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University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

The 4th Corner Youth Café (Limerick City) 'An exploration of Staff and Volunteers' construction of their practice '

Damien McMahon

CARL Research Project



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Name and year of course:	Masters in Social Work 2014
Date completed:	28/04/13

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- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
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Abstract

Background to the Study

This study took place as part of a Community Academic Research Links (CARL) project within University College Cork (UCC). Limerick Youth Service (LYS) opted to use the CARL process as they wished to research practice within the 4th Corner Youth Café, which had not been previously done. The Youth Café Model is a relatively new concept in Irish youth work, but has now emerged as the main means of providing universal youth work as an aspect of practice (Kiely 2009). It was deemed necessary therefore, to understand how practice in the 4th Corner Café is impacted by having to work within the café model in a disadvantaged area. The other main factors of interest were the staff and volunteer roles, and how current policy is also impacting on the practice. Thus it was felt that the participatory nature of CARL would support them to directly work with their staff and volunteers in a research process to see how they construct their practice.

Objectives

The aim of the research is to get a deeper understanding of the practice within the 4th Youth Corner Youth Café.

The following are the objectives that were decided on for this study:

-To gain a further understanding of the Youth Café Model in a disadvantaged community and how this guides practice.

-To interpret the roles of staff and volunteers at the 4th Corner Youth Café.

-To investigate the impact of current policy on practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café.

Methodology

The research methods used were primary participatory research, supplemented with secondary research with a literature review to inform the topic. Semi Structured interviews were conducted with staff and volunteers of the 4th Corner Youth Café. Qualitative methods within an interpretivist perspective were used to decipher the data, and a thematic approach was used to code the data. Overall the methodology allowed the researcher to explore the staff and volunteers' construction of their practice and what influences it.

Findings

The findings show that the practice with the 4th Corner Youth Café is congruent with the core practices of Youth work; including building and facilitating "Empowerment, Equality and Inclusion, Respect for young people, Young People involved in decision making, partnership and voluntary participation"(The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in Bane 2009, p. 172). Although it was noted that challenges were arising in relation to the desired levels being met regarding youth participation practice, particularly in the youth cafe model. It was also evident that practice in relation to staff and volunteers needs to be addressed as to best support those with the most training to engage in higher levels of direct work. Challenges were also highlighted in relation to how state policy is having a direct negative impact on the positive practices within the café due to funding. Finally the findings reflected that while there are challenges in having an open-access universal project in a disadvantaged area, it was seen that staff and volunteers felt that their practice was not negatively impacted. It was actually highlighted that they felt the café model supported them to effectively meet the needs and possibilities of the young people that attend.

Recommendations

The culmination of the research findings provided recommendations that could support improving practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café. Some of the recommendations have wider implications, but nonetheless, will also be relevant to supporting and improving practice. The recommendations include further training of staff and volunteers regarding Youth Participation Practice, implementation of a process that supports staff and volunteers to further and better articulate their practice, and clarification by the youth work sector of a tangible model for Youth Cafés. Finally, additional avenues of study were highlighted to include further investigation into the significance of a universal model in a disadvantaged area. This topic could be further enhanced, as well as continuing research surrounding the transitions of young people from the café model, as both would further inform and improve current practice.

Author's Conclusion

The researcher believes that the research has given an in-depth picture of the practice within the 4th Corner Youth Café and as a result has provided recommendations for future development. This can only be a positive for LYS and the Staff and Volunteers as it will support them to not only improve practice but inform the wider community and stakeholders of the positive work that they do, overall benefiting all the young people that they engage and work with now and in the future.

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Firstly I would like to thank Damien Landy of Limerick Youth Service for his constant support throughout this process. I would also like to thank the dedicated staff and volunteers who participated, for being so open and honest and respectful of the research. I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr. Eleanor Bantry White for her patience, guidance and support throughout the process, it was greatly appreciated.

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Callie my beautiful daughter you arrived in the middle of the MSW and you have smiled every day since your beautiful smile makes your Dad's day, so keep smiling.

Statement of Authorship

Title: Adult: The 4th Corner Youth Café (Limerick City) ‘An exploration of Staff and Volunteers’ construction of their practice ’

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Dissertation submitted to UCC in part fulfilment of Masters in Social Work

(MSW).

Tutor: Dr. Eleanor Bantry White

I hereby declare this dissertation is my own work. I also declare that all identifying information has been omitted to protect the identity of all individuals involved in the research.

Signed:

Dated:

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Research

This chapter will introduce the research topic: The 4th Corner Youth Café **(Limerick City)** 'An exploration of Staff and Volunteers' construction of their practice ', by initially giving background information on Limerick Youth Service (LYS) and the 4th Corner Youth Café. The chapter will then discuss the relevance of area in which the youth café is situated, as it is an area of high disadvantage, followed by a discussion around the rationale for the study. It will then go on to outline the research aims, objectives and questions that underpin the study. Finally the chapter will then outline the subsequent chapters within the research.

1.2 Overview of the Limerick Youth Service and the 4TH Corner Youth Café

LYS was founded in 1973 and currently works with over 3,000 young people annually. Its aim is to advocate on behalf of all young people, whilst empowering and encouraging them to take a leading role in shaping their own futures with that of their communities(Limerick Youth Service 2014). LYS youth work services include various youth intervention projects, volunteer led youth clubs and three youth cafes all within the environs of Limerick City and County. The 4th Corner Youth Café, founded in 2008, is situated in a regeneration area on the north side of the city. It provides an out of hours, open access space for 14 to 19 year olds that is supported and facilitated by youth work staff and volunteers. The aim is of a Youth Café is to provide a gateway for young people to discuss issues being faced by them, (expertise Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2006). Consequently providing a space and for education to happen at the level, place and time where a young person and their peers can feel comfortable and can participate (Jackson 2012).

1.3 The Youth Café in a Regeneration Area

The 4th Corner is situated in the north side area of the Limerick city known as Moyross, which is designated as an area of high disadvantage (Limerick Regeneration N.A). Consequently, it is under the remit of the regeneration programme for Limerick. As part of this programme, youth work has been central in engaging young people from the area, and this is evident with the numerous different projects facilitated through youth work in the community (Limerick Regeneration N.A). These include Garda Youth Diversion Projects, various Drugs projects and many others; with the common denominator being that majority

of these projects are youth work intervention-based. However, the 4th Corner is relatively unique in the area with regards to youth work provision as it is open access, and therefore not based on any specific intervention policy.

1.4 Research Rationale

This project was completed as part of the University College Cork (UCC) Community Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative, which offers students the opportunity to undertake research on behalf of Civil Society Organisations, in this case, LYS. As part of their strategic plan 2012 -2016, the need to engage in research was highlighted as best to learn and improve practice. As a result, an area was identified in partnership with UCC in relation to gaining a deeper understanding of practice within the youth cafe model in a disadvantaged community. It was also noted that the practice within the 4th Corner had not been previously researched. Another justification for the study was that it was felt that the research would facilitate LYS in supporting staff and volunteers to make informed changes to existing practice within the café (Dick, 2001). It was also hoped that the research would encourage them to effectively inform relevant stakeholders outside of the sector of the type of work that is being done in the café, which is noted as a relative weakness in the youth work sector (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). This has affected how those outside of the youth work sector have viewed the work that is undertaken with young people, which has had a direct negative impact on policy, and therefore practice (McMahon, 2009). LYS, therefore, wanted to hear how they construct what they do in the café from the staff and volunteers directly. This ability to harness "on the ground" information about youth work practice is why LYS opted for CARL, with its core grounding of participatory research.

Overall, the research is relevant to the researcher's journey into social work, as there many commonalities within the practice of youth work and social workers, which will be explored throughout the research. The researcher was also is aware that the social work system is currently overloaded, and many social workers have workloads that do not facilitate much direct contact work with young people (Burns McCarthy, 2012). As a result, particularly with young people, social workers refer and link them to various youth work supports. An understanding of current practice is therefore significant, as to best inform social workers when linking young people to the most appropriate support, particularly in relation to open access supports as it is not a route they traditionally use, yet it is one that could benefit them to support young people.

1.5 Key Terms

This section defines key terms that were used throughout the research.

1.5.1 Youth Café

The Prince's Trust (2006 in OMCYA 2008 p .8) describes Youth Cafés as "safe, alcohol-free places where young people feel welcome, can meet friends, have fun and take part in a wide range of activities." Yet this research contends that the above definition does not fully reflect the meaning of the term 'Youth Café'. Therefore this research, when referring to the term 'Youth Café', will be reflecting The Office of Minister Children (2008 in OMCYA, 2009 p. 9) categorisations, as highlighted below, with the 4th Corner Youth Café best reflected in Type 3:

> '• Type 1 – A place or space to simply hang out with friends, chat, drink coffee or a soft drink, watch TV or movies, surf the internet etc.
>
> • Type 2 - The same as type 1 but with the inclusion of entertainment or leisure services chosen by the young people themselves along with information on state and local services of interest and relevant to young people.
>
> • Type 3 – Perhaps the ideal model and the one to be aimed towards in the medium to long-term where types 1 and 2 are augmented by the actual provision of services targeted directly at young people. This can include education and training, healthcare both physical and emotional and direct targeted assistance'.

1.5.2 Open Access

The term 'open access' will be used throughout. For the purpose of the research it will mean, as Davis and Merton (2009, p.10) define an:

> '• engagement by young people which is not dependent on their coming with a specified label attached to them personally – other than, of course, that of 'young person';
>
> • engagement which does not hinge on eligibility criteria;
>
> • engagement which is voluntary and which allows considerable (though of course not total) discretion about what facilities they might use and which programmes they might wish to join once they have decided to engage'.

1.5.3 Volunteer

It can be assumed that when 'volunteer' is referred to within the research that it will mean 'an unpaid individual who donates his or her time to support staff to facilitate the running of the café'. It is also noted that all volunteers will have undertaken a minimum of training that consists of mandatory induction and child protection training from LYS before they were sanctioned to begin volunteering within the 4th Corner Café. .

1.6 Research aims and objectives

The aim of the research is to get a deeper understanding of the practices within the 4th Youth Corner Youth Café.

The objectives are

(1) To decipher current practice.
(2) To gain further understanding of the Youth Café Model in a disadvantaged community.
(3) To interpret the roles of staff and volunteers.
(4) To investigate the impact of current policy on practice.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How does working in the 4th Corner Youth Café guide practice?

2. What roles do both staff and volunteers preform within The 4th Corner Youth Café?

3. Does government policy affect the current practice within The 4th Corner Youth Café?

1.8 Chapter Outlines

This study consists of 5 chapters, with their functions outlined below.

Chapter 1: Introduction to study

The chapter has introduced the topic that is to be researched, while also providing relevant background information on LYS and of the 4th Corner Youth Café in a regeneration area. The chapter also highlighted the researchers' aims, objectives and research questions for the basis of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reflects on relevant literature in relation to the study, examining literature available in relation to youth work and the Youth Café model, with specific references to practice, policy and volunteer participation.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The chapter highlights the overall methodology for the study, which outlines the theoretical and philosophical approaches, data sampling, and methods of data collection and analysis.

Ethical considerations are also to be discussed, as well as underlining possibilities of bias, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and analysis

The chapter outlines the core themes arising from the data, analysing them by referencing appropriate literature along with the opinions and experiences of staff and volunteers in the 4th Corner Youth Café.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The chapter concludes the research; giving recommendations that will inform both LYS and those who wish to undertake future research. Finally it includes the researchers' own reflections on the research process.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research topic by giving background information on Limerick Youth Service and the 4th Corner Youth Café. It then examined the significance of the regeneration area in which the youth café is situated, followed by a discussion around the rationale for the study. Key terms were then outlined, followed by research aims, objectives and questions that underpin the study. Finally the chapter gave an outline of the chapters within the research.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology used to undertake this study. As a result it will examine the researcher's process, theoretical perspective and participatory action research. The chapter will then outline the reasons for adopting a qualitative, interpretive framework. To get a clear understanding of the wider context of the study, the limitations and strengths of the research will be discussed, concluding with an ethical discussion.

2.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The research is being undertaken as part of the CARL initiative within UCC, consequently the nature of the research will be participatory action research which:

> 'At its heart is collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves' (Baum et al, 2006 p. 854).

The partnership between LYS and UCC is significant, as for research to be deemed participatory; decisions should be made jointly, where possible, within and about the research process (Bergold & Thomas 2012). To affect strong collaboration, the researcher should also be aware of the importance of reflexivity within this type of research as Borg et al in Bergold and Thomas (2012, para 52) highlight:

> 'Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of themselves as the instrument of research. This is a particularly important issue for action researchers who are intimately involved with the subject of the research, the context in which it takes place, and others who may be stakeholders in that context.'

PAR acknowledges that it is those within the community who possess the knowledge and expertise which should be harnessed and utilised throughout the research process (Strand et al, 2003). This is hugely significant, as the staff and volunteers have experiential knowledge which is highly valued within this type of research (Killett, 2006). Partnership through PAR such as this one should look to identify and solve community based issues or affect social change. Fundamentally, this type of research supports creating avenues to challenge the status quo, as participants within the process armour themselves with an improved knowledge base, which facilitates to challenge more effectively (Healy 2001, Strand et al, 2003).

2.3 Qualitative Research

A qualitative research aim requires a focus on issues that occur in the "real world", while endeavouring to understand the complexities of the issues as to portray them in their "multi-faceted" form (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p. 135). It does this by seeking to understand peoples' perspectives of issues that are being researched which is a "central motif" of qualitative research (Bryman, 2008, p. 8). As the research sought to explore the construction of youth worker and volunteer practice; qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate method for this study, as it would also facilitate a provision of rich data from a relatively small sample size (Sarantakos, 1998).

2.4 Theoretical *Perspective*

A systems theory approach was utilised for the study. This encompasses an understanding that different elements within a system constitute a whole, consequently leading to examining a person and their interconnections with the systems that make them whole (Beder, 2000). Therefore, it cannot be dismissed that the systems in which youth workers and volunteers operate, play a significant role in the type of practice that they engage in within the 4th Corner Youth Café. An interpretivist perspective was also used in order to explore the youth workers and volunteers' construction of their own practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café. As Carey (2009, p. 90) notes:

> 'A methodology influenced by interpretivism will emphasise the importance of meaning, identity and personal experience to research participants, and will therefore seek to use a method such as the interview which is able to explore personal experience in great detail.'

This framework helped decipher attitudes, opinions, and underlying feelings that participants conveyed during the study (Carey, 2009). It was understood that research within this framework cannot be free of value as all participants' 'reality' is constructed by their perception of it (Grix, 2004). Consequently for the researcher, the interpretation of the information received impacted on how it was perceived, yet the participant's accounts are central to gaining further understanding, clarity and knowledge of the topic. Overall, the framework supported utilising the researchers and participant's social world, which contributed to getting a deeper understanding of the topics being discussed (Bryman 2008). The interpretivist perspective is well matched with the use of qualitative data, as it is based upon peoples' experiences of their social world rather than figures and statistics to inform research (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). This type of research facilitated a deeper understanding

of people's experiences which was greatly significant, as it supported a comprehensive exploration of staff and volunteers' construction of their role and work practice within the 4th Corner Café.

2.5 Research Methods

Research methods are the procedures used to harness relevant data in order to investigate a topic thoroughly. These methods are dictated by the research questions, thus providing a process that facilitates best answering the questions asked (Bryman, 2008). The two key methods used in this study were both the literature review and semi-structured interviews.

2.5.1 Literature Review

The review of literature offered the opportunity to engage with other research on the topic with a critical perspective. It highlighted a previously existing awareness about the topic, thus informing the relevance of the research. As a result, it also played a significant role in informing the type of methods used (Grey, 2004).

2.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were the chosen direct research method, as they supported the probing nature of the research, which provided more detailed information than more rigid forms of research (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). It was initially proposed to use focus groups, but in consultation it was noted that the mix of staff and volunteers could result in a strong possibility of group domination due to hierarchical professional relationships. As a result, semi-structured interviews were seen to best facilitate a level of comfort for the participants, which in turn supported more enhanced contributions. Semi-structured interviews also provided a flexibility whereby the researcher was able to delve deeper into some of the unexpected issues raised (Grix, 2004). The structure chosen was particularly important in this research, as there are many nuances to youth work practice, which was magnified by the relative newness of the youth café model.

2.5.3 Sampling

Through much discussion, it was agreed with LYS that the ideal form of sampling used in this study would be a purposive selection. This sampling occurs whereby participants meet certain criteria, indicating that they are able to explore the themes of the research (Carey, 2009). As a result, participants were not selected randomly, as they had to be current staff or volunteers within the 4th Corner Youth Café. They also had to be available during the timeframe in which the study would be completed. This ensured a type of non-probability

sampling was used, known as convenience sampling. Consequently, the accessibility of participants also played a significant role in their participation in the research (Bryman, 2008). LYS kindly agreed to source the participants for the study.

2.6 Data Collection and Analysis

As previously noted, semi structured interviews were used to collect the data. Before the interviews, all participants were sent an information sheet, consent form and an example questionnaire (see appendix) that would be used in the interview. LYS also explained the context of the interview to participants and prior to the interviews, the researcher offered all participants the opportunity to further query any concerns or questions. Location of interview was agreed with all participants, and the most convenient space available was sourced by the researcher. All of the interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, which were then transcribed. The method used to analyse the data was thematic, which supports 'categorisation of different phenomenon or phenomena' (Bryman, 2008, p282). The theoretical perspectives as discussed above, informed the interpretation of the themes identified, which gave a significant outline of the participants' construction of their practice within the café. The data was then coded using different colours, thus supporting organised deciphering of the information.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The research followed guidelines as set out by UCC and CARL. Participant protection is at the core of these guidelines, which should be the priority of the researcher (Carey, 2009). To maintain a high standard of protection for the participants, approval was first sought from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC to ensure all ethical standards were met in designing the research. The researcher and LYS were also explicit at all times, especially while informing the participants of the process and their rights within it.

2.7.1 Informed Consent

All participants were verbally informed about the nature of the research in a manner that was accessible to all participants. Prior to the interview the forms, previously given to the participants, were again read through until both the researcher and the participant were comfortable that there was a full understanding of what the participants were engaging in. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any stage and that LYS were fully supportive of this measure. It is important for a researcher to recognise that undue influence can be felt by participants to engage in studies, therefore avenues of

exiting studies should be available (McDonald & McDonald). They were also made aware that they could complain to UCC should they have any concerns with the study. All participants were over the age of 18 and no incentives, monetary or otherwise, were provided for their participation.

2.7.2 Confidentiality and Privacy

All participants were informed that all efforts would be made to preserve their anonymity, but they were also made aware that this could not be fully guaranteed due to the small nature of the research. They were also strongly informed about the limits of confidentiality with regards to child protection. It is for this reason that pseudonyms were used and all identifiable data for each participant was diligently deleted. Also, language was amended if felt it could potentially identify a participant if used. All data was stored anonymously on a secure server and will be destroyed once this study is graded.

2.8 Limitations of Methods

On reflection, there were notable limitations regarding method. Firstly, there was a small sample size, which can have an impact on the validity of the research as (Bryman, 2008, p. 180) notes 'the bigger your sample the more representative it is likely to be (provided sample is random)'. Hence this was a restriction, as the number of staff and volunteers working within the café were limited. This also impacted on the on the possibility of the randomness of the sample. Another limitation identified was the analysis of data by a single individual, as this left room for subjectivity (Carey 2009, Bryman 2008). This subjectivity is also relevant to PAR, as critics have highlighted the strong possibility for bias due to the input in the process of research, which can be applicable to LYS, who organised the research into one of its own projects. (Bergold & Thomas 2012).

2.9 Conclusion

In order to discuss and support the methodology used, this chapter has outlined the theoretical framework for the study, which was grounded in systems and interpretive perspectives. It examined the context of participatory research and how it supports a self-reflective inquiry that can create positive change. It was felt that this was the best approach to facilitate a thorough and interrogative research project, due to the unique circumstances of the 4th Corner Youth Café and the proposed outcome of such a study. The use of qualitative research was discussed, showing its importance in eliciting quality data. The chapter then outlined how the types of methods used, including a literature review, were seen to help inform the research

questions, semi-structured interviews and data sampling. The collection of and analysis of the data was then highlighted and all were seen to be supportive of the theoretical framework. The rest of the chapter then reflected on ethical considerations which underlined the possibilities of bias, and finally the contexts of limitations for the methods used were highlighted.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

To inform the research questions, this chapter will critically analyse the relevant literature, policy and debate that is pertinent to the current practice within the 4th Corner Youth Café. The review looked to define youth work and engage with the principles and values that underpin it. To gain further insight into current practices within the café, the relationship between the Irish State and youth work will be charted and appraised. Funding in youth work will then be examined to understand any direct impacts on current practice. This will enhance an analysis of the ongoing debates within youth work, such as universal provision and professionalisation. The concept of Youth Cafés as a model of practice and the relevance of youth participation practice within that model will also be reviewed. To give full context, reference will be made to the 4th Corner Youth Café, as well as any commonalities to social work where relevant. Overall the review aims to critically engage with the dominant themes in youth work practice, and as a result, provide a stable literary background for the forthcoming research.

3.2 Defining Youth Work Practice

Youth work has been described as a profession and a practice that is hard to define (Jenkinson, 2000; Bradford, 2005; Treacy, 2009; Powell et al., 2010; O' hAodain, 2010); a criticism that has also been levelled at social work (Walker et al 2008 Hepworth et al 2010). Youth work has been described under many different guises in Ireland and as Jenkinson (2000, p. 107) highlighted;

> 'Over the years youth work in Ireland has been struggling to develop an identity of its own; an ethos and conceptual framework that is particular to that discipline, as opposed to being seen as an offshoot of social work, probation work or even sport and recreation activities. There is a need to clarify what is central to youth work as there is much confusion, even within youth organisations, as to what it entails(Banks 1994 p.2-3, Godley1996).' (Jenkinson, 2000, p107)

This has led youth work in Ireland over the intervening period, to the present day, to undertake a process whereby it has looked to identify its key principles, values and practices. The key contribution to this was the enactment of the Youth Work Act 2001 which defines youth work as:

> 'a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is –

> complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.' (Youth Work Act 2001, Part 1, Section 3).

Critics such as Spence (2008, p. 6-7) highlight how the definition places the 'status of the profession' as 'secondary'. She also argues that

> 'whilst the definition might be particularly reflective of, and will certainly influence the bias of development in Irish Youth Work, the concepts which it mobilises are all contestable' (Spence, 2008, p. 7).

Although Devlin (2010, p. 94) points out that the definition is broad enough to maintain the 'core features' of youth work, he also notes that as youth work continues to evolve, the definition is most likely subject to change. The available literature has shown a strong correlation in relation the core features of youth work practice; they encompass working with and bringing together young people to enjoy activities in a voluntary capacity to best support them to enhance their lives through partnership and youth-centred practice, whereby avenues to address social change can be facilitated and addressed. (Spain 2013 Jenkinson, 2000; Tucker, 2004; Jeffs & Smith, 2008; Kiely, 2009; O'hAodain, 2010; Devlin and Gunning 2009a; Powell, 2012).

It is reflected within the literature that practice is grounded in the ability to build positive relationships with young people, as it is recognised that without this, effective youth work practice cannot happen (Spain, 2013, Devlin and Gunning, 2009). Building effective relationships with clients is also seen as central to enabling positive change within clients in social work practice (Trevithick 2003). The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in Bane (2009, p. 172) have identified five core values that underpin youth work practice and these are 'Empowerment of young people, Equality and Inclusion, Respect for all young people, Involvement of young people in decision-making, Partnership and Voluntary participation' and these are congruent with what the literature reflects.

There are considerable concerns that as youth work has evolved, some of these core values have been challenged, if not completely undermined, particularly in relation to voluntary participation and issues of control and monitoring (Hurley, 2002; Jeffs & Smith, 2002 Kiely, 2009; McMahon 2009; O' hAodain 2010). This has happened with the introduction and increasing state emphasis on funding towards targeted provision such as Neighbourhood Youth Projects and Garda Youth Diversion projects. This will be further discussed in the section 3.6. Also, practice in the Irish context has been criticised for being conservative, as it looks to 'fix' young people by integrating them back into the system through the dominant

personal development practice that prevails (Bane, 2009). Yet many practitioners have reflected on strength in their practice, having engaged with young people with no limited pre conceptions (Devlin and Gunning 2009).

The definition and principles as described above are central to the functioning of the 4th Corner youth Café. In providing universal open access Youth Work, the café is attempting to function from the recognised statutory definition and principles discussed.

3.3 Youth Work and the Irish State

State involvement in youth work began in the 1940's with the formation of Comhairle le Leas Óige 1942 (Council for the Welfare of Youth), now known as the City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) (Devlin, 2009). Youth work before this intervention was dominated by the Catholic Church through subsidiarity, which underpinned social and educational services in the Irish state, and was originally a voluntary vocation (Geoghegan & Powell, 2006). The state intervened to co-ordinate a strategy in response to the issue of high youth unemployment in Dublin (Devlin 2010). This step represented a change of policy by the state, signifying that the State was going to play a significant role in how youth work progressed (Treacy, 2009). The Church was happy for this to take place as they were aware that they held a special position in the direction of state policies, so they knew they could dictate policy when necessary (Devlin, 2010).

The State formalised many structures within youth work throughout the 1950's to 1970's. Programmes began to be funded from the "Youth Affairs Section" which is still in existence and is part of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) was also created to represent and support the interests of voluntary youth organisations (Devlin, 2009). Significantly though, the main youth organisations disaffiliated from the NYCI leaving youth work without a unified voice (Jenkinson, 2000).

One of the most influential events with regards to the relationship between youth work and the State was the publication of the Final Report of the National Youth Policy Committee, known as the Costello report (1984) (Scanlon et al, 2011). Its significance was reflected in National Youth Work development plan 2003-2007 (2003, p.4) where it stated that it was:

> 'the first sustained examination of youth work services and their relationship with other aspects of youth policy and provision was undertaken by the Costello Committee whose Final Report was published in 1984. Its continuing significance lies in the fact that it set out for the first time a framework for the delivery of a comprehensive youth service at local and national levels, and its

> influence can in fact be traced in the Youth Work Act, 2001'(*National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007, 2003 p.4)*

The Costello Report facilitated the publication of the numerous different documents regarding the relationship of youth work and the State, such as the In Partnership with Youth: the National Youth Policy (1985). This eventually led to publication of Work Act 1997 (National Youth Work development plan 2003-2007, 2003) which almost put youth work on a legislative footing.

Although the Youth Work Act 1997 was repealed, it led to the implementation of the Youth Work Act 2001 which 'provides a statutory framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services by the Minister, VECs (Vocational Educational Committees) and by the National and Regional Youth Organisations' (NYCI, 2013). The act was welcomed for giving youth work both structure and coordination (O' hAodain 2010; Devlin 2009). Although Kiely and Kennedy (2005) criticise it for limiting voices who could contribute to Youth Work's development, as the representatives who could engage with developments were limited by the act.

Since the implementation of the Act, the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 was created, although many of the proposals were not realised due to budget constraints (Leahy & Burgess, 2011). Changes have been implemented, and through the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), created in 2005, youth work was brought under its remit in 2008 when it became known as the Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs (OMCYA), now known as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Consequently they have set about employing standards of practice for the profession, by implementing a National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) (OMCYA, 2011) for youth work. Devlin (2009) points out that youth work coming under the remint of a single department is positive step, as it facilitates co-ordination of resources and the raising of standards. Although it is noted that the state is expecting more of practitioners while still providing limited funding and resources (Jenkinson, 2013). What is most evident is that as a result of youth work's journey regarding its relationship with the state, youth work in Ireland has become a profession that is now interwoven with the workings of the Irish State. A core criticism is that youth work has become more associated with outcome based practice based

on quantitative targets, thus undermining 'flexibility and responsiveness', which are key elements of practice (Bowden & Lanigan, 2011, p. 6).

3.4 Funding and its Impact on Practice

Current funding for youth work in Ireland has seen a 30% cut since 2008 (Kennedy, 2013). In 2012 the NYCI felt the need to produce a report called The Assessment of the Economic Value of youth work (Indecon, 2012), such was the financial pressure that the sector was experiencing. This was significant, as it magnified the move towards justifying youth work practice on a value for money basis.

Hence, funding for youth work is highlighted as a key challenge for youth workers in practice (Devlin and Gunning 2009a). Funding for youth work is not centralised (Jenkinson, 2009), which contributes to making the practice of youth work convoluted. For example, The DCYA directly funds Youth Information Projects, Drugs Task Force projects and some Special Projects for Youth, although this can depend on location, as many are administered by the Department of Education through local Vocational Education Committees. The DCYA also provide capital funding through Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPSFS) and Youth Café Capital Grants Scheme 2013. In tandem with this, the Health Service Executive (HSE) administers funding for Neighbourhood Youth Projects and the Department of Justice provides funding for Garda Diversion Projects. Also, the Department of the Environment provides funding through city and county councils for other various projects.

The 4th Corner is currently funded through Regeneration, which is currently a subsection of Limerick City Council. Each funding stream has different criteria which relate to a public health issue or social order agenda, regarding the process and outcomes in utilising the funding. This can give undue influence to funders in to youth work practice, as workers and organisations try to meet the different criteria set out (Treacy, 2009; Kiely, 2009; McMahon, 2009; Scanlon et al 2011).

Doorley (2003, p.5) goes even further when he argues that:

> 'As a consequence of funding shortages, some organisations are being lured into contracts that bind them to implement policies of the State rather than meet the needs of the group they are working with or for' (Doorley, 2003, p.5)

The significant impact on the overall function of universal youth work is that it is has undermined the practice within these settings such as cafés, as they have become under-

resourced (Kiely 2009). This has therefore limited opportunities within this type of youth work, as funding is less available for activities and transport thus, limiting the possibilities for most effective practice. Capital funding has been made available through Youth Café Capital Funding Programme 2013, but this programme is for new entities only and does not fund the running or staffing costs, thus limiting the scope for youth work within them.

3.5 Professionalisation in Youth Work

While youth work is still primarily facilitated by volunteers (Powell et al 2010), it is now predominately being led by professional youth workers who, particularly over the last ten years, are expected to have attained significant educational training before they are eligible to apply for a position. This is being facilitated by an ever-increasing demand by employers for competencies and credentials, especially for new employees. Although this is a process that is still not uniform (Fusco 2011). As Jenkinson (2013 p.8) points out:

> 'A decision by the youth work sector to move towards requiring full-time youth workers to hold professional qualifications was set out in the National Youth Work Development Plan. Increasingly, holding a professional qualification became a desired and often an essential requirement of youth work employment'. (Jenkinson 2013 p. 8)

Alternatively, social work in Ireland has very much come to a point whereby there are standardised educational requirements to become a social worker (Kearney& Skehill). The result for youth work has been a sector with a higher level of professionalism (Powell et al. 2010). The central premise for this drive to professionalise appears to be to legitimise the practice (Vance 2010). Yet there is increasing doubt over the strive for professionalisation in youth work, particularly if it is based on increasing the right and rewards of youth workers, as this may lead to a corrupt system that looks to benefit the worker rather than young people (Sercombe, 2004, p. 22)

Johnston-Goodstar and VeLure Roholt (2013, p.141-142), argue that the benefits of professionalisation outweigh the negatives when they highlight how:

> 'Freidson (2001) describes four benefits to professionalization: recognition, quality, compensation, and building a discipline. The benefits are a combination of altruism (quality and building a discipline) and self-interest (recognition and compensation). Three of these recognition, quality, and compensation have most often been used as desired outcomes for youth work professionalization (Beker, 2001;Lochhead, 2001).' (Johnston-Goodstar and VeLure Roholt 2013 p.141-142)

While many have highlighted this move as a positive (Fusco, 2011; Emslie 2013), caution should also be taken, as professionalisation facilitates an emphasis on acknowledged

standards of practice. As many have argued, this could exclude effective ways of working that are unique and a challenge to the status quo, as salaries will be supported by the system within youth workers are meant to facilitate challenging (Sercombe 2004; Vance, 2010; Johnston-Goodstar and VeLure Roholt, 2013).

Additionally, professionalisation can facilitate a move towards managerialism (Bradford, 2005 McMahon, 2009; Emslie 2013) which has also been a criticism of social work (Ferguson&Woodward 2009). This undermines the practice of youth workers working directly with young people, as the emphasis on meeting targets and outcomes has created an environment where youth workers spend more time administrating rather than practicing (Davies and Merton 2009, 2010; In Defence of Youth Work, 2011; Tiffany, 2007). This has led to a situation whereby volunteers are the ones who are most available to undertake direct contact as they tend not to be burdened with administration duties (De St Croix 2013 In Defence of Youth Work, 2011). What has transpired is a situation whereby those who are most trained are limited to the amount of direct work they can do with young people, thus putting undue pressure on volunteers (Davies & Merton 2010). Therefore as the literature represents, volunteers need to be 'nurtured' in a youth work sector that needs to move towards a more professionalised entity, as to best maintain its core ethos and practices (Powell et al 2010 p. 88).

3.6 Limited opportunity: Universal Provision in a Disadvantaged Area

Universal Youth Work, as demonstrated in 3.4, is underfunded. As a result of this, it is becoming secondary to targeted projects, due to an increasing emphasis on targeted youth work in Ireland (Powell et al, 2010; Bowden and Langan, 2011).As hAodain (2010, p. 44) points out:

> 'There appears to be a strong case to be made that the emphasis on targeting 'problem' groups of young people poses difficulties for 'universal' youth work, which becomes the poor relation, underappreciated and under-funded' (O' hAodain 2010 p. 44).

Targeted projects have been criticised, as participation in projects such as Garda Youth Diversion, which work with young people who are engaged with the criminal justice system, is on the basis of a referral being made by An Gardaí Siochána. While participation in a Garda diversion project is voluntary (O'hAodain, 2010), he and Scanlon et al (2011), question the degree to which the participation is voluntary. Kiely (2009) in Scanlon et al (2011 p, 4) states:

> 'the principle of voluntary participation is compromised by projects which are characterised by more coercive kinds of participation and a greater orientation towards the surveillance and control of young people' (Scanlon et al 2011 p,4)

Therefore, many have argued that targeted youth work is facilitating the state to control the focus and practice of youth work (Bowden, 2006; McMahon, 2009; Kiely, 2009; Treacy 2009). These projects also reinforce a sense of difference between young people. This is rather significant to youth work practice, as one of the enshrined core values is that it's based on young people's voluntary participation. Another criticism of targeted youth work is that it perpetuates stereotypes, therefore contributing to labelling the young people who attend as deviant, separate to society (Becker 1963). Yet notwithstanding this, it has been argued that targeted projects offer the best opportunity to engage with those hard to reach young people at the periphery of society (Scanlon et al 2011).

Targeted youth work therefore has been directed towards areas of disadvantage, as this is where the majority of hard-to-reach young people reside, and it has resulted in universal provision becoming limited in these areas (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). While this work is limited, there are opportunities through projects such as the 4th Corner and earlier studies have shown universal youth work as being effective, and also the most valuable form of youth work by workers in these areas affected by disadvantage (In Defence of Youth Work 2011, Devlin and Gunning, 2009).

3.7 The Youth Café Model and Youth Participation

The youth café model is a relatively new concept in youth work, with the first youth cafés in Ireland opening in 2001. Research by Forkan et al (2010a) highlights that while all cafés are unique entities; they possess common themes of universal open access Youth Work and youth participation practice at their core. There are criticisms surrounding the model and many youth workers have questioned if the cafés actually provide youth work (Powel et al 2010). What is evident is that youth cafés are now the dominant way in which the state is looking to support universal provision. While this is seen as a positive step for universal provision (Bowden and Langan, 2011), how well they are supported has been based on limitations, and always subject to funding (O 'Hadaoin 2010). This has led to some criticism of the model for not maintaining a universal approach, as shortfalls are facilitated by other funding streams; therefore cafés have to facilitate targeted work (Kiely, 2009; McMahon 2009). It has also been argued that the current model is somewhat conservative, and that it

follows many of the principles of targeted projects, particularly social control and attaining social norms (Powell *et al.* 2010, O 'Hadaoin 2010).

Overall, while these are challenges, youth cafés do offer the opportunity to expand universal provision (Forkan et al 2010), as they endeavour to provide universal youth work as defined by Davies and Merton (2009 p.5) in Scanlon et al, who describe it as:

> 'open access' youth work in which admittance is not dependent on the young person 'having a prior label attached'; does not lay down eligibility criteria; and is not only voluntary but allows 'considerable freedom of choice within the relevant facilities' (Scanlon et al 2011 p. 5)

The significance of youth participation is preserved through article 12 of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child 1989, which is Internationally Binding, and to which Ireland signed up to in 1992. As a concept, it has been associated with different disciplines, but in Ireland it is closely connected with youth work:

> The *National Youth Work Development Plan* (NYWDP), which was designed to provide the 'blueprint for youth work in Ireland' (Department of Education and Science, 2003a: iv) directly connects participation in youth work to Article 12 and the view of young people as citizens: The emphasis in youth work on the importance of the active and critical participation of young people is in keeping with the view that young people have rights as citizens (Department of Education and Science, 2003a:14).

While there appears to be considerable commitment by those within youth work regarding youth participation, there are relatively low levels of young people actively participating in practice, particularly in the decision-making process of youth organisations (Bowden and Lanigan, 2011, Leahy and Burgess, 2011). Youth cafés are at the forefront of providing a platform for meaningful youth participation, as it is at the core of the Youth Café model (Forkan et al 2010a). Therefore, practice within the cafés contributes to facilitating young people with the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and perceptions about their abilities and capabilities. This is by supporting them to have informed engagement with key concepts within youth work such as social justice, equality and inclusion (Seebach, 2008). This is particularly relevant to the young people within the 4th Corner, as youth participation practice can also create avenues for young people to link in with and challenge the decision making processes within their local and wider communities (Checkoway et al, 2003). This in turn reflects a practice that embraces elements of the critical social change model.

3.8 Conclusion

This review, in engaging with the relevant literature, has shown that there are many challenges facing the practice of youth work in Ireland. The constant challenge to define

youth work practice is still ongoing, and this facilitated the debate over the core values that it supports. This was a positive characteristic, as the values of 'Empowerment of young people, Equality and inclusion, Respect for all young people Involvement of young people in decision-making, Partnership and Voluntary Participation'" (NYCI in Bane 2009, p. 172) are revealed as central to the practice. What is evident is that the State has become the dominant force in shaping the practice in the way youth work is funded, whereby the targeted practice was seen to be the preferred method of youth work in disadvantaged areas. Thus Universal youth work was seen to be undervalued as a result, yet it was seen to be more reflective of all the core values of practice. The move towards professionalisation was seen to be positive, as it has resulted in raising standards and practices. It is recognised that this must be done cautiously, as it has the ability to undermine youth worker and volunteer practice. The Youth Café Model was noted to offer the opportunity to engage in universal provision, and youth participation practice was seen to be central to this. Overall by referencing the 4th Corner, it provided a relevant backdrop to the review, giving a clear and applicable insight around the topics discussed, thus informing the research questions.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and outlines the key findings within the study. Six participants were interviewed, all of whom were either staff or volunteers within the 4th Corner Youth Café. To ensure anonymity, the participants will be referred to as P1-P6 (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6). The interviews resulted in numerous different themes arising, and to best inform the analysis, five key themes were focused on. These included (i) Building Relationships with young people, (ii) Creating Pathways to Participate, (iii) Connecting with Parents and Community, (iv) Staff and Volunteers: a differing role, and (v) The External Influences on Practice. These themes are reflective of systems theory, as within each theme it is recognisable that the practice in youth work is interconnected with the systems that practitioners interact with; including Family Systems, Community Systems, and Sate Systems, which is reflected in the literature (Ford et al 2005).

4.2 Building Relationships with young people

All participants were clear that a significant value to their practice was building positive relationships with young people, as it enabled them to provide support and positive change. P1 equivocally stated that *"the ninety-nine percent of the work that we do is based on a relationship with the young people you know you get nothing done unless you have a positive relationship"*. P3 also reflected this with the comment: *Oh, it's a big thing, a big thing, you have to know them"*. P4 noted , "*once you have that relationship built, I mean you can conquer anything like"* To build the relationship P1 highlighted that "*you really have to come in with an open mind and non-judgemental approach, I think that approach is key to the successful relationship building*".

Many of the participants spoke that these relationships support you to build a trust with the young people. P4 noted *"you build a relationship with them and they kind of build up a trust, and they trust you"*. P1 concurred with this saying "*it's all about them being able to trust us I suppose".*

All participants were conscious that the onus was on them to create the opportunities to build the relationship. P2 commented *"it's just about getting out, I think, pool, and FIFA is great*

like, it's a great way to break the ice cause you know people then can start chatting, you know, just ask them how school is and stuff".

All noted that building relationships enabled them to recognise when there were personal issues with the young people. P6 reflected this when highlighting "*you kind of get to know their kind of, tell signs*". Many highlighted that this resulted in the formation of a relationship where P5 noted that young people *"begin to express themselves, share some of the talents they have and share some of the challenges they face."*

The participant's emphasis on the importance to practice of building positive relationships with the young people concurs with the literature (Henry et al 2010 Davis 2005), particularly regarding recognising times of distress, and supporting them to enhance their talents. (Spence 2008, Devlin& Gunning 2009). The importance of building relationships to practice is even more magnified in an open access environment, as engagement in the programmes does not happen successfully without a strong relationship between the staff and volunteers and the young people, as they are seen to be the foundation for learning and education within youth work (Rhodes 2004, Smith 2001).

4.3 Creating a pathways to Participate

4.3.1 Creating a Safe Space

The participants noted the importance of creating a safe accessible space as an alternative to the street. P1 noted how *"we're all really open-minded in here, it's a friendly space, very welcoming*" also commenting on how "*they come back because it's a safe space*".

P2 stated "*we make it safe by, d'you know, we offer them things to do to keep them off the streets*". Some felt this was an underestimated part of their practice with P5 pointing out that its:

> "*maybe something we take for granted, but a youth café in Moyross, in a disadvantaged regeneration community, the forums or the spaces for social interaction are quite limited and certainly social interaction in a, in a healthy way. Am, so you know the basic thing of allowing young adults a space where they can interact in a social way, in a healthy way."*

The environment that is created by youth workers within a space contributes to what the young people expect of the space and the staff or volunteers within it (Spence and Deveanney, 2006). It is therefore important that youth workers and volunteers are conscious of this so they can facilitate a space that creates positive associations for young people. The

staff and volunteers reflected this with particular attention to accessibility and safety. Research by Forkan et al (2010, a&b) has pointed out the significance of making youth cafés safe and accessible, with many young people highlighting that it is one of the reasons that they attend. If young people see the space as accessible and safe, they are most likely to engage and participate as they know that the staff and volunteers have endeavoured to make the space a place that they can make their own (Spence and Deveanney, 2006).

4.3.2 Youth Participation

Many of the participants spoke about how youth participation was a core part of their practice in the café. P5 spoke about it in terms of ownership by pointing out how the staff and volunteers challenge:

> *"young people to take ownership, giving them the capacity, building capacity for the young people to have a real sense of ownership over the space, and to inform what the extra programmes and ideas are that are offered through the cafe, but also to influence the base model of the cafe in terms of the ground rules, the appearance of the place, the opening hours etc., so at every level, they're young adults, they're supported, am there are young people being supported and some of the young adults as volunteers, but, participants are being supported to take ownership of the space".*

P1 noted "*how we always liaise with the young people, you know and see what they want to do*". P6 spoke about a project within the café and it was about "*giving young people the responsibility*" and noted this was done as the young people *"set their own terms and conditions, have their own contracts, application forms,* this was followed out by noting " *it's really empowering".*

Some participants acknowledged that there were challenges and recognised that these challenges may not hold to the expectations of the youth café model with regards to a functioning youth committee when P1 noted that:

> *"it has worked to a certain extent, it's not really consistent but we have a youth committee and people drop in and out. You know, realistically you'd like the youth committee to be running the whole, am, all programmes and everything and coming up with programmes and ways to spend money but it hasn't worked as well here being honest".*

P5 supported this by describing how *"its complex in that the youth café model is distinct in a disadvantaged community, so there's am, a maybe a different emphasis, on the core*

principals around youth participation". Consequently P1 did recognise that "we *need to do a bit more training*" with regards to running a youth committee in a disadvantaged area.

Youth participation is central to maintaining the ethos of a youth café and it is also becoming a central in youth work practice (Seebach, 2008), as it facilities embracing the core elements of youth work practice "Empowerment, Equality and Inclusion, Respect for young people Young People involved in decision making, partnership and voluntary participation" as outlined (NYCI in Bane, 2009, p. 172). It is evident that the staff and volunteers saw it as a focal point for them in their practice to make the young people central in the decision making about how the café functions. There were obvious challenges to practise in relation to facilitating a youth committee and this is a concern. However, on a positive note, it was recognised that training was needed to support staff, volunteers and young people in order to make this happen. The literature shows that the focus of youth participation in youth work, particularly regarding young people at the margins of society, should be to support them to participate within their current capacity, with the intention of building on that (Black et al, 2011). The findings are supportive of this and show that the staff and volunteers consistently challenge themselves and the young people to build towards increasing levels of youth participation.

4.4 Facilitating Connections with Parents, Family and Community

4.4.1 Connecting with Parents and Family

All participants spoke about the importance of engaging with parents. They spoke highly about the facilitation of a weekly coffee morning for parents and others within the community. The coffee morning was seen an opportunity for staff, volunteers and young people to engage primarily with parents and family , thus giving them a better understanding of what happens in the café. Participants spoke about how it had created improved avenues of communication with parents. P5 noted that:

> *"the community coffee morning has allowed parents to grandparents to relatives of the service users, or the young people, Young people to, you know, their broader network of family to see where they're young people are going and what they do and what they experience in the café and that has a benefit in, am, creating a healthier sense of community,"*

P6 commented how "*even the parents of the kids support it, they're behind it, they're not stopping their kids coming down to us, we don't get phone calls going 'oh (Name) was doing this and doing that', we don't, they're more than happy if we ever have a problem and ring them up they're more than happy, they're always good about it"*

Others noted that, as a result, parents call in to the café outside of hours to speak with staff and volunteers looking for support in relation to their young people. The practice of engaging parents, as demonstrated, is supported by the literature, which shows that if workers create opportunities for effective communication with parents, it will enable youth workers to maximise the possibilities of their work with young people (Spain, 2013).

4.4.2 Connecting with the community

Some participants spoke of the importance in facilitating young people to engage positively with the community. As P1 noted "*it's good to promote positive concepts between young people and adults in the community*". They gave an example of this whereby "*we have Santa's grotto here every year that the young people plan and organise and roll out on the day and it just gives an opportunity for struggling families to bring their children to see Santa*" " P5 echoed this type of linking with the community when he pointed out how "*we support young people to link in inter-generationally and different sub-groups going on, there's a community festival coming up and a sub-group from the youth café is supporting the delivery of that*".

Supporting the creation of positive links between young people and the community challenges the stereotypes often associated with young people (Byrne et al, 2006). Youth Work practice has always been associated with creating these links, as in doing so, helps create higher levels of acceptance, inclusion and worth for the young people in their community (Devlin & Gunning, 2009).

4.4.3 Creating Wider Networks

All the volunteers and staff emphasised the importance of taking the young people out of their community to meet other young people, and most importantly to break down barriers. They liaised with other professionals and other youth groups to organise evenings where they went and engaged with other clubs doing different activities. P1 describes:

"a bus up to Southill to play soccer with the youth cafe in Southill and it really broke down barriers between the two communities and again got these young people out of

their comfort zone, em, and, you know they were mixing with young people from another side of the city, from another regeneration area."

Limerick has had well documented fractured past, which has led to young people from different communities being very distrustful of each other, thus creating significant geographical and social divides within the city (Hourigan 2011). This has created significant challenges, yet the workers identified the engagement of the young people in the wider community of Limerick, through social interaction with their peers, as very significant within their practice. The literature concurs with this, as youth work is seen to be in the most appropriate position to recognise and facilitate avenues for young people to break down barriers that exist between different communities through social interaction (Spence & Deveanney, 2006).

4.5 Staff and Volunteers: A Different Practice?

All participants noted that their roles were similar because of the existing team ethic. They were consistent when they spoke about the differing role of the youth worker and the volunteer within the café. Each pointed out that the role of the youth worker involved a lot of behind-the-scenes work, particularly with in relation to administration, which has increased over the years. P3 commented "*I think there's a lot more paperwork gone into it now than what was there, like, it's (the café) there what is it five years now*". There was full agreement that the youth workers completed all of this, with one participant P2 pointed out that because of the:

"paperwork aspect, everything, you know has to be documented, and they have to do, d'you know, could be in the office doing phone calls and stuff and trying to sort out this, that and the other, [coughs, excuse me] and d'you volunteers are really out in the forefront, constantly out there cause volunteers don't have to have the paperwork"

As a result, it was felt by those voluntary participants that they had more freedom to directly engage with young people, because of the administrative demands. The volunteers also pointed out that they look to the staff for support, with the staff noting that this was becoming an increasing part of the role, P5 stated "*there's a certain skill set required around volunteer support and development, and ensuring quality standards*".

As seen in chapter three, demands on youth workers to account for their work by monitoring outcomes has created a situation whereby the role of a youth worker has become more administrative. Youth workers spend less time in direct contact with young people as the need to document and administer is becoming ever more increasing (De St Croix 2013 In Defence of Youth Work, 2011). This was evident above, which is also concerning as it is those with highest skill set who are limited regarding the amount of direct work they can do. This is compounded by the extra work undertaken with the supporting and training of volunteers. With increased funding cuts, there is a strong probability of a further reliance on volunteers and the impact of this on youth workers practice must be monitored. This reflects the interdependence between youth work practice and the State. This concern should not undermine the fact that the mix of volunteers and staff is seen by them as the best fit for running the café, which is also supported by the literature (Devlin and Gunning 2009).

4.6 External influences on Practice

4.6.1 Funding

The staff and volunteers were asked about challenges relating to their practice and there was a consistent response, as all participants were aware that current budgetary cuts were significantly limiting what they could do. P1 commented:

> *"Em, when, see when I started in the youth café that's when the cuts really started happening, but from listening to the young people from what the other youth workers used to do with them, and just from being in the know about what the other youth workers used to do with them, things have changed quite a lot."*

This was seen to limit the possible activities and there was a fear of repetition when P2 noted:

> *"there's only a certain degree you can do, you know, there's only a certain amount of things you can bake, make, before you go you need buses and stuff and you're going to need a little bit of money for food or something like, that's hard .."*

This theme continued with regards to funding when they spoke about the impact of halving the size of the café when a back room was removed due to funding and how it has had an effect on the dynamic of the café, and their practice, as a result. Many of the volunteers said that they had to spend more time monitoring behaviour as the café was now more confined. P1 noted, *"like, we're operating in a much, much smaller space, you know, you can't have as many young people in such a small space, especially if you have a lot of hot heads I suppose,*

so, am yeah that'd be the main challenge." P3 reflected also when they had the bigger room it was easier to maintain a calmer environment *"d'you know what I mean, cause they're not confined to one certain area, d'you know what I mean, if you're not happy with someone in the front room, go in the back room."*

All staff and volunteers were vocal on this topic and much of it reflected on the ability to go off site and out of the community which was noted above. Youth Work at present has taken significant amount of cuts and has received disproportionate cuts in comparison to other sectors in society (Kennedy, 2013). This is compounded in a disadvantaged area, where the young people and their families are unable to supplement the cuts for activities. The practical impact of the café being in a confined space also has created a situation whereby the staff and volunteers show it has inhibited them, as they have to spend more time managing behaviour as the space is so restricted.

4.6.2 The Youth Café in a Disadvantaged area

Some participants spoke about the relative uniqueness of having an open access cafe in a predominately disadvantaged area and how it can guide practice. P1 highlighted how

> "*you know youth café here is in a regeneration area, and, I suppose the area would present with a lot of issues I suppose like, early school leaving, lone parent, em, drug and alcohol misuse, and, we'd see it in the young people, you know, a lot of them mightn't have stuff to do and they engage in anti-social behaviour and a lot of it is triggered because of drug and alcohol abuse"*.

As a result, the staff and volunteers react and plan as issues and possibilities for education and awareness present. P5 commented "*the café model allows us, as I said, different programmes to be grafted on top*". P3 also pointed out how when issues arose around sexual health; they ran a programme:

> "*we've done sexual health, d'you know what I mean.. Yeah, a lot of them with the sexual health, there were a lot of them that were kind of freaked out about it, they were nervous at first, but after a few minutes they kind of got into it, but they were even, they shocked themselves, on how much they took from it, and at this age and just leaving them walking out the gate with them like, they were talking about, d'you know the sexual health and they didn't know this about this thing, like, d'you know that kind of thing."*

One participant (P2) echoed the uniqueness of the practice the when he/she stated:

> *"one of the guys wanted help doing out his CV but he didn't want to put that he was from Moyross in it, because he knew that it would affect his chances of getting the job, so he had to put that he was from a different area. You know, I don't think that's right, I think that's why you need the supports around."*

Consequently, having the cafe in this area means that staff and volunteers have to be adaptable and resourceful as the needs are greater, yet not defined. As a result, the staff and volunteers reflected this adaptability but were conscious to recognise their limitations. P3 commented:

> *"I'd try my best to point them in the right direction, d'you know what I mean, like, if they weren't happy with what I was saying to them, like I'd have numbers or stuff that if they need I can give them and if they wanted to talk through me and if they wanted I'd go with them."*

Areas of disadvantage as noted in the literature have tended to be resourced with youth work projects that are based on targeting (O'hAodain, 2010 Kiely 2009). Therefore the concept of having a youth café in a disadvantaged area is a different concept for the young people to engage within. The staff and volunteers have pointed out that many of the prevailing issues associated with areas of disadvantage do arise in the café. The result, as seen, is that the staff and volunteers have the freedom to act in their practice, rather having to refer to other agencies because the remit does not allow. They were therefore able to attend to any daily issues that may arise for young people like fixing a C.V., while on the other hand, implementing programmes when common themes arose and needed to be addressed. The literature noted this as being strength of the practice within the café (Forkan et al 2010).

4.7 Conclusion

The findings have highlighted how practice was not confined to the café, and the participants noted that it was a core part of their position to engage young people with the wider community. This was particularly relevant with regards to breaking down existing barriers between young people in neighbouring areas. The differing roles of the staff and volunteers were notable, and it was seen that staff had to spend more time doing administration and supporting volunteers. This in turn had meant that the volunteers undertook most of the direct work, which was concerning as it is the staff who have higher levels of training in this

remit.The findings also highlighted that having the café in a disadvantaged area does impact on practice, as there is a high level of need and it was proven that where it was implemented, the café model provided a significant level of freedom in how the staff and volunteers can address these issues. It was seen that due to funding cuts, the café and associated activities had become limited. This meant that staff had to spend a lot more time monitoring behaviour as the space was more compact and there were fewer outlets for young people as off-site activities were significantly reduced.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The research endeavoured to facilitate a space for participants to discuss their practice in an open and transparent manner. In doing so, it is hoped that the study will provide an opportunity for further understanding relating to what the participants do within the 4th Corner Youth Café. The objective for this research was that it would create an avenue for development of practice, and subsequently an improvement of the overall running of the café. The study focused on responding to the research questions, and as a result, examining the impact that working in the 4th Corner has on practice. Highlighted topics included understanding the differing roles between youth workers and volunteers, and the impact that current policy has on the current practice of participants. This chapter summarised the findings, offered recommendations and opportunities for future research, discussed how the research informed social work study and practice and finally, reflected on the research process while noting the limitations of the research.

5.2 Summary of the research

It was clear from the findings that practice in the café is congruent with the literature which encompassed "Empowerment of Young People, Equality and Inclusion, Respect for all Young People, Involvement of Young People in Decision-Making, Partnership and Voluntary Participation" (NYCI) in Bane (2009, p. 172) based on building positive relationships (Devlin and Gunning, 2009). The overwhelming consensus was that creating a safe space based on voluntary participation supported them to practice effectively in this way. Youth participation practice was also seen to be central to the participants' work and this was seen to be supported by the practice being a central tenant of the youth café model (Forkan et al 2010). Challenges were seen in relation to reaching the aspirations of the literature surrounding youth participation practice in a youth café model. Yet it was notable that the participants were cognisant of these challenges and were endeavouring to consistently improve and address them.

Practice was also seen to be reflective of being in a disadvantaged community, as participants reflected on adaptability, as issues synonymous with disadvantaged areas were also an evident aspect of the young people's lives in the café. The participants were seen to be more

responsive because of the universal nature of the practice within the café, as they were not restricted in the types of supports and interventions and educational programmes they could put in place. This ability to respond and be flexible is core to the practice of youth work (Bowden & Lanigan 2011).

The research highlighted how practice in the café is not limited to the space, and all participants were reflective of the importance of engaging young people with the wider community. Therefore it was important for the workers to introduce the community to the space, and engage the young people with their local and wider society outside of the space. This was in an effort to create positive perceptions and meaningful participation in the community. Research was seen to be supportive of this, as it was noted that when positive perceptions of young people are reflected, it supports them to be meaningfully engaged within the community (Byrne et al 2006).

The research was very clear and apparent in relation to how staff and volunteers construct their practice and roles within the café. The research highlighted how volunteers spend the majority of their time engaging directly with the young people, and this was recognised. This was as a result of staff having to spend a significant amount of time doing behind the scenes work, particularly in administration and implementation of policies and procedures. This was seen as a concern for practice as it is those with the most training are doing the least amount of direct work In Defence of Youth Work, 2011; Tiffany, 2007) Participants noted that the onus was on the professional staff to provide guidance and leadership and the research noted that this was an underestimated part of staff practice. It was organised by both the literature and as for best practice to happen within the café model it should be supported by staff/volunteers and this is reflective of (Powell et al 2010) findings in relation to youth work.

While there was not a clear and explicit understanding of the impacts of government policy on practice, it was still prevalent within the data, particularly with how aware the participants were of the funding issues. This is reflective of national policy as youth work has received steeper funding cuts in comparison to other sectors (Kennedy 2013). As a result the research shows that they are restrictively limited by what they can do on and off site as the basic funding is not available, which in turn negates the possibilities of engaging the young people outside of the local community. This was noted by participants as a challenge for practice, as there is less of an opportunity to facilitate these young people in order to broaden their experiences outside of their community

The research also showed how the loss of available space within the café over the last few years due to funding cuts has changed the dynamic of the café, as it has become more of a confined space. Participants pointed out how it has created a situation whereby tensions can become quite problematic among young people, as there is limited space to diffuse and negate it. As a consequence, it was noted that staff and volunteers have an increased focus on monitoring behaviour than they would have had previously. It can be seen from the research that as a result of the space being made significantly smaller, they are challenged in facilitating active group projects such creating murals, boat building and mechanics. The significant reduction of allocated funding to youth work has been seen to negatively impact both the practice within the café and outside of the café, thus notably restricting the practice of the staff and volunteers. Finally the literature has shown that the culmination of national policy has pushed youth work practice in the directions of intervention practice (McMahon, 2009). While not flagged by the participants, it is notable that the underfunding of universal projects such as cafés is facilitated by the state preference to direct funding towards targeted interventions (Kiely 2009 , McMahon 2009).

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the literature review and the findings in relation to staff and volunteers' construction of their practice in the interviews, recommendations have been identified that would further support and enhance practice within the 4th Corner Youth Café, and also support informing stakeholders of current practice.

- While there was significant emphasis placed on Youth Participation practice, challenges in attaining the highest levels of participation in the youth café model were evident. It is therefore recommended that staff and volunteers are supported further with training in relation to this aspect of practice. This is particularly relevant for young people from disadvantaged areas as it gives them an opportunity to address, understand issues and most important develop critical thinking outside of their own personal development (Seebach 2008).

- The role of both the professional and volunteer are mutually important to the best practice taking place in the 4th Corner Youth Café. Yet, there is a significant onus on professional staff to engage in administrative activities, which takes them away from direct engagement with young people. Thus it is recommended that volunteers and staff consider the time allocated to different elements of running the café. It would be

beneficial for volunteers to have elements of administration attached to their roles as to better inform them about the quality standards within youth work. This would also facilitate the utilisation of the professional skills attained by youth workers, consequently giving a more rounded experience of practice for both staff and volunteers.

- As previously noted, the staff and volunteers struggled to verbally articulate their practice and working in a relatively new project model such as a youth café compounded this issue. This is a core challenge within the youth work sector and is reflected throughout the literature (Jenkinson 2013). Yet the staff and volunteers are seen to be effectively employing many of the core practices of Youth Work. Therefore it would be beneficial for staff and volunteers to engage in a process of reflection that would facilitate them to effectively articulate their impressive practice. This would also support the practice within the café, as a process of reflection may enable them to critically analyse, thus enhancing how they work within the youth café model.

- Youth work in Ireland is somewhat convoluted, and this is a reflection of how it is funded (McMahon 2009). With youth cafés, it has been noted that currently, funding for projects is only currently available for capital funding, and there is minimal complimentary funding for staffing management and/or training of volunteers. As a result of this funding structure, there appears to be an emerging expectation that youth cafés are facilitated by volunteers. The research highlighted how the best practice within cafes was to have a combination of professional staff, supplemented by additional workers through voluntary participation. As result, government would have a tangible model to fund rather than the ad hoc model at present, which has come to fruition due to ad hoc funding and acceptance of it due to weak advocacy by youth work organisations (Kiely 2009).

- Suggested further research would include investigating the farther the significance of having a universal model in a disadvantaged area, and if so, discussing the impacts on practice and the young people who attend . Secondly, this area could be further enhanced and the time is right to research the transitions of young people from the café model. This would inform further the practice within them as it would facilitate

knowledge in relation to the impacts of engaging in a café over a significant amount of time.

5.4 Relevance to Social Work

The researcher found in experience on placement, that he was referring or introducing many of his clients to support services, and that was particularly true of young people. Yet in discussions with colleagues, it was found there was not a full awareness of the practices within those support services. The significance of this has a negative impact on the best care of clients, which are surely not being met if social workers are not fully aware of relevant projects and support services. As a result, this piece of work was considered important, as the youth café concept is a relatively new model and there is not widespread understanding of the model or the practices within it. Secondly, youth cafés are an element of support that are not intervention based, therefore, it could be an opportunity for social work to introduce young people to a support service that does not label them, thus having a positive impact on self esteem. To support the process, the researcher explored commonalities that exist between social work and youth work and these were discussed throughout. They included how both professions are hard to define, the importance of building positive relationships and how both have become challenged in relation to the impact of managerialism on practice.

5.5 Limitations of Study

The researcher feels that the analysis section, in relation to the impacts of policy on practice, was not as comprehensive as he would have hoped. This is as a result of the staff and volunteers focusing on funding, and on reflection, it is felt a more thorough investigation could have been sought through further questioning in relation to this. The researcher also regrets not widening the study to previous staff and volunteers, as it is felt that an insight would have been gained into the changing dynamic of practice within the café. A final limitation was that many of the participants would have known the researcher in a professional capacity, and this could have impacted on their responses within the interviews (Bryman 2008). The researcher feels that the guidelines as set out by CARL, particularly in relation to confidentiality, which were explained to the participants, along with the information pack provided to all participants did negate this limitation somewhat.

5.6 Reflection on the research

Doing this study, initially was a daunting prospect, as I admit finding academic projects a challenge. This apprehension has lessened as a result of enrolling in my chosen course of

study, but was present nonetheless. I negated this by utilising all information made available to me through the course in relation to research, particularly within the specific research classes. As a result, I maintained contact with a core group of academic colleagues throughout the process and they were a consistent source of support and guidance. I also utilised the learning journal and this benefited me hugely, as I was able to consistently challenge my thought process which enabled to me to re-evaluate when necessary. I cannot over-emphasise how important it was and I will carry this type of journal into practice and utilise it, particularly in relation to early decisions made in practice.

I was very aware that as an employee of LYS, although not directly linked with the project, that I had to consistently ensure my objectivity. I was very much supported in this by LYS at all times, as they emphasised their support of the research process, and the importance of relevant informed findings. Even so, this was challenging, as when collating the data and writing up my findings, I initially started looking for negatives in the practice to prove that I was not biased. Yet when I reflected on this, I reminded myself that my role as researcher was to be honest with the research data and to reflect whatever it presented. Overall, I do feel that being an employee actually benefited me as I was aware of the structures and people within the organisation. I was therefore able to navigate and engage with the relevant people, which made the practicalities of the research less challenging than if I was an outsider, which was a significant benefit in the limited timeframe I had to complete the research.

The entire process reinforced to me why I have entered into the caring professions, as I really took encouragement from the literature, research and informal discussions that took place during the project. The core learning I take away from the research process is how important it is to challenge one's practice through utilising reflection and up-to-date research. These are two aspects I would have probably not engaged with effectively before starting this course, as I was very much an active learner and practitioner. As a result, I now intend to address this when I return to practice on completion of this course.

5.7 Final Comments

The findings in the research show that the practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café is based on the core values of youth work practice: Empowerment of young people, Equality and Inclusion, Respect for all young people, Involvement of young people in decision-making, Partnership and Voluntary Participation " (NYCI in Bane 2009, p. 172). Also evident was

the consistency in practice based on relationships, building partnerships and linking young people with their community through elements of personal development and youth participation. The importance of volunteers to practice was evident but it was seen that due to the ever increasing administrative functions of the practice, there is a challenge in managing both staff and volunteers' time more effectively. Importantly, staff and volunteers need to attain avenues to articulate the excellent work that they do in an effective manner. If the work is not understood, it is not adequately recognised and therefore it can become undermined, underfunded and underappreciated. This study was one such avenue, and the research is available to inform practitioners outside of youth work, within social work, of the practice that takes place within the 4th Corner Youth Café. Finally, this research will be presented to UCC Research Conference in May 2014. It will also be available on the CARL website for viewing. The researcher will engage with Limerick Youth Service with regards to the findings. As already agreed with the participants, the research will also be available for all participants of the study to view.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : Information Sheet

Department of Applied Social Studies, UCC – Research Projects

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for a Masters of Social Work at UCC, I am required to carry out a research project. The study is concerned with staff and volunteers' understanding of their practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café. It aims to find out:

1. What impact does working in The 4th Corner Youth Café have on practice?

2. What roles do both staff and volunteers perform within the café?

3. What impact does government policy have on current practice within The 4th Corner Youth Café?

What will the study involve? The study will involve an interview in the 4th Corner Youth Café, which will take approximately 40 minutes to one hour.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you are suitable to take part and the project wants to hear your opinion on practice within the Café.

Do you have to take part? No. Participation in the interview is voluntary you do not have to take part. If you want to take part there is a consent form with this information sheet which you can read and sign. You can keep a copy of both the consent form and this information sheet. Even if you sign the consent form you can still change your mind and not be interviewed. For up to two weeks after the interview you can also change your mind and not have information from your interview included in the research project.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, but it cannot be guaranteed due to the small nature of the study. Yet I will aim to ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous where possible. As a result, the researcher will make all possible efforts to maintain anonymity.

What will happen to the information which you give? The information you give to me will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone else including workers in the Café. I will hold onto your information until 6 months after the research project is completed and then it will be deleted.

What will happen to the results? The results of the research will be presented in my college thesis and be available online at http://carl.ucc.ie . The results will also be given to Limerick Youth Service. The thesis will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I do not think there will be any disadvantages to taking part but talking about your practice may highlight professional challenges. The next question will discuss what to do if there is a problem.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview I will talk to you about how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you feel distressed you will be able to talk to Youth Work Manager in Limerick Youth Service. _____.

Who has reviewed this study? This research has been approved by the School of Applied Social Studies UCC and Limerick Youth Service.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Damien McMahon email: 110221679@umail.ucc.ie or my tutor Eleanor Bantry White on 021-4902899.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix 2; Consent Form

Consent Form

I……agree to participate in ……..research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with …….to be tape-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be a priority but cannot be guaranteed in the write-up, but all efforts will be made through disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed……. Date……..

Appendix 3; Interview Questions Guide

Interview Questions Guide

The interviews will be semi-structured, so the interview will be guided by the participant's responses. I will have three core questions which I will ask in some way, examples of guidance questions are beneath each core question:

(1) How do staff and volunteers construct what they do in the 4th Corner Youth café?
   a. Tell me about what you do in the youth café?
   b. What types of activities do you do in the café?
   c. Describe the work that you do in the café?

(2) How do they see their role as a staff member or volunteer in the 4th Corner Youth café?
   a. Describe the role of a volunteer in the café?
   b. Describe the role of the youth worker in the café?

(3) Does current government policy impact on staff and volunteers practice in the 4th Corner Youth Café?
   a. Do you think your work has changed in the café since you started?
   b. Can you tell me if the government are supportive of the work that takes place in the café?

Based on role the responses received I will further probe and explore the areas of

- Challenges to practice.
- Values of youth work practice.
- Perception of the role.
- Volunteerism versus professionalism
- Things that they would like to see change.

- Community/Government support and understanding of the café and the role of the staff and volunteers.

The researcher will start the interview with this opening statement and question:

My name is …… and I am here to find out how working and volunteering in the café has been for you. I am interested in understanding what you do in the café with the young people and why you your work with in a particular way.

The researcher will finish the interview by asking the staff and volunteers if there is anything they would like to add.