

Findings of a Youth-led Research Initiative in Athenry, County Galway

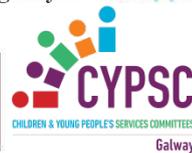


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An Gníomhaireacht um
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Child and Family Agency



PRESENTATION COLLEGE ATHENRY
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The research team would like to thank the 447 young people in Athenry who took the time to take part in our survey.

‘Students should not only be trained to live in a democracy when they grow up; they should have the chance to live in one today’

Alfie Kohn

Foreword

Children and young people have a lot to say. More than this, they can tell us a lot.

Galway Children and Young People's Services Committee recognises the value of listening to children and young people. The committee understands that because children and young people have first-hand experience of using our services they are uniquely placed to tell us what works, what doesn't work and what might work better.

We have asked young people to share their opinions with us. Now, we must give these opinions the consideration they deserve. Collectively and individually, member organisations must decide whether, and how, our services need to evolve to reflect the findings presented in this report. Beyond this, we must be willing to use the insights and experiences shared in this report to better understand what life is like for young people today. Having a better understanding of how our young people experience the services we deliver, how they view and value their relationships, how they perceive concerns and how they dream about their futures, can only lead to a type of engagement that is more considerate, understanding and supportive.

I want to thank Brian Ó Maoilchiaráin (Coláiste an Éachreidh), Cathal Moore and Joe Kelly (Presentation College) and Ciaran Folan and Joe Monaghan (Clarin College) for supporting this project. Thanks are also due to Tusla's Seed funding Project for Children and Young People's Participation.

Finally, I wish to say a special thank you to all of our researchers. I sincerely hope that each of you enjoyed this experience and learned something from it.



John Donnellan
Area Manager (Interim), Tusla
Chairperson, Galway Children and Young People's Services Committee

Introduction

This report is the result of a youth-led research project supported through Tusla's Seed funding Project for Children and Young People's Participation. Galway Children and Young People's Services Committee and the Athenry Child and Family Support Network supported 33 transition year students from three second level schools to design and undertake a major research study into the perceived service needs of young people in Athenry, Co Galway.

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) are the strategic interagency structures that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services for children, young people and families in each county or local authority area. The central purpose of a Children and Young People's Services Committee is to ensure effective interagency co-ordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people in its area. This coordination is achieved through the development and implementation of a three year Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) are frontline structures working to integrate local service delivery. Athenry Child and Family Support Network is one of 10 CFSNs operating across Galway city and county. Membership of CFSNS is open to all services that play a role in the lives of children and families in a given area.

Findings presented in this report will inform the future work of Galway Children and Young People's Services Committee and the Athenry Child and Family Support Network. This project comprises a key element of the consultation process that will inform the Galway Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2021. Consequently, this project will see young people directly influencing the nature and extent of service delivery throughout the implementation period of the CYPP.

Profile of Athenry and its Second Level Schools

The county Galway town of Athenry (*Baile Átha an Rí*, meaning "Town of the Ford of the King") lies 25 kilometres east of Galway city. The town is most famous for the song 'The Fields of Athenry' but is also noted as a medieval town with well-preserved town walls, King John's Castle, the ruins of a Dominican priory and a medieval street plan. Athenry is well served by public transport with the M6 and M17 motorways and train links to Galway, Dublin, Ennis and Limerick.

Population and schools' catchment area:

The population of Athenry Town is 4445 (CSO 2016) of which 923 are aged 0-9 years and 541 are aged 10 -19 years. In addition to those living in the town, a significant number of young people from surrounding areas attend the town's three second level schools. The total second level student population is 1936. The schools serve a catchment area that includes the villages and townlands of Clarenbridge, Craughwell, Lackagh and Turloughmore. Students also come from Galway city, Tuam and Oranmore.

The schools:

The Presentation College is a co-educational Catholic Voluntary Secondary School and has a student population of 1158. Clarin College is a co-educational Vocational Secondary School and has a student population of 600. Coláiste an Eachréidh is an all-Irish post-primary school under the auspices of Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board with a student population of 178.

Local services for young people:

Despite the high numbers of young people living, or attending school, in Athenry, there are limited facilities for young people in the town. There is a Foróige club that meets in a school hall on Friday nights. The club is over-subscribed and operates a waiting list. There are also smaller clubs and groups such as scouts, snooker club, coder dojo, drama and art. Apart from Foróige, there is no specific youth support service or dedicated meeting place for young people in the town.

Methodology for the Study

This study is informed by the Lundy model of Participation (2007), the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020* (DCYA 2014), *Tusla's Toward the development of a Participation Strategy for Children and Young People* (2015) and by Article 12 of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), and draws on the expertise of the Youth as Researchers Programme in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI, Galway. The research team consisted of 33 young researchers from the Transition Year programme in the three second level schools in Athenry who worked together to design, develop, plan and conduct the study. This team was assisted by 2 Galway CYPSC staff. The research project benefitted from the full support of the Principals and Transition Year Coordinators in each of the three schools.

The research team met on 8 occasions from September 2017 through April 2018. An initial meeting explained the project to all interested Transition Year students from the 3 schools (Appendix 1). From that meeting 33 young people self-identified as researchers and were recruited to the project.

Research skills were introduced to the team during the course of a further 7 workshops. These workshops were planned in line with guidelines developed by the Child and Family Research Centre of NUI, Galway, and were facilitated by CYPSC staff. During the workshops, the young researchers worked together to develop their own research question, select a research methodology, design their own data collection tool and organise the data collection. The young researchers were introduced to research ethics and, even though the identified risks for this study were considered to be low, the team worked with their schools and the facilitators to ensure that supports were in place for any young person who may have been affected by any aspect of the data collection process.

Parental consent was obtained through the school's parent communication tools and worked on an 'opt out' basis due to the large numbers in the sample. No parents objected to their child's participation in the study. The research question and research objectives that were developed by the team are as follows:

Research Question: *What matters most to young people living in or going to school in Athenry?*

Research Objectives: To find out what are young peoples' views on services and facilities in the town; to consider their views on their relationships at home, with friends and in the community; to identify the main concerns for young people in Athenry; to explore their dreams and ambitions for the future.

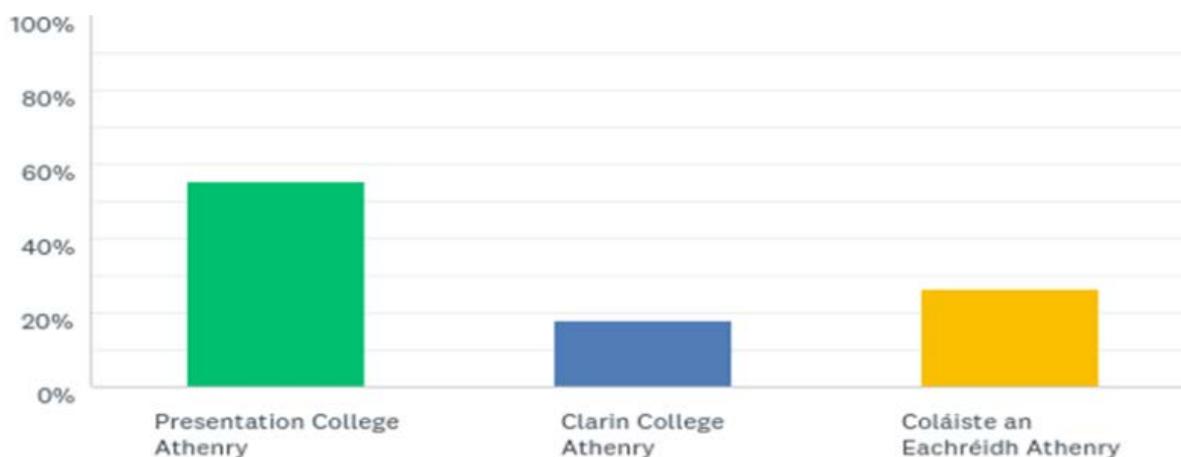
Data collection: The team developed a questionnaire (Appendix 2) based on the 4 research objectives. The survey was piloted by 2 of the research team and adjustments were made on the basis of this feedback. The survey was administered online through Survey-Monkey and was made available to all students attending school in Athenry during the week of the 15th to the 19th January 2018. The research team visited every class in the 3 schools to promote the study and to encourage participation. In total 447 responses were received over the week.

Research Findings

In this section, the findings from the research project are set out. In total, 447 young people took part in the study. Of these, 66% live in Athenry Town and 34% live outside Athenry town. Of the 142 who indicated they live outside Athenry Town, 19% (27) live in Craughwell; 17% (24) live in Clarinbridge; 11% (16) live in Tuam; 10% (15) live in Monivea; 10% (14) live in Oranmore; 8% (11) live in Loughrea; 4% and the remainder live in Galway City, Lackagh and Turloughmore and Rea (10%, 14).

Schools attended:

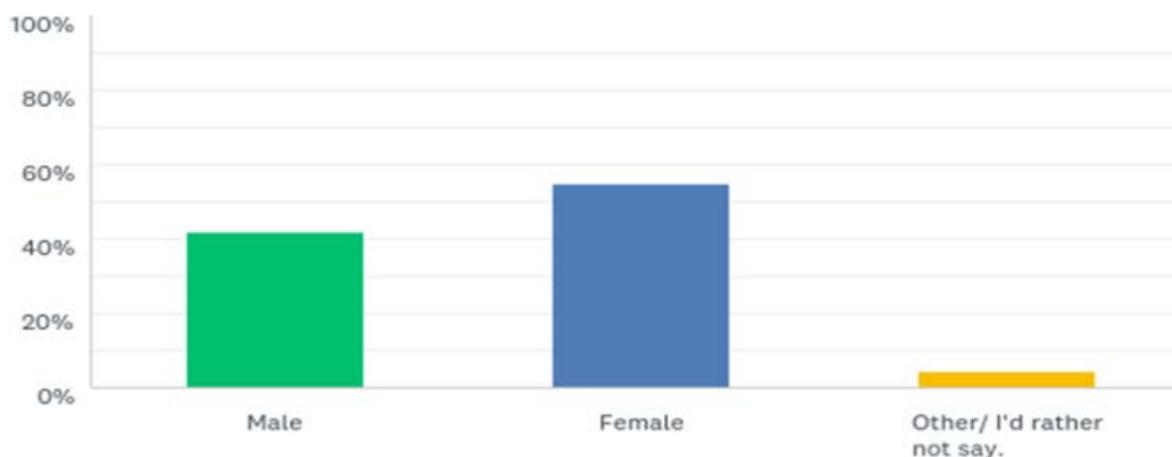
Graph 1: Respondents by School



Of those who responded to the survey, 56% (248) attend the Presentation College; 18% (79) attend Clarin College and 26% (118) attend Coláiste an Éachraidh.

Gender distribution:

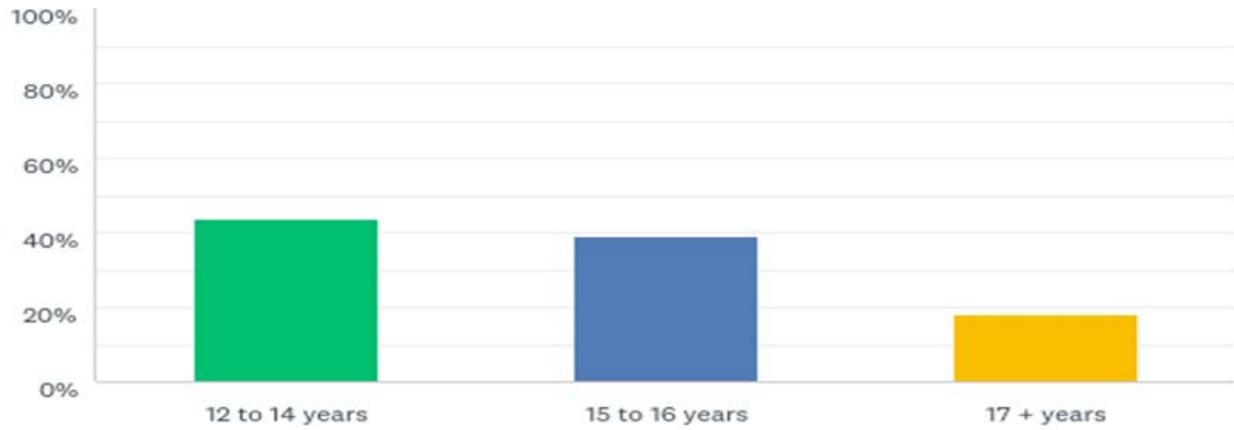
Graph 2: Respondents by Gender



A greater proportion of females (54%) than males (42%) responded to the survey. Twenty respondents (4%) identified as 'other / would rather not say'.

Age distribution:

Graph 3: Respondents by Age Group



The largest proportion of respondents, 44% (193), were in the 12 to 14 years old age group. A further 39% (174) of respondents were aged 15 to 16 years old while 18% (81) were aged 17 years or older.

Services and Facilities

Young people were asked for their views on the standard of services and facilities in Athenry.

Graph 4: Views on the Standard of Services and Facilities in Athenry

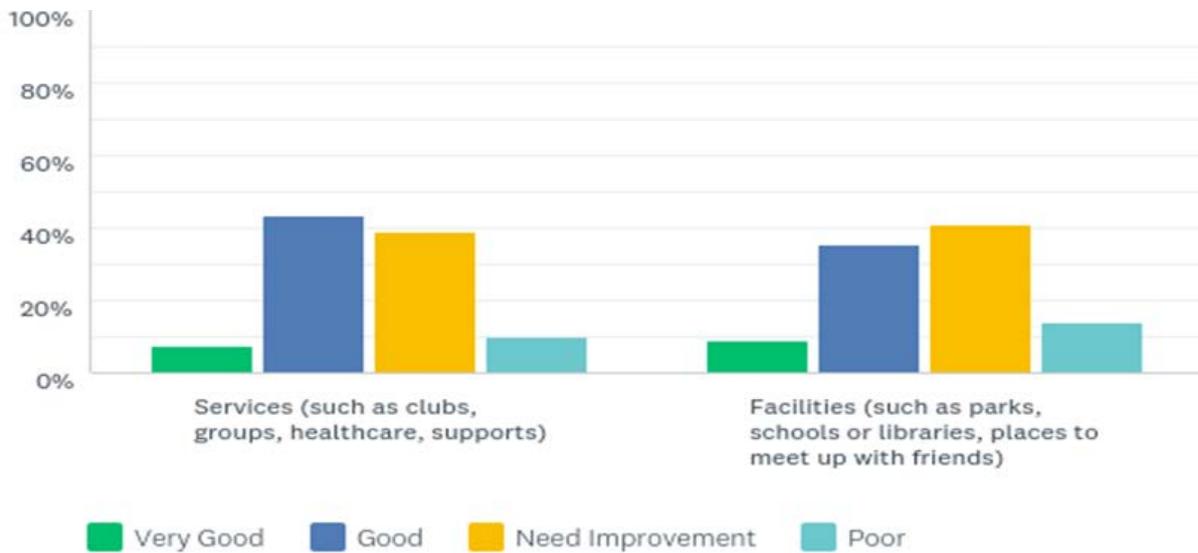


Table 1: Views on the Standard of Services and Facilities in Athenry

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NEED IMPROVEMENT	POOR	TOTAL
Services (such as clubs, groups, healthcare, supports)	7.71% 34	43.31% 191	39.00% 172	9.98% 44	441
Facilities (such as parks, schools or libraries, places to meet up with friends)	9.22% 40	35.71% 155	41.24% 179	13.82% 60	434

A combined 51% of respondents felt that the standard of services was either very good or good. This contrasts significantly with the proportion who felt that the standard of facilities in the town was very good or good (45%).

When asked about facilities, a high number of respondents stated that more youth friendly facilities are needed in Athenry where they can meet up with friends in a safe environment. When asked about services that support young people's mental health, almost half, 48%, of respondents were unsure. A significantly lower proportion of respondents indicated that they felt these types of services were adequate (22%) than inadequate (32%).

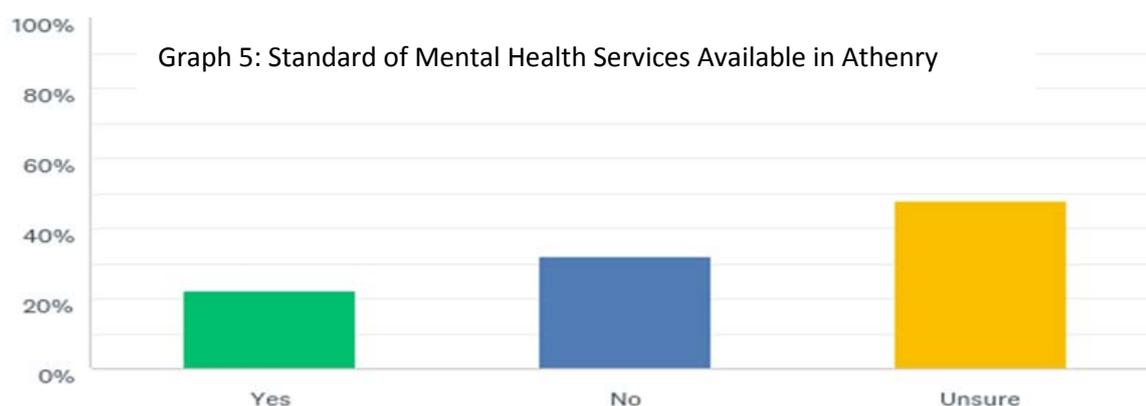


Table 2: Standard of Mental Health Services in Athenry

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	22.40%	99
No	31.90%	141
Unsure	47.96%	212
Total Respondents: 442		

A perceived lack of mental health supports, for example having an adult to talk to about their mental health, emerged as a prominent theme within the qualitative data analysed. Respondents suggest that the number of clubs that have staff that can deal with mental health and suicide should be extended. Respondents note that Foróige is the only club apart from Sports Clubs available to young people in the town and feel that this is an area that sports clubs could discuss and address.

Many respondents said they were unaware of where to go to for support relating to their mental health. One response stated *'If I felt I needed to talk to someone apart from my parents or teachers, I wouldn't know where to go to'*. The need for mental health services to be advertised more widely was cited repeatedly.

Responses suggested that counselling services in the schools are not adequate or being used by the people who really need them and that school counsellors are often involved in resolving petty squabbles or relationship dramas rather than dealing with mental health. As a result, many of the young people who responded to the survey felt they would not approach the schools' counselling services if they had concerns for their mental health. They tell us *'If I was having problems with my mental health I wouldn't trust the schools with it'* and *'the way I feel happy is knowing I will go to college and leave Athenry as soon as possible'*.

When asked what activities or hobbies did young people in Athenry participate in afterschool, 82% responded that they 'meet with friends' (361). The next two most activities most frequently cited activities involve screen time: 'social media' and 'watch TV / Play video games'. Activities that respondents needed to travel to participate in were less frequently cited. For example, 'indoor sports' and 'drama'.

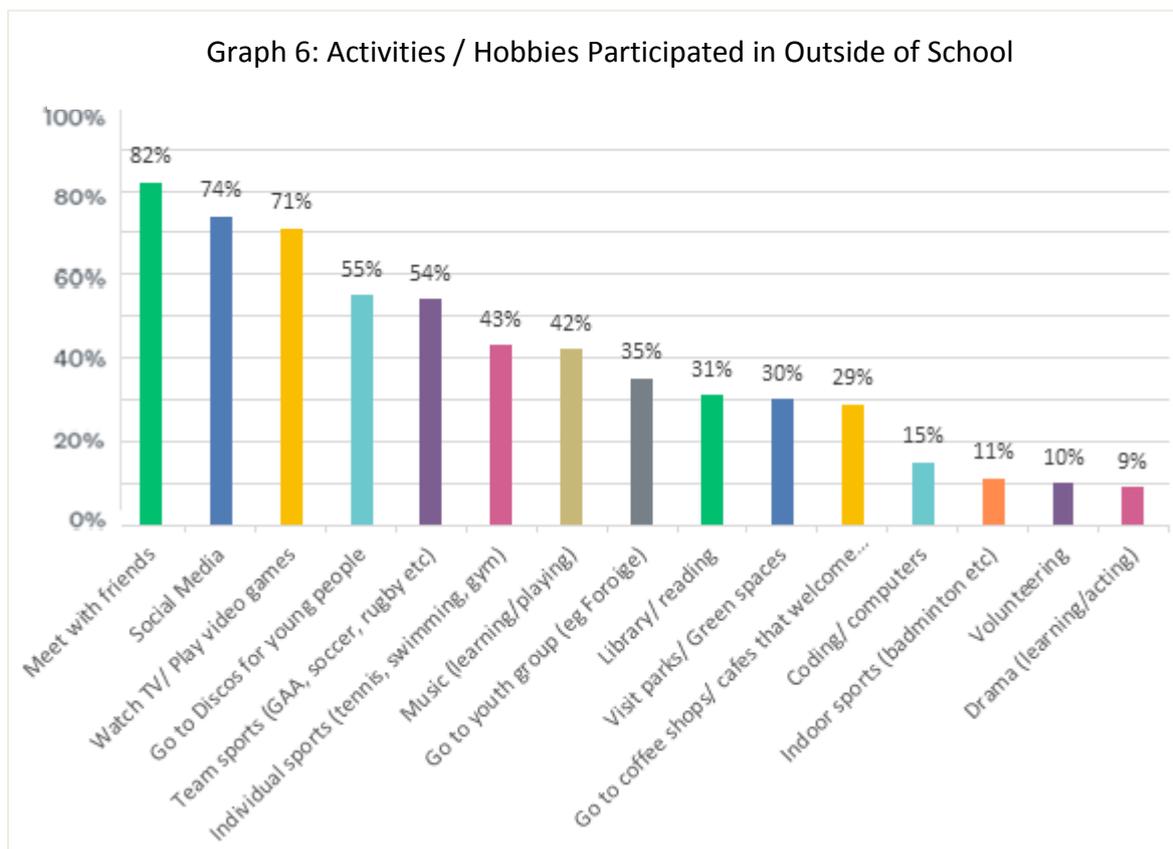


Table 3: Activities / Hobbies Participated in Outside of School

Activity	Number	Percentage
Meet with friends	361	82
Social Media	325	74
Watch TV/ Play video games	313	71
Go to Discos for young people	242	55
Team sports (GAA, soccer, rugby etc.)	240	54
Individual sports (tennis, swimming, gym)	191	43
Music (learning/playing)	186	42
Go to youth group (e.g. Foróige)	155	35
Library/ reading	136	31
Visit parks/ Green spaces	132	30
Go to coffee shops/ cafes that welcome young people	128	29
Coding/ computers	65	15
Indoor sports (badminton etc.)	50	11
Volunteering	45	10
Drama (learning/acting)	39	9

When considering what might encourage young people in Athenry to take part in more activities, respondents indicated that they are much more likely to take part in activities if they have friends doing the activity already. Having friends taking part in an activity was seen as the most important factor in encouraging other young people to take part. While advertising is important, having friends already involved is much more likely to encourage other young people to get involved.

Some young people feel bullied or mocked by other young people for taking part in some activities and this affects their confidence and reduces the likelihood of their participating. This suggests that the perception of friends is very important for young people when they are thinking about taking part in activities.

Services in Athenry need to be massively improved to encourage young people to get involved in more activities *'if there were more modern facilities people would be more likely to take part'*. The data also suggests that there needs to be greater choice of activities in the area. While there is a huge emphasis on sports such as GAA and Soccer there are fewer options to engage in non-sport activities such as art and computers.

Respondents also noted that the cost of some activities means they cannot take part and that more free or inexpensive activities are needed and activities that involve travel are less popular than those local to the town.

Relationships

When asked about the strength of their relationships, respondents indicated that their strongest relationships are with their friends.

Graph 7: Respondents' Strongest Relationships

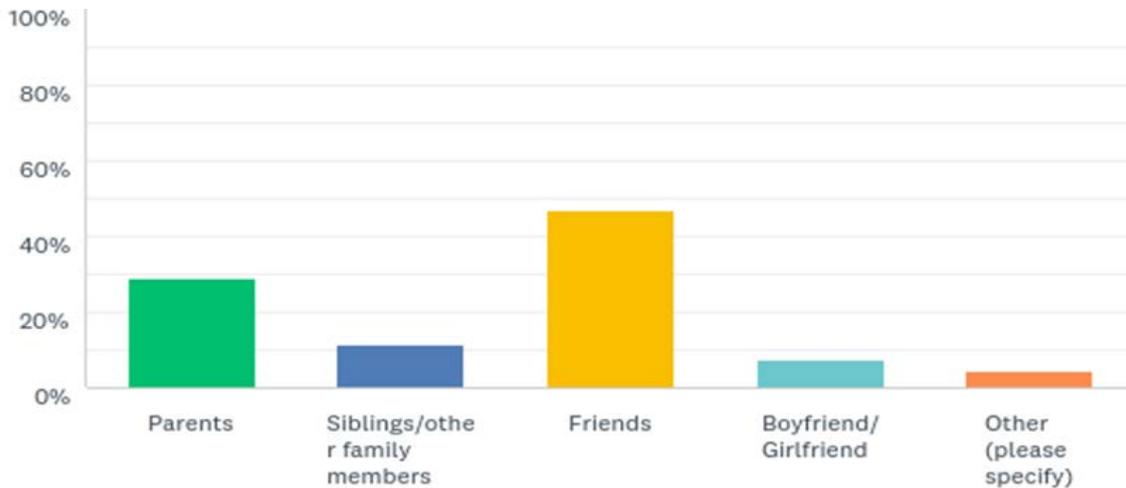


Table 4: Respondents' Strongest Relationships

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Parents	29.12%	129
Siblings/other family members	11.51%	51
Friends	47.18%	209
Boyfriend/ Girlfriend	7.45%	33
Other (please specify)	4.74%	21
TOTAL		443

However, when asked who they would feel most comfortable talking to if they had a problem or needed support, 43% of respondents indicated they would talk to their parents (191) and only 31% indicated they would talk to their friends (135).

Graph 8: Who would Respondents turn to with a Problem

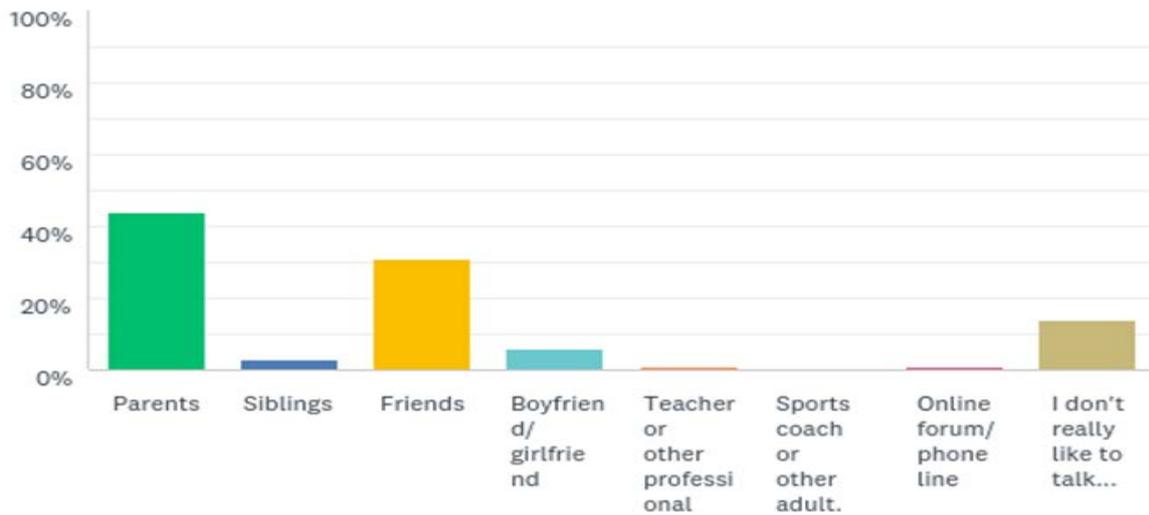


Table 5: Who would Respondents turn to with a Problem

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Parents	44.01%	191
Siblings	2.76%	12
Friends	31.11%	135
Boyfriend/ girlfriend	6.22%	27
Teacher or other professional	0.92%	4
Sports coach or other adult.	0.23%	1
Online forum/ phone line	0.92%	4
I don't really like to talk about my problems	13.82%	60
TOTAL		434

Table 5 demonstrates that parents and friends are the two groups who young people are most likely to turn to when they need advice or if they have a problem, while few would turn to a teacher or other professional, a sports coach, their siblings or an online forum or phone line. More than 1 in 10 young people stated that they do not really like to talk to anyone about their problems.

In response to being asked if they felt that most of their relationships were positive and respectful, the majority of respondents (more than 80%) indicated that their relationships at home and with friends are mostly positive and respectful. When asked about their relationships within the broader community (with schools, gardaí, clubs, etc.), 71% indicated that that their relationships were positive.

Graph 9: Relationships viewed as Positive and Respectful

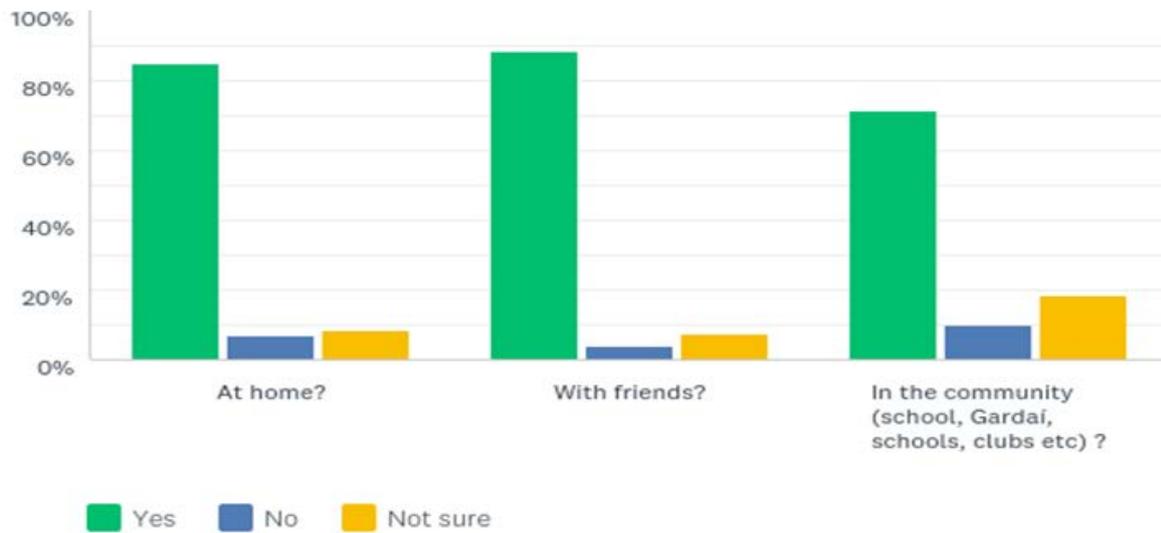


Table 6: Relationships Viewed as Positive and Respectful

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
At home?	84.88% 376	6.77% 30	8.35% 37	443	1.23
With friends?	88.46% 391	3.85% 17	7.69% 34	442	1.19
In the community (school, Gardaí, schools, clubs etc) ?	71.30% 313	10.02% 44	18.68% 82	439	1.47

When asked if young people in Athenry have opportunities for their voice to be heard and respected, a marked difference was evident between how young people perceive they have opportunities their voices to be heard 'at home' (80%) and in the community (only 41%).

Graph 10: Opportunities for Respondents to be Heard and Respected

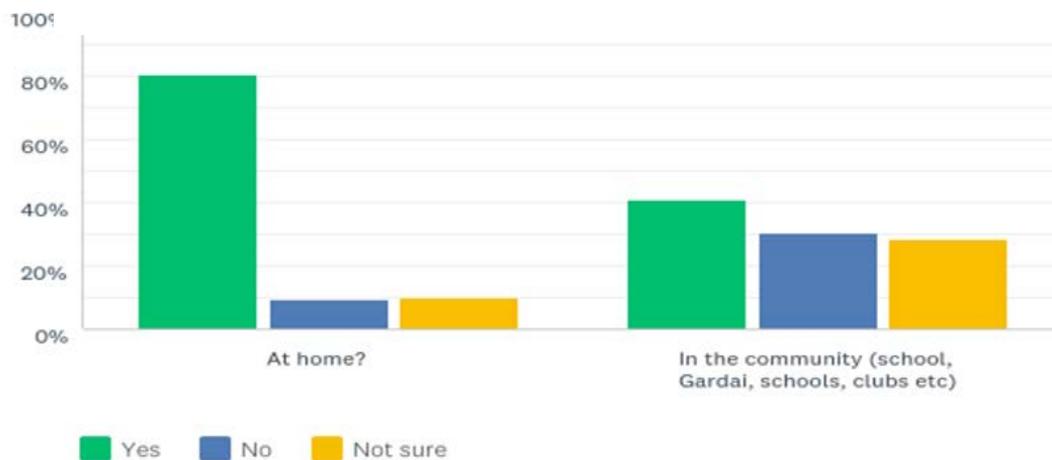


Table 7: Opportunities for Respondents to be Heard and Respected

	YES	NO	NOT SURE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
At home?	80.59% 357	9.26% 41	10.16% 45	443	1.30
In the community (school, Gardai, schools, clubs etc)	41.14% 181	30.45% 134	28.41% 125	440	1.87

When considering what can be done so that the views and opinions of young people are heard and respected in Athenry, 2 main themes emerged in the responses. Firstly, many young people felt somewhat alienated by the adult community and wanted to be treated with greater respect when it came to being heard. One respondent felt that groups and organisations could *'listen more to our ideas of what we [society] need to improve'*. The second theme concerned ways in which young people's voices can be heard. When considering how this might be achieved, some respondents proposed tools such as suggestions boxes so that young people can write their ideas anonymously, while others proposed more open forums and councils where young people could be more involved and more visible such as *'a board of young people in the community'*.

Concerns

We asked young people to talk about their worries and concerns. The most often reported worry in the survey related to peer pressure and bullying (especially cyber bullying). Young people in Athenry worry about how they are perceived by others, fitting-in and being accepted by their friends and peers. Over half of all responses (220) related to these worries. Respondents stated that they worry about *'people judging them'*, and *'just what other people think of them and if they are going to be liked or not'*. One respondent stated *'I believe that nowadays young people are worried about how others see them e.g. physical appearance, clothing etc'*.

Responses referenced worries *'that they will be bullied or disliked'* and referred to *'getting bullied online'*. Worries relating to Information Communication Technology and social media were frequently cited with respondents stating that they are worried about being cyber-bullied, the amount of time they spend online, the numbers of followers they have and likes they get, and how they present themselves online. They worry that people are *'not thinking about the real world, are all caught up in social media'*.

The next major worry identified relates to school, homework, teachers and exam pressure with 186 young people identifying this as their main worry, citing *'lots of school work'*, *'school- stress with exams'* and *'school tbh [to be honest]'*. The points race and the CAO process were identified as a source of stress and respondents indicated that they were under pressure to live up to other peoples' expectations and this can cause *'mounting stress and pressure to always do better combined with social anxieties and lack of relaxation'*.

Young people also reported that they worry about their mental health, depression and anxiety. Respondents expressed their concerns about *'mental health issues and the shame that surrounds them, and having to pick up the mess that has been created by the current adult generation while they blame our issues on smartphones'*. One respondent noted that *'people are thinking about suicide and in the years I've been in this school no one has talked to us about this. It makes us think it's weird to be thinking about it so they don't speak up. If someone comes in the talk to us about this, it will seriously help so much'*.

Finally, young people also are concerned about social and environmental issues such as alcohol and drug misuse, global warming, poverty, the health service, the economy and *'a certain orange president'*. Respondents also cited some practical concerns such as access to wifi and short battery life for their phones and tablets.

In relation to how safe young people feel when they are out and about in Athenry, the majority feel either safe (34%) or fairly safe (38%) with only 16% feeling very safe, while 12% felt not that safe or very unsafe.

Graph 11: Extent to which Respondents feel safe and secure in Athenry

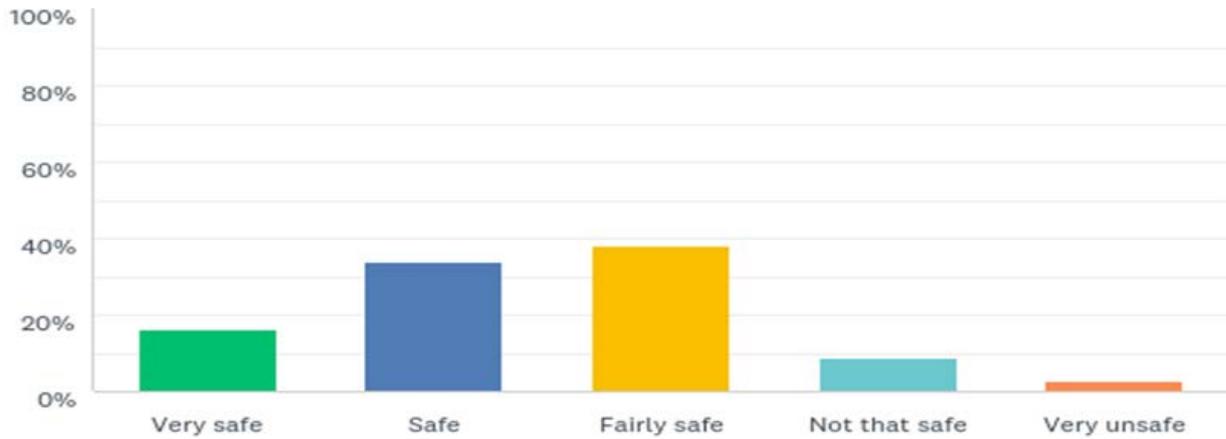


Table 8: Extent to which Respondents feel safe and secure in Athenry

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very safe	16.22%	72
Safe	33.78%	150
Fairly safe	38.29%	170
Not that safe	8.78%	39
Very unsafe	2.93%	13
TOTAL		444

Under-age drinking is the most common anti-social issue that young people are aware of happening in Athenry. Nearly three quarters of respondents, 73%, indicated an awareness of this. Throwing litter or dumping rubbish was reported by 67% of respondents and drug abuse was reported by 51% of respondents.

Graph 12: Awareness of Criminal and Anti-Social Behaviour in Athenry

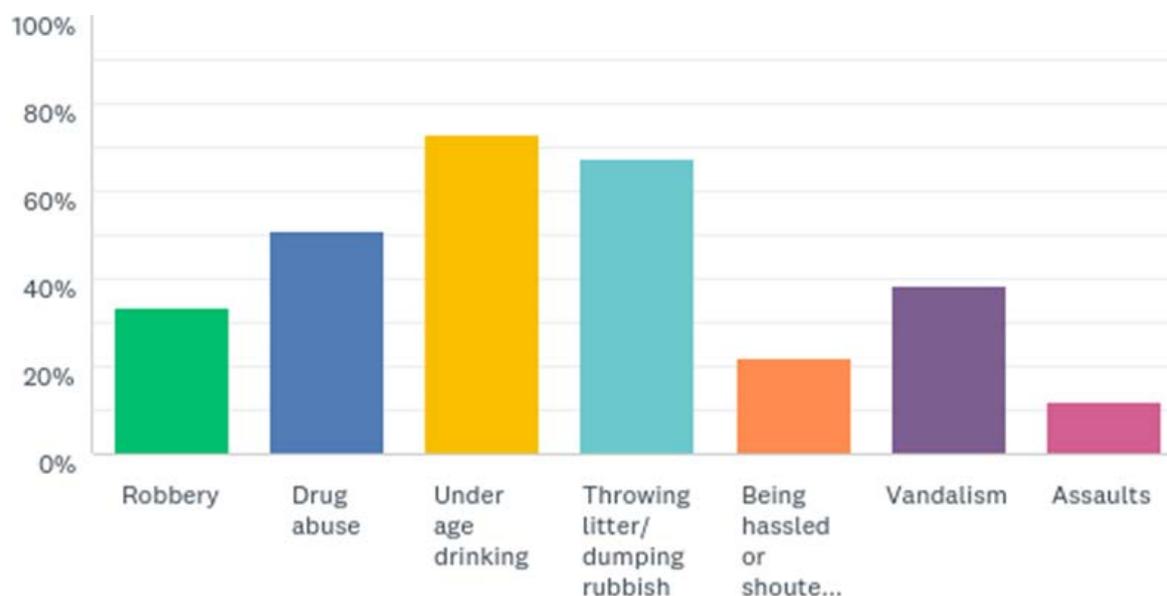


Table 9: Awareness of Criminal and Anti-Social Behaviour in Athenry

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Robbery	33.72%	145
Drug abuse	51.16%	220
Under age drinking	73.02%	314
Throwing litter/ dumping rubbish	67.44%	290
Being hassled or shouted at	22.09%	95
Vandalism	38.60%	166
Assaults	12.09%	52
Total Respondents: 430		

When considering what could be done in Athenry to help young people feel safer, many of the 96 young people who responded to this question said they would feel safer if there was a stronger and more visible garda presence in the town and in the wider community. They also felt that more CCTV cameras would help in certain areas to reduce opportunities for drug dealing and drug abuse. Drug abuse was identified as a problem in the schools with some young people attending school while still affected by drugs. This was said to lead to disruption and a tense atmosphere in the classroom.

Respondents also suggested there should be clean-up groups from the schools who go into the community to help to clean and tidy-up the town to combat litter and vandalism.

When considering the role of parents, one respondent indicated that *'parents should be more aware of what their children do or where they go'*. It was also suggested that if there were *'more people to talk to about your problems'* then there may be less anti-social activity taking place.

Dreams and Ambitions

Young people were asked about their dreams and ambitions for when they leave school. Just under 60% of respondents (261) have a good idea of what they want to do when they leave school. Boys are more likely to answer ‘yes’ to this question (59%) than girls (55%). As might be expected, a greater proportion of 14 to 16 year olds knew what they wanted to do after school than did 12 to 14 year olds (82% and 53% respectively). However, of those aged 17 years or older, only 65% knew what they wanted to do after leaving school.

Graph 13: Having an Idea of what they want to do After School

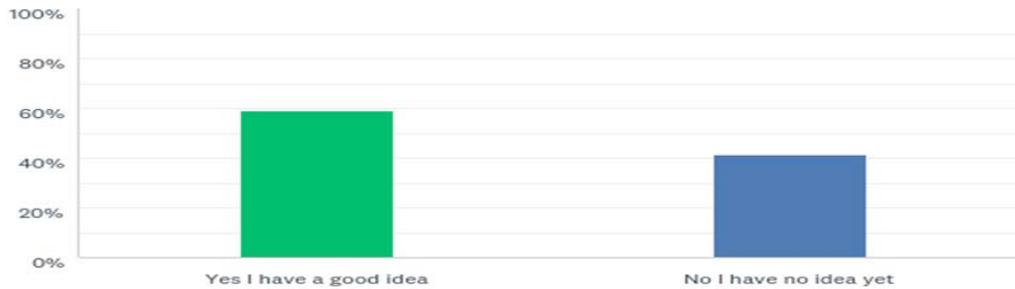


Table 10: Having an Idea of what they want to do After School

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes I have a good idea	59.05%	261
No I have no idea yet	41.40%	183
Total Respondents: 442		

When asked what they would like to do after graduating from school, most of those respondents who had a defined ambition referred to attending college and university courses. The most popular courses identified were teaching, nursing, medicine and engineering.

When considering what might be done in Athenry to support young people to achieve their dreams and ambitions, the perception most frequently articulated related to the need for more encouragement and the importance of listening to, and supporting, young people in the choices that they make.

A large majority of respondents agreed that it is helpful *‘to have guidance counsellors to help people find out what they need to achieve their ambitions’*. More choices, talks, college visits and open days were also frequently cited as helpful. A considerable body of responses suggested that some guidance should also come from *‘people who actually care about other people and who haven’t given up on their dream; people who are ambitious and what to achieve something meaningful in the world. There are too many engineers and IT people’*.

The need to assume personal responsibility for realising ambitions was cited by many respondents: *‘I must work hard myself’* and *‘I have a great school and some truly great teachers...I think I’ll do fine’*.

Beyond academic and vocational considerations, respondents also noted that access to improved sporting activities and facilities would help realise dreams and ambitions.

Discussion and recommendations

The following discussion is framed by the 4 research objectives which guided the project.

Young peoples' views on services and facilities in Athenry:

Overall the study found that respondents were more satisfied with the standard of services available in Athenry than with the standard of facilities in the town. In the survey, services were described as 'Set up to meet a need - such as the Doctor, Gardaí and Youth Club' while facilities were described as 'places, buildings or areas that are designed for a reason such as parks, meeting places, schools or libraries'. This finding raises a number of discussion points.

It is recognised that the school facilities in the town are currently very inadequate and all 3 schools are at different stages in the process of building new school premises. This may have impacted on the lower satisfaction rate for facilities in the town. However, the data also referred to the park and the playground having no youth specific sections and the library having limited opening hours.

Young people in Athenry have clearly identified facilities that are lacking in the town, most notably a dedicated youth space where young people can meet up with friends and hang-out and get support if needed. The lack of a safe dedicated youth space is identified as a significant challenge by young people, especially as meeting with their friends was identified as the most popular activity undertaken by respondents.

A perceived lack of mental health services is evident in the data. The survey findings highlight that nearly three quarters of young people in Athenry feel that mental health and well-being services for young people are inadequate.

Meeting with their friends is the most popular activity undertaken by young people. The next two most popular activities involve screen-time. Team sports and Individual sports are only the fifth and sixth most popular activities. Activities that young people have to travel for or need to be paid for are less popular. Opportunities for young people to volunteer are reported to be limited and the findings highlight that even when young people are qualified, they are often not trusted to volunteer with local services / organisations.

Young people have clearly identified that the one thing that is most likely by far, to encourage more participation in programmes and activities targeted at them is having a friend who is already attending or who is willing to attend. This is an important finding as it suggests how agencies and services who are seeking to engage with young people might best promote their programmes. Asking young people to bring a friend, or asking them to promote services amongst their friends, may be more effective than posting notices or using social media.

Recommendations for the provision of service and facilities in Athenry

- The development of a youth space in the town. This space, along the lines of a Youth Café, could also provide young people with access to support and advice on mental health and well-being.
- Improvements to opening hours for the library and a dedicated youth space to be developed in the park and playground.

- Developing a 'refer a friend' type approach when engaging young people in services or programmes.
- Improving universal and targeted mental health and well-being services for young people.
- Promoting more opportunities for young people to volunteer with local services and organisations.

The views of young people in Athenry on their relationships at home, with friends and in the community:

Young People feel their strongest relationships are with their friends. But when there is a problem they are more comfortable turning to their parents than professional practitioners. It is important that service providers are aware of this, especially when thinking about supports that are needed by parents in the community in order to be able to respond effectively when their son or daughter shares a serious concern. More than 1 in 10 young people tell us that they do not really like to talk to anyone about their problems. This is a worrying statistic.

Most young people in Athenry report that the majority of their relationships at home and with friends are mostly positive and respectful. When asked about their relationships within the broader community, fewer young people indicated that their relationships were positive. This is an area for service providers and community groups to consider. Young people are very eager for their voices to be heard and for their views to be respected. This happens less in the community than at home or with friends. Some young people feel comfortable putting themselves forward for committees, forums, etc. Some do not, preferring anonymous suggestions boxes or surveys in order to get their views heard. Both sets of young people need to be catered for.

Recommendations for improving relationships

- *Young people are most likely to discuss their problems with parents and friends. These are the people that need to be supported to respond properly.*
- *Young people want to be asked about things and to be listened to. Service providers need to allow for people to answer in different ways.*

The main concerns for young people in Athenry:

The main worry for young people in Athenry is peer pressure and bullying, particularly cyber-bullying. Respondents stated that they worry about how others perceive them and feel as if they are being judged. Young people also are concerned about school pressure (tests, results, homework) and depression and anxiety. Respondents referred to social and environmental issues that concern them alongside more practical concerns such as access to Wifi and the battery life on their phones.

In relation to the perception of being safe in the town of Athenry, most young people report feeling generally safe but they have identified a number of anti-social or criminal behaviours and activities that they are aware of in the town. The most frequently cited anti-social behaviour is underage drinking. This is followed by littering and drug misuse.

Recommendations for increasing the sense of safety and security of young people in Athenry

- Programmes to tackle bullying and cyber-bullying need to be delivered through the schools.
- More resources need to be directed toward safeguarding mental health and well-being.
- There should be a more visible Garda presence.
- CCTV should be installed in specific locations.
- There should be greater links between schools and civil society (Tidy Towns, etc.).
- Parents should be more vigilant in their parenting role.

Young people's dreams and ambitions for the future:

Many young people do not have a good idea what they want to do after leaving school. Furthermore, a significant percentage become more uncertain as they get closer to the leaving certificate examinations. It is an interesting finding that more young people aged 14 to 16 years old say they have a good idea of what they want to do after leaving school than do those who are aged 17 years or older.

Most young people who know what they want to do after leaving school referred to college and university courses, and, to a lesser extent, training and apprenticeship programmes. The most popular courses were: Teaching, Nursing, Medicine and Engineering.

A number of responses highlighted the value of career guidance in schools and talks and open days in Universities and Colleges. However, a number of responses also suggested that schools could consider talks from people who have not followed traditional routes into 3rd level as well as people who have engaged in life-long learning opportunities as adults, engaged in creative projects or have shown entrepreneurial abilities.

Recommendations to support young people in Athenry achieve their dreams and ambitions

- Services, and adults more generally, need to give more encouragement and support to young people.
- A higher standard of community and sports facilities should be delivered. These will help when young people to make decisions about their future.
- Provide more input from people who have not followed traditional routes into 3rd level and people who have not given up on their dreams.

Conclusion

This report sets out the background to the Youth-led Research Project that was conducted by 33 Young Researchers from three second level schools in Athenry.

A profile of the town of Athenry indicates that there is a high number of young people either living in the town or coming into school from the surrounding areas. Despite this, dedicated facilities for young people are relatively scarce and are not highly regarded. Services such as the Foróige club are more positively regarded. However, there is a noted lack of services that support young people's mental health and well-being.

Young people value their relationships with friends above their other relationships. However, it is to parents that young people are most likely to turn to if there is a problem. This suggests that parents and friends need be supported to respond appropriately to young people who reach out. The report also highlights ongoing worries about bullying, including cyber-bullying, peer pressure, underage drinking and drug misuse.

The report acknowledges that young people worry a lot about being judged by adults and by other young people. When considering how best to support young people achieve their dreams and ambitions, the report recommends that services, and adults more generally, need to give more encouragement and more support to young people.

It is hoped that this report will inform planning and service-delivery in Athenry and in the county.

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Appendix 1: Invitation to take part in a Youth as Researchers' project in Athenry

Invitation to take part in a Youth as Researchers' project in Athenry

The Athenry Network: Who are we?

We are a network of all the services and agencies who work with children, young people and families in Athenry and surrounding areas such as schools, Family Support Services, Youth Services and so on. We are part of a bigger network in Co Galway that is called the Children and Young People's Services Committee or CYPSC. There is a CYPSC in every county and they look at how best to plan and deliver services. We met with your Principals and TY co-ordinators and asked them if we could work with you this year to carry out a small study in Athenry that asks young people in the town what they want. We hope that this would mean an improvement in services and facilities in the town for young people.

What is Research?

Research is 'a process by which we 'find out' about something. The great thing about carrying out your own research is that you can 'find out' about something that affects young people or a problem in your community that needs to be addressed. Your research can then be used to influence change in the area or to address a particular issue. In order for our research to be valuable we must ensure that it follows a certain set of rules'ⁱ. We will work with you and other TY students from Athenry to ensure that this research project adheres to good research standards. In the end, you will have produced a valuable source of information on issues that affect the lives of teenagers who live or go to school in Athenry.

What do we want to find out?

We want to find out what young people who live or go to school in Athenry think about the services, facilities in the town; we want to know what you think is working well, what could be improved or what is not there at all and maybe really badly needed. We also want to find out what the big issues for young people in Athenry so that we can let the agencies and services know what they should be planning for in the future. We think the best way to find out is to ask you to ask other young people in the 3 secondary schools these questions. Then we can look at all the responses and we can start to identify the main areas that are concerning young people.

What will I have to do if I take part?

We are looking for a small group of TY students from the 3 second level schools in the town to help us with this study. We are hoping to have 6 or 7 students from the Pres and 4 or 5 from the other two schools in the town; these students will carry out the study with support from the Network. If you are interested, we will meet with you and explain what is involved. Your TY co-ordinators know about this and can arrange for you to get the time to meet us. We will also talk to you in more detail about what happens during a research project. We will then work with you on designing the tool that we will need to carry out the study; this might be a survey or a questionnaire for example and then we will ask you to carry out the survey; you might decide to do it by social media, or by text or face to face with the other students in the 3 schools. Once this has happened we will look at what you have collected; this information is called 'data' and we will need to start analysing the data to work out what the key areas that we are seeing, so that

we can identify the main issues facing young people in the town. Once we know this we can report on our findings to the Athenry Network and the Galway CYPSC and ask them to look seriously at these issues.

How long will it take?

We hope to meet with interested students in September and then to start working on this before Halloween and have our findings by Christmas. We know you are busy with other projects and we do not think that this will take up a lot of your time; we will meet with you to design the research tool, and then again after the data has been collected. You might be a bit busier for a few days when you are collecting the data but your TY co-ordinators know about this.

Do I need to get permission?

Your Principal and TY Co-ordinator have given their permission for us to ask you to take part. We would like to let your parents know that you are taking part so we will give you a letter that you can give to them that will explain all of this in more detail.

Do I have to take part?

No! You don't have to take part and there is no need to explain your reasons to anyone if you are not interested. However, we think this is a good opportunity for you to learn new skills, and it will also be very useful for you if you are thinking about going to University as you will have to carry out research there. We also think it will be really good for the town of Athenry as we will be able to take what the young people say and bring it right to the attention of the decision makers in the different agencies in the County. By doing this, we think that the views of the young people of Athenry may be taken very seriously and be acted on.

Who can I talk to for more information?

You can talk to your TY co-ordinator if you are interested or have more questions. We will ask your TY co-ordinator to let you know when we will be having the first meeting and to make sure you have permission to attend; it will probably mean you have to leave school and come to Primary Care Centre in Athenry for these meetings. We hope to have the 1st meeting in September so if you are interested we would ask you to sign this form and hand it to your TY co-ordinator. Thank you for reading this information sheet.

I am interested in taking part in the Athenry Network Youth as Researchers' Project

Your name_____

Your School_____

Date_____

Appendix 2: Copy of Questionnaire

The Transition Year students in the 3 schools in Athenry have come together with the Athenry Network and Galway CYPSC to find out what matters most to young people who live in or go to school in Athenry. We want to find out what you think because we are hoping that this will bring about changes in the town. We will present the findings of this survey to the Network and the CYPSC and we will ask them to give feedback on your views and opinions and to think about what needs to change.

The survey is anonymous which means you do not need to say your name but we do want to find out some other things;

I live in Athenry Town or it is my nearest town? Yes No

If 'No' what is the nearest town/village to where you live?

What school do you attend? Presentation College Coláiste an Eachréidh Clarin College

I am Male Female Other/ I'd rather not say

I am aged 12- 14 15-16 17+

What do you think of the services and social facilities for young people in Athenry? (Please tick the box you agree with most)

	Good	Needs Improvement	Poor
Facilities (places/buildings/areas that are designed for a reason such as parks, schools or libraries)			
Services (these are set up meet a need such as the doctor, Gardai, youth club).			

Are there enough services and facilities for young people in Athenry that help you feel good about yourself and support your physical and mental health?

Yes, there are enough No, there are not enough

Please tell us how services and facilities could be improved for young people in Athenry?

What activities/hobbies do you take part in outside of school/in your spare time?(Tick all that you do now or did in the past year)

Activity	Yes I do this	No I don't do this
Team sports (GAA, soccer, rugby etc)		
Indoor sports (badminton etc)		
Individual sports (tennis, swimming, gym)		
Visit parks/ Green spaces		
Meet with friends		
Go to coffee shops/ cafes that welcome young people		
Go to Discos for young people		
Go to youth group (eg Foroige)		
Social media		
Watch TV/ Play video games		
Coding/ computers		
Music (learning/playing)		
Drama (learning/acting)		
Volunteering		
Library/ reading		

What might encourage you to take part in more activities?

Less expensive? Better transport? More time? Other ? if 'other' please explain _____

Section 3: Relationships

Who is your strongest relationship with right now? (tick one box)

Family Friends boyfriend/ girlfriend

Who would you feel most comfortable talking to if you had a problem or needed support?
(tick one)

Family Friends boyfriend/girlfriend teacher or other professional

Sports coach or other adult Online forum or phone line support I don't really like to talk about my problems Other

If 'other' please explain

Do you consider that the majority of your relationships positive and respectful?

At home? Yes No Not sure

With friends? Yes No Not sure

In the community (school, Gardai, clubs etc) Yes No Not sure

Do you have enough opportunities for your voice to be heard?

At home? yes no

In the community (school, Gardai, clubs etc) yes no

What could be done to improve relationships in the community?

Section 4: Concerns

What do you think are the biggest worries for young people in Athenry?

How safe do you feel when you are out and about in Athenry?

Very safe Safe fairly safe not that safe very unsafe

What are the most common crimes or types of anti social behaviour that you are aware of happening in Athenry?

Robbery Drug abuse Under age drinking Throwing litter/ dumping rubbish

Being hassled or catcalled Vandalism Assaults

Other concerning activities (please give examples)

What could be done in Athenry to help young people feel safer?

Section 5: Dreams

Do you know what you would like to do after you leave school?

Yes I have a good idea No I have no idea yet

If you ticked 'yes' please tell us what your ambitions are for your future? (tick one)

College/university Training/Apprenticeship Go straight into a job

Turn a hobby into a career Live off social welfare

How you would like to live your life when you finish your education/training? (tick one)

Emigrate from Ireland Move away from Athenry to another area in Ireland

Be in a healthy and happy relationship Start a family Have good physical and mental health Be rich and famous Other

If 'other' please

explain_____

What can be done in Athenry to support you to achieve your dreams and ambitions?

Thank you for taking our survey.
