

# Reviewing the Safety of Children and Young People in Sligo / Leitrim

*A Collaborative Approach with Children,  
Young People and Parents*

## Executive Summary

*Compiled by:*

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## Introduction:

Many statutory agencies are commitment to ensuring the safety of children and young people at a national level, including Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the HSE and the Children and Young People's Services Committee. According to Tusla, everyone in society must play their part in safeguarding children and young people and protecting them from harm in so far as is possible. With this in mind, the following report outlines research undertaken by Sligo Leitrim Children and Young People's Service Committee (CYPSC) to identify the views and opinions of children and young people on safety within their community, school / educational environment and their home. In addition to this, engagement with professionals and parents / guardians was also undertaken to gain an insight from the perspective of adults engaging with children and young people on a regular basis.

## Background

Sligo Leitrim Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) was established in 2014 and is one of twenty-seven committees across Ireland. Their function is to ensure effective interagency co-ordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people, in its area, between the ages of 0 and 24 years. It also endeavours to realise the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' five National Outcomes for Children and Young People as set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC has established a number of working groups to address identified and emergent need across the region and one such working group is the Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group. The commitment of this group is to secure better developmental outcomes for children and their families; bring together agencies, services and representatives to coordinate work for the benefit of children, young people and their families; improve the lives of children young people and their families through co-ordination, planning and service delivery and ensure that professionals and agencies work together to achieve this.

## Purpose of this research

The working group developed a three-phase research process to identify any areas of concern pertaining to the safety of children and young people in Sligo / Leitrim. This in turn will inform any appropriate and necessary action plans going forward to continue providing support to children and young people with regards their safety.

## Phases of the Research Process

### *Phase 1: Collaboration with professionals*

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, an event funded through CYPSC was facilitated in the Clayton Hotel, Sligo. The event was attended by over 80 professionals representing more than 30 statutory, voluntary and community agencies from across Sligo and Leitrim who work with children and families. The key issues identified through discussion, and documented in a report by Rita Burtenshaw, included:

- Services and supports already in place and working well
- Priority needs and gaps
- Identification of solutions by professionals in attendance

The subsequent step to this event was to carry out research with children and young people across the Sligo Leitrim CYPSC division and their parents.

### *Phase 2: Engagement with children and young people aged 8-24 years*

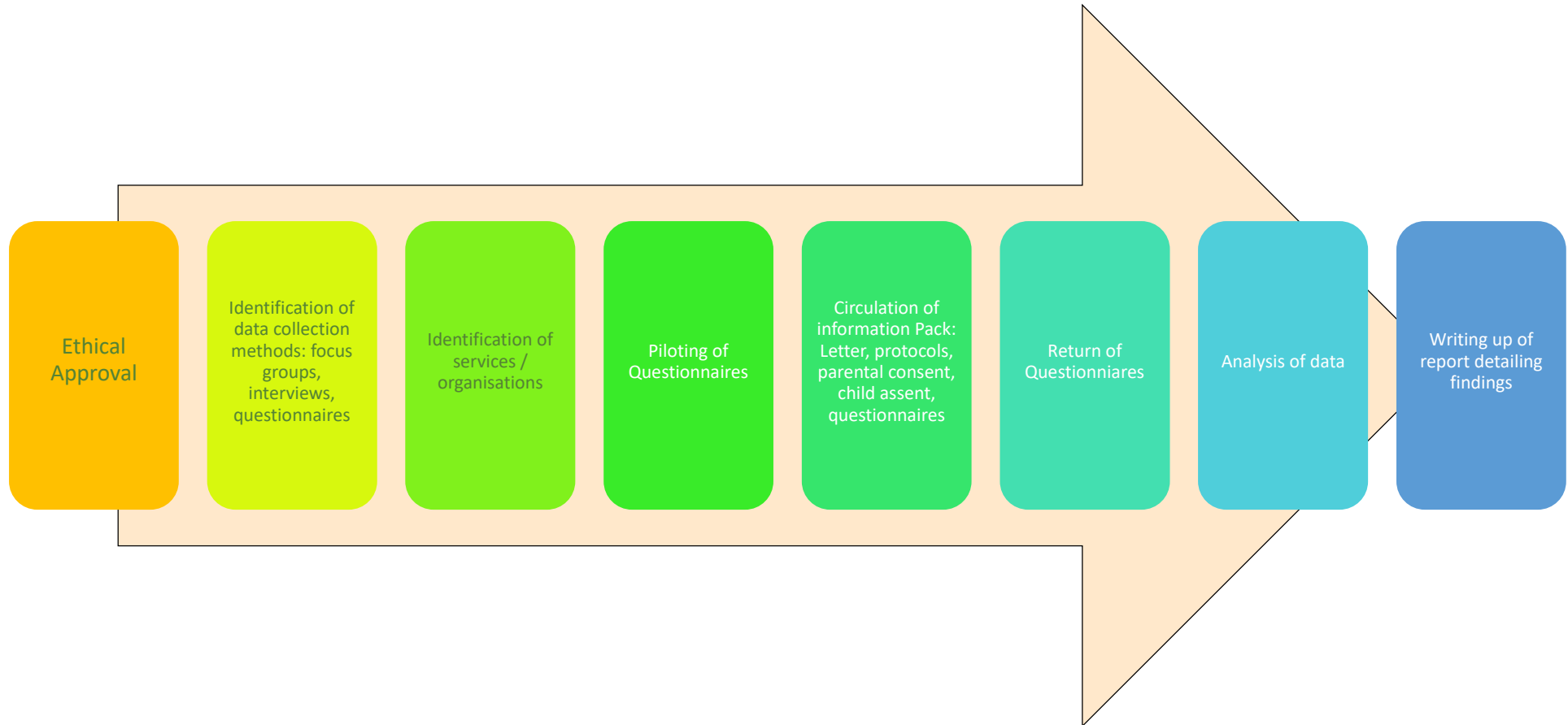
The aim of this research was to gather views about what keeps children and young people safe and free from harm, from as many individuals in Sligo and Leitrim aged between 8 and 24 years old. It is part of a multi-layered information gathering exercise which will assist CYPSC in identifying priority actions in relation to Child and Youth Safety in Sligo and Leitrim. The information gathering process focusud on three distinct areas: safety in the community; safety in early years, schools and educational environments and safety at home.

### *Phase 3: Engagement with parents / guardians*

It was also deemed important by the sub-group to include the voice and opinions of parents on what they believe are the key issues regarding the safety of children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim.

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## Overview of Methodology



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## Visual Analysis of data

Collaboration with <u>Children and Young People</u> Analysis of Questionnaires						
	Response Rate	30 services / settings		491 Questionnaires Analysed		
Q1 A	Age Range of Respondents	8-11	12-16	16-18	19-24	N/A
		212	162	86	27	4
Q1 B	Location of Respondents	Leitrim	Sligo	Other		N/A
		247	229	8		7
Q2	Do you think children and young people are safe in their community	YES	NO	MAYBE		N/A
		425	50	12		4
Q3	Do you think children and young people are safe in their school / educational environment	YES	NO	MAYBE		N/A
		442	37	9		3
Q4	Do you think children and young people are safe in their home	YES	NO	MAYBE		N/A
		433	25	23		10
Q5	Who / what keeps children and young people safe in their.....	WHO (in order of most popular answer)		WHAT (in order of most popular answer)		
a)	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guards</li> <li>• Parents / Guardians / Home</li> <li>• Other Family Members</li> <li>• Adults in the community</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Neighbours</li> <li>• Teachers / Schools</li> <li>• Other Emergency Services</li> <li>• Other services</li> <li>• Club Leaders / Coaches</li> <li>• Myself</li> <li>• Helplines</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road Safety</li> <li>• Surveillance Measures</li> <li>• Community Spirit</li> <li>• Club / Groups</li> <li>• Positive Relationships</li> <li>• Personal Safety Awareness</li> <li>• Rules / Law</li> <li>• Quiet Area</li> <li>• Physical Structures eg walls</li> <li>• Defibrillators</li> <li>• Drug Prevention</li> </ul>		

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b)	School / Educational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Friends / Classmates</li> <li>Other Staff- Principal/SNA/Chaplain</li> <li>Family</li> <li>Trustworthy / Caring Adults</li> <li>Coaches</li> <li>Myself</li> <li>Guards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rules</li> <li>CCTV / Camera's</li> <li>Physical Environment – Locked doors, windows etc</li> <li>Safety Provisions – door buzzers etc</li> <li>Education on personal safety</li> <li>Everyone knows each other</li> <li>Talking to someone</li> <li>Anti-bullying Awareness</li> <li>Roll Call</li> <li>Technology</li> </ul>
c)	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents / Guardians</li> <li>Siblings</li> <li>Neighbours</li> <li>Dogs / Pets</li> <li>Other Family Members</li> <li>Friends</li> <li>Other Adults</li> <li>Myself</li> <li>Comfort Toys / Teddies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Environment – locked doors and windows, gates etc</li> <li>Alarms</li> <li>Safety Education</li> <li>Rules</li> <li>Mobile Phones</li> <li>CCTV / Cameras</li> <li>WiFi / Technology</li> <li>Talking</li> <li>Kindness / Love / Understanding</li> <li>House Phone</li> <li>Social Media</li> </ul>
Q6	<b>What <u>more</u> can be done to keep children and young people safe in their...</b>		
a)	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Text/community alert initiatives</li> <li>Adult supervision</li> <li>Guards</li> <li>Emergency Services</li> <li>Youth facilities</li> <li>Community gatherings</li> <li>Security surveillance</li> <li>Community Safety</li> <li>Road Safety Measures</li> <li>Public Phone Boxes</li> <li>Emphasis on anti-social behaviour</li> <li>Personal safety education</li> <li>Have mobile phones</li> <li>Be nice/caring/kind</li> <li>Opportunities to talk</li> </ul>	
b)	School / Educational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Security Surveillance</li> <li>Teachers / Staff</li> <li>Safety Measures</li> <li>Road Safety Measures</li> <li>Personal Safety Education</li> </ul>	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision at breaks</li> <li>• Anti-bullying</li> <li>• Practical Safety Measures</li> <li>• Stricter rules / consequences</li> <li>• Mentors for younger children</li> <li>• Interactions between teachers / home / student</li> <li>• Help to learn</li> <li>• Private lockers</li> <li>• Kindness to each other</li> <li>• Trips / Activities</li> <li>• Talking / counselling opportunities</li> <li>• School Inspections</li> </ul>
c)	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical safety measures</li> <li>• Security Surveillance measures</li> <li>• Parental guidance / supervision</li> <li>• Guard dog</li> <li>• Rules</li> <li>• Parenting Workshops</li> <li>• Talking Opportunities</li> <li>• Personal Safety Education</li> <li>• Support / information from authorities</li> <li>• No violence</li> <li>• Less electronics</li> <li>• Emergency provisions</li> </ul>
Q7	<b>Do you think young people can access support around safety when they need it?</b>	
	<p><b>YES</b></p> <p><b>(76%)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have phones to ring for help / support</li> <li>• Access to Childline and other helplines</li> <li>• Close community</li> <li>• Confide in and trust friends/family/teachers/people in the community</li> <li>• Supports readily available through clubs, school, local library</li> <li>• Online support available</li> <li>• Access to Guards / Emergency Services</li> <li>• Educational Programmes such as RSE and Stay Safe informs us what to do</li> <li>• Lots of activities available</li> </ul>
	<p><b>NO</b></p> <p><b>(9%)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of information available</li> <li>• Not aware of where to access information</li> <li>• Feel too ashamed / uncomfortable / scared to ask for support</li> <li>• Not all children, especially younger children, have access to phones so no way of calling for help if needed</li> <li>• Stigma attached</li> <li>• Lack of Garda provisions</li> <li>• No knowledge of emergency access numbers</li> <li>• Not enough mental health support</li> <li>• No one to help or listen</li> <li>• Asking for help may be seen as a sign of weakness</li> <li>• More public phones needed</li> </ul>

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	<p><b>MAYBE</b></p> <p><b>(2%)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some children unsure of what support is out there and where they can access it</li> <li>Depends on the individual child and how comfortable they are in accessing the information they require to help them</li> </ul> <p><b>ADDITIONAL COMMENT:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adults don't understand how children and young people's brains work and what goes on for them.</li> </ul>
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<b>Collaboration with <u>Parents / Guardians</u></b> <b>Analysis of Questionnaires</b>						
	<b>Response Rate</b>	55 parents / guardians				
Q1	<b>Age Range of Respondents</b>	<20 years old	21-30 years old	21-40 years old	41-50 years old	>50 years old
		0	2	15	24	14
Q2	<b>Location of Respondents</b>	Leitrim	Sligo	Other	N/A	
		20	34	1	0	
Q3	<b>Do you think children and young people are safe in their community?</b>	YES	NO	MAYBE	N/A	
		33	13	7	2	
	<b>Explanations provided</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children are aware / educated about the dangers around them</li> <li>Everyone looks out for each other's children</li> <li>Parental Supervision</li> <li>Garda Vetting of coaches / club personnel</li> <li>Community Alert / Community Text Alert</li> <li>Residing in a safe area</li> <li>Everyone knows everyone else</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anti-social behaviour including drugs, alcohol and gangs</li> <li>A lot of strangers in the locality</li> <li>Cyber-bullying</li> <li>Internet usage</li> <li>Danger of paedophiles</li> <li>Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depends on the circumstances for example age of children, location, background, peers</li> <li>Vulnerable without adequate supervision</li> <li>Lack of facilities,</li> </ul>		



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good sense of community involvement</li> <li>• Children know where to seek help if needed</li> <li>• Stay Safe Programme</li> <li>• Living in a rural community, therefore it is safe</li> </ul>		especially for teenagers	
Q4	<i>Do you think children and young people are safe in their school / educational environment?</i>	YES	NO	MAYBE	N/A
		45	5	5	0
	<i>Explanations provided</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good security</li> <li>• Good child protection procedures</li> <li>• Anti-bullying campaigns</li> <li>• Policies in place</li> <li>• Well-trained and supportive staff</li> <li>• Safety Awareness / Education i.e. Stay Safe Programme, Sex Education</li> <li>• Mandatory Reporting</li> <li>• Positive mental health support</li> <li>• Rules and regulations</li> <li>• Small school environment, everyone knows one another</li> <li>• Garda Vetting</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Changes in teaching styles and interaction with the children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More openness and acceptance of diverse backgrounds needed</li> <li>• More anti-bullying awareness and clampdown on bullying needed</li> <li>• Insufficient supervision</li> <li>• More emphasis on positive mental health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No support for early school leavers</li> <li>• Responses of teachers sometimes questionable</li> <li>• Bullying can still happen</li> <li>• More understanding of teen development needed</li> </ul>	
Q5	<i>Do you think children and young people are safe in their home</i>	YES	NO	MAYBE	N/A
		39	10	6	0
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good levels of security</li> <li>• Rules</li> <li>• Monitoring technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of domestic violence /</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on background,</li> </ul>	

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	<b>Explanations provided</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety awareness</li> <li>• Educated and aware parents</li> <li>• Good structural buildings</li> <li>• Adequate contacts in the event of an emergency</li> <li>• Provision of internet safety and awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• abuse within the home</li> <li>• Inadequate laws to deal with child abuse</li> <li>• Unsupervised access to online activities / chat rooms</li> <li>• Addictions e.g. parental substance abuse</li> <li>• The belief that what happens at home stays at home</li> <li>• Parental mental health issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parental support,</li> <li>• Some children can suffer neglect</li> <li>• Accidents can happen no matter how safe the home is</li> </ul>	
<b>Q6</b>	<b>What supports / services are available to keep children and young people safe in their...</b>				
<b>a)</b>	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and awareness around possible dangers</li> <li>• Supportive people in their lives e.g. school staff, parents, Gardaí, neighbours</li> <li>• Community setting / support</li> <li>• Clubs and activities – Youth Clubs, After School Clubs, Big Brother/Big Sister, Sports Clubs, Scouts,</li> <li>• Family Support</li> <li>• Training e.g. Internet Safety</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP)</li> <li>• Agencies – Tusla, Social Services, Child Line, ISPCC, Family Resource Centre, HSE, CYPSC, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services,</li> <li>• Garda Vetting</li> <li>• Community Alert initiatives</li> <li>• Safeguarding Initiatives – Children First</li> <li>• Road Safety – Speed bumps, Crossings, speed limits</li> </ul>			
<b>b)</b>	School / Educational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home School Liaison</li> <li>• Anti-bullying initiatives</li> <li>• Personal Safety Programmes – Stay Safe, Zippy's Friends</li> <li>• Cyber-bullying awareness</li> </ul>			

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good teachers, Staff, Board of Management</li> <li>• School Counsellors / Chaplains</li> <li>• Good security measures</li> <li>• Department of Education – school policies, safeguarding children and young people,</li> <li>• Student Mentors, Big Brother/Big Sister initiatives</li> <li>• Safety Education – Road Safety, Personal Safety, Fire Safety</li> <li>• Adequate supervision</li> <li>• Parents Association</li> <li>• Agencies – Tusla, County Childcare Committees, Sports Partnerships,</li> <li>• Friends / Peers</li> <li>• Garda Vetting</li> <li>• Children First Training</li> <li>• Adequate and inclusive policies and procedures</li> <li>• After School Activities</li> </ul>
c)	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, extended family, friends, neighbours, community</li> <li>• Family Support – Public Health Nurse, GP,</li> <li>• Agencies – Social Services, Family Support Workers, School Liaison Officers, Early Intervention Teams, CYPSC, Gardaí, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services,</li> <li>• Phone and internet monitoring</li> <li>• Safety Measures – Fire Safety,</li> <li>• Education on dangers / how to keep safe</li> <li>• Anti-bullying initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Q7</b>	<b><i>What more needs to be done to keep children and young people safe in their...</i></b>	
a)	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More local campaigns on safety, bullying, internet and online use, substance abuse and misuse, anti-social behaviours,</li> <li>• More Guards,</li> <li>• Education and awareness around safety – Personal Safety, Fire Safety, Internet Safety,</li> <li>• Provision of more activities especially for teenagers</li> <li>• More education-based training for parents / guardians</li> <li>• More availability for Child Protection Training</li> <li>• Community involvement opportunities and initiatives for parents and children</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More funding for local initiatives</li> <li>• Improve national policy e.g. about homelessness</li> <li>• More security – street lighting, CCTV,</li> <li>• Clampdown on underage drinking,</li> <li>• Community groups and initiatives – Community Alert, Youth Clubs, Tidy Towns, Helping the elderly, Scouts,</li> <li>• Additional non-sport related activities</li> <li>• Better mental health strategies and supports,</li> <li>• Better infrastructure and amenities – footpaths, cycle paths, playground, sports pitches</li> <li>• Better road safety – speed limits, appropriate school drop-off locations,</li> <li>• Better provisions / source of contacts for new families to the community</li> <li>• More awareness of supports available to children and young people</li> </ul>
b)	School / Educational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More vigilance around bullying</li> <li>• More education on supports available to children and young people</li> <li>• More education for teachers on dangers for children – social media, road safety, stranger danger,</li> <li>• More safety awareness initiatives – bullying, cyber-bullying, sex education,</li> <li>• More collaboration between organisations</li> <li>• Proper screening for external bodies entering school premises</li> <li>• More interaction with external agencies – school visits from local organisations and authorities,</li> <li>• More emphasis on physical activities</li> <li>• More focus mental health strategies and awareness – self-care</li> <li>• Continuing education in evolving technology monitoring</li> <li>• Infrastructural enhancements – road safety initiatives, speed bumps,</li> <li>• Building positive relationships between school, child and home</li> <li>• Better communication with home – newsletters, parent teacher meetings, engagement with Board of Management,</li> </ul>
c)	Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement of parents in safety awareness and education on topics such as positive parenting, Social Media, Internet / Online awareness, Abuse, child development, substance use and misuse,</li> <li>• Family support – early detection and intervention, regular visits,</li> <li>• More staff / provisions to agencies such as Tusla</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building supportive relationships - engagement between parents and children for greater awareness on issues affecting children and young people</li> <li>• Clearer reporting guidelines and procedures for reporting concern</li> </ul>
Q8	<b><i>Additional Comments provided by Parents / Guardians:</i></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every child deserves a safe environment regardless of where they are. Checks must be put in place at home, at school and in the community to ensure this is achieved</li> <li>• Sligo can be a rough and threatening environment for young people at night times and weekends. When a lot of drink is consumed, and random acts of intimidation and violence can flare up on the streets or in a club often leading to significant injury. Much more Garda involvement and publican co-operation needed along with additional camera and lighting to reduce the triggers for such behaviour</li> <li>• All families should have emergency plan in place where children know to access numbers and assembly points in case of fire</li> <li>• The area that I live in is in two counties and two provinces and we seem to be forgotten when it comes to resources</li> <li>• Babysitting classes and clubs teach older children how to care for younger ones in a safe way</li> <li>• Continued vigilance and good advice is needed for the safeguarding of children</li> <li>• Asking children and including them in what they feel are areas to be addressed</li> <li>• Good advice and instilling good values and morals to our children. Keep an eye on what's happening around them</li> <li>• Develop a free to download app for young people with information on supports out there</li> <li>• There are supports for breastfeeding. There are mother and toddler groups. <b>NO</b> supports for parents of teenagers especially lone / single parents</li> </ul>	

## Overview of Findings

Through this collaboration with children, young people, parents and guardians, several important recurring themes were identified:

- Anti-bullying Awareness: Recognition was provided for the important emphasis currently placed on anti-bullying campaigns and education for children and young

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people. However, continuous and further education on this topic is deemed important by participants. Such suggestions included the provision of confidential boxes in schools, so children and young people can make a disclosure regarding issues of bullying in a confidential and secure manner.

- Identification of other important and continuous safety education and training was also deemed necessary including Children First Training, First Aid, Personal Safety Awareness e.g. stranger danger. Many participants believed that such training should be made available to all individuals engaging with children through their community environment, their school / educational environment and their home environment.
- Through the analysis process the need for more activities, clubs and amenities for children and young people became very apparent with many highlighting the lack of activities available to teenagers. Participants were of the belief that such provisions would assist in reducing anti-social behaviour and issues with alcohol and drugs use and misuse.
- Huge emphasis was placed on the importance of road safety for children and young people including tough crack down on speeding, more provision of speed ramps and pedestrian crossings and more adequate drop-off and collection points at schools.
- Responses from children and young people on what keeps them safe focused mainly around the people in their lives including parents, siblings, extended family, teachers, neighbours and even shopkeepers. Having trusted people in their lives and environment as well as talking and counselling opportunities were perceived to be the most recognised above all other suggestions from children and young people regarding their safety. The closure of local Garda stations was also mentioned regularly on why communities may not be safe.
- In contrast to this, responses from parents and guardians placed emphasis on the importance of engagement from agencies such as Tusla, Social Services, An Garda Síochana and Family Support in ensuring the safety of children and young people. They also stated the provision of adequate policies and procedures such as child protection training and practices is vitally important.

## Recommendations:

One of the outcomes of this research was the identification of recommendations to improve children and young people's feelings of safety in their community, their educational environment and their home. It is crucial to demonstrate to them that their views are highly valuable and will be used to plan future objectives. Suggestions were outlined to help improve provision for their safety in their formative years. Such recommendations include:

- Placing continued emphasis on the provision of safety awareness education within schools and local communities as highlighted by respondents in relation to programmes around stranger danger and personal safety,
- Continuing ongoing anti-bullying awareness campaigns within schools and communities through information events, workshops and educational lessons
- Utilising the contents contained within the report to encourage organisations such as the Gardaí and Local Authorities to commit to CYPSC
- Supporting the 'Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group' to ask for consideration of the issues highlighted for work/projects in the future
- Providing opportunity for whole community training and information opportunities on topics such as bullying, internet safety, personal safety, Child Protection, First Aid, building resilience and self-esteem, supporting the mental health of children and young people, farm safety, road safety
- Informing primary and post primary schools of the value and regard placed on teachers and staff by children and young people with regards to keeping them safe. Also, encouraging and promoting the roll out of the buddy system and mentoring support in all schools across Sligo and Leitrim. School personnel will also be encouraged to introduce a confidential comment / suggestions box to allow children express concerns and opinions in confidence around issues / topics affecting them i.e. bullying issues