



OPENING DOORS

Evaluation of the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project's Drop-In Centre

for young people seeking asylum and those with residency.

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DLCTC	-	Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre
DLIADT	-	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
DLRCC	-	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council
DRP	-	Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project
HSE	-	Health Services Executive
IRC	-	Irish Refugee Council
OSH	-	Old School House Hostel
PLUS	-	Please Let Us Stay Campaign
RIA	-	Reception and Integration Agency
SSP	-	Southside Partnership
SCSA	-	Separated Children Seeking Asylum
TSP	-	Transition Supports Project

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The Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP) has operated a Drop-In Centre in Dún Laoghaire for young people seeking asylum/those with residency every Monday evening since June 2005. Supported by Southside Partnership and the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre, the Centre provides a space for the target group to meet, socialise, and connect with service providers. The process of documenting the learning from the DRP's Drop-In Centre was identified as one of the actions within the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan (2007-2010), which aims to develop and enhance the participation of minority ethnic groups in all aspects of community life.

An evaluation of the Drop-In Centre's activities, which was commissioned by Southside Partnership, took place in late 2007. Its aims were to look at the Centre from the perspective of participants, organisers and other stakeholders, and to identify the key lessons from the project. To fully address these objectives, the evaluation documented the history of the project, including significant events in its development. Additionally, it identified the outcomes for participants of their participation in the Drop-In Centre, and analysed the nature and extent of the collaboration between the Centre and other organisations that support its activities. Ultimately, the findings of the evaluation aimed to: identify key learnings and challenges from the programme; document examples of best practice that could be transferable to other projects; and outline some recommendations for potential developments in the future.

Background: Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown has a relatively long history of involvement with people seeking asylum. For a number of years from the start of 2000, a large number of asylum seekers were housed in various hostels and accommodation centers in the area. These included Sandycove House, the Old School House, Glandore Lodge, and Kilmarnock House. Between 2000 and the closure of the last accommodation center in 2006, several thousand asylum seekers passed through the Dún Laoghaire centres. Several local projects were initiated in response to the numbers of people seeking asylum who were being accommodated in the area. These included the UNITE Project, which was established by Southside Partnership, and the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP), set up in 2001 and run on a voluntary basis ever since.

The DRP held a weekly advice and information clinic from the Old School House until its closure in April 2005. It was decided that it would be important to continue this work in



another venue, even though many of the clients had been moved to locations outside the area. With the assistance of Southside Partnership, the DRP made contact with the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre (DLCTC) on York Road, which offered the group the use of its premises on Monday evenings. It was decided to use these facilities to run a "Drop-In Centre" for young asylum seekers/those with residency, which would offer a place to socialise with their peers, discuss any concerns or problems they wanted to raise, and get information through talks and activities. The Centre began to operate on a weekly basis in June 2005, and has continued to be open for two hours every Monday evening to the present.

Drop-In Centre Activities: Since its establishment, the Centre has had the broad aim of providing a venue for young asylum seekers where they can relax, socialise, access information and advice, and plan social and cultural activities. As identified in previous studies, the target group face a set of particular issues, which include the fact that they have to go through the asylum application process without the support of their families or customary social networks. Their identified needs include access to leisure and

recreation, relief from boredom and loneliness, and emotional support and general guidance. Although the DRP does not set out a formal programme of activities for each year, the findings of the evaluation indicated that the Centre meets these identified needs through responding to the needs and requests of the participants on an ongoing basis. Indeed, the fact that volunteers have had the flexibility to react to needs as they arise appears to be an important factor in its success.

Amongst the activities that take place in the Centre are the provision of information, advice and referrals for participants in need of support with their asylum applications. The Centre has been used as a venue where participants can meet with politicians, media and representatives from other organisations. The PLUS campaign, established by a group of young asylum seekers to lobby for their being granted leave to remain in Ireland, has also been run through the Centre since 2005. Volunteers additionally arrange events that aim to increase participants' knowledge about life in Ireland and to generally build their confidence. This is often done through working with other local groups (such as Southside Partnership and the Garda Siochana) and with representatives from relevant organisations, including the Irish Refugee Council and the Transition Supports Project. The willingness and openness of other organisations to become involved in the Centre's work demonstrates the success of the project at the community level.

A major change that has taken place since the Centre's inception is in the educational needs of participants. Many have moved from second-level into third-level education, with the result that more funding is required to support them in education, as the vast majority of participants are not entitled to access free fees for third-level education because of their status in Ireland. The DRP uses the Centre to provide this financial support for young people, and to offer access to careers guidance and assistance with enrolling in courses. Two educational programmes have also been run through the Centre in 2007: the Garda's "Get Wise" programme, and a digital media training course.

Evaluation Findings - Interviews with

Participants: For the evaluation, a total of twenty interviews were conducted with participants who attend the Centre. Ten of these took place through individual interviews and ten through focus groups. Efforts were made to ensure that the participants came from a range of backgrounds: criteria included gender, nationality, length of time in Ireland, and

status within the asylum process. The respondents outlined a wide range of areas in which they had received help through the Centre. These included assistance with accessing and participating in educational courses, supports for their applications for asylum, taking part in talks and workshops on a range of topics, receiving emotional support, and accessing other relevant organisations, either directly or through referrals. The social aspects of the Centre were also highlighted, with participants noting that it offers them an opportunity to make new friends, to meet other people who are in a similar situation, and to simply hang around and not have to think about everyday problems and concerns.

According to one participant, "When you're here, you just forget about the situation in the hostel, you forget about your process...everyone is laughing, everyone is happy, so it's a good environment to be in".

The close relationships that have been built up between DRP volunteers and participants over the years were frequently mentioned, which highlighted the high levels of trust that exist between them. It appears that this is a key factor in the success of the Centre, and it additionally illustrates the sense of ownership that participants who attend the Centre have. All respondents found the contact that the Centre offers with representatives from other organisations to be useful; in particular, people talked about how the Garda Siochana's regular presence and the "Get Wise" programme that they ran has helped to break down barriers that may have otherwise existed between them and the police. There was a widespread feeling that participation in the Centre had had very positive effects on their lives in Ireland. Some participants talked of how the Centre had helped them to become more tolerant and accepting in their everyday lives. They discussed how important the emotional support offered through the Centre was for them during difficult times, and how it helped them to feel less alone in Ireland.

One participant discussed how the DRP, through the Centre, had helped her with all her educational needs: "They paid for my course fees, and they're going to pay for my exam fees; they also give me a bus pass, then money for books; also, like, advice

about the course: what I want to do, what's the best for me, which way to go".

Further specific areas of support highlighted by participants included:

- **Access to education:** In 2007, 41 participants were being supported to attend a wide range of educational courses. This included careers guidance, assistance with enrolment, and the provision of financial support for course fees and related costs. If this assistance were not available through the Centre, the participants would not be in a position to access third-level education;
- **Socialising and developing friendships:** the importance of the Centre as a space for socialising was continually mentioned throughout the interviews. Participants talked of meeting friends through the Centre, of learning more about people from other cultures, and of the importance of having a place where they could hang around and forget about any problems they might be facing; and
- **Getting involved in local activities:** A large number of the respondents talked of local activities with which they had become involved through the Centre, and several commented on how they never would have done so, had they not been encouraged to by the volunteers.

In terms of suggestions for the future, all of the respondents stated that they would like to meet more young Irish people in the Centre. It was felt that this would help to promote integration, and to encourage Irish people to learn more about what life is really like for people seeking asylum. Finally, the young people repeatedly referred to specific volunteers who had provided them with help in all aspects of their lives, and expressed their gratitude for this. As a result of these close relationships, there is a sense of trust and respect within the Monday evening sessions.

According to one participant, "Even though you don't ask, they [the DRP volunteers] would know something is going on and keep on, you know, getting at you until you actually tell them what's up...one way or the other, they always find out, and then they help you".

Evaluation findings - Interviews with DRP vol-

unteers and supporters of the Centre: Data were collected from a number of respondents involved in running and supporting the Centre. Volunteers with the DRP were interviewed, either in person or through a written questionnaire, while interviews took place with respondents from Southside Partnership and the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre. The importance of having a flexible approach towards activities was repeatedly brought up by respondents, in recognition of the particular situation and needs of participants as a result of their being within the asylum process. Several DRP volunteers noted that while it may sometimes appear to newcomers that the Monday evening sessions are unstructured, there is a loose underlying structure and that the lack of firm rules and regulations is possibly a very important factor in contributing to the Centre's success.

All respondents highlighted the positive benefits of involving a range of organisations and groups in the Centre. These included: helping to raise the profile of young asylum seekers, assisting with the provision of referrals to other agencies, and building relationships between the participants and organisations such as the Garda Síochána. In general, both groups of respondents felt that the Centre helps to contribute towards integration in a number of ways. This included the relationships formed between participants and volunteers, the ways that participants are encouraged to get involved in local activities, and the fact that it facilitates participants to attend educational courses where, it was felt, they themselves can become more involved in Irish society. As mentioned by one volunteer, empowering the young people to make their own decisions is critical to ensuring that they are able to participate in life in Ireland.

According to one volunteer, his involvement has been an "eye-opener to me for opening up the world of asylum seekers: most Irish people don't know about it and would be horrified. They're second-class citizens effectively, and they shouldn't be".

A number of areas were identified as being critical to the success of the Centre, and could form the basis for guidelines on good practice for other similar initiatives:

- The need to adopt a fluid and flexible approach and not to be overly-structured;

- The need to be able to respond to people's needs as they arise, as a result of the uncertainties within the asylum process;
- The need to empower young people to be able to make their own decisions, especially as they may become institutionalised within the direct provision system;
- The need to foster a sense of ownership among the participants;
- The need for a core group to oversee activities;
- The need for continued access to funding to support the activities, especially educational participation;
- The importance of supportive attitudes and openness among other local organisations;
- Crucially, the need to spend a large amount of time building up the trust of participants and to be able to demonstrate a commitment and ability to get results in terms of what is promised to participants; and
- The need for good record keeping, transparency in accounts and annual reports, and policies relating to child protection.



highlighted as an example of good practice. Finally, all the organisational representatives felt that the Centre very much helped to promote integration, both through enabling the young people to meet Irish people and learn more about life models from their own communities and situations.

Evaluation Findings - Interviews with

Organisations that Support the Centre: Interviews were carried out with representatives from organisations that are involved with and support the Centre's work. These were the Garda Síochána, the Irish Refugee Council and the Transition Supports Project. In addition Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council completed a detailed questionnaire. The Centre's position as a space that is not associated with more formal or statutory service provision was identified as an important factor by these respondents. In general, they felt that this can make participants more open to discussion and to talking about problems and issues that might not be brought up otherwise. Additionally, the fact that it offers them an opportunity to network informally with each other was noted as a positive aspect of the Centre.

In terms of the benefits of the Centre, respondents raised issues including: the support provided by volunteers for the participants; the opportunities the Centre offers for socialising; and the variety of activities available through the Centre. The provision of supports for people to encourage them to enter or stay in the education system was also

According to one respondent, "I think it's been proved by its success that it was necessary... Sometimes you still have up to 40 people turning up on Monday evenings, all coming from the city centre, but still congregating in this one place. I think that's testament to the volunteers in the project".

Recommendations for the Future:

As illustrated by the interviews with key stakeholders, the Drop-In Centre is a very successful initiative that provides a range of necessary supports to young people seeking asylum. The Centre offers personal assistance that participants may not be able to access elsewhere, which covers areas including asylum applications, assistance with practical aspects of living in Ireland, and support for education. Through adopting an open and holistic approach, the Centre has encouraged and facilitated the involvement of a number of groups in working to address the needs of participants, and has provided a space within which

inter-organisational relationships can develop. Crucially, the Centre offers a place for participants to socialise with their peers and also to develop close and trusting relationships with volunteers. All of these factors have, according to respondents, ultimately helped to assist with people's integration into Irish society.

A number of suggestions for the future were raised through the evaluation. It is important to remember that the DRP operates on an entirely voluntary basis, and is therefore somewhat constrained in the amount of extra activities that it can realistically undertake. However, several of the suggested activities could assist with strengthening the organisation's structures, thereby helping to ensure its sustainability:

- Getting internet access for Monday evenings;
- Carrying out short evaluations with participants twice a year to get an overview of their needs, which will help to inform planning;
- Although the Centre's main aim should not be to encourage integration, it could be useful to examine ways of getting more young Irish people to participate. This could be done as an activity once a month/once every few months;
- As a completely voluntary organisation, the DRP has limited capacity to engage in developing comprehensive volunteer policies that would cover such areas as safety statements, debriefing for volunteers, processes for recruiting, selecting and managing volunteers, etc. However, once developed, these could be mainstreamed relatively easily and could help to ensure the sustainability of the organisation;
- Funding for educational activities is a key part of the Centre's work: several respondents mentioned that a philanthropic organisation could very usefully provide support for this;
- Involving volunteers from the young people's cultural backgrounds and communities: this is already taking place to some degree, and should be encouraged;
- Building capacity among the young people to be more involved in planning activities;
- The possibility of setting up a scholarship for one of the participants who has residency to participate in a youth work course and bring the learning from this into the Centre could also be examined; and



1. Rationale and aims of the evaluation

The Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP) has operated a Drop-In Centre in Dún Laoghaire for young people seeking asylum/those with residency every Monday evening since June 2005. Supported by Southside Partnership and the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre, the Centre provides a space for the target group to meet, socialise, and connect with service providers. The process of documenting the learning from the DRP's Drop-In Centre was identified as one of the actions within the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan (2007-2010), which aims to develop and enhance the participation of minority ethnic groups in all aspects of community life.

As outlined in the terms of reference, the aim of this evaluation is to look at the Centre from the perspective of participants, organisers and other stakeholders, and to identify the key lessons from the project. To fully address these objectives, the evaluation comprises the following elements:

- Documenting the history of the project, including significant events in its development;
- Identifying the outcomes for participants of their participation in the Drop-In Centre;
- Analysing the nature and extent of the collaboration between the Centre and other organisations that support its activities; and
- Documenting the achievements, challenges and lessons to be learned from the Centre.

Ultimately, the findings of this evaluation aim to: identify key learnings and challenges from the programme; document examples of best practice that could be transferable to other projects; and outline some recommendations for potential developments in the future.

2. Structure of the evaluation

In Section One, background information about the rights and entitlements of participants in the Drop-In Centre is set out. In addition, an overview is presented of some of the specific challenges that separated children and aged-out minors face, as identified in previous Irish studies and reports. Recommendations regarding best practice in youth work with separated children are also highlighted. Section Two looks at the history of initiatives in the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown area to support people seeking asylum and refugees. This provides an overview of the wider context



within which the Centre was developed. In Section Three, the development of the Drop-In Centre is documented, and an overview is presented of the activities that it offers for participants.

Sections Four, Five and Six focus on the findings of interviews with the key stakeholders involved in the Centre. Section Four presents the findings of interviews and focus groups with participants in the Centre, Section Five looks at the views of volunteers and the two organisations that support the Centre (Southside Partnership and the Community Training Centre), and Section Six discusses the feedback from other organisations that are involved in the Monday evening programme. Finally, Section Seven focuses on the key lessons of the project and outlines some recommendations for possible future developments.

SECTION ONE: RIGHTS, ENTITLEMENTS AND SITUATION OF DROP-IN CENTRE CLIENTS: AN OVERVIEW

In order to understand the particular situation of the young people who use the Drop-In Centre, it is necessary to look at their situation within the asylum process in Ireland, and beyond, when they may receive either humanitarian leave to remain or refugee status. The system is a complicated one, with people's rights and entitlements being very much dependant on the category into which they fall. Participants in the Drop-In Centre are, for the most part, either separated children seeking asylum or aged-out minors. Additionally, they may fall within three categories within the asylum process: those seeking asylum, those with humanitarian leave to remain, and those with refugee status. Their status affects, amongst other issues, their accommodation entitlements, their access to social welfare payments, and their entitlement to state funding for third-level education. This section provides a description of the various categories within the asylum process and outlines the rights and entitlements of people within this. It focuses on the specific situation of children and young people, outlining some of their particular needs in terms of youth work, as highlighted in previous studies and reports.

1.1 Definitions

Ireland is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Under the Convention, a **refugee** is defined as a person who has fled his or her country and is unable to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. According to the terms of Article 1(1) of the 1996 Irish Refugee Act (as amended), the term "membership of a particular social group" has been extended to include membership of a trade union and membership of a group of persons whose defining characteristic is their belonging to the male or female sex or having a particular sexual orientation.

In some cases, although a person seeking asylum might not be granted refugee status, they may be given **leave to remain on humanitarian grounds**. This permission is granted at the discretion of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and is considered to be an exceptional measure to allow a person to stay in Ireland if they do not fully meet the requirements of the Geneva Convention, but are still considered to be in need of protection. In general,

people who are granted leave to remain receive this permission for a set amount of time, usually a year, after which they apply to have it renewed¹. Since 2006, people seeking asylum may also apply for **subsidiary protection**. This stems from the EU Qualification Directive, and applies to "a third country national or stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm²." The definition of serious harm includes threats to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has applied to be granted refugee status. Under the Geneva Convention, Ireland is obliged to examine each application for asylum that is lodged in the state. Anyone who is waiting for a decision to be made about his/her application is therefore legally allowed to reside in the state. According to Section 8(5) of the 1996 Refugee Act (as amended), an **unaccompanied minor** is a child under the age of eighteen who has arrived at the frontiers of the state or entered the state and who is not in anyone's custody. Unaccompanied minors are also commonly referred to as **separated children seeking asylum (SCSA)**. When these young people reach the age of 18, they are often referred to as **aged-out minors**.


1.2 Rights and entitlements of asylum seekers, refugees, and people with leave to remain³.

Asylum seekers: The vast majority of asylum seekers who have arrived in Ireland since April 2000 have been accommodated within the direct provision scheme. Under the scheme, asylum seekers are provided with accommodation and full board at specified centres throughout Ireland. Recent government policy has concentrated on "dispensing" people to centres outside the Dublin area. They are entitled to a weekly income supplement of ?19.10 for adults and ?9.60 for children. In addition, they can apply to their community welfare officer

¹ See Immigrant Council of Ireland (2005), *Factsheet 4: Rights to 'Leave to Remain in Ireland'* for further information.

² For further information, please see *Integrating Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council Information Note: Subsidiary Protection under the Qualification Directive*, (September 2006), available at www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

³ Further information about rights and entitlements is available from the Refugee Information Service (www.ris.ie) and the Reception and Integration Agency (www.ria.gov.ie).



for exceptional needs payments. In May 2004, the government introduced a habitual residency condition for access to social assistance payments. Since that date, all applicants for these payments, regardless of their nationality, are required to be habitually resident in the state to qualify for them. In general, an applicant who has not spent most of his or her life in Ireland will need to have been present in the state for two years or more, be working in the state, and have a settled intention to make it her or his permanent home in order to satisfy the habitual residence condition. Amongst the Social Assistance payments covered by the habitual residency condition are child benefit and supplementary welfare allowance, other than once-off exceptional and urgent needs payments.

Asylum seekers are entitled to health care on the same basis as that of an Irish national, ie, they have the right to a medical card, subject to a means test. Services available free of charge under the Medical Card Scheme include GP services, prescriptions and medicines (with some exceptions), women's health services, and optical tests and glasses. Applicants are entitled to access specialised medical and psychological treatment on the same basis as that of an Irish national. A free medical screening (for infectious diseases such as TB, Hepatitis B & C, and HIV) is also available for all asylum seekers. It is provided on a confidential basis and is independent of the application for refugee status.

Anyone who applied for asylum after July 26th, 1999, does not have the right to work in the country, unless s/he has been granted some other form of immigration status, eg, residency rights stemming from marriage to an Irish or EU citizen. In reality, there are very few, if any, asylum seekers who applied for asylum before this date and who have not yet received a decision on their application. In relation to education, all children under age 18 have the right to state-funded primary and secondary education. According to the White Paper on Adult Education (2000), asylum seekers over age 18 are entitled to free access to literacy classes, language classes and mother culture supports. They are not entitled to any form of payments to support their enrolment in third level education.

Refugees and people with leave to remain:

People who receive refugee status have similar rights to Irish

citizens, and are exempt from the habitual residence condition when applying for social welfare payments. In order to qualify for access to free fees for third level courses, they must have lived in an EU state for three years prior to their application. Those with leave to remain in the state are entitled to work in Ireland, and to access social welfare entitlements. However, they must satisfy the habitual residency condition in order to access these latter entitlements. Additionally, they do not qualify for free fees for third level education, but can apply for a maintenance grant from their local authority.

1.3 Separated children seeking asylum and aged-out minors

When children under age 18 apply for asylum in Ireland, and they are outside the care of a family member or guardian, they are accommodated in the following ways: those under 12 years of age are placed in foster care; and others are either placed in residential care that specifically caters for SCSA, or in residential care along with Irish children. Responsibility for their care is within the remit of the Health Service Executive (HSE). Philips (2006:6-7⁴) states that the majority of these children aged between 15 and 18 are placed in hostel accommodation, all of which (bar one centre) is fully catered. In terms of further care provided, "at least one project worker is assigned to each individual hostel. Each child in each hostel also has a social worker assigned to them" (ibid).

As mentioned, people who arrived in the country as unaccompanied children, and who turn 18 without receiving a decision on their application for asylum, are known as **aged-out minors**. As noted by Mooten (2006:61⁵), "On reaching 18, aged-out minors are transferred to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), and moved into adult accommodation centres. Once they have completed secondary education, they cannot access work, third level education, or vocational training, and they are forced into being dependent on the state." It should also be noted that those with independent means can access further education by paying the higher rate of tuition which non-EU nationals are required to pay. In reality, this is not an option for the vast majority of young asylum seekers, who are not entitled to avail of either free fees or third-level maintenance grants.

⁴ *Making Separated Children Visible: The Need for a Child-Centered Approach*, Mooten (2006), Irish Refugee Council.

⁵ See <http://www.equal-ci.ie/projects/ecahb.html> for further information.

⁶ *Steps Towards Inclusion: Developing Youth Work with Separated Children*, McCrea (2003), National Youth Council of Ireland.



Aged-out minors who reach age 18 are processed as adults within the asylum application process. As they are no longer within the care of the HSE, they cannot avail of the support of a guardian or social worker while their case is being processed. The transition from being within the care of the HSE and having access to these supports to moving into the adult system can be a very difficult and traumatic one. In recognition of the specific difficulties facing this group, the Transition Supports Project (TSP) was established in 2005⁵, and ran until the end of 2007. Funded by EQUAL, the three-year project aimed to "develop a model for effective multi-agency working to co-ordinate, integrate, activate and deliver services to separated children seeking asylum to enable them to participate in education (formal and informal) with a view to preparing them for adult life."

1.4 Challenges facing separated children and aged-out minors

As noted by McCrea⁶ in a report published by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), many separated children have left difficult or traumatic situations in their countries of origin. On arrival in Ireland, they must go through the asylum determination process without the support of their families or customary social networks. Additionally, they face restricted access to educational and leisure opportunities. McCrea notes, however, that separated children may share many of the same interests as young Irish people "and face the more 'normal' challenges associated with the transition into adulthood" (2003: vi).

She lists the needs of the group in relation to youth work as including: access to leisure and recreation; opportunities to make friends and develop social networks; relief from feelings of boredom, loneliness and stress; diversion from the anxieties of the refugee determination process; emotional support and general guidance; access to information and referrals to other services; and assistance with their formal education.

Among the structural barriers within the youth work sector that limit its capacity to develop work with separated children, she includes:

- Resource constraints: many youth workers do not have the time or resources to actively widen access to their

programmes and services, often due to the piece-meal nature of funding for the sector;

- The age profile of separated children: many youth organisations do not have programmes catering for people between the ages of 16 and 18;
- Organisational and programme inflexibility within the youth work sector: separated children can be excluded from certain youth groups because they live outside specific catchment areas.

These findings are also echoed in Philips' 2006⁷, report into the needs of young separated asylum seekers. She states that very few people over the age of 18 are linked into local youth clubs or other sporting activities. Amongst the reasons she identifies for this are: language difficulties, lack of information, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation (p.10).

Among the recommendations for developing good practice in youth work with separated children, McCrea suggests that time should be devoted to building up trust with the group. Space should be provided to meet with friends and engage in other unstructured leisure activities, and the positive contribution that separated children can make to Irish youth work should be recognised. In addition, she notes that "In the absence of a family support structure, many separated children lack opportunities for emotional support and general guidance. Youth work with a strong personal element can go some way towards meeting this need." (ibid: p19).

Another important issue to consider is access points into youth work: many young Irish people participate in youth initiatives as a result of parental involvement or family and community connections. However, McCrea highlights how separated children do not have such networks in Ireland and thus (ibid: 28): "The absence of a significant adult and other family supports in the lives of separated children means that they cannot rely on lifts to venues, the easy procurement of guardian consent and other supports often associated with participation in youth work".

A further structural barrier to the participation of these young people was noted in her report: this arises from the lack of interaction between youth organisations and

⁷ *Report on the Needs Assessment of Separated Children Seeking Asylum and "Aged-Out" Minors*, Siobhan Philips (2006), Equal Transition Supports Project

⁸ *Making Separated Children Visible: The Need for a Child-Centered Approach*, Mooten (2006: 47), Irish Refugee Council.

voluntary and statutory agencies working with separated children. It was strongly suggested that greater communication between the two sectors would be a vital component of increasing awareness of the particular circumstances of separated children.

It is interesting to note that in Philips' report (2006:22), the DRP was referenced as being as "positive source of help" in the lives of a number separated children/aged-out minors who were interviewed. They were also specifically mentioned by respondents when they were asked about positive experiences when they were helped since coming to Ireland (ibid: 26). Mooten's report⁸ of the same year mentioned the DRP as one of a small number of organisations that offer befriending assistance and support to separated children, which helps to address their psychosocial needs.

1.5 Discussion

Participants who use the Drop-In Centre on Monday evenings **come from a variety of circumstances and can be at very different places within the asylum process:**

- Some are under age 18, and are therefore within the care of the HSE and entitled to supports from both social and project workers. Some are "aged-out" and have moved from HSE-supported accommodation into adult accommodation centres, under the auspices of RIA, where they no longer have access to these additional supports.
- Those who are over 18 and are still awaiting a decision about their application are not entitled to any financial supports for third level education, nor are they allowed to work. People who have received leave to remain are allowed to work, but not to access free fees for third-level education. Those with refugee status are entitled to free third-level fees, but only if they have been resident in the EU for three years prior to getting status.
- **Accommodation:** as noted, anyone awaiting a decision on their case will generally be accommodated in a direct provision centre, where they receive full

board and ?19.10 a week to cover all other costs. These centres are spread throughout the country, and residents may be asked to relocate to an entirely different area at very short notice, depending on government policy. As a result, connections that the young people have built up within an area can be lost very quickly, which adds to their sense of instability.

- People with leave to remain and those with refugee status can move into private rented accommodation, and are entitled to access rent allowance to subsidise costs, where applicable. However, in the case of those with leave to remain, they must satisfy the habitual residence condition to qualify for these payments. Again, this can leave people in a somewhat precarious position, if they do not have the financial means to support themselves and do not qualify for supplementary payments.

All of **these factors contribute towards making the position of the young people an uncertain one**, and can lead them to have a range of problems for which they may require assistance and support.

Within this context, a number of factors have been identified as contributing towards **good practice in youth work with young asylum seekers**. Although the NYCI report in which these factors were identified specifically focuses on separated children, the issues are also applicable for aged-out minors, who, as Philips notes, tend not to be linked into local youth initiatives. These factors include:

- Access to **socialising and recreational opportunities**;
- **Diversion from the anxieties** associated with being within the asylum process;
- **Emotional support**;
- Access to **information and referrals**; and
- Assistance with **formal education**.

As a result, all have been taken into consideration when conducting the evaluation of the Drop-In Centre in Dún Laoghaire.

SECTION 2: DÚN LAOGHAIRE -RATHDOWN: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Acronyms used in this section

DLCTC	-	Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre
DLIADT	-	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
DLRCC	-	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council
DRP	-	Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project
ERF	-	European Refugee Fund
OSH	-	Old School House Hostel
SCSA	-	Separated Children Seeking Asylum
SSP	-	Southside Partnership

This section examines the background to the development of the Drop-In Centre, setting out the context in which local organisations in the Dún Laoghaire area initially got involved in activities to support people seeking asylum. It briefly outlines the area's history of hosting asylum seekers, and gives an overview of some of the initiatives undertaken with this group since 2000. While it is not within the remit of this evaluation to provide a detailed account of all the activities developed over the past seven years, it is important to set out the history of key stakeholders' involvement in the area. The activities of Southside Partnership and the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project are therefore summarised, as are some of the main points highlighted in the County Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan.

2.1: Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown's hosting of people seeking asylum.

For a number of years from the start of 2000, a large number of people seeking asylum were housed in various hostels and accommodation centres in the Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown area. Between the period of 2000-2006, the following accommodation centres were in operation in the area:

- Sandycove House, Sandycove (opened 2000 and closed 2004);
- Old School House, Eblana Avenue, Dún Laoghaire (opened 2000 and closed April 2005);
- Glandore Lodge

(opened 2005 and closed February 2006);

- Kilmarnock House, Killiney (opened 2002 and closed April 2006).

During this time, several thousand asylum seekers passed through the Dún Laoghaire centres. The closing of the centres in the area in 2006 was in line with the fall in the numbers of people claiming asylum in Ireland, and with the government's policy of dispersing accommodation centres throughout the country.

2.2 Southside Partnership and the UNITE Network

In response to the numbers of people seeking asylum who

were accommodated in the area, a number of local projects were initiated. These included the DRP (see below), and the UNITE Project, which was established by Southside Partnership (SSP). In 2001, the UNITE Project received initial one-year funding from the European Refugee Fund (ERF), during which time it worked to establish a network of relevant service providers. A needs analysis of asylum seekers living in Dún Laoghaire was also conducted in 2002, as part of the project. One key area of attention highlighted was the educational needs of SCSA, and a young asylum seekers' education task group was set up to progress this issue. The need for specific supports for SCSA was realised by the VEC, who appointed an education officer to work specifically with this group in 2003.

Although the ERF funding for the UNITE project worker

ended in 2002, SSP continued to work with the target group, and to facilitate the UNITE network, also working closely with the DRP. In 2004, a further needs analysis was conducted with people accommodated in Kilmarnock House. This group of residents included many aged-out minors, who had previously lived in the OSH. Based on the recommendations of the report, SSP worked closely with residents for the next one-and-a-half years, until the closure of the accommodation centre, to introduce new support structures, including information and referrals, a crèche, a gym programme, and other social events. Other activities included lobbying and advocating on behalf of the residents with RIA, and raising their profile through the UNITE network and other task groups (in conjunction with DLRCC and RAPID). In 2004, SSP was also involved in setting up the TSP and submitting the initial application for the programme. Since the closure of the last accommodation centre in the area in 2006, the UNITE network has continued to focus on the needs of new migrant communities in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown.

When the closure of the OSH was announced in 2005, SSP recognised the need for the continuation of support services for young people seeking asylum. They approached the Community Training Centre about the possibility of using its premises as a drop-in centre, and thus helped to facilitate the establishment of the Monday evening event. They have continued to support the Centre through the provision of funding for activities and through working with the DRP to support their services and encourage networking with other service providers, including the DLIADT. In 2007, they provided the funding for a digital media training course for the Centre's participants, which was run in conjunction with DLIADT.

2.3 Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP)

The Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP) was established in 2001. At that time, a large number of people seeking asylum were being accommodated two hostels located in Dún Laoghaire town (Sandycove House and the Old School House). The aim of the DRP has, from its inception, been to "befriend, advise and support asylum seekers/refugees in our area", focusing on their "education, social and integration

needs"⁹. From the outset, all people involved with the DRP have been volunteers. The group does not rent any office space, as it is its policy that all activities should be undertaken on a voluntary basis. Instead, volunteers have operated through visiting hostel accommodation (primarily the Old School House Hostel and Kilmarnock House) and through linking in with other community groups to use their premises. Since 2001, volunteers with the DRP have worked to respond to the needs of asylum seekers in a number of ways, including:

- Education and training (both through the direct provision of language and literacy courses and through encouraging people to register for and attend formal educational courses);
- Providing friendship and support through social, recreational and cultural activities;
- Advocating on behalf of asylum seekers with the relevant authorities on issues such as welfare, health, the asylum determination process, prison visits and other legal matters;
- Networking with governmental and non-governmental organizations and groups dealing with the issue of asylum; and
- Encouraging integration through celebrating the achievements of people seeking asylum and raising awareness about their situation.

The DRP's activities have, from the start, been characterized by the amount of work it does with SCSA and young people seeking asylum. This came about in part as a result of the profile of people seeking asylum who were accommodated in the area. As stated in the DRP's 2006 Annual Report, while adults and families lived in the accommodation centres, a noteworthy feature was the large number of SCSA in Dún Laoghaire. For example, in 2002, of the approximately 220 asylum seekers living in the Old School House and Sandycove House, 140 were SCSA¹⁰. The DRP worked with this group from the outset of its activities, focusing in particular on providing support with accessing education. This included liaising with secondary schools in the area to facilitate enrollment, liaising with Youthreach

⁹ DRP Annual Report, 2004

¹⁰ DRP Annual Report, 2002

courses, providing literacy and language classes, and identifying suitable third level courses (VEC, etc) for people over the age of 18. The DRP made weekly visits to the accommodation centres, which enabled volunteers to meet people face-to-face and respond to the issues that were raised.

As noted in section 2.1, the accommodation centres in the area began to close during 2005 and 2006. According to the DRP's 2005 Annual Report, many former residents of the Old School House had continued to visit the hostel during the group's weekly sessions there, and it was considered important that another venue be sourced in which this outreach work could be continued. The last remaining accommodation Centre, Kilmarnock House, closed in 2006. This prompted the DRP Committee to decide in April 2006¹¹, to focus their activities on "the young graduates of the Dún Laoghaire hostels now living in the greater Dublin area. The absence of hostels in Dún Laoghaire has meant that the DRP no longer has contact with recently arrived unaccompanied minors (separated children)".

The DRP had held a weekly advice and information clinic in the Old School House until its closure in April 2005. As

mentioned, it was decided that it would be important to continue this work in another venue, even though many of the clients had been moved to locations in the city centre, Mosney, etc. With the assistance of Southside Partnership, the DRP made contact with the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre (DLCTC) on York Road, which offered the group the use of its premises on Monday evenings. It was decided to use these facilities to run a "Drop-In Centre" for young asylum seekers, which would offer a place to socialize with their peers, discuss with DRP volunteers any concerns or problems they wanted to raise, and get information through talks and activities. The Centre began to operate on a weekly basis in June 2005, and has continued to be open for two hours every Monday evening to the present.

2.4 Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan

In 2007, a coalition of groups launched *Moving Forward Together: An Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan for the county of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown 2007-2010*¹². The plan was devised in consultation with a number of local groups, including the DRP and SSP. It aims to improve access to services for

minority ethnic groups and to develop and enhance their participation in all aspects of community life. Among the specific areas in which it sets out actions to be undertaken at the county level are information provision, education, and recreation and community development. The plan focuses on all immigrants within the county, but includes young asylum seekers as one specific interest group through its actions in the area of recreation and community development. In this, documenting the learning from the DRP's Drop-In Centre is a particular action (2007:21), which demonstrates how the model of the centre is perceived to be an important one from which other groups can learn.

2.5 Discussion

- Dún Laoghaire Rathdown has a relatively long tradition of hosting people seeking asylum: between 2000 and 2006, several thousand people were accommodated in a number of centres throughout the county. A number of key initiatives were introduced at the local level to respond to the needs of this new group;
- These include Southside Partnership's UNITE Project, set up in 2001. Its activities have included outreach work within the accommodation centres, lobbying and advocacy work on behalf of residents, and documenting the needs and requirements of residents through a number of needs analyses. Since the closure of the centres, SSP has continued to support young people seeking asylum through assisting with the establishment of the Drop-In Centre and providing financial support for its activities;
- A further community-based activity to support people seeking asylum is the DRP, a volunteer-run group that was set up in 2001. The DRP has worked over the past number of years to provide services such as education, outreach, assistance with asylum applications, and advocacy on behalf of clients. It has always focused on young people, and continued its activities following the closure of the last hostel in the county through the establishment of the Monday evening Drop-In Centre;
- At the broader county level, 2007 saw the publication of the County Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan, which aims to improve participation for all migrants in every aspect

¹¹ DRP Annual Report, 2006.

¹² For further information, please see www.dlrard.ie



Acronyms used in this section

DLCTC	-	Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre
DLIADT	-	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
DRP	-	Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project
IRC	-	Irish Refugee Council
SSP	-	Southside Partnership
TSP	-	Transition Supports Project

The Drop-In Centre takes place every Monday evening in the Dún Laoghaire Community Training Centre premises on York Road in Dún Laoghaire. The venue provides a large room for talks, socializing, workshops and other events. Additionally, it has several smaller rooms that can be used for one-to-one consultations, as well as a kitchen. Since the beginning of 2007, food has been provided for participants, including sandwiches, fruit and drinks. The Centre is open for two hours every Monday evening, from 19.00 to 21.00, and occasionally later, depending on the activities taking place. The Centre is generally attended by between seven and ten volunteers, who organize and take part in the activities or are available to talk on a one-to-one basis to the young people who attend. A number of representatives from other organizations also attend on a regular basis (including the Garda Síochána, the Irish Refugee Council and the Transition Supports Project), making themselves available to talk to participants.

3.1: Aims of the Drop-In Centre

From the start of operations in 2005, the aim of the Centre has been to provide **"a much-needed facility where the young people involved can meet in an informal and relaxed setting to socialize, receive information and support from members of the DRP and from each other and organize social and cultural events."**¹³ The DRP has never set out a detailed list of objectives or an annual programme for the Centre, but has rather tended to respond to the needs of participants as they are brought up. According to one volunteer, who has been involved with the DRP since it was set

up¹⁴, "we 'go with the flow' & deal with situations as they arise. The activities have changed as the client group have got older - far fewer now in school, some married, some have babies, most are living outside Dún Laoghaire".

As a result, the programme of activities that it offers is very flexible, and has evolved since the first drop-in evening was held in 2005.

3.2 Activities in 2005 and 2006


When the Centre first began in June 2005, it was initially decided to run it on a pilot basis and see what the response would be. The initiative was publicised through the DRP, including through some of the young people seeking asylum who worked with the group and who encouraged people to attend by visiting accommodation centres throughout the city and telling people about it. Information was also spread through the DRP's contacts within the asylum-seeking community, which they had built up over the preceding four years. The response to the Centre was positive: by the end of 2005, it had been attended by over 136 young people, and the DRP found that "those who attend for the first time often come back the next week with friends, which allows contact to be made with other young asylum seekers and those with residency"¹⁵.

Amongst the activities that took place during 2005 and 2006 were the provision of information, advice and referrals for participants in need of support with their applications for asylum. The opportunity for the Centre to offer a venue for

¹³ DRP Annual Report, 2005.

¹⁴ Interview with DRP volunteer, October 2007

¹⁵ DRP Annual Report, 2005



publicising the situation of young asylum seekers was also recognised. In its 2005 annual report, the DRP noted that "having access to the DLCTC has made it possible for the DRP to invite politicians, representatives of other NGOs, legal and other professional personnel and interested journalists to meet with the young people and discuss their situation." Between June 2005 and the end of 2006, a number of politicians, media, and representatives from other organizations came to visit the Centre. These included:

- A number of local TDs, including the Minister for Education;
- A number of religious figures;
- The Cathaoirleach and other representatives from Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council;
- Local community and ethnic liaison Gardaí;
- Representatives from other service providers, such as the Irish Refugee Council (IRC), the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC), the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Transition Support Project (TSP), the Children's Rights Alliance, and Sports Against Racism in Ireland; and
- Journalists from a number of publications.

Through inviting representatives from these different organizations to visit, either once-off or on an ongoing basis, the Centre started to establish itself within the community and to foster links with other relevant organizations. Other activities included arranging a series of events aimed at improving the young people's public speaking skills, informing them about civic life and participation in Ireland and generally building their confidence. For example, participants were encouraged to take part in debates and to watch DVDs on topics of interest. The value of the Centre as a space for socializing was also recognized, with parties and celebrations taking place to mark special events (eg, Christmas, birthdays, exam results). Informally, people were encouraged to use it as a venue to catch up with friends and to meet new people. A further highlight of the year was when the PLUS group (see below) were awarded a certificate by the Cathaoirleach as part of the Year of

Citizenship Through Education.

3.3 Activities in 2007

In 2007, the demographics and activities of the Centre changed somewhat. In 2005 and 2006, a large number of people attending the Centre had been in secondary school. Many of these did their Leaving Cert in 2006, with the result that service provision then switched to focus on facilitating their access to ongoing education. According to one volunteer¹⁶, the young people were "growing up into young adults and the support had to adapt to encouraging them to make their own life choices as to where they wanted to go, and also to take responsibility insofar as they could." As a result, activities during the year have been focused on accessing and administering funding for third-level education, providing career guidance and assisting with enrolling in courses. The volunteer also noted that "a number of people are coming from Mosney now; other young people with leave to remain are also coming back from as far afield as Kildare, for help and to meet their friends. There's a slightly broader base now. As the young people move on, they're still keeping in touch." According to the DRP's organisational records, an average of 35 people attended the Centre each Monday in 2007.

Ongoing relationships with other organizations enabled a number of new activities to be introduced in 2007¹⁷. With funding from SSP, and in conjunction with DLIADT, participants were offered the opportunity to do a digital media training course. This began in February, and it was decided that the course would concentrate on producing a film about the Drop-In Centre. Participants took part both as presenters and in the production of the film, with the course running until June. A ten-minute film was produced at the end, which was shown for the first time at a local celebration of World Refugee Day. Local Gardaí also ran the "Get Wise" programme through the Centre: this twelve-week programme ran until June, and covered topics such as drugs, road safety, and personal safety.

Throughout 2007, the provision of one-to-one information and advice continued. A number of social outings were organized, such as trips to the theatre. Due to the fact that the general elections were held in 2007, the visits by politicians were not as frequent, but it is planned that these will continue again in 2008. Visits from the IRC and the TSP

¹⁶ Interview with DRP volunteer, October 2007

¹⁷ Information taken from weekly DRP notes from the Drop-In Centre.

also became an established part of the routine.

3.4 Specific activities run through the Centre

Please Let Us Stay (PLUS) Campaign: The Drop-In Centre has additionally been used to support the PLUS campaign. This campaign is being run by a group of young asylum seekers, under the auspices of the DRP. Since 2005, they have been lobbying the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to urge that they be allowed leave to remain in Ireland under terms similar to those introduced for parents of children born in Ireland prior to 2005. It is estimated that this group comprises not more than 250 young people, all of whom came to Ireland as SCISA and some of whom have waited for more than five years for final decisions about their applications for asylum.

The PLUS campaign initially used the Centre as a venue to meet and plan its activities, and also as a place in which to meet visitors who were interested in finding out more about the campaign. As noted previously, these included politicians, religious figures, and representatives from a range of non-governmental organisations. As a result of meetings with politicians, an informal cross-party Oireachtas group was set up in 2005 to examine the situation of the young people and to see how it could be addressed and progressed with the Minister for Justice.

Since then, a number of the young people involved in the campaign have received leave to remain in Ireland. While the PLUS campaign is still actively raising the profile of young people seeking asylum (through awareness raising at events, festivals, concerts, etc), its engagement at the political level has changed somewhat. According to one volunteer with the DRP, the group has been extremely successful at putting the case of the young people on the political agenda. It is planned that in the future, the group will link in with other organisations working in the area to progress the campaign.

Education: The DRP supports young asylum seekers and refugees who use the Drop-In Centre by providing funds both for course fees and for the ancillary costs in attending educational courses (transport, food etc.). Its 2005 Annual Report notes that by far the largest part of its funds during the year was allocated to education/training and associated costs. In 2006, some 36 persons received assistance with

education, with a breakdown as follows:

Other	Courses	Degree	Third Level
Refugees/ Leave to Remain	10	2	8
Application Pending Leave to Remain	26	0	26
TOTAL	36	2	34

The courses taken included mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, accounting, lab. assistant, business studies, nursing, computer maintenance, travel & tourism, hairdressing, and care assistant ¹⁸.

A total of 41 people were supported in educational courses in 2007 ¹⁹. These ranged from full-time university degrees to evening courses. Subjects included childcare, business studies, accounting, sports therapy, nursing and tourism. A breakdown of students according to residency status is not yet available, but the following table illustrates the numbers being supported to participate in different types of courses - this support is for fees, transport, books and equipment.

University	Other 3rd level	Leaving Cert	Non-accredited courses

World Refugee Day: In 2005, 2006 and 2007, the DRP and the participants in the Drop-In Centre organized celebrations of World Refugee Day in June. These were run in conjunction with a number of local groups - DLRCC, SSP and the DLIADT. These events aimed to highlight the situation of people seeking asylum in Ireland and to showcase the positive contributions that they are making to Irish society.

Website development: In 2006, it was decided to set up a website to publicise the DRP's activities. One of the aims of the site was to provide further information about

¹⁸ DRP Annual Report, 2006.

¹⁹ Source: DRP organisational records, 2007



the specific situation of aged-out minors, for members of the general public, and also as a resource for media and relevant service providers. The site contains details about the activities run through the Drop-In Centre, and provides contact information for people who are interested in getting involved or in supporting the PLUS campaign. The site was designed by one of the participants in the Centre, who is being supported by the DRP to complete a course in media and website design. Launched towards the end of 2006, the site has, according to one volunteer, "proved very useful as a reference point for people who are interested in learning more about the DRP and the Centre". Further information is available at www.drp.ie .

Further activities connected with the Centre: It should be noted that while the Drop-In Centre is the focus of much of the DRP's work, volunteers with the group are also involved

in a number of activities that take place outside the Centre, but are organised through it. This includes ongoing outreach work and the provision of support to young people who attend the Centre. For example, volunteers meet with people who are doing educational courses and provide them with help with their course work throughout the week. In 2006, a one-to-one befriending scheme began and this has since expanded. Under this, individual volunteers befriend a number of young people. They maintain regular contact through phone calls and meet up off-site, either for social purposes or to provide specific support for medical and legal needs ²⁰. As this work does not strictly fall within the activities of the Drop-In Centre, it is not within the remit of this evaluation to examine its outcomes. However, it is important to note that contact and relationships between the volunteers and the participants are ongoing outside of the Centre. According to one volunteer, "these activities developed as a result of the Drop-In Centre, and make the



²⁰- Information gained from interviews with DRP volunteers, October 2007.

Centre more effective, because there is a follow-up throughout the week".

Key events in the history of the Drop-In Centre

2005:

- Old School House Hostel closes in April, thereby ending the weekly information clinics run by DRP volunteers;
- SSP and the CTC facilitate the DRP to establish a pilot Drop-In Centre for young people seeking asylum: premises are made available every Monday evening;
- DRP volunteers work to develop a programme of activities for the Monday evening sessions;
- The PLUS campaign links in with the Drop-In Centre, and a range of politicians and other organisations are invited to visit and learn more about the situation of SCSA and aged-out minors.

2006:

- Other organisations (Gardaí, IRC, TSP, etc) continue to link in with the Centre and to attend on a regular basis;
- The programme of activities includes talks, workshops and debates;
- Members of the PLUS campaign awarded a certificate by the Cathaoirleach as part of the Year of Citizenship through Education;
- The Centre links with other organisations, including DLRCC and SSP, to organise a celebration for World Refugee Day;
- A total of 36 participants are supported to attend educational courses;
- The DRP develops a website to publicise its activities, including the work of the Drop-In Centre.

2007:

- The Centre responds to the changing educational needs of participants by focusing on offering career guidance and assistance with enrolling in third-level courses; 41 young people are currently being supported in educational courses;
- Gardaí run a twelve-week "Get Wise" programme through the Centre;
- Participants take part in a digital media training course supported by SSP and the DLIADT, producing a ten-minute DVD about the Centre;
- The DVD is shown as part of the annual celebration for World Refugee Day, arranged by the Centre and



other local organisations;

- During the first ten months of the year, an average of 35 young people attends the Centre every Monday.

3.5 Discussion

- Since it began in 2005, the Centre has always had the broad aim of providing a venue for young asylum seekers where they can relax, socialise, access information and advice, and plan social and cultural activities.
- Specific actions for the Centre are not set out at the start of the year: this is as a result of the ever-changing needs and demographics of the clients. Several volunteers have stressed the need for flexibility in their activities, to provide the space to address issues as they arise.
- In both 2005 and 2006, the Centre was used as a meeting point where politicians and other relevant organisations could meet the young people and learn more about their situation in Ireland and the PLUS campaign. This was not a large feature of the Centre in 2007, mainly because of the general election, but there are plans to begin the visits again in 2008.
- A major change that has taken place since the Centre's inception is in the educational needs of participants. Many have moved from second-level into third-level education, with the result that more funding is required to support them in education. Volunteers also provide more access to careers guidance and assistance with enrolling in courses.
- Two educational programmes have also been run through the Centre in 2007: the Gardaí's "Get Wise" programme, and a digital media training course. Core activities continue to be the provision of one-to-one advice and information (both personal and with

SECTION 4: INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS IN THE DROP-IN CENTRE

In order to gather the views of participants about the Drop-In Centre, ten face-to-face interviews and two focus groups with a total of ten participants were conducted. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed and piloted with a participant who had been very involved in the Centre since its establishment. The data collection took place in the Centre over the course of six weeks (September to October 2007). This allowed participants to become familiar with the researcher and the aims of the evaluation, and also helped to provide access to respondents who did not attend every week.

It was decided that conducting the interviews in person would help to overcome any potential language or literacy barriers, and would also allow the opportunity to discuss any questions that the respondents might have about the evaluation. The aims of the evaluation were fully explained to each respondent, both in person and in writing. The fact that participation was entirely voluntary was stressed, and all respondents were told that no names would be used either in the draft or final reports. Efforts were made to ensure that a range of participants was interviewed: criteria included gender, nationality, length of time in Ireland, and situation within the asylum process.

4.1 Background information

As outlined, a total of ten participants were interviewed face-to-face. Of these, six were female and four were male. Two of the participants were 19, two were 20, three were 21, one was 22, and one was 23. Four were born in Nigeria, two in Angola, three in Kenya, and one in Eritrea. The lengths of time they had been living in Ireland ranged from one year and nine months to six years, with six having lived in Ireland for four years or more. Five respondents were awaiting a decision on their application, two had been granted humanitarian leave to remain, and three had refugee status. The length of time which they had been attending the Centre varied hugely: six of the participants had been coming to the Centre since the beginning in 2005 (three of whom were very instrumental in setting it up), while one had started coming only nine weeks previously. Of the others, one had come since late 2005, one since mid-2006, and one since the start of 2007.

Attendance at the Centre: When asked how they had heard about the Centre, four said that they had heard about it through friends. According to one, "I just heard from a friend of mine and I came. I just find, like, it's really nice and

you meet other people and you have friends, because I never knew anyone, I didn't have anyone I knew around."

Another respondent also stated that he had heard about it through word of mouth: "I can't remember who I heard about it from, but in the hostels, we all just went out together on Monday nights".

The connection with the previous outreach clinic held in the Old School House was also highlighted: several had been residents there. One respondent stated that his friends had lived there, and told him about the DRP, so he started going there to find out more, then began attending the Drop-In Centre when it opened. Three also talked about their involvement in setting it up; one discussed how he and other friends, in conjunction with the DRP, decided to start the PLUS campaign for lobbying for leave to remain for aged-out-minors. He talked of how they went to different hostels, initially to get people who had lived in the OSH to come to the new Centre to work on advancing this campaign.

Six of the respondents said that they come to the Centre every week; one said that she comes "every Monday. Because sometimes you just need to meet other people and talk to them. I always find it's good when you come here and meet other people. You don't feel lonely". One comes once or twice a month; two others were parents of young children, so could only come once a month or once every couple of months. One respondent stated that he can only come once every few months, as he has college and "there is unfortunately only one Monday in every week". Respondents were additionally asked how far they travel to come to the Centre. The responses indicate the distances that people are willing to travel to attend: only one lived in the Dún Laoghaire area, while four lived in the city centre, two in Bray, one in Blanchardstown, and two in Maynooth.

"Sometimes you just need to meet other people and talk to them. I always find it's good when you come here and meet other people. You don't feel lonely".

4.2 Services accessed through the Centre

Education: The respondents were asked about the type and nature of the services provided through the Centre. As noted previously, a large amount of the DRP's resources are focused on education, and all of the respondents stated that

they had received some type of assistance with this. Amongst the services identified were:

- Information about courses and careers guidance;
- Assistance with accessing and enrolling in courses;
- Funding for registration and fees;
- Money for books; and
- Bus passes.

Two respondents noted the importance of receiving help and guidance about the courses from volunteers. According to one, she had been encouraged to enrol in education through her participation in the Centre, saying that she wasn't doing anything, but the volunteers encouraged her to find a course, which she feels will be a good thing to help "keep myself busy".

"We have career guidance...I talked to [one of the volunteers] and we stayed a long time because I really was so confused, I didn't know what to do. So he helped me and they bring the brochures, so they always help us to think what we want to do...I was so confused, I really didn't know what to do at first".

One discussed how the DRP, through the Centre, had helped her with all her educational needs: "They paid for my course fees, and they're going to pay for my exam fees; they also give me a bus pass, then money for books; also, like, advice about the course: what I want to do, what's the best for me, which way to go".

Another talked of how he received both course fees and transport fees, and said that "that's really helped me a lot". Other respondents discussed how they had been helped to access courses such as French lessons, guitar lessons, English and maths classes, and computer classes.

Support within the asylum application process:

In terms of supports provided within the asylum application process, several respondents talked about receiving references and letters of support, and getting assistance with contacting lawyers. According to one, he encountered "various people just trying to give me heads up, so it was good". Two of the respondents had received refugee status before coming to the Centre, so never required any

assistance with this.

Talks and workshops: Participants identified a number of different talks and workshops they had attended in the Centre. These included:

- Visits by politicians;
- A number of talks held by the Gardaí (through the "Get Wise" programme);
- Films on the environment and climate change;
- Irish dancing lessons;
- Job interview preparations; and
- Digital media course run in conjunction with DLIADT in the first half of 2007.

In general, these events were noted as a positive thing. The involvement of the Gardaí was mentioned in particular: "when the Gardaí is coming, that's very interesting. They tell you all the parts of the law, the things we like to get to understand".

Additionally, one stated that since she started coming to the Centre, "I've been able to learn one or two things here from the talks and shows...that's really enlightened my knowledge of the asylum process".

Emotional support: Respondents were asked whether they would talk to volunteers in the Centre if they had problems and wanted advice. All said that they definitely would. Several mentioned the fact that the volunteers were always ready to provide help: according to one, "Sometimes it's hard to talk about problems. They're all the time ready: even if you don't talk to them, they talk to you. Even if you're smiling they'll ask you if you're sure you're ok, and get you to talk about anything that's bothering you".

This was echoed by another respondent, who said that she definitely found the emotional support to be useful: "they will ask me for it, and they will help me for it".

"Even though you don't ask, they would know something is going on and keep on, you know, getting at you until you actually tell them what's up...one way or the other, they always find out, and then they

help you".

Another noted how support was always available from the volunteers: "sometimes you just feel a little bit confused, and maybe you might be a bit depressed, and if you come here and maybe talk to [one of the volunteers], she's really nice. And if you talk to her, she will just show you someone to talk to and she will make sure you have someone to talk to". Another said that she has all the volunteers' phone numbers, and gets in touch with them any time she feels she needs support or advice.

Socialising: All of the respondents said that the Centre was a good place for socialising. One felt that it should not focus on providing a place for people to meet up, as this was already available in the hostels. He felt that the volunteers should instead concentrate on providing more direct assistance for people who need it. However, the other nine respondents felt that the social aspects of the Centre were very positive: one said that in the Centre, "everyone has the same problems: it's a comfort, a good place. People are close. It doesn't only help with material things, but also with socialising".

Further comments made about the social functions of the Centre are worth emphasising, as they show the important role that it plays in people's social lives. As noted previously, one of the aims of the Centre has been, from the outset, to provide a safe, neutral place in which young people can meet up. One respondent said that before the Centre opened, people would hang out in hostels but not talk to each other: this changed once they began to attend on Monday evenings. Another said that: "here you meet people of the same calibre; they've got the same kind of problems you've got". For another respondent, the Centre provided a good way of relaxing and forgetting about problems. Three of the respondents mentioned that they had made a lot of friends through coming; one stated that she didn't really know anyone in Ireland before she started attending, while another stated that "I've met most of my friends here".

"When you're here, you just forget about the situation in the hostel, you forget about your process...everyone is laughing, everyone is happy, so it's a good environment to be in".

Bus passes: Finally, bus passes were mentioned by nine of the respondents as being a very useful service provided through the Centre. Several stated that they received these through the TSP, and that it made a big difference for them in

helping them to get out to the Centre and to travel around Dublin: "sometimes you don't have enough - a bus ticket can cost 6 euro out of ?19.10. Then you don't have enough to buy a Coke or do anything much else".

One told of how the provision of the bus tickets helped her to keep coming when she was moved from Dún Laoghaire: "when they closed the hostel [where she used to live], I was in Drumcondra and I had to come all the way, and [one of the volunteers] used to help us with the bus every Monday night...it was a long trip, but sometimes I just wanted to come down and meet other people instead of being closed all the time".


Accessing other organisations: When asked about other organisations they'd met through the Centre, respondents listed the Gardaí, the IRC, the TSP and various politicians, including the Minister for Education and the Cathaoirleach. Seven of the respondents specifically mentioned that the presence of the Gardaí was a very useful and positive feature of the Centre. Several of them referred to the fact that, in their countries of birth, they would have found it difficult to relate to or to trust the police. Through their ongoing presence in the Centre, the Gardaí have helped to change these perceptions and to build up new relationships. It is worth highlighting some of the responses to illustrate the positive impact that their presence has had.

"We all have our own views of police in our countries...now people have confidence in the guards - they offer lots of services."

"The guards are friends now. The police weren't my best friends before - I had bad perceptions before."

"The Gardaí, like, they tell us that we shouldn't be scared of them, we should be able to approach them. They tell us what's wrong, and what we're supposed to do...in case you come across any racism, they tell us how to report it."

"When you see the guards outside, you're scared. When you get to know one of them, you know they're all human beings, that they have feelings as well, you know, and that they have a family... it breaks that barrier, you know, of 'this is me, the Guards, I'm very



powerful, I can do everything to you and you can't do anything', but it breaks that whole kind of relationship down, and makes it an informal one, and that's very suitable."

Another respondent talked of how meeting people from other organisations was very helpful with finding out more about Ireland: "It's useful, because you know when you come from a foreign place, you don't know many rules or things that you're supposed to be doing, because you don't know you have to do it...you get a lot of information and hear about a lot of things what's happening". The IRC and the TSP were both mentioned as being useful sources of information.

Voluntary work: Four of the respondents said that they had become involved in doing voluntary work through going to the Centre. This included involvement in: local activities, such as the DRP itself; the Garda Síochána's Cultural Diversity Committee; giving talks with ethnic liaison officers and with NGOs; working in charity shops, and volunteering with the Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures. Three others were involved in volunteer placements that they had organised themselves, including working with local community groups in the city centre on running a festival and setting up a radio station; working with children living in the inner city on a summer project, and working with an international development NGO.

The importance of the Centre and the DRP in setting up these connections was highlighted by two of the respondents. One highlighted how useful her voluntary work had been for helping her to become more established in her life in Ireland: she heard about volunteering

"through the Centre, because I didn't used to do anything, so they tell me I have to go out and do something, and mix with people to get more information. I was a lone parent, so it was only me and my child, so they tell me every time I have to go out...It was useful for me...every time they say to me that they are not the only Irish people in Ireland, I have to go out and meet different people and meet Irish people, not just only them".

"If it hadn't been for the DRP, I wouldn't have got involved with the other groups. It's a springboard - you can go anywhere from here".

4.3 Overall views about the Centre

Other centres for young asylum seekers/refugees:

Respondents were asked whether they knew of any other centres like the Drop-In. Eight of them said that they did not, while two mentioned other places: the Rainbow Centre in the south inner city and St. Peters in Phibsboro. Both of these were noted as good centres, but it was stated that they provide services for all people seeking asylum, not specifically for young people. When asked whether they would like to attend a centre nearer where they lived, if it were set up by another group, only two said that they would. It is interesting to note that one respondent had been attending the Drop-In Centre for the shortest amount of time (nine weeks), while the other was a parent who lived on the opposite side of the city.

A number of reasons were given for why people would prefer to keep coming to Dún Laoghaire. These included:

- The supports available in the area that have been built up over time (relationships with the community, the Gardaí, local politicians, etc);
- The fact that the Drop-In caters exclusively for young people, whereas they might just be one small group in another centre;
- Concerns about the motivations behind other Centres: "not all the Centres are really genuine, and most just use us";
- The good atmosphere that exists in the Centre: "I'd like this one better...because the people are really nice and very helpful";
- The relationships that have been built up over time: "because it's like a family here. Everyone is happy being here, being with the people you trust and know. People who have been with you through tough times, you know, they are still there. It's good to be around them. If any other people want to set something up like that, well, it's too late for them because everyone is here."; and
- Individual volunteers and the help they provide: "Since I come to Ireland, they're the people I know...so at least for three years and a half, they know everything about me. If you go to new people, you've to start telling your history from the beginning"

This last point was highlighted by several people, one of whom said that her attendance at another centre would depend on the people who were managing it. If it were the DRP, she felt that then maybe people would go, "but if it's different people who you don't know, you prefer the same place". Finally, another felt that "we need to appreciate the volunteers, who've always been here for us".

Spreading the word: Respondents were asked whether they would tell other people to come to the Centre, and why. All of them said that they would, and do. Among the reasons given for doing this were:

- "It's a stepping stone to get out of your comfort zone. You need to take the vital step and start doing something. It helps people a lot - it's brilliant."
- "Yes, I tell people, like, if I knew we had the same problems together. I say 'there's a place I go and I find it very helpful, you may be able to find help there as well'...and I know it has helped some of my friends, which I know of, so..."
- "[My friends] always have their routine to come all the time. It's just something, you just want to be there."
- "It's the best. There's no other place they can go to get the same kind of things we get here, the opportunities we get here, there's no other place, you know."

Another stated that he recommends that people come because the DRP "get results". And another mentioned the integration aspects of the Centre, saying that she tells other people she knows from her country of birth to come to the Centre to meet more Irish people, and that she invites Irish volunteers to celebrations for her national day, etc. One participant specifically mentioned referring a friend whose asylum application had been turned down, saying that the system keeps changing and that the volunteers are the best people to ask for advice and help.

Effects on life in Ireland: When asked whether the Centre had made their life in Ireland more easy, all respondents said that it had. The ways in which it had helped included:

- **Personal development:** "In terms of how I make decisions, how I react to things. It's changed me a lot in my personal life - I'm more accepting now. The

place has opened a lot of doors for me".

According to another, "actually I find it difficult to associate with people and tolerate people, but coming here, you're able to know more people...I think that's really helped me, one way or the other, in where I stay now."

- **Emotional support:** "When you have someone to rely on, you're not by yourself. When you're hoping someone will lift you because you're already down...there are small things that help to lift you, and it's good to know so many people are behind you. It's a comfort. It wouldn't be so easy to be here alone."

Another stated that "There are sometimes, like when I didn't have my status, that you just feel like life is so hard. You think you're all alone, but when you come here, you find other people in the same situation, and you feel 'oh, ok, I'm not the only one'. So you feel much better that way".

This was echoed by another respondent, who said that she felt very lonely during her first Christmas in Ireland, but when she came to a party in the Centre, "it made me feel warm in my heart, being with people who care".

- **Information:** "Because there were a few things I never knew about until I came down here." Once you get more details about life in Ireland, "then you start using them and applying them, and things get easier for you."

- **Access to education:** "If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have gone to college. I would be at home now."

4.4 Suggestions for the future

The respondents were asked whether they would like to change anything about the Centre, or could suggest any things they'd like to see introduced in the future. Five felt that nothing should change ("I wouldn't change anything. Not a point, not a comma", "everything's perfect at the moment", and "the Centre is much more than a social thing - it gives people opportunities"), while the remainder highlighted a number of possible areas.

- Encouraging people to come on a regular basis, even

when they get leave to remain or refugee status. It was noted that "once they have leave to remain, it's a new chapter in their lives. It's a totally different world", but also felt that these people have very particular support needs that must be addressed. Another felt that some people only come sporadically because they feel like they're not progressing their asylum applications. However, she stated that they should come more regularly, as the application for leave to remain was outside the hands of people in the Centre, who could only do a certain amount to help within the current system;

- Focusing more on providing advice, financial support and orientation, rather than being a social outlet;
- Providing more ice-breaker activities, which would help to bring in new people, or people who are shyer about participating: "at the moment, we just come here and chat, you know, try to make things more intellectual. But sometimes we just need to rest the brain, and just have some fun".

The possibility of having more young Irish people coming to the Centre was raised, and all the respondents felt that this would be a good development. One said that "I don't think it's a good idea [to be] just for people with the same issues because most Irish people don't really know what's going on in this system...I think it's better if they can come here and learn one or two things, not just because we are asylum seekers, but just to learn the process and know what it is and how we feel being asylum seekers."

It was felt by one respondent that Irish people might initially be intimidated about coming in to the Centre, but that it would be a good way to encourage them to meet people from different backgrounds. However, another felt that "not many Irish people are interested in our situation", and so might not be interested in attending. One person said that he is "looking for integration" and would like to connect with more Irish people and see activities that would bring people together. The possibilities for encouraging integration were echoed by another respondent, who said that "Everybody should come: it's better for people to get to know each other. Because if you don't know someone, you feel like they're different from you...it bridges a gap, so it's better: the more, the merrier."

And another stated that "The more you get mixed, the more you can integrate and you know what Irish

people do."

A number of people mentioned that some young Irish students had come to the Centre in the past. However, they all said that they didn't know why they had stopped coming. Their age was also mentioned as a factor: "So it would be much more better, you know, if Irish youths of our age come down here, those that would understand what we're going through. Sometimes those that come are quite young... so they wouldn't really understand, and they would be quite shy, and not very outspoken. But if you had people of the same age...they all know what it's like to be an adult, and to be restricted from doing the things you want to do...having them present there, we can then integrate properly with them, with their help."

4.5 Further comments

The respondents were also asked what the best things were about the Centre. Four people mentioned individual volunteers, with one stating that the best thing was "the relationship we have with the volunteers, and between ourselves - these relationships make things work and make them easier."

He stated that in the Centre, there is "love, respect and affection". Another highlighted the advice that he receives from volunteers: "Before I make a decision, I call them and ask for advice".

One said that the talks were the best thing, saying that they "help us to learn about different aspects of life...not only about life as asylum seekers". Another mentioned the social aspects of the Centre, and the opportunities it offered to meet other young people and Irish volunteers.

One participant said that it was difficult to put into words what he liked the most about the Centre: "The best things are the things that can't actually be said, but are things that are felt...there's a joy, you feel some joy; you feel happiness. There are things that I can't really say, but can only feel, and those are the best things for me".

And finally, the respondents were asked if they had any further comments they would like to make about the Centre. One stated that it would be amazing if the Centre were able to provide them all with fees for their education.

Another said that he would like the Centre to grow into a proper youth centre, which would be a great place for meeting other young Irish people. Four expressed specific thanks to the volunteers:

- "Thanks to them for being here for us...thanks and God bless."
- "Thanks for giving us the place"
- "I just feel that the Centre is good and tell them to don't get tired, don't give up on us. I hope they'll still be continuing with it!"
- "I think they should continue doing the same job, I think it's brilliant. And I thank whoever is associated with them, and I really appreciate it. I always come here on Monday for some reason, I don't even understand why! Sometimes I'm tired, but I just want to come here."

4.6 Focus group findings

To supplement the findings of the face-to-face interviews, two focus groups were also held with a total of 10 participants. In the first, five were male and one was female. In the second, two were male and two female. Two were aged 17, five were 20, one was 22, and one was 23. Six were from Nigeria, two were from Angola, one was from Guinea and one was from Eritrea. Of the 10, nine were awaiting a decision about their applications, while one had received leave to remain. Four said they go to the centre every week, two go twice a month, and four go once a month.

The participants were asked to discuss the types of things that they do in the Centre. Their responses mirrored those from the face-to-face interviews: amongst the things listed were meeting people, socializing and having fun, getting to know how things work in Ireland, meeting people from organizations like the Gardaí, and participating in workshops, courses and talks. When asked about the things with which they get help in the Centre, the following were listed:

- Support for social life, support for school, support for college;
- Education (get help enrolling in school);
- Support with applications for asylum (through reference letters and campaigns);

- Funding (for school and domestic needs);
- Getting involved in the community (integration); and
- Emotional support (encouragement and motivation).

The food provided on Monday evenings was also mentioned as being very important.

All participants said that they tell other people to come to the Centre, with the reasons for this including so that others could also access help and could get to know "how to integrate into the community." They stated that "it's about getting everyone together in the Centre. Getting to talk to each other, knowing people, meeting people from your own country". It was also stated that the Centre "joins people together" and offers a good opportunity to meet other people, especially during school or other course holidays. In discussing the issues further, one participant said that "you have to bring other people to benefit from it as well...what they're doing here is giving people a second chance".

In terms of integration, the Centre was felt to help with meeting people directly, and also with providing assistance with going to school, which in itself encourages integration. Additionally, one participant noted how coming to the Centre and meeting Irish people "also helps with humanitarian leave to remain, because there's a space allotted for Irish people who know you, who can give you a reference. If you're able to integrate properly, you will at least get a good reference."

Participants were asked whether there was anything they'd like to change about the Centre, and listed the following:

- Punctuality (on our side)
- Change (in activities)
- Get us working in teams
- People only coming in when they're in trouble or need something
- Venue can be a bit noisy and busy sometimes, and it would be good to have more space
- New people should be taught about Ireland, its history, politics and customs.

It is interesting to note that the issue of punctuality, and of people arriving late to the Centre, was discussed by these participants, showing that they are aware that it can cause problems sometimes. One participant echoed the feelings raised by one or two people in the face-to-face interviews, saying that people were "pretty much coming when they need something, like escorting someone to GNIB." When asked about the type of activities people would like to do, there were few specific ideas, just a general feeling that some new ones would be good. As outlined, one suggestion was to provide people who have recently arrived with an introduction to life in Ireland.

They all felt that it would be good to meet more young Irish people, aged between 18 and 25: "yes, that would be great. If they would like to meet us." Again, the younger students who came before were mentioned, but no-one was sure why they had stopped coming. They said that they would bring their Irish friends, but "some are a bit scared of coming to a place where they feel like they're the only ones, like they're the odd ones out." "Intimidated". "Yeah, so that's a huge factor as well."

Finally, participants were asked what they thought was the best thing about the Centre. Again, the volunteers were mentioned several times, with their openness being highlighted frequently, along with the fact that they "always try to help you and motivate you". Cultural diversity and getting the opportunity to meet people from many different countries was identified as another good thing. Other areas highlighted were "being around people you love, getting new ideas about your life, and most important of all, help." Several mentioned that they had received references for their asylum applications, and one said that he had received one when he was looking for a job. One participant stated that "It's a huge investment as well in our future, because I suppose they are investing a huge amount of time and everything in the future, so that's a thing that is really outstanding".

4.7 Discussion

Respondents from both the face-to-face interviews and the focus groups outlined a wide range of areas in which they had received help through the Centre. These included:

- Assistance with accessing and participating in educational courses, supports for their **asylum applications**, taking part in **talks and workshops**

on a range of topics, receiving **emotional support**, an **accessing other relevant organisations**, either directly or through referrals.

- The **social aspects** of the Centre were also highlighted, with participants noting that it offers them an opportunity to make new friends, to meet other people who are in a similar situation, and to simply hang around and not have to think about everyday problems and concerns.
- Of the ten respondents in the face-to-face interviews, only two said that they would attend a similar Centre if it were set up by another group nearer to where they live. The responses of the other eight participants demonstrated the close relationships that have been built up between DRP volunteers and participants over the years, and highlighted the **high levels of trust** that exist between them. It appears that this is a key factor in the success of the Centre, and it additionally illustrates the sense of **ownership** that participants who attend the Centre have.
- The fact that all respondents said that they encourage other young people to attend shows that they find it to be very helpful, not only with the provision of educational and emotional support, but also with **learning more about Ireland and integrating into Irish society**: according to one, the Centre helps people to know "how to integrate into the community".
- All respondents found the contact that the Centre offers with **representatives from other organisations** to be useful; representatives from the Gardaí, the IRC and the TSP were specifically mentioned. In particular, people talked about how the Gardaí's regular presence and the "Get Wise" programme that they ran has helped to break down barriers that may have otherwise existed between them and the police. According to participants, this has very much helped to change their previous perceptions about the police force, and to see the Gardaí as an organisation that is there to assist them, rather than something of which to be wary.

There was a widespread feeling that participating in the Centre had had very positive effects on their lives in Ireland:

- Some participants talked of how the Centre had helped



them to become more **tolerant and accepting** in their everyday lives;

- They also discussed how important the **emotional support** offered through the Centre was for them during difficult times, and how it helped them to feel less alone in Ireland;
- The information that they have received on Monday evenings had, according to a number of respondents, helped them to learn more about Ireland and **made their lives here easier**;
- Others talked of how they would not be involved in any **educational programmes**, if it were not for the support and advice they had received through the Centre.

When asked about anything they would like to change about the Centre, several of the participants said they felt that nothing needed to be changed. Specific suggestions that came out of the one-to-one interviews included:

- Having **more activities** that would help to bring new arrivals into the group;
- The **difficulties with encouraging people to**

SECTION 5: INTERVIEWS WITH DRP VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE CENTRE



In order to capture the feedback of DRP volunteers and organisations that support the Centre, two sets of questionnaires were devised. One was administered to a total of four DRP volunteers: two of these were face-to-face, and two through questionnaires. Interviews also took place with representatives of Southside Partnership and of the Community training Centre, both of which, as previously outlined, have been instrumental in establishing and facilitating the Monday evening sessions. The interviews for both groups covered topics such as the nature of the respondents' involvement with the Centre, what they perceive its roles and functions to be, how the activities have developed since its establishment, the ways in which it assists young people and encourages integration, and any suggestions that they had for possible future developments. In this section, the responses of the volunteers and the supporting organisations are set out and discussed.

5.1 DRP Volunteers

Activities conducted in the Centre: Two respondents were founder members of the DRP, one a volunteer for two-and-a-half years, and one for one-and-a-half years. Three had been involved with the Centre since it was set up. Activities with which the volunteers were involved in the Centre included the provision of one-to-one advice, providing financial support for people in education and for pressing welfare needs, assisting with running workshops, organising speakers, and publicising the situation of young asylum seekers. In terms of the process for deciding the activities for the Centre, all highlighted the need to react to situations as they arise, with one stating that "the process is flexible but very much 'needs' based and has a variety of different information sessions and programmes".

They noted a number of issues raised by young people on an ongoing basis, including their insecurities within the asylum process and the sense of instability to which this gives rise. Educational needs, medical needs and problems relating to accommodation were also frequently brought up. When asked how they attempt to address these needs through the Centre, volunteers mentioned the provision of one-to-one support and of referrals to relevant agencies, all of which must be done within the constraints of the asylum application system. One respondent highlighted the need to empower clients to address problems themselves, and to support them in doing this: "As volunteers, we'd be very aware that we don't want to create a culture of dependency".

In terms of issues that they would like to address through the Centre, but aren't in a position to do so, all of the responses related to problems that arise for people out of being within the asylum process. These included stress, depression, the low weekly allowance for people seeking asylum, and dispersal around the country. The difficulties for people moving from direct provision when they receive residency were mentioned, and it was suggested that a good way to address this would be through opening a "step down" facility for young people, where they could live for up to six months and where volunteers could assist them with budgeting, learning to cook, and looking for employment. One volunteer also said that "if we'd a bigger place and loads more people, and could do it two or three times a week, and had access to unlimited funding, that might make it easier!".

How the Centre operates: In terms of the Centre's role and functions, all respondents noted its importance as a place for people to meet, socialise, and receive information and support. Its benefits were listed as the fact that it provides social and educational supports, in a relaxed environment. Furthermore, the way in which it offers participants a sense of permanency and security through its regular sessions was brought up: "It also provides a certain amount of certainty in an otherwise very uncertain time for these young people". Reasons why the volunteers believed that the Centre works well included the fact that it is an "open, accepting, non-judgmental" environment. According to one volunteer, the sessions may often appear to be very chaotic to outsiders, as people come and go throughout the evening. She noted that there is a lack of rules and regulations, and that participants can socialize as they want: "it just seems to work, because of that or in spite of that, it's very hard to say which". In addition, she felt that the young people are free to express themselves as they wish, and that they do not, in general, have many opportunities in which to do this.

Engaging with other organisations: The opportunities that the Centre offers for engaging with other organisations was seen as being very beneficial by all respondents. It was noted that networking and developing relationships with others has very much helped to raise the profile of the client group. Through these contacts, the volunteers can also provide referrals to relevant agencies, if they are not in a position to tackle the issues. The relationship built up with the Gardaí was specifically mentioned by all respondents: according to one, the "guards are a classic example [of a good relationship] - they do lots of work. They've broken



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down huge amounts of boundaries." However, one respondent also felt that it was important to maintain a critical distance from other organizations, to a certain point: "I think we need to keep our autonomy, and maintain our own ambience, which is unique, in my opinion".

Integration: The volunteers all felt that the Centre helps to promote integration, but to differing degrees. One noted how relationships are formed between volunteers and participants, and how these carry over to activities other than those that take place on Monday nights. Another discussed how young people get involved in local activities, such as the Festival of World Cultures, which helps to make them more involved in the local community. The two-way nature of integration was also brought up, in terms of how the Centre both encourages young people to learn more about Irish society, and introduces Irish people to other cultures through their engagement with the young people. However, one felt that "we would need to have more young Irish people attending if we really wanted integration to flourish".

There were somewhat mixed responses to the idea of having more young Irish people attending on a regular basis. It was felt that "ownership should rest with those seeking

asylum", but that young Irish people could attend for planned activities. One difficulty that was raised was the problem of consistency in terms of attendance, "which can have a negative impact on individuals who form a bond". It was also noted that it can be difficult to find the "right" people - those who are willing to be very flexible and to understand the particular situation of participants and how this can impact on their lives. Additionally, one respondent felt that bringing young Irish people into the Centre could be one part of activities, but not the main one, as the participants "should be able to go out and integrate themselves". She felt that attending educational courses provides one of the best avenues for this to take place, and that the Centre can more usefully focus on supporting people to become part of, and stay within, the educational system.

Participants' involvement in setting the agenda:

In terms of the young people's involvement in driving the agenda for activities, some issues were raised in relation to encouraging this to happen. Previously, the young people formed a committee to plan activities and were facilitated in doing this by a volunteer. However, this petered out after about two months. According to one respondent, "they weren't ready for it - they are in such a state of flux and

uncertainty that it's very hard for them to think outside their immediate concerns and needs, never mind the difficulty of planning and organising Monday night for the Drop-In".

However, she felt that as they get older and more settled, this will become easier. The need to have a core group that manages and plans activities was mentioned by another volunteer, who felt that the volunteers can best provide this at the moment. One respondent stated that "I think the young people are encouraged and facilitated in driving the agenda and would always be consulted regarding the activities. They may at times need encouragement to make suggestions and follow through on actions".

Suggestions for the future: A number of suggestions for ways in which the Centre could be changed were raised:

- One respondent felt that the participants should be more proactive about organizing and setting the agenda for the activities: it was noted that this had not been hugely successful when tried in the past, but that it should be attempted again;
- The possibility of having more Irish people coming in was raised, but it was also noted that there could be some difficulties with doing this on a formal, structured basis, as the needs of the clients change frequently;
- Having access to the Internet during Monday evenings was highlighted as a positive improvement that could be made; and
- The need for formal policies, procedures and safety statements was brought up.

Key learning from how the Centre works: When asked what they thought other groups could learn from how the Centre operates, two highlighted the successes of a fluid and casual approach that it not over-controlled. It was also noted that this should be supported by a solid core group, to oversee activities. One volunteer had the following recommendations: "Have a combination of organised activities, free time and one-to-one sessions. Be open to suggestions. Don't be afraid to adapt to changing needs & aspirations". The commitment and consistency of the volunteers was also highlighted as being a key factor for success. And the participants' engagement with the sessions was noted: "Above all, the young people appear to have a sense of ownership of the place on Monday nights and I think this is crucial to its success and regular attendance".

Finally, several of the volunteers brought up how much they personally have gained through their involvement with the participants, mentioning the learning they have experienced through working with the young people.

According to one volunteer, his involvement has been an "eye-opener to me for opening up the world of asylum seekers: most Irish people don't know about it and would be horrified. They're second-class citizens effectively, and they shouldn't be".

5.2 Organisations that Support the Centre

Three interviews were conducted with representatives of Southside Partnership and the Community Training Centre, which are the main organisations that support the Centre. Two were conducted in person and one by written questionnaire. The types of support that the organisations provide includes facilitating the establishment of the Centre, providing the premises, funding activities such as the digital media training course, and attending the Centre to provide individual support to participants. Again, respondents saw the key role of the Centre as providing a space for socialising and for receiving help and support: "It's a place for people to meet, a contact point. They can access information and support there, and it's also a fun place to be".

One felt that the model is "tailor-made for participants" and that its activities are structured, but in a loose way, which is "very suitable for the target group".

Engagement with other organisations: In terms of the involvement of other organisations, respondents felt that this was very beneficial, and that it provides a good place for NGOs to meet and network. The involvement of the Gardaí was again praised, with their work there identified as being very helpful in breaking down barriers. It was also highlighted how the Community Training Centre is very interested in being available for use for members of the community outside its regular hours. As a result of the positive outcomes of the Monday evening sessions, the possibility of opening the CTC to other groups is being considered. One respondent noted that "it is an excellent forum to establish and maintain interagency links...it is important to keep a community (community development)

ethos as this facilitates integration".

Integration: The Centre was viewed as being a good way to encourage integration, through the fact that the volunteers' connections may offer participants opportunities to which they would not otherwise have had access. The ways in which participants get involved in local activities was discussed: "Some of the young people were very involved in the Festival of World Cultures and they are all encouraged to attend community events for performance, fund raising, general participation and enjoyment". Additionally, it was noted that the educational opportunities offered by the Centre, whether informal or formal, also encourage people to become involved in activities that can assist with integration. A key factor for the success of integration initiatives was identified as being the "open attitudes" of people in the DRP and in local organizations towards getting involved in activities. The volunteers' belief in the ethos of integration was also highlighted as being very important. On an organisational level, the fact that records are maintained of each individual who attended was identified as an example of good practice that helps each individual to receive the specific support they need.

Benefits for participants: In terms of the benefits for young people who attend, the educational opportunities they are offered was brought up. The fact that volunteers work to give participants something that stimulates them, and to give them hope, was raised. It was felt that the Centre's successes stem largely from its openness and from the relationships between volunteers and participants: "this is a difficult issue to articulate, as it can be quite intangible, but it seems to be critical". The fact that the volunteers recognize and respond to the difficult situation in which people find themselves was discussed, as was their willingness to tolerate the way in which participants arrive late. According to one respondent, "such regular and high attendance among the young people is proof in itself that needs are being met and that this service is very much needed and appreciated".

Suggestions for the future: Suggestions for future developments included:

- The need to ensure that policies and procedures are clearly articulated and mainstreamed (child protection, etc). It was felt that this could help with the sustainability of the project. At present, the work is very dependant on key volunteers, and there could be concerns about what might happen if they moved on;
- The diversity of needs and backgrounds of those

attending was brought up, and it was suggested that specific training for volunteers in addressing these could be of benefit;

- The possibility of the DRP taking on paid staff to support activities was raised, but some concerns were highlighted as to whether this would change the dynamic of the way the Centre works;
- Creating and facilitating links between participants and young Irish people was mentioned: it was suggested that this could possibly be explored in conjunction with students in DLIADT; and
- The possibility that the Centre might in the future be incorporated as part of a space for local services that focus on all migrants was also mentioned.

5.3 Discussion

As highlighted by both DRP volunteers and organisations that support the Centre, a wide range of activities is offered through the Centre. These include the provision of emotional and financial support, assistance with education, and facilitating socialising between the participants.

- The importance of having a **flexible approach** towards activities was repeatedly brought up, in recognition of the particular situation and needs of participants as a result of their being within the asylum process.
- Several respondents noted that while it may sometimes appear to newcomers that the Monday evening sessions are unstructured, there is a **loose underlying structure** and that the lack of firm rules and regulations is possibly a very important factor in contributing to the Centre's success.

All respondents highlighted the positive benefits of involving a range of organisations and groups in the Centre.

- These included: helping to raise the profile of young asylum seekers, assisting with the **provision of referrals** to other agencies, and **building relationships** between the participants and organisations such as the Gardaí.
- It was noted that the Centre is positively viewed by the Community Training Centre, who regard it as a model

for potentially making the premises available to other community groups in the future.

- In general, both groups of respondents felt that the Centre **helps to contribute towards integration** in a number of ways. This included the relationships formed between participants and volunteers, the ways that participants are encouraged to get involved in local activities, and the fact that it facilitates participants to attend educational courses where, it was felt, they themselves can become more involved in Irish society.
- As mentioned by one volunteer, **empowering young people to make their own decisions** is critical to ensuring that they are able to participate in life in Ireland.

Regarding suggestions for the future, areas raised included:

- Encouraging participants to be **more proactive about organising activities** for Monday evenings; although this had not been fully successful in the past, it was felt that it should be attempted again.
- The importance of having **established policies** on all aspects of running the Centre was mentioned, and the need for **specific training for volunteers** to assist them in addressing all the issues raised by participants was discussed.
- It was also felt that having **access to the internet** on Monday evenings would be a positive development.
- While the idea of involving more young Irish people in the Centre was broadly welcomed, there were some concerns as to how this could be best approached, in order to ensure that it would be sustainable and would not become the main focus of the Centre. As noted, it was felt that the best way to encourage real and sustainable integration is through **facilitating young people to become directly involved in activities themselves**, whether through education or other social activities.
- The idea of bringing the Centre within **broader services for migrants** was raised, were such a centralised service to become available in the area in the future.

As established in the interviews and focus groups with



participants in the Centre, the **close relationships** and ties that have developed between volunteers and young people were very evident. The volunteers talked of how much they had learned through their involvement with participants, and how it had facilitated their integration with new communities in Ireland. The difficulties for young people arising from their situation within the asylum application process were continually referred to, including the fact that participants are now dispersed to accommodation centres throughout the city and beyond, which can make it hard for them to travel to the Centre on a regular basis.

Representatives from organisations that support the Centre also raised the particular difficulties and pressures for participants, but noted the commitment and dedication of the volunteers to trying to address these as far as possible. As highlighted previously, it was felt that their **flexibility and openness have been key** to the Centre's continu-

SECTION SIX: INTERVIEWS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED WITH THE CENTRE

Interviews were conducted with representatives from four organisations that are involved with and support the work of the Centre: the Gardaí, the Irish Refugee Council, the Transition Supports Project, and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council (DLRCC). Three of these were conducted in person, and one written response was also received. Three of the respondents had been involved with the Centre since its establishment, two of whom had also attended the information clinics in the Old School House. One had been involved for five months, although her organisation had linked in with the group since its inception. Two stated that they attend nearly every week, one attended about once a month, and one had visited on two occasions, in addition to linking in with the group for external events.

6.1 Role and functions of the Centre

When asked what they perceived the Centre's role and functions to be, the respondents highlighted a number of areas including (1) the provision of information, support and referrals; (2) socialising and networking; (3) mentoring and empowerment of participants; (4) providing an avenue for engagement with the group for Irish service providers, and; (5) offering individual interventions and advocacy. One respondent felt that the exact role was "not so easy to define" and that part "is the provision of community and emotional support...part of it is mentoring and empowerment, support with educational plans and other referrals", which highlights the multi-faceted nature of the supports and activities provided. Another talked of the need for the Centre to come into existence after the closure of the Old School House, and of the importance of ensuring that this avenue of providing support for young asylum seekers was continued.

6.2 Involvement with the Centre

The respondents were involved in the Centre in a variety of ways. For example, the Gardaí have been involved both through their informal presence on a regular basis and through giving talks and running the "Get Wise" programme in the Centre in 2007. Others highlighted how their involvement has included giving information and helping with referrals and links to other agencies, where necessary. The representative from the TSP noted how they worked very well together with the DRP on the provision of bus passes, via the Centre. People came in to their office with a letter or referral from the DRP stating that they were involved in

education or some form of social activities, and were then given a bus pass to encourage their continued involvement in these activities.

Among the benefits identified were the opportunities it offers to link directly with participants, who may otherwise be a difficult target group to reach. According to one respondent, "for ourselves, it's a way for us to link in on a continuous basis to the ethnic minorities. In that sense, it's been good because sometimes it's very hard to link in on a somewhat structured basis." Others felt that their presence on a continual basis helped to establish relationships with the participants, and to show how their organisations were committed to working with them.

Access to participants through the Centre also helps the organisations to identify priority areas for their work: "it has to be a priority to have direct consultation with young people and to have the reality check that is their direct situations. To have better awareness of their situations and to help with referrals, but also to have a sense of...their opinions in informing our priorities." It was noted that the Centre provides a relaxed and informal setting within which to interact with participants, where participants possibly feel freer to discuss their situation than they would if they were in their accommodation centres: "In the Drop-In, I think there's a freedom, which is essential if you want to know what's really happening". This was echoed by another respondent, who talked of how attending the Centre could help to identify issues of concern to participants that could then be raised by her organisation at a wider level.

The Centre also offers organisations the opportunity to informally meet other service providers who are working with the target group: "it's also a way for us to network with other voluntary organisations and individuals that assist in [the area of] cultural diversity". Additionally, three of the respondents highlighted how the Centre gives them the opportunity to make announcements to the group about issues that might be of interest to them, and to provide them with information directly.

6.3 Integration

All of the respondents stated that the Centre helps to contribute towards integration. A number of ways in which it does so were noted, including the interaction it encourages between the participants and the local community. One person stated that "it also exposes the

local community to the foreign communities that are currently living in Ireland. The Drop-In Centre itself does not discourage outsiders from visiting the Centre, and that, I find, is great: it's not a closed shop".

The more formal aspects of integration were also highlighted, in terms of the talks and the information they provide people about life in Ireland, especially through those delivered by the ethnic liaison Gardaí. It was felt that this can be very important for people who do not yet have status or leave to remain, as it gives them "hope and guidance" for planning for their futures in Ireland. The Garda representative echoed what was said by the young people in noting that their presence in uniform in the Centre helps participants to get to know the organisation: "That alone breaks down barriers and builds bridges. It also helps and aids them to integrate, and for us to integrate with each other, I suppose. In that sense, it can only be a win-win situation".

One highlighted how the relationship between the volunteers and the young people is a key aspect to facilitating integration. He noted how people may become isolated within the asylum process and noted that "integration may mean being taken out of that cocoon and taken into the community, but if the community is not ready, you cannot force it upon them. Those seven, eight, nine dedicated people [the volunteers] will be a little conduit into some form of integration". Another pointed out that the Centre has provided opportunities for young people to meet with politicians, service providers, and other members of the local community.

A further important point in relation to integration that was discussed was the fact that the young people provide excellent role models for each other. The respondent stated that "for some of them, that's maybe even more relevant for integration, to see that here's another young African who was in a similar situation as me. But now, they've stuck to the programme, they've had good legal advice, they made plans for their education, they've improved their English...so I think in a lot of ways, it's very practical and very motivating for them".

6.4 Areas of good practice

All four respondents felt that the Centre works well. The various types of support that it provides for clients were noted, including the individual supports that participants

receive and the opportunities which it offers for socialising

According to one respondent: "It's a very significant support structure for the young people. You realise it even more when you see the people who have got status, and they're still coming back to it. In most cases, to be honest, when people get status they try to move on or to start new chapters. I think that, such has been the quality of support that they have got from the Project, they are still coming back and they're still looking forward to the Monday evenings".

Another stated that the Centre assists with combating depression and isolation which young people may be at risk of experiencing. The fact that the Centre offers a variety of activities was highlighted as being very important: "presentations, talks, trainings, music, relationships and socialising happening on the edges. It's all of those dynamics of different outcomes that are really important for everyone involved." It was noted that although there is a lack of any immediately apparent structure to the Monday evening programme, "somehow, that works: it's not a strict, pressured environment and there's some flexibility for urgent consultations or interventions or one-on-one support".

A number of specific areas of good practice in how the Centre operates were identified. Amongst these were:

- encouraging integration with local communities;
- providing for the needs of young people, including encouraging them to stay within the education system for as long as possible;
- networking with other groups and service providers, and providing a forum for them to hear directly about issues affecting the young people;
- the fact that confidentiality and child protection issues are taken very seriously by the volunteers;
- the DRP's transparency, in terms of publishing annual reports and accounts in a timely fashion; and
- the involvement and conduct of the DRP volunteers.

6.5 Suggestions for the future

A number of ways in which the Centre could develop in the future were outlined. These were:

- **Need for more structure:** in relation to the delivery of presentations, educational programmes, etc, it was felt that participants would need to be involved on a more structured basis. This echoes the responses from the participants in the focus groups, who themselves identified their lack of punctuality as an issue.
- **Need for planning and evaluation:** One respondent felt that, due to the reactive nature of the Centre, a structured approach to planning and evaluation that tried to include as many participants as possible would be beneficial. It was felt that this could assist with standardising the provision of services to all the participants, especially newcomers, and would also help to make participants aware of all the different types of supports they can access through the Centre. The planning and evaluations could be done in an informal manner, and possibly take place once or twice a year.
- **Involving more young Irish people:** Some concerns were expressed that this could change the dynamic of the Centre, but it was felt that it could be a good initiative to pilot as an extra activity. It was also suggested that the participants should be involved in organising this initiative, possibly through inviting their Irish friends, otherwise it could be artificial.
- **Encouraging other young asylum seekers to attend:** It was felt that participation in the Centre is very beneficial for young people, and that its activities could be publicised to all SCSA and aged-out minors, to encourage them to get involved and partake of its services.
- **Funding:** Several respondents stated that access to more funding would assist the Centre in the provision of its services. One suggested that a philanthropic organisation could very usefully provide funding to support the Centre's work.
- **Becoming part of service provision for all minority ethnic groups in the area:** One respondent stated that he would like to see the Centre evolve into a wider organisation that would cater for all minority ethnic communities in the area. It was felt that

if plans for opening a cultural centre in Dún Laoghaire go ahead, this could provide a perfect venue. By opening it out to all immigrants, this would help to promote a cultural diversity agenda, rather than focusing specifically on people seeking asylum; and

- Involving more volunteers from the young peoples' cultures: It was felt that it would be very good and useful to encourage more people from similar backgrounds and communities as the participants to volunteer in the Centre.

Finally, one respondent discussed the possibility of encouraging the participants to be more involved in driving the agenda for the talks and activities. It was felt that these activities are definitely valued, but that it could be interesting to encourage the participants to take responsibility for choosing and organising the presentations over the course of a few weeks. However, it was acknowledged that it might be hard to get this involvement, due to a number of factors: "They've been in the direct provision system where they're happy with what they get and what they get is something different...sometimes it's really hard to stimulate someone to say 'you can create something'...maybe it's out of their daily routine in a way, unfortunately. For some of them, they're just more like teenagers, they're not adults and can be...less responsive".

6.6 Discussion

The organisations' responses illustrate the ways in which the Centre provides a forum for organisations other than the DRP to link in with participants.

- The respondents highlighted a number of ways in which they have **provided activities or services** through the Centre, including through running courses, offering advice, information and referrals, and making announcements of relevance to the group.
- The Centre's position as a space that is not **associated with more formal or statutory service provision** was identified as an important factor by the respondents. In general, they felt that this can make participants more open to discussion and to talking about problems and issues that might not be brought up otherwise.
- Additionally, the fact that it offers them an **opportuni-**

ty to network informally with each other was noted as a positive aspect of the Centre.

In terms of the benefits of the Centre, respondents raised issues including: the support provided by volunteers for the participants; the opportunities the Centre offers for socialising; and the variety of activities available through the Centre.

- The **provision of supports for people to encourage them to enter or stay in the education system** was also highlighted as an example of good practice. As outlined in Section 4, all of these issues were also raised by the participants in the Centre.
- Additionally, all the organisational representatives felt that the Centre was a very good way of **promoting integration**, both through enabling the young people to meet Irish people and learn more about life in Ireland, and also through helping them to see positive role models from their own communities and situations.

There were a number of suggestions for future developments:

- It was felt that some **more formal structures** could usefully be introduced, which would help to encourage participants involved in any training programmes to attend and participate on a **regular, punctual basis**.
- Regular **planning and evaluation with participants** (either annually or twice a year) could help to identify specific needs within the group, and to plan for these on a more structured basis.
- The idea of **involving more young Irish people** in the Centre was brought up, but with some reservations about how best to introduce this without altering the dynamic of the Centre.
- The fact that not all SCSA and unaccompanied minors attend the Centre was discussed: it was felt that they would find the services very useful, and that more **publicity could help to raise awareness of what the Centre has to offer** them.
- It was also suggested that in the future, the Centre should **become part of a wider intercultural**



strategy, which would cater for all minority ethnic groups in the area.

- Finally, the idea of **involving more volunteers from the young people's communities or cultures** was raised.

Overall, the respondents were very positive about the Centre and what it provides. The relationships and trust that exist between the volunteers and the young people were repeatedly mentioned. In addition, the **openness of the Centre's organisers in relation to inviting other members of the local community** in was praised, and specifically mentioned as a good way of encouraging integration. The success of the Centre in terms of the numbers of young people who attend it regularly, and the fact that people continue to attend even when they receive residency, was noted as a good indicator of its success.

As stated by one respondent: "I think it's been proved by its success that it was necessary... Sometimes you still have up to 40 people turning up on Monday evenings, all coming from the city centre, but still congregating in this one place. I think that's testament

SECTION SEVEN: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the findings and recommendations of the evaluation are presented. The overall findings of the interviews are set out, and the specific outcomes of participating in the Centre for young people are highlighted. Key learning from the way the Centre operates, as identified by both volunteers and other organisations, are discussed. Finally, a number of suggestions for possible developments in the future are discussed.

7.1 Overall findings: responses from interviews with participants, organisers and supporters.

In terms of the Centre's objectives and activities,

- There is **broad agreement across the three groups of stakeholders as to what the Centre's objectives are**, and the fact that it is fulfilling these;
- Overall, the **feedback from participants about the Centre was extremely positive**. They noted a wide number of areas in which they received help: education, applications for asylum, participation in activities, socialising, emotional support, financial support, integration, personal development, referrals to other organisations, and assistance with making a new life in Ireland. Several of these areas were identified in the NYCI's 2003 report as being key to supporting good practice in youth work with SCSA;
- **Organisations that link in with the Drop-In Centre praised the supports that it provides for young asylum seekers**, and also identified the opportunities that it offers them to meet young people directly and to network with other agencies as being useful for their work.
- The **openness of local organisations to providing support for the Centre's activities was highlighted by the DRP and supporting organisations**, illustrating the importance of groups involved in community development in making the Centre a success.
- All of the participants and the respondents from organisations that support the Centre highlighted how



the dedication of the DRP volunteers and their

commitment to the young people who attend are crucial to making the Centre a success.

In relation to the main challenges faced by the Centre, its supporters and participants, the uncertainties that young people face on a daily basis as a result of being within the asylum process were repeatedly raised. These have a huge impact on planning activities and providing support, as volunteers have to be very flexible in responding to pressing needs as they arise for participants.

7.2 Specific outcomes for participants in the Centre.

Participants highlighted a number of areas in which they had received assistance through the Centre that they would otherwise not have been able to access:

- **Access to education:** In 2007, 41 participants were being supported to attend a wide range of educational courses. This support took the form of careers guidance, assistance with enrolment, and the provision of financial support for course fees and related costs. If this assistance were not available through the Centre, the participants would not be in a position to access third-level education;
- **Encouraging the fostering of good relationships between participants and the Gardaí:** as noted, this was specifically highlighted by a large number of the young people;
- **Learning about Ireland:** participants mentioned how they have learned things about life in Ireland through talks and workshops run in the Centre that have made it

easier for them in their day-to-day lives;

- **Integration:** both volunteers and participants talked of how they had learned a lot from each other, which has helped to encourage the two-way aspects of integration. The fact that some young participants are positive role models for other attendees was also noted as something that assists with integration;
- **Socialising and developing friendships:** the importance of the Centre as a space for socialising was continually brought up throughout the interviews. Participants talked of meeting friends through the Centre, of learning more about people from other cultures, and of the importance of having a place where they can hang around and forget about any problems they may be facing. Many mentioned how going to the Centre helped them to feel less alone;
- **Raising the profile of young asylum seekers with politicians:** the availability of the premises in the CTC has provided a venue for participants to meet politicians directly, to tell them about their situation, and to discuss the PLUS campaign.
- **Building up relationships with representatives from other organisations:** people from organisations such as the IRC and the TSP attend the Centre on a regular basis and offer direct support or referrals to participants who need them.
- A large number of the respondents talked of **local activities** with which they had become involved through the Centre, and several commented on how they never would have done so, had they not been encouraged to by the volunteers.

As illustrated by the responses, the Drop-In Centre is a very successful initiative that provides a range of necessary supports to young people seeking asylum. The Centre offers personal assistance that participants may not be able to access elsewhere, which covers areas including asylum applications, assistance with practical aspects of living in Ireland, and support for education. Through adopting an open and holistic approach, the Centre has encouraged and facilitated the involvement of a number of groups in working to address the needs of participants, and has provided a space within which inter-organisational relationships can develop. Crucially, the Centre offers a place for participants



to socialise with their peers and also to develop close and trusting relationships with volunteers. All of these factors have, according to respondents, ultimately helped to assist with people's integration into Irish society.

7.3 Key learning from how the Centre operates:

A number of areas were identified as being critical to the success of the Centre. These could potentially be used by other similar initiatives as the basis for guidelines for good practice:

- The need to adopt a **fluid and flexible approach** and not to be over-structured;
- The need to be able to **respond to people's needs as they arise**, as a result of the uncertainties within the asylum process;
- The need to **empower young people** to be able to make their own decisions, especially as they may become institutionalised within the direct provision system;

- The need to **foster a sense of ownership** among the participants;
- The need for a **core group to oversee activities**; however, it should be noted that this requires a huge amount of time and energy on the part of the volunteers;
- The need for **continued access to funding** to support the activities, especially educational participation;
- The importance of **supportive attitudes and openness among other local organisations**;
- Crucially, the need to spend a large amount of time **building up the trust of participants and to be able to demonstrate a commitment and ability to get results** in terms of what is promised to participants; and
- The need for **good record keeping, transparency in accounts and annual reports, and policies relating to child protection.**

7.4 Suggestions for possible future developments

Respondents raised a number of suggestions for future developments. In discussing them, it is important to remember that all the DRP's activities are carried out on a voluntary basis and that volunteers already give a large amount of their time to supporting existing activities. Although several respondents raised the possibility of taking on a paid member of staff to support activities, volunteers with the DRP are very keen to keep their work on a strictly voluntary basis, in order to ensure their continued autonomy. Where possible, it may therefore be useful to consider the option of taking on volunteers for specific activities, or of linking in with organisations that already work in the area and that have specific expertise. The recommendations set out below cover a range of topics, from organisational supports and training through to the potential extension of activities to new areas.

- **Getting internet access for Monday evenings:** if funding were available, the DRP could examine the possibility of setting up wireless access for the laptop



which they currently bring to the Centre;

- **Carrying out short evaluations with participants twice a year to get an overview of their needs, which will help to inform planning.** Informal evaluations of activities could also be carried out, in order to capture people's responses to them and to find out what they find to be most useful or enjoyable; again, this could help to inform planning;
- **Although Centre's main aim should not be to encourage integration, it could be useful to examine ways of getting more young Irish people to participate.** This could be done as an activity once a month/once every few months. Participants could bring their own Irish friends to start this off; a further suggestion was that links could be established with students in DLIADT on a more formal basis;
- **Developing comprehensive volunteer policies:** As a completely voluntary organisation, the DRP has limited capacity to engage in developing comprehensive

volunteer policies that would cover such areas as safety statements, debriefing for volunteers, processes for recruiting, selecting and managing volunteers, etc. However, once developed, these could be mainstreamed relatively easily and could help to ensure the sustainability of the organisation. Volunteering Ireland has comprehensive resources and training programmes to support this, and Volunteer Centres Ireland also work to support and resource volunteers' involvement in activities. This area could either be addressed by (1) accessing funding for an existing volunteer to participate in courses and draw up policies, if someone were available to do this or (2) looking for a volunteer to work specifically on these areas;

- **Cultural perspectives on timekeeping:** Participants in the Centre and representatives of several organisations mentioned the difficulties that can arise as a result of young people arriving late to the Centre and not engaging with more formal activities on a structured basis. This is a very difficult area to address, as participants' external circumstances can sometimes mean that they are not in a position to attend. However, it also illustrates some of the cultural differences that can exist between Irish people and people from other cultural backgrounds in terms of the importance placed on timekeeping. It may therefore be useful to run activities for newcomers about Irish culture that would focus on this issue in particular;
- **The possibility of incorporating the Centre into wider initiatives that aim to mainstream the needs of all minority ethnic groups could be considered in the future.** At present, no such

- **Funding for educational activities is a key part of the Centre's work:** several respondents mentioned that a philanthropic organisation could very usefully provide support for this. The findings of this evaluation could be disseminated to potential donors to illustrate the very positive benefits that the Centre has for participants, and to encourage them to consider the provision of funding specifically for education;
- **Involving volunteers from the young people's cultural backgrounds and communities was a further suggestion:** this is already taking place to some degree, and should be encouraged. Volunteers could possibly be sourced through groups such as Integrating Ireland and the Africa Centre;
- **Building capacity among the young people to be more involved in planning activities:** although this was tried in the past, and was not hugely successful, it was felt that as young people's situation in Ireland becomes more stable, it should make it more achievable. One possible route could be through accessing funding for a youth worker who would focus specifically on facilitating and engaging young people in developing the agenda for activities. The NYCI or other youth support organisations could be approached to assist with this;
- **The possibility of setting up a scholarship for one of the participants who has residency to participate in a youth work course and bring the learning from this into the Centre could also be examined.** Funding for this could potentially be sourced through a relevant third-level institution;



