers of young people seeking to access youth services due to the effects of the recession (ibid.). Given that government policy had located funding predominantly in services for disadvantaged young people it can be argued that a reduction in service provision would disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged young people in society. In this context the National Youth Council of Ireland commissioned an Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work, which found that every 1euro invested by the state in youth work would return 2.2 euro in savings over a ten year period (Indecon, 2012).

Bowden and Martin Lanigan (2011) argue that youth work can be viewed as a public good in that it engages young people in municipal and public life. It can be argued that is it doubtful the State shares this view based on their funding of the sector. As increasingly it would appear the sector is being subjected to working within business and neo-liberalist market models in which the State as the purchaser requires the sector justify their value in terms of outcomes and economic benefits.

### **3.5 Universal and Targeted Provision**

Universalism is based on the principle that service provision is available to all potential users without eligibility criteria being applied (Davies and Merton, 2009). Universalism is viewed as a core value of youth work practice (Department of Education and Science, 2003; Kiely, 2009; Powell *et al*, 2010). Davies and Merton (2009) however view the term ‘open-access’ as being representative of universal youth work in practice. It is defined by,

*engagement by young people which is not dependent on their coming with a specified label attached to them personally – other than, of course, that of ‘young person’; engagement which does not hinge on eligibility criteria; engagement which is voluntary and which allows considerable (though of course not total) discretion about what facilities they might use and which programmes they might wish to join once they have decided to engage. (Davies and Merton, 2009, p. 10)*

O'hAodain however (2010a, p. 68) argues that historically a two tiered model has existed within youth work in that it has aimed to serve both '*mainstream*' and '*targeted*' or '*disadvantaged*' groups of young people.

*Targeted provision describes specific programmes and/or facilities which are offered to young people or which they may be required to attend. The young people are given dedicated and often intensive attention because they have been identified as within certain 'at risk' and/or 'special needs' categories, (Davies and Merton, 2009, p. 9).*

A key theme emerging from the literature is that youth work in Ireland and indeed other countries, has become increasingly targeted in nature as more funding has been made available for interventions with specific youth populations particularly those seen as 'at risk' or 'disadvantaged' (Davies, 1999; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Kiely, 2009; McMahon, 2009; O'hAodain, 2010a, 2010b; Powell *et al*, 2012, Jenkinson, 2013).

An example of the growth of targeted youth work can be seen in the significant development of Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYPDs) over recent years (O'hAodain, 2010b; Jenkinson, 2013). GYPDs aim to '*divert young people away from crime and towards positive and socially responsible behaviour*' (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008, p. 43)

The growth of targeted youth work can be viewed as incongruent with the youth work value of universalism. The move towards more targeted forms of practice has been influenced by the policy developments and funding priorities discussed in sections 3.3 and 3.4, which direct funding towards interventions with problem or disadvantaged groups of young people, with funding dependant on delivering measurable outcomes (O'hAodain, 2010b). It has been argued that this has resulted in youth work taking on a law and order remit and it has been questioned as to whether some current targeted practices are consistent with youth work as traditionally defined (*ibid.*).

A key criticism of targeted youth work is that due to its concentration in disadvantaged populations is that it labels and stigmatises the young people involved. Scanlon *et al* note that the growth of targeted projects has caused youth work to be perceived ‘... *as catering only for ‘the disadvantaged’ or those with ‘problems’*” (Scanlon *et al*, 2011, p. 10). While targeted projects espouse aims of integrating young people into mainstream society, by segregating those viewed as problematic into distinct projects ‘... *they run the risk of ‘ghettoising’ them’* (ibid., p. 9). The segregation of young people into targeted projects associated with deviance can enable society to label them as outsiders (Becker, 1963).

In addition to stigmatising certain groups of young people Devlin and Gunning (2009) found that the targeting of services towards young people deemed ‘disadvantaged’ reduced youth works potential to work with young people who may be viewed as ‘advantaged’ but are experiencing significant crisis in their lives.

There are however positive aspects to targeted intervention. Scanlon *et al*’s (2011) study noted that targeted intervention did engage and reach out to young people who would have never attended universal youth services. Additionally positive engagement in a targeted service often led to young people participating in more universal projects (ibid.). Accounts such as these can be seen as indicative of youth work’s principle of taking where the young person is at as a starting point.

While funding has been channelled towards targeted approaches, often as it has been argued at the expense of universal youth services, recent years have seen the development of youth cafes which represent a universal approach to service provision (O’hAodain, 2010b). Youth cafes have been identified as a key need by young people and funding has been allocated for their development (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2007; Pobal, 2013).

### 3.6 The Youth Café Model

A youth Café is described as

*a safe, dedicated, quality meeting space for young people ranging in age from 10 to 25 years. It is determined by young people for young people, in partnership with adults in the locality. (Forkan et al, 2010, p.2).*

The facilities and services available from Youth Cafes vary widely across the sector with some employing full time staff to others run by volunteers (O’haodain, 2010b). The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café is facilitated by one full time staff member and a number of volunteers. Youth Cafés have been classified into three main types (see section 1.7.2).

Youth cafes can be accessed by all young people and as such carry no stigma or labelling (Forkan et al, 2010). The open access model also allows youth cafes to work with young people across varying levels of the Hardiker Framework (Hardiker et al, 1991). This can range from young people simply wanting a place to hang out to young people experiencing immense difficulties in their lives. Services comprising of young people from a variety of social backgrounds with varying needs were viewed as beneficial to young people (Devlin and Gunning, 2009).

Given the universal nature of the youth café model it would appear to be representative of youth work values. However there have been criticisms put forward. Powell et al found that there was some ambivalence among youth workers as to whether the youth café model ‘actually constitutes youth work, and the degree to which it differs from previous youth work interventions’ (Powell et al, 2010, p6).

The Youth Café model has also been criticised for being too conservative in nature. It has been argued that it is rooted in a personal development and character building framework (O’haodain, 2010b). This approach, rooted in the functionalist tradition, is viewed as being concerned with the social control of young people which aims to socialise them in the dominant values of society (Hurley and Tracey, 1993). O’haodain, (2010b, p. 50) argues that

this approach ‘... *fits well with the agenda of our neo-liberal, individualised society*’. He goes on to advocate for Youth Cafés utilising the Critical Social Education Model to engage young people as envisaged in the Costello report (ibid.).

### **3.7 Youth Cafes as a Safe Open Access Space**

Internationally youth cafes have been envisaged as a facility for young people to hang out together in a safe space without to the pressure to use alcohol or drugs (Forkan *et al*, 2010). Young people naturally gravitate towards their peers and hanging out ‘adult free’ is an important and natural feature of adolescence which allows young people to develop skills such as the ability to negotiate in a group (Hendry *et al*, 1993 cited in De Róiste and Dineen, 2005; Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999). For many young people apart from the family home, open public spaces are the only places they can hang out (De Róiste and Dineen, 2005; Woolley, 2006). However, hanging around on the streets was also linked to drinking alcohol, smoking and drug use among young people (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999; Sweeting and West, 2000 cited in De Róiste and Dineen, 2005).

Young people’s use of open public spaces to hang out has become problematised. Young people using public spaces are perceived as a threat to the personal safety of others (Loader, 1996 cited in Woolley, 2006; Malone, 2002). This perception of young people as threatening led to marginalised young people engaged in street culture being further marginalised and isolated from their communities (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999).

Young people want safe spaces to hang out with their friends (De Róiste and Dineen, 2005) and youth cafés are viewed as being able to provide this safe space (Donnelly *et al* 2009). Research by Forkan *et al* (2010) found that young people’s main reason for participating in youth cafes having ‘*a safe, comfortable space to hang out with friends*’ and that a ‘*comfortable facility*’ and ‘*good atmosphere*’ were also important (Forkan *et al*, 2010, p 31).

### 3.8 Youth Participation

Youth participation is a core value of youth work (Seebach, 2008; Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2010). The value placed on young people's participation by youth work upholds the view of young people as citizens and can be seen as recognition of children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Department of Education and Science, 2003). While various policy commitments have been made to increase youth participation across all sectors this has not been fully realised in practice (Leahy and Burgess, 2011). The youth work sector however does provide opportunities for participation (ibid.).

Various models of participation can be draw upon to 'measure' young people's participation the most influential of which is Hart's (1992) '*Ladder of Children's Participation*' (see *Figure 2*)(Barn and Franklin, 1996, cited in Seebach, 2008). The model is arranged hierarchically, with the bottom rungs of the ladder viewed as non-participation, the middle rungs representing consultation and the top rungs shared decision making (Hart, 1992). The hierarchical nature of this model has been criticised for implying that the highest rungs have the most value (Barber, 2007).

Participation has to a large extent been interpreted as young people being consulted in decision making (Percy-Smith, 2010). Percy-Smith (2009) however contends that the benefits to young people from participation are not a result of changes to service provision arising out of consultation, but derive from the learning, experiences and increased confidence gained from taking part. Participation has been found to benefit young people in terms of personal and skill development and contributing to social inclusion (Seebach, 2008). Notably for social work practice, participation has been identified as protective factor as it has been found to promote resilience in young people (Seebach, 2008).

## The ladder of participation

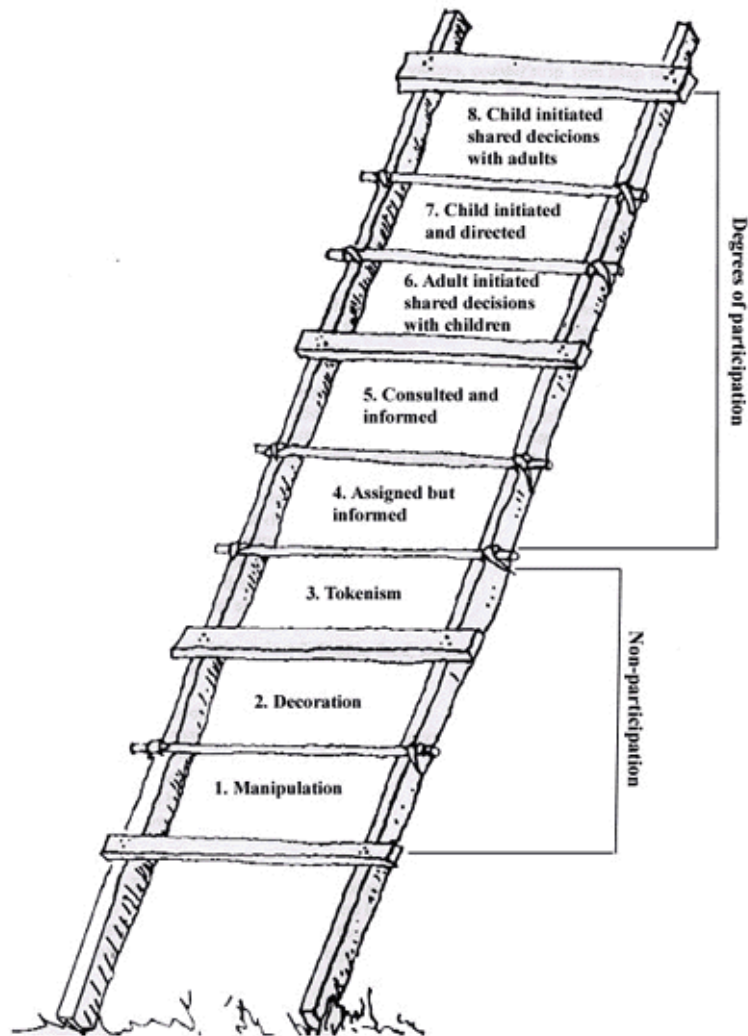


Figure 2 - Ladder of Children's Participation (Hart, 1992), [source: Google Images]

### 3.9 Young People's Perspectives on Youth Work

Given that young people's participation is a core value of youth work it can be argued that in evaluating youth work and enhancing youth participation it is essential to listen to young people's voices and their perspectives on youth work.

Research by Devlin and Gunning (2009) found young people experienced many positive benefits and outcomes from youth work. They acknowledge that the study is not representative of young people's views in general due to sample selection (ibid.).

Interestingly young people's perceptions and experiences of youth work were broadly congruent with those of the youth workers and representative of youth work values in general (ibid.). One point of divergence was that young people viewed the purpose of youth work as predominately concerned with *'keeping them off the streets'* (Devlin and Gunning, 2009, p. 48). It can be argued this is quite an insightful view given that the majority of State policy is concerned with the social control of young people.

The young people noted positive changes within themselves through their participation in terms of greater sociability and personal development, with the latter increasing over longer involvement in the service (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). The relationships between the young people themselves and the workers were viewed as key in facilitating positive experiences and outcomes (ibid.). The distinct approach taken by youth work which differs from formal education system, respect, a safe space and participation in decision making were also viewed as positive by the young people (ibid.).

The findings of a study by Bowden and Martin Lanigan (2011), with older teenagers (aged 15-19), were broadly consistent with Devlin and Gunning's research in terms of the importance of relationships and participation, and benefits from personal development. Again this study is not representative of young people in general as participants in the study were self-selected (Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011). The study also found that the longer older teenagers were involved in a service the more important participation in decision making processes became and also influenced a young person's decision to continue attending (ibid.). The research also found that young people found the Youth Café model attractive (ibid.). However Bowden and Martin Lanigan (2011) advocate further research to ascertain whether this model itself or the informal drop-in dimension, which has long been a feature of youth work, is what the young people find attractive.



An additional common theme emerging from both studies was the creation of bridging social capital through young people's participation both in terms of the wider community and positive intergenerational relationships (Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

Through engaging with the relevant literature a number of conclusions can be made. It appears that there is an inherent conflict within the youth work sector. This conflict arises from the sector endeavouring to practice and deliver a service in accordance with its core values and principles but being constrained from doing so by the control the State has on the sector. This control is achieved by the State in its role as the main funder of services. This allows state policy, which the arguments presented in this review have shown to be incongruent with youth work's values and principles, to prescribe the nature of youth work in Ireland.

Universal youth work is underfunded due to the emphasis placed on targeted provision. Youth Cafés can offer the opportunity for more young people to participate in youth services without having a prerequisite label of 'at risk' or 'disadvantaged'. However there have been issues identified with regards funding and maintaining them as open access, universal spaces. Despite these criticism the young people's perspectives presented demonstrated that their experiences of participation in youth work have been positive.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the research findings. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify and analyse the young people's experiences within the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café. Relevant literature has also been applied to the findings. Seven young aged between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two were interviewed. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the participants' extract presented here to ensure anonymity. In this chapter no distinction is made between youth workers and volunteers and the term 'worker' is used to represent both.

### 4.2 Why did I Come Through the Door

All of the young people interviewed have either participated in the youth café since it first started in 2008 or joined within the first year of it opening. Of those that participated from the opening their initial attendance arose either out of curiosity regarding the café or through being approached directly by the youth worker either in school or in another way. With those who joined later attributing their initial attendance to word of mouth from friends and older participants. Many of the young people also indicated that the café appealed to them as prior to its opening there was nowhere else like it for them to go.

*"I'm here since I was about fourteen like, I heard it from you know my friends they were talking about it, so I came down to see what it was like"* Paul

*"I'm here since day one the first day it opened like ... I was only passing like ... I thought it was a café, came in whatever and the workers really that's why I thought that I came down the second time because this is the first round this side of town anyway at least of a youth café whatever, ah there's clubs and that like about once or twice a week but I was thinking this thing's bit odd like what were the workers meant"* Shane

*“Well the reason I came here in the first place was because when we were fifteen there was literally nothing to do around this area ... So [worker] ... approached us before it opened said there was a youth café opening and to come down so we came down and never looked back” Liam*

All of the young people’s initial attendance at the 4th Corner was voluntary in nature which is seen as key to engaging young people in youth work (Devlin, 2010).

### **4.3 An Open Safe Secure Space**

The open access nature of the café was important to the young people as space they could hang out in most days. Having somewhere to hang out was important to the young people as they felt it kept them off the streets.

*“it was open on four days when it first opened like you know and I used to always be down here like, be part of the furniture down here” Paul*

*“A place for us to come to you know get us to keep off the street and kill a bit of time before we went in home so it was handy to have” Daniel*

When asked if there were other places to hang out in the area the predominant response was no and the young people indicated that the only other places to hang out were on the streets or in the bookies.

*“No just either around the roads or in the bookies across the way, but no this is really the only place like that you could come down” Liam*

Hanging out in groups is a natural feature of young people’s lives (Hendry *et al*, 1993 cited in De Róiste and Dineen, 2005; Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999). Essentially young people will find somewhere to hang out and it can be viewed as positive that the café offers the young people this space given that the only other options available to young people to hang

out are on the streets or in the bookmakers. In particular, the use of the bookmakers as a place for young people to hang out can be viewed as concerning given its potential to contribute to young people developing gambling problems.

Further analysis of the young people's responses reveals that the café was more than just a physical space to hang out it but that it was a safe and relaxed space with a friendly atmosphere. The young people indicated that the open access safe space was something which initially attracted them to the café but also something which contributed to their engagement over the longer term.

*"... secure really and open, it was open and secure at the same time"* Daniel

*"we just thought we'd continue going it was kinda like a place we could relax in a safe environment and rather than being on the streets especially with the bad weather, it was a comfortable place to go to"* Brian

*"Just the friendly atmosphere like you and get on with everyone, the leaders are sound out ... it's just really the friendly atmosphere down here, it's just kinda like a family kinda thing you know"* Liam

The overall purpose of the youth café model is to create this safe relaxed space for young people (Forkan *et al*, 2010). The young people's responses demonstrate that the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner has succeeded in creating that space. In addition it is also a feature that contributes to the young people's participation the café. This is in line with Forkan *et al*'s findings that young people's main reason for participating in youth cafes was having '*a safe, comfortable space to hang out with friends*' and that a '*comfortable facility*' and '*good atmosphere*' were also important (2010, p 31).

#### 4.4 Having a Say and Getting Involved

The young people discussed a wide variety of experiences and activities participated in through the café. The young people experienced varying degrees of participation within the café. Levels of participation varied in relation to different aspects of the café and the young people's own interests and abilities.

Young people had a say in the activities and programmes they participated in, with choice and shared decision making evident in the café. For example staff or the young people themselves may suggest an activity and the young people will decide as a group if it is something they wanted to participate in.

*"... you know they give you your own freedom they say do you want to do this"* Shane

*"... we kinda decide as a group, make suggestions that what would we actually like to do and if the money is there and insurance and everything covered we generally go for it ... it's good that they [workers] can make suggestions 'cause the suggestions that the leaders might make they might not be on the minds of people, something for instance if it was something new that they haven't done ... it's good to have numerous choices 'cause they're all probably off different people then you can decide amongst the group, but generally as groups like they'll come up with suggestions and then you can decide as well as the leaders"* Brian

The young people also discussed programmes such as art and carpentry which had allowed them to contribute to the design of the café.

*"We've the art programme which you see all the art on the walls and stuff and the carpentry programme, all the tables outside"* Liam

Involving young people in the design elements can contribute to them feeling a sense of ownership of the café (Prince's Trust, 2005).

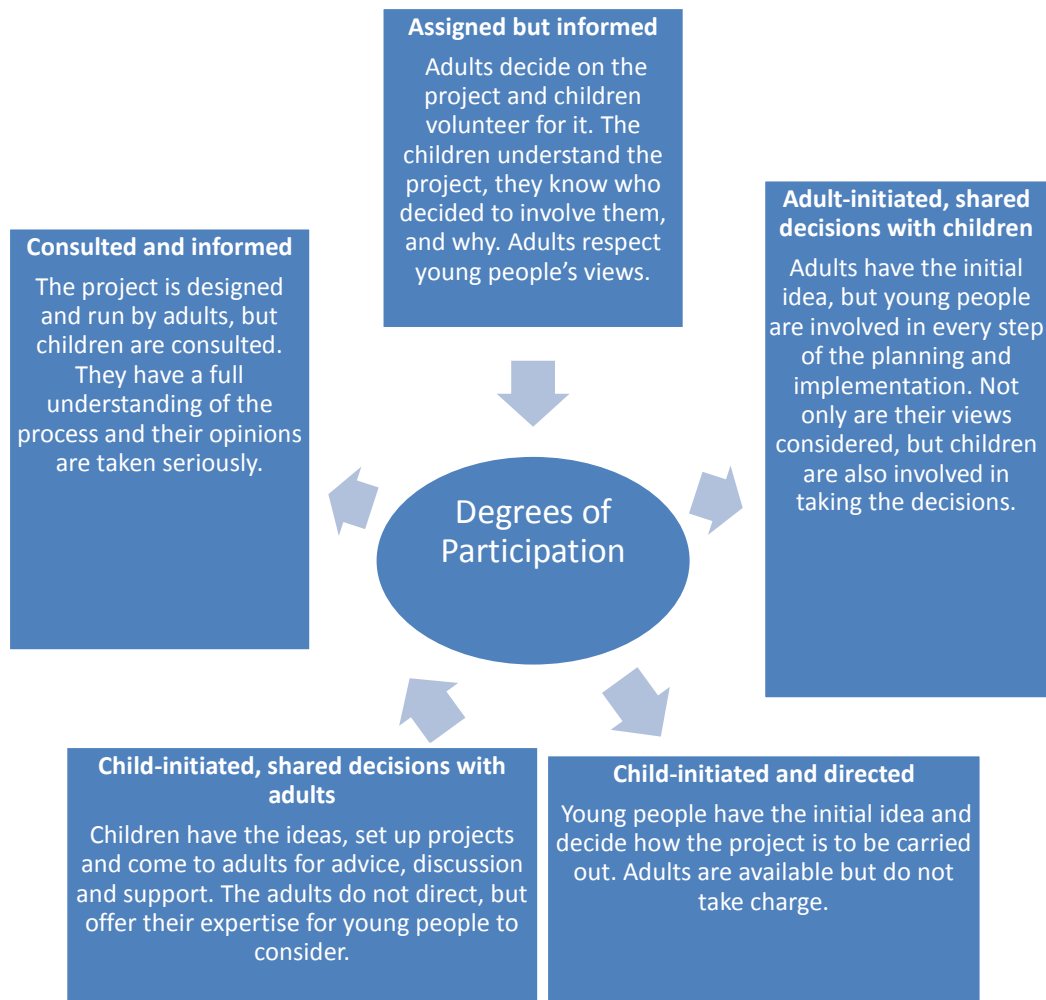
Another degree of participation is evidenced in how the young people also participated in the planning and implementation of programmes within the café. One young person discussed how after consulting with the other young people he had planned and implemented a hill walking programme which promoted physical activity as part of a national project aimed at promoting positive mental health. The young person applied for funding and received training from the funding organisation to implement the programme. The young person received the funding and organised and implemented the programme with access to a mentor when needed for advice. The programme was successful and other young people interviewed commented on it positively.

The young people also discussed participation in applying for various funding schemes, participation in the youth bank (a network of grant-making committees run by young people) and visiting youth cafes in other parts of the country to learn from other young people how their cafes are run. The young people valued this level of participation in the running of the café.

*“They get you active not as in like doing, fair enough they do the summer programmes sports and things like that but it’s not really about that either like it’s we do a lot of trying to do things for the café as well ... it’s more self-productive, that’s what it is like... not a business, like but that’s what it sorta felt like you were organising events and things”* Shane

The varying degrees of participation within the café can be seen to be representative of Treseder’s (1997) model of participation (*Figure 3*). In contrast to other models of participation such as Hart’s ‘*Ladder of Children’s Participation*’ (1992), Treseder’s model is non-hierarchical and as such does not view one type of participation as more valuable than another. The model values differing degrees of participation and their capacity to be the most

appropriate in relation to particular circumstances and the needs and capacities of the young people involved (McAuley and Brattman, 2002).



*Figure 3 - Treseder's Model of Participation (1997) (adapted from, McAuley and Brattman 2002, p. 48)*

Youth participation is a core value of youth work practice (Seebach, 2008) and through examining the young people's experiences it is clear that this is a value being espoused in the 4<sup>th</sup> corner youth café. Bowden and Martin Lanigan (2011) found that participation in decision making influenced older teenager's decisions to continue attending youth work services. The degree of participation in decision making experienced by young people in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner

may be contributing to them continuing to engage as they have gotten older. Although as will be discussed in section 4.7 when asked directly about continued engagement, no young people attributed it to participation in decision making but did discuss participation in activities within the café as key to continued engagement.

## 4.5 Relationships

### 4.6.1 Relationships with Friends

All the young people valued socialisation and the positive nature of peer relationships within the café. The young people discussed how the café created the space for socialising with their friends and also developing new friendships.

*“... my particular group of maybe four or five lads and then there was other similar groups to us and then there was basically people that may have known no one what so ever but they kinda bonded rather quickly ‘cause everyone was there for the same reasons the same purposes. Everyone just kinda got on together chatted away and there was high numbers of participants coming down and really enjoyed what it was about” Brian*

*“I’d say there’s a sorta like a close young, y’know like a close family you get to know the people completely like that are here” Shane*

*“it [the café] keeps you sane ‘cause if you’re in home staring at the four walls you know it’s not good for your mental health, but you’re coming out your interacting with other people your own age and even older people so you’re learning as well you know getting to hear different opinions on stuff even soccer matches sport anything that’s in the news or anything you know rather than having your own opinion up home to yourself ....” Brian*

This finding is in line with previous research studies in which young people identified socialising with friends as the key factor contributing to their involvement in youth work services (Devlin and Gunning 2009; Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011). This finding also



highlights the central role friends play in the lives of young people. As outlined in Erikson's stages of psychosocial development peers are socially important during the adolescent stage of identity vs role confusion (Shaffer and Kipp, 2007).

A theme emerging from young people's discussions of peer relationships is the positive influence of peers on behaviour. Many of the young people felt that the influence of their friends in the café helped them to stay out of trouble.

*"you just mature yourself you know, your friends around you when you see that they're not doing stupid things ... you just mature as well like you're not gona go do it [get into trouble] yourself"* Paul

*"one thing that helped was just all the friends that are around you as well, you know that you're coming down here all the time playing pool you're not hanging around out on the roads doing stupid things your down here playing pool getting a great laugh even with the staff having a great laugh with them join in getting a laugh with your slag everything like I mean you won't get that out on the roads"* Kevin

This finding demonstrates the role of the youth group in social learning through the personal encounters and situations which arise between the young people (Hurley and Treacy, 1993). Additionally it demonstrates the importance of positive peer influences for young people. Similar to the association between risk taking behaviours and negative peer influence, friends engaged in protective behaviours can positively influence their peer's behaviour (Tomé, 2012).

#### **4.6.2 Relationships with Workers**

The young people also spoke positivity of relationships with the staff. Young people valued the being able to drop in and talk to staff. Some young people attributed their engagement with the café to relationships with the staff.

*“... we could go in sit down have a cup of , chat with the lads” Daniel*

*“[name of worker] got us to come here and trust me I was really bould and I spent three years down here, I changed lot like started going doing meetings with everyone started getting involved with more activities and everything” Kevin*

*“it’s not really the place or anything y’know ... It’s really the workers really like, they’re sound like, I get on with them there, talk to ‘em like. We’re close enough like we’re here since day one so every worker that’s been here we’re close enough because we do a lot like with em they do a lot with us like” Shane*

Being able to come in and talk to workers is important as listening on the part of adults is key to building relationships (Spence *et al*, 2006). The importance to the young people of the relationship with the workers is consistent with previous studies which found that young people attributed their involvement in youth work to the relationship with the workers (Devlin and Gunning 2009; Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011).

The majority of the young people felt the café would not be the same without the staff and volunteers. The young people felt that the workers balanced having fun with them and maintaining boundaries within the café. The young people also indicated that they valued having the staff in that café to maintain rules and boundaries.

*“[worker] like she does have the crack sometimes as long as it doesn’t go beyond that, which I think she has taught people well not to cross the line basically” Brian*

*“it needs someone like to set the rules like ‘cause if you’ve someone just one of us we wouldn’t know what to do like so you’d have to have someone set the rules” Alex*

Devlin and Gunning’s (2009, p.52) research also found that young people recognised the ‘balancing act’ workers had to play in that they had a distinctive authority which was based

on the friendships with the young people. As discussed in section 4.3 the young people valued the secure nature of the café, this finding can be seen to indicate that they recognise and value the role of the staff in maintaining the café as a safe space.

Some of the young people also attributed positive changes in their lives to their relationships with the staff.

*“she [worker] often kept doing meetings, just going away playing pool, brought us fishing done like all a load of activities and just doing meetings with me got me to calm down and everything that helped a lot. I haven't been in trouble since” Kevin*

This finding is in keeping with research which found that positive outcomes for young people in youth work have been found to be dependant largely on the quality of the relationship between the young people and the youth worker (Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 2005). This use of the relationship in youth work practice is in congruence with the use of the relationship as a base for intervention in relationship based social work practice (Ruch, 2010).

#### **4.7 What Keeps me Coming Back**

All the young people interviewed have been attending the café for five or six years and are in the upper age limits for participation in youth work services. While the young people's many positive experiences discussed throughout the findings can be seen to contribute to their continued participation this section examines the young people's responses when asked directly what has continued to engage them with the café.

Some of the young people discussed the opportunities for activities, socialisation and keeping them from hanging around the roads as contributing to continued engagement.

*“it’s the activities and all you’re not hanging around the roads, somewhere to go to chill out with your friends have a cup of tea, talk, play pool, do activities, you stop hanging around the roads you know what I mean doing stupid things like so it’s very helpful for young kids and us as well like” Kevin*

*“ .. it was just fun like, it kept me in here instead of being out messing around ... you just come down week after week playing pool, playing soccer, it keeps you interested and stuff like” Liam*

*“Ya like I said it’s a great place and it offers variety as well activities like if you go around with a group of lads like around the roads maybe they mightn’t do these activities they might want to stay local, with here you can get a group of fifteen maybe twenty people, go- karting is a great day out you know and film making, stuff like film making that you’re not gona do anywhere else basically, you know” Brian*

While the degree of participation in the café was not explicitly cited as a reason for continued engagement, the activities within the café were. Given the findings discussed in section 4.4 which demonstrate that the young people have a say and a choice in and a role in organising activities within the café, participation can be viewed as a factor contributing to continued engagement.

However the overwhelming theme emerging regarding continued engagement is that of the positive atmosphere or nature of the café and the positive relationships between both peers and workers.

*“It’s just the kinda nature of the place, it was comfortable you could do your own thing, you know there wasn’t someone in your ear all the time telling you what to do, it was more relaxed than any other club that we were involved in so it was different we could be*

*ourselves. We got into trouble when we were younger and we were barred and stuff and even at that you kinda, even if you're barred the lads still come down and you couldn't so the next you came down you wouldn't do, you wouldn't be in trouble again, so you'd try and stay in with the lads. Other than that it was just a nice place to be"* Daniel

*"I don't know I suppose like the staff are more welcoming than anything like you know and it's a good craic down here and there's always a good atmosphere down here so why wouldn't I want to keep coming back like"* Paul

*"... I suppose that's all I can really explain it's the workers, like I'm not saying Limerick Youth Service I'm not bigging them up, I'm not saying they picked the best workers but we have got, we were fortunate enough for like [names workers] ... we got close to them really but it was more I don't know ..."* Shane

*"... a lot of people were friendly down here you know it was great environment down here like and after that then you just come down week after week"* Liam

*"Just the laugh like and the staff they're all mad things like the staff are, so it's good down here you get a laugh and talk to people like its good like, a few games of pool ..."* Alex

The young people's responses when directly asked about continued engagement reflect the themes evident across their experiences within the café of a safe space, participation and relationships discussed in previous sections. It is the combination of these factors that influences positive experiences and contributes to continued engagement.

These findings can be seen to be representative of previous research by Devlin and Gunning (2009) and Bowden and Martin Lanigan (2011) which found that young people attributed becoming and staying involved in youth work to socialising with both existing and new friends in an enjoyable safe and comfortable environment but also to positive relationships

that exist with between the young people themselves and the adults involved. Bowden and Martin Lanigan's (2011) study also found that participation and decision making within youth projects was key to keeping older young people involved.

## 4.8 What Have I got from Coming Here

### 4.8.1 Personal Development

The young people felt that they had got a lot from participating in the café. As discussed in section 4.4 the young people have participated in a range of activities, fundraising and facilitation of programmes which have fostered personal and skill development. One young person linked participation in the café to creating a sense of identity and linked participation to the development of confidence and skills, particularly social skills.

*“ya it gives you somewhere to go like a sorta sense of identity as well, that you're kinda part of the youth café ... you get to express yourself and like encourage participation and really you kinda start to find yourself and then your skills ... especially with confidence as is a big thing, it increases your social skills massively, the young people these days are you know stuck at home on their devices you know, iPads, not really developing their social skills, it's all right talking through the internet but when they come out then to meet people they probably don't know what to say they're not confident speaking to each other, whereas down here you're constantly speaking, you're constantly interacting, you're meeting people from different backgrounds, different experiences, you're really learning in that sense like”* Brian

This account of personal and skill development through participation is similar to other research findings (Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011). The café would appear to be rooted in a personal development framework, which *'focuses on the personal development needs of young people with little reference made to the social situation or environment in which the young person lives'* (Hurley and Treacy, 1993, p. 27). A criticism of the youth café model is that it rooted in personal development and character

building framework and does not utilise the Critical Social Education Model (O'hAodain, 2010b). However the young people's accounts of personal development should still be viewed as positive in terms of the impact on the young people themselves.

#### **4.8.2 Staying Out of Trouble**

Many of the young people felt that participating in the café had had a positive impact in their lives and had contributed to them not getting into trouble.

*"... a lot of young people have got life lines I thought out of this café, like they could have been out robbing cars doing whatever and young people do around here, but a lot of people got life lines ... I was interested in it too going out late nights whatever with your friends and that like but its places like this ... the leaders they were organising things like we were going to Dublin ... and we weren't back till late so we were going home to bed. I'd say if you looked up the statistics I'd say a few people who are locked up that have charges or things like that or probably one or two even, no I don't think anyone got jail, its rough like. That's what I mean by the purpose and the lifelines they gave us. It's not even that they didn't pressure us or anything like that they gave us choice do you want to this do you want to do that and they put the work in with us like and at the end of the day I've never been in jail, never been arrested thank god" Shane*

*"it's just changed my life a lot I could be like in jail now or anything like that cause when I used be bould going around breaking windows and everything and they brought me into meetings and calmed me down now I'm just a normal young fella doing well for myself so it did help me a lot and I hope that this way I'll be able to help other young fellas" Kevin*

The young people attributing participation in the café to not engaging in anti-social behaviour is significant given the social context of the café's location in a regeneration area where there

are high levels of anti-social behaviour and high profile serious crime (Power and Barnes, 2011).

#### **4.8.3 Volunteering and Giving Back**

Many of the young people discussed how as older participants in the café they were taking on a volunteering role and giving back to the café and younger participants. They felt that they were able to mentor younger participants as they had gone through similar experiences when they were that age.

*“when I got to the age where I had to leave , I thought to myself that they did so much for me I thought I would give back something and volunteer” Liam*

*“if we’re volunteering they [younger participants] can come they can do what we done they can stay out of trouble as well” Daniel*

*“you get to experience them if they’re bould as well the same thing that I went through, like years before them, I’d start helping them as well like ... your looking thinking that was myself back going back six years ago ... look at me now and they could be the same like” Kevin*

The sense of wanting to help other young people can also be viewed as positive in terms of the young people’s own resilience. It is recognised within resilience theory that supporting young people with problems to help others can contribute to major positive change in the young person (Forkan *et al*, 2010).

#### **4.9 Changes for the Future**

Overwhelming the young people are happy with the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café and the way in which it is run. Some young people would like to see a group set up for the older participants and for the café to have longer opening hours. The young people were however aware of funding constraints with some participants noting the loss of the second room in the café and



there not being as many activities available compared to a number of years ago. It was noted that despite funding constraints the café still had a lot to offer young people.

*“I don’t really think I’d like to change anything because for the funding that’s there there’s not really more that the café could really offer ‘cause in fairness like they do the fundraising sometimes, try and get extra activities and extra stuff but for what is made available by the government it’s brilliant, so there’s nothing really I’d change as such”* Brian

Another young person felt that he would like to see more recognition for what the café was doing with young people.

*“it’s losing funding things like that people don’t see the importance of things like this ... there is no really focus on this place they see it young people come into it’s just another facility or whatever, it’s not like, ... [more focus on] the purpose of it like ... you’ll see its doing this its doing that but don’t see the purpose of it ... [worker] on about statistics, research things like this, you don’t see research on the good it does”* Shane

Funding for youth work has seen a thirty percent reduction since 2008 (Cunningham, 2012). While the café has protected the young people to some extent from feeling the direct impact of this it is out of their control to fully insulate the young people from the effects of government policy.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented and analysed the research findings. In addition it has applied relevant literature to the findings. A range of themes emerged from the young people’s discussions including engagement, the nature of the space, participation, relationships and impacts on their lives. A more comprehensive summary of the findings will be provided in chapter five.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This research set out to examine young people's experiences of participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café through an extensive literature review and semi-structured interviews with seven young people participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Cafe. This chapter offers a conclusion to the research project. In order to do so it will summarise the key findings in relation to the research questions. It will then offer an overall conclusion. Recommendations arising from the research findings will be offered. Limitations to the study will be outlined and the relevance of the research to social work will be discussed. A final reflection on the research process will conclude the piece.

### **5.2 Key Findings**

It was found that the young people first visited the café out of curiosity or through hearing about the café from youth workers or friends. The common theme is that all the young people's initial contact with the café was voluntary. Following the initial visit a number of factors were found to have contributed to young people's initial engagement with the café. These factors included relationships with both friends and workers and having a place to go and something to do. These factors found to contribute to engagement in this research are reflective of the findings of previous studies (Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Bowden and Martin Lanigan, 2011).

Young people recounted a wide variety of experiences within the café. Through various experiences and activities the young people were found to have engaged in differing degrees of participation within the café which was found to be representative of Treseder's (1997) model of participation. The open access nature of the café was viewed as positive by the young people and the young people experienced the café as a safe secure and open space with a friendly atmosphere. This atmosphere can be attributed to the positive relationships evident

between both the young people themselves and the café workers. The social aspect and relationships between both peers and the workers were viewed as positive. A safe space, participation and positive relationships can be seen to interact to create the positive experiences of the young people. It was the positive experiences created by these factors that contributed to young wanting to continue to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café.

Participating in the café was found to have significant impacts on young people's lives. The positive experiences within the café have resulted in some young people now wanting to take on a volunteering role and give back to other young people. Personal and skill development through participation was evident. Some young people felt that participation in the café had a role in keeping them away from anti-social behaviour and crime. Relationships within the café can be seen to have a role in facilitating this as the young people felt that the café workers had helped them but also that peers had a positive influence on behaviour. Given the café's location in a regeneration area participation can be viewed as a protective factor. This is also reflective of the youth café model's ability to work with young people with varying levels of need. As discussed in the literature young people at risk of crime are predominantly engaged in targeted youth work projects and interventions. This finding demonstrates that the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner has the ability to voluntarily engage and work with at risk young people within an open access universal model without the need to segregate them into distinct projects. Due to the small scale of this study this finding can be seen to represent the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner only and cannot be applied to youth cafés generally.

### **5.3 Final Conclusion**

As evident by the answers to the research questions overwhelmingly the interplay of the recurring themes of a safe space, participation and relationships influences everything within the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café. The youth café model allows for the creation of the safe space within which the core values of youth work of participation and relationships are practiced. It

is this interaction which prompts the young people's initial engagement, which influences their positive experiences which then leads to participation over a longer period. It is then through participation in the café influenced by these factors that the young people experience positive impacts in their lives.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

- This research has demonstrated that overwhelmingly the young people's experiences of participation within the café are positive and that participation has had significant positive impacts on the young people's lives. The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café should continue to endeavour to create this safe space for young people to facilitate participation and relationship building.
- The young people who participated in this study are in the upper age ranges for participation in youth work. A number of them are now at the stage where they are ready to take on a volunteering. The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner has a role to play in facilitating the young people's transition from service users to volunteers. These young people have a lot to offer both the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner and the wider youth service as volunteers. They have an intrinsic understanding of what youth work is through their experiences in the café. In addition, as they themselves articulated they are well placed to help other young people going through similar things to what they went through when they were younger. I would recommend that the café facilitate the young people to engage in volunteer training including experience volunteering in the wider youth service. Volunteering in the wider youth service would give the young people an opportunity to differentiate their role as service user in the café and volunteer youth worker in the wider youth service. The 4<sup>th</sup> Corner should continue to be available to the young people as a source of support while training. The young people also indicated the need for a group for older participants. A group could be established that facilitates the

young people to continue to socialise with their friends in a safe space but which would also acts as a source of support for those engaged in volunteer training.

- This research was conducted with males only, as there are no females over eighteen years old participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner. I would recommend further research concerning the retention of female's participation in the café. In addition as this research was carried out with older young people who have participated over a number of years. Therefore I also would recommend research with younger and recently joined participants to discover their perspectives on the café. In addition given the similarities in the findings between this research and other small scale studies on young people's perspectives of youth work I would recommend a larger scale study in this area.

## **5.5 Relevance to Social Work**

Social workers commonly refer young people to youth work services and the development of Local Area Pathways (LAP) will see social workers increasingly making referrals to community organisations such as youth work services. LAP aims to create local networks of community and voluntary agencies which can provide preventative support to children and families where there are child welfare concerns but a referral to child protection social work under Children's First is not required (Child and Family Agency, 2013). Referring to the community and voluntary sector Jeyes, states that *'These are our partners who can reach communities in a way the social work brand cannot'* (Jeyes, 2013, p. 17). This research is relevant to social work practice as if social workers are referring young people to youth work services they need to be aware of the approach youth workers take to engaging and working with young people. The community base, voluntary participation and focus on relationships which characterise youth work may leave it better positioned than social work to engage some young people. Social workers need also to work in partnership with youth work

services and having a greater understanding of the sector may contribute to working in partnership with youth work services to better meet the needs of young people.

## **5.6 Limitations of the Study**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven young people. There was a technical issue with the recording of one interview which resulted in not all the data being collected. The data remaining data from this interview was included in the findings. It was envisaged that the interviews would be of approximately forty minutes duration. The interviews in practice lasted for approximately ten minutes with some shorter and some longer. I found that it was difficult to engage the young people for longer than this. I feel however the young people shared what they wanted to in this time period. I feel it was an over-estimation on my part that young people would engage in an interview for forty minutes. I feel however that the data collected was rich in content despite the shortness of the interviews.

The small scale of the study limits the research findings and as discussed in section 2.6 the sample was limited to males over eighteen which limits the generalisation of the findings.

## **5.7 Reflection on the Research Process**

When the CARL projects were first introduced to us last year I felt that I would like to do one but was unsure as to whether it would be right for me. Looking back over the research process I can honestly say I made the right decision. Undertaking a CARL project has been a great experience.

I feel that I engaged well with the literature. I surprised myself in that I found researching for the literature review very interesting, I did not tire of it or become bored with the topic. I feel that having such an interest in young people and youth work made the whole process much easier and allowed me to develop a more in depth understanding of the topic. I also found that the more I understood the topic the more I re-evaluated my position and views on the topic which lead to a greater understanding of the data from the young people.

I found the experience of undertaking primary research very worthwhile. While I was nervous about interviewing the young people I feel I got over it and enjoyed the experience. I feel that it also contributed to my self-awareness. I found in the interviews I had to be continuously self-aware and be conscious of how I responded to the young people. I noticed in the initial interviews I almost slipped into social worker mode in my responses to the young people but consciously checked myself before responding to stay in interviewer mode. Through becoming aware of this in the initial interviews I was much more attuned to my thoughts and responses in subsequent interviews.

Throughout the research process some friends on the MSW and I became a source of mutual support for each other in that we discussed our projects and bounced ideas off each other. This sharing of ideas and support contributed greatly to the reach process and I feel it has demonstrated to me the importance of peer support.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix One: Interview Guide

The interviews will be semi-structured so the interview will be guided by the participant's responses. I will have three core questions which I will ask in some way:

1. How do young people come to participate in the 4th Corner Youth Café?
2. What have been the young people's experiences of attending the 4th Corner Youth Café?
3. What has contributed to young people continuing to participate in the 4th Corner Youth Cafe?

Based on the young people's responses I will further probe and further explore the areas of:

- Friends
- Activities
- What is it about the Café that makes young people continue to engage
- Spaces to hang out
- Attending other clubs/services
- Relationships with staff
- Anything negative or anything they would like to change

I will start the interview with this opening statement and question:

My name is ----- and I am here to find out what attending the youth café here has been like for you. I'm really interested in hearing about your experiences so maybe we could start at the start and you could tell me about when you first came here and why you decided to come?

I will finish the interview by asking the young people if there is anything they would like to add and thanking them for participating.

## Appendix Two: Information Sheet and Consent Form

### Department of Applied Social Studies, UCC – Research Projects

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

##### Information Sheet

**Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for a Masters of Social Work at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with young people's experiences of participating in the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café. It aims to find out about and understand young people's experiences of attending the Café.

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve an interview in the 4th Corner Youth Café which will take approximately 40 minutes to one hour.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you are suitable to take part and the project wants to hear your opinion on the Café.

**Do you have to take part?** No participation in the interview is voluntary you do not have to take part. If you want to take part there is a consent form with this information sheet which you can read and sign. You can keep a copy of both the consent form and this information sheet. Even if you sign the consent form you can still change your mind and not be interviewed. For up to two weeks after the interview you can also change your mind and not have information from your interview included in the research project.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

**What will happen to the information which you give?** The information you give to me will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone else including workers in the Café. I will hold onto your information until 6 months after the research project is completed and then it will be deleted. Your information may be shared with responsible staff in the School of Applied Social Studies, UCC. I can give you a copy of a transcript of your interview to keep if you would like.

**What will happen to the results?** The results of the research will be presented in my UCC Master of Social Work dissertation and be available online at <http://carl.ucc.ie>. The results will also be given to Limerick Youth Service. The dissertation will be seen by my supervisor and staff at the school of applied social studies, UCC. The dissertation is available for students to read and may be read in the future by other students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal. If you would like a copy of the report I can provide you with one when it is completed.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I do not think there will be any disadvantages to taking part but talking about your experiences in this way may cause some distress. The next question will discuss what to do if there is a problem.

**What if there is a problem?** At the end of the interview I will talk to you about how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you feel distressed you will be able to talk ----- at the 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Youth Café.

**Who has reviewed this study?** This research has been approved by the School of Applied Social Studies UCC and Limerick Youth Service.

**Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me: ----- email: ----- or my UCC Supervisor ----- on ----- . You can also talk to ----- or ----- at Limerick Youth Service.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.



## Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in ----- research study, The 4th Corner Youth Café – an exploration of participant’s voices

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with ----- to be tape-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....