



Sligo Comhairle na nÓg

AGM Report 2009/2010





Foreword

As Chairperson of Sligo County Development Board it is my great pleasure to present to you the Annual Report of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg, following the 8th AGM which was hosted by the Board on 13th October 2009.

Sligo County Development Board are committed to developing Comhairle na nÓg as the official structure for the participation of young people in strategy and policy development in the county and to increase the participation of young people in local decision making. Developing and supporting the Comhairle na nÓg has therefore been prioritised by Sligo County Development Board in it's current strategy as one of it's priority actions for the period mid 2009-2012. Developing the Comhairle na nÓg in Sligo involves a working partnership between Sligo County Council, County Sligo VEC and Foróige and is funded through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as part of the National Children's Strategy.

This year's AGM was the most successful yet and saw 120 participants aged between 12 and 18 representing both their schools and youth organisations from all around County Sligo. The AGM provides a forum for young people to put forward their views and have their voices heard on issues selected by Sligo's young people. The 2009 AGM also saw the holding of democratic elections amongst the attendees to elect 25 youth councillors to represent their electoral areas on the Comhairle na nÓg Executive, (Sligo Youth Council) for a period of 2 years and replicates the membership of Sligo County Council itself.

Comhairle na nÓg offers an opportunity for young people to become actively involved in a forum which focuses on relevant issues for young people on an ongoing basis. It affords young people an opportunity to voice their views and work with State Agencies along with representing Sligo at the National Dail na nÓg event in Dublin.

I wish to thank all the participants who attended the AGM and congratulate all those who were elected onto the Comhairle na nÓg executive. I would also like to pay tribute to the former members of Comhairle na nÓg and their Development Worker who's endless commitment and hard work must be commended. Finally, I encourage all young people to consider getting involved in the Comhairle na nÓg and look forward to seeing its continued growth and development in Sligo.



Cllr Tony McLoughlin
Chairperson Sligo County Development Board

Background to Comhairle na nÓg What is it all about?



The Irish Government made a significant commitment to children and young people in the country with the endorsement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child in 1992 and the publishing of the *National Children's Strategy 'Our Children – Their Lives'* in 2000.

The National Children's Strategy states three main goals:

1. Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. Children's lives will be better understood: their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.
3. Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) is part of the Department of Health and Children and was set up in 2005. They aim to directly involve children and young people in as many aspects of their work as possible, with particular attention being given to goal number one of the strategy – giving children a voice.

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is a Sligo County Development Board Project and involves a working partnership with County Sligo Vocational Educational Committee, Foróige and Sligo County Council.

The comhairle meets monthly to discuss topics of interest and concern to young people in County Sligo. These topics range from serious issues of drug and alcohol abuse to positive mental health for teenagers. An expert advisory group has been established, which is made up of key state agencies and relevant non government agencies who link with Comhairle na nÓg to ensure the voice and opinions of young people is included in their strategies and policies. With the support of the advisory group it is envisaged that the issues identified by young people in County Sligo can be met. By identifying these issues the youth council can then strive to effect positive changes for the youth of County Sligo.

Mission Statement

“to provide a forum (Comhairle na nÓg) for discussion regarding issues and problems that our youth face. The aim of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is to become recognised as the official structure for the participation of young people in policy and strategy development both locally and nationally”

Annual General Meeting 2010 were YOU there?



The 8th Sligo Comhairle na nÓg AGM took place in the Clarion Hotel on the 13th October 2009. Young people from around the County were invited to attend, to express their views on topics deemed important by them. The Comhairle na nÓg AGM provides a forum for young people to discuss local and national issues of relevance to them.

There was 120 enthusiastic young people present, making it the highest turnout to date, with representatives from 11 secondary schools and 8 youth clubs/organisations in County Sligo.

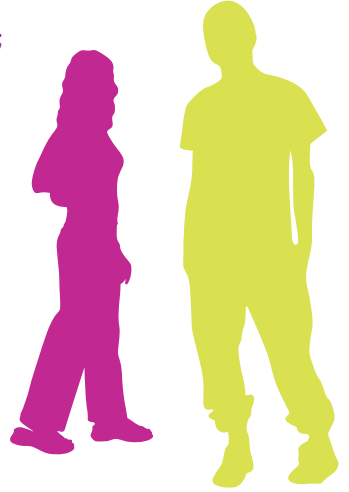
The following secondary schools were represented;

- Grange Post Primary School, Grange
- Sligo Grammar School, Sligo
- Summerhill College, Sligo
- The Mercy College, Sligo
- The Ursuline College, Sligo
- Ballinode College, Sligo
- St Mary's College, Ballysadare
- Colaiste Mhuire, Ballymote
- St Attracta's Community School, Tubbercurry
- Colaiste Iascaigh, Easkey
- Convent of Jesus and Mary, Enniscrone



The following youth groups/organisations represented;

- Grange Foróige Club
- The CRIB Youth Project & Health Cafe, Sligo
- Youthreach, Sligo
- Cranmore Regeneration Project, Sligo
- Coolaney Foróige Club
- CLASP, Geevagh
- Aclare Foróige Club
- Pioneers Club, Tubbercurry



What happened on the day?

Following the opening address by Chairperson of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg, Gavin Cawley, the morning consisted of two workshops. The first one was on the topic of alcohol and drugs and the second one was an open debate. Young people were asked to put forward their views and suggest possible solutions facing young people in Sligo today.

After lunch there was an election where those interested in becoming youth councillors on Sligo Comhairle na nÓg, could put themselves forward for election. Every person present had a vote.



Following a brief but tense wait – the election results were announced. Newly elected councillors serve a two year term on Sligo Comhairle na nÓg.



Feed back from Workshops

What YOU, the young people of Sligo had to say



Alcohol & Drugs

- There were strong concerns expressed about the level of misuse of alcohol and drugs by young people and the associated health risks.
- Young people feel peer pressure to fit in with this culture. It was recognised that alcohol is ever-present at all major occasions in society.
- The media are glamorising alcohol and drugs.
- Young people feel that, in many cases, parents are not aware of the extent of alcohol use that young people are engaged in.

Access to alcohol

This emerged as a very significant issue for young people in the workshops:

- fake ID is easy to obtain and use
- ID is not even checked in many pubs and outlets, even if young people are obviously underage
- as an underage young person, there is no problem getting drunk in many pubs in Sligo and pubs that serve underage young people are well known
- older people purchasing alcohol on behalf of young people adds to the problem.

Education programmes in schools

The fact that SPHE is only offered at Junior Cycle level was felt to be evidence that it is a low-level priority. However it was noted that it is in Senior Cycle that problems with drug and alcohol misuse particularly happen.

Lack of alternatives

Young people stated that part of the reason that alcohol and drugs are misused is as a result of boredom and lack of attractive alternatives.

Head shops

Head shops (retail outlets selling drug paraphernalia and products claiming to induce "legal highs") add to the problem of a culture of drug use.

Solutions and possible actions

- Emphasise positive alternatives.
- Have positive role models, like national sports stars, or local role models.
- More positive attitudes to alcohol should be developed in the home.
- Media discussions (youth orientated) about the problem
- Better enforcement of rules around requirement for valid ID
- Clampdown on pubs and outlets selling alcohol to underage young people.
- There should be substance misuse programmes for Senior Cycle students.
- Young people also said that there should be a greater range of clubs and facilities available throughout Sligo, including sports clubs and youth clubs, particularly in rural areas.

Finally, information on what is available for young people locally should be up to date and easily accessible. Social networking media could have a role in this regard (bebo, Facebook, Spunout.ie, teenspace.ie, etc.).

The Open Debate

A number of issues were raised, the top four were as follows;

- Youth Facilities
- Mental health
- Transport
- Road Safety



Following a discussion on each topic the young people in the workshops were asked to come up with possible actions that Sligo Comhairle na nÓg could work on as a group.



Youth Facilities

Young people expressed the view that there are not enough youth friendly, accessible facilities in County Sligo. Based on this the following actions to address the problem were proposed;

- Raise awareness about facilities that already exist in each area.
- Fund raise for equipment for community/sports halls.
- Change the image of youth clubs – make them more youth friendly and “cool” places to be.

Road Safety

The following are possible actions which were proposed;

- More relevant information on the effect of drink and drugs when driving
- More pedestrian crossings
- Better street lighting
- Cycle lanes
- Education – relevant youth friendly education and information on road safety.

Mental Health

Following a discussion on what positive mental health means and how to reduce the stigma associated with mental health the young people present proposed the following actions.

- Develop eye-catching, more youth friendly advertisements and posters addressing mental health.
- School education and counselling - regular practical training/workshops on how to recognise feelings associated with poor mental health.
- Anti –bullying, self esteem and confidence building programmes in schools delivered by trained staff.

Transport

With many young people from County Sligo living in rural areas, transport was listed as being a very serious concern for many. A number of possible actions were proposed.

- More frequent and affordable buses.
- Student discounts – adult rates should not apply until 18 years of age.
- It was also suggested that there was a need for a greater number of safer, well lit bus shelters in rural areas with buses serving more routes.



Members of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg 2010

Sligo/Drumcliffe Area

Clara McSharry
David Murtagh
Thomas Waters
Rachael Kilgallen
Aaron Waldron
Lorcan Feeney

Enniscrone Area

Brid McGowan
Michael Cleary
John Feeney
Damien McGuinness
Niamh Burns

Sligo/Strandhill Area

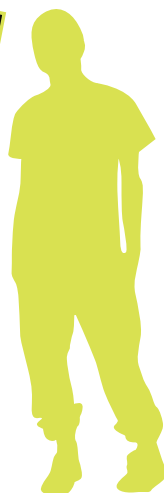
Hayden Cawley
Aaron Gaughan
Sinead Reilly
Leah Hayes
Muireann Morrissey
Elizabeth Corcoran
Hazel Flynn
Caoimhe Hough
Cian Tuohy

Ballymote Area

Aoife Loftus
Varsha Murthy
Monique Flatley
Seamus Costello

Tubbercurry Area

Michael Birt
Erin Fahey
Shona O Dowd



So What's Next For Sligo Comhairle na nÓg?



Sligo Comhairle na nÓg meet on the first Tuesday of each month. They have divided themselves into four working groups:

- Alcohol & Drugs
- Mental Health
- Transport
- Youth Facilities

Each group will work towards addressing the concerns and issues which were raised at the AGM. They will link with local authorities and relevant youth organisations with the aim of bringing about positive changes for youth in Sligo. For example they will meet with and make recommendations to the North West Regional Drugs Taskforce, Mental Health Ireland, Sligo VEC etc.

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg will link with adults working for youth on an ongoing basis and will promote Sligo Comhairle as the official structure for youth participation in Sligo.

Five members of Sligo Comhairle will attend the annual Dail na nÓg in Dublin in March, where young people from each Comhairle come together to discuss youth issues with the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs and other key professionals working for youth.

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg will also establish links and take part in information sharing events with Fermanagh Youth Council.

Quotes from young people who are and have been involved in Sligo Comhairle na nÓg

"I got a sense of involvement in my community and a feeling that I have a say in what's happening for young people in Sligo."

Caoimhe Hough,
Chairperson of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg

"Being involved in Comhairle na nÓg gave me a great insight into democracy in action at a local and national level. It was a great experience from which I emerge with many new friends and skills."

Moya Gorman,
Former member of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg

Thanks to:

iRadio's Mark Canning and his team Nomee & Sean for broadcasting live from the AGM. Phil Burns from Sligo VEC who photographed the event. Kevin O'Brien, driver with Sligo VEC who transported young people to and from the event. Sligo Leader Partnership Co for the provision of the Rural Transport Programme which also transported young people on the day.

Sligo County Council who made a contribution to Comhairle na na nÓg on behalf of Sligo County Development Board.

Staff of the Clarion Hotel and also to Tesco Sligo for sponsoring fruit for the morning break.



C/O The C.R.I.B Youth Project & Health Café
Rockwood Parade, Sligo
t: +353 (0)71 9146526
e: elaine.granaghan@Foroige.ie

