

Report of DCYA consultations with children and young people living in Direct Provision

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This report of the views of children and young people was compiled by researchers from the Child Law Clinic at the School of Law, University College Cork. For more information on the Clinic research team and their work see <https://www.ucc.ie/en/childlawclinic/ourwork/>

Executive Summary: Consultations with Children in Direct Provision

Background to the Consultation

The Direct Provision system is the means through which the State provides accommodation, food and personal expenses to asylum seekers while their applications for asylum status are being processed.

Figures from September 2015 showed 4,467 residents in the Direct Provision system. 1,061 residents are children under 12 years, with a further 166 aged between 13 and 17 years.¹ According to

the Report of Working Group to Report to

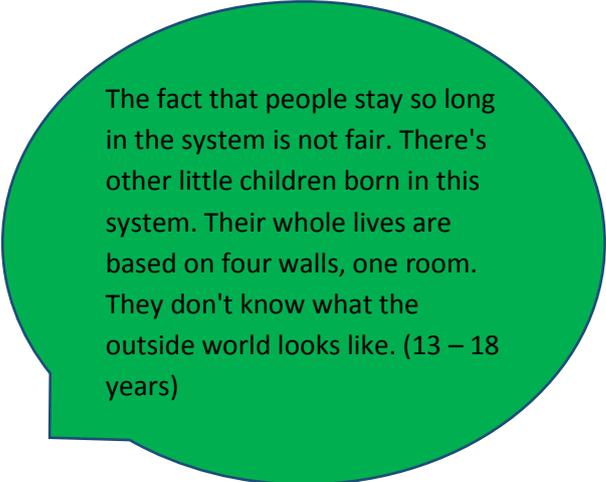
Government on Improvements to the Protection

Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers. Final Report: June 2015'

(hereinafter called *The Report*), at the end of February 2015, 41% of residents have lived in this system for five years or more.²

Children and young people had not been directly consulted as part of *The Report*, although 31 children and young people had provided written submissions. Subsequently, a Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) representative who was a member of that Working Group recommended that the voices of children living in direct provision should be further explored separate from any recommendations in the Working Group report.

Following internal Departmental discussions between the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit and the Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice and Equality, it was decided to undertake a consultation with children and young people living in Direct Provision. This report presents the findings from that consultation process. The aim of the consultations was to hear the views of children and young people living in Direct Provision Centres to find out what they like, dislike and would like to change or improve about the places they live.



The fact that people stay so long in the system is not fair. There's other little children born in this system. Their whole lives are based on four walls, one room. They don't know what the outside world looks like. (13 – 18 years)

¹ *Reception & Integration Agency Monthly Statistics Report September 2015*

<http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%209-2015.pdf/Files/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%209-2015.pdf>

² *Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, Final Report* (Dublin: Department of Justice, 2015) p. 16.

Report on Consultations with Children in Direct Provision

I came because I wanted, like, my brothers and sisters told me ideas for when I was coming and I wanted them to be heard. Because it's all about the adults most of the time. Like, when you're having meetings it's always for the adults, not for the children, so I thought if I came, I could be heard. (Exit interview, 8 – 12 years)

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Ireland is a State Party, recognises that children have a range of rights, including the right to be heard in decisions that affect their lives (Article 12). It also recognises the principle of non-discrimination in relation to the treatment of all children (Article 2), which includes children who seek international protection either alone or with their families (Article 22). This report sets out the findings from a consultation with children and young people living in Direct Provision that was carried out by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in compliance with Ireland's commitments to include children's views in decisions that affect them, as set out in the new *National Strategy Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (2015).

People have been there for 9 years or 8 years and it's not fair (8 – 12 years)

The Direct Provision system was created to provide temporary accommodation for asylum applicants within the immigration system in Ireland.³ One third of people living in direct provision are children and young people.



Figure 1 Drawing (8-12 years)

A recent Government Working Group report informed by written submissions from 31 children under 18 years, as well as from 58 adults and 13 groups of residents, highlighted a number of issues in relation to the system, including the impact on children of being born and/or living their formative years in an institutional setting; the impact of financial difficulties on children's health and social development; the need for play and recreation facilities; and the heightened risks to child welfare and child protection due to the nature of Direct Provision.⁴

In conjunction with the consultation undertaken by the Working Group, the Citizen Participation Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) arranged to undertake a series of consultations with children and young people living in Direct Provision, in co-operation with the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice and Equality. An Oversight Committee of key stakeholders was established to advise on and support the consultation process. This Committee was jointly chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and

³ See Appendix 5: Direct Provision Centres.

⁴ Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, Final Report (Dublin: Department of Justice, 2015) p.p.19 - 21.

included representatives and managers of the Direct Provision centres.⁵ The Committee met regularly from design stage and throughout the consultations to reflect on and review progress.

With input from the Oversight Committee, the DCYA Citizen Participation Support Team developed methodologies for the consultations that were age-appropriate and strengths-based, and which were similar to methodologies that the DCYA uses extensively in participation initiatives and in the various consultations they are involved in.

This report aimed to document and analyse the process and findings of the consultations with children and young people living in Direct Provision. The report comprises a short introduction outlining the background to the project and the role of DCYA and the RIA; a context for the consultation in terms of the literature on the Direct Provision system and on children and young people's participation in decision-making; an account of the rationale for the involvement of children and young people, including an analysis of the methodologies used in recruitment and in the consultations; findings from the consultations, both individually and from the entire process; and a summary and key messages for policy makers. In collaboration with a group of participants, a child and youth friendly version of the report will be developed to be made available in a range of formats that are accessible to a wide audience.

⁵ See Appendix 1. Oversight Committee members.

Key Findings

Children and young people attending the consultations were asked to identify the things they like, dislike and would like to change about where they live, and to vote in each category. The top results are set out below:

Top votes

	Pilot 8 - 12 yrs	Consultation 2 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 3 13 – 17 yrs	Consultation 4 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 5 8 – 12 yrs
Likes	Summer Camp	Having a house to live in	The Manager	Hobbies and sports	Parks and playground
	Playroom and Computer Room	Homework Club	Friends	Christmas presents	Football pitch
Dislikes	Don't like to be called Refugees	Paying for stuff	Lack of money	I don't get my papers	Having to share house with other families
	"The "nothing" story" ⁶ (Don't like anything)	Reception area	Food	Men bothering us and taking over the TV room/ You don't get the food that you want	You're not allowed to keep pets
Changes	Better houses and hostels	Things to do and playrooms	Increase weekly allowance/ Further Education Opportunities	They should give us the papers faster	Get our papers quicker
	Get our papers	Food/ Kitchens	End Direct Provision	Increase the weekly money	We want to have pets

The issues

The main message that emerges from the data is that on the whole, children and young people living in Direct Provision are dissatisfied with the system and say that their personal wellbeing, family life, private life and social life is adversely affected by long stays in the Direct Provision centres.

⁶ This voting category was named as such by the children to reflect the number of times they had responded that they liked nothing about where they live.

Although some of the children and young people talked about “the amazing community” and “nice people,” and others referred to their enjoyment of having easy access to their friends, the majority of those consulted are highly critical of what they state are the

“overcrowded” and “dirty” conditions under which they are forced to

Everyone sticks together (13 – 18 years)

live for long periods of time. They say that they do not like the system, that it is “not fair”, “not safe,” and that they are frequently subjected to rudeness and insensitive treatment by staff (including security staff) and by adults living in the centres. Many

I always see my mum dressing (8 – 12 years)

children and young people raised issues relating to racism, stigma and bullying, both where they live, and in school.

While some of the children and young people like the area they live in, particularly those who live near the sea and those who live near the centre of Dublin, many said they “can’t travel” because of poor transport services, have very little access to outside places, and “don’t really go out.” A number of children and young people also talked about the problems they face in going on trips organised by their schools.

We can't be able to go to parties at night because there is no bus to [the centre] at night. (13 – 18 years)

A recurring theme among the children and young people consulted was the food they are provided with in their centres. In particular, many issues arose about the quality and the quantity of food that is provided. The diets were described as “horrible and disgusting” (13 - 18

years), “always the same” (8 – 12 years), and “the food has no taste.” (8 – 12 years). Undercooked food, especially chicken, came up as a problem in a number of consultations, and children said that residents often won’t eat the food: “The chicken should be cooked not filled with blood” (8 – 12 years). Access to culturally appropriate food and/or cooking facilities was also an issue, as was the communal dining system. One child said they “do not like to stand in the queue for food” (8 – 12 years).

We need to buy every day something for school and how we buy with €? (13 – 18 years)

€50 clothing money you can't buy shoes for that! (13 – 18 years)

All ages spoke about the inadequacy of the weekly payments to meet basic needs such as school books, uniforms and other related expenses. Teenagers also mentioned the clothing allowance as being entirely unrealistic and as contributing to difficulties in fitting in with their peers.

A striking finding from these consultations is the similarity between the themes emerging, and those identified in the ‘*Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers. Final Report: June 2015*’, namely living conditions, supports, and the length of time for processing asylum applications. A more detailed account of the findings is presented in the main report.

Key messages for policy makers

In the course of this consultation, children and young people have raised a number of important issues for policy-makers to consider.

Likes - Children and young people:

- appreciate the facilities, especially the play and recreation facilities and homework clubs, that are provided where these are fit for purpose
- respect and like the managers and some staff of their centres where they are respectful, kind and caring
- enjoy the sense of community and access to friends that living communally sometimes enables

Dislikes and Changes - Children and young people:

- are unhappy about the length of their stays in the system with a number of children saying they have lived in the system since they were born
- are stigmatised because of where they live, in addition to some racism
- want their families to get their papers so that they can live normal lives
- are unhappy with the level of financial assistance their parents receive, which impacts directly and indirectly on them
- dislike the cramped, shared and often sub-standard accommodation they live in
- often have nothing to do, when recreational facilities are inadequate or lacking entirely
- say that the food they are served is not culturally appropriate; is of low nutritional value; and is often poorly cooked to the point of being dangerous to their health
- state that menus are monotonous and packed school lunches are exactly the same every day
- feel unsafe when families are sharing space with single men
- experience disrespectful attitudes from staff at the centres towards them and their mothers
- cannot enjoy a normal social life due to lack of suitable transport, clothing and money
- worry about their education when they have no space or support for homework, and also worry about limited third level opportunities

Methodology

The methodology used in this consultation adopted a strengths-based approach, based on the assumption that children and young people are experts in their own lives and that their own words can most fully capture their experiences. The methodologies for the consultations were developed by the DCYA Citizen Participation Support Team and brought to an Oversight Committee of key stakeholders, jointly chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and including representatives and managers of the Direct Provision centres.⁷ These methodologies were based on models that have been successful in the past and build upon the experience and expertise accumulated in the Unit through its engagement with children and young people all over Ireland in numerous consultations and other participatory initiatives.⁸

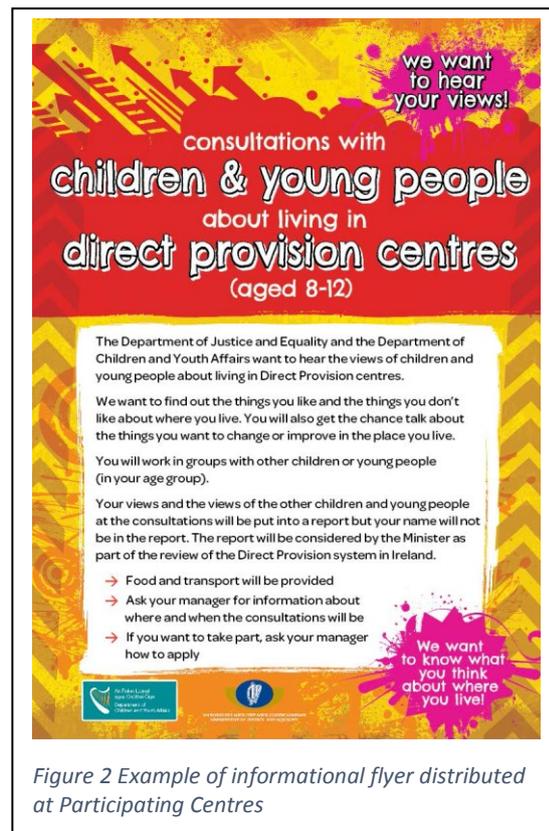


Figure 2 Example of informational flyer distributed at Participating Centres

A total of 110 children and young people (63 x 8 – 12 years, 29 x 13 – 18 years) from 11 centres were recruited through representatives and managers of the centres, who were provided with information about the consultations to give to the children and their families. The pilot was conducted in July and the other four consultations, three with 8 – 12 year olds and one with 13 -17 year olds, took place in Autumn 2015.

A series of adult and child-friendly informational flyers were distributed at Direct Provision centres outlining the project and inviting children and their parents to approach their centre managers for a more detailed explanation. In order to ensure that the selection was fair and transparent, children's names were put into a lottery where there was an oversubscription to participate. Full parental consent and child assent was also obtained for each participant.

A mixed methodology was planned for the consultations comprising post-it notes and place-mats, where children and young people could write and draw their views freely. A consensus workshop (using a "Sticky Wall" where participants place and order 'post-it' type notes) method was also used, where participants were invited to present their ideas on cards which were then grouped into

⁷ See Appendix 1.

⁸ A list of participatory initiatives is available at: <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=%2Fdocuments%2FChildYouthParticipation%2Faboutus.htm&mn=chin&nID=1> accessed 24/02/2016

themes, small group sticky dot voting to narrow themes for voting upon, and a large group secret ballot.⁹

A “Wall of Ideas” for additional comments was also provided where participants were able to add anything they felt they wanted to express outside of the main activities.

The methodology for the pilot was three-staged: an open-space session where children were asked to write what they liked and disliked about where they live, and these were grouped; place-mats for children to express how they would share their views on where they live with a new family arriving at their centre; and a consensus workshop where children were asked to explore and then vote on the top three things they would like to change about where they live.¹⁰



Figure 3 Dislikes 8 - 12 years

On the day of each consultation, children and young people were greeted with refreshments, and breaks, games and physical activities were built into the schedule.



Figure 4 Consensus workshop 13 - 18 years

It was anticipated that most of the children might not recognise the term ‘Direct Provision’ and this was borne out at the pilot session where the children seemed confused by the term and one suggested that it was to do with “getting provisions from learning.” Many said they had never heard the term before. Some said they had heard it on TV about people living in hostels, and others said they had heard people talking about where they live and calling it Direct Provision. They knew about other Direct Provision centres but did not use the term themselves. It was decided to instead use the expression “where you live” when talking to the children.

⁹ See Appendix 2: DCYA methodologies

¹⁰ Ibid.

Consultation Findings

The methodologies adopted for these consultations, including the sticky notes, place-mats, lists, ideas cards, votes and graffiti walls, together with comments from the evaluations and exit

We only get 19 euro and there are so many things that need money, you can't work and we only get 19 euro. These days shoes cost 30 euros so how are we supposed to pay for other stuff? (8 – 12 years)

interviews, provided a broad and rich source of data for analysis. The researchers were therefore presented with a complex task to sift through this data to pick out the main themes that the children and young people had focused on in their deliberations. In addition to presenting the children and young people's likes, dislikes and changes together with the top votes, their contributions to discussions about what to tell families who were arriving at their centre, as well as the views they shared on the wall of ideas, were also considered.

Many of the issues identified by the children reflected those that had been highlighted in the Working Group report such as the length of time living in an institutional setting, financial issues, play and recreation facilities, and safety.¹¹

And if we could have our papers as fast as we can, because I am hoping I could have my papers before Christmas, because I've been waiting for my papers for eight and a half years. (8 – 12 years)

Within these categories, children talked about their families' lack of control over their food, poor living conditions and the lack of space and privacy, disrespect experienced within their centres from some staff and stigma in their daily lives about living in their Direct Provision centres:

In my school people are being mean to me because I sleep with my mum. (8 – 12 years)

People discriminate against us because of our backgrounds and because we're different, and also they say stuff like, "you're poor" and "go back to your own country". (13 – 18 years)

¹¹ Working Group to Report to Government Working Group on the Protection Process on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, Final Report (Dublin: Department of Justice, 2015) p.p.19 - 21.

Likes, Dislikes and Changes

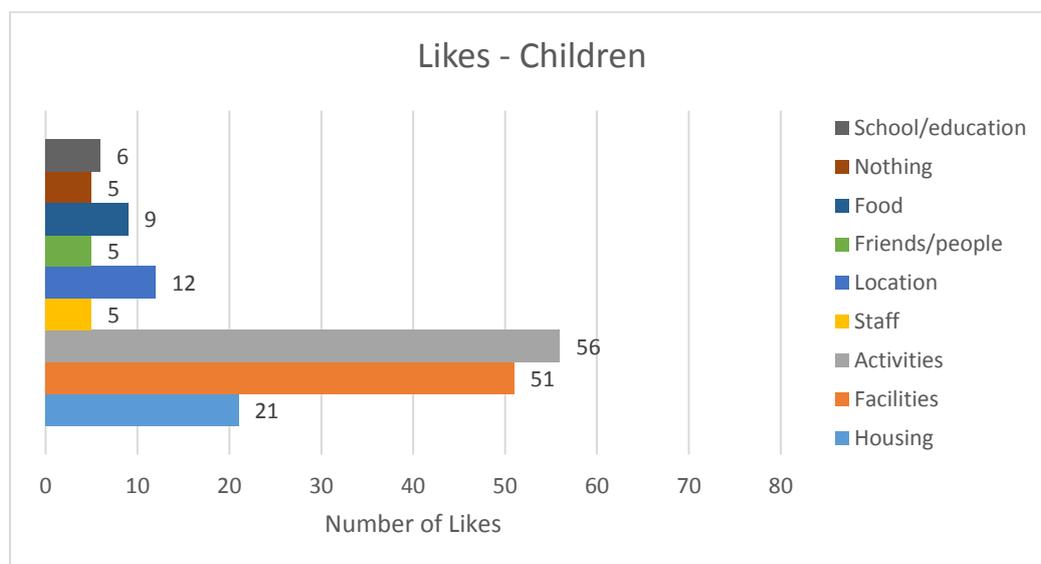
Children and young people were asked what they like, dislike and would like to change about where they live and voting themes were agreed upon. The themes were displayed and participants voted for their top choices by secret ballot. The following section provides a description of the main themes and the frequency with which they were raised, together with the results of the voting outcomes.

Likes

In many of the sessions the children and young people displayed some difficulties in identifying what they liked, but eventually, the discussion developed and children started to talk about the things they enjoy and the things they appreciate in their lives. However, these discussions resulted in significantly less data than the things they dislike and wish to change.

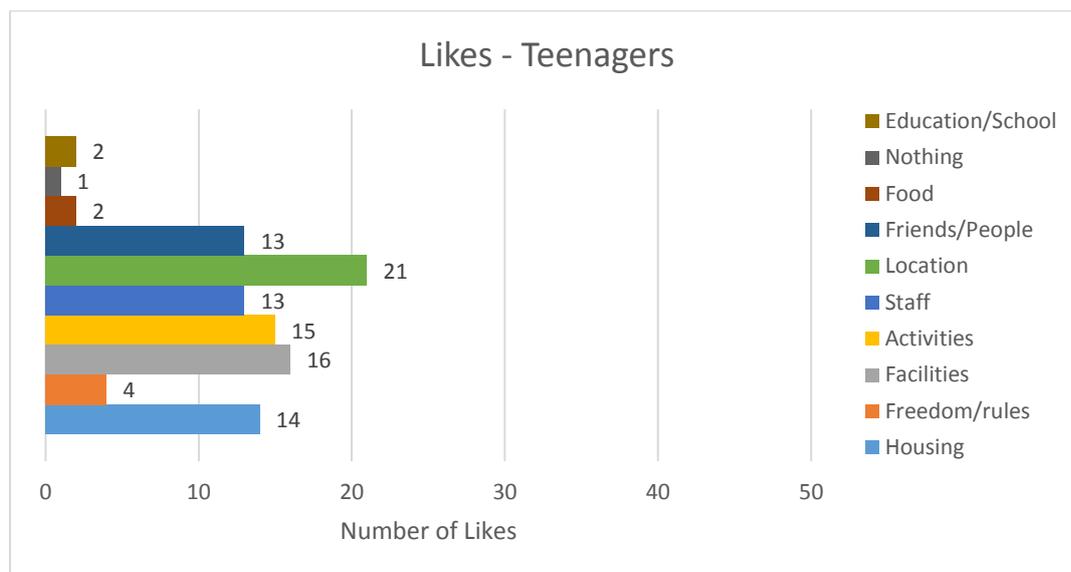
The main topics mentioned in the children’s sessions (8 – 12 years) were:

- **Activities:** issues such as homework club, crèche, barbecues, summer camp and trips
- **Facilities:** issues such as the playroom, computer room, playground, football pitch and bus
- **Housing and accommodation:** mainly raised in one of the sessions where having their own houses and in some cases, rooms, was mentioned frequently
- **Location:** particular to one of the centres which is close to a beach.



In the teenagers’ session (13 – 18 years), the main likes were:

- **Location:** beach location; the city location was also particularly appreciated by the teenagers who lived in that centre because it allowed them easy access to school, services and a social life
- **Facilities:** free Wi-Fi, gym, the bus
- **Activities:** youth club, cookery classes, trips, football
- **Housing:** large houses; the rooms; space; central heating
- **Staff:** some managers and bus drivers were particularly well thought of
- **Friends/people:** friendships and sense of community in the centre they lived in.



Likes – top votes

Pilot 8 - 12 yrs	Consultation 2 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 3 13 – 17 yrs	Consultation 4 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 5 8 – 12 yrs
Summer Camp	Having a house to live in	The Manager	Hobbies and sports	Parks and playground
Playroom and computer Room	Homework Club	Friends	Christmas presents	Football pitch

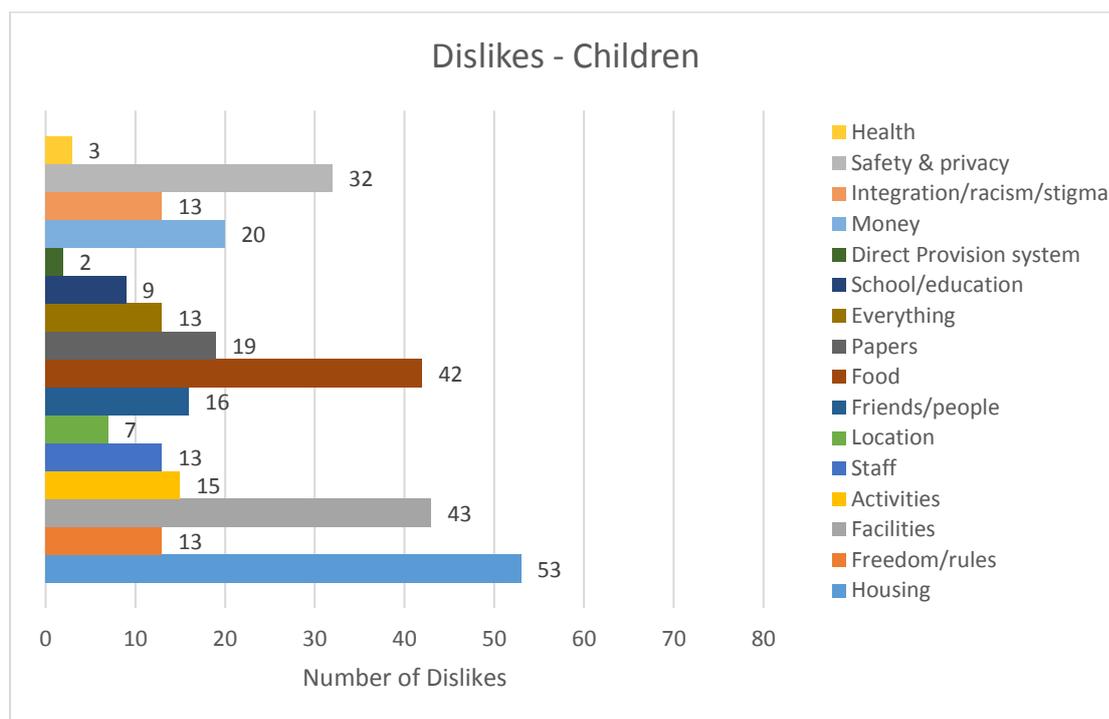
Dislikes

Children and young people readily volunteered information about the things they dislike about where they live.

The main issues that were raised by children (8 – 12 years) were:

- Housing and accommodation: including lack of space, shared bedrooms and beds, dirty buildings, lack of their own cooking or laundry facilities
- Facilities: issues such as transport for school and leisure, playrooms, with separate activity spaces for the adults, distance to the laundry, not enough bathrooms
- Food: issues such as not getting enough food, children not being allowed to have milk, lack of variety, poorly cooked and undercooked food, out-of-date food

- Safety and privacy: this category covered issues such as shared bedrooms and bathrooms, concerns expressed by children about the behaviour of some of the men in their centres,¹² fighting between adults and with local people, fear of foxes, bullying
- Money: including the weekly allowance, money for school books, money for school trips, money for activities
- Papers: achieving refugee status, being allowed to travel, having access to free third-level education, parents/adults being allowed to work.

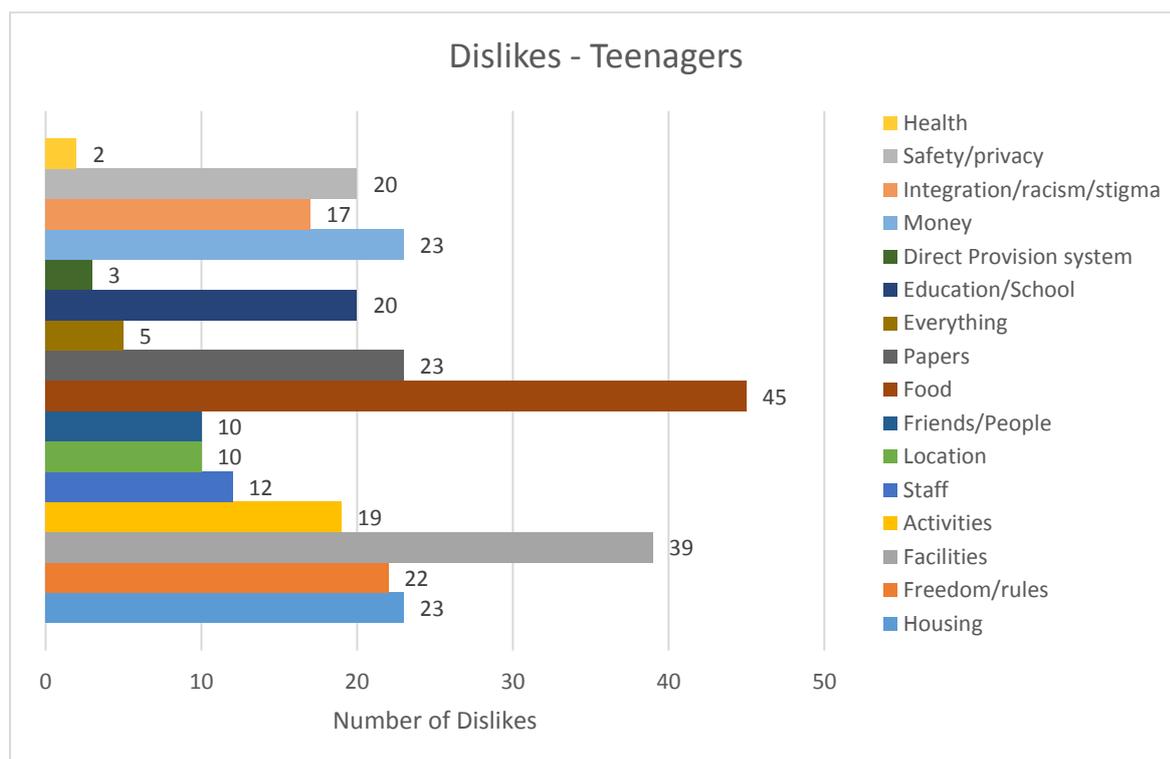


In the teenagers' session (13 – 18 years), the main dislikes were:

- Food: including issues with inadequate amounts of food, food quality, poor cooking, culturally inappropriate food and monotonous menus; rude kitchen staff
- Facilities: issues such as poor transport, shared (and remote) laundry facilities, poor recreational facilities, lack of activities for teens
- Papers: stigma of living in the hostel; wanting to live elsewhere than the hostel; freedom to travel; access to third-level education; hatred of the Direct Provision system
- Money: general financial problems; inadequate weekly allowance; not enough money for clothes and a social life; college funds
- Housing, safety and privacy: sharing accommodation (including bathrooms) with others, and in particular, the presence of large numbers of single men created discomfort and fear especially among teenage girls; issues such as dirty carpets, leaky pipes, cockroaches, spiders

¹² Child protection issues raised by participants were immediately followed up by the social worker allocated to the consultations by the RIA, in compliance with Children First guidelines.

- Freedom and rules: including feeling watched and controlled by staff, cameras in the rooms and around the centres; rules preventing access to the gym and TV room for under-18s; not being allowed visitors; lack of access to outside social life with peers
- Education: no access to third-level education; lack of space/ computer/Wi-Fi access for homework; not being able to travel on exchanges or trips with class; feeling treated differently in school because of being a refugee.



Dislikes – top votes

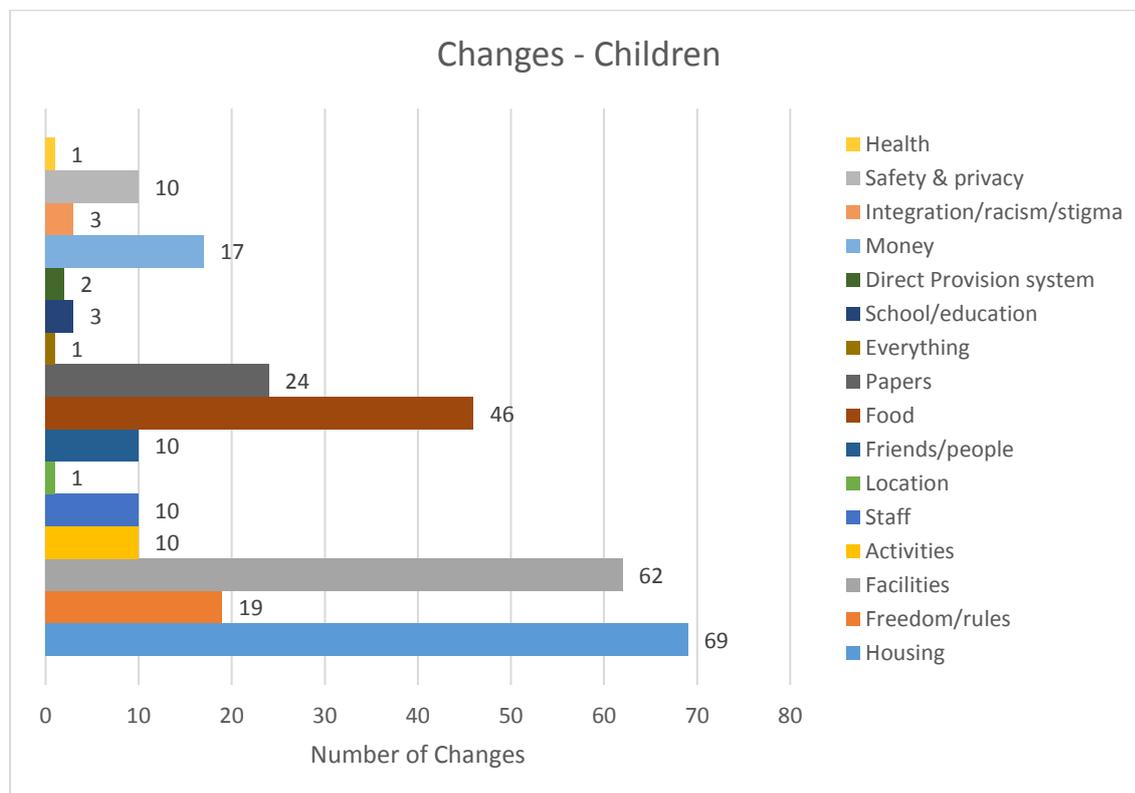
Pilot 8 - 12 yrs	Consultation 2 8 - 12 yrs	Consultation 3 13 – 17 yrs	Consultation 4 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 5 8 - 12 yrs
Don't like to be called Refugees	Paying for stuff	Money	I don't get my papers	Having to share house with other families
"The nothing story" (Don't like anything)	Reception area	Food	Men bothering us and taking over the TV room/ You don't get the food that you want	You're not allowed to keep pets

Changes

The consultations were designed to allow children and young people to suggest changes they would like to see, as well as giving them the opportunity to give their views on what they like and do not like about their lives in Direct Provision.

Children (8 – 12 years) focused largely on issues of immediate relevance to their lives:

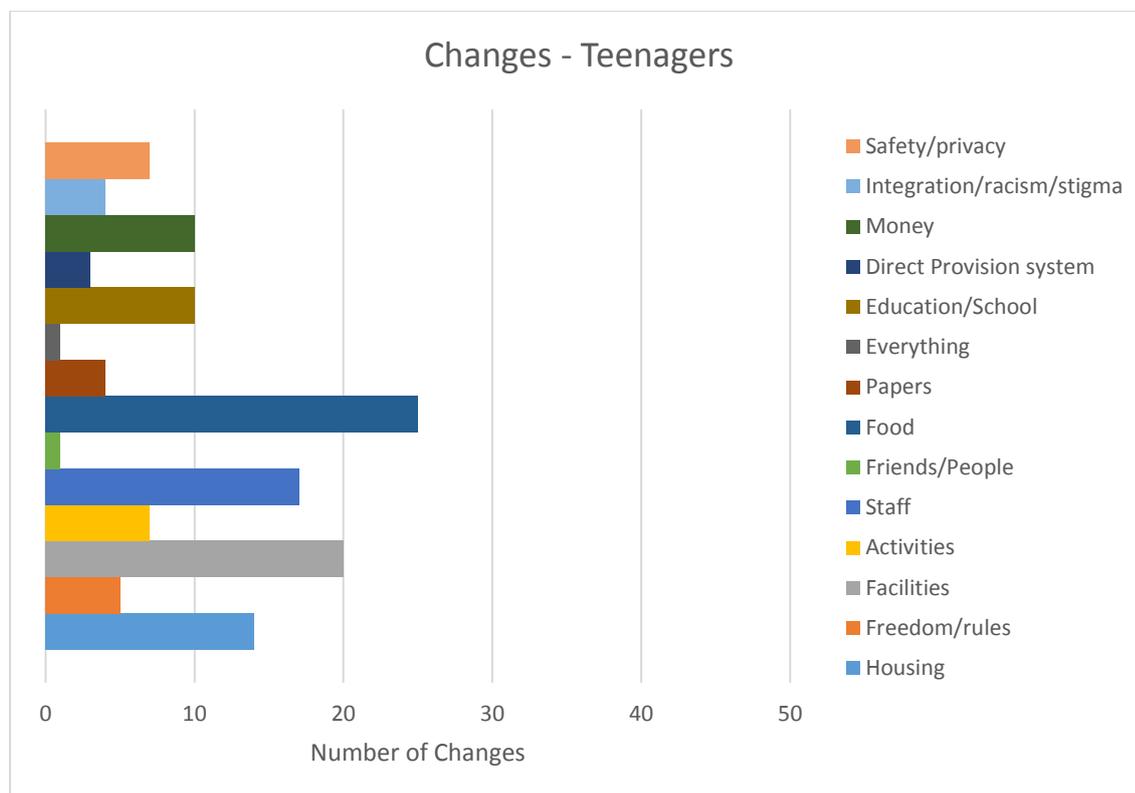
- Housing: individual family houses; no more shared rooms; bigger rooms; laundry facilities in homes; own gardens; cleaner accommodation
- Facilities: provide adequate playrooms (including recreational spaces for adults who currently dominate existing spaces); more accessible laundry facilities; better cooking facilities for families; improve transport
- Food: provide safe, healthy, fresh food; provide culturally appropriate food; allow families to cook their own food; provide variety including in packed lunches for school
- Papers: to allow parents to work; to allow families to leave the system; for travel; to allow for family reunification.



In the teenagers’ session (13 – 18 years), the main changes suggested were:

- Food: provide safe, healthy, fresh food; provide culturally appropriate food; allow families to cook their own food; provide variety
- Facilities: provide homework clubs; provide adequate playrooms (including recreational spaces for adults who currently dominate existing spaces); more accessible laundry facilities; better cooking facilities for families; improve transport
- Staff: change the negative attitudes of the staff; change the chefs; improve cleaning

- Housing: individual family houses; no more shared rooms; family-only centres (no single men in centres with children); bigger rooms
- Money: increase the weekly allowance; more money for school needs
- Education: allow access to third-level education; provide school transport; provide homework clubs; provide money and permission for school trips.

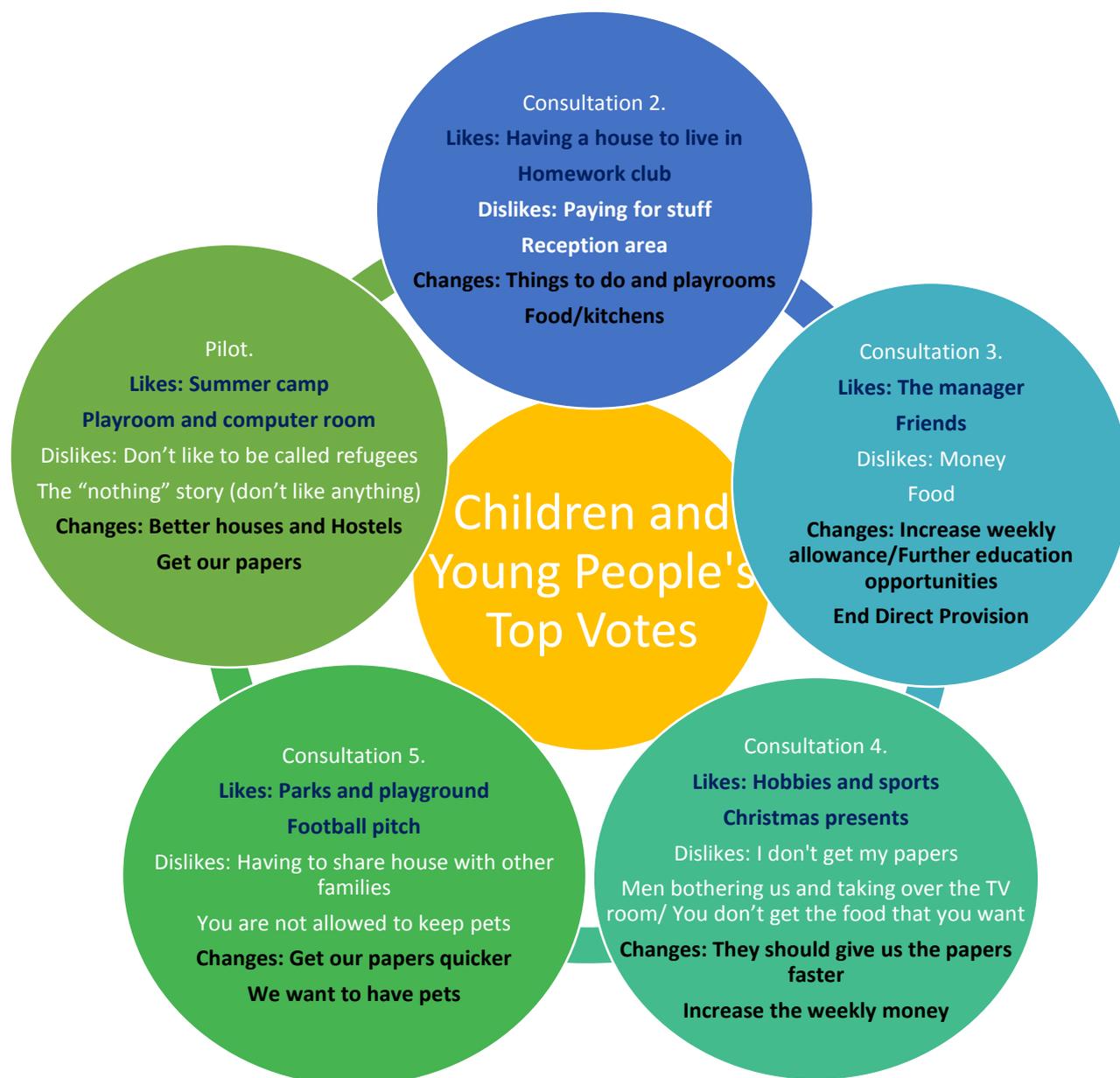


Changes - top votes

Pilot 8 - 12 yrs	Consultation 2 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 3 13 – 17 yrs	Consultation 4 8 – 12 yrs	Consultation 5 8 – 12 yrs
Better houses and hostels	Things to do and playrooms	Increase weekly allowance/ Further Education Opportunities	They should give us the papers faster	Get our papers quicker
Get our papers	Food/ Kitchens	End Direct Provision	Increase the weekly money	We want to have pets

The Children and Young People's Top Votes

The top votes from each consultation are set out in Figure 8 below.



The voting system allowed children and young people to identify themes emerging in their smaller groups and propose these as topics for the larger group to vote on in a secret ballot. There were similarities in the top votes across the four younger children's sessions, with 'papers' and recreation facilities appearing in all four, while the older teenagers were more concerned with lack of money and education opportunities. Food came up as a top dislike/change in three of the consultation sessions, but featured strongly in discussions at all of the sessions.

Discussion

Since the methodology resulted in the generation of large quantities of data that could not be fully captured by the voting and consensus methods alone, a further stage of analysis, using NVivo, was conducted to provide a broad picture of all of the entries on the sticky post-its, placemats, consensus workshops, votes, and wall of ideas. Since many of these themes were raised in likes, dislikes, changes, 'what you'd tell a new family' discussions, and the walls of ideas, it was decided to explore the variety of views thematically to reflect the views of the children and young people.

The top issues that emerged using this method were food, accommodation, play and recreation, education and homework clubs, money, restrictions, and the presence of single men in the centres.

Other themes included the length of time it takes to get "papers", stigma and racism, staff and management, and ending the system of Direct Provision. #

Following the thematic analysis, differences between the issues of interest and concern to each age group were also explored to highlight the different emphases between the two groups.

Food was a consistent theme, and was voted in the top two categories in three of the consultations. Food issues centred on a number of sub-themes: that food is of poor quality, is poorly cooked, and that they are provided with an unhealthy diet:

We eat rice and chips every day. (8 – 12 years)

Although some of the younger children said that they liked the food at their centre, a number of children and young people of all ages and from numerous centres complained that the menu is always the same, and they are given the same packed lunch for school every single day.

A number of children mentioned that they were not allowed to cook their own food so always had to eat Irish (or Polish) cooking. If they want to eat appropriately, their families have to buy their own food from their meagre allowance:

The food is not good – we eat Irish food and drink – they should cook African food or let us do it ourselves. (8 – 12 years)

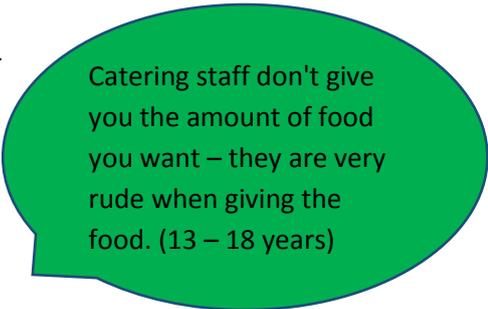
They specifically complained that the food is cold, chicken is regularly undercooked, that they are served leftovers, and that there is not enough food:

I don't like that we aren't allowed to take as much food as we want. (8 – 12 years)

Many of the children and young people said that the kitchen staff were "rude" or "mean" to them and their mothers.

Accommodation was another central theme and was voted in the top two categories in three of the consultations. Bigger rooms and separate rooms for different genders and ages, bigger and separate family houses, improved laundry facilities, closer car parking, allowing visitors and friends to sleep over, and the general lack of privacy were the main issues of concern:

I hate sharing a room with my mother and small brother and big brother, I need my space. (8 – 12 years)



Catering staff don't give you the amount of food you want – they are very rude when giving the food. (13 – 18 years)

Many of the children also talked about rats, mice, cats, and, in once centre in particular, about how the foxes kept them from playing outside:

[I] hate foxes – can't go outside later than 6pm. (8 – 12 years)

Many of the children talked about “smelly and dirty” (8 – 12 years) houses, toilets and reception areas in their centres, and appeared particularly unhappy about this. One teenager remarked:

They only clean the place when MIA or RIA is coming. (13 – 18 years)

Play and recreation was a central theme of the consultations, and was voted in the top two categories six times, and only the 13 – 18 year age group did not select it as a voting category. Children in one of the centres were very enthusiastic about the playroom, summer camps, and the trips they were sometimes taken on, and many enjoyed the beach location, including the sea views. While in three of the consultations play and recreation topics were top ‘likes’, elsewhere children voted for improvements in play facilities and activities.

I want to live in a house and a garden so I can play football. (8 – 12 years)

A large number of participants of all ages made reference to the adult males in their centres taking over the playrooms and the computers, making it difficult for children and young people to use these facilities.

Many of the teenagers also talked about problems relating to recreation and leisure, with many bemoaning the lack of a playroom or enough computers and internet access. Others pointed out that they were unable to participate in a normal teenage social life outside of the centre because of the lack of money to spend, being unable to afford appropriate clothing, and poor transport.

There are loads of men bothering us (8 – 12 years)

Men “bothering” the children and young people, and taking over the recreational facilities, was a top vote to change in one of the consultations. It was also a theme in the discussions in some of the others. Younger children

complained of men smoking next to children; preventing the children and young people from using the play and computer facilities; and fighting between themselves and, in one centre, with people from the towns:

I would like to stop the men fighting. (8 – 12 years)

We do not get to use the room where there is two pool tables and a big TV because the men are always there (8 – 12 years)

Some of the teenagers suggested that there was a need for more facilities so that everyone would have something to do:

We need to have more resources – there's nothing much to do. We can't even go into the facilities room because it's always filled with men and the reception don't allow us in. In Christmas we got an Xbox from RIA so we had facilities but we never got a chance to play it – all the MEN are always playing it. (13 – 18 years)

However, there was also an issue of safety in the presence of single men in centres

There is so many men, and coz they look creepy look at you. (13 – 18 years)

where there were children, and it was suggested that centres for families should not also have single men living in such close proximity.

Man asking girls to come to their room. (13 – 18 years)

Racism and stigma was an underlying theme that ran through three of the consultations, sometimes implicit, as in the quotation below, and other times more explicitly in comments about staff treating residents rudely, in school, and in the wider community:

And our school, our teacher, my teacher shouts at me more than – my teacher doesn't loves me more than – she likes the other kids instead of me. There's another girl from Romania that gets like that, bullied. (8 – 12 years)



Figure 5 Being called 'refugee' by staff

Some children said they disliked being called “refugees and asylum seekers” by staff or by other residents who have already got their papers.

Papers were an issue of concern at every consultation session. Children and young people were acutely aware of the delays in the asylum system and their comments show that their lives are deeply affected by the resulting uncertainty and lack of ability to plan for the future. As a result, children expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness:

A place where have to stay until you get your papers :((8 – 12 years)

They don't let my friends in my room – they don't let visitors; I miss my dad – he lives in Africa; I don't have my cousins. (8 – 12 years)

Many of the comments display resignation to these delays:

At least to get your paper at one day. (8 – 12 years)

As well as remarkable levels of patience:

Anyone that lived long, like seven years or over, should get their documents. (8 – 12 years)

There was some confusion among the teenagers:

False hopes; working group said we'll get papers over summer break. (13 – 18 years)

One of the top votes at the teenagers' consultation was to end the Direct Provision system.

Staff and management were discussed at all sessions, and in some cases were the subject of praise and appreciation, in particular the managers of the centres. One teenager said the staff at the centre are “kind, giving, helpful, playful.” Many of the comments about the staff, however, particularly reception staff but also including kitchen staff and security, were highly critical, and accused staff of being uncaring, unfair, rude, mean, and disrespectful.

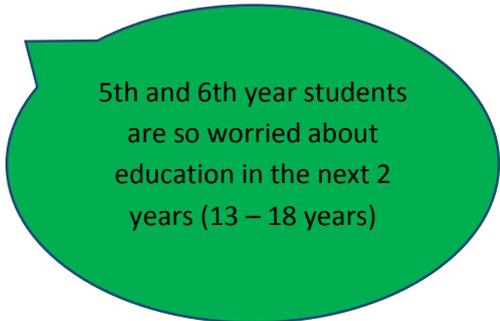
Teenagers' issues

While the main themes of food, accommodation, education and money remained important among both age groups, teenagers also raised a number of educational issues, such as college:

The fact that we can't go to college, I understand that if you live up to five years in Ireland, they pay half your fees – what about those that haven't lived in Ireland for five years and finished their leaving? What are they supposed to do? Stay home, waste their lives and time? (13 – 18 years)

School trips and activities also came up and there was a general view that it was impossible to go without a valid passport, in addition to the financial impossibility:

We can't go on school trips cause we can't afford the money to go on trips and when you have a school trip like going to France you can't go, 'cause we can't go. (13 – 18 years)



The lack of a homework club for secondary schools were seen as a particular problem for young people living in Direct Provision centres who experienced difficulties completing homework due to space restrictions, noise and lack of computers and Wi-Fi:

I would like internet in houses because we can't do homework at home. There is a computer room but is always filled by single men. (13 – 18 years)

A number of teenage girls talked about the restrictions they experienced due to the presence of unrelated adult men in the accommodation centres:

I would like to change the fact that where we live there are lots of men, we cannot do anything as girls without men staring at us - we can't wear heels, make-up etc., without them thinking we are in our 20s. (13 – 18 years)

I will not put any single men in family hostels because it's not safe. (13 – 18 years)¹³

Others said that lack of privacy was a significant issue, both in terms of being watched by the security cameras, and in relation to shared rooms, bathrooms, and shared houses.

Many of the teenagers were very appreciative about the managers and staff of their centres whom they stated were kind and helpful. Those living in the city liked the central location and the freedom this afforded, while those living in remote areas complained about the lack of transport, especially at night, which prevented them from enjoying a social life outside of the centre:



We can't stay in town long because of the bus times. (13 – 18 years)

¹³ Child protection issues raised by participants were immediately followed up by the social worker allocated to the consultations by the RIA, in compliance with *Children First* guidelines.

The clothing allowance was also said to be inadequate, resulting in them feeling and being perceived as different by their peers.

€9.60 is not enough for a child we get no spending money and it's very hard for us to go to town or eat out with our friends because we can't afford it. I would like to change the bus times because we can't spend two hours with our friends. And clothing money amount should be changed because we can only buy very cheap clothing and it's hard to fit in with people. (13 – 18 years)

Children's issues

The majority of children consulted were concerned with play and recreation facilities, and while many children expressed appreciation for the playrooms they have, and others said they enjoyed playing outdoors, a number indicated that the playrooms and outdoor facilities are sub-standard, with few toys and broken swings. Lack of access to computer rooms was a feature of many complaints.

I think the play centre in [centre] is great, there is a play room. (8 – 12 years)

A large number of children raised the issue of education and school, and many praised their homework clubs, which they valued highly:

Homework club is kind and gentle. (8 – 12 years)

Sometimes children wished to improve these amenities:

In homework club if someone coughs by the end of the homework club everybody gets the cough because of the amount of space. (8 – 12 years)



Figure 6 Playroom 'likes' (8 - 12 years)

Some children did not have access to homework clubs but expressed a wish to have them.

Many complaints were made about accommodation, such as lack of space and shared rooms:

The houses are too small. I don't have my own room. There is only 3 rooms in my SMALL house and the rooms are tiny. (8 – 12 years)

And my mum don't work – she stays in the room all the time. (8 – 12 years)

Many children worried about the difficulties their mothers faced: in coping with the poor facilities, such as laundry and cooking facilities; as well as their family's lack of money.

Children also highlighted the problems facing them in school, in not being able to afford school books, uniforms and other school expenses.

A number of children also talked about problems with 'reception' (staff at their centres) not allowing visitors, monitoring their movements and telling them what to do:

Some of them are mean – I don't like them to tell us to go our room! (8 – 12 years)

There were also very frequent mentions about delays in getting their papers:

It took so long to get your papers, I've been here for 8 years. (8 – 12 years)

Food was a major issue of concern, both in terms of health:

The food makes you fat. (8 – 12 years)

Different food for allergies. (8 – 12 years)

in relation to variety:

They have the same food every time. (8 – 12 years)

and in respect of the quality:

Before they gave me expired potatoes in [centre]. (8 – 12 years)



Figure 7 "Dining Room" (8 - 12 years)

Wall of Ideas

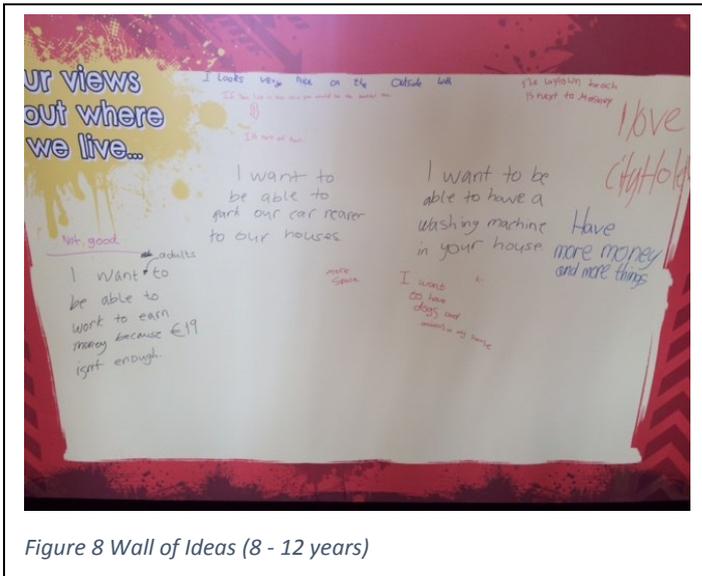


Figure 8 Wall of Ideas (8 - 12 years)

If you live in Sea View you would see the beaches. (8 – 12 years)

Participants were invited to write any other views and opinions that they wished on a “Wall of Ideas” which was displayed throughout the session and which could be approached during any free time or at specified moments during the session. While some

children and young people availed of this opportunity, many did not, and the comments on the Wall largely reflected the themes that had been raised throughout the consultations. Children’s comments about living conditions were prevalent, including comments about “foxes,” “dead mice,” and “killed cats,” while some wrote that their living space was “comfortable” or that they had a sea view.

Teenagers were more positive on the wall, and wrote about “wonderful friends” and “nice garden,” and one said they “love the different people in it”. Teenagers were optimistic about the changes that could be made:

Some problems but can be worked out (management, staff). (13 – 18 years)

Some children complained about being separated from family members in other countries, the lack of space and sharing their rooms, poor laundry facilities, car parks being too far from housing, and not being able to have pets.

People have been living in the centre for eleven years (8 – 12 years)

People should stop knocking on our doors while being drunk at night (8 – 12 years)

Participants also wrote about the delay in getting their papers, the length of time living in the system, that they want adults to be allowed to work, and the lack of money provided them and their families.

Some complained about the anti-social behaviour of some local residents, conflict between Direct Provision residents, and others said they would like the food to

be changed, and would like the opportunity to travel to different countries:

I don’t like seeing my friends travel to countries and I can’t. (8 – 12 years)

Evaluations and Exit interviews

Evaluation forms

Children and young people who attended the consultations were asked to complete an evaluation form to give feedback on their experiences of the day. The results of these evaluations were analysed to offer an overall picture of their experiences of the consultation. The findings from the

I didn't like this I loved it!! (8 – 12 years)

evaluations show that the consultations were highly appreciated, and that participants felt that they had been provided with a well-organised space in which to share their views. Most said that they would change nothing

about the consultation.

- The vast majority (94%) stated that the event was excellent or very good, while only 4% reported that it was okay. A tiny proportion of the younger children (2%) but none of the teenagers said that the event was not good.
- Most stated that the day was organised excellently or very good (90%), while some (8%) reported that it was okay. A small number of children (2%) but again, none of the teenagers, identified that the day was poorly organised.
- Almost all of the children and teenagers liked the open-space session about what they liked and disliked about where they lived, with the majority (83%) stating that it was an excellent or very good session. A small number of children and teenagers (13%) felt reported that this session was okay. 4% of children and teenagers reported that this was a poor session.
- For the most part, the children and teenagers enjoyed the session on what they would like to change about where they lived, with the majority (81%) stating that it was an excellent or very good session. A small number of children and teenagers (14%) reported that this was an okay session. 5% of the children or teenagers reported that this was a poor session.
- The majority of children and teenagers liked the session on voting their top priorities, with the majority (80%) stating that it was an excellent or very good session. A small number of children and teenagers (14%) reported that this session was okay. 6% of children and teenagers reported that this was a poor session.
- Overall, the children and teenagers were satisfied with the venue with the majority (85%) stating that the venue was excellent or very good, while a few children and teenagers (13%) said that it was okay. 2% of the children said that it was a poor venue, while none of the teenagers said it was a poor venue.
- Generally, the children and teenagers were satisfied with the food, with the majority (90%) stating that the food was excellent or very good. A small number of teenagers (8%) reported that the food was okay. 2% of children reported that the food was poor.

The children and teenagers identified a wide range of things that they identified as being the best things about the day. For children it was the food, the methodology (games; drawing; voting; writing things they liked, disliked and wanted to change), having their voices heard, and meeting new people. The teenagers liked meeting and socialising with new people as well as reuniting with peers from previous accommodation centres, the food, and sharing experiences of hostel living with peers.

The food was delicious and was the best meal I ever had. I would like to thank everybody for what they did for all of us. Thanks a lot. (8 – 12 years)

The vast majority of the children and teenagers stated that they would change nothing about the consultation. However, some children made suggestions relating to the food and choices regarding the methodologies used (namely the games; voting; writing). The teenagers identified changes namely relating to duration of the consultation (requests to make it longer), that the consultation be open to a larger number of people, and the inclusion of more activities.

The children and teenagers were offered the opportunity to offer additional comments. Most of the children did not avail of the opportunity to offer additional comments while most teenagers availed of this opportunity. Those children who responded used the opportunity to praise the process and offer thanks for the experience (I loved it; this day was the best; excellent; good). One child stated

I really hope changes take place in the system and it gets sped up. (13 – 18 years)

that the food was “delicious” and “the best meal I ever had.” Similarly, the teenagers praised the methodologies (icebreakers, using videos), enjoying the day (brilliant; good; excellent; fun; special), and expressed their gratitude towards leaders asking for further consultations like this one. Some teenagers also expressed their wishes for changes to the Direct Provision system.

Exit interviews

In order to assess participants’ views and reflections on the consultation process itself, exit interviews were carried out with a total of 40 randomly selected children and young people who were asked:

- Why did you decide to come?
- Was it what you thought it would be like?
- What was the most memorable part of the day?

It’s because I want to tell about the hostel because the hostel is not good, and I have to share rooms with my mom and my sister and all that (8 – 12 years)

Exit interviews showed that the purpose of the consultations was fully understood by the vast majority of children and teenagers who largely said they wanted to come to the consultations to have their voices heard.

I came to tell everybody about the reasons why I don’t like the hotel. (8 – 12 years)

Many children and young people saw the consultation as an opportunity to make changes to the Direct Provision system:

Because I wanted to change the asylum, I wanted to know how we can change this place. I wanted to get this place changed. (13 – 18 years)

I've been living in direct provision since I was 10 and I'm 17 now, my whole teenage years, so I came to give my views on what can be improved for people coming in (13 – 18 years)

Because I think there should be a few changes because most people in the centre where we live don't get their papers quickly and they wait a lot and a lot, and they wait for a really long time. (8 – 12 years)

Would you be able to put in your report for us to be able to park our cars nearer to our house? (8 – 12 years)

Other participants said their decision to attend was influenced by family members:

Well, my mum told me that it's like, if you want to have your papers, you should come here to chat with these people, so I said okay. And then I learned a lot today, and told them how I feel about living where I am living today. (8 – 12 years)

Because of meeting, they told me yesterday, my uncle told me I can do anything I want for the hostel – everything, says, I don't like it, I like it, and I love it. (8 – 12 years)

Some children were attending as representatives for their families:

I came because I wanted, like, my brothers and sisters told me ideas for when I was coming and I wanted them to be heard. (8 – 12 years)

When asked what they thought the consultation would be like, the majority of the children and young people said it was even better than expected:

To be honest, I thought it was better coz I thought it would be like a lecture thing where we just sit down and someone says stuff and we answer a couple of questions and that was it but it turned out it was a million times better than what I expected it to be. (13 – 18 years)

No – it was better, more fun. I thought it was going to be like all serious and all. (8 – 12 years)

... the voting, the map, like, writing about housing, the bullying in school, the football pitch, everything - how important it is. (8 – 12 years)

Participants were asked to identify the most memorable part of the day. Many children said they enjoyed the methodology, particularly the voting:

The opinion part and sitting together in a group and working stuff out (8 – 12 years)

(8 – 12 years)

The voting, because kids aren't allowed to vote for like what they want, but today we had an experience of that. (8 – 12 years)

The voting, the map and the sweets. (8 – 12 years)

That we were playing games, we had fun, we ate, it was good

The teenagers enjoyed meeting their friends and getting to know new people:

Being reunited with my friends from ex/other hostels and knowing what people voted for. (13-18 years)

The fact that I made loads of friends here. (13 – 18 years)

Making new friends. (13 – 18 years)

Many of the children and young people particularly appreciated the democratic process where everyone's views were given equal consideration:

The most thing I liked about today was when we were writing down what we wanted to happen, what we wanted all about the place, what was wrong and what we don't like about the place. (8 – 12 years)

I remembered the writing on the wall. I loved everybody and thank you for today (8 – 12 years)

The children and young people who took part in the exit interviews were very positive about their experience of the consultations, and happy that they were given an opportunity to voice their opinion on the Direct Provision system:

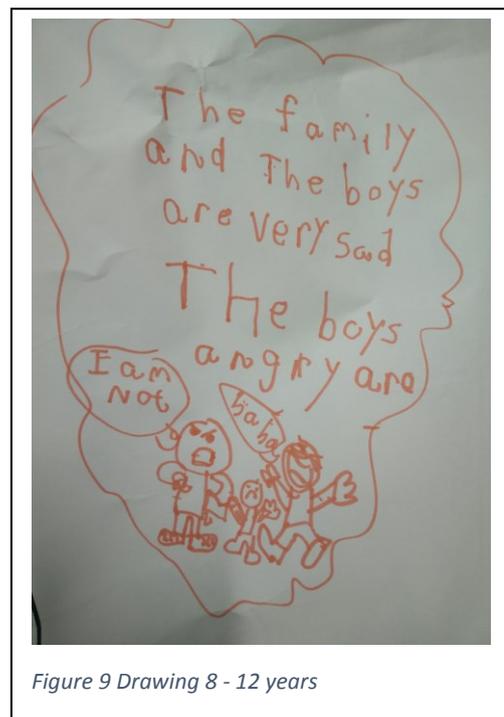
The way we actually got a say in the stuff that happens around and we were able to tell people what happens around the buildings and all and the fact that it changes a lot when RIA come around and they make it look better. (13 – 18 years)

Summary and Conclusions

A range of children and young people from Direct Provision centres across Ireland talked, wrote and drew pictures of the effects of living in the Direct Provision system on their lives. In doing so, they demonstrated that children and young people are experts in their own lives. The specific nature of their individual views is captured by the mixed methodology employed in this consultation process, and these views together provide a unique insight into the everyday experiences of a group of children and young people whose voices are rarely heard.

This consultation gathered children and young people's views and votes on a wide range of topics chosen by themselves, including food, size and quality of accommodation, education and homework clubs, rules and restrictions, the presence of single men in the centres, the time it takes to get "papers", stigma and racism, staff and management, and the overall system of Direct Provision.

The issues identified by the children and young people reflect the general themes highlighted in the Working Group report, such as the length of time living in Direct Provision, financial issues, play and recreation facilities, and safety. However, in their own words and images, through systems of discussion, drawing, writing, and voting, children and young people identify specifics that are particular to their lives and priorities that reflect their unique experiences and their distinct concerns.



Key messages for policy makers

In the course of this consultation, children and young people have raised a number of important issues for policy-makers to consider.

Likes - Children and young people:

- appreciate the facilities, especially the play and recreation facilities and homework clubs, that are provided where these are fit for purpose
- respect and like the managers and some staff of their centres where they are respectful, kind and caring
- enjoy the sense of community and access to friends that living communally sometimes enables

Dislikes and Changes - Children and young people:

- are unhappy about the length of their stays in the system with a number of children saying they have lived in the system since they were born
- are stigmatised because of where they live, in addition to experiencing some racism
- want their families to get their papers so that they can live normal lives
- are unhappy with the level of financial assistance their parents receive, which impacts directly and indirectly on them
- dislike the cramped, shared and often sub-standard accommodation they live in
- often have nothing to do, when recreational facilities are inadequate or lacking entirely
- say that the food they are served is not culturally appropriate; is of low nutritional value; and is often poorly cooked to the point of being dangerous to their health
- state that menus are monotonous and packed school lunches are exactly the same every day
- feel unsafe when families are sharing space with single men
- experience disrespectful attitudes from staff at the centres towards them and their mothers
- cannot enjoy a normal social life due to lack of suitable transport, clothing and money
- worry about their education when they have no space or support for homework, and also worry about limited third level opportunities

In closing, this consultation presents policy makers with a unique opportunity to listen to the voices of children and young people directly affected by the system of Direct Provision as it now stands. The children and young people who took part in this consultation did so in the belief that their participation would contribute to a better, fairer and more equitable system for them and their families. For this participation to be meaningful, there needs to be an open and transparent consideration by those in positions of authority of the views contained in this report, and a rigorous, clear and accessible response to the issues that these children and young people have raised in this singular process.

Lundy's model of participation sets out four prerequisites for effective and sustainable participation: *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence*. The methodologies used in this consultation process provided the children with *space* where they could share their views, a variety of media through which they could *voice* those views, an *audience* of decision-makers with whom their views would be shared, and it is now for those decision-makers to ensure that those views have *influence* in bringing about the changes that have been asked for by the children and young people themselves.

Appendix 1: Oversight Committee members

Ashbourne House	Martina	Collins
Athlone Accomodation Centre	Maria	Hannigan
Atlantic House, Tramore	Omolara	Suwebat Busairi
Atlas House Killarney	Mary	Chkheidze
Atlas House Tralee	Jamie	Carnegie
Baleskin Accomodation Centre	Deirdre	Tobin
Birchwood House	Olivia	O'Hanlon
Bridgewater Centre	Martina	Walsh
Carroll Village	Robert	Hyslop
Eglinton Hotel	Loretta	Needham
Eyre Powell	Deirdre	Germaine
Georgian Court	Graham	Carey
Globe House	David	Kelly
Kinsale Road Accomodation Centre	Sorina	Gabor
Knockalisheen	Laoise	Carmody
Mosney Accomodation Centre	Pat	McKenna
Ocean View/Atlantic House, Tramore	Shirley	Moore
The Old Convent, Ballyhaunis	John	Nally
Watergate House	Mark	Pollard
Clonakilty Lodge	Marian	O'Regan
Hatch Hall	Killian	O'Grady
Drishane Castle	Terrence	Scanlon
St Pats Centre	James	Keogh
Tusla	Mary	Kenny
DCYA	Noreen	Moran
DCYA Participation Officer (Foróige)	Martin	Donohoe
DCYA Participation Officer (YWI)	Suzanne	Byrne
Reception and Integration Agency	Sinead	McGuinness
DCYA Participation Officer (Foróige)	Rosie	O'Brien

DCYA	Bairbre	Meaney
DCYA	Elaine	Masterson
Health Service Executive: Health Screening Team in Baleskin	PJ	Boyle
Reception and Integration Agency	Eugene	Banks
Reception and Integration Agency	Ann	Gill
DCYA	Anne	O'Donnell

Appendix 2: DCYA Methodologies

PILOT: CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN DIRECT PROVISION

ICEBREAKERS

- Fun games
- Team building games
- Name games

GRAFFITI WALL / WALL OF IDEAS

A graphically designed kappa board will be available to children and young people throughout each consultation for their views and ideas, with the following title:

- *Our opinions about Direct Provision*

OPEN SPACE SESSION

Introductory question: What is Direct Provision?

Questions:

What do you like about Direct Provision?

What do you not like about Direct Provision?

- Take some (2 or 3) examples from the entire group.
- The wall is divided into 'what you like' and 'what you don't like'
- Write your ideas on individual post-it notes and put them on the wall (max 4 for 'likes' and 4 for 'not likes' per person).

GROUPING OF POST-IT NOTES

Five children or young people are asked to group the post-it notes, supported by facilitators

- A list of topics is developed

During this grouping exercise, one facilitator is playing games with the other children.

GROUP WORK ON TOPICS

Graphically designed floor mats are placed on the floor around the room.

- 2 to 3 topics are assigned to each floormat (depending on the number of topics identified at the Open Space session)
- Setting the scene (to help ground discussions): Imagine a new family has arrived in your centre. You've become friendly with the children. Think about the types of things that would be important to tell them about Direct Provision.
- Discussion prompt question for each topic: Tell a new child in direct provision more about why (X topic) is important to you?
- Each group spends 25-30 minutes populating their floormats with illustrations and writing.
- Each group moves three times to visit other floormats, with 10 minutes at each one to add their ideas to those developed by previous groups.

AFTERNOON SESSION

CONSENSUS BUILDING WORKSHOPS

The children are divided into 2 groups

Each group takes part in a facilitated consensus building workshop using the following focussed question:

- *What are the things you want to change about Direct Provision?*

This method will result in a prioritised list from each group

QUICK GUIDE TO CONSENSUS BUILDING

BRAINSTORM

1. Individual children make lists
2. 3 children per group to develop cards
3. 1 idea per card
4. 3-7 words per card

CLUSTER

5. Most important cards get put up first from each group of 3 children
6. Cards are grouped under symbols according to which ones are similar
7. Review cards and make sure all similar ones are together in clusters

NAMING

8. Start with largest cluster and ask group to propose a name or title that answers the focussed question
9. Create new groups if necessary
10. Move cards from group to group

RESOLVE

11. Focus the group on consensus by reading all the title cards
12. Discuss the significance of the consensus
13. Discuss what they think are the next steps – or what should be done as a result of the consensus
14. **VOTE** on top 3 (All topics are written on cards by workshop assistants and each one is assigned a number) – Each child is given 3 cards and votes on their top 3 in the ballot box

FULL GROUP VOTE

- The top three priorities from each group are put on a big screen and assigned a number.
- Each child/young person votes for their top **3 priorities** in a ballot box (three voting cards each).

CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN DIRECT PROVISION

Revised Consultation Methodology

11.00 ICEBREAKERS

- Fun games
- Team building games
- Name games

11.15 PLACE MAT SESSION

Place Mat is divided in two. Questions:

What do you like about where you live?

What do you not like about where you live?

11.45 CONSENSUS BUILDING WORKSHOPS

The children are divided into 2 groups

Each group takes part in a facilitated consensus building workshop using the following focused question:

- *What are the things you want to change about where you live?*

This method will result in a prioritised list from each group

QUICK GUIDE TO CONSENSUS BUILDING

BRAINSTORM

- Individual children make lists
- 3 children per group to develop cards
- 1 idea per card
- 3-7 words per card

CLUSTER

- Most important cards get put up first from each group of 3 children
- Cards are grouped under symbols according to which ones are similar
- Review cards and make sure all similar ones are together in clusters

NAMING

- Start with largest cluster and ask group to propose a name or title that answers the focused question
- Create new groups if necessary
- Move cards from group to group

1.00 LUNCH

RESOLVE (Consensus Workshop Completion)

1. Focus the group on consensus by reading all the title cards
2. Discuss the significance of the consensus
3. Discuss what they think are the next steps – or what should be done as a result of the consensus
4. VOTE on top 3 (All topics are written on cards by workshop assistants and each one is assigned a number) – Each child is given 3 cards and votes on their top 3 in the ballot box

FULL GROUP VOTE

- The top three priorities from each group are put on a big screen and assigned a number.
- Each child/young person votes for their top **3 priorities** in a ballot box (three blank voting cards each).

GRAFFITI WALL / WALL OF IDEAS

A graphically designed kappa board will be available to children and young people throughout each consultation for their views and ideas, with the following title:

- *Our opinions about where we live*

2.00 EVALUATION AND CLOSE

Appendix 3: What is Participation?

The term ‘participation’ is core to article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, participation has emerged as a core set of practices supporting the implementation of the CRC, and describes it as broadly referring to:

...ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.¹⁴

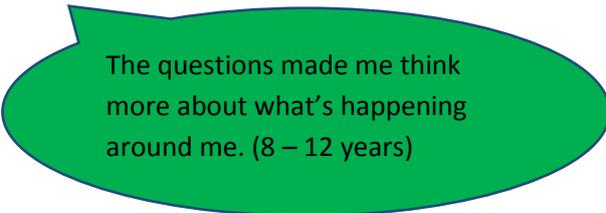
Furthermore, it states that participation should be:

...the starting point for an intense exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children’s lives.¹⁵

In addition to its status as a rights-supporting mechanism, participation has also been recognised as having tangible benefits to children and to society as a whole. Research has demonstrated its potential to increase children’s skills, personal confidence and self-esteem,¹⁶ as well as improving public decision-making processes and outcomes.¹⁷ Moreover, the inclusion of children in decision-making challenges narrow, adult-centred definitions of democratic citizenship.¹⁸

Rights-based participation

Lundy’s model of participation identifies four key elements – space, voice, audience and influence – that must be included as a prerequisite to effective rights-based participation for children and young people.¹⁹



The questions made me think more about what’s happening around me. (8 – 12 years)

When all of these conditions are met, children have the opportunity to express their views about matters that affect them and space is opened up for the development of dialogue producing shared meanings that can shape the lives of both children and adults. The *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making* (2015) adopts Lundy’s model to frame its participatory approach, and the model has influenced the development by the DCYA of a variety of interactive and age-appropriate methodologies aimed to provide children and young people with an assortment of means to express their views.

¹⁴ CRC/C/GC/12 (I) 3.

¹⁵ CRC/C/GC/12 (III) 13

¹⁶ Carolyne Willow. *Children’s Right to be Heard and Effective Child Protection: a guide for governments and children’s Rights advocates on involving children and young people in ending all forms of violence.* (2010) Stockholm: Save the Children Fund.

¹⁷ B. W. Head, Brian ‘Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation,’ (2011) *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 33, pp. 541 – 547.

¹⁸ Nigel Thomas, “Towards a Theory of Children’s Participation,” (2007) 15 *International Journal of Children’s Rights* 199-218.

¹⁹ Lundy, “‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child *British Educational Research Journal* Vol 33, Issue 6, 2007, 927-942.

Children and Young People's Participation in Ireland

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), in particular the Citizen Participation Unit, has been a champion of children's participation since its beginnings in the National Children's Office in 2000. The Unit has undertaken and supported children and young people's participation widely at national and local levels.

Participation of children and young people in decision-making has been a key principle of policies published by the Department and its predecessor, including the *National Children's Strategy (2000)*²⁰ and *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014)*.²¹ Recently, the DCYA published the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015)* which aims to mainstream children's participation across Government departments and statutory agencies. The priority action for the DCYA is the establishment of a Children and Young People's Participation Hub as a national centre of excellence for children and young people's participation to support Government departments to implement the strategy. The Hub will also act as a central repository for information regarding participatory initiatives carried out by the voluntary and statutory sectors. The Participation Hub recognises the need for consultations such as this one and for participation work across sectors to be documented and co-ordinated, in order to maximise effectiveness and avoid duplication.²²

Impacts of participation

A recent study that examined young people's involvement in Department of Children and Youth Affairs participatory initiatives found that, in line with the findings from international literature, the personal impacts of participation were highly rated by participants. However in previous research in Ireland,^{23,24} low levels of participation and satisfaction with their influence in civic life have been noted among young people. While it is widely recognised that children and young people want to influence decisions about their lives, older teenagers in particular have been found to



Figure 10 Consensus workshop "Sticky Wall" 8 – 12 years

²⁰ Department of Health and Children, *National Children's Strategy-Our Children, Their Lives (2000)*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at www.dcyia.ie

²¹ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: www.dcyia.ie.

²² Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) *Policy and Literature Review of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: www.dcyia.ie. See also Child Law Clinic, UCC and Centre for Children's Rights, QUB, *Advancing Children's Rights: Capturing the Learning of the Atlantic Philanthropies Grantees in Ireland* (unpublished).

²³ Paul Burgess & Pat Leahy, *Youth Participation in the Republic of Ireland (2008)* Cork City: Youth Work Ireland Cork.

²⁴ E. O'Leary, *Taking The Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision Making in Ireland (2001)* Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland/Carnegie Youth Initiative.

lack confidence in the current systems and structures that are in place for facilitating the inclusion of their voices.²⁵ Providing opportunities for voluntary, informed participation, dissemination to appropriate decision-makers, and subsequently providing feedback on outcomes to participants creates a 'loop' of participation that supports meaningful engagement in decision-making processes.

The methodologies used by the DCYA are strengths-based and assume that children and young people are experts in their own lives. These methodologies are designed to capture the views of children in their own words, in order to remain faithful to children's own interpretation of their experiences, and have been tested in a range of settings and with children and young people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. In this consultation, because of the difficulties in accessing this population directly or through usual channels such as schools and Comhairle na nÓg groups, attractive and age-appropriate informational flyers were distributed to children and their families in order to ensure that those who took part were fully acquainted with the purpose and scope of the consultations. The feedback from evaluations and exit interviews demonstrates that this approach was highly successful, providing a model for future consultations with hard to reach populations.

The majority of participants in this current Direct Provision consultation process said that they were pleased to have the opportunity to be listened to and they expected their views to influence change:

Just that there's someone out there who's taking our views into account and doing something about it. (13 – 18 years)

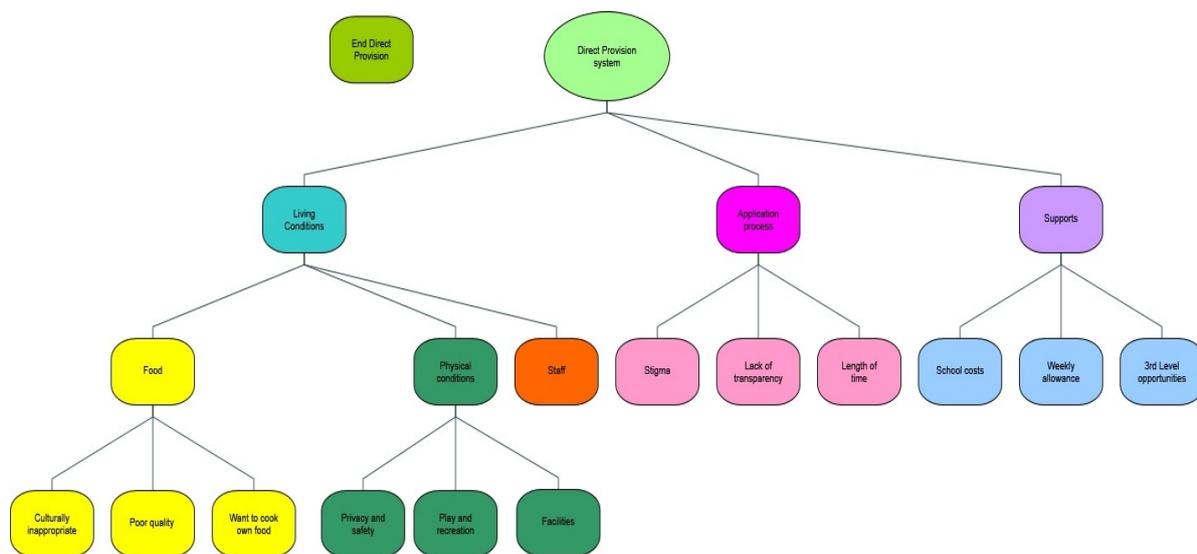
The inclusion of a children and young people's version of the report findings to be distributed to participants and other interested parties is a key feature of DCYA methodologies and reflects a firm commitment to completing this participation loop. It is vital that in addition to maintaining good practice in the methodologies for such consultations, similar projects conducted by other stakeholders likewise build proper feedback mechanisms into those consultations to ensure that children and young people who take part are apprised of how and where their views are considered and of the impact of the consultations.²⁶

²⁵ Cathal O'Connell, Siobhan O'Sullivan Lorcan and Byrne, *Children's Voices in Housing Estate Regeneration* (2015) IRC, DCYA, DECLG, Ireland.

²⁶ L. Lundy. "'Voice' Is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (Dec., 2007).

Appendix 4: Themes identified from NVivo analysis

Although a large volume of data was generated at the consultations, a number of overall themes dominated the findings. These included the length of time children were forced to live in the Direct Provision system itself, the poor quality and inappropriateness of the food served in the kitchens, the inadequacy of the weekly allowance, the lack of space, safety and privacy for families, and lack of access to play amenities for children. A number of children called for an end to the system of Direct Provision.



Appendix 5. Direct Provision Centres

At the end of September 2015, the RIA accommodation portfolio was comprised of a total of 35 centres throughout 17 counties, with a contracted capacity of 5,429. These centres were:

- 1 Reception Centre, located in Dublin.
- 32 Accommodation Centres.
- 2 Self Catering Centres, located in Dublin and Co. Louth.

Of those centres in the RIA portfolio, only three were built ("system built") for the express purpose of accommodating asylum seekers. The majority of the portfolio comprises buildings which had a different initial purpose i.e. former hotels, guesthouses (B&B), hostels, former convents / nursing Homes, a holiday camp and a mobile home site.

The mobile home site is located in Athlone and the "system built" centres are:

- Knockalisheen, Co. Clare (State-owned);
- Kinsale Road, Cork City (State-owned);
- Baleskin, Co Dublin;

The seven state-owned centres are:

- Knockalisheen, Co. Clare;
- Kinsale Road, Cork City;
- Atlas House, Killarney;
- Atlas House, Tralee;
- Johnston Marina, Tralee;
- Park Lodge , Killarney;
- Athlone.