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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

# ‘Smells Like Community Spirit’: An Exploration of Stakeholders Perceptions of the Social Needs and Issues for Young People in Douglas.

## CARL Research Project

**in collaboration with**

## Douglas Matters

CARL
COMMUNITY - ACADEMIC
RESEARCH LINKS
University College Cork, Ireland

| | |
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| **Date completed:** | 19 April 2018 |

# Community-Academic Research Links

**What is Community-Academic Research Links?**

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

## **CARL** seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- 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
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

**What is a CSO?**

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

**Why is this report on the UCC website?**

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access and the free and public dissemination of research results.

**How do I reference this report?**

Author (year) *Dissertation/Project Title*, [online], Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Ireland, Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/ [Accessed on: date].

**How can I find out more about the Community-Academic Research Links and the Living Knowledge Network?**

The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. http://carl.ucc.ie. You can follow CARL on Twitter at @UCC_CARL. All of our research reports are accessible free online here: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/rr/.

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops called the Living Knowledge Network. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: http://www.scienceshops.org and on Twitter @ScienceShops. CARL is also a contributor to Campus Engage, which is the Irish Universities Association engagement initiative to promote community-based research, community-based learning and volunteering amongst Higher Education students and staff.

**Are you a member of a community project and have an idea for a research project?**

We would love to hear from you! Read the background information here http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/ap/c&vo/ and contact us by email at carl@ucc.ie.

**Disclaimer**

Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

# Declaration of Originality

I hereby state that this research project titled *'Smells Like Community Spirit: An Exploration of Stakeholders Perceptions of the Social Needs and Issues for Young People in Douglas'* is my own work. Any work that is not my own has been acknowledged and referenced appropriately.

Name : _____

Date: _____

**“WHAT SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE DO WITH THEIR LIVES TODAY? MANY THINGS OBVIOUSLY. BUT THE MOST DARING THING IS TO CREATE STABLE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THE TERRIBLE DISEASE OF LONELINESS CAN BE CURED”**

**- KURT VONNEGUT**

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# Abstract

Arising from the ISPCC's report, 'Douglas Consultation Report: Consultation Proposal and Findings' in 2016, this research was done in collaboration with the CARL initiative in UCC and with Douglas Matters. CARL promotes community-based research, allowing the voices of small community organisations to be heard. The study is part of a wider, three-part research project that focuses on the lives of young people in Douglas. This section of the research explores the perspectives of adult stakeholders in Douglas around the social issues arising for young people in the community. Interpretivism, social constructivism and community-based participatory research were the theoretical underpinnings of this research. The methodology used was primary research in the form of semi-structured interviews. Six adult stakeholders participated in these interviews, five of whom were professionally linked with the Douglas area and the final participant being a resident who held a voluntary role in the community. The adult stakeholders identified the social issues, the resources available in Douglas to address these issues and the gaps that are evident in these resources. The results of this research saw a general dissatisfaction with the services available in Douglas and the adult stakeholders discussed several ways that the gaps should be addressed. Based on the data collected, several recommendations have been made with the hope that they will inform future development of the Douglas community.

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# Chapter One: Introduction and Background

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the research being undertaken, discussing the rationale, the research aims and objectives and the research questions it seeks to answer. The chapter will also discuss the Community Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative, which plays a collaborative part in this project. Finally, this chapter will provide an outline of the following chapters of this research project.

## 1.2 Background to Research

Between 2014 and 2015, the Advocacy Project volunteers within the ISPCC[1] collected data relating to issues facing young people and families in the Douglas area. This culminated in a report being published – the Douglas Consultation Report: Consultation Proposal and Findings. This stemmed from a review of the waiting list for the ISPCC's Emotional and Behavioural support service. Douglas was identified as the area most in need in Cork city and county (ISPCC, 2016). The advocacy volunteers took this opportunity to investigate the reasons behind this. They did this by tracking and analysing local media, consulting with the people who lived and worked in Douglas and by consulting with the young people of Douglas.

The ISPCC found that there was little on offer to the young people of Douglas. Events organised by support groups geared towards teens[2] were often glossed over in local media. Besides this, issues such as poverty, anti-social behaviour and family dysfunction were identified as prevalent within the Douglas community. It was agreed more could be done to improve the issues facing youth in Douglas. From this consultation report, Douglas Matters was born. A Douglas Matters event was held in November 2015 and those who attended included politicians, the Lord Mayor of Cork and representatives of the social work department, the Garda Youth Diversion Project, Barnardos and CAMHS (ISPCC, 2016). At this event, the issues that had arisen in the ISPCC's report were discussed and those who attended debated how best to tackle these issues. A follow up meeting on 20th April 2016 saw community members interested in the ISPCC's progress in Douglas gathering to discuss the possibility of a community-led ideas forum to work on some of the remaining issues (ISPCC, 2016). At the end of this event, it was agreed that a working group would continue from the ISPCC's findings and consultation.

[1] Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
[2] Such as the Garda Youth Diversion Project or Foroige.

Subsequently, Douglas Matters wanted students to undertake research on their behalf, the aim being to follow up on the consultation report. Douglas Matters presented several topics that they hoped to have researched and my research partners and I each chose which aspect of the research we would individually carry out.

## 1.3 Rationale

Douglas is considered by many in Cork to be an affluent area, a 'good place to live'. There are rarely negative news stories published about the Douglas area and on the surface, it seems that Douglas is almost free of any major social issues. However, as discussed above, the ISPCC report disproved this. This indicates that there are some inconsistencies in the picture-perfect surface of the Douglas community.

In conducting this research project and identifying both the resources available and the gaps, I hope that a significant contribution can be made to the progression of the Douglas area. I am particularly invested in this piece of research as a member of the Douglas community. The possibility of being able to make a difference within this community was a driving force behind the rationale of this research project. However, I also acknowledge that my status as a community member may bring some unique ethical issues and biases. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three (3.6).

The Community Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative promotes community-based research, which allows the voice of small community agencies not only be heard but potentially make tangible changes by gathering information that can inform their argument for that change. The CARL initiative along with the community organisation (Douglas Matters) has allowed me better access to the community for this research and develop this project in a way that may not have otherwise been possible.

## 1.4 Aim of Research

To explore the perspectives of adult stakeholders about the social issues faced by young people in Douglas, the resources available to deal with these and the potential gaps in these resources.

## 1.5 Objectives

1. To identify the social issues that are arising for young people in Douglas.
2. To identify potential gaps in the resources being offered in Douglas to combat these issues.
3. To explore the perceived benefits and drawbacks to having a community social worker implemented in Douglas.

## 1.6 Research Questions

1. From the stakeholders' perspectives, what are the social issues arising for the young people of Douglas?
2. What community resources are available in Douglas to respond to these social issues for young people and where are the gaps?
3. From the adult stakeholders' perspective, how could the gaps in resources best be addressed?
4. Is there a place for a community social work role within Douglas?

Each of these questions will be answered using data gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with adult stakeholders in Douglas. The research will be community-based and participatory and will rely on the narratives of these stakeholders to draw up findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.7 Chapter Outline

**Chapter One:**

Chapter One introduces the research topic and explains the rationale. It outlines the aims and objectives of the project, as well as the research questions that underpin it.

**Chapter Two:**

Chapter Two will review the literature available regarding the individual topics that make up this research project. It will explore concepts such as youth issues, the role of social work and the idea of community cohesion.

**Chapter Three:**

Chapter Three will detail the methodological approach taken. The chapter also outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the project, the process of primary research and outlines the ethical concerns that were considered and assessed prior to the approval and ultimate undertaking of this research.

**Chapter Four:**

Chapter Four will present the findings and qualitative analysis of the primary research, linking it to the relevant literature where appropriate.

**Chapter Five:**

Chapter Five will draw a conclusion to the research, based on the previous chapters. It will also put forward several recommendations, based on the findings made in Chapter Four, both from the participants and from the researcher. This chapter will conclude with a reflective piece from the researcher on the research process.

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will aim to give the reader a better understanding of community cohesion and what is said in the existing literature about issues affecting young people today. Furthermore, this chapter will seek to explore what the literature says about the role of community social work. The literature discussed in this review will also help to inform the conclusions of this research.

This chapter will look at both academic literature as well as any relevant official reports that may have been commissioned. Both Irish and international literature will be reviewed for this piece, in the hopes of getting a well-rounded and relevant view of these areas of discussion.

## 2.2 Community Cohesion

It appears that there is not a singular definition of 'community'. However, one that is widely accepted is as follows: "a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings" (McQueen et. al., 2001, p. 1929). So, by very definition, a community can have diverse meanings to different people, depending on their experiences. Community cohesion is described by Van Gundy et. al. (2011) as "an individual-level sense of belonging, safety and acceptance within one's neighbourhood or community" (p. 297).

The idea of community and community cohesion, is particularly relevant when discussing Douglas, due to its perceived fragmented nature. "Classical sociological perspectives speak to the importance of social cohesion for the maintenance and well-being of human societies … and contemporary work continues to locate meaningful sources of well-being in community solidarity, integration, and supports" (Van Gundy et. al., 2011, p. 293). According to Albanesi, Cicognani, and Zani (2007 as cited in Van Gundy et, al., 2011), a sense of community attachment is a key predictor of adolescent social well-being. It becomes clear when reading literature regarding community, social structures and community cohesion that academics see benefits in a cohesive community. However, there is also an argument that research around macrolevels of community have been neglected, and so too has the research of the contextual effects of community structure on individual behaviour (Sampson, 1991). Sociological research carried out on communities appears to regularly adopt a typical design that seems to favour an individual level of analysis (Sampson, 1991). Arguably, this design is favoured

because attempting a study at macrolevel is quite difficult, due to the numbers needed to successfully complete it.

An interesting finding coming from Sampson's research (1988, as cited in Sampson, 1991) is that residents of areas characterised by frequent population turnover have fewer opportunities to form friendships, participate in local affairs and for organisational contact. The suggestion that individuals can be affected by a communal trend of moving on from the area is one that should be given due consideration in this research. Could this be prevalent in the Douglas community?

While community cohesion has been generally seen as positive for the individuals living there, there is literature to suggest there are also drawbacks. In relation to adolescents and young people, there is some evidence that being too embedded or too integrated in one's social groups can erode well-being (Van Gundy, 2011). Therefore, extremely high levels of social connectedness may be detrimental to youth. Another drawback to community cohesion could be that some community members may feel like they do not belong (Van Gundy, 2011). Arguably, tight knit communities are tough to become integrated into after their formation, perhaps leading to feelings of isolation and rejection from 'outside' members. Portes (1998, as cited in Van Gundy, 2011) considers that the same strong ties that present benefits for some may exclude others, demand conformity, and thwart positive social and personal development. Detached youth may feel that community members are unfairly judgmental and rejecting of them (Van Gundy. 2011).

## 2.3 Youth Issues

As Grattan (2008) points out, the notion of young people being rebellious and rambunctious is one that is an historical accuracy. However, "what is new is the constant negative portrayal of young people" (Grattan, 2008, p. 255). He goes on to state that young people are represented as both a social problem and a social threat, resulting in young people feeling demonised by the media reporting (Grattan, 2008).

The issues facing adolescents and young people in Ireland today is a topic that is increasingly coming to the forefront of national discussions. In 2015, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) published the first ever National Youth Strategy (2015-2020). This report has its roots in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – National Policy Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2014-2020*, which aimed to improve Ireland in terms of making it one of the best small countries to grow up in, by protecting, respecting

and fulfilling the potential of young people. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* stated that the DCYA would invest thirty-five million euro into the "longitudinal study of children, *Growing Up in Ireland*" (Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, pp. ix). This was an effort to ensure that this report was not simply full of good intentions, but rather would take active steps towards improving the standard of living and outcomes for young people in Ireland.

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* discussed the state of youth affairs at the time of its publication, concluding that while Ireland was by no means a bad place to grow up, there was space for work to be done. At that point, just eighty per cent of children and young people were benefitting from opportunities in the country. This document showed interest in improving supports for families. It acknowledged the difficulties that parents face today in trying to raise children – between maintaining a work-life balance and staying knowledgeable about the changing aspects of childhood and topical issues of today (Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). The importance of a supportive and functioning family system is further acknowledged in the *National Youth Strategy* (2015), as it discusses how this contributes to a young person developing a sense of identity, self-worth and trust in others (Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015). The *National Youth Strategy* goes on to point out that family support can help in contributing to a child's sense of belonging, which is "essential to their own well-being and their participation in society" (Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015, pp. 14).

The '*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'* Framework (2014) discusses the importance of maintaining a space for childhood in our society and the concern that this space is currently shrinking. The Framework spoke about improving understanding around the impact of modern technologies, digital media and sexualisation and creating ways to ensure that children and young people receive the support and information to best respond to these influences. This awareness of emerging issues for young people today and the creation of new ways to deal with these is something that is relevant to this research. It shows the importance of keeping up to date with issues that arise for young people and of implementing support systems accordingly.

Leahy and Burgess (2011) address some of the emerging issues for Irish youth in *Youth Participation in the Republic of Ireland*. Again, like the previous literature, it appears that the progression of technology and the significant part it plays in the lives of young people may cause some of the emerging issues (Leahy & Burgess, 2011). They question the benefits and

drawbacks of such technologies, wondering if the increased use among young people is leading to isolation and disengagement form civil society (Leahy & Burgess, 2011).

Van Hout (2009) discusses the prevalence of adolescent substance use. She believes what started as an issue amongst marginalised or sub deviant groups, is now a feature in the social lives of many Irish young people, with illicit drugs becoming more accessible and widely used (Van Hout, 2009). However, it should be noted that this finding may not be fully accurate, due to the sampling used in Van Hout's research. The participants were self-selected and were members of the community, law enforcement and drug services. The final number of participants was forty-two, which is a relatively small sample considering the number of adolescents and young people in Ireland. Furthermore, the sample of people interviewed were widely those who work with young people and encounter the issue of drug use professionally on a regular basis. It could be argued that because of the sample's professions, they are more exposed to drug use among young people than many other members of the community. So perhaps her research findings are not generalisable enough to conclusively state that illicit drug taking is widely used among young people.

There is some discussion around the issue of mental health and young people. Peiper et. al. (2017) state that "extensive needs analyses document that there is considerable risk for psychological distress and mental ill-health within this population, and a consequent need for systematic and accessible early intervention". A study done in Ireland showed that up to twenty per cent of adolescents have significant mental health problems (Hartnett et. al., 2016). However, it does appear that there are gaps in the literature about this topic when you take into consideration how widely recognised it is as an issue societally.

Finally, and perhaps least written about, is the ever-present issue of young people having nowhere to go.

> Public space is imperative for young people's development of identities, social relationships, and sense of autonomy. Nevertheless, teenagers are not welcomed in public space, because adults consider it as naturally and normally an adult space and teenagers as its pollutants (Kato, 2007, p. 1).

Kato (2007) goes on to describe how hanging out is a social activity that typically involves at least two people and it does not have any set goal. In this author's opinions, teenagers choose to hang out in commercial areas such as shopping centres, because they can express their

independence from their parents in ways such as making decisions around what to purchase (Kato, 2007).

## 2.4 The Role of Social Work

Social workers must continually re-examine their roles and tasks based on a dual responsibility that consists of making decisions on solid findings and evaluating the effects of their actions (Timberlake, Zajicek-Farber and Anlauf Sabatino, 2008 as cited in Drolet et al., 2013).

There is extensive literature around the role of a social worker in a school setting. Drolet et al (2013) discuss how, in a school setting, social workers have the means to work with people from other disciplines and "provide support to those who intervene with youths as part of their day to day work or serve these same persons as key resources of information regarding social problems" (pp. 536). The authors state that school is recognised as an excellent environment for preventative programmes for adolescents to take place (Drolet et. al., 2013). This perspective on having a social worker present in a school setting could speak to any concerns around anti-social behaviour that the community may have, perhaps in relation to substance use among its young people. It is made clear by Drolet et al. that the role of social work within a school is quite effective in the American contexts. Perhaps something could be said for this model of support being adapted to the Irish context.

However, implementing a school social worker may only address a handful of the issues presenting themselves in the community, not to mention that only a fraction of the community members would have access to this. Hardcastle (as cited in Bortoletto, 2016) declares that "assessment (of community) is essential for effective social work practice … Knowing the community gives us credibility with the community". The Springboard model, which is established in the North side of Cork city, sees a collaborative effort between agencies and the community, which allows families to access community-based support. McKeown (2001 as cited in O'Sullivan, 2007) undertook an evaluation of the pilot Springboard projects and concluded that the participating parents and children experienced improvements in wellbeing, which they attributed to the support they had received from Springboard. What is interesting to note with the Springboard project, is how they work to integrate themselves into the community. O'Sullivan (2007) describes after securing their premises, the team spent their first year networking and developing relationships with residents, as well as making links with other agencies in the area.

In the context of the Springboard model, social workers played a supportive role and worked to be agents of change for the community. Healy (2005, as cited in O'Sullivan, 2007) stated that services users preferred social workers who were clear about what they were doing and why. For this model to work, "professionals in social work need to adopt critical reflectivity in order to reframe their practice within the context of the service user's environment" (Fork, 2002 as cited in O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 14). In the Evaluation Report carried out by O'Sullivan (2007), it was found that eighty per cent of service users were very satisfied with the service. "Respondents liked the centre being nearby … and the house being part of the community" (O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 47).

The entire project focuses on using a strengths perspective in their approach. It is clear to see the benefits of having a supportive, community-based service that has easily accessible family support services for locals. Many other writers have identified the advantages to having this kind of strengths-based support integrated into the community. Holtz (2008) acknowledged that "by constantly assessing, evaluating and concentrating on the client's strengths, rather than deficits, the worker develops a sense of trust with the client and creates an opportunity to empower the client to take action" (p. 13). However, one thing that must be considered with the Springboard model is that it is exclusively rolled out in communities that are identified as deprived (O'Sullivan, 2007). Because Douglas is not in this category, it is unlikely that a Springboard project would be rolled out there. However, there is certainly space for a community project based on the model in the Douglas community.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The literature presents some interesting ideas around the concept of community, the topic of young people, the issues they face and the possible supports that could be implemented to help remedy these issues. It is worth noting that many of the same themes presented themselves throughout the literature, be they Irish or internationally informed. In terms of the international literature, there appeared to be more programmes and plans to support young people in difficulty. This may be something to keep in mind, since the issues arising were similar in both Irish and international contexts. Therefore, some of the remedies employed internationally could be relevant in an Irish context. What stands out the most from this review of the literature, is the overwhelmingly positive conclusions that have been drawn from a community-based social work or support service.

The literature helped to broaden my understanding of the research topic and presented me with some new perspectives to consider going forward. It has aided in beginning to answer my

research questions and acts to support the findings made in the qualitative part of the research. The next chapter will discuss the research design of this project and the research methods that were used.

# Chapter 3: Research Design

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will aim to provide an overview of the research process that was undertaken for this study and will explore the methods used to carry out the research itself. A discussion will be had about my involvement in a community based participatory research project and the process of undertaking the project as part of the UCC CARL initiative. This chapter will conclude with a discussion around the ethical considerations and issues that arose or had the potential to arise in pursuing this piece of research.

## 3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

The basis of any research project lies in the research design. Research design is "the strategic plan for a research project … setting out the broad outline and key features of the work to be undertaken, including methods of data collection and analysis to be employed" (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 648). The key theoretical approaches I used when engaging in this project were social constructivism and interpretivism.

### 3.2.1 Social Constructivism

Carey (2012) explains that constructivism is a position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It focuses on the social context in which meanings are developed (Waloszek, 2017). Quite simply, the constructivism theory ascertains that there is no definite understanding of an experience, instead they can have multiple realities attached to it.

Social constructivism is considerably more pertinent today than ever before, as it respects the plurality and diversity in our social world (Misra and Prakash, 2012). Misra and Prakash (2012) state that in using this approach in research and recognising 'others' on their terms, it builds trust and encourages dialogue. This theory seemed to be the most fitting for the research process, as the data was collected through the narratives of participants. These narratives differed from person to person and so are socially constructed. The idea that the approach is a way of building trust and opening a dialogue is very pertinent to this research project, as the participation of the community and its stakeholders are central in carrying it out. Their involvement and input were vital and so it was important for there to be a sense of trust when they were sharing their experiences.

### 3.2.2 Interpretivism

Carey (2012) identifies interpretivism as a means of understanding individual experiences or significant times in people's lives, as well as how they make sense of them. This research used interpretivism because stakeholders provided a narrative, through interviews, around the experience of life in Douglas and these narratives needed to be interpreted and analysed.

### 3.2.3 Community-Based Participatory Research

Because the research was carried out in collaboration with the CARL initiative, a central aspect of the research was that it is community-based participatory research (CBR). CBR "is a collaborative, change-orientated research that engages … community members in projects addressing community identified needs" (Puma et. al., 2009, p. 34). With this style of research, academic students and community members work together throughout every stage of the research -from identifying the research issue to implementing the recommendations that are ultimately made. This research was carried out in conjunction with Douglas Matters, a community organisation who identified research aims they believed to be important, and so it was imperative that a collaborative approach to the research was taken. CBR is an important aspect to this research, as it allowed me to interact both with members of Douglas Matters and with members of the wider Douglas community, to get an in depth look into the most relevant issues presenting and the community's opinion on them. The concept of CBR fits in quite well with the theoretical underpinnings which were identified, as it also respects the diversity of people's experiences and works to open a dialogue with the community that is affected by the research.

## 3.3 Research Methods

The research method used in this study was qualitative, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C). "Qualitative inquiry seeks to discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (Dezin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 43). Ó'Súilleabháin (2017) ascertains that qualitative interviews do not aim to gather knowledge that is true all the time and, in all conditions, rather, knowledge that is contextual and conditional. The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to give stakeholders in the Douglas community ample opportunity to portray their thoughts and opinions as fully as they wished to do so and not be under constraints of a rigid interview schedule.

Purposive sampling was used in this research process. The goal of this style of sampling was to sample participants strategically so that those involved are relevant to the research questions

being posed (Bryman, 2012). In the case of this research project, the participants were selected because they were stakeholders in the community. The agency link person for this research project helped the researcher identify some of these participants. Once these participants were identified, recruitment began. This involved contacting each of the participants via telephone or email and pitching the research to them, furnishing them with the research aims and any other relevant information they want wish to know. If they expressed interest, the participants would then be sent a copy of the information sheet (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B). This further outlined what the research was about, who it was for, what their participation would involve and information around their right to confidentiality.

Figure 3.3.1 Table of Participants [3]

| **Gender** | **Age** | **Role** |
|---|---|---|
| Kevin | 40's | Garda/GAA Volunteer |
| Darren | 20's | Local Mental Health Advocate |
| Paul | 50's | Local Teacher |
| Frank | 50's | Local Support Worker |
| Liam | 60's | Intellectual Disability Support Worker/Resident |
| Sharon | 40's | Local Councillor |

The interviews ran between half an hour and forty minutes and covered five areas with the participants: 1) who they were and their role in the community, 2) youth issues arising in the community, 3) resources available 4) aims and aspirations for the community and 5) the role of social work within the community. The questions in each of these sections often led to new questions and further points of discussion. As the research was carried out as part of the CARL initiative, it was imperative that the interview questions were ones that reflected the community group's aims for the research.

The interviews were digitally recorded, and brief notes were taken throughout. Focus groups were considered briefly at the initial stages of the research, as it was considered that focus groups could be beneficial for the research partners in collecting data for their separate projects

[3] **Names used in this table are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.**

in one step. However, as each individual research partners research questions became more refined and definite, it was agreed that a focus group would not best serve their needs.

Data collection from the interviews was identified thematically. Carey (2009) explains that thematic analysis involves excavating data from the research methods to identify thematic similarities that help answer the initial research questions. This involved interpreting the information gathered from the participants and interpreting the meaning of any patterns that occurred in that information. The themes that were drawn from the data collection process were carefully examined and considered in part in relation to the findings that emerged in the literature review. These were then used to inform findings and draw conclusions.

## 3.4 Limitations and Boundaries

This research sought to gather the opinions of stakeholders around social issues affecting young people in the Douglas community. One limitation is that the research relies on what might be considered external opinions, rather than on the thoughts and opinions of the young people themselves. Due to this, it is important to note that the data collected narrates the experiences of adults and professionals in relation to youth social issues, but it may not actually accurately represent what the young people consider to the most prominent issues for them. However, because this research project is only one of a three-part project for Douglas Matters, it must be acknowledged that the other two parts of this study do focus on the perspectives of young people.

Finally, due to time constraints and scope of this research study, it was only possible to carry out a small-scale study. Subsequently, the data collected and presented in this research should be noted as only reflecting the experiences and opinions of this specific sample and not necessarily of the entire population of stakeholders or community members in Douglas. Furthermore, it was not always feasible to arrange interviews with potential participants who would have had a lot to offer to the research, due to clashing schedules and a tight time frame. In terms of scope, the research had to be narrowed down exponentially and the most prominent themes were chosen to be examined and to answer the research questions outlined by Douglas Matters and the researcher in the initial stages of the research process.

## 3.5 Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, it is vital that I consider the possible ethical issues that may arise both during and from my research. Since this research was going to involve interacting with members of the community, an application had to be made to the Social Research Ethics Committee

(SREC) in UCC before the project could move forward. This application outlined the rationale for the research, the methods that would be used, the research questions and aims and an outline of how the confidentiality of my research participants would be kept. This process was a lengthy and time consuming one which, while beneficial in ensuring the project was ethically viable, was also a source of stress due to time constraints. Initially, it was not expected that this project would have to go through SREC, since the research was being carried out with persons over the age of eighteen, none of whom would be vulnerable adults. However, seeing as the research was being done as part of a group project, it was agreed amongst us and our supervisor that it would be best for all three projects to go through the SREC application process, so that the project could be considered airtight ethically.

The initial application was returned to the researcher with concerns surrounding how secure the storage for hard copies of the data was. In collaboration with my supervisor, a plan for more secure storage of information was discussed and agreed upon. Following this, a reapplication was made to SREC, with the appropriate revisions made. The second application was subsequently accepted, and the research was deemed ethically viable by the SREC standards (see Appendix D).

Ensuring that the participants were furnished with enough information to be able to give informed consent was of the utmost importance to the integrity of this research. The information sheets provided participants with information regarding what the research was about, who it was for, their rights as a participant and any issues that the researcher might anticipate arising from the research. If the participant was satisfied with this information and wished to participate in an interview, the consent form would outline in detail what they were consenting to. By signing it, the participant acknowledged that the purpose of the research was explained to them fully and they consented to the information they provided being recorded and used in academic writing. Participation in this research was completely voluntary and participants were informed that they had the option to withdraw from the research up to two weeks after they had participated.

Something that had to be carefully considered was the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Many of the participants were professionally affiliated with organisations or services, and so it was important that their identity be protected so that they would express their views as freely as possible, without the fear of backlash from their employers or associates. The information sheet outlined the participants right to confidentiality and how this will be

maintained by using pseudonyms in any subsequent publications of the research. Furthermore, because Douglas is quite a small area where certain professionals may be easily identified, as they may be the only individual in that role, some of the participants role description have been adapted to be more vague, to protect their identity.

### 3.6 Reflexive Positioning and Ethical Issues

Tan and Moghaddam (1995) describe reflexive positioning as "the process by which persons position themselves privately in internal discourse". My position as a researcher in this project might be a rather unique, possibly contentious one. As mentioned in my rationale in Chapter One, I live in Douglas. Therefore, I must acknowledge the biases I had beginning the research and the ethical issues that may arise due to my status as a community member.

Having grown up in Douglas, I would believe there is very little on offer for young people who do not wish to participate in sports. Furthermore, I would not have been aware of many supportive resources available to community members. So, going into this research I was aware that this internal bias may colour the way I framed my interviews and how I reviewed the literature. It was important for me to be aware that my experience of the area does not speak to the experience of everyone who lives there and so, I had to be mindful in how I constructed my research objectives and questions. My acknowledgement of this bias is an attempt to eradicate it within my research and move forward with as little of that bias as possible.

The second potential ethical issue was my 'insider status'. Having lived in the community, gone to school there and been a member of clubs and activities that ran there, I have built up a list of contacts within Douglas. Because of this, it was important that I be mindful of how my insider status might influence how people interacted with me and how they might potentially feel about the research. I considered the fact that those who agreed to participate might be more careful of what they said, as they may feel that I would want a certain response seeing as I was from the area. Secondly, I wondered if there was a possibility that if I were to contact stakeholders I knew through my first-hand experiences in Douglas, they may be wary of my trustworthiness as a researcher seeing as I am entrenched in the community and may therefore refuse to participate.

Being aware of my biases and the potential ethical issues that may arise in my research process was central to my project. It allowed me to consciously open my mind to different opinions on issues that were affecting the community. I engaged in conversations with my research supervisor around the ethical issues that may arise from taking on this research. During these

discussions, we spoke about how my biases could affect my views on the research and how I could best prevent this. I spoke openly to my peers about my ideas for research and sought their opinions on how I could improve it. I made it my business to seek out participants from diverse backgrounds that may offer a different perspective than the one I would have. While I cannot say that my biases disappeared completely during the research process, by addressing them I feel confident that I did not allow them to influence my work and the conclusions that I came to.

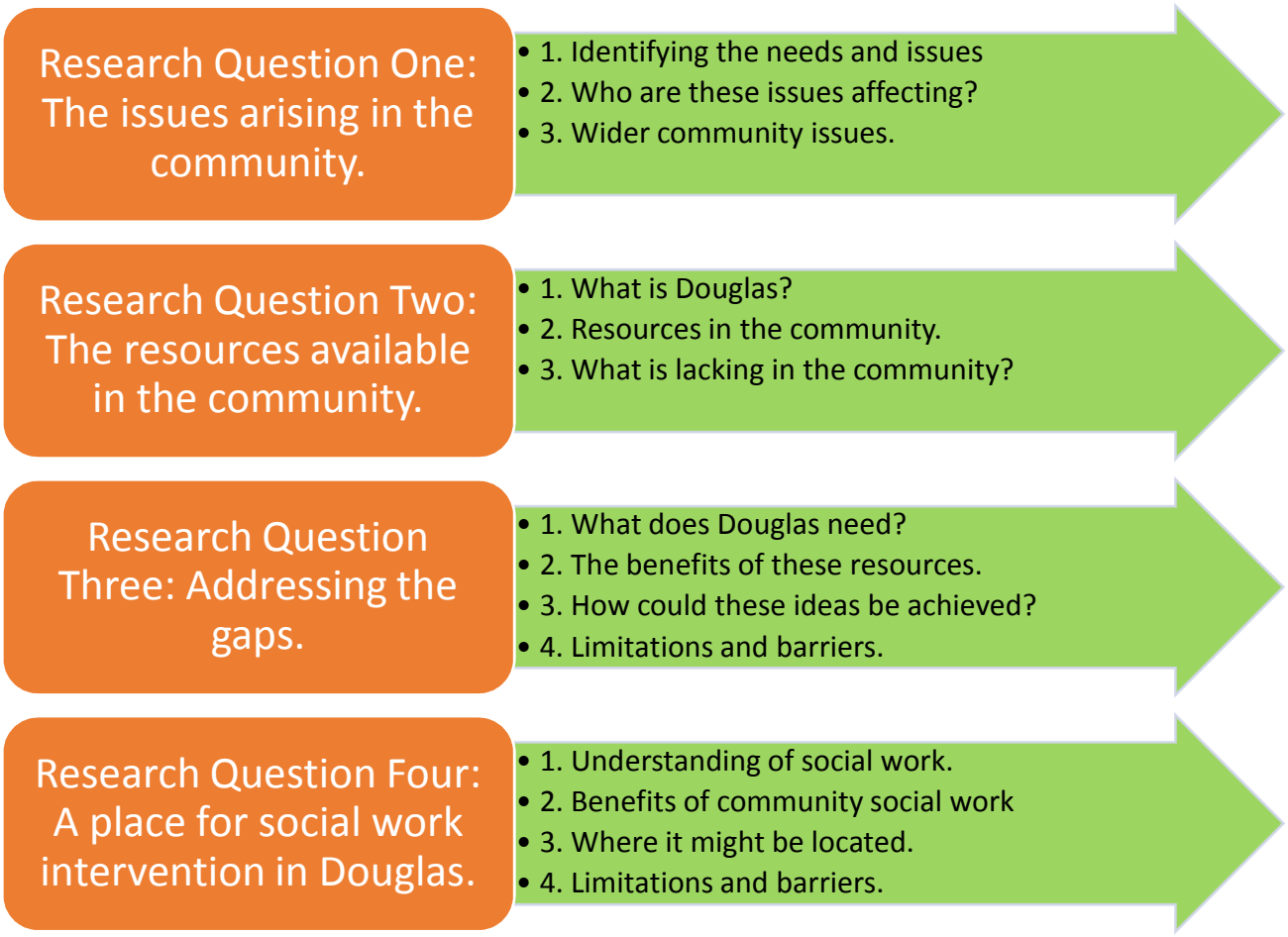
## 3.7 Conclusion

Upon concluding this chapter, the researcher hopes that the reader has gained an understanding of the process that was involved in achieving the research aims and objectives. This chapter provided a comprehensive description of community-based participatory research and its relevance to this study. The research design and the research methods were discussed, and this discussion attempted to show the justification for choosing this approach. Finally, the limitations to this study and the ethical considerations were discussed. The following chapter will discuss the findings of the data collection for this research.

# Chapter Four: Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss the primary research findings gathered from interviews with stakeholders in Douglas. The findings have been analysed thematically for the sake of clarity. These themes will follow the same pattern as the interview schedule. This chapter will focus on analysing these themes and discussing them under their corresponding research question and in relation to the relevant literature. To protect the anonymity of the participants, they have been assigned pseudonyms (see Fig. 3.3.1).




## 4.2 Research Question One: From the stakeholders' perspectives, what are the social issues arising for the young people of Douglas?

This section will furnish the reader with an understanding of the experiences of adult stakeholders, in relation to the issues within Douglas. The objective of this research question is to identify the most prominent social issues for young people in the community.

### 4.2.1 Nothing to Do

Despite the literature discussing young people being engaged in anti-social behaviour, the stakeholders of Douglas held a different opinion. One of the most prominent issues arising during interviews was that young people in Douglas simply have nowhere to go – and while this may contribute to some anti-social behaviour, in general young people are not causing trouble. It's more so that these young people end up hanging out in 'pockets' of the community that are hidden from view.

> *"The garda sergeant here will tell me, you know, the kids aren't bad – when I get on to her about anti-social behaviour in the 'Mangala' – the kids aren't bad, but it's just impossible to police"* (Sharon)

While it was acknowledged that there was a variety of sports teams to join in the community, it was agreed that for a young person not interested in sports, there was little to do. Kevin ascertains that young people have had to make do with what's available to them.

> *"The queue for KCs is a social event in itself because there's nowhere else for them to go"* (Kevin).

Many participants expressed concern that the amount of 'hanging around' done in Douglas has led to young people from outside the community travelling to Douglas to join in and this is where the trouble lies.

> *"There's gangs of kids coming from all parts of the city to Douglas because there's already gangs of kids there"*. (Kevin)

A few of the participants had an issue with many of these children being dropped to Douglas by their parents to hang around and parents knowing that there was no structured activity or adult supervision.

> *"Parents dropping their kids to Douglas to hang around and then they get arrested and you wonder 'where did you think he was going? What did you think was going to happen?"* (Kevin).

> *"In some of the places where I get complaints about large gangs hanging out … it has been commented to me repeatedly that big expensive cars, driven by well-dressed parents drop the children off and leave the kids to their own devices"* (Sharon).

In the opinion of Darren, who was the youngest of the participants, there will always be young people hanging out and drinking in the park.

> *"Even if there was other stuff to do, that's just part of being that age. Even if you built some all-encompassing youth centre, they're still going to be in the park drinking"* (Darren).

### 4.2.2 Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues among young people was the focus of two participants. Darren spoke of how there seems to have been very little progress in mental health support since his experience of losing his best friend to suicide six years ago.

> *"I started this when my best friend killed himself … since I've become aware of it, I have heard of so many young people killing themselves over the last couple of years. Nothing has changed. I went to the funeral of a girl who had killed herself five years after my best friend and nothing had changed. The exact same destruction"*. (Darren)

Paul also acknowledged the increased demands for individual support around mental health issues.

> *"Over the last number of years, the demands have changed greatly from guidance counselling to personal counselling … many teenagers feel isolated, unlistened to and unheard. As part of that, they are involved in various risky behaviours and there is an escalation of mental health problems"* (Paul).

Both participants held the view that those in real risk were the ones who were not engaging in conversations around mental health or wellbeing.

### 4.2.3 Wider Community Issues

On foot of young people having nowhere to hang out, many of the participants spoke about the issue of safety, both for the young people and the older population of Douglas. As discussed in the literature, adults often do not want teenagers in public spaces. These spaces are considered to be naturally adult spaces and adolescents are 'pollutants' (Kato, 2007). This thinking is mirrored somewhat in the opinions of the stakeholders, though it must be noted that each participant spoke about young people in respectful, positive language.

> *"My daughter isn't left walk around Douglas village because in my opinion it's not safe … Teens having nowhere to go can end up being a safety issue for them and for the whole community"* (Kevin).

> *"Young people always travel in groups around Douglas and I think that's a safety thing. Then … elderly people feel afraid in their homes because of these groups of young people"* (Liam).

Some of the participants spoke about how some social issues may inadvertently affect young people. Participants who discussed this, focused mainly on the financial struggles that some families experience and the impact this has on young people. It seemed that each participant agreed that there was a perception of Douglas as an affluent area and that this may add to the pressures families face.

> *"I see in some of the larger and more expensive estates … that because houses were built and sold in the boom times, mortgages are huge and … both parents working trying to cover the mortgage and so the children are largely self-parenting"* (Sharon).

> *"When the crash came there was a lot of torment behind closed doors, trying to pay mortgages etc and that stress could be seen in the children"* (Paul).

#### 4.2.4 Discussion

These findings identify some of the issues that the stakeholders think arise for young people and how they believe these issues impact the community. We have seen from the literature on issues faced by adolescents that youth culture and its perils are a hot topic. Grattan (2008) discusses how the idea of young people being rebellious and rambunctious is one that is an historical accuracy, but that the new negative portrayal of them is what is new. While there are elements of this thinking in the findings, it seems that the stakeholders are mostly focused on how these issues stem from young people having nowhere to go in their community.

### 4.3 Research Question Two: What community resources are available in Douglas to respond to these social issues for young people and where are the gaps?

This research question aimed to find out what resources stakeholders felt were available to the community. The term 'resources' was purposefully not defined to the participants, to get a true representation of what they considered to be encompassed by the term.

#### 4.3.1 What is Douglas?

A question that arose several times among the participants was 'what is Douglas?'. This question was occasionally asked regarding the geographical definition of Douglas. Some participants were unsure if they could discuss Rochestown or the Grange area when discussing Douglas. However, this question mainly arose in a philosophical way, with many participants

questioning could Douglas even be considered a community, due to an apparent lack of community spirit or cohesion.

> *"There's no community spirit. No cohesion and it's very difficult to get support groups going. Douglas is growing so quickly, and I think the community services and the community spirit hasn't grown with it"* (Frank).

> *"Many issues stemming from fragmentation – there seems to only be community spirit in the clubs that people have joined, it's insular. There's a large cohort of people that don't belong to anything"* (Paul).

> *"Douglas is no longer a village, it's a commercial centre. People don't say they're from Douglas anymore, they're from Grange or Donnybrook. There's no community in Douglas"* (Liam).

### 4.3.2 Resources in the Community

In relation to this question, participants ended up speaking about what is lacking in Douglas. However, the participants were able to identify some resources available in the community. Once again, sports clubs featured.

> *"If you go into Douglas GAA club tonight there will be 15-20 teens coming into the bar to play a game of pool … If it wasn't for sports, they would have had nothing"* (Kevin).

The community park was also named as a great resource to the community.

> *"The playground is fantastic … a real draw to people and it doesn't really matter what their social background or status is, everybody comes to the playground"* (Sharon).

In general, every participant was able to name some positive aspects about what was available in Douglas.

> *"There's the library, Young at Heart [4], the ICA[5], the community park. There are also many drug and alcohol services in Douglas"* (Liam).

> *From my direct experience as a parent who has a child who went to school in Douglas … the biggest young person's resource are the shopping centres. They have accidentally formed the youth café or hang out zone"* (Sharon).

[4] Active retirement group in Douglas.
[5] The Irish Country Woman's Association

*"If you're going to talk about problems … there's nothing that really helps those problems. But talking about regular life, there's loads of stuff to do"* (Darren).

One issue that arose several times was the fact that everything that was available in Douglas was very money focused and this was a big problem for both young people and their parents.

*"Nothing is free in Douglas"* (Liam)

*"One of the problems is when they're hanging out in shopping centres, there is always a need to go in with money. As a parent I find it a huge issue because I simply don't have the money to give … I know another mother … she couldn't deal with the money focused, spending focused element of the hanging out that was going on"* (Sharon)

### 4.3.3 What is Lacking

It was acknowledged that in terms of supportive resources, they were few and far between and so many of the participants focused very much on what Douglas was lacking.

*"There is still no family resource centre, no adult or under eighteen mental health teams, no educational support for children struggling academically, no social workers, the Garda station is unmanned for long periods of time"* (Liam).

*"There's no medical centre in Douglas. That's just massive to me because that effects people of all ages. There has been no youth café, nowhere for the kids to hang out"* (Sharon).

One participant believed there were times that resources were available in Douglas, but they were not taken up by the people they were aimed at.

*"Foroige had a youth club about ten years ago and they had a job to attract more than 3 or 4 young people … even when it was moved more centrally, only a couple of people took it up. I think the lack of resources is due to the apathy shown when the services were there"* (Frank).

### 4.3.4 Discussion

These findings indicate a general dissatisfaction among the participants with the resources available in Douglas. It appears they think that many issues stem from a lack of community in Douglas. As seen in Sampson's research (1988, as cited in Sampson, 1991) residents of areas that are characterised by frequent population turnover have fewer opportunities to form friendships, participate in local affairs and for organisational contact. Many participants spoke

about the 'fragmented' nature of Douglas and their opinions seem to mirror the findings made by Sampson.

## 4.4 Research Question Three: From the adult stakeholders' perspective, how could the gaps in resources best be addressed?

This research question aspired to understand what each of the stakeholders would like to see in Douglas and how they felt it would benefit the community. Their conclusions are based on their own experiences and observations of the Douglas community. This question also sought to uncover whether the stakeholders thought that their ideas could become a reality and the reasoning behind their response.

### 4.4.1 What Does Douglas Need?

Given that there was a focus in this research on youth issues and the lack of places to go for young people, it is surprising that so few of the participants felt that a youth café or youth centre was something that would be beneficial to Douglas. In fact, only one participant spoke exclusively about starting a youth club in Douglas.

> *"A youth club. You just need four walls, TV etc, it's not difficult. Douglas has a beautiful building in the park that is empty upstairs that would be ideal"* (Kevin).

Interestingly, despite the recognition that there was little to do for young people who didn't engage in sports in Douglas, two of the participants felt that a multi-sports centre would benefit the community. It was their opinion that this type of centre could draw people in and ultimately offer more than sports.

> *"In the UK there are dedicated sport centres … used as a community meeting spot. Different groups using it … it's not just sport for sports sake. It's not dedicated just for youths; the elderly use it. Almost like a community hall but with a particular focus"* (Frank).

> *"It would need to offer a load of stuff and would probably need to be a come as you go bases … There are a lot of shy, retiring kids who want that opportunity but don't want it in the whole team environment"* (Sharon).

Alternatively, there was the idea of a multi-disciplinary primary care or family resource centre, located in the centre of Douglas. This was enthusiastically discussed by several participants.

*"A multidisciplinary approach, a community hub … It's only logical to think that if there was a cohort of people of all different disciplines but all working on the same team it would be beneficial"* (Paul).

*"A multidisciplinary centre or something like it ... And it must be located in Douglas"* (Liam).

*"Douglas needs a family support centre! I would like to see … whoever is relevant buy the Extravision[6] building and decorate it up, make it bright shiny colours and put 'Douglas Family Support Centre' over the door"* (Sharon).

*"My golden standard would be a multi-disciplinary centre"* (Frank).

Two of the participants saw the need for a multi-disciplinary approach in schools, to deal with the issues young people are facing.

*"More resources in schools … like in the US how they have a school nurse and the school has permission to send a student to a GP if they see a need. That whole area of medical care would be fantastic to have"* (Paul).

*"I think there needs to be education on mental health available for free in schools"* (Darren).

Finally, discussing Douglas in terms of a space, one participant spoke about the need to make Douglas a vibrant village centre that would attract people into it.

*"Douglas village centre itself, the East Village in particular, needs to become pedestrianize … lots of village life, tables and chairs on the streets, attractive paving, green space. Green space is so important for mental health."* (Sharon).

### 4.4.2 Potential Benefits of Resources

In terms of a youth club, it was felt that there were benefits in the youth clubs in other communities and it was envisaged that it would be the same in Douglas.

*"If they have problems, they have a place to go where they can share it. The volunteer running that club might be the only adult they can talk to"* (Kevin).

The participants who discussed the idea of a multi-disciplinary or multi-sports centre in Douglas felt that the benefits could be significant.

[6] The Extravision building is a very large vacant building in the centre of Douglas village.

*"Very far reaching benefits … Getting a child support takes huge pressure off the family"* (Liam).

Speaking about their experience of a similar service in another Cork community, one participant had this to say about its benefits to that community:

*"The reality is there are communities of young people growing up who desperately need the intervention in their families. One of the things we do … is we offer parenting courses because it enables us to do the whole community thing in more of a group setting and that has been very successful. But we can't even offer that in Douglas because there's nowhere we can offer it out of"* (Sharon).

In terms of bringing more resources into schools, the participants again felt there were a number of benefits to both young people and the community at large.

*"If we had the support in school, we might not have half the problems on Friday/Saturday/Sunday that the guards have to put up with"* (Paul).

*"Learning about mental health benefitted me … And I understand when I'm feeling down … it's because there's something going on in my brain that needs to be adjusted. Knowing that makes it easier to deal with mental health"* (Darren).

### 4.4.3 How Could This Be Achieved?

Each participant had several ideas in terms of what needed to be done to make their 'golden standard' into a reality. Most of these ideas centred on someone passionately taking on the project and making it their job to improve Douglas.

*"It needs to be somebody's baby … you need people to buy in and say we're willing to open it up and use it as a youth facility"* (Kevin).

*"You need people with specific skills to spearhead it"* (Frank)

*"I'd love to see a task force of selected local authority officials … types of people who are genuinely interested in the development of the village, socially and physically and commercially … I do always genuinely believe that if there's informed energy at a community level, money will come"* (Sharon).

One participant discussed how there needs to be a conversation about the issues young people are facing and the way in which we tackle these issues needs to be addressed.

> *"First of all, it would take people to have the conversation and be a little bit more honest about what's happening on the ground … being more proactive than reactive"* (Paul).

Once again, the lack of community cohesion in Douglas was addressed and several participants felt that this needed to be addressed to get resources up and running.

> *"It seems a lot of subgroups are very tight knit and would do anything for the members of their own little groups. But they never all come together and do something for the village"* (Frank)

> *"It has to be holistic, everybody has to be on board … A community effort, people falling in together to address it"* (Darren)

### 4.4.4 Limitations and Barriers

The participants had reservations about the reality of implementing these resources into Douglas. They were vocal about what they felt the barriers would be to its success. Once again, many of the concerns harped back to a perceived lack of community in Douglas

> *"I can't see it happening though. Can't envisage a way of doing it – there's no cooperation or community push"* (Liam).

One participant felt that organisational factors would be a barrier to progressing Douglas.

> *"It's not going to be County Council for very much longer. It's going to go to City Council. I can't lie to you, City Councils record of placement making is pretty poor"* (Sharon).

Participants also spoke about how these resources often rely on volunteers to do large parts of the work. They felt that this could be the downfall as people no longer have the time to give.

> *"Volunteerism has deteriorated, we have become very individualistic"* (Paul).

> *"Youth cafes flounder in lots of places because it can be over relegated because of insurance reasons, they all need to be Foroige vetted and trained … A ten-week course turns people off who just want to give a couple of hours on a Friday night"* (Kevin).

### 4.4.5 Discussion

It is clear from these findings that while each participant has an idea of what would benefit Douglas in addressing the issues arising, they are not sure of how realistic these goals actually are. Some appear to have lost faith in the larger institutions that drive our societies, such as the

State and local Councils, to do the work required to get these resources up and running. Others believe that the lack of community cohesion in Douglas will be the biggest boundary to getting resources placed into the community. Van Gundy (2011) describes community cohesion as an individual feeling a sense of belonging, safety and acceptance in their own community. One could imagine with this lacking, it may be very difficult to get individuals to engage with supportive resources that are placed within the community.

## 4.5 Research Question Four: Is there a place for a community social work role within Douglas?

This research questions aims to ascertain the level of understanding that the stakeholders have about the role of social work. Furthermore, it seeks to gather their opinions on whether there is a place in Douglas for a community social work role, along with their views of potential benefits and drawbacks of this role.

### 4.5.1 Understanding of Social Work

Because most of the participants were professionals who have worked with social workers in some form, the level of understanding of what a social worker is was generally good. However, in describing the role of a social worker, participants focused very much on the Child Protection aspect of the role.

> *"Safeguarding families … supporting, linking in with services and on the children side of it, advocating for young people"* (Frank).
>
> *"I understood social care years ago. Now, it's more social protection"* (Liam).
>
> *"I would have always thought social workers were people who went into homes that were in trouble and tried to work with mothers, children, families … overall, to me a social worker is somebody who works on the combination of interpersonal relationships, coping abilities and practicalities to try and make everything work together"* (Sharon).

When asked whether they had ever heard of community social work specifically, the response was mixed. One participant admitted that they had never heard of it. Other participants discussed their own experiences with community social work.

*"I would be on the board of the Family Support Centre in [another town][7] and the HSE has assigned us a community social worker … she would definitely be the person who tries to liaise interpersonally on the community level"* (Sharon).

*"I would see it through the family resource centres and the family support workers. I would be very familiar with the Springboard model"* (Liam).

### 4.5.2 Benefits and Location

Many of the participants felt that a community social worker would be of benefit to the Douglas community.

*"Does Douglas need a dedicated community social worker? Yes please!"* (Sharon).

*"We'll give mental health as an example – if there was a community social worker that could come to their school/youth club to talk to them it would be amazing"* (Kevin).

One participant felt that even attempting to implement a supportive role would be of benefit, even if it did not end up being successful. He spoke specifically on having a social worker dealing with mental health in the community.

*"Even if nothing came of it, people would know the community cares about these issues because something was set up to help – even if it fell on its face, people would know that someone tried to do this, so they know the issue is there"* (Darren)

One participant felt that a community social worker would not have anything to offer to Douglas but saw a role for a social worker to take an advisory role for professionals.

*"Maybe a social worker whose job it is to advise professionals. Somebody who can come in and give you advice … an advisory role"* (Frank).

When asked where they envisaged this role being, the participants that felt there were several spaces where this role would fit. Some participants saw the role being in the multi-disciplinary centre that they had identified as a possible resource for Douglas.

*"In a family support centre - let them take a prominent space in the village centre so everybody can see it and anybody who needs to go in can"* (Sharon).

Some saw there being a benefit in a community social worker being placed in a school context.

[7] The name of this area has been redacted to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

*"I feel they should be in schools … If you're in a school, you have a captive audience"* (Kevin).

### 4.4.3 Limitations and Barriers

Each participant felt that implementing a community social worker would come with its fair share of challenges. In the context of schools, participants acknowledged that schools may be slow to allow social workers in due to the stigma that may come with it.

*"They don't want guards or social workers calling into their school … They would see it as an admission that the school has issues"* (Kevin).

*"I understand the stigma that if a school needs social work then it must be a bad school, but they bring in people to check our physical health and there's nothing said about that. But if you're talking about stuff that isn't physical then people have an issue with it"* (Darren).

On the topic of stigma, many of the participants concerns centred around the stigma that is often attached to social work intervention in general.

*"Social workers are viewed as 'you're involved with social work, you're in big trouble' … There would have to be a cultural change in how we view social work"* (Paul).

*"The stigma around social work … The fear of being judged. There would need to be a huge divide between child protection and community social work"* (Liam).

*"Unfortunately, you might need to place it under a different name – it would still be social work at the end of the day, but you would call it something different"* (Darren).

However, one participant felt that by placing a social worker in the heart of the community, the stigma around social work intervention could be eradicated.

*"I think it would break the stigma. I think it would become a perfectly normal and natural thing … Make it 'whoop-de-doo, we have this for Douglas, thanks be to God at last, isn't this great!'. And isn't that the message that we need to go out there"* (Sharon).

It was also acknowledged that the perception of Douglas as an affluent area could go against the community in this regard, because it would be unlikely that Douglas would be offered funding for a community social worker or family resource centre.

### 4.5.4 Discussion

There was an overall positive response to the idea of a community social worker being employed in Douglas. Each participant saw the potential benefits of the role and felt it would have a positive impact on the Douglas community. However, the participants recognised that the stigma attached to social work could be a huge barrier to the community engaging with the service. The literature available around the Springboard model – this being one of the most prominent community support models in Ireland - speaks about how hard the organisation worked to integrate itself into communities, to gain the trust of the residents and develop relationships with them (O'Sullivan, 2007). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the Springboard model is that it is almost exclusively rolled out in communities that are identified as deprived (O'Sullivan, 2007). Ultimately, it was the consensus of the participants that a community social worker would benefit the Douglas community, but a lot of work would have to done for the role to be accepted by the community.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the findings of the primary research carried out for this research project, relating it back to the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two. Each finding has been followed by a discussion and the following chapter will set out the conclusion of this research project and the recommendations stemming from these findings.

# Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

## 5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five will provide the closing comments for this research study and present the recommendations arising from the research findings and the subsequent discussions on these findings. Concluding this chapter, there will be a final reflective piece about the process of engaging in a research project as part of a group and in collaboration with CARL and Douglas Matters.

## 5.2 Concluding Comments

The aim of this research was to explore the thoughts of adult stakeholders in relation to social issues presenting for young people in Douglas. This involved discussing their perceptions of these issues and of the resources that are available in Douglas, or lack thereof, to support young people through these issues.

The participants felt that young people having nowhere to go in Douglas was problematic, both for the young people themselves and for the wider community. They felt that young people 'hanging around' drew in large gangs from other areas and this could be a safety issue. Furthermore, participants believed that young people in Douglas did not have access to supportive resources within their communities to tackle any deeper issues, often using the example of mental health. Additionally, participants spoke about the need to address the gaps in resources in Douglas. The consensus was that more resources placed in the heart of the community would benefit young people and their families.

The research question regarding the potential for a community social worker in Douglas yielded some complex responses. While the participants saw many potential benefits to the implementation of a community social worker in Douglas, they also widely discussed the notion of a negative stigma that was attached to social work involvement. Participants felt that this negativity could be a barrier to successful intervention by a community social worker. This finding is a worrisome one and consideration must be given to why social work is seen in such a negative light.

The conclusions that have been drawn from the research will work to inform the recommendations that will be made below. The recommendations will reflect the opinions of both the participants and the researcher.

## 5.3 Recommendations

It should be noted that this research project is part of a larger three-part research project. These recommendations are reflective of the research findings made in this section of the research project.

- Many participants felt that the placement of more supportive resources in the heart of the community would be of benefit. It was recommended that some form of multi-disciplinary centre be set up in Douglas – be it a family resource centre, a primary care building or a multi-sports centre that contained services within it. The value in this kind of resource being centrally located and readily accessible to anyone who wished to use it was discussed. Having supportive resources available front and centre in the community could aid in breaking the stigma that surrounds accessing such resources.
- Some participants felt that more resources being placed in schools would benefit young people. This seemed to focus particularly on mental health. In the opinion of one participant: "*there needs to be education on mental health available for free in schools"*. Another participant saw value in implementing more resources in schools in the form of medical care, saying: *"that whole area of medical care would be fantastic to have"*. However, it must be considered that schools may not be open to welcoming such supports and while this would be valuable, it may not necessarily be realistic.
- While many of the participants were in favour of a community social work presence in Douglas, they suggested removing the term 'social work' from any supports going into the community. They felt the stigma and negative perception around social work could be a barrier to community members engaging. One participant asserted that *"unfortunately, you might need to place it under a different name"*. This begs the question of whether community social work intervention would be effective in Douglas, if the perception is so negative. Perhaps alternative supports should be considered instead.
- It was acknowledged that Douglas is largely a commercial centre that consists of eating houses and shopping centres. It was suggested that better planning could combat this and make Douglas village more vibrant and appealing. It was suggested by one participant that certain areas of the village be pedestrianised and made more visually appealing by adding greenery. In doing this, it was thought that people would naturally begin to gravitate to the village centre and perhaps resources may follow.

- Finally, the lack of community spirit or cohesion was discussed repeatedly throughout the interviews. This was seen by participants as a barrier to the implementation of supportive resources in Douglas, as they felt people would not feel comfortable accessing services in a community they did not feel truly part of. It is recommended that this be addressed in some manner, to pave the way for resources. One participant advocated for a taskforce to be set up, whose sole focus would be the improvement of the Douglas community. Perhaps this taskforce could take on responsibility for community events that promote cohesion and community spirit. However, this particular recommendation would be difficult to implement, and it would not be easy to identify if it has been successful.

## 5.4 Limitations to Research

The limitations are the small sample of adult stakeholders. Furthermore, five out of the six participants were involved in Douglas in a professional context and so their opinions may have been coloured by this. Further studies would benefit from a larger sample and perhaps from involving people who are not professionally involved in Douglas.

## 5.5 Future Research

The suggestions made in relation to addressing the gaps in resources in Douglas were largely made by people in professions that see the benefit in things such as social work intervention and multi-disciplinary teams. A larger sample including community members from various other backgrounds would be needed to gain a more accurate representation of the needs and wants of the Douglas community.

It has been indicated by participants that there is a negative perception of social work intervention within many communities and that this could act as a barrier to them engaging in resources. The question here would be where this stigma comes from and what could social workers do to improve relationships with the communities in which they work.

## 5.6 Researchers Reflection

When I was first asked by my tutor was I interested in participating in a CARL project, I was apprehensive. I had already began thinking about doing my research project about school social work and was slow to move away from this. Having had a negative experience of research in my undergrad, I was adamant I would not settle on a research topic that I was not passionate about. Add to this that my tutor had mentioned that the project was going to be a group effort and I was ready to run a mile. However, the more I investigated the Douglas Matters project, the more drawn in I became.

As I have mentioned before, I have lived in Douglas my whole life. While I am proud of where I am from, I have long believed that huge changes needed to be made to the area and that it was severely lacking in several aspects. The more I thought about the CARL project, the more I realised that this could be an opportunity to make a difference in my community and to do a research project that could have an impact. I found myself becoming more excited and more invested in the idea of this research project.

Initially, engaging in a group project for such an integral part of my academic career was not something I was enthusiastic about. I was concerned about having to involve others in my research process and how this might impact me. While I enjoy working with people, I can often be very stubborn in how I like things done, particularly with academic work, and so I was worried a group project would be more stress than it was worth. However, I had become quite invested in the Douglas Matters project and so I decided to challenge myself. When we met as a group initially, we realised that we were all interested in researching very similar areas and had to spend some time teasing this out. Eventually, and thankfully without much hassle, we all settled on our individual research topics and were happy in how they would all fit together in the end to form our final project. I can now say that working as part of a research group was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the research process. We were able to engage in critically constructive discussions about each other's research focus, pool our resources and provide each other with support throughout. It truly was a privilege and a joy to work with [redacted] throughout this process. The fact that I was able to partake in this process with two of my peers meant that the research we presented is more impactful, as we were able to 'divide and conquer' so to speak and deliver a piece of work that we feel is in-depth and holistic.

In terms of the research process itself, I found it extremely challenging to narrow down my research aims and objectives initially. In the beginning stages, I often felt at a loss when asked what I was doing my research on and began to feel overwhelmed as I could not see where my research project was going and what its point was. Even when I eventually did nail down my research questions, at many points, I had a crisis of confidence, as I wondered whether my research goals were good enough. Were they relevant? Was I doing justice to my community by picking these themes over other ones? I spoke about this with my supervisor and we discussed the ways in which my project was relevant and how it had the potential to make changes. Following this, I felt more driven and more confident in my research.

Taking on a CARL project came with its own set of challenges, not least the added pressure of extra deadlines. In undertaking this project, I had to begin working much earlier than many of my peers, as I had to make applications to SREC and be able to present my ideas to our link person with Douglas Matters. This meant beginning to nail down my research questions, interview schedule, information sheet and all other relevant materials while in the throes of my final placement. At the time, this was hugely stressful and required a lot of time management and planning. I felt slightly envious of my peers who were focusing completely on their placements and were not being pulled in different directions. However, at the end of this process, I am so thankful that I was pushed to begin early and work steadily over the last seven months because it ultimately reduced my workload in the final weeks.

Overall, I have had a very positive experience throughout this research project, and the times that I felt negatively toward the process were ultimately great learning experiences. I have learned that I am capable of juggling and managing a lot at the one time, something that I hope will stand to me as I begin my social work career. More than that, I have learned that I enjoy partaking in projects that have the potential to drive social change. I feel very fortunate that I was given – and accepted – the opportunity to be part of such a project and I feel that it has inspired me to consider doing further, similar research.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Having analysed the primary research, the gaps in supportive resources in the Douglas community cannot be denied. It appears that little has changed from the findings of the ISPCC report in 2016, which also identified that there was little on offer to young people in Douglas. This chapter has outlined the recommendations made by both the participants and the researcher in regard to addressing these gaps. It is hoped that the data collected and presented in this research project can be used by Douglas Matters in the future development of Douglas.

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# Appendices

A. Information Sheet

B. Consent Form

C. Interview Questions

D. Social Research Ethics Committee Application Approval

# Appendix A

**Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work (MSW) at UCC, a research project of our choice must be undertaken. I have decided to carry out a Community Academic Related Links project in conjunction with Douglas Matters. It will be concerned with the community's stakeholder's viewpoint on youth issues, resources and the place of social work in the Douglas area.

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve interviewing stakeholders in a semi-structured format, using open ended questions to allow them to give their opinions in regard to the community (e.g. What do you feel are the main issues facing youth in Douglas today?). These interviews will take place during the month of February and the study will consist of one interview per stakeholder. I anticipate these interviews lasting no longer than an hour and a half.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked to take part because of your daily interactions with the youth in Douglas. Due to these interactions, you have a valuable insight into the issues that are prominent for young people in Douglas today.

**Do you have to take part?** No, your participation will be completely voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will also be given the option to withdraw your consent before the study commences and up to **two weeks** after you have participated in the data collection.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** Yes. Pseudonyms will be used within the thesis, presentations and subsequent publications

**What will happen to the information which you give?** This data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and research supervisor. It will be securely stored on an encrypted laptop. On completion of the project, they will be retained for minimum of a further ten years and then destroyed.

**What will happen to the results?** The results will be presented in a thesis, as well as in a presentation to Douglas Matters. In keeping with collaborative research projects, my research colleagues will also be appraised of the result as the research progresses. These individuals are [redacted] (fellow Social Work students), Fiachra Ó Súilleabhain, our UCC supervisor, and Louise Murphy and David Boule, Representatives from Douglas Matters. They final thesis will

be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. My thesis will be published on the CARL website. 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 don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. It is possible that discussing certain experiences may cause you some distress.

**What if there is a problem?** At the end of the procedure, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, we can discuss your options in terms of who to contact.

**Who has reviewed the study?** The Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC have reviewed this study. 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 me: [redacted]. You can also contact my research supervisor at fiachra.osuilleabhain@ucc.ie.

# Appendix B

I _____ agree to participate in [redacted] research study.

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

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with [redacted] to be audio 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 ensured in the write up by disguising my identity.

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

(Please tick one:)

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

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

Signed:

PRINT NAME:

Date:

# Appendix C

**1.Who:**

You have been asked to participate in this research study due to your status as a stakeholder in the Douglas community and because of your regular contact with the youth of Douglas. Can you explain your role within the community?

**2. Youth Issues:**

A) What do you feel are the most prominent issues arising for young people in Douglas over the last couple of years?

B) What leads you to believe that these are the most prominent issues?

**3. Community Resources:**

A) Douglas is considered to be a rather affluent area. How do you think this 'affluence' is reflected within the community?

B) What are your thoughts around the resources available to the community in Douglas?

C) What are your thoughts regarding the resources available to young people in Douglas?

**4. Aim, Goals and Aspirations:**

A) Is there anything that you feel would be of benefit to the young people of Douglas, in terms of tackling the problems you deemed to be most relevant for them?

B) Why do you feel this would be of benefit?

C) How do you envisage this becoming a reality for Douglas?

**5. Social Work:**

A) What is your overall understanding of social work?

B) Have you ever heard of community social work?

C) In your opinion, do you see a role for social work to be more prominent in Douglas?

D) If so, where do you see this role being and what would you envisage the benefits being for the community?

E) If not, what do you think the drawbacks of a prominent social work presence in Douglas would be?

# Appendix D

**Ethics Committee, Social Research**

to me

Feb 16 Details

Dear [redacted]

The Social Research and Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved your resubmission on application Log 2017-038 entitled "Douglas Matters: The Stakeholders Perspective on Community Issues."

The committee wishes you every success with your research and thanks you for your patience during the application process.

All the best

Liz

# Glossary

**The following with provide a guide to some local areas referred to within this research.**

- KCs is a hugely popular chipper located in the centre of Douglas village. It draws large crowds and the queue that forms outside the door is a well-known meeting place for many young people.

- Ballybrack Woods is known colloquially as 'the Mangala'. A pathway through the woods runs from the residential outskirts of Douglas right into the centre of the village. While this is a popular walking area for many locals, it is also known to be a place where large gangs of young people meet, often to engage in underage drinking or other anti-social behaviours.

- The community park was spoken about widely in the research as the main resource in Douglas. This park is located in Douglas village and consists of a play area, a multi-

purpose sports court and a newly redeveloped community centre. The park is another popular area for young people to meet.