

# **Youth Needs and Service Provision in Fethard**

**A Study conducted June-August 2005**

**Commissioned by  
Fethard & Killusty Community Council**

**Prepared by Tipperary Institute**

*Look at Fethard from a child's perspective and make sure young people are listened to...*

**Fethard Girl Aged 14**

## **1. Executive Summary**

### **1.1 Findings and Recommendations**

In May 2005, Tipperary Institute was commissioned by Fethard and Killusty Community Council to conduct an analysis of the needs of young people in the Fethard area. The purpose of the analysis was to assist the Community Council in developing appropriate responses to meeting youth needs and in introducing services and facilities into the town for the young. Over the period June to August 2005, 116 young people between the ages of 10-18 were interviewed. In addition, 22 adults who are involved with young people as care providers, service deliverers or in a club or sporting context were interviewed.

The study concluded that for the young, Fethard has many positive features. Young people, particularly boys, have access to a wide range of sporting activities in the town. All of these sporting activities are organised by adult volunteers and obviously demand great dedication and time investment. The young people interviewed like the friendly atmosphere of the town and the close nature of community life. It was heartening, and perhaps surprising to hear that they had a very high appreciation of the history of the town and features such as the town wall were very popular and important to them.

On the negative side, and for all respondents of all age groups, the related themes of 'having nothing to do', 'having nowhere to go' and the lack of facilities was a major concern. For all respondents, from pre-teens to adults, this was without question their main concern. While Fethard has the usual mix of clubs and activities and is well-served by the sporting organisations, there is no organised, designated space for young people to mix, to develop and to express themselves. For young people who may be troubled, excluded or marginalised in some way there is little or nothing. Girls are particularly poorly catered for, both on the sporting front and in a general lack of facilities for them. Issues of poor provision are compounded by a lack of co-ordination between the services that do exist.

For the adult respondents the issues of alcohol and drug abuse among the young were major concerns. Under-age drinking was noted among both boys and girls, with a general view that by age 15, drinking was quite common and drug abuse was also believed to be widespread. Causes cited were easy access to alcohol, negative peer pressure and a lack of alternative activities and facilities for young people. For the pre-teens, aged 10-13, alcohol and drug abuse was also a worry. An anti-drink, anti-drug attitude was pervasive among the primary

school children interviewed. This resistance seems to disappear as the young move into the teenage years. The fact that under-age drinking and drug use was not emphasised by the older teenagers interviewed does not mean that this behaviour is not occurring. It could be that the young people were embarrassed or afraid to mention these issues; it may also be the case that they do not see taking alcohol or drugs as problematic.

Most of the adults interviewed were worried that the lack of parental involvement in youth activities was one of the main factors inhibiting the development of youth services. They linked the lack of adult volunteers to a lack of supervision, a reduction in the number of youth leaders available and the under-utilisation of existing services. Many mentioned poor parenting skills.

Anti-social behaviour among young people in Fethard was noted. Vandalism and bullying was reported by the younger boys and girls and the smaller ones in particular feel intimidated at times by some of the older teenagers. This behaviour was linked to availability of alcohol, drugs and social exclusion. Some very young children are involved and negative leadership from older youth is a problem. The need for a stronger Garda presence and a focus on prevention was a recurring theme.

One quite striking negative finding was how negatively labelled the young people felt by adults. Many believed that adults held them in a poor light, and felt categorised as bad and as troublemakers by adults.

Many young people in Fethard are at risk of poverty and marginalisation. Some are living in homes where money is tight, parents are under pressure and there are few if any supports available from the State. Respondents were concerned about early school leaving in Fethard. Negative experiences of parents within the education system, discipline issues and the lack of support to education initiatives to counter disadvantage were noted. It is generally accepted that a (sizeable) proportion of families in Fethard find themselves in a situation of compound disadvantage where poor education leads to reduced employment opportunities, lack of access to training means that ability to retrain is restricted and the feeling of marginalisation and isolation is augmented by physical isolation in 'invisible' housing estates located on the fringes of the town. The concentration of housing development in large estates at one end of the town was unacceptable to respondents. Local authority policy in this regard was criticised as leading to anti-social behaviour with negative implications for many residents, in particular the elderly.

## **1.2 Recommendations for Community Action**

1. It is recommended that a Forum for Youth be established in Fethard. This could consist of an Adult support group made up of concerned adults in the area, such as those interviewed and be affiliated to the Community Council and may have a Youth committee (see 5 below), made up of representatives of the young. These groups may then be facilitated to develop an Action Plan for youth in the area.
2. Fethard needs to join with other areas in the Slievardagh area in developing a strategy specifically focusing on meeting young people's needs. Priorities for this group might include securing funding to facilitate provision of services for young people
  - It is important that models of best practice in other youth focused projects are visited and investigated.
  - It is imperative that a professional youth worker is employed if real and meaningful change is to occur.
  - Politicians need to be lobbied to put Rural Youth work on the political agenda.
3. Voluntary youth organisations have an important part to play in the delivery of services to youth and communities, both disadvantaged and advantaged. The re-establishment of the Youth club and the development of other services for youth in the town, perhaps with the support of Foroige or TRYSS, and with more involvement of adults is a priority.
4. It is important that a youth committee made up of representatives of the various age-groups and of both boys and girls be established. It is important that this group receives training, is well structured and is in a position to actively participate in the development of the Action Plan. It is important that Youth leadership courses and initiatives such as 'Big Brother'/'Big Sister' mentoring are developed in order to encourage healthier relationships among young people.
5. For the younger children and teenagers, the re-establishment of cubs, brownies, scouts and guides is important and this should be given priority also.
6. It is important to young people that they feel respected and listened to. It is imperative that some actions take place in the short-term to ensure that the goodwill generated by the research is not replaced by cynicism on the part of the young people.

Activities such as day-trips, a film for youth, dance classes or a supervised disco could be organised easily and quickly and success built on these small achievements.

7. When asked for their ideas about changes that would make living in Fethard better for them, the most popular suggestions among the teenagers were around having a place of their own where they could meet other peers and have a place that they could call their own. Through this research, the Community Council has gained a clear endorsement from the young people of Fethard to develop a youth centre catering for their leisure needs and to include a café type area that the young people can call their own.
8. In any initiative with young people, it is also important to introduce a range of developmental activities, and with young people taking ownership of the process themselves wherever possible. A mix of activities such as the following deserve consideration:
  - Youth Information, Health and Safety Awareness
  - Music rehearsal room
  - Education classes/FETAC classes
  - Theatre, dance and exhibition space
  - Confidential counselling
9. It is essential that particular attention be paid to young people at risk of poverty, isolation and marginalisation. Specialised support from the various agencies should be sought and services and facilities developed for these young people as appropriate.
10. The development of sports activities for those not involved in team activities at present is a priority. Many boys are not involved in sports to date and are thus at risk of marginalisation. It is important that girls are given priority in this as they are so poorly catered for at present. Development in areas such as soccer and boxing may appeal to boys not already involved in team activities. It may be possible to increase use of certain existing facilities by organising for example Tennis, Golf and Handball tuition for those not involved in team sports.
11. It is important that Drug and alcohol information and diversion programmes be implemented for young people and concerned parents. The assistance and expertise of the TRYS and other drug initiatives is important here and Fethard needs affiliation to

such networks. Awareness raising for local publicans and retailers around youth needs and alcohol and drug awareness is another priority area to be addressed.

12. It is recommended that the various organisations such as the schools, parents groups, sports organisations and the community council work together to develop responses both to prevent early school leaving and to support those who have already left. The assistance of concerned State agencies such as the VEC is important in this.
13. It is recommended that the existing facilities in Fethard are developed and inclusive of young people. The Tirry centre for example could become a community-based youth centre or drop-in facility while other initiatives develop. The excellent local website could be used to host a directory for organisations in the area and a youth 'notice board'. The young people could compile a local directory of active and community services, clubs and activities, with contact information, explaining, in a socially inclusive manner, what they do and how one can get involved. The young could be involved in environmental awareness projects such as Bulb planting and Community/River cleanup. A junior section of Historical Society could be established for example and could participate in the already successful Fethard tour guide for summer visitors.
14. It is important to encourage young people to become involved in the Arts. Simple initiatives such as encouraging young musicians to perform in public during the summer, a camera club with a youth section and the possibility of a designated 'art' wall may be explored. The Arts Facilitator in South Tipperary County Council may be contacted to convey the need for development of youth arts programmes in Fethard. (Ann Ryan on 062 64736 or email [ann.ryan@southtippercoco.ie](mailto:ann.ryan@southtippercoco.ie).) The South Tipperary Arts Centre arts programmes that involve young people to meet the specific needs of Fethard's youth. (Contact Ronnie Fitzgerald, the Outreach/Education officer on 052-27877.)
15. The inter-generational aspect of local development as proposed by the Community council is important in breaking down barriers between the generations. The mixed-age use facility proposed is an important option to develop and explore. Ways to encourage dialogue with the young people need development. Initiatives such as recruiting and training older people in the community as youth volunteers are important. It is also positive to encourage a culture of praising young people: for

example, create a 'Fethard Youth of the Month' award, covering all ages and activities and make a public presentation each month at the Youth Club to reward some individual and/or group achievement. Both young and old take great pride in the history of Fethard; this is common ground so build on it. Ideas such as a competition for each street/area to take part in collecting stories and reminiscences to encourage such dialogue and deepen inter-generational ties might be explored.

### **1.3 Recommended Actions for Parents**

In a vastly changing world, society needs to take heed of the profoundly important needs of young people and make the necessary provisions to try to satisfy them. An adequate response must be community based. There must be some way found through which the community can exercise care for its own young members so that families are supported rather than isolated. Community based voluntary youth organisations are an important contribution to this end.

Given the concern about parenting issues and issues relating to marginalisation it is necessary to develop links with specialist organisations to assist the community in developing a strategy to support parents in Fethard. Organisations such as Barnardos or Foroige may be called on to assist in this regard. Foróige, for example, sets out to support families and family life in its youth work programmes and services. The practical means by which the organisation seeks to support and strengthen families includes family life education for young people, general parenting education, personal development training for young mothers and specific education and providing developmental opportunities for disadvantaged young people and their parents.

It is recommended that a Parent Support group be established in Fethard to allow dialogue, contact and mutual support to occur. The assistance of the Community Council, local organisations and the schools may be enlisted to this end. Some of the initiatives this Parent Support group could explore are the following:

- A Volunteering programme for parents could be organised. A first step may be to find ways of emphasising the importance of parental support for the activities that their children are involved in. A survey of parents to establish barriers to volunteering may prove interesting.
- Organise meetings in the various areas of town with a view to isolating the difficulties and issues facing parents and develop a strategy with these groups.

Linkages such as those made with the Fethard women's groups are important and should be nurtured and maintained.

- Based on these discussions and if appropriate parenting skills courses may be developed. Again the assistance of the statutory and voluntary youth organisations is important if effective courses are to be organised.
- Interesting courses in nutrition and cooking courses to improve skills and demonstrate the links between junk food and unruly behaviour could be organised
- Investigate and develop ways of fully supporting the parents' councils in each of the three schools.
- Contact the National Parents Council to set up workshops for parents to support students making the transition from primary to secondary school. For details tel: 01-887404
- Develop links with organisations such as Treoir, the national co-ordinating body of both statutory and voluntary agencies dedicated to supporting single parents. [Www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie) <mailto:info@treoir.ie>



## Actions for Agencies

1. Fethard in particular and the Slieveardagh area in general has been neglected in terms of facility development and investment in community resources. Larger urban centres, albeit still lacking in facilities, have received disproportionate amounts of investment. The quality and level of voluntary effort and commitment to sports and other developmental activities for young people needs to be much more heavily supported and subsidised by State agencies. The practical and political support of all concerned state agencies is important in redressing the balance of investment into rural towns.
2. Youth development or the converse, youth disadvantage, needs to be linked to the overall development, or lack of same, within the geographic area itself. Tackling youth issues cannot occur in isolation, particularly where issues of disadvantage are a causal factor of negative behaviour. A holistic approach to tackling marginalisation, disadvantage and lack of state services in Fethard and the wider area needs consideration.
3. It is vital that a dedicated youth service is developed in the area. The support of state agencies in securing this is important.
4. Training facilities for rural youth are a priority given the number of early school leavers and the lack of facilities for them in the immediate area. It is recommended that the statutory agencies give this issue due attention.
5. Proper housing and infrastructural development is crucial given the issues of poor quality of life and anti-social behaviour in some of the local authority estates. Any future housing development should not repeat the mistakes of clustering disadvantage and poor service provision reported in this research. Proper community participation in the planning and development of new housing and the development of adequate services pre-development is essential.
6. It is essential that particular attention be paid to young people at risk of poverty, isolation and marginalisation. Specialised support from the various agencies is urgently required and services and facilities developed for these young people as appropriate.

7. It is recommended that the various social services visit schools more often and develop a positive relationship with students and their parents.
8. It is important to local people that Gardai have a more visible presence in Fethard. It is recommended that Gardai set up Juvenile Diversion Programme using Restorative Justice Principles and mediation skills. It is also recommended that the schools request a Garda Schools Programme to improve linkages and communication.
9. Agencies need to support the schools in developing adult literacy classes and to expand special needs support and to expand career guidance support.
10. It is important that Drug and alcohol information and diversion programmes be implemented for young people and concerned parents. The assistance and expertise of the TRYS and other drug initiatives is important here. Awareness raising for local publicans and retailers around youth needs and alcohol and drug awareness is another priority area to be addressed.
11. It is recommended that the various organisations such as the schools, parents groups, sports organisations and the community council work together to develop responses both to prevent early school leaving and to support those who have already left. The assistance of concerned State agencies such as the VEC is important in this.

## **2. The Context.**

Over the past number of years, there has been an increase at least in the rhetoric of commitment to developing services for youth in Ireland. The Youth Work Act of 2001 places youth work in Ireland on a statutory basis for the first time. It provides a legal framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services by the Department of Education and Science and the Vocational Education Committees. Many concerned parties hoped that the plan would contribute to a well co-ordinated, integrated and effective service to young people in Ireland.

However, several critics believe that the lack of sufficient support for rural youth work is a weakness. It is very difficult for youth organisations to get funded under any budget line to provide and support youth work in rural areas whereas in some urban areas significant resources were available. Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that youth organisations have had to reduce their rural work due to the large increase in urban provision in recent years. This lack of investment is mirrored clearly in small towns and villages like Fethard. Without a very strong input from volunteers, the schools and concerned community organisations, there would be little or nothing for young people to do.

The United States Youth Programme lays out 5 principles to guide youth development. These are:

- ◆ Ongoing relationships with caring adults
- ◆ Safe places and structured activities
- ◆ A healthy start for a healthy future
- ◆ Marketable skills through effective education
- ◆ Opportunities to serve

Here in Ireland, the philosophy of youth organisations such as Foroige and the National Youth Federation is that every young person has the right and obligation to develop him/herself and society. All have a right to put their mark upon the world; to create what ought to be rather than simply adapt to what is; to develop their uniqueness and potential and to be able to say that their presence in this world made a positive difference. This very positive thinking is perhaps not strongly reflected in the perceptions of adults. Young people are often regarded as a problem rather than a resource; youth as a force to be controlled rather than developed.

A Foroige Report of 2000 ( *Foroige Challenge 2000: Meeting Youth needs in the New Millennium*) stated that there is a sense in which modern society has lost touch with the young. It tends to see the mass of youth as concerned almost solely with school on the one hand and a frivolous or even hedonistic pursuit of pleasure on the other.

Foroige's research is very clear with regard to young people's attitudes to being perceived in a negative light. They find it offensive. They are clear that they want respect and positive regard from their community. They make clear in their own words that they do not all want to be "tarred with the same brush", to be "seen as trouble makers" or to have society "look down on them". The research in Fethard would demonstrate that this is also the case.

*"Even the most truculent and difficult children can show a surprisingly generous readiness to accept just sanctions, but a fierce resistance to being blamed or judged".*

*There are many aspects to young people and it is the responsibility of society to free itself from a diminished perception of the young and substitute in its place a realistic view of their personalities and lives. Society needs to develop a view of the mass of youth as individual persons who are members of families – sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; people who are friends and confidants of others; people who are concerned with the present and worry and hope about the future; people who want to be involved in the community and play their part in the work of society; people who enjoy healthy fun and frolics appropriate to their age; people who ponder serious matters of great concern to themselves and their society; people who know the reality of pressure and stress; people who sometimes make mistakes and do what is wrong and people who need the guidance and leadership of adult society. (Foroige 2000)*

The basic requirement for society is to view adolescents as persons; albeit persons at a particular age and with particular needs. Armed with this realism, society may be able to make appropriate provision to advance the wellbeing and development of its young people. The adherence to a caricature instead of reality is to virtually ensure that society cannot respond appropriately to the needs of youth and cannot make good the deficiencies that endure in society's existing provisions for the proper development of the young.

Voluntary youth organisations have an important role to play in the delivery of services to youth and communities, both disadvantaged and advantaged. This is being increasingly recognised in Ireland. A major strength of voluntary youth organisations is that they are able

to involve competent people from the local neighbourhood and community to deal with local problems. Such people are major resources especially when working in partnership with other youth and community serving agencies. A major difficulty facing voluntary youth organisations, despite recent improvements, is their inadequate funding by the State. If voluntary youth organisations are to make the contribution of which they are capable, they will need additional substantial funding.

For the Fethard and Killusty Community Council, inter-generational harmony and understanding is a priority. In a document developed in March 2004 (Convent Hall Proposal) the Council outlined their vision of developing an inter-generational facility at the Convent Hall site. Hopefully for Fethard this report and its recommendations can be a step on the way to a positive engagement between all residents of the town, whatever their age.

## Methodology.

In May 2005, Tipperary Institute was commissioned by Fethard and Killusty Community Council to conduct an analysis of the needs of young people in the Fethard area. The purpose of the analysis was to assist the Community Council in developing appropriate responses to meeting youth needs and in introducing facilities in the town for the young. Over the period June to August 2005, 116 young people between the ages of 10-18 were interviewed. In addition, 22 adults who are involved with young people as care providers, service deliverers or in a club or sports context were interviewed. Forms used for this purpose are included as appendices to this document.

The research used a mainly qualitative approach to data collection although some gathering of statistical data was necessary. Since the purpose of the research is essentially exploratory in nature a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate in gathering information that would reveal the opinions and feelings of research respondents.

Various approaches common to qualitative research were used:

- Key informant interviews to collect information on opinions and needs.
- Group interviews to gather opinions
- Young people were also asked to fill out a simple assessment sheet called an H form so that there was a record of their opinions.

Data collection took place over the period June-August 2005. 22 individual interviews were carried out with adults. The sample of adult respondents represented different categories including those involved in the local community, education and training, parents of young people and volunteers involved in running activities for young people in Fethard. Prior to commencing the research *per se* key documents such as the Census were scanned for information.

***Table A Census Data 2002-Numbers and ages of people aged 10-18 in Fethard DED***

Age	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Totals
Male	18	12	10	11	12	12	12	15	16	118
Female	13	12	4	5	11	9	16	16	12	98
Total	31	24	14	16	23	20	28	31	28	216

Group interviews were carried out with a total of 116 young people. Two of these were held in the Primary schools with 10-13 year olds. The remaining interviews were held in the Tirry Centre and one session was held in the Judo club and one in Killusty. The young people attending were interviewed in groups about the aspects of life in Fethard they liked and disliked; about issues and problems affecting them and their suggestions for improvement. They were also asked to fill in a simple assessment form as a record of their views.

***Table B Profile of Interviewees 2005***

<b>Age</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Male</b>	1	9	7	12	3	8	7	0	3	50
<b>Female</b>	1	11	17	10	12	6	3	3	3	66
<b>Total</b>	2	20	24	22	15	14	10	3	6	116

In general the interviews went well. In the schools the interviewers met with very enthusiastic young people who were very open with their views and opinions. The structured environment of the classroom also meant that interviews were easier to conduct. Initially it was difficult to meet with the older youth as post-primary school was closed for summer holidays. However there was an enthusiastic response to advertisements for young people to attend meetings. The 2002 Census states that there were 216 people aged 10-18 years in Fethard DED at that time. This survey covered 116 young people, which, despite demographic shifts in the intervening years, means that over half of the young population of the DED participated in the research, which is a very high response rate.

A few issues deserve mention re Methodology:

- More girls than boys turned up for interview
- It was much easier to engage the younger group 10-13 as they were at school
- Very few 17-18 year olds were interviewed
- While most interviews went smoothly, on occasions it was difficult to engage the interviewees due to large numbers, youthful high spirits and sometimes reluctance to talk due to embarrassment, shyness etc.

## 4. Findings from the Research

### 4.1 Teenagers aged 13-18

70 young people aged from 13-18 years participated in interviews and 68 completed H forms. When asked to complete the form stating *some things I like about living in Fethard*, the following were the most frequently mentioned aspects:

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Frequency of mention</i>
• Sports	21
• Friendly People	20
• The Town wall/Historical sites	11
• Friends	6
• Judo club	6
• Relaxed/feel safe	5
• Shops	5
• The walks around town	4
• Small town	4

When asked to list *Some things I dislike about Fethard*, the following emerged:

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Frequency of mention</i>
• Nothing to do	32
• Nowhere to go to meet	23
• Negative labelling by adults	13
• Boring	10
• Alcohol	9
• Drugs	7
• Violence	5
• Not much for girls	4
• Nothing but sport	3

On analysing the H-Forms submitted by the young people it was clear that sports featured as a major area of interest. The GAA was mentioned as a source of activity and of pride, especially for the boys. Other sporting activities such as rugby, ladies football, swimming, volleyball and athletics were mentioned. One bone of contention seems to be that the tennis courts are locked for much of the time and therefore inaccessible. Judo is a very popular activity also and was mentioned by many enthusiastic participants. The point was made that there is little sports provision for girls, and that while boys of all ages are catered for in sporting terms, girls are not. Comments such as *there is not much sport for girls...boys get all the support in sports* were typical. Another noted this gender divide who said that *sport is available but boys are catered for all age groups whereas girls are limited*.



A number of boys wanted to see Soccer available in Fethard; this was strongly recommended on a number of occasions to the interviewers. There is also a demand for boxing among the boys. The provision of these two sports might appeal to boys who are not included in other sports and who may feel marginalised as a result.

Another aspect of the town that was a positive was the people. Many young people like the friendly atmosphere in Fethard. One girl said that *It is a quiet and small town, the people are friendly and the town wall is a nice place to visit*, others liked the intimate nature of the town *You're close to everybody*. For others, the fact that *everybody gets on* was important and many agreed with the statement that Fethard is a *nice little community*. It is perhaps interesting to note that while there was a note of appreciation around the small, safe intimate nature of the town and its rural setting, the facilities that some young people expected were more in character with a larger urban area such as Clonmel. This is a contradiction that perhaps needs more exploration.

It was heartening and perhaps surprising to read from the sheets that the young people had a very high appreciation of the history of Fethard. Many positively commented on aspects such as the town wall. Others mentioned the scenery and the buildings as features they liked. The walks around the town were another positive for them. It is interesting to note that this heritage aspect should attract so many comments from the youth; this is perhaps the result of a number of developments in the town-the special nature of the walls themselves and the potential that youth might see in that; the emphasis given to local history at school and the high level of community pride and involvement in conservation and restoration. These positive comments provide a basis for action that could be built on and developed by any youth initiative.

On the negative side the related themes of 'having nothing to do', 'having nowhere to go to meet and socialise with friends' and the 'boring' nature of Fethard were overwhelming. Of the 68 forms completed, a cumulative total of 65 mentions of these aspects of life in Fethard was calculated. For this age group (13-18 years) this was without question their main concern. While Fethard has the usual mix of clubs and activities and is well served by the sporting organisations there is very little to allow young people to mix socially except in the pubs. For young people on the margins who are not involved in organised activities there is little or nothing.

A typical comment was that *After school you don't have much to do, just hanging around (Girl 14 years)*. Another believed that *We can only hang around the streets doing nothing*. It was indeed obvious to the interviewers during the research that there were a lot of teenagers 'hanging around' the main street, sitting on the town wall or outside the 'chipper' with apparently nothing to do. While there is perhaps nothing intrinsically wrong with being in a public place together the potential for boredom to lead to anti-social behaviour or vandalism must be noted. This was also an issue for the young people themselves. One typical comment was *if there was a place for us all to meet up there would not be as much vandalism in our town*. Another noted that *some things get vandalised and broken by teenagers that are bored and feel they have nothing better to do*.

**It is concluded from the research therefore that outside of sport there is little for teenagers to do in Fethard except to congregate in unsupervised public places where the potential for boredom to develop into anti-social behaviour and substance abuse is high.**

One quite disturbing finding of the research was how negatively labelled the young people felt by adults. *Adults just think that we are all the same and have no respect...if someone does something all of us get blamed*. Some young people believed that older people referred to youth as 'thugs', 'troublemakers', and 'scumbags'. Others felt that the adults praised them when they succeeded at sport but ignored them otherwise. Some felt judged and labelled, particularly when they are in a group, whereas they were 'okay' when alone. Other perceptions that the youth had were that adults thought of them as 'bold, cheeky and lazy'. Another young girl wished that adults could *look at Fethard from a child's perspective and make sure young people are listened to*. **In the light of this discussion, the intergenerational aspect of the programme proposed by the Community Council would make a lot of sense in breaking down misunderstanding between different age-groups.**

It was also quite disturbing to note that within this age group there is a group of disaffected youth, particularly boys who expressed some very negative opinions about the town and life in general. Some comments from them included that Fethard is a dump, is 'crap' and has nothing decent about it. Seven boys wrote that they liked nothing about the place. It was interesting to note that despite this negativity, they would like to see Soccer developed in the town as well as other facilities such as Boxing and Snooker. **Any youth facility needs to address the needs of youth who feel marginalised if they are not to develop further negative attitudes and behaviour.**

From interviews with adults it would appear that concern on the drug issue has grown over the last few years and that drugs are becoming more prevalent. It is interesting that while 7 young people mentioned drugs as a negative aspect of life in Fethard, most respondents did not mention the issue or were unwilling or unable to discuss the issue. While there was certainly concern among this older age group about drugs, the issue did not feature in any way as highly as for the adults interviewed, nor indeed does it mirror the opinions of the primary school boys and girls who were very concerned about these issues. One girl said... *the people where I live, all they do is drink*; another said that there were *people taking over nice areas to drink and use drugs in large groups*. A young boy wanted to *stop drugs being sold in Fethard because it causes the violence* ( male 15).

Most of the adults mentioned under-age drinking as an issue. The existence of a drink culture was spoken about by a number of adults and they worried that young people were being socialised into this culture at an early age. Many maintain that underage drinking is an issue as young people hang out in pubs, as there is nowhere else to go. The issue of alcohol did not feature as highly in the discussion with young people but 9 did mention it as a concern. This is not necessarily significant, as the interviewers did not specifically push them into a discussion on the topic. The fact that under-age drinking and drug use was not emphasised by this group does not at all mean that this behaviour is not happening. It could be that the young people were embarrassed in front of the interviewers and did not want to mention these issues. It may also be the case that they were afraid to mention these issues in front of their peers. It may also be the case that they do not see talking alcohol or drugs as problematic.

**Whatever the case it is clear that under-age drinking and abuse of drugs is widespread in Fethard and leads to problems for young people with regards to health and safety. Elements of fear and intimidation were mentioned by this age-group as well as by the younger children.** One said that *Some of the people are dangerous...rough people hang out on street corners*. One young girl said *I dropped out of school because of bullying* Peer intimidation was another issue. On getting involved in youth activities one girl said *We'd like to be involved but not to be leaders as we might be jeered at so it's safer to be part of something and not stand out*.

When asked for ideas about making Fethard a better place the most popular H-Form replies were as follows:

Suggestion for improvement	Frequency of mentions
A Place to meet/Youth cafe	27
Indoor sports (soccer, basketball, handball, boxing etc)	23
Disco	17
Swimming pool	16
Pool/snooker	12
A Youth Club	8
Arcade	6
Park/Playground	5
Cinema	4

When asked for their ideas for changes that would make living in Fethard better for them the most popular suggestions among the teenagers were around having a place of their own where they could meet other peers and have a place that they could call their own. The suggestions were around having a café to ‘hang out’ in for the day, a place to sit and chat, and somewhere with a jukebox. One girl expressed it as wanting *a place for us to sit down or play pool and things like that instead of having to be in the Barracks field all the time*. Another set a positive note in that she wanted to participate in some creative activity *we should be off the streets and be involved in things*. Another young person was keen that the Community Council would go ahead and *build a place where we could go and do something and not be judged*.

**Whatever the motivation it is clear that the Community Council have gained a clear endorsement from the young people of Fethard to develop a youth centre catering for their leisure needs and to include a café type area that the young people can call their own.**

The next most popular suggestion was to develop sports for those not already catered for. This group would include boys who are not involved in sports to date and are thus at risk of marginalisation. Soccer, basketball, handball and boxing were all mentioned as sports that could be established and that could at least commence in an indoor setting. It is important that

girls are a priority in this as they are so poorly catered for at present. Sports for girls as well as dance and keep-fit were popular suggestions. **It is therefore important that sports facilities for girls are developed as a priority as well as sports such as soccer and boxing that may appeal to boys not already involved in team activities.**

Two other popular suggestions were Discos and a Swimming pool. While discos are a popular choice among the young, the interviewers picked up certain reluctance among the older people about them. Fears of drinking, drugs and fighting among the youth are concerns. This is understandable. However, the nearest discos are in Clonmel and Killenaule and parents may prefer to have their children socialise in Fethard instead of other towns where the risk of trouble may be higher. Perhaps a compromise solution might be to set up a small committee of parents and young people who could investigate the idea of running a few alcohol-free discos and perhaps run one on a trial basis to see how that goes prior to committing to running them on a regular basis.

The idea of developing a swimming pool while attractive is unlikely to happen in Fethard as funding would be difficult to obtain and running costs prohibitive. However, it might be possible to organise a weekly bus run from Fethard to the pool in Clonmel, which would facilitate travel and access for those young people who cannot easily get to a pool otherwise. There was also a good deal of support from this group about re-establishing the Youth Club in Fethard. Several young people had been members of the youth club and were disappointed that it stopped functioning. **The re-establishment of the Youth club, perhaps with the support of Foroige or TRYS, and with more involvement of adults is a priority.**

## **4.2 Primary School Interviews**

Group interviews and H-form surveys were completed with 20 boys and 26 girls in St Patrick's Primary school and Nano Nagle School. The students were 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class and aged between 10-13 with an average age of 12. The students were very lively, interested groups and gave the interviewers a warm welcome. They seemed to be happy to participate in the research, even if some of the boys appeared a little quiet.

### 4.2.1 St Patrick's National School

In terms of positive aspects of Fethard, the boys are aware of the history of the town and spoke of it with pride. Games/sports are big areas of interest with hurling, rugby and football mentioned. The chipper, pubs, the sweet shop and the car boot sale were mentioned positively. The town wall and Augustinian church were all referred to. The people and the importance of friends also came through.

The answers given on the H-form about some things they liked about Fethard were as follows and the numbers indicate the frequency of mention:

- The various shops 19
- Sports facilities /Sports in general 19
- The People 10
- Historical Sites 9
- Pubs/restaurants 11
- Ballroom/Bingo 6
- Places to go 3

In terms of dislikes, the overwhelming answer was that outside of sport there is little for the boys to do. A sense of being deprived of access to the various sports grounds was expressed (gates are locked) as well as a sense of dismay as to why this should be so. Several mentioned 'nothing to do' as a feature of life in Fethard. The boys were also averse to the level of drinking and alcohol use in public places and so-called 'bush-drinking'. Vandalism affects the young boys and they feel intimidated by this behaviour. The problems identified as being of concern to the young people in Fethard at present included:

- Bullying by older teenagers.
- The threat of being attacked especially by rival 'gangs'.
- Drink and drugs were criticised as being responsible for some of the anti-social behaviour in the town. An anti-drink, anti-smoking culture seemed to prevail

among this class. They felt that there were too many public houses in Fethard. Older people buying alcohol for those who are underage came in for a lot of criticism also.

- The 'back lane' was mentioned as an area to be avoided especially if one is alone. Some of the boys cannot take their dogs down there, as the risk of broken bottles is too great
- The recent robberies in the town seemed to have had an impact on the boys.

H-form analysis gave the following result about aspects of life in Fethard they dislike:

- Nothing to do 12
- Drink/alcohol 9
- Vandalism/graffiti 7
- School 5
- Drugs 5
- Smoking 5
- Not enough shops 3
- Rough people 3

Apart from the 'field sports' available in Fethard it appears that many of them travel to Clonmel for swimming and shopping. The cost was of major concern. The fact that so many parents now have to work outside the home and are thus unavailable to get involved in activities with their children posed a problem in regard to transportation. Several boys referred to their time in the Cubs, which has now been disbanded due to lack of volunteers. There was a sense of indignation that no explanation had been given to the boys themselves as to the reason for the disbandment. The other suggestions were: cycling, play station, golf and meeting friends

It was interesting to observe that some had difficulty in dealing with the column: "Some things I don't like about living in Fethard", and attempted to fill it in nearing the end of the exercise. Does this suggest that despite some of the negative responses, that overall their perception of life in Fethard is for the most part positive?

*They were extremely keen on the idea of having a Youth Centre facility for activities. There was a most enthusiastic response to this suggestion.*

Regarding the issue of the activities for such a centre the boys had lots of ideas:

- Games room: snooker/pool room, similar to 'Circles' in Clonmel.
- Cinema
- Crazy golf
- Bowling alley
- Air Hockey
- Leisureplex/ Swimming club.
- Somewhere with a jukebox to 'hang out'.
- Gymnasium.

#### *Suggestions for improvement-H Form*

1. Swimming pool and Leisure centre 14
2. Games shop/Video games 11
3. Arcade 8
4. Pool/snooker 8
5. Scouts 5
6. Music club 5
7. Soccer 6
8. More sports 4
9. Cinema 4
10. Café 4

#### 4.2.2 Nano Nagle School

The group of girls were very enthusiastic and easy to engage. When asked what they liked about Fethard, the historical nature of the town scored highly and 21 out of the 26 girls wrote that the history of the town and ancient features were a positive feature of Fethard. The natural resources scored highly. The people of the town were a positive they noted, as was their school and the teachers. The various facilities such as music, bingo, ladies football, disco dancing, sports facilities and drama were all mentioned. In terms of things they do not like, the Gangs and anti-social behaviour by older teenagers was their main concern. These young girls mentioned this frequently. They are worried about intimidation, bullying when they go to Secondary school and the older boys and girls picking on the smaller ones. They are also very concerned about teenage drinking by the town wall, the river and the back lane. They



maintain that teenagers are bored or are showing off when they behave in this way. Others mentioned the lack of a Garda presence and the girls expressed a concern about the lack of Gardai in several occasions. Early school leaving was also an issue they brought up.

The issue of a lack of facilities was a major source of concern. Having no facilities and nothing to do was expressed frequently as an issue for them and as an explanation for the anti-social behaviour of older teenagers. Issues around smoking and drugs were of great concern to the girls.

It seems that they must go elsewhere for shopping and entertainment. Transport seems to be an issue and the expense of getting to facilities in Clonmel was a factor. They also fear harassment and bullying from Clonmel girls when they go there. There seems to be an expectation that they should have access to facilities associated with larger urban centres.

It would appear that these girls do not see older teenagers as allies. There appeared to be an understanding of the lack of facilities for teenagers but the discussion ended in a criticism of that age group instead. It appears that these children are very much aware of the problems in Fethard.

All agreed that not many girls' sports were available, and many wished that the 'Brownies' were still active. This discussion was quite negative in tone. The girls spoke of the 'young people' as if there was a huge age gap. They saw adults as being suspicious of them and the conversation returned to the 'moral dilemmas' such as lack of respect, stealing etc.

They seem to have more fears than hopes with references to drugs, too many houses being built, and the recent burglary in the town made them fear for their safety. Bullying was also a cause of concern from their perspective, with one little girl saying '*I don't want to grow up*'. They also expressed concern about the back lane behind the Housing estates as an area of anti-social behaviour.

*Overall the girls were positive, enthusiastic and extremely hopeful that a youth facility would be available to them in the short-to-medium term.*

*What do you like about living in Fethard? H Form responses-Girls*

- *Some things I like about living in Fethard*

- Historical Sites 21
- Natural Resources 15
- Friendly people 12
- Ladies Football 11
- Disco dancing lessons 11
- School and teachers 11
- Sports facilities and clubs 8
- Drama 7
- Nice place to live 7
- Restaurants 6
- Music in school 4
- Rugby 4

*Some things I don't like about living in Fethard*

- Gangs 17
- Drinking 13
- No facilities 13
- Nothing to do 13
- Litter 11
- Drugs 9
- Smoking 8
- Rough town/violence 7
- Vandalism 6
- Graffiti 5
- Bullying 5

*Suggestions for improvement*

- Get rid of Gangs and bullying 9
- A youth club centre 9
- Clean up the town 8
- Stop the drinking 7
- Town park 3
- Cinema 3

### **4.3 Interviews with Adults**

In the course of investigating the factors that might place young people at risk, particularly the more vulnerable, the interviewers spoke individually to 22 adults about their concerns relating to young people living in Fethard. These informants were all involved with young people in Fethard on a regular basis, through sports and other community activities, and also as parents, care workers and teachers.

In the interviews, these key informants were guided through a series of questions regarding their concerns about young people and the risk behaviour they engage in (see section on Methodology). It was therefore left up to the informant to mention whatever they wanted under the heading of risk behaviour. Most had a range of concerns and all of their answers were noted and therefore informants were free to mention as many concerns as they wished. The following picture emerged from the 22 interviews:

- 20 cited poor service provision for young people as a major issue
- 19 mentioned alcohol as a concern
- 19 were worried about drug use
- 20 addressed the issue of parenting
- 15 were concerned about anti-social behaviour and ‘negative peer leadership’
- 15 were concerned about issues connected to school and career planning.
- 11 attributed social exclusion and disadvantage as being a factor in the lack of integration.
- 16 acknowledge that the decline in the numbers of organisers and volunteers is a worrying trend.
- 10 believed that there is a lack of co-ordination between agencies in Fethard.
- 13 expressed strong reservations regarding housing policy and planning in the town.

#### 4.3.1 Concern about poor service provision for youth in Fethard.

More than ninety percent of the respondents were critical of the low level of service provision for young people in Fethard. 'Service Provision' for the purpose of this research refers to access by young people to sporting and non-sporting activities. It also refers to the services provided by state agencies involved in youth support.

Most respondents agreed that sporting activities, particularly for boys was well provided for. Many acknowledged the great input by volunteers into activities for youth in Fethard. Young people who were not 'into' sport were at a huge disadvantage. 'Sports are based on ability; a lot of kids are not in' was one comment, and many of the adults are aware that nearly all of the sports in Fethard are team sports, 'and if you do not enjoy being in a team there is little else to get involved in'. Another said 'we have a high level of anti-social behaviour as they have nowhere to go if they are not into sport'

Respondents felt that there was little for girls to get involved in, in particular. One mother said that 'there is nothing for those who are not into sport, like my 3 girls'. Another believed that things have deteriorated and that there was 'little for girls, compared to years ago'. Another believed that 'the GAA caters for all ages of boys, but not for girls'.

Most of the respondents feel frustrated that the existing facilities are not being utilised or taken care of. 'There are beautiful facilities in Fethard but they are let run down'. We were told of a lively tennis scene in Fethard some years ago while today, 'the perfectly good tennis courts in Fethard have been let run down and a wall built around them, which killed the atmosphere'.

In Fethard, young people have nowhere to meet friends or socialise in a relaxed and supervised way. The lack of a youth club received a lot of attention. There is a great need for properly trained personnel to run this very important facility on a long-term basis. Respondents felt that it should be supervised, and that strong leadership and enthusiasm is needed. 'Bottom up services/taking ownership works. Top down doesn't work.'

Many acknowledged that some young people are difficult to motivate and that meeting the needs of this group is a challenge. 'Give them a safe environment' was the advice of one parent, while another said: 'Kids need to just hang out sometimes; things do not always have to be structured'.

On the other hand, two respondents felt that there were plenty of services in Fethard; 'I think they are spoiled for choice' was the opinion of one club leader while another stated: 'the problem is that some young people may belong to too many clubs and therefore cannot be committed to any one club'.

The fact that there are no regular discos was also discussed. While the risk involved in running them without adequate supervision was seen as a deterrent, there is fear that the teenagers may in fact be in greater danger by going elsewhere. "There is reluctance to run them in Fethard, but if we do not provide them, our kids are going to discos in Killenaule and Clonmel and may be in greater danger there'

The question: "*What services etc are available to young people in Fethard who experience problems/difficulties?*" was to be the most thought provoking. 'None' was the reply in the majority of cases. Because of the high numbers of teenagers in Fethard, the lack of a youth worker or counsellor was thought to be a priority in meeting the needs of young people who find themselves worried or in trouble. Some felt that the social services should be easier to access and not just in time of crisis. "I wish the social services were more 'user friendly'. If it was possible to liaise with them in seeking advise and not just in a time of crisis, this might remove the stigma of referral. They should visit the schools informally more often.'

Given the lack of services generally it is a matter of note and concern that there is nothing for children who may be permanently disadvantaged. As well as young people who may be marginalised by social circumstances there are no services for disabled or ethnic minority children in Fethard. While figures are difficult to come by, the 2002 census states that there were 12 travellers in Fethard at the time of the census. While reference was made during this research in the schools to Traveller children, they were not singled out for separate attention in this study, but there is no reason to believe that any particular services exist to meet their needs. The census also states that there were 14 children aged 0-14 who were disabled and 14 persons aged 15-24 who were disabled. Again there was no evidence that their particular needs are being met in Fethard.

**Generally then the respondents believe that outside of sport that there is little for young people to do in Fethard. Girls are particularly poorly catered for. There is nowhere for young people to go to meet and relax in a safe environment. Young people with**

**difficulties and problems are particularly vulnerable. There are no facilities for children and youth with a disability or for young Travellers.**

#### 4.3.2 Alcohol abuse amongst young people in Fethard

In the interviews, 19 informants mentioned alcohol as a major concern, and this issue combined with lack of facilities for youth and with worries about drug use, was a frequently mentioned risk factor.

Under age drinking was noted amongst both boys and girls from as young as 10-13 years old with the general view that by age 15, drinking was quite common. Indeed one person held the opinion that there was 'no specific profile and that it would shock most people to think it's their kids.'

Several respondents referred to the easy access young people have to alcohol in Fethard from a range of licensed outlets and how this issue is 'not being handled properly.' Respondents referred to the fact that young people are not being asked for ID; they noted the willingness of vendors to sell alcohol at any hour of the day, and they cited the frequency with which older teens purchased alcohol for younger ones.

For many of the respondents, the alcohol problem appeared to be growing worse and stated that under age drinking 'has seen a huge increase.' One person felt it 'was not a serious issue at the moment but could become so if we do not intervene on time.' Indeed one respondent felt sufficiently strongly enough to say that they felt 'very concerned about specific individuals and I'm sure that some young person will die.' Other serious concerns noted were that young people are drinking hard spirits, they are mixing drugs and drink, they were drinking and driving, and that alcohol was leading to them taking sexual risks.

Several people noted that the problem was worse in summer and at weekends, when outdoor drinking or 'ditch drinking' became more common. Outdoors drinking takes place most often in the quiet lanes and back roads of Fethard, as well as on the river walk and by the town walls. However one respondent thought the problem was actually worse in the winter, when drinking sessions could take place in secret under cover of darkness. A particular concern mentioned was that drinking sessions occur with mixed groups and with all ages present.

In addition to easy access to alcohol being a significant reason why young teenagers are drawn to alcohol, several respondents felt that 'bravado, peer pressure and wanting to be part

of the gang' were causes that exerted additional pressure on individuals in groups. For older teens, it was noted that a number have dropped out of school and are on the dole leading to boredom and alienation.

Other reasons proposed by informants for the extent of alcohol abuse by young people in Fethard are linked to wider society and rural social exclusion and these included alcoholism in the family, second generation unemployment, lack of parental supervision, the neglect of amenities for rural youth and the lack of a full-time Garda presence.

**Under-age drinking is a growing problem in Fethard caused by easy access to alcohol, negative peer pressure and lack of facilities for young people.**

#### 4.3.3 Drug use amongst young people in Fethard

19 respondents mentioned Drugs as a concern in relation to young people, making concerns about alcohol and drugs of equal importance amongst informants.

From the interviews with adults it would appear that concern on the drug issue has grown over the last few years and that drugs are becoming more available.

Several people noted that there has been an increase in the number of young people smoking hash and there was a general feeling that there is a growing drug problem in Fethard. As one respondent said 'Yes, there's no point in denying it, it's not out of control, but it is definitely more noticeable.' Another respondent who talks to young people a lot was 'in no doubt that they (youth) have access to drugs in Fethard.'

Respondents referred to availability of ecstasy, speed and hash. Several respondents observed that 'the (drug) problem came in from outside initially,' but that 'the pushers have moved in' and that drugs 'are now being supplied by locals right here in Fethard.'

The use of drugs was noted amongst boys and girls from ages 14 to 17 years. Worryingly, there appears to be a trend amongst young people to progress quickly to mixing drugs like ecstasy, speed and alcohol together. One respondent cited an instance of substance misuse following which 'one kid is now in rehab.'

The issue of negative leadership was mentioned more than once. The issues of peer pressure where 'one strong peer draws another,' plus a 'gang mentality' were cited as some of the reasons why drug use has taken hold. There was a worry expressed that younger kids are 'being led astray by older kids.' One respondent felt that 'a small group causes a lot of trouble, but they have hangers-on and the problem grows as a result.' Some adults considered the problem to be restricted to specific areas, and that 'the same names keep cropping up.'

In a broader sense, the lack of interests for young people and the lack of focus leading to boredom were recurring comments. 'The summer time is deadly' was how one adult put it. As with alcohol, drug abuse can be linked to family problems and social exclusion from wider society. 'Many children do not feel valued by either family or society' was one comment.

Several respondents made reference to the fact that drugs awareness and information used to be included in the Youth Club, which ran for three years until it closed down in 2003.

**The overall view of adults regarding drug use is that it is has become endemic in Fethard and that both boys and girls of all ages are at risk.**



#### 4.3.4 Concerns regarding Parenting

20 respondents referred to parenting as an important issue relating to youth needs in Fethard.

The comments on parenting fall into two broad categories:

- Parental involvement in youth activities
- Parenting skills

The lack of involvement by parents in the community was cited by 14 respondents as one of the main factors inhibiting the development of youth services. One respondent expressed the view ‘that parents should lead by example, and by becoming involved the kids will follow.’ The same individual felt ‘that we should be targeting the younger children and their parents to get involved in things at an earlier age.’

The issue of parental involvement is central to the perception of whether there are sufficient youth services in Fethard. Several respondents felt that ‘there are plenty of services and activities (for young people) but not enough parental involvement.’ This lack of adult volunteers is linked to a lack of supervision, a reduction in the number of youth leaders available and underutilisation of existing services. One respondent felt that ‘it’s hard to do anything without the parents’ involvement and cooperation.’ Respondents proposed various possible reasons why parents don’t get involved as volunteers in the community ‘because they are not interested’, ‘they are not bothered’, ‘they don’t care,’ or because ‘parents see activities for kids as a babysitting facility.’

What is also apparent is that parents in Fethard are, like modern parents generally, time poor. The rise in the numbers of women in the workforce means that, as one respondent remarked, ‘this time factor is something that is a feature of life now’ and prompted one informant to question ‘would parents be prepared to give time to leadership courses?’ Another comment was that ‘parents will give money but not time.’ Sadly, one comment indicated ‘that some of these youngster’s parents never come to encourage them, either at training or at competition.’ However a comment that ‘time is an issue, but should not be a deterrent’ seemed apposite.

The need for input by both mothers and fathers has its basis in very practical needs. One respondent noted how ‘we really need to get the parents involved, especially the dads.’ When asked why the dads particularly, the response was ‘because the girls need to be taken better care of, their fathers should look out for them more.’ Several respondents noted that without female youth leaders, male volunteers can be left in a risky situation should any of the young people they train become injured. One commented that ‘I cannot take any child to the doctor

without a female present in the car.’ One specific example is the scouts as ‘there is no female leader, hence the scouts are not meeting at the moment.’

On the positive side, some youth activities in Fethard were highlighted in particular because they are able to attract ‘30 or 40 young lads to train in the worst of weather’ and this is because ‘they have lots of adults helping out with transport and training, the parents of these kids seem to want to be involved.’

Several informants suggested that to respond to this situation, ‘we should encourage parents to get involved and spend time with their kid’s activities, even as supporters’ and stressed that ‘parents need to be informed of the importance of their input.’ Another suggestion was to ‘ask the older or middle aged people to help out as they often have great experience dealing with young people and they may not be as busy as today’s parents.’ However the realistic observation that ‘parents of today’s kids will help out if their kids are *on* the team, but if they are not picked to play, then they withdraw their support’ cannot be denied.

The Commission on the Family (Report 1998:56) states “*the unique and essential family function is that of caring and nurturing for all its members*” and further states that it is within the family that a person’s basic needs are met and that the meeting of these needs is “*especially important for children*”. Hence the major difficulties for children from dysfunctional families.

As in other institutions and throughout society as a whole, huge changes are occurring within family life. These include increases in lone parenthood, the growth in single parenthood, marriage breakdown and the changes in employment resulting in both parents working outside the home. Whatever the changes taking place within the family it is crucially important as a source of security and support for the adolescent. Of particular interest in this context is that one of the tasks of the adolescent is to equip him/herself to be able to leave home and stand on his/her own two feet. But he or she needs a sound base from which to do that.

Parental issues were mentioned on a number of occasions. Poor parenting was mentioned by various interviewees, who maintain that young people's problems start early in the home. There are young people who have anti-authority attitudes and who are never disciplined. Homes where unemployment is endemic also present issues. Various incidents involving lack of discipline and authority; kids being left to their own devices, irregular attendance at school and being allowed out late at night were mentioned. In some cases where both parents are working this means fewer home-based activities and that the parents are under pressure. Other respondents were concerned about the pressure on single-parent families who may feel unsupported and vulnerable. One said 'I worry about the young single parents, many of whom are the offspring of single parents themselves. This is a problem that has repercussions for the town in the long-term, I'm afraid'

**The lack of adult volunteers is linked to a lack of supervision, a reduction in the number of youth leaders available and underutilisation of existing services. Poor parenting skills were mentioned by various interviewees, who maintain that young people's problems start in the home.**

#### 4.3.5 Concerns about anti-social behaviour

In the interviews, 15 informants referred to anti-social behaviour and vandalism as concerns.

Many respondents spoke about anti-social behaviour in the same context as issues such as alcohol, drugs and parenting. There were references to incidents of vandalism of cars, trees and benches and how these acts could perhaps be viewed 'as a form of attention seeking.' There were concerns voiced about 'some of the old people being intimidated by some of the younger people' and how older members of the community 'are terrified, particularly at night-time.'

There were several comments on the negative impact of vandalism and how 'the sports centre is not being utilised as intended because of the vandalism.' There were also comments about 'the little respect for other people's property' and the challenges to prevent any new facilities 'from being hijacked and wrecked,' and how if there were to be a disco set up that 'it takes very little for trouble to flare up.'

11 adults expressed concerns about the emergence of negative peer leadership among young people in Fethard. Negative peer leadership is potentially very damaging and has the

potential to glamorise intimidation and bullying behaviour. In Fethard respondents noted that 'older boys often hang around with younger boys, but not with their peers'. We were given examples of 'secret drinking sessions; 'they happen with all ages present, which is bad'. While peer pressure is a feature of teenage years generally, 'when negative leadership overcomes the positive', it is time to intervene.

At present, there are two Gardai stationed in Fethard, Sgt Kevin Corry and Garda John Lonergan. The station is open Mon-Fri from 10am – 12.30pm and then from 7pm the Gardai are on patrol. Outside these times, Clonmel Garda Station responds to calls.

Many respondents referred to a low key Garda presence in Fethard and felt that a 'live in police force is essential.' The perceived result of this low key presence is that 'the young people know they can do what they like after eight in the evening, which is when the Garda station closes, it is in effect a free for all.' One interesting observations was that 'the Gardai are more sympathetic than they are given credit for, but if some parents do not trust them, then the kids will not either.' The need for a stronger Garda presence 'as a role model for the young people of Fethard', particularly a need for a Community Liaison Officer, was noted. The CLO has previously given a talk to Youth Club members and 'it was a great success, the kids had never been talking to a Garda in this capacity before and it definitely helped to break down barriers.'

**Anti-social behaviour in young people in Fethard can be linked to availability of alcohol, drugs and by social exclusion. Some very young children are involved in this behaviour and negative leadership from older youth is a problem. The need for a stronger Garda presence and a focus on prevention is a recurring theme.**

#### 4.3.6 School and life chances.

'School' was mentioned by 15 of the interviewees, with most of them referring to what they perceived as the high level of early school leaving in Fethard.

Leaving school without completing state exams is a huge disadvantage when it comes to gaining employment; therefore the 'life chances' of these young people are greatly compromised as a result. The issue of early school leaving in Fethard was noted. One noted that 'young people have inconsistent attendance at school and are dropping out of school'.

Issues associated with this were negative attitudes to school and the limited ability of the school to respond to pressing educational and developmental needs of students.

Several of those interviewed felt that negative attitude to school may result in school drop-out. This phenomenon may come from an indifferent attitude to education in the home. A relatively high percentage of parents in Fethard had not completed school, according to one educationalist. While it is not possible to get an age-breakdown, the 2002 Census states that 292 persons out of a total of 965 persons who had completed their education had done so at or before the age of 15. 'The percentage of parents who have a lack of concern about education is about 20% (in Fethard) when it should really be 5%' was the opinion of one observer.

This negative attitude, along with learning difficulties may manifest as disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Some children find discipline hard to take and 'they become resentful and therefore become alienated by their own behaviour'. Being disruptive in class is a problem for some and 'What is termed 'messing' in school, turns into anti-social behaviour once they leave school; either way society suffers.'

However, those involved in education reported frustration in dealing with often-complex cases as it takes so long to get professional help for those in need. There was general agreement that early intervention was essential when dealing with those who experience learning difficulties, but 'when the schools need help there is a huge amount of red tape-teachers need to be able to flag their concerns earlier' and this situation could worsen as the 'special needs' allocation to certain schools has been reduced. However, when young people do 'drop out' of the educational system, some suggested that access to some form of specialised career advice for this vulnerable group should be a priority, as at present most of these young people are simply slipping through the system.

Kellaghan et al (1995:8) on Educational Disadvantage in Ireland states *"While the school is still seen as having a crucial role to play, it is now recognised that the educational system has to work with other institutions and agencies, both statutory and voluntary"*. As a further development of this line of thinking the recent Government initiative on the Integrated Services Process, the aim of which is to *"develop new procedures to ensure a more focused and better co-ordinated response by the statutory authorities to the needs of communities with the greatest levels of disadvantage, as a basis for a model of best practice."* (Area Development Management, 1999)

One of the myths that exists surrounding the disadvantaged and education is the belief that such young people have no real interest in school and do not really want to succeed. Recent research by Foroige indicates that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds placed doing “better at school” as the second most important ability they would wish to develop in themselves and this was almost equal to their first choice of more self-confidence. Furthermore, they placed “to fail exams” as the single most important fear they had for the future. It is important that the myth of no interest or desire to succeed be debunked. Disadvantaged young people do want to succeed. What they need is the support and conditions in which they can do so.

**Respondents are concerned about early school leaving in Fethard. While no official figures are available the issue was a source of concern. Negative experiences of parents of the education system, discipline issues and the lack of support to education initiatives to counter disadvantage are areas of concern.**

#### 4.3.7 Social disadvantage, exclusion and marginalisation

Fethard is designated as one of the areas of highest disadvantage in the country following analysis of the 1996 Census. Disadvantage in this case is measured by criteria such as high numbers of ‘economically inactive’ age cohorts, numbers of early school leaving, numbers of unskilled manual workers, unemployment and low levels of home ownership. According to the census, there were 63 unemployed persons in Fethard and 522 in employment. The decline in traditional agriculture and industry during the 1980’s was compounded by a number of factors that shaped the decline of many small towns in Ireland at that time:

- The loss of skilled young people who move from small rural towns to larger urban centres
- The lack of real employment opportunities and of a significant skill-base within such communities contributing to a further decline in commercial investment and retail outlets in rural towns
- The lack of sufficient demand for key services and social amenities due to population decline
- A skewing in population resulting in higher numbers of age-dependent and unemployed people
- A lack of investment in private housing development and thus lack of a sufficient consumer base for the development of local services and outlets

Such a pattern of decline is familiar to the residents of places such as Fethard. One response to these issues by the local authority has been the construction of quite high numbers of social housing units. While this is necessary and laudable, there are a number of consequences that must be noted. The first of these is the concentration of disadvantage in isolated rural towns. The second is the failure by the state to adequately provide services to meet the needs of people in these housing schemes and access to social services continues to be a major issue in towns such as Fethard, where active voluntary groups struggle to provide key services. And the third and related issue is that of large numbers of young people growing up together with all of the advantages and disadvantages that situation can create.

It is generally accepted that a (sizable) proportion of families in Fethard find themselves in a situation of compound disadvantage where poor education leads to reduced employment opportunities, lack of access to training means that their ability to retrain is restricted and the feeling of marginalisation and isolation is added to by isolation in 'invisible' housing estates at the fringes of the town. Inevitably, a greater or lesser degree of social exclusion occurs. Some vulnerable young people can experience social exclusion as feeling marginalised in some way. One respondent said that 'many (young people) do not feel valued by either family or society'. Others referred to the lack of money in some families for leisure 'Some kids feel they look different'. This comment referred to those children who could not afford the same 'kit' as the majority of their peers. Very often this dilemma could be overcome, but according to one trainer: "In my experience, young people drop out of our club instead of discussing their problems"

The result of feeling excluded may well result in a 'backlash' at society. This often manifests itself in what some may see as mindless vandalism, but one respondent summed it up thus. "I am concerned about vandalism in Fethard. I call this 'revenge behaviour'. Much of anti-social behaviour happens in group situations. Feeling part of a group can be a valuable experience for a child or young person'.

The demise of the Brownies was discussed in detail, 'The brownies and guides are a big loss I think; they are character forming and are good in fostering community awareness.'

Referring to young males, "I think they like being part of a group. Being in a club or organisation may fulfil this need in a positive way which requires accountability, so perhaps being in a 'gang' is seen as a substitute for feeling included?"

#### 4.3.8 Lack of volunteers and organisers

More than 75% of all those interviewed are extremely concerned about the current drop in the numbers of available volunteers and organisers.

Despite the lack of state services for youth in Fethard, there are many clubs and organisations that are active in meeting at least some recreational needs. However, these clubs and organisations are almost completely dependent on volunteers, without whom activities would cease. This has in fact happened in a number of cases. Many of those interviewed believe that the wider population are not as willing to get involved in running these clubs as in the past; many questioned the attitudes of the younger parents in particular, in terms of their commitment to the needs of their own children in providing leisure and sport activities for them. ‘Parents will give money but not time’ is the general opinion and it would appear that many young parents ‘expect things to be done for them’ in terms of providing activities for their children.

A major concern at present among those interviewed involves the reported reluctance of women in the wider community to get involved, which means that many clubs which provide for young children of both sexes and who also cater for older girls, could be in danger of ceasing operations due to lack of voluntary participation and support. With more women involved in the workforce there is perhaps less time for them to become involved in community activity.

“I would like to see a study done on the attitudes of parents of *younger children* in Fethard to see why they are unwilling to become involved in running the clubs with us”, is the wish of one long-term club leader. It is obvious to everyone that ‘time’ is a scarce commodity in today’s world, but people felt that it should not be used as an excuse.

Many wondered if a culture of individualism is now a fact of life and that this attitude may have repercussions for the future as it may give the next generation the impression that participation and developing a team spirit are seen as secondary and may be undervalued as a result.

**The lack of volunteers is threatening the continuation of activities for the young. Respondents believe that the lack of volunteers is connected to ‘lack of time’ issues lack of obligation on parents to be involved in the extracurricular activities of their offspring, and this is placing an unfair burden on those that do**



### 3.9 Concerns about the lack of co-ordination between agencies.

While Fethard is well catered for in terms of the number of sports facilities and venues such as theatres etc, 10 of those interviewed felt that clubs, organisations and services could be better coordinated.

It was generally acknowledged that ‘there are some brilliant people in organisations at the moment but they seem to work in isolation or seem to be divided in some way.’ Some of those interviewed were critical of some local committees who they perceived as elitist. ‘There’s a ‘class thing’ connected to what committee you’re on in Fethard,’ was advanced as a reason for lack of coordination between some organisations.

There was a general consensus that those who are involved in the GAA have a better support network but those involved in the minority sports often feel isolated. There were several suggestions about the revival of a ‘directory’ of organisations and contacts, to be made available to all involved. Many of the respondents suggested a number of meetings to set up a discussion group about sharing ideas and offering support.

Support for a Gym was strong as it was felt that sporting or non-sporting organisations could utilise it. Running this type of venture together could be a first step in a cooperative exercise between various organisations.

*“Recognition is growing amongst the many different agencies dealing with a single aspect of youth distress – justice, protection, school failure and truancy, early or inappropriate sexual activity, suicidal ideation or risk-taking behaviour, and mental health – that they are drawing from the one problem pool.” (Foroige 2000:27)*

It is essential, therefore, that the different agencies serving the disadvantaged not only provide more intensive interventions, but also ensure effective co-operation and co-ordination with other agencies providing services to the same people and communities.

As stated already, appropriate co-operation and co-ordination should always apply but this is especially true in the case of the disadvantaged because of the much greater intensity of service needed.

**While Fethard is well catered in terms of the number of sports facilities and venues such as theatres etc, 10 of those interviewed felt that clubs, organisations and services could be better coordinated. Working in isolation may be a waste of valuable resources. Suggestions for a Directory of services and a forum to regularly discuss youth needs was endorsed. The newly established forum to discuss youth issues is another welcome development**

#### 4.3.10 Concerns regarding Planning and Housing policy

13 of the respondents were concerned about Housing policy for Fethard and the impact that housing concentration has on young people.

Many were critical of Local Authorities who built large housing estates but provided little in the way of services to support their tenants. One respondent said that the ‘ghettoising of social housing and poor planning, creates social problems’

Many of the adults avoid certain areas of the town, especially at night. ‘It’s dangerous walking in the lanes’ (behind the housing estates) was the opinion even of the males we interviewed, as these areas appear to have become the territory of the teenagers. Another said: ‘ I blame the county council for this. They put too many houses into one place, with little or no facilities or support.’ Even those who lived in some of the estates were critical of the layout of rows of houses, preferring smaller developments to encourage a sense of neighbourhood.

It appears that the highest concentration of young people in the 10-19 age group are living in close proximity to each other. Allowing for the needs of this age cohort in terms of sports and enjoyment, many adults are uneasy about the change in attitude towards the elderly of late, many of whom are neighbours of these young people in question. Some of the respondents felt that there is a lack of respect and an increase in aggression. ‘Yes, they are upsetting the older people, which is something that did not happen before’.

When asked if they could identify who these people were, we were informed that ‘ The older lads on our estate are the ringleaders.’ There is a concern that the ‘Elderly people are frightened of them, and their own parents do not seem to know where they are’. There were several instances of young people out in the open very late at nights without a curfew.

**The concentration of housing development at one end of the town is unacceptable to respondents. Local Authority policy in this regard was criticised as leading to anti-social behaviour that had a particularly negative implication for the elderly.**

## Appendix 1

### **Semi Structured Interview Schedule for Statutory Agencies/Personnel**

#### Services and Facilities

1. What services/organisations/facilities do you know of that are available to young people in Fethard and what do these offer to young people? Who are these organisations/services aimed at, what type of young person? Are there enough services existing?
2. Which of these services/organisations/facilities are popular with young people, which do they tend to use, why is this? What services etc do young people tend not to use and why?
3. What services etc are available to young people in Fethard who experience problems/difficulties?
4. What services etc do you think young people in Fethard need/why?
5. Suggestions for meeting youth needs

#### Needs Assessment Information

1. Based on your experience of working in the Fethard area would you have any concerns about young people in Fethard? If yes what would these concerns be? If not why not?
2. Do you have any concerns about young people engaging in anti social or at risk behaviour in Fethard?
3. If yes, what kinds of behaviour are you concerned about? If not why not?
4. Do you know of particular young people engaging in these behaviours? If so how often, when, where? Who are they (general characteristics – sex, age, location etc
5. Why do you think young people engage in these behaviours?  
drugs, education, employment, crime, violence, pregnancy, isolation, abuse

## ***Appendix 2: Sample of Interview Schedule Used with Young People***

### **Semi Structured Interview Schedule for Young People**

#### **Services and Facilities**

1. What is it like living in Fethard? What do you like/dislike about it?
2. What kinds of activities can young people get involved in?
3. What is there to do in the evenings/weekends?
4. Where can young people go to meet, hang out, get involved in things?
5. Describe what services and facilities there are for young people in Fethard?
6. Where can young people go if they are experiencing problems/difficulties/trouble?
7. What kinds of services and facilities do you think young people need in Fethard?

#### **Needs Assessment Information**

1. What kinds of problems can young people in Fethard have?
2. What kinds of trouble can young people get into?
3. What ideas do you have about solving these problems?

## Appendix 3

### **‘H Form’ exercise Fethard Youth Needs Survey**

<b>Some things I like about living in Fethard</b>	<b>Male/ Female (Circle one)</b>  <b>Age</b> <b>10/11/12/13/14/15/16/17/18</b>  <b>How do you rate living in Fethard on a scale 1-10</b>  <b>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</b>	<b>Some things I don't like about living in Fethard</b>
	<b>Ideas for changes that would make living in Fethard better for me</b>	

#### Appendix 4 **Fethard Youth Needs interviews.**

**Q 1. What is it like living in Fethard?**

**Q 2. What do you like about it?**

**Q 3 What do you dislike about it?**

**Q4a What about sport?**

**Q4b What about alcohol?**

**Q.4 What type of activities can young people get involved in, in Fethard itself?  
Probe (maybe they go elsewhere?)**

**Q. 5 Are there clubs that you can join?**

**Q6 Are there clubs that you do not join?**

**Q.7 Which activities would you like to be available to you in Fethard?**

**Q 8 Would you use an indoor games facility?**

**Q 9. When adults (grown-ups?) talk about young people, what kind of words do you think they use?**

**Q 10 What do you think young people can contribute to the community in  
Fethard?**

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