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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

An exploratory study of the social needs wishes and preferences of young people in a small community in West Waterford.

Jillian O'Connell

CARL Research Project
in collaboration with
Aglish Community Development Committee

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Date completed:	

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby state that this research project titled ‘An exploratory study of the social needs, wishes and preferences of young people in a rural small community in West Waterford’ is my own work. Any work that is not my own has been acknowledged and referenced appropriately.

Name: Jillian O’Connell

Date: 22nd April 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research was done in collaboration with the CARL initiative in UCC and with Aglish Community Development Committee (ACDC). This research investigated the social needs, wishes and preferences of young people in a rural community in West Waterford. This need was identified by the Aglish Community Development Committee as they leased a 2-acre site from Waterford City & County Council for a potential development. It was important to ACDG to engage with the young people in the area so they could have a say in what facilities are to be developed within the community. Primary research was conducted with transition year students by means of semi-structured one to one interviews. The findings of this research indicate there is a need to provide young people in the area with suitable spaces and places to meet with friends. Findings also indicated that young people feel they are connected to their community by means of their membership in sport, however they do not feel like their voice is being heard when it comes to decisions being made in their locality. Based on the data collected several recommendations have been made which will hopefully inform potential developments in the Aglish community.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACDC: Aglish Community Development Committee

Aglish: Small rural village situated in Co. Waterford, South East, Ireland.

TY/Transition Year: – This is the 4th year of secondary school. Students are usually aged between 15-16 years old

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: “This image shows a child vanquishing a dragon in order to proclaim their own manifesto” (Donnelly, 2020).

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the CARL research project. It outlines the background and rationale by describing a community-based issue. It also provides the aims, objectives and research questions and offers the reader an insight in to why this topic is worth researching.

1.2 Background to Research

Aglish is a very small rural community in West Waterford. Aglish village and environs has a total population of 787 people according to Pobal small area maps 2011-2016 (Pobal, 2019). During the Celtic tiger years there was a housing estate built in the locality which consists of 86 houses. However, the infrastructure or services were never put in place to address the needs or the growing demand of what a

development of this size would mean for the village. The population increased in size and so too did the number of young people residing in the community. With no facilities or resources in place for the young people there is little or no opportunity for social engagement. As a parent of two teenagers this was particularly worrying for me and I became involved in the local community development group. Aglish Community Development Committee (ACDC) emerged from a public meeting held on January 17th 2018. The meeting, attended by 40 local people, highlighted key developments required to enhance the quality of life of those living in Aglish and surrounding areas. ACDC is a community group made up of voluntary members from the community. Our vision as a community group is to provide a community whereby people of all ages can reside in an environment which is sustainable for current and future generations.

In 2019 ACDC successfully secured two acres of land from Waterford City and County Council. This study will seek to engage with the young people to gain an insight into what they would like to see developed on this green site. The scope of this research project will focus on the young people. Our community group does not have the resources to carry out such a research project by themselves, I submitted a proposal to CARL to research this topic on their behalf.

In order to understand the needs, wishes and preferences of young people living in a rural community it is necessary to undertake a literature review. The research will explore the relevant legislation, policy, theories and practice in order to answer the research questions. Existing literature will help the researcher to fully understand the issues that affect young people and investigate what, if any, are the negative impacts if the appropriate services and safe places are not available in a community for young people to access. The researcher, through conducting primary, research will explore for the first time the voices of these young people to capture their thoughts and opinions. This will be the first time a study of this kind will be carried out in a small rural community in West Waterford which will take into account the first-hand experiences of young people.



Figure 2: Satellite image of Aglish and of the 2-acre site and surrounding area

1.3 Research Rationale

On a professional level I am interested in this particular topic, as I have worked for many years as a community development officer. As a result, I have a good working knowledge of the importance of social inclusion and the importance for young people to have the structural infrastructures and opportunities locally to engage socially. Without these opportunities people can become unintentionally marginalised and socially excluded. Community development uses a ground up approach and as a Social Work student in my final year I learned that social work and community development share many of the same theories, values and principles and as such are intrinsically linked.

My involvement with this CARL project excited me as I feel I will be returning to my grassroots of community development as this research will afford the young person the opportunity to have their voices heard regarding their experiences of living in a rurally isolated community. This information will identify the needs and wishes of the young people in the community in relation to their social needs for the very first time. The findings of this dissertation will assist the community group to create opportunities within the community for their social engagement which will in turn promote the young person's social inclusion and enhance their participation within their own community.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research is to investigate the social needs of young people within a small rural community and its environs in West Waterford. A second objective was to examine young people's

perceptions of their participation in their community. The researcher through conducting primary research will explore for the first time the voices of these young people to capture their thoughts and opinions. The data gathered is hoped to determine what facilities and resources are needed for young people which will ultimately promote young people's engagement within their own community.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research aims and objectives the following 4 research questions were developed in collaboration with Aglish Community Development Committee.

1. What do young people in this community do in their spare time?
2. In what way might living in a rural area impact how they spend their free time?
3. What activities would they like to engage with in their community?
4. What facilities and resources would they like to see developed in their community?

1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter One:

This chapter provided an overall background and rationale for the research. It clearly defined the research aims, objectives and research questions which will form the basis of this dissertation.

Chapter Two:

Chapter two will review the current literature to examine the policies and legislation that are in place to promote the participation and engagement of children and young people. It will examine the relevant social work theories to help understand how the young person interacts within their environment to better understand the topic further.

Chapter Three:

Chapter three will introduce the reader to the epistemology and theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. It will examine the methodology and the data collection method that was used in this research.

Chapter Four:

Chapter four will present the findings from the analysis of the primary research and will link it with the findings in the context of the literature reviewed.

Chapter Five:

Chapter will five will draw conclusions following the analysis of data in the previous chapter. It will provide recommendations based on the findings from the participants and from the researcher. This chapter will conclude with a reflection by the researcher on completing a research project.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the reader of the chosen CARL research project. It outlined the background and rationale for the project. It discussed the aims, objectives and presented the research questions. The chapter concluded with an overview of each chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the policies and legislation that are currently in place to promote young people's participation in all areas and decisions that affect their lives. The first section will also examine current research within an Irish context in relation to rural development and social inclusion policies. It will present a profile of rural Waterford and the unique challenges for young people living in rural areas which is a theme that runs through this research. The chapter will explore theories that are relevant in order to understand how young people interact with their environment. It will focus on the need of young people to have a sense of belonging and connectivity to their community. This chapter will discuss models of participation that can inform our practice by engaging with individual and groups collectively to raise attention and bring about change. This chapter will also draw on literature to examine the importance of social recreation for a young person's overall physical and mental health and how the lack of public spaces is a particular problem in rural Ireland.

2.2 Policy and Legislation

2..2.1 The Right to be Heard

The fundamental right of a child to be heard and to be involved in decisions that affect their lives was recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992 thus recognising the rights of children under 18 prescribed for in law. This need to empower children was further enshrined in the Children's Rights Referendum held in 2012 after which the Government inserted a new article into the Constitution, Article 42A entitled 'Children'. Article 31 of the UN Convention further recognises "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts."

2.2.2 The Right to Participate

In Ireland, the National strategy on children and young people's participation in decision making 2015-2020 was put in place to "ensure that children and young people have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives" (DCYA, p. 5). Literature highlights that the voice of the young person is crucial in everyday lives in order to determine what their needs are to make them feel socially included

within their own community. The National Children's Strategy, Our Children-their Lives, published by the Department of Health and Children (2000a), specifically refers to the issue of play and recreation in its Objective D, which states that "children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood" (2000, p. 56). Following on from the National Strategy, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People "Better Outcomes, Brighter future, 2014-2020 was ratified. "This Policy Framework has adopted an outcomes approach based on five national outcomes for children and young people" (DCYA, p. 4). Outcome 5 of the national outcomes is "Connected, respected and contributing" and it specifically discusses children's participation within their environment (DCYA, p.6). After reviewing this policy and examining this outcome, it contextualises the importance of children participating in their own communities and the benefits of this engagement.

Tusla launched its new Child and Youth Participation Strategy for 2019-2023 and in the document it defines participation as "….the involvement of children and young people in decision-making on issues that affect their lives at the individual and collective level" (2019, p. 10). The benefits of participation are overwhelmingly positive and for the young person it can provide them with a platform to have their voices heard and in doing so can give them ownership and control to effect change within their community. The primary research conducted with young people in this project is hoped to be an empowering experience and it is envisaged their input will determine what activities and initiatives are needed in order to meet the needs of these young people in their community. Literature too also highlights the significance in promoting participation for children and young people in research and Greene advocates for an approach "*with* children - rather than *on* children" (2006, p. 8).

2.3 Current Research in an Irish Context

2.3.1 Rural Development

Disadvantage in rural areas can be overlooked or indeed invisible because geographically people are more spread out and as such it is not concentrated in any one area. This can partially explain why rural Ireland has been relatively neglected in policy with little research on rural poverty and rural disadvantage. Patrick Commins who works in the research centre in Teagasc conducted a study into 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas' and he argues "apart from data pertaining to low-income farming there is limited systematic information on the forms and processes of exclusion, which operate within rural economies and societies across Europe" (2004, p. 60). He also purports there has been no comparative

studies carried out exploring people's experiences of living in rural Ireland with other EU member states (Commins, 2004). In my review of the literature and research there seems to be little contemporary research available.

As a Government response to examining economic activity in rural Ireland the Government established The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) in November 2012. CEDRA compromised of a number of expert groups that were tasked with investigating and reporting on the medium-term economic development of rural Ireland to 2025. In April 2014 the Commission compiled the report 'Energising Ireland's Rural Economy' which included 34 recommendations to Government to enhance and support economies in rural Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2014). The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government were then given the task of implementing the recommendations. From a review of the recommendations the researcher notes that although the key recommendations acknowledge broadband and transport are challenges for people living in rural Ireland none of the recommendations refer specifically to rural youth as a cohort with unique needs.

2.3.2 Social Inclusion

Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) were established in 2014 as part of the Government's policy document "Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government, and the Local Government Reform Act 2014" (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government). These groups have the responsibility for oversight and management of community development in local authority areas. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2020 (SICAP) and LEADER programme (2014-2020) are two of the programmes that the LCDC manage and both programmes are funded by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. The SICAP is a programme that provides supports to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, individuals and groups (Pobal.ie). The LEADER programme has the remit to deliver programmes primarily aimed at rural development. However, in a case study conducted on social inclusion in North County Meath the study concluded "…. that often national policies were designed with urban areas in mind, without adequate consideration given to their implementation in rural areas" (OECD, 2016, p. 19).

2.4 Social Work Theories and Approaches

2.4.1 Ecological Systems Model

In order to understand how young people, interact in their community it will be important to examine Ecological Systems Theory. This theory is relevant to my topic as it will examine how the young person interacts with their environment. This model allows us to understand child development through their participation within their natural environment. Brofennenbrenner's ecological systems theory best explains human socialization and "underlines the influence on development of different level and size environments, in the first place – social and cultural environments" (Härkönen, 2001, p. 16). Brofennenbrenner divides the young person's environment into four layers; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem and each layer has an influence on one's behaviour at varying stages of development.

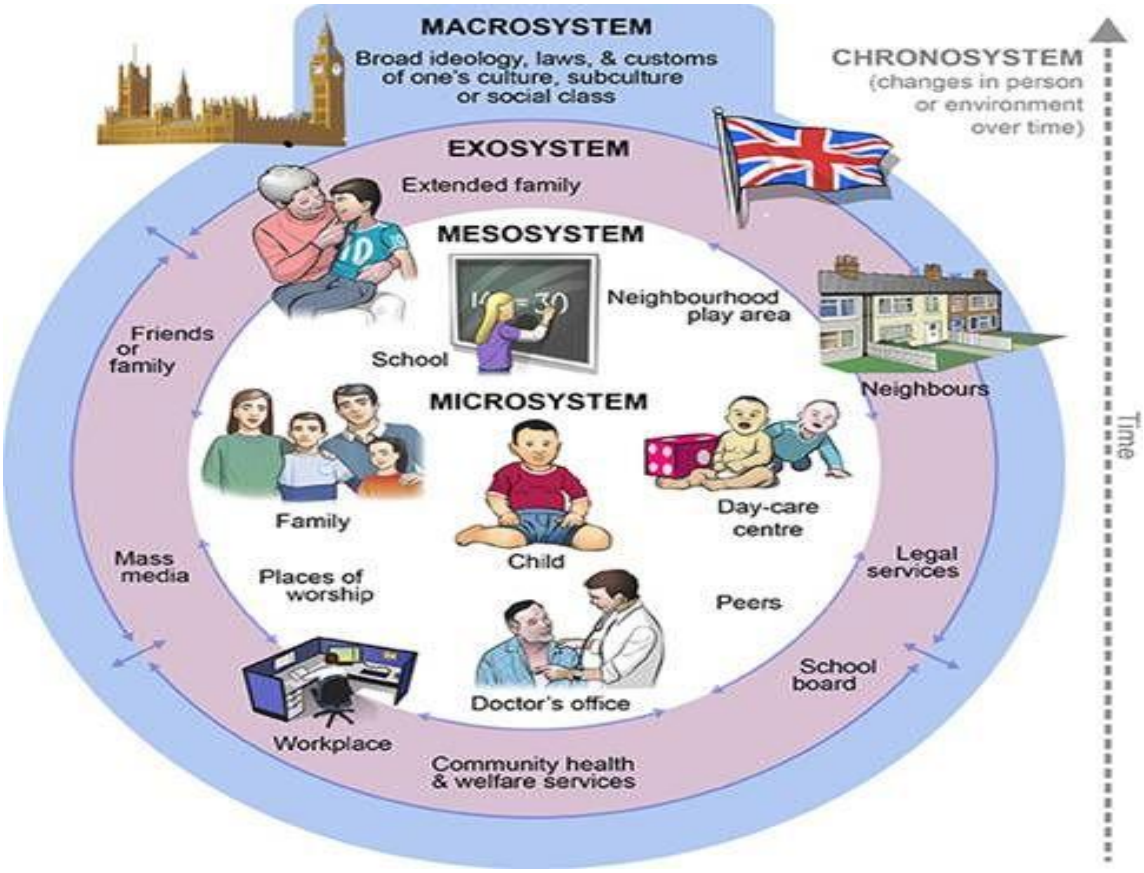


Figure 3: Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

2.4.2 Community Based Social Work

This approach focuses on the importance of engaging and promoting an individual's participation within their own community to ensure that no one feels excluded. According to Green and Haines "community development is a method used by social workers and others…. that focuses on developing the resources of communities (Green and Haines, 2002, p. 7). Community based or patch-based social work was common in the 1980's which saw multi-disciplinary teams geographically located. More recently there has been a call for the return of a more relationship and community based social work approach. This is evidenced in an article published in the Guardian newspaper that puts forward an argument for patch-based social work to return to England (Brindle, 2009). In Netherlands this approach is called the 'Buurtzorg' approach and sees workers spending large hours of their working day in direct contact with their clients and services users using a bottom up approach (Brindle, 2017). This approach is also in keeping with the principles and values of community work which Twelvetrees defines as "the process of assisting ordinary people to improve their communities by undertaking collective action" (1991, p. 99). Although commentators would argue there is diversity and difference within community development and social work much of the guiding principles, values and theoretical ideas underpin both of these approaches.

- Collectively
- Community Empowerment
- Social Justice and Sustainable Development
- Human Rights, Equality and Anti-Discrimination
- Participation

(All-Ireland Standards for Community Development, 2016)

2.5 Rural Waterford and Young People

Waterford's Children and Young People's Committee (CYPSC) carried out comprehensive research in 2014 to profile the services provided by statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations to children and families in Waterford City and County (CYPSC, 2014). In their social demographic profile of children and young people they found that "the majority of children aged 0-17 in the County live in non-urban areas" (2014, p. 60). Additionally, in a survey of children's services they report that the majority of children's services are concentrated in urban areas with West Waterford been underprovided

for. The research also highlights the lack of youth provision in rural West Waterford and cite "youth work funding in rural Waterford is a small fraction of that seen in the City and one of the lowest per capita of young people seen nationally " (2014, p.7). This is particularly concerning as research highlights the role of youth clubs and youth facilities can have a positive impact on a young persons overall mental and physical well-being. Throughout the report rural Waterford and its particular challenges and issues are continuously highlighted. Lack of public transport, limited broadband and rural isolation were all cited as unique issues in rural Waterford.

2.6 The Need to Belong

Abraham Maslow (1954) proposes that needs are arranged in a hierarchy. The third stage of his model discusses social needs and belonginess (Holt et. al., 2009).

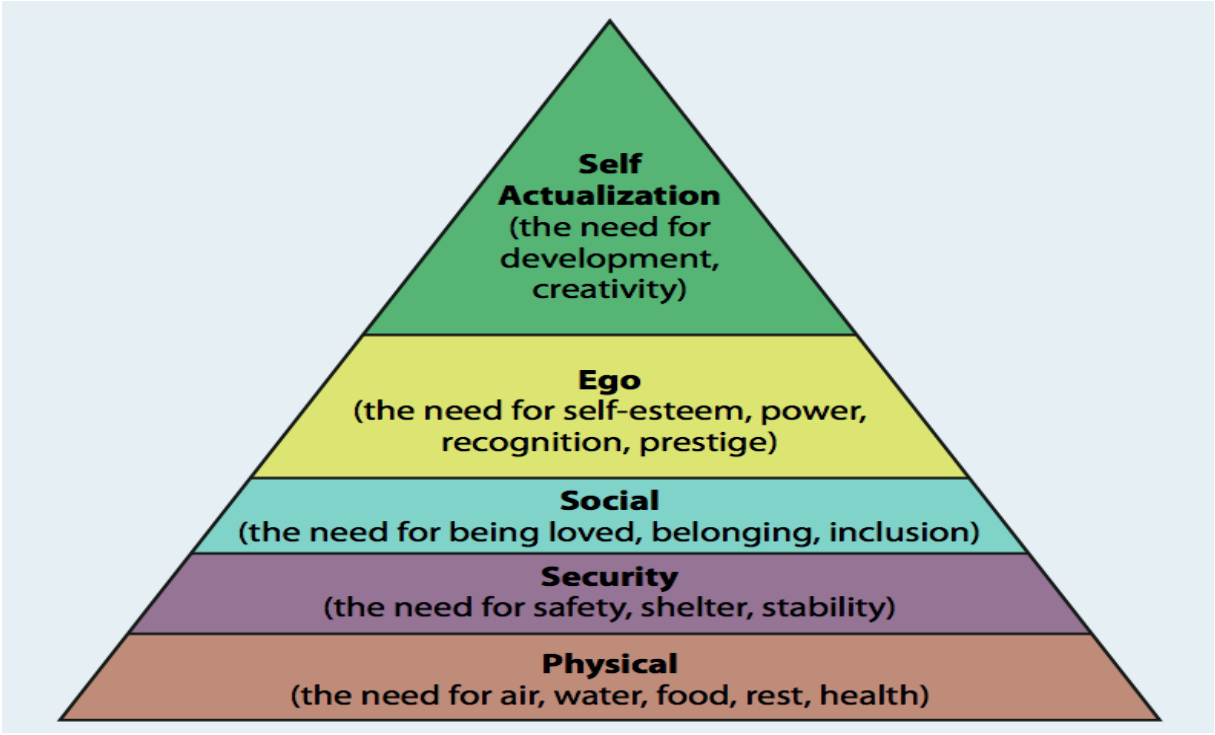


Figure 4: Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

The need to belong and to feel included, safe and loved all contribute to a person's self-worth. In order to achieve this stage, one must be afforded social places for engagement and participation. This is also evidenced in Erick Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development theory which looks at adolescence and identify formation (Holt et al., 2009). This is the stage in a young person life where they are searching to form an identity and a time in which companionship and friendships become increasingly important

for the adolescent. For these connections to develop young people need access to childhood spaces as these relationships contribute to one's health and well-being. The need for young people to feel like they belong and to have a safe and secure place for recreational opportunities was also recognised in Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for young people launched in 2007 (Department of Health & Children, 2007). The policy illustrated that "extensive consultation has shown that the lack of recreational opportunities continues to be a major concern for young people throughout the country" (2007, p. IV).

2.7 Models of Participation

2.7.1 Laura Lundy's Model of Participation

There are many approaches used to engage and promote participation with young people and Laura Lundy's model of Participation is one such model that is used quite often by Tusla and youth work agencies. The model is underpinned by Article 12 of the UNCRC which gives due weight to the voice of the child in all matters affecting their lives (Lundy, 2007). It sees young people as distinct from adults with inherent rights of their own. The model has four interlinking elements Space, Voice, Audience and Influence that are interconnected and offers a way of working with children and young people to conceptualise a child's right to participate and make decisions.

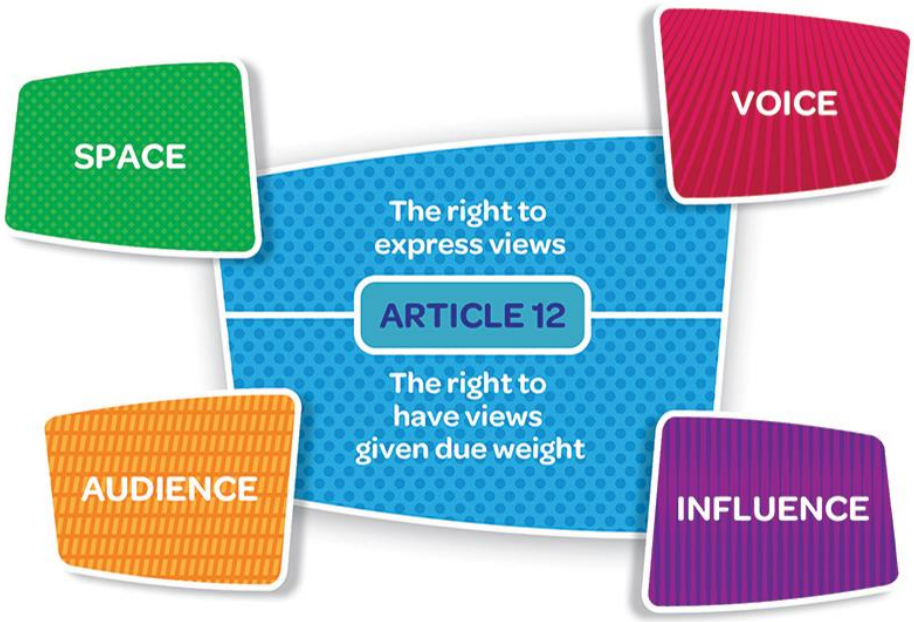


Figure 5: The Lundy Model of Child Participation

A review of literature suggests that Article 12 UNCRC is not being fully implemented with children's rights not fully realised in practice. In an audit carried out on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People on children's rights in Northern Ireland the research concluded that "children's views were not sought or listened to or, worse, that they were afforded only minimalist, tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults" (Lundy, 2007, p. 2). This was also echoed in a study with young people aged 12-18 living in Ireland and one of the key findings indicated,

> Young people felt ignored and excluded by politicians, resident associations and community development committees and that the regeneration of their areas resulted in instances of them being barred from using privately owned commercial leisure complexes
>
> (Byrne et al., 2006).

2.7.2 Community Profiling

One which way to get individuals and young people involved is through community profiling. This approach allows workers to build a profile of the issues and needs in the area they are working in. Community profiling is a type of information gathering (Beresford and Croft, 1993) and Murray Hawtin describes community profiling as a participative approach (1994). Community profiling will be conducted in this research project as it seeks to engage with young people to investigate their needs and experiences with a view to providing relevant supports in their community. The benefits of community profiling are it contributes to the democratisation of knowledge, methods and understanding peoples lived experiences.

2.7.3 Youth Cafés

Youth cafés are another model used to engage with children. The benefits of youth cafés as a vehicle to encourage and promote youth participation has been highlighted in research. Forkan et al., describe youth cafés as "a dedicated, safe, relaxed, friendly and inclusive meeting space for young people" (2015, p. 90). For young people adolescence is a time in their life where making friends and developing new relationships is important. It is also the phase in a young person's life where they start to develop a sense of self. These needs can only be met though safe places and youth friendly environments.

2.8 Recreation and Leisure

According to Byrne et al., recreation and leisure time is extremely important for young people as it provides opportunities for social engagement with their peers all of which are beneficial for a young person's physical and mental health (2007, p 1). It is also important that the young person play an active role in planning and designing their own recreational activities. The lack of appropriate infrastructure, services or indeed safe spaces in communities can contribute to the young person feeling isolated and bored in reality. This boredom can further escalate into a young person becoming engaged in anti-social behaviour. Many studies have been conducted to examine the correlation between boredom and substance misuse in adolescents. In a study conducted by Sharp et. al. in 2001 the findings indicated that leisure boredom emerged as the most consistent and strongest predicator of alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use" in adolescents (2011, pg. 343). This leisure boredom combined with the lack of appropriate services and facilities available to the young person can also result in the young person become more visible within their community. In rural areas this is particularly a problem where the availability of youth clubs tends to be in urban areas and with much of the land privately owned young people do not have access to free places. With nowhere to go young people tend to gather in the local streets and often this "hanging out" can be viewed negatively by older adults and poorly reported in the media.

In a research report by Cork Institute of Technology on behalf of National Children's office (2005) with 90 young people what they describe in their findings was "teenagers' resentment that they were viewed suspiciously by adults when in groups in public places; as potentially noisy and troublesome" (De Roiste and Dineen, 2006, p. 9). This research indicates that there is a transition from adolescence to adulthood which is fraught with complexity as the young person strives for autonomy and independence. Too often this can be quite simply explained as 'growing up behaviour'. However, there appears to be a recent phenomenon whereby society prefers to problematise young people and in an article published by O'Connor and McQuinn in the Independent it discusses the "Rise in anti-social behaviour making people's lives a misery". Headlines similar to this are not helpful and do nothing to address the lived experiences of young people living in disadvantaged rural communities. This is not just an issue in contemporary Irish society and in an article published by Alan Travis (2015) in the United States he cites "Cleveland chief constable Jacqui Cheer says new legislation reflects growing intolerance of young people in public spaces". In an attempt to counteract anti-social behaviour and leisure boredom services

and infrastructures must be put in place. In a paper published by Alston and Kent they purport that "failure to invest in young people leads to their social exclusion" (2009, pg. 93).

Rural youth differ from their counterparts in terms of the type of recreational activities they engage in with youth clubs and youth cafés mainly situated in larger towns and urban areas. In rural villages the GAA tend to have a strong presence within the community which is highly beneficial for the young people that enjoy playing football and hurling. However, for the young person that does not enjoy sports, rural communities have very little to offer in terms of recreational opportunities. In a study carried out by De Róiste and Dinneen they reported that "59% of young people believed there was very little leisure provision for teenagers in their locality (de Róiste and Dinneen, 2005, p. 64). For the children that sport is not their first preference and with the lack of physical spaces an additional barrier many of these young people are forced to turn to social media as a form of recreation. Much research exists on the effect of social media on young people's lives. In a study carried out by Richards, Caldwell and Go the researchers concluded;

> That the health impact of social media on children and young people was greatest on mental health and specifically in the areas of self-esteem and well-being, with related issues around cyberbullying and 'Facebook Depression', with an association between the use of social media and self-esteem and body image
>
> (2015, pp. 1152)

2.9 Conclusion

As this research project seeks to explore the voices of young people in regard to their social needs, wishes and preferences it was necessary to undertake a literature review to examine the policies and legislation that are in place to promote the participation and engagement of children and young people. It also examined the relevant social work theories to help understand how the young person interacts within their environment to better understand the topic further. It looked at models of participation that, if implemented in practice, can effectively increase and promote a young person's participation and discussed the positive effects of youth participation. This chapter evidenced in research undertaken by Waterford's Children and Young People's Committee that rural Ireland can be viewed as an oppressive place for young people to grow up in due to the lack of services and facilities. A review of the literature

additionally found in a study carried out by De Roiste and Dineen rural youths believe there is a lack of leisure and recreational opportunities in their locality. Finally, this review was also beneficial for providing an understanding of existing research that highlights the importance of social recreation for young people. Chapter three will identify the epistemology and theoretical perspective, methodology and research methods employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the reader to the epistemology and theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. It will examine the methodology and the data collection method that was used in this research. This chapter will also discuss the ethical considerations and my own researcher reflexivity that allowed me to present this study in an effective and impartial way. The chapter will conclude with the limitations and challenges that arose whilst undertaking the research.

3.2 Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

According to Carey epistemology is "the nature of knowledge and knowledge production" (Carey, 2013 pg. 78). This research project will be underpinned by 'constructivism'. I chose constructivism as "social constructivism emphasises the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world" (Crotty, 1998, pg. 58). A view of knowledge based on social constructionism leads to the theoretical position of interpretivism. "Interpretive theory attempts to uncover the meaning and 'reality' of people's experiences in the social world" (Carey, 2013, p. 60). I feel this philosophy is particularly relevant as my research strives to uncover the views, wishes and experiences of young people living in a small rural community. The research can only be done by engaging with the young person to get a sense of their experiences through one to one interviews. I chose interpretivism as opposed to positivism as positivism applies a more scientific based method to human behaviour which Ritchie et al., argues can be "independent, objective and value free social research" (2003, p. 24). The Theoretical perspective will also be underpinned by a combination of social work theories mainly ecological systems theory in an attempt to make sense of the topic further. Ecological systems theory examines how a person interacts within their environment. This approach seems to represent best my research questions as it looks at child development, children's participation within their environment and the concept of social inclusion.

3.3 Methodology

Payne and Payne define methodology as a 'grander scheme of ideas orientating researchers' work' (Payne and Payne, 2004, pg. 150). A social work methodology can consist of many forms of research procedures that will help organise your ideas in order to make sense of the issues and questions in your dissertation. I intend to use primary research in the form of one to one interviews which is one of the

more traditional types of methodologies used within social work research. Primary research is a qualitative approach with the "aim of developing a theory that will explain what was experienced" (Newman, Benz and Ridenour, 1998, p 3).

The methodology I intend to use to collect data will take the form of one to one interviews. As a researcher and an MSW student I prefer to use a face to face approach as I enjoy talking to people and this is something that comes naturally to me. This pragmatic approach is the best method of garnishing the information needed as the interviews "includes the participants' explicit interpretations and understanding of events" (Ritchie et. al., 2013, p. 180). Defining the questions for the interview was done in collaboration with the Aglish Community Development Committee and the questions were reviewed by my supervisor. Formulating the questions was extremely important with the use of clear language and short questions decided to be most effective.

3.4 Interview Questions

A full copy of the interview questions is included in the appendices.

3.5 Sampling

For the purpose of the research the researcher will use purposive sampling which selects participants' "because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions which the researcher wishes to study" (Bryman,2012 as cited in Ritchie et al., 2013, pp. 113). The participants for this research study were transition year students who attend Blackwater Community School which is the catchment school for Aglish. The Transition Year (TY) co-ordinator in the Blackwater Community School along with the researcher recruited the participants. The selection criteria meant that the participants will be living locally and will potentially avail of the resources/facilities that will be developed on the 2-acre site. The participants will be male and female young people in transition year aged between 15 and 16 years old who attend the Blackwater Community School in Lismore, Co. Waterford. The Transition year co-ordinator will select the young people in Transition Year based on their geographical location. The number of participants will be between 8-10 which takes into account the considerable time it will take to conduct in-depth interviews on a one-to-one basis and the time needed afterwards to transcribe the conversations.

I will interview selected students from transition year based on the goals of this study and based on their geographical location. I will use audio recordings and I, the researcher, will perform the transcriptions. The data will be analysed and divided up into themes based on what emerged from each of the students during the interview. I will also use the information gathered from the interviews to compare/contrast with already existing research.

3.6 Summary of the Research Strategy

The first phase of the research involved meeting with the community group to discuss the aims and objectives of the project and the writing up of the research questions. The next stage involved meeting the transition year students as a group in the secondary school on 27th January 2020. At this meeting the purpose of the research was explained to the participants and as the young people were under the age of 18 consent forms and an information pack were sent home to parents/guardians for consent purposes. The first set of one to one interviews were carried out in the school on the 3rd February 2020 with the students who had returned the signed parent/guardian consent form and the signed participant assent forms. A second date of 13th March 2020 was set to return to the school to interview the remaining TY students however the school closed 12th March 2020 due to Covid 19 pandemic.

3.7 Data Analysis

A review of literature reveals many approaches for analysing qualitative data. However, for the purpose of this study I will use "thematic analysis" (Ritchie et al., 2013). This involves examining participant's personal experiences in an attempt to make sense of the perspectives of the individuals I am interviewing. It is recognizing and interpreting that there are common factors that shape those experiences and organizing the data into themes and topics based on the similarities.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

This research adhered to the six guiding principles of The UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESREC) and the UCC Research Code of Conduct (2016). As the research involved interviewing young people under the age of 18, I had to apply to the UCC social research ethics committee for approval. This application was made October 2019, it was assigned for review November 2019. It was returned for changes and additional information 26th November and permission was granted 12th December to proceed. As the project involved interviewing young people under 18, I had to be Garda Vetted by UCC. I also had to be cognisant to adhere at all times to the Children Frist guidelines which is the national

guidance for the protection and welfare of children. As the young person is under 18, consent forms were sent to parents/guardians for consent purposes. Participation in this study was voluntary and the young person along with their parent/guardian were notified of this fact in an information sheet prior to the commencement of this study. Interviews with the young people were carried out in the school setting and ethical considerations in research with the young people occurred at all stages of the research process. If participation in the research inadvertently impacted on the young people's everyday lives in terms of revealing new knowledge or raising questions for them there was a designated liaison person within the school that the young person could be referred to if the need arose.

3.9 Reflexive Positioning as the Researcher

As the researcher I am aware of my own potential biases and I practised "empathic neutrality" (Ritchie et al., 2014) during this study. I am a mother of two children who attend the Blackwater Community School. I intentionally chose TY students to participate in this study as neither of my children are in TY. I am also local to the area; however, I did not see this as problematic but instead a motivating factor because being from the community I am extremely interested in improving the community and making it inclusive for all members of society. As this is a very small rural community, I had the advantage of knowing many of the committee members who comprise the Aglish Community Development Committee. In order to manage the potential for researcher bias arising from community membership, I used supervision with my UCC dissertation supervisor to monitor my own reflexivity. When it came time to analyse and extrapolate the data in the transcripts, I brought the information to supervision in order to tease out the various themes. This enhanced the rigour of analysis and served as an effective quality control measure. Finally, to develop self-care strategies to manage my professional and personal experiences I used my journal throughout the duration of this study to explore how this research and its findings impacted on me.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations for this research was the sample size. I had intended to interview 8-10 participants' however only 7 consent and assent forms were returned. It should be noted that those were the individuals I had met as part of the focus group to discuss the premise of the project. The remainder I had scheduled to meet with on the 13th March 2020 however the school closed due to Covid 19. The methodology included the use of an audio recorder however this may have interfered with their ability to speak freely. I did get the opportunity to speak with them before and after the audio recordings and

the conversations flowed more freely and some of the participants actually discussed they were "uncomfortable" and "froze" when they were been recorded. Finally, due to Covid 19 the college closed, and I was unable to access the library and search the relevant databases. As a result, my dissertation and research was continued and completed at home which created its own challenges. My progression was hampered by poor rural broadband as my two children in exam years were drawing on the same line and we all required decent broadband to do self-directed study.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical approach the researcher employed in this study. It identified the theoretical perspective as constructionism and epistemological position as interpretivism. The methodology and methods used were described in detail and demonstrated for the reader how a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used in order to gather information. This chapter also described the use of thematic analysis as an approach for interpreting qualitative data and the chapter concluded with discussing the limitations and challenges in the study.

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CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings as a result of conducting seven one to one interviews with TY students in Blackwater Community school along with the findings in the context of the literature reviewed. The findings summarised the voices of these young people and will be presented thematically in to 4 core themes. All names and identifying information of the research participants have been omitted in order to protect their identity and confidentiality. The following pseudonyms will be used throughout; Participant (P) 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

4.2 How do Young People View their Community

In order to build a profile of Aglish and its environs it was important to understand how the young person viewed their community. Aglish, Ballinameala and Mount Stuart make up the Parish of Aglish and also include the village of Villierstown and environs of Kereen.

> *"Am my community is a small rural village called Aglish, it's mainly made up of a housing estate, football pitch and a shop and a church".* (P1)

> *"I live in Ballinameela it's like Ballinameela, Aglish & Villierstown…like so...I'd say it's like a close kind of community. Everyone knows each other. You'd be kind of like related to everyone as well and like everyone gets along like and there is no real fighting or nothing".* (P2)

> *"I live in Aglish and I live out in the countryside…. ah it's grand like, it's quiet*". (P4)

> *"Yea so I live in Ballinameala and there's a school and a pitch and there's not too much other than that". (P5)*

> *"Ah Villierstown not a lot of cars pass through like nothing really there to do". (P7)*

The quotes from the young people suggest Aglish is a small rural community comprising of a "school", "shop", "housing estate" and "football pitch". Comments also suggest it is "quiet" with young people feeling like there is "nothing really there to do".

4.3 Theme One: Free Time and Leisure Needs

4.3.1 What are young people currently doing in their free time?



Figure 6: Provides an overview of what young people do in their spare time

In each of the interviews the participant's indicated that there was a lack of facilities or 'things to do' in Aglish. Participant 2 stated

> "*We don't really have much places to go."*

Each of the interviews also indicated that young people move out of their communities to engage in activities during their free time. Trips to Dungarvan (large town) appeared to be popular with this cohort as it presented the young person with more opportunities for social and recreational activities.

> *"I go working, I hang out with my friends and stuff like……and go into town and something like…. I hangout with my friends in town and the GAA field I suppose…. Go to town as sure nothing to do around Aglish".* (P4)

> "*I enjoy like painting and stuff like but I do that at home and I do gymnastics in Dungarvan and…I hang out with my friends in each other's houses and go into Dungarvan and just hang around the town*". (P5)

Sport was also mentioned by a lot of the participants as one of their favourite things to do with 'hurling' and 'football' the most popular sports. However, the findings indicate that involvement in sport can be gendered and participant 2 and participant 3 both indicate to this where they state there is "no camogie club for girls".

4.3.2 Where do young people hang out?



Figure 7: Illustrates where young people go to hang out in Aglish

The majority of the participants stated that Aglish does not have suitable spaces or places that they can go to regularly to meet up with their friends. Each of the respondents cited the 'football pitch', 'bench outside the local shop' and "at the cross" as common places to go and hangout.

Participant 5 in particular made the point that it would be important to have a building/shelter that was safe and warm that they could use to gather socially. In addition, the need to be together was also mentioned which was something that came up in nearly all of the interviews.

> "*Not anywhere to hang out in Ballinameala but I suppose we could go to the pitch but indoors we'd like to stay warm….and yea just not too much in Ballinameala but just somewhere to*

go……important because just to hang out with each other and each other's company and….". (P5)

It is also worth noting that for many of the young people, free time and hanging out saw them leaving their community because of the lack of facilities.

"*Hang out in Dungarvan or Waterford City I'd say. Like I'd stay in my community like unless I was doing football or hurling training or like a match or something. All you have is a pitch and a shop. Cause like if you go to Dungarvan, there's a load of shops and stuff. You could go to like a restaurant and stay there. Or there be like Ice skating up in Waterford city you could go to, but we wouldn't have anything like that. There are fields, pitches or the school like*". (P2)

4.3.3 Discussion

My findings were representative of research carried out by McAleer & National Youth Council of Ireland (2019) in which a focus group of young people clearly describe the lack of places to go and things to do in rural Ireland. Similarly the findings are in keeping with the research conducted by Lalor, De Roiste & Dineen (2006) where they cite that the lack of facilities and resources in rural communities for young people means that often young people are forced to gather in places within their community which can be viewed as unsuitable by older adults. In addition, in rural areas there can be competition for free spaces, this was found in research carried out by Matthews et al. with young people in rural Northamptonshire in the UK. The study indicated that children do not have access to green spaces or public places with much of the land privately owned by the farming community (Matthews et al., 2000).

4.4 Theme Two: Challenges to Growing up in Rural Ireland

4.4.1 Rural v's Urban Divide

This theme emerged from asking the participants if they felt they had the same opportunities growing up in a rural community as opposed to someone who grows up in a big town. All of the participants felt there was a lack of facilities in rural areas compared with the opportunities available to young people in towns and urban areas.

"*No because they can have a lot more opportunities, a lot more facilities.*" (P1)

"No, they have like more advantages like more buses and loads of shops around…they have places like to go and eat, we don't have that". (P2)

"Am……I don't think so…. I think in urban areas they have more stuff to do…more variety of sports and things to do". (P7)

Participant 3 also felt that there is a lack of youth services in the community and that youth clubs and recreational facilities were only available to those living in urban town settings.

"They've more facilities like they can….and more clubs and everything and they can go play badminton, tennis or whatever they want it's at their feet…. their doorstep."

4.4.2 Lack of Transport

In analysing all the responses provided by the participants in the interviews transport was a theme that emerged throughout many of their answers although there was no specific question asked in relation to this. However, as this was a theme that arose it would be remit of the researcher if it was not addressed in the findings.

Participant 1 highlighted the fact that although transport links do exist in the community it could be more effective as often the local link can operate on restrictive timetables and have limited routes.

"*Maybe better transport to the village like the local link into local town Dungarvan*".

Participant 2 and 4 agree in their statements that the lack of available transport means they have to rely on adults for transport so they can move beyond their community to access activities and facilities. This can impact on the autonomy and independence of the young person.

"…. Whereas we can't even go anywhere without asking our parents to drive us there…. because it's just like so far away from everywhere. There isn't even a bus running through like in Ballinameela, it's just once a week from Aglish". (P2)

"*I have to rely on someone to bring me into town and stuff to actually do the stuff……. we have the local link, but it doesn't go that often". (P4)*

4.4.3 Discussion

The findings indicate that there is a lack of youth provision to meet the needs of young people living in rural Ireland. These findings were also echoed in the literature review in chapter two. Furthermore, in research carried out by McAleer on Youth work in rural Ireland, youth workers report there is an "urban-rural" divide when it comes to funding allocated to youth work provision (McAleer, 2019). The geographical location of where one grows up can have an impact on how one experiences and perceives their life. The lack of transport means young people are unable to access clubs and youth facilities and other services that are important to the young person. What is best described in books and portrayed in films as the pleasing and idyllic view of growing up in the countryside literature illustrates that this does not accurately represent the views of all young people in these areas. This sentiment was also echoed by the majority of participants that took part in this study where they cite the lack of transport, lack of youth clubs and proximity to larger towns and urban areas as the challenges in growing up in a rural community.

4.5 Theme 3: Facilities and Resources

4.5.1 The wishes of young people in Aglish

During the interview young people were asked the question; What do you think young people want in your area? It was clear from asking this question that young people had definite ideas what they would like to see developed in their community. All 7 of the participants' stated they would like somewhere they could go to meet and hang out with friends.

"*I think for young people they would like places you can go and hang out more, see their friends like…a place they can go if the weather is bad that you don't have to be down at the pitch or outside the shop*". (P1)

"Am…. anywhere……somewhere to hang out even….and just to meet up with people". (P5)

"*Really like a Youth centre, like games, pool table or something like that. Like a café maybe*". (P2)

> "*It's more of like where people can hang out and get together and hang out and meet up and talk and places to go and talk and stuff and hang out*". (P6)

Participant 3 when asked this same question made an interesting observation when stating there should be something on offer in rural communities for young people if sport and GAA are not a young person's first preference.

> "*Somewhere to go and do more stuff…like maybe for some people who aren't into sports, they could go and maybe do like drama or whatever they are into really. Maybe even a gym or something*".

4.5.2 Young people's Suggestions for the Proposed New Development

Towards the end of the interview the young people were asked what they would like to see developed on the 2-acre site in Aglish? This was the information ACDC was most interested in.



Figure 8: Two-acre site for development with church and GAA grounds in background

The majority of the participants expressed the view that a building, playground, park or gym are spaces and places that young people would like to go to meet up.

> "*An area like a building that young people could go to…maybe like have pool-tables and places like a facility where we could go. Pool tables or basketball courts just yah…"* (P1)

> "*Maybe a gym or maybe a playground as well".* (P2)

> "*I think like a hall or something with a gym in it and stuff……I wouldn't mind a badminton club or something…."* (P4)

> *"Not too sure now…. just somewhere I don't know……maybe foróige for the teenagers maybe…. playground for younger ones as well and that would be a place for teenagers to hang out as well*". (P5)

Participants 6 and 7 highlighted that the provision of youth facilities does not need to be an extravagant building and can be inclusive of other demographics.

> "*Well for like younger and older people I'd say a park or playground so they could hang out more and young people like U 10 or whatever so they would have a place to go around their areas…cause like football pitch not really a place you can go to hang out unless you want to play hurling and football a playground would be good and it's alongside the shop as well*". (P6)

> "*Am, something where people can meet up often with something actually to do something interesting, I think a Park would be a good place people could actually sit down and eat food and enjoy being outside…. a park is good for everyone like*". (P7)

4.5.3 Discussion

It was evident from the participants responses that spending time with friends is important to them and the need of a shelter/youth centre/youth café would provide them with the infrastructure to allow these friendships and relationships to foster and develop. These findings are represented in Erick Erickson's fifth stage of psychosocial development which examines adolescence and identity. This is a time in a young person's life where making friendships and forming relationships is extremely important. The other findings indicate that young people can have concern and be considerate of others which is

demonstrated in their responses where they mention facilities such as a park and playground to include younger children.

This lack of recreational activities for teenagers was also highlighted in a study carried out by De Róiste and Dinneen in 2005 (chapter 2). Research also suggests that the lack of spaces and places in communities can often mean young people and adults find themselves competing for available space. In research conducted on rural areas in the UK, Davis and Ridge in their study identify that;

> in rural areas, children and young people find themselves in a very particular social environment where there may be powerful adult groups [affluent incomers and early retirers seeking an idyllic rural lifestyle] who can dominate in a struggle for space and resources; where children and young people can be social very visible and yet find their needs both invisible and unmet (1997, p. 3)

Although this research by Davis and Ridge is over 20 years old, this theme is one that runs through many of the studies where children describe having nowhere to go and are not welcomed in public spaces by adults (Kato, 2007).

4.6 Theme 4: Sense of Belonging

4.6.1 Youth Participation

One of the questions in the interview asked the participants if they would like to be part of the decision-making process in your community? The responses from the participants overwhelmingly demonstrate that young people if given the opportunity would accept the invitation onto a committee and are not averse to being involved in their community.

> *"I'd like to be part because you get to see the village from a different point of view…. How young people find growing up there and making decisions for the village".* (P1)

Furthermore, many of the participants saw the benefits of participating.

> "*Yes, so then they'd have a young person's voice. Like we could tell them our ideas and people maybe from other areas might come to our parish*". (P2)

"yah, we would be able to get our opinions out, because instead of adults making our opinions heard but might not be putting the message across properly". (P3)

"*Yea, yeah just to get ideas in there…to get other feedback and stuff as well to help make decisions*". (P5)

"*Yea I suppose yea….I suppose when everyone grows up like we will be the ones in charge….we will be the ones to experience what's going on in the village like….so we're kinda the future I suppose you could say and make future decisions and stuff*". (P7)

4.6.2 Community Engagement

In order to gauge youth participation participants were asked the following question: Do you feel like your voice is being heard when it comes to decisions being made in your community? 6 out of the 7 participants stated they had no opportunity to express their views and are not part of any decision-making process in their community.

"Not sure, not really…Because we're never really like given any choices either it's there or not there". (P3)

Participant 7 felt like the adults do not engage with young people when making decisions and that they presume they know what the young person wants.

"*No…. they wouldn't really like ask questions I suppose if stuff is going on in the area…. they just go ahead with it and do it".*

A number of responses also indicated that it is the adults in the community and who are on committees who appear to hold all the power when it comes to making decisions.

"*Not really, more the adults that are living in the village make the decisions for the younger people". (P1)*

"Mmmh, not really like…I wouldn't be asked or anything it usually the adults that sort things out or planning things". (P5)

Participant 2 made the point that adult's do not always know what young people want or need.

> "*No cause there's no children in the parent's association ...like any of them associations are all grownups, so they are making the decisions. The younger children, they might want a playground or something like and adults might not know that as they might not have children themselves*". (P2)

Finally, participants were also asked; do you feel like you are part of your community. Interestingly participants 2, 3 and 6 all considered themselves actively involved in the community by means of their association with sport.

> "*Yea because I have at least once or twice a week I do something part of in my community like for example football….".* (P6)

> "*Yah, well I try to get involved in anything that's there like athletics club, football, choir*". (P3)

> "*Yah, there isn't much but the football club, I'm part of that*". (P2)

4.6.3 Discussion

The need to belong and to feel connected illustrated in the findings correlate to the 3rd stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) discussed in chapter 2. These findings indicate that in order for young people to feel connected and included in their community young people must be afforded with opportunities to participate in all areas that affect their lives. According to Saleeby, feeling a sense of place and belonging to one's community is empowering because,

> Membership means that people need to be citizens – responsible and valued members in a viable group or community. To be without membership is to be alienated, and to be at risk of marginalization and oppression, the enemies of civic and moral strength
>
> (Saleeby, cited in Healy, p 164, 2005)

In a report by Coyne et al., children report that sport is the second-best thing about living in Ireland (2012, p 43) and often equate this membership in sport to active citizenship in their community (Forde et al., 2017). Finally, the findings also indicate that young people feel they are not being listened to or considered when decisions are being made. In research carried out by Forde et al., on the participation

of young people in their communities they found that “many adults do not recognise children and young people as social actors and citizens in their own right” (2017, p 5).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the main finding from the interviews that were conducted with the young people. The data was analysed and divided into four core themes. The next chapter will address the key recommendations as a result of these findings.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIVE PIECE

5.1 Introduction

Following the analysis of data in the previous chapter this chapter will offer conclusions and provide recommendations based on the findings. This chapter will conclude with a reflection by the researcher of completing a research project.

5.2 Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to investigate the social needs, wishes and preferences of young people in a small rural community in West Waterford. A second objective was to examine young people's perceptions of their participation in their community. Following my own review, it would suggest that youth studies are usually done by professionals, it was important for ACDC that this study would give a voice to the young person. At the start of the interview the young people were asked to describe their community. All of them described Aglish in a positive light describing Aglish as a small rural village comprising of a housing estate, football pitch with a shop and church. What they described is a close community where everyone knows each other and where everyone gets along and there is no fighting. The main findings that stemmed from this research is that the young people in Aglish and surrounding areas feel like there is nothing to do in their community. They also felt that growing up in a rural community has its own challenges namely lack of transport links, lack of suitable places to hang out with friends and the lack of recreational and youth facilities. The participants also felt they had limited opportunities when compared to their counterparts in urban areas. One of the key findings is that the need for young people to be together was a dominant theme that ran throughout the interviews. All of the participants talked about places they would go and meet, to hang out with friends. They also reported that some of the places they meet, for example at the bench outside the local shop or at the dug outs at the GAA pitch, are not suitable, preferring instead to go somewhere that would provide them with shelter.

The research question that examined the young person's perception of their involvement in their community yielded unexpected findings. The responses from the young people suggests they feel included and connected to their community by means of their involvement in sports. However, the research also revealed that young people do not feel they have a voice when it comes to decisions being made in their community. Finally, the ACDC were primarily interested in seeking the young people's

ideas and thoughts as to what should be developed on the 2-acre green site in the village. Some of the things that were mentioned was a gym, building, youth café and youth centre. However, the majority also identified a park, playground and maybe even a bench where they could sit down and enjoy being outside. What the young people have described are informal spaces which are in stark contrast to elaborate spaces or extravagant buildings that adults perhaps think young people need or want in their community.

The conclusions that have been drawn from these findings will now inform the recommendations after analysing the data.

5.3 Recommendations

- Create links within the community to enhance young people's participation. This could be achieved by inviting a young person onto the ACDC committee to represent the voice of young people.

- ACDC should research grants available to small villages and rural communities. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme which is funded by the Department of Community and Rural Development is one such grant that is available to ACDC. The grant aid would allow ACDC to provide amenities for example a park bench, a playground which are inclusive for all age groups.

- The Local Link is the rural transport service that operates in Co. Waterford which is funded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The majority of participants claim transport is an issue and cite infrequent service and a restrictive timetable as a challenge in their community. ACDC could liaise with the Transport Co-ordination Units (Local Link Office) to examine usage, identify gaps in service provision and plan how to address unmet needs to ensure a more frequent service locally.

- Youth club/Youth Café was mentioned by some of the participants as a place they could go to meet with friends. ACDC have access to a small community space/hall currently and the committee should consider making this area available to young people as a place they could go to meet up and socialise in their spare time. The benefits of a youth café are highlighted in

research and are cited as safe places where young people can foster and develop relationships with peers and adults (OMC, 2007).

- To explore the idea of employing a community based social worker to develop groups and individual supports within the community. Community Development (CD) uses a 'bottom up' approach and works with individuals and groups collectively to bring about small changes within a community. ACDC should examine the possibility of applying to The Community Services Programme (CSP) which provides supports to communities by providing them with funding towards the cost of employing a worker. The CSP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and administered by Pobal.

5.4 Limitations

As a researcher I recognise that all research projects have limitations. One of the key limitations in this research was the sample size. One of the reasons for this is only participants from Aglish and its environs were selected to part take in the interview. Secondly, the researcher was scheduled to return to the school 12/03/2020 to interview three additional participants however the pandemic resulted in the closure of all schools. In hindsight I may have conducted the interviews in another way using focus group and note taking as the participants expressed that they 'froze' when the audio recorder was switched on. The researcher believes this was reflected in their responses as they felt they could not speak freely. This is something I would be mindful of again when I am interviewing and/or working with young people.

5.5 Researchers Reflection

For this reflection piece I find myself having to reach deep to most accurately reflect the areas I struggled with. I have always been a hard worker and even areas of previous learning which tested my endurance, once completed I expertly file away and move one – job done so to speak. This masters journey, even before COVID-19 became a factor, tested my limits and made me question my own ability at times.

When I completed secondary research as part of my H-Dip. in 2018 I found the process extremely difficult losing interest in my research topic halfway through. The experience left me doubting myself academically and I was overwhelmed at the thought of completing a master's dissertation. The learning I gained from this process in 2018 was that I needed to engage with and carry out research that was of great interest to me as I knew this would result in a higher degree of commitment and focus. I also

learned from undertaking secondary research that my strengths would lie with undertaking a primary research piece as I love working with people and finding out new information.

This experience shaped my decision making in deciding the type of research I wanted to get involved with for the MSW which ultimately led me to becoming involved with the CARL project. Becoming involved in the CARL project afforded me the opportunity of working with a local community group and young people. This I felt was in keeping with my previous work history in community development and I felt it was a good match from the outset pertaining to my natural strengths and abilities. I commenced the ethics application in September 2019 and truthfully, I became slightly frustrated with the process not realising the amount of information and detail that was needed. I finally got approval in December 2019 and met with the young people for the first time in January 2020. After meeting with the young people, I felt confident from talking to them that this was going to be a positive experience for all involved.

Completing this research project has taught me many things. Firstly, to expect the unexpected as the arrival of the pandemic saw the closure of all schools and colleges. Prior to COVID-19 I continued to attend UCC library daily and secured myself a workstation that I felt I absolutely needed to support my writing and references. The sense of security, quietness, access to literature and structure the library afforded supported my own need to see this journey through. Suddenly as a result of COVID-19 my safety net was removed, and I was thrown into an unknown area to write the dissertation in my own home. This presented so many challenges, poor and very limited broadband, lack of a dedicated workstation, access to the library and an unstructured day. To add to this both my children would also be at home studying as both have state exams in 2020 Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. All three of us required access to broadband and a laptop.

However, these challenges taught me to think on my feet and adapt to a different way of working. It taught me to prioritise and to effectively manage my time keeping skills especially the extensive time needed to read books and journal articles. I developed better research skills and learned how to efficiently search databases in the UCC online library. I became efficient in self-directed study and proactive in the use of the time with my dissertation supervisor.

As I look back after completing this process, I realise that I have grown personally and professionally. I have learned that I can adapt when faced with challenging situations and still complete the chosen task

without compromising the result. Personally, I have more confidence in my abilities, and I realise that there are challenges in every walk of life. What defines you as a person is how you rise to those challenges and how you respond to them. Professionally, I have grown stronger and wiser and I feel more confident in knowing the resilience I have demonstrated from the beginning of this process will scaffold me in my future career as a social worker.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Confirmation of Ethical Approval

Log 2019-203 Approved

Thu, Dec 12, 2019, 1:37 PM

Ethics Committee, Social Research <srec@ucc.ie>

to me

Dear Jillian
The Social Research and Ethics Committee has now approved your application Log 2019-203 entitled “An exploration of the needs wishes and preferences of young people in a small rural community in West Waterford.”

The committee wishes you every success with your research.
All the best
Liz

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET
(Parents/Guardians)

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Purpose of the study

As part of the requirements for the Masters of Social Work degree at UCC, I Jillian O'Connell must conduct a research study. The research will investigate the social needs of young people within a small rural community in West Waterford. This research is in partnership with the Aglish Community Development Company and the Blackwater Community School.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve interviewing young people in Transition Year who reside in Aglish and its environs to investigate their social needs and to establish what facilities they would like to see developed within their community. It is my aim that their engagement with the study will lead to them influencing positive changes within their community for young people which I hope will ultimately promote the young person's sense of identity and belonging.

Why has your child been asked to take part?

For this research to be truly valuable it is important to consult with young people. Your child has been asked to take part as they reside within a small rural community in West Waterford. This research will afford the young person the opportunity to have their voices heard regarding their experiences of living in rurally isolated communities and it is hoped the development of this knowledge will determine what facilities are needed for the young person moving forward.

Do you have to give permission for your child to take part?

Participation is voluntary. If you agree to let your child participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form to give permission. You will then be given a copy of the consent form and information sheet about the research. You can withdraw your child from the research at any time prior to, during the interview, or 2 weeks post data collection and request for their data to be destroyed.

Will your child's participation in the study be kept anonymous?

Yes, I will ensure that your child's identity will be protected in the dissertation and in the presentation of the findings from the research. Your child's name will be anonymised and any extracts from what your

child has said and that are used in the research will be entirely anonymous. Confidentiality will be maintained with the exception of circumstances where your child may disclose that he/she are at risk of being harmed. Under the UCC Child Safeguarding Statement which sets out the legal requirements under the Children First Act 2015, I have an obligation to respond appropriately to disclosures in order to protect your child. However, as this research will be carried out within the school setting, I will have access to a designated liaison person in the school that your child can be referred to should the need arise. Finally, my dissertation supervisor, Olwen Halvey (CORU Registered Social Worker), will be responsible for ensuring that standard reporting procedure is followed if necessary.

What will happen to the information, which your child gives?

All data will be kept anonymous for the duration of the study, available only to my research supervisor and myself. All data that is stored is kept anonymous. The data will be securely stored on my personal laptop. On completion of the project, the data will be transferred to Fiachra O' Suilleabhain, UCC for storage for 10 years. After that time, the data will be deleted.

What will happen to the results?

The results of the study will be presented in the dissertation and at a presentation at a 2-day Conference attended by MSW 1 and MSW 2 students which will be held in UCC in May 2019. The findings will also be presented to Aglish community Development Company who are partners in the research. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will also see the results. Future students on the course may read this dissertation and the study may be published in a research journal. The copy of this report will be made available on the CARL website.

What are the disadvantages of taking part?

This research is about interviewing the young person (your child) and affording them the opportunity to have their voices heard for the first time regarding their experiences of living in a rural community. The study is intended to be quiet a positive and practical piece of research as the researcher will be asking the young person questions regarding living in West Waterford and asking them what kind of services and facilities they would like to see developed within their community. I do not envisage any negative consequences for your child taking part in the research.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the process I will discuss with your child how they found the overall experience and ask how they are feeling about it. If your child reports they may be feeling distressed for whatever reason I will refer the child to the designated liaison officer within Blackwater Community School to discuss this further.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by my supervisor in UCC, Olwen Halvey and members of Aglish Community Development Company. Approval must be given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC before studies like this can take place.

Any further queries?
If you need any further information, you can contact;
Researcher: Jillian O'Connell
Email: 117221382@umail.ucc.ie

Supervisor: Olwen Halvey
Email: olwen.halvey@ucc.ie

If you agree to your child taking part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

YOUNG PERSON INFORMATION SHEET



What is research?
Research is a way of find out more about something

What is this research project about?
This research is to investigate the social needs of young people within a small rural community in West Waterford.

Why is this research happening?
This research will involve conducting individual interviews with transition years students who reside in rural communities in West Waterford (Aglish and its environs).

Why have you been asked to take part?
This research is for you and other young people who live in your area. Your right to be heard and to be listened to is extremely important so you can have a say in what facilities are developed within your community. So, if you would like to take part we would ask you to speak with your parents/guardian so that they can give you permission to take part (those under 18).

Where will the interviews take place?
The interviews will take place in the Blackwater Community School on the 16th December 2019. Each student who is interested in taking part will be given an allocated time for the interview. It is intended the interview will take no longer than 30 minutes.

Do you have to take part?
No, you only take part if you want to and if your parents agree. You will be asked to sign a form agreeing that you want to take part. If you are under the age of 18 you must also talk to your parents/guardians as they need to read an information sheet and sign a form saying that they allow you to take part. You and your parent/guardian will keep a copy of the signed forms and information sheets. You can stop taking part at any time in the research, before, during, or after the interview (up to 2 weeks after). I will then destroy the data so it will not be used.

Will my name be mentioned in the research?
I will ensure that your identity will be protected in this dissertation. Any extracts from what you have said and that are quoted in the research, will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give?
All data will be kept anonymous during the study available only to my research supervisor and myself. The data will be securely stored on my personal laptop. On completion of the project the data will be transferred Fiachra O' Suilleabhain, UCC for storage for 10 years. After that time the data will be deleted.

What will happen to the results?
The results of the study will be presented in the dissertation and presentation at a 2-day Conference attended by MSW 1 and MSW 2 students which will be held in UCC in May 2019. The findings will also be presented to Aglish community Development Company who are partners in the research. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will also see the results. Future students on the MSW program may read this dissertation and the study may be published in a research journal. The copy of this report will be made available on the CARL website.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?
This research is about interviewing you the young person and affording you the opportunity to have your voices heard for the first time regarding your experiences of living in a rural community. The study is intended to be quite a positive and practical piece of research as the researcher will be asking you questions regarding living in West Waterford and asking you what kind of services and facilities you would like to see developed within your community. I do not envisage any negative consequences for you if you should take part in the research.

What if there is a problem?
At the end of the process I will discuss with you how you found the overall experience and how you are feeling about it. If you report that you may be feeling distressed for whatever reason I will refer you to Mr. Denis Ring who is the designated liaison officer within Blackwater Community School to discuss this further.

Can anything good happen to me if I take part?
Lots of good things can happen if you take part! You get the opportunity to speak about your community. By participating in this research, it means your voice will be listened to and you can have a say in what facilities you would like to see developed in your community to meet your social needs. You can write about your experience of being part of a research project in your CV if you wish. Your participation with the project could mean you can make positive changes in the future for lots of young people in your community.

Who has reviewed this study?
This study has been reviewed by my supervisor in UCC, Olwen Halvey and members of Aglish Community Development Company. Approval must be given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC before studies like this can take place.

Any further queries?
If you need any further information, you can contact;
Researcher: Jillian O'Connell
Email: 117221382@umail.ucc.ie

Supervisor: Olwen Halvey
Email: olwen.halvey@ucc.ie

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

Appendix 3: Parental/Guardian Consent Form

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

I ……. (name) agree to my child …… (child's name) participating in the Aglish Community Development Company's CARL project.

- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.
- My child's participation will be voluntarily
- I give permission for my child's interview with Jillian O'Connell to be audio-recorded.
- I understand my child can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or whey they are participating.
- I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by anonymising my child's identity.
- I understand that extracts from my child's interview may be quoted in the dissertation and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick appropriate box)
I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my son's/daughter's interview ☐
I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my child's interview ☐

Signed: ……. Date: ……

PRINT NAME: ……

Appendix 4: Participants Assent Form

ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS
(Under 18)

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

I have been invited to take part in research by Jillian O'Connell in collaboration with Aglish Community Development Company for the purpose of a Community Academic Research Links (CARL) project.

- My parent/legal guardian has given consent for my participation in this research.
- I do not require communication assistance or mobility assistance.
- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.
- My participation will be voluntarily.
- I give permission for my interview with the researcher to be audio-recorded.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, up to two weeks post interview, before the interview starts or while I am participating in the interview.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks after the interview by contacting the researcher at the email address provided in the information sheet and in this case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the research and any subsequent publication if I give permission below.

(Please tick appropriate answer)

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

Signed: …… (participant) Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: …….

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

GUIDANCE FOR ONE TO ONE INTERVIEWS

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Interview Questions:

- Tell me about your community?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Where do you hang out? Why?
- What facilities/services/clubs are there currently where you live?
- Are you part of these facilities/services/clubs? Why/Why not?
- What do you think young people want in your area?
- Do you feel like you are part of your community?
- Do you think your voice is being heard when it comes to decisions being made in your community?
- Would you like to be part of the decision-making process in your community (part of the group/committee that make these decisions). Why/Why not?
- What would you like to see developed on the two-acre site in Aglish?
- Do you feel that you have the same opportunities growing up in a rural community as opposed to someone who grows up in a big town/city?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I haven't asked yet in relation to how your community should develop in the future?