| Title	An Evaluation of the Educational Action Research (EAR) Project, Athlone
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Publication Date	2009-01
Publication Information	Forkan, C., O'Regan, C., O'Sullivan, P. (2009) An Evaluation of the Educational Action Research (EAR) Project, Athlone, Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.
Publisher	Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway
Link to publisher's version	http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/an_evaluation_of_the_educational_action_research_earproject_athlone.pdf
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2475

ATHLONE COMMUNITY TASKFORCE

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An Evaluation of the Educational Action Research (EAR) Project Athlone.
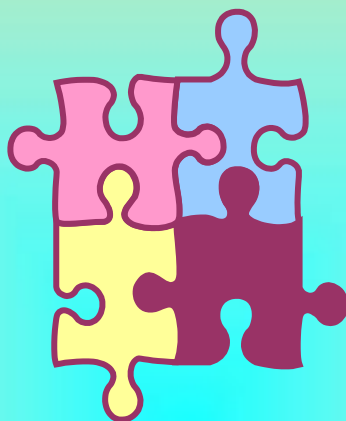
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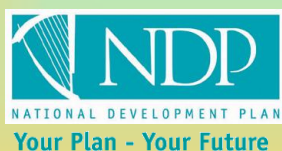
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Preface

Athlone Community Taskforce (ACT) is a Community Partnership which was established in 1992 as an Athlone Rotary Club initiative. Our mission is to create enterprise and employment opportunities and measures leading to this, in consultation with the Athlone community, statutory and non statutory agencies.

Following a strategic review of the activities of Athlone Community Taskforce in 2003/2004, the ACT Board took a decision that an effective contribution to tackling unemployment in the long-term in the Athlone area would be to consider methods of supporting young people to remain in education. Predicated on the doctrine that the lower the educational attainment of a person, the more likely that the person will be unemployed or prove difficult to up-skill should a job be lost, the Educational Action Research Project (EAR Project) was established in 2005. The Project adopted a child-centred action research approach "*to examine from a young person's perspective the experience of the transition from primary to post-primary*". Following this, the Project was later transformed to implement a 3-year action plan with the overall Project vision *"to create conditions to support young people to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school"*. The EAR Project plan was designed to offer continuity to young people during the transition phase with initiatives focusing on the primary level, summer break and post-primary level. Children who fail to make a positive transition from primary school to post-primary school are more likely to become early school leavers or under-achievers.

From the very beginning, a formal evaluation of the EAR Project was planned by ACT and the Management Team. We are very pleased that the Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway was able to perform this evaluation for us. The very positive findings are a clear endorsement of EAR Project and the child-centred approach and also confirm our view that the Project objectives have been achieved and the recommendations from the initial research report 'Going to Secondary?' successfully implemented. The outcome is very encouraging for ACT and the results more than justify the efforts invested in the Project and in the young people involved.

The recommendations in this evaluation provide new challenges for ACT and its partners in the Partnership Group (See Appendix 4). We look forward to working together on the recommendations and to building further on the sound basis established by the EAR Project in order to promote the well-being of young people in Athlone and to enhance their opportunities of achieving meaningful employment.

Finally, on behalf of the Educational Action Research Management Team, I would like to extend my thanks to all parties who participated in and performed this valuable evaluation & analysis.

Mary Daly Scanlon
ACT & Chairperson (2008) EAR PROJECT Management Team

The Educational Action Research Project Team and Advisors:

Mr. Frank Murtagh (2005 – 2008), ACT & WCD;

Mr. Eamonn Farrell (2007 – 2008), HSE Midlands;

Ms. Jean Reed (2005 – 2008), The Grubb Institute;

Ms. Suzanne Kelly (2005 – 2008), ACT;

Mr. Gerry Fee (2007 - 2008), Department of Education and Science;

Ms. Sheila McArdle (2005 – 2008), Educational Action Research Project Manager;

Mr. Michael Fuery (2008), ACT;

Aidan Waterstone (2005 – 2007), HSE Midlands;

Seamus Murray (2005 – 2007), Department of Education and Science.

Foreword

Initiatives which are practical and innovative and designed to support young people in their education, formal and informal, are always welcome. So too are initiatives designed to gather information about what works best in the provision of services to young people. All the more reason, therefore, to be grateful for an initiative which set out to do both, namely an educational action research initiative such as the EAR project. Action research is a particularly valuable strategy in educational and developmental work, because it allows the people most directly affected to have a say in identifying problems and priorities and to be actively involved in developing responses, and in evaluating them, as evidenced in this report.

It is made clear in the report that 'the EAR programme delivery uses youth work methods' and is 'informal in its approach' to supporting young people in the transition from primary to second level education. This seems to me to be one of the key reasons for its success. The Youth Work Act 2001 defines youth work as 'a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary involvement … which is (a) complementary to their formal, academic and vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary organisations'. It is clear that a range of programmes and activities, whether or not they are carried out within a context or an organisation which is explicitly labelled as being youth work, can adopt strategies, approaches and methods which are based on youth work principles. The most important principles are that the informal and non-formal[1] education of young people is the primary concern and that they are taking part of their own volition. Both of these clearly apply in the case of the EAR project.

Using such an approach creates particularly rich opportunities for positive learning in a context which is young person centred (rather than simply young person *focused*, an important distinction made by the project) and in which an emphasis is placed on the importance of relationships in shaping and sustaining the learning process. The

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[1] 'Non-formal education refers to learning and development that takes place outside of the formal educational field, but which is structured and based on learning objectives. This is differentiated from informal learning, which is not structured and takes place in daily life activities within peer/family groups etc. Youth work interventions typically result in both non-formal and informal learning' (Youth Service Liaison Forum, *Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland*, 2005, p. 13).

testimony of all of those involved in the EAR project, both adults and young people and whatever their organisational perspective, seems in one way or another to bear out this central importance of relationships; and not just relationships between the adults and the young people, but those among the young people themselves. When good informal and non-formal learning environments are created, young people learn very effectively from each other. This is abundantly clear from the feedback to the transition programme, where both the young people 'receiving' the guidance and those 'imparting' it appear to have gained so much in terms of knowledge, skills and personal qualities. The consistency with which the young people expressed the view that the programme wasn't long enough was striking – many educators and trainers would envy such a response! Adopting a youth work approach also means that the possibility exists (indeed should be encouraged) for the adults to learn from the young people, although this is a challenge which may involve a shift of culture and mindset, as at least one respondent explicitly acknowledges.

Good relationships and positive attitudes, while crucial, are not in themselves sufficient to ensure that the work is successful or that things go smoothly. An important point emerging from this evaluation is the need for careful planning and for clarity about roles and responsibilities, all the more so when collaboration between multiple agencies and organisations is involved. It is a credit to all of those who have managed, directed and contributed to the EAR project that so much has been achieved so efficiently in the delivery of what is quite a complex and multi-faceted programme. The challenge now – and this evaluation report does not underestimate it – is to ensure that these valuable and valued initiatives, to which the young people have responded so positively, are enabled to continue by being appropriately mainstreamed and 'embedded' within the relevant partner organisations. There have been too many examples in Irish education and social services of worthwhile and imaginative programmes ceasing to exist on the expiry of a specific source of funding or a particular institutional framework, and of the 'wheel' having to be 'reinvented' subsequently because the original need remains.

The authors of this report demonstrate both a knowledge of the strengths of a qualitative approach which focuses on the subjective (and usually retrospective) perceptions of participants, and an awareness of the growing demands for objective

indicators of success in a policy environment increasingly concerned with outcomes and accountability. The project's own tracking and monitoring systems provide a basis for development in this regard and already provide significant evidence of success. In terms of the participants' own perspectives, the report contains many persuasive accounts (from both the young people themselves and from the adults working with them) of personal and social growth and development, of opportunities provided in the present which enrich young people's lives and enhance their sense of possibilities for the future. The choice of the name 'EAR' suggests an emphasis on the importance of listening, and the lessons of the project to date merit a careful listen.

Dr Maurice Devlin

Department of Applied Social Studies,
NUI Maynooth.

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Executive Summary

The Educational Action Research Project

1 Athlone Community Taskforce (ACT) established the Educational Action Research (EAR) Project in 2005 to strengthen the ability of young people in the Athlone area to make a successful transition from primary to post-primary school.

2 The issue of whether or not a young person makes a successful transition is intrinsically linked to the issue of early school leaving. It is well documented (Chapter 2) that young people who leave school early are among the most vulnerable in society in respect of their life chances.

3 The Project began by carrying out a *child-centred action research project* (underpinned by Resilience Theory) working with 6th Class primary pupils *"to examine from a young person's perspective the experience of the transition from primary to post-primary school".* The child-centred information generated from this process informed the development of a range of eleven initiatives to respond to the needs of young people in a holistic way. (McArdle, 2006). These initiatives were developed and implemented by forming *collaborations between statutory and non-statutory organisations, schools and communities*. Each of the proposed projects was designed to work towards the overall vision: "*to create conditions to support young people to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school*" (Chapter 4).

The Evaluation

4   The Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC), National University of Ireland Galway was appointed in early 2008 to evaluate the EAR Project. Four evaluation objectives were agreed:

- *To ascertain is the EAR Project creating conditions, which support young people it directly works with to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school?*

- *To examine interagency collaborations that have been facilitated by the EAR Project*

- *To identify if involvement in the EAR Project has led any agency to implement more child-centred practice.*

- *To offer guidance on the future sustainability of the EAR Project*

5   The evaluation was designed in consultation with a Research Advisory Group, consisting of representatives from key link agencies as well as the CFRC and the Project Manager of the EAR Project (Chapter 3.1).

6   Data in the form of qualitative testimonials were collected from across two distinct groups, the Non-Participant Stakeholders and the Participant Stakeholders (Chapter 3.3).

- Non-Participant Stakeholders comprised of 5 distinct groups (ranging from parents to staff to the management group) totalling **33** participants.

- The second group of Participant Stakeholder was made up of 6 distinct groups of young people which the EAR Project had worked with directly and totalled **81** participants.

7   The findings (Chapter 5) were analysed and linked to the four evaluation questions and provided the basis to formulate the following range of recommendations.

8   In parallel with the formal evaluation of the EAR Project, the Project Manager conducted a tracking exercise during the summer of 2008, on past participants who had been involved with the Project during the academic years 2004-2007. This collected data on **98** young people (Chapter 4.3).

What did the Evaluation Reveal?

Findings - Tracking Exercise

9 The figures from the Tracking exercise indicate that the EAR Project is associated with **positive retention rates at Junior Cycle as well as successful transfer to second level**. (Chapter 4.3 – 4.4)

Objective 1 - Has The EAR Project Supported Young People Make A Positive Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School?

10 It is clear from the generated data, that across the full range of initiatives on offer, *young people had the free will to participate, were listened to, were facilitated in the decision-making process and they felt respected*. These are all essential elements of child-centred practice.

   - The majority of young people interviewed, parents, the EAR Project staff and representatives of stakeholder agencies understood the main purpose of the EAR Project, which is to support young people at the time of the transition from primary to post-primary school.

   - They also possessed an understanding of the EAR Project practice principles.

11 *Based on this* information it is evident that *the overall vision of the Project is understood at three levels of resilience,* namely the *individual*, the *family* and the *community*.

The Transition Programme

12 The Evaluation showed that young people participating in the Project experienced *increased levels of confidence about making the transition* to post-primary school. It is clear that those directly involved in the transition programme were supported to examine their hopes and fears about the move. For the young people and in particular the past participants, the transition programme was extremely helpful in *aiding their positive progression* through school. This also held true with the extremely *high transfer and retention rate* found during the Tracking Exercise presented in Chapter 4.

13 The Evaluation process also revealed information to inform future practice to respond to child-centred identified need. These recommendations focus upon the transition programme, to develop a set of outcome measures and an early 1st Year support.

14 In the 1st Year of the transition programme, there were a total of 6 sessions run in each primary school. After feedback from the schools in year one that it was too long, the programme was shortened to 4 sessions. However, the data from this Evaluation shows that the ***children wish for the programme to be longer***.

Recommendation No. 1

It is recommended, therefore, that the EAR Project liaise with both the primary schools and young people involved in the delivery of the transition programme, and search out an innovative way of giving extra time to the transition programme, in order to meet the needs of the young people in question and offer them optimal support via the transition programme.

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15 The chance to ***meet students from second level*** and talk to them about specific issues was also found to be ***very useful by the primary school children***. Two issues concerning this process raised by the primary school children need to be addressed.

Recommendation No. 2

It is recommended that the EAR Project ensure that all second level students who visit primary schools to help with the transition programme are supported to be confident about their role in the process.

Recommendation No. 3

It is recommended that the EAR Project investigate ways to ensure that a mixture of students from 1st Year through to Leaving Certificate level are asked to participate in the visits to primary school.

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16 There was also a general consensus that the ***presentation night*** was a great opportunity to express their hopes and fears of the transition process to their teachers, other students and their parents. However, in some cases, participants and representatives of the Education sector expressed concerns that some of the primary school participants in the transition programme did not co-operate with the facilitators, making it difficult for the remaining young people to get full benefit from the programme.

> **Recommendation No. 4**
>
> It is recommended that the EAR Project ensure that all facilitators on the transition programme are proficient in working with a large group of primary school children and have the skills to deal with any negative group dynamics.

17 The EAR programme delivery utilises youth work methods and is informal requiring movement, group discussion, arts and crafts and presentation skills. This is a different approach from the more structured methods utilised by teachers in schools. The element of misbehaviour is a real one and needs to be considered and responded to in a meaningful way. The suggestion that the teacher is present has been in operation in a number of schools that have availed of the programme.

> **Recommendation No. 5**
>
> For the schools where a teacher is not present for the transition programme, it is recommended that the Project liaise with these schools, at a scheduling appointment, about the possibility of having a teacher present for the programme. If the choice is not to have a teacher present and misbehaviour occurs, a procedure should be agreed with the school to respond to the situation, with a child being removed from a session not being a possibility.

18 The *second level students* who had gone to provide information to 6th Class pupils identified benefits for the 6th Class students about to make the transition - "*they will have people they will recognise when they come to the school*" and "*fair idea what secondary is all about*". In addition, they were able to identify *benefits for their school and themselves* on an individual level, developing skills and that "*teachers would look to us and give us more responsibility*". The process gave them *confidence and experience*. But they felt that for the actual time with the primary school children, the session needed to be more organised and structured (Chapter 6.2.2).

Recommendation No. 6
It is recommended that the EAR Project facilitate a template with which the session between primary school children and visiting students from second level can be planned, to ensure that all key areas are addressed and that each child gets to voice their questions and comments.

Activity Groups and the Summer Connected Programme

19 The results from both of the activity groups interviewed revealed that by their involvement in the activity groups, they had become better able to *make new friends* and that they had *learned how to co-operate* with each to do the various activities. Participants in the Summer Connected Programme indicated that the Project activities had bonded the group together and offered them a chance to *develop their talents and abilities* and subsequently their *life skills*. The experience also allowed them to develop their *self-confidence* through the range of programme activities. Parents were aware how much the Summer Connected Programme had *matured* their children and how it had enabled them to become very *open and discursive* (Chapter 6.2.3 – 6.2.5).

An Early 1st Year Support

20 Parents requested that the EAR Project examine the need for the provision of a version of the Summer Connected Programme during the two mid-term periods from school. This would keep their children in touch with the Project and aid their progression through the school system.

Recommendation No. 7
It is recommended that the EAR Project examines the need for a specific targeted programme aimed at working with young people who made the transition to second level but who are identified as experiencing settling-in difficulties within the first six weeks of second level.

A Set of Outcome Measures

21 In the light of the findings, the Evaluation identified the desirability of establishing improved outcome measures (Chapter 6.2.6).

Recommendation No. 8

It is recommended the EAR Project introduces a series of independent prospective outcome measures to gauge the development of those young people involved in the Project on a longitudinal basis. This will enable the Project to meet and understand the optimal needs of the young people and thus help to build their level of resilience. It will also link the work of the Project to the *Agenda* outcomes-focussed policy. The process will also provide valuable *sign-posts* to the youth and family support sector on what works. In addition, the resultant outcomes can be used as a form of '*results based accountability*' with funders.

Objective 2 - Is There Evidence That Inter-Agency Collaborations Have Been Facilitated by the EAR Project?

22 The data revealed that the EAR Project had managed to bring a "*myriad of organisations*" **together to respond to the needs of young people in the Athlone area**. The agencies and organisations, and the EAR staff and the management group, believed that the Project Manager had worked hard to promote inter-agency collaborations. The important role played by the EAR Project **in fostering inter-agency collaboration** was also supported by many of the education sector representatives (Chapter 6.3).

Objective 3 - Has Involvement with the EAR Project Led to any Agencies Implementing more Child-Centred Practice?

23 The evaluation revealed that all of the **young people** interviewed supported the view that they were **treated with respect** by the Project staff and always asked about the activities they wanted to do. For the non-participant stakeholders, there was a similar view.

24 The staff group commented that all the EAR initiatives were developed in response to the expressed needs of young people. The supportive role of the Project Manager encouraged staff to continually critically reflect on their work and see how it could become more child-centred. This led staff to recognise the more holistic setting from which the child emerged and so made them more aware

of the needs of the young people with whom they worked. For the stakeholder agencies, the view was that the EAR Project is client-centred and has young people at the core of all the decisions (Chapter 6.4).

Recommendation No. 9

To bolster a child-centred approach, it is recommended that the EAR Project work with the Partnership Group in developing a set of indicators to track the impact of a child-centred approach, with the children with whom they work. To this end, the inclusion of AFQuATs (See Chapter 2) and the *Developmental Assets Approach*, as developed by Peter Benson in the Search Institute in the US, could be incorporated.

Objective 4 - Positioning of the EAR Project into the Future

25 Despite the existence of varying opinions on what should happen to the EAR Project in the future, it was possible to agree a common ground. The overall consensus was that *the initiatives of the Project needed to continue*.

26 After examining the data, the points raised by the Management Group in this regard adequately reflect the wishes of the others groups and are presented below:

- There was general consensus that it is important that the ***contact made with young people*** via the Project is maintained over the coming years. The development of this initial trust between them and the Project will help their overall progression.

- Where possible, post December 2008, the initiatives started and developed by the Project need to be ***embedded*** in the practice of the various agencies which are part of the current Partnership Group.

- In order for the initiatives to be successfully embedded by these agencies, the majority of the Management Group believed that the best way this could occur would be for ACT to fund a co-ordinator for a ***hand-over period***, with this period probably being 2 years.

- The job of the co-ordinator would be to primarily work with and support the stakeholder agencies to identify what extra help they would need to embed the initiatives in question and the child-centred approach. The role of the co-ordinator would be that of a facilitator and thus radically different from the

management role undertaken by the current Project Manager. The co-ordinator could link in with organisations taking charge of the various programme *"...to have an overview of the master plan...to give advice and direction on occasion..."* This would help eradicate the risk of the smaller initiatives waning over time.

- The new co-ordinator would also identify further areas of work for ACT, which would then be developed and handed on to other agencies over time, similar to the original EAR initiative process of embedding.

Child and Family Research Centre

This evaluation was conducted by the Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC). The CFRC is a partnership between the Health Service Executive (HSE) and National University of Ireland, Galway. Based in the School of Political Science and Sociology, the CRFC undertakes research, education and training in the area of child and family care and welfare.

The Centre's objectives are to:

- Understand child and family needs by producing scientific research and evaluations;
- Improve services for children and families through: third and fourth level education; better service design; and learning networks for service practitioners;
- Build research capacity in family support through applying best practice methodologies, developing researchers and supporting practitioner research;
- Influence policy for children by engaging with researchers, policymakers, service providers, children and their families.

The CFRC researchers involved in this evaluation were Cormac Forkan and Patsy O'Sullivan, with specific support from Dr. John Canavan, Dr. Pat Dolan, Professor Chris Curtin and Connie O'Regan. Gillian Browne, Emily O'Donnell, Brian Merriman and Aileen Shaw from the Centre also helped to prepare the report for publication.

More information on the CFRC can be obtained from the following website:

www.childandfamilyresearch.ie

Acknowledgements

This evaluation would not have been possible without the willingness of people and organisations to contribute their invaluable insights into the EAR Project. In particular, the authors would like to thank:

- **The Interviewees** – *This includes all the young people who agreed to take part in the data collection, both past and present EAR Project participants; the parents; the staff of the Project; the schools; the management group and representatives from key stakeholder agencies.*
- **The Research Advisory Group (RAG)** – *The group helped guide and advise on the work of the evaluation.*
- **Ms. Sheila McArdle, Project Manager, the EAR Project** – *Sheila was of enormous help, particularly in relation to arranging groups for interviews and for never treating any request as too big a trouble.*
- **Mr**. **Michael Fuery**, CEO, ACT- *For his help throughout the process.*
- **Ms. Connie O'Regan** – *A colleague at the CFRC for her advice on the literature in the 'transition' area.*
- **Mr. Brian Merriman (CFRC)** – *For his excellent proof-reading of the final document.*
- **Dr. John Canavan, Dr**. **Pat Dolan and Prof. Chris Curtin** - *For their continued support and expertise.*

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

> *"Education is part of the process by which the culture of the people is formally transmitted to the young and they* [the young] *are trained in the necessary skills and techniques which enable them to take full part in the adult life of their society".*
>
> MacGreil (1992:7)

From this description of the role of education in society, it is not surprising to find that the content and shape of our educational system is continually being debated and developed at all levels. As stated, one of the primary functions of education is to equip people with the skills and training necessary to allow their successful integration into the market. This is an essential function. Since the 1960s in Ireland, there has been a shift from an *elitist* approach to education to a *populist* one (Tovey & Share, 2003), with an ever-growing proportion of people involved in all levels of education.

However, it can be argued that instead of education being for personal development first and foremost, education has become commercialised, with a trained worker being the end result sought. She argues that education should be a broader enterprise. As well as providing workers for the labour market, it has the power to enable the most oppressed in society to bring about radical change in their own lives and communities. However, in the seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) Freire suggested that the most disenfranchised groups in society were often not given this opportunity. Freire stated that *learning* should be used to facilitate development of a person's consciousness and critical thinking, which in turn would lead to positive social change.

Despite the proliferation of education in Ireland, there is still ample evidence of dysfunctional components within the system, particularly for those from less advantaged backgrounds. For example, 15% of students leave the second level system without having completed their Leaving Certificate. Similarly, 66% of Travellers leave school before the age of 15, as compared to 15% for the general population (Forkan, 2006). It is no surprise, therefore to find numerous community-

based, state funded initiatives across the country, aimed at helping the transition of young people from primary to second level and aiding their retention at second level. The focus of this evaluation is the EAR Project, one such supportive Project, based in Athlone, co. Westmeath.

1.2 Background to This Evaluation

Athlone Community Taskforce (ACT) established the Educational Action Research (EAR) Project in 2005 to conduct a child-centred action research project working with 6th Class primary pupils *"to examine from a young person's perspective the experience of the transition from primary to post-primary school".* The resulting research report and three-year action plan entitled, *Going to Secondary?* (McArdle, 2006) made recommendations to establish a total of eleven initiatives. Each of the proposed projects is designed to work towards the overall vision: *"to create conditions to support young people to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school".*

In early 2008, ACT invited tenders to evaluate the EAR Project. In the request for tender document, three specific evaluation questions were listed:

1. *To ascertain is the EAR Project creating conditions, which support young people it directly works with to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school;*
2. *To examine interagency collaborations that have been facilitated by the EAR Project;*
3. *To identify if involvement in the EAR Project has led any agency to implement more child-centred practice.*

After a tendering process, the Child and Family Research Centre based at NUI Galway was awarded the contract. Following an initial meeting with the Project Manager and the CEO of ACT, it was agreed that a fourth evaluation question would be added:

4. *To offer guidance on the future sustainability of the EAR Project*

These four objectives will form the basis for this evaluation report.

1.3 Layout of the Report

This evaluation report consists of 6 chapters, which contain the following information:

- **Chapter 2 – Transition to Second Level**: *The chapter looks at the link between early school leaving and successful transition to secondary school. In doing so, it looks at the key literature in the respective areas.*

- **Chapter 3 – The Research Process**: *This describes the formation of a Research Advisory Group to oversee the evaluation. It also deals with the ethical safeguards utilised as well as outlining the number of participants in the evaluation.*

- **Chapter 4 – Description of the EAR Project Model**: *The background of the EAR Project is outlined in detail and information is presented on the spin-off programmes developed as part of the initial baseline research. In addition, a recent tracking exercise conducted to provide a snap-shot of the EAR Project is described.*

- **Chapter 5 – Testimonial Data**: *This chapter presents the subjective findings gathered from interviews with both participants of the EAR Project and those who are external stakeholders, namely agencies, parents and schools.*

- **Chapter 6 – Discussion and Recommendations**: *In light of the objectives of the evaluation and the data gathered, this chapter discusses the main findings and presents a set of recommendations for consideration by the management of the Project.*

Chapter 2
Transition to Second Level School - The Need for an Outcomes Focus

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the EAR Project was established to strengthen the ability of young people in the Athlone area to make a successful transition to second level school. The issue of whether or not any young person will make the successful transition is intrinsically linked to the understanding of early school leaving. Therefore, the first section of the chapter examines the issue of early school leaving in light of the profound impact it can have both on the individual and their community. The second section focuses specifically on the process of school transition and draws out key points from the literature. The final section examines the recent development of an outcomes-focussed policy agenda in Ireland, within which the EAR Project can be located. It also presents a model of self-evaluation for Projects designed for young people.

2.2 Early School Leaving

In 2004, a report by the Commission of the European Communities stated that in 2002, some 85.6% of 22 year olds in Ireland had completed upper second level education as compared to only 75.4% for the EU average. As a social indicator this appeared to demonstrate that the Irish education system was successful, signified in particular by the considerable growth in those accessing second level education since the late 1960s. However, upon closer scrutiny, it became clear that the Irish educational system still contains a number of dysfunctional elements. Some 40 years after the introduction of free secondary education, the fact that this year, approximately 15% of the population will leave school without completing upper second level (JEDI, 2005) is one such example.

There is also substantial evidence of the correlation between poor educational achievement and poverty. As suggested by Eivers et al. (2000), leaving school early infiltrates a person's experience of employment, economic activity and poverty, literacy and numeracy, psychological well-being, marriage and parenthood, while also often being related to criminal activity. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that young

people who leave school early are among the most vulnerable in society in respect of their life chances, suffering multiple and cumulative disadvantages. As well as having social implications, early school leaving also has an economic cost to society. To quantify this, the National Education Welfare Board (2004: 2) presented a number of facts:

- 1,000 children do not even make it to secondary school.
- Absenteeism is an early indication of early school leaving.
- 3 out of 4 prisoners had poor attendance at school and about 40% left school before 14.
- It is estimated that at least €14m a year could be saved on things like unemployment costs, crime etc, if young people were prevented from leaving school prior to Junior Certificate.

Therefore, the problem of early school leaving adds up to a significant and persistent problem requiring adequate policy and practical responses by the state. This need was supported by President McAleese in 2001 when she spoke at a conference organised by the Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) Working Group on Education and Employment. The President pointed out that:

> *"This is indeed an exciting time to be young and in Ireland. We have been witnesses to the radical transformation of our country and we know that a vital key to that transformation was unlocking the potential of our people, widening access to education ... Our experience has taught us that every life that is only half lived, every talent that goes unused, every human being whose potential is wasted is a huge loss to the individual, his or her family, his or her community, his or her country. That loss is not just economic; it goes to the very heart of civic life, for we are civically healthy when our young people are getting the very most they can from the options and opportunities education offers them."*
>
> (DEP, 2002: 10)

It is clear from this statement, that the issue of early school leaving has become a national policy issue of immense importance. One of the most successful methods for dealing with the early school leaving is to support young people making the transition from primary level to secondary level education. This next section examines some of the key facts relating to transition.

2.3 Making the Transition from Primary to Secondary School

2.3.1 Introduction

The report entitled *Going to Secondary School*, McArdle (2006) notes that the transition from primary to second level is a crucial move in the life of a young person. The importance of this view is further pointed out by the Department of Education and Science in their publication DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools; 2005). It states that *"Pupils who fail to make this transition successfully are more at risk of early school leaving or educational underachievement"*. With regard to the literature on transition, there is a large body of research dedicated to the study of school transition. Specific research themes within this area include exploring why some youth seem to cope much better than others with the transition, identifying the short- and long-term consequences of transition difficulties and evaluating efforts to support youth in making a smooth and successful transition. Hargreaves (1996) describes the triple transitions experienced by young people: there are the changes of early adolescence, changes in society and changes in secondary schools. He notes that schools can exacerbate adolescent feelings of alienation. He also describes the cultural differences between primary and secondary schools. In primary schools, the emphasis is on caring and control. However in secondary schools, there is a narrower academic focus and the student polarization can occur as a result of streaming. Galton et al (2000a & b) also explored the differences between both primary and secondary schools. He describes the function of the primary school is to impart basic skills, while the function of the secondary system is to supply broad based knowledge and understanding across a wide ranging curriculum. However, Lucey et al. (2000:203) notes that there will always be anxiety in the transition process:

> *"The kinds of fears and anxieties which children raise in relation to the transfer in the late 1990s are very similar to the ones which the children of 20 years ago raised. This tells us something about features of this transfer which are unchanging as well as some aspects of the transition which are more resistant to the kinds of interventions which schools have put in place."*

2.3.2 Young People's Experiences of Transition

Measor et al. (1984) studied the transfer of young English adolescents to secondary school using a qualitative methodology. They found that prior to transfer there were two main aspects to pupils concerns about transition. These were concerns about the formal aspects of the school relating to the school's goals, values and organisation vs.

informal aspects relating to peer group and teen culture. Pupils were concerned about the size and learning the physical layout of the new school, dealing with a new discipline and authority system, coping with an increased academic workload, being bullied and losing friends. Related to this, Cotterell (1986) found that there are individual differences in how the transition event is approached by an individual, and that it is their appraisal of the situation which will determine whether it is likely to be harmful or not and what are their options for dealing with it. He reported that having adequate information about the new school is crucial. He also stated that transition can have a disruptive effect on students, the secondary environment can be bewildering and youth can feel lacking in direction, challenge and support. In an earlier study Cotterell (1982) reviewed experiences of 102 students in 1st Year of secondary school by reviewing diaries that were maintained over the first three weeks of secondary school. He found that initial student concerns related to learning about the new procedural aspects of secondary school and worries about being victimized. After this period, anxiety about schoolwork increased, while satisfaction with school can decreased.

Zeedyk et al. (2003) found that among pupils, parents and teachers, the most frequently reported transition concerns were bullying, getting lost, and managing increased school work and peer relationships. Tobell (2003) reviewed the transition experiences of 30 students at the end of their 1st Year in the new school. Issues that were identified by the students were the changes in types and amounts of relationships that occurred for them throughout the year. They also struggled with teacher expectations that they would behave like adults. Students were also interested in building good relationships with the teachers but found this and the overall learning experience difficult in a bigger school. It did take time to get used to the new organization of the secondary school. They did suggest some supports that would aid the transition process. These were support with getting to know the new environment, including learning in groups to help avoid feeling lost. Tobell (ibid.) noted that those who had attended summer school in the secondary school reported some benefits of this. However she concludes that given the differences between secondary and primary school and the downturn in achievement that occurs at this time, further transition supports should be provided in schools, including efforts to place good relationships between teachers and students as central to the education process.

A significant amount of work on the topic has been undertaken in the US. Key landmark studies in the area of transition were undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s in Baltimore and Milwaukee in the US (Blyth et al, 1978; Simmons et al., 1979, 1987). Simmons et al. (1987 a & b) reported the culmination of this work on the effects of transition to school on 621 youth. Despite being a different system from Ireland, the findings showed that in general, the older the child was when making the transition, the better able they were to cope. On the basis of this research, they developed the *Developmental Readiness Theory*. This theory suggests that difficulties in the transition process occur when the transition to the new environment happens before the child is ready. It also indicates that youth who are out of step developmentally either developing too early or too late or spending time free from adult supervision too early all have negative effects. As Simmons (1987: 6) suggested:

> *"This move from a small protected school environment into a much larger, more impersonal junior high school may be the child's first experience coping with a secondary rather than primary type environment. The distinction between the primary or intense and intimate relationships (gemeinschaft) and the secondary or impersonal and specific relationships (gesellschaft) is a fundamental one and has been emphasized by many of the classic theorists in society"*

Other US researchers have extended the work of Simmons et al., and explored the concept of transition problems in terms of the match between the individual and their environment. The theory, as developed by Eccles (1993), has become known as the *Person-Environment Fit Theory*. It explored reasons why transition to school is related to decreases in school performance and connection, with a focus on the inappropriate environmental makeup of secondary school. Eccles (2003:140) found that aspects of the environment were not suitable for the developing adolescent. The developing adolescent indicates the need for more independence and control over their environment, has worries about peer relationships, identity concerns and demonstrates increased cognitive development, yet:

> *"In light of these needs, the environmental changes often associated with transition to junior high school seem especially harmful in that they emphasize competition, social comparison, and ability self-assessment at a time of heightened self-focus; they decrease decision-making and choice at a time when the desire for control is growing; they emphasize lower level cognitive strategies at a time when the ability to use higher level strategies in increasing, and they disrupt social networks at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and may be need of close adult*

relationships outside of the home. The nature of these environmental changes, coupled with the normal course of individual development, is likely to result in a developmental mismatch so that the "fit" between the early adolescent and the classroom environment is particularly poor, increasing the risk of negative motivational outcomes, especially for adolescents who are having difficulty succeeding in school academically".

As a solution to this person-environment mismatch, Eccles (2003) propose that grading should be based on progress rather than normative development, students should be grouped by choice and interest rather than ability, tests should be used to establish what needs to be learnt rather than to compare students to each other. Finally they highlight the value in providing opportunities for choice, decision-making and cooperative learning rather than competitive learning structures.

2.3.3 Catalogue of Concerns

A large body of research exists detailing the problems that arise at times of transition. Three categories of difficulties will be used as outlined in Akos et al. (2004) and defined below as

1. *Academic:* Difficulties with academic performance post transition, including a focus on increased homework and more difficult course.
2. *Procedural*: Difficulties in getting used to the school environment, timetables, learning the new building layout and school routines. It will also include difficulties in relationships with teachers and adjusting to new disciplinary systems.
3. *Social:* Difficulties due to disruptions in friendship groups and making and managing new peer group relationships.

In addition a fourth category will be used

4. *Individual characteristics*: The aspects of the individuals identity, background or experiences that results in increasing their vulnerability to transition problems.

A detailed summary of the key transitional problems experienced under these headings are presented in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1
Catalogue of Transition Problems

Category	Issue	Source
Individual Characteristics	Girls have more problems Gender experiences are different at time of transition and need to be considered	(Hargreaves, 1996) (Simmons, 1987) (Hirsch, 1987) (Jackson, 2000)
	Younger students	(Summerfield, 1986)
	Minority Youth Youth without English as a first language	(Hargreaves, 1996) (Hargreaves, 1996)
	Decrease in Self Esteem, especially girls	(Anderson, 2000) (Simmons, 1987) (Seidman, 1994) (Fenzel, 1989)
	No change in self esteem	(Hirsch, 1987)
	Conduct Problems in Primary School	(Anderson, 2000) (Simmons, 1987) (Berndt, 1995) (Isakson, 1999) (Dowling, 1986)
	Lower Academic Ability	(Anderson, 2000) (Felner, 1993) (Isakson, 1999) (Shanks, 1986) (Humphrey, 2004)
	Lower socio-economic background (may be overlapped with race	(Anderson, 2000) (Felner, 1993) (Dowling, 1986) (Summerfield, 1986)
	Lack of parental support for education benefits	(Anderson, 2000) (Felner, 1993) (Summerfield, 1986)
	Off Time Pubertal Development, Early or Late	(Simmons, 1987)
	Early Unsupervised Time	(Simmons, 1987)
	Previous experience of Bulling	(Simmons, 1987)
	Previous experience of problem relationships with peers	(Simmons, 1987) (Isakson, 1999)
	Dealing with more than one stress at a time	(Simmons, 1987) (Felner, 1993)
	Youth with internal motivation fare better than those with external motivation	(Harter, 1992)
Academic	Decrease in academic performance post transition Decrease in academic more in boys and in minority groups	(Seidman, 1994) (Harter, 1992) (Reyes, 2000) (Smith, 2006) (Galton, 2000) (Galton, 2000)
	Decline in academic performance can be traced back to primary school, age of 7	(Duchesnse, 2005)

Procedural	Increased School Size & Departmentalisation Tracking, emphasis on ability	(Cotterell, 1992) (Anderson, 2000) (Eccles, 2003)
	Value in more access to a large space and increased opportunities for independence	(Pointon, 2000)
	Lack of private student space in secondary school, the desk is borrowed.	(Pointon, 2000)
	Less satisfaction with school Less connection to school	(Anderson, 2000) (Reyes, 2000)
	Less Positive Attitudes to Subjects/Teachers	(Anderson, 2000)
	Differences between school's curriculum	(Cotterell, 1986) (Eccles, 2003)
	Mismatch between cognitive skills and expectations	(Cotterell, 1986) (Eccles, 2003)
	Decrease in pupil preparedness for class	(Seidman, 1994)
	Minor rules are confusing	(Murdoch, 1986)
Social	Increased difficulties in peer relationships, Especially girls	(Fenzel, 1989) (Hardy, 2002) (Anderson, 2000) (Simmons, 1987) (Demetriou, 2000)
	Increased social pressures from peers	(Harter, 1992) (Demetriou, 2000)
	Negative effect of anti social peer group	(Demetriou, 2000)

2.3.4 Irish Research on School Transition

Smyth et al. (2004) conducted a study into the transition process for young people moving from primary to secondary school. The study had a mixed methodology that combined a national survey of all secondary school principals, who responded with a 78% response rate, with an in-depth focus on transition issues in 12 case study schools. They found that school principals reported that a minority of youth will have problems with the transition caused by literacy and numeracy problems, lack of family support and increased number of subjects. In the 12 case study schools the study found that school size can have a negative effect on coping with the transition, as can the increased number of subjects and different teaching styles. Bullying was reported as a concern in all 12 schools, while there were structured policies in place to respond.

The authors found evidence of a reluctance on behalf of the students to report concerns. Overall they reported that 1 in 10 students will have ongoing problems with the transition with the most common reasons listed as bullying, learning problems, immaturity and the personality of the student. Similar findings were found by McArdle (2006).

Smyth et al. (2004) found that students themselves reported that having contact with the school and information about the school prior to the transition can ease the process, through relying on siblings and/or friends from primary school. However the students did report mixed emotions at the notion of moving, with students who had the most difficulty in primary school reporting the most negativity. Difficulties experienced by the 1st Years included coping with increased teachers, new subjects, different relationships with teachers, rites of passage (1st Year beating, boys' schools). Students reported enjoying the benefits of wider experiences and greater autonomy. The role of school climate, the nature of the interaction between the students and the teacher has important influence on the students attitude to school and themselves. Smyth et al. (2004) concluded that there should be an exploration of a generic school preparation module for all primary schools. In particular research should analyse the role played by student mentors, with reference to international research and best practice. Other recommendations to aid in successful transitions include the need to provide extra-curricular activities, to develop a supportive informal climate, to work on curriculum continuity between primary and secondary schools. Smyth et al. (2004) also recommends increased use of taster programmes for primary students prior to transfer and transition activities that encourage the involvement of parents. There is also a role for developing of subject range and choice to include practical, hands-on subjects, including the continuing expansion of IT.

Naughton (2000: 128) undertook an examination of the issues relating to the transition of Irish secondary school students. He argued that traditionally schools tend to see the problem of transition as residing in the student themselves and that this therefore absolves schools from responsibility, their role is simply one of management and containment. He proposes that programmes to support adolescents in make the transition should focus on support for the adolescent adjustment, the learning adjustment, and the organisational adjustment that is required in order to settle into the new school environment.

2.4 An Outcomes Focussed Policy Agenda

2.4.1 Introduction

As a result of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), policy and services for young people have been increasingly concerned with achieving outcomes for and with them. The publication of *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (2007) by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs reveals a shift in Ireland towards this outcomes focus, while also pointing to higher expectations and standards for public services (CFRC/OMCYA, 2007).

The *Agenda* is the first attempt in Ireland to establish a set of high-level outcomes towards which all our services should be working. The seven national service outcomes for children are:

1. *Healthy, both physically and mentally;*
2. *Supported in active learning;*
3. *Safe from accidental and intentional harm;*
4. *Economically secure;*
5. *Secure in the immediate and wider physical environment;*
6. *Part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and the community;*
7. *Included and participating in society.*

In addition to this focus, *The Developmental Welfare State*, published by NESC (2005) placed strong emphasis on joined up and integrated policy and services. On the ground, the issue of inter-agency co-operation has always been a difficulty for youth and family support projects. However, the *Integrated Planning for Outcomes for Children* (Bradley et al., 2008), shows the significance of the issue at all levels from front-line services to policy-makers and politicians. Therefore, any services for young people, including the EAR Project in this case, need to regard the themes of outcomes and integration as being central to their work (Forkan et al., 2008).

2.4.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

To achieve these outcomes for our young people, there is a need to monitor and evaluate any initiative which works with them. In doing so, it is important to recognise the difference between the terms *monitoring* and *evaluation*. Once a Project is initiated, it can begin to monitor its work by collecting various types of data, such

as throughput, take up of programmes by sex and age profile of the young people attending and their general level of satisfaction with the service for example.

> "*However, over time this soft data would not enable the* [Project] *to adequately assess its progress as set out in its original objectives. Therefore, after a period of bedding-in, it would be envisaged that* [the Project] *would begin to develop robust systems of evaluation, while continuing to monitor key aspects of the Project*"
>
> (Forkan et al., 2008: 74-5)

Bradley et al. (2007: 3) suggest that in order to achieve the positive life outcomes for children, policy makers, service providers, and practitioners need to subject their work to these questions:

1. Are we making a positive difference for children (*as a result of planning for the right outcomes?)*
2. Will we know it *(by monitoring achievement of agreed outcomes)*
3. How will we measure this *(through evaluation that gets us to full information or "the true story behind the apparent story")*

With regard to addressing the "*How will we measure this*" question, a very useful tool for evaluating services was developed under the auspices of the HSE and the Programme of Action for Children. As a result of the joint work, the *Adolescent Friendly Quality Assessment Tools* (AFQuATs) was published in 2006. The tools were developed to assess the quality of services for young people in relation to adolescent friendly quality standards and can be applied broadly to any youth related Project. The AFQuATs are based on the following six Quality Dimensions, with each dimension being further sub-divided into assessment categories (See Appendix 1 for details).

1. Accessibility of Service
2. Flexibility of Service
3. Staff Training
4. Quality Information for Young People
5. Partnership Approach
6. Confidentiality and Privacy

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide the policy context through which to view the existence of the EAR Project. It discussed the consequences of early school leaving for those who leave education early while also examining the various factors associated with the process of school transition. The final section presented information on the recent development of an outcomes-focussed policy agenda in Ireland as well as information on the AFQuATs model of self-evaluation for all Projects dedicated to improving life outcomes for young people.

Chapter 3
The Research Process

3.1 Research Advisory Group

This evaluation began in April 2008 and was completed by September 2008. Following an initial meeting between the CFRC, the Project Manager of EAR and the CEO of ACT, the aims and objectives of the evaluation were agreed. It was also decided that in line with good research practice, a *Research Advisory Group* (RAG) would be established to advise and support the researchers from the CFRC in conducting the evaluation. The membership of the RAG consisted of the following representatives:

- Aishling Walsh (Big Brother Big Sister Programme, Foróige , Athlone);
- Eamonn Farrell, (Family Support Services Manager, Longford/Westmeath);
- Michael Fuery, (CEO, ACT, Athlone);
- Parents' Representative;
- Sheila McArdle, (Project Manager, EAR Project);
- Cormac Forkan (Researcher, CFRC, NUI Galway).

At the first meeting of the RAG, the Terms of Reference for the Group were discussed (See Appendix 2). It was agreed that the group would meet during the course of the research to support and advise on the Completing Research Design, Data Collection, Final Analysis of Research Findings and Format of Final Report. It was also agreed that the RAG would not have a management function over the researchers from the CFRC.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

As the CFRC is based at NUI Galway, prior to the initiation of the evaluation, the researchers submitted a written form to the Research Ethics Committee requesting permission to engage in the evaluation. After some procedural elements were qualified, full approval was given to the CFRC to conduct the evaluation.

In addition to this, throughout this evaluation process, the work was guided by the ethical standards of the Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI-Ethical Guidelines). In general, ethical guidelines ask three main questions (Bryman, 2002):

1. Was there a lack of informed consent or deception?

In advance of any of the data collection sessions for the evaluation, all participants were informed about the aim of the evaluation, the process of data collection as well as the fact that they were not obliged to answer any question if they so wished and that they were free to decline the invitation to participate. Each participant was asked to read a consent form and sign it to show they knew what they were asked to become involved in (See Appendix 3). When dealing with children, parental consent was sought prior to the data collection. The combination of these methods ensured there was no deception by the researchers of any of the adults or children involved in the evaluation process.

2. Was there harm to participants?

As part of the evaluation, the researcher always guarded against any consequences for research participants which could have been predicted to be harmful. A plan was put in place to deal with any possible upset for any participant, arising from their participation in evaluation interviews. The process was also guided by *Children First National Child Protection Guidelines*, for dealing with any disclosures made during interviews with regard to child protection. All of this ensured that the participants were not harmed in any way.

3. Was there an invasion of privacy?

All of the information shared by participants during the evaluation process was treated as confidential. No information was shared with anyone outside the CFRC, except in aggregate form as part of report findings. No research participants will be identified in this evaluation report as every effort has been made to ensure that the individual stories of young people or their families are not identifiable. Due to the nature of the process, apart from young people and their families, anonymity of other stakeholders cannot be guaranteed.

3.3 Number of Participants in the Evaluation

In the subsequent chapters, detailed information will be given on the types of research methods used to collect the data necessary to answer the objectives of this research, as outlined in Chapter 1. In addition, micro-level information will also be presented on the numbers of people who participated in the data collection phases of the evaluation.

However, Figure 3.1 provides a macro view of the exact number of participants in the evaluation. A total of 114 people took part in evaluation, from within two different categories. A more detailed analysis of these figures will be given in subsequent chapters.

Figure 3.1

Numbers of Participants in Evaluation Process
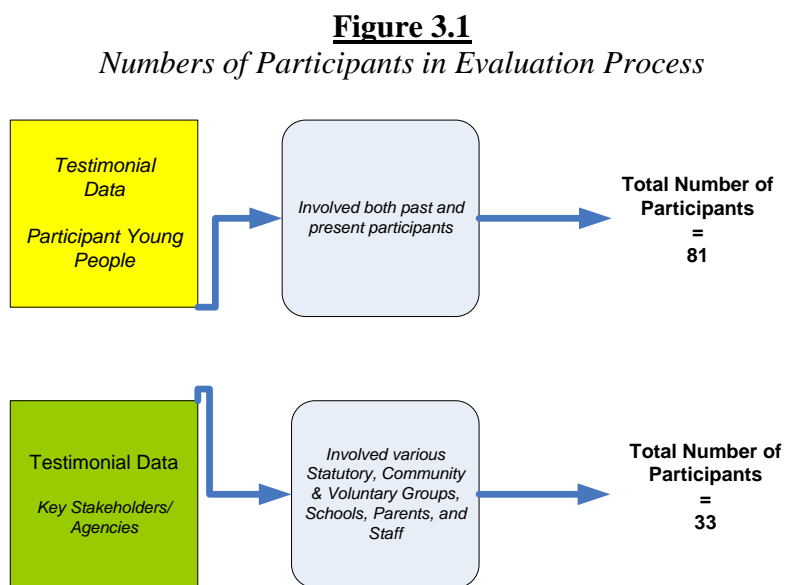
Chapter 4
Description of the EAR Project Model

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents specific information on the EAR Project itself. The first section deals with the Project model as operated by the Project. It presents information on the background to the EAR Project as well as the eleven initiatives within the Project, in addition to key spin-off initiatives. The second section analyses a recent tracking exercise conducted by the EAR Project Manager, to provide a snap-shot of the EAR Project, during the summer of 2008.

4.2 The EAR Project Model

4.2.1 Background to the EAR Project

The work leading to the initiation of the EAR Project dates back to 2003. At that time, a strategic review of the activities of Athlone Community Taskforce was held. The review led the ACT Board to a decision that an effective contribution to tackling unemployment in the long-term in the Athlone area would be to consider methods of supporting young people to remain in education. This led to the development of the Educational Action Research Project, which was designed for ACT by the UK based Grubb Institute, in the light of its involvement in previous ACT projects with young people in Athlone. The Institute proposed a child-centred action research process to support children in transition combined with a mapping of existing resources and agencies supporting young people, so they could come together to offer relevant provision for the children.

The aim of the action research was *"to examine from a young person's perspective the experience of the transition from primary to post-primary"* (McArdle, 2006). The research was given a one year timescale from February 2005-January 2006. As reported in the ensuing research report entitled *Going to Secondary School* (McArdle, 2006), the research was progressed through two simultaneous Strands, A and B. Strand A – *The Transition Programme* - worked with a total of 25 6th Class pupils, 9 females and 16 males, drawn from two different primary schools in the Athlone area.

Each of the pupils volunteered (with parental consent) to participate in this two-phased project.

- Phase One of Strand A involved working with young people in primary schools where each had the opportunity to explore their individual transition needs, apprehensions and concerns.

- Phase Two of Strand A involved working in post-primary level. The Project Manager reconnected with the volunteer researchers to see if they wanted to participate in a semi-structured interview. This process provided the opportunity for the young people to provide information about their early experiences of the post-primary context. Parents were also invited to provide their experience of their child's transition from primary to post-primary school. To provide a holistic picture of the transition experience, the school perspective was obtained by inviting post-primary school staff to contribute to the research process.

Strand B of the research involved the Project Manager networking with a total of 84 stakeholders in the region. As well as this process helping to publicise the EAR Project, it allowed specific information to be gathered from the schools and agencies, namely:

- To identify existing transition supports in place at the time of the research;
- To ascertain the existing contribution the service makes to building resilience in young people;
- Current interactions between agencies which promote resilience;
- To identify areas of potential transformation where integration and collaboration can be enhanced to build resilience among young people.

As part of the original design, a Partnership Group was formed, with representatives from the Youth Work sector, the HSE, Home School Liaison, Athlone Community Services Council, the Community and Parents (See Appendix 4 for list). One of the key strengths of the Partnership Group was the way in which it was designed. It was created not to be a rigid, closed group, but one that allowed the various organisations to join or leave, depending on the need being addressed.

The terms of reference of the group were:

1. To assist and support the transition programme and spin-off initiatives
2. To encourage support for the programme among agencies and other groups
3. To supply information regarding the sector/agency current initiatives
4. To supply information regarding the sector/agency proposed initiatives
5. To take a proactive approach to influence legislation to correspond with identified need for transformation
6. To be committed to the processes of the Partnership Group.

A subsequent analysis of the research findings from Strand A led to a detailed report addressing three central themes, those being *"The need to belong", "What will the school really be like"* and *"Will I be able to learn".* McArdle (2006: 112) concludes that:

> *"It is clear through the action research process that a range of in and out of school factors impact on a young person's transition from primary to post-primary school. Some of these factors young people are aware of and others that they are not aware of".*

4.2.2 Initiatives Provided by the EAR Project

Following an analysis of Strands A and B, it was possible for the EAR Project to identify areas for the potential development of further initiatives, within the 1st year of the programme. McArdle (2006) lists these 'spin-off' projects as *The Education Welfare Act* (2000), *the Me, Myself and I Programme*, the *Special Needs Survey* and the *Principals' Forum*. In addition, McArdle (2006) outlined a number of recommendations to inform the development of a three-year action plan for the EAR Project. To support young people make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school, in addition to dealing with their concerns, it is also necessary to work with the family, the school and the community. Therefore, *"to respond to these child-centred identified needs, it necessary to create supports in and out of the school context"* (McArdle, 2006: 126).

As a result, a number of initiatives were developed for young people across primary level, the summer break period and post-primary level. Detailed information on the purpose of these initiatives, as well as their progression and current status will now be provided (See Appendix 5 for additional information on Initiatives). In addition to these original initiatives as proposed in the *Going to Secondary School* Report, the EAR Project developed further spin-off projects to respond to child-centred needs and these are also outlined.

1. Transition Programme – Going to Secondary School

The Transition programme was designed to enable young people to participate and manage their own transition from primary to post-primary school. As shown in Table 4.1, a total of 346 young people have participated in the Transition programme between 2004 and 2008. It was run in six primary schools and five secondary schools in 2008 and was run in conjunction with other agencies apart from in its first year. At the end of the academic year 2007-08, it had been agreed (in principle) that the School Completion Programme (SCP) will offer the Going to Secondary Transition Programme within the SCP cluster of schools for the 2008-09 academic year. The Midland Regional Youth Service (MRYS) will be offering schools the choice of the Going to Secondary Transition Programme or the SOS Transition Programme to cater for the schools not within the SCP remit.

Table 4.1
Details of Progression of Transition Programme

Academic Year	Number of Young People	Primary school	Post-primary school	Project Partners
2004/2005	25	2	5	n/a
2005/2006	83	4	5	MRYS, Barnardos
2006/2007	90	4	5	MRYS, Barnardos
2007/2008	148	6	5	MRYS, Barnardos and SCP

2. Transition Programme - Training for Facilitators

The training for facilitators was developed to ensure the continuity of programme delivery in different schools by different agencies and to promote the overall quality of the programme. As illustrated by Table 4.2, a total of eight people have taken part on the training for facilitators programme, between 2005 and 2008. A training programme was delivered in November 2008 which will be available to MRYS, SCP staff, schools and other agencies. The training programme delivery includes applying the child-centred approach, child protection, reflective practice and programme content and will increase the pool of trained facilitators to deliver the programme.

<div align="center">**Table 4.2**</div>

<div align="center">*Details of Progression of Transition Programme – Training for Facilitators*</div>

Academic Year	Number of Participants	Agencies	Participant Numbers
2004-2005 (research year)	NA[1]	NA[1]	NA[1]
2005-2006	4	MRYS, Barnardos	2 2
2006-2007	2	EAR (New member of staff)	1
2007-2008	2	MRYS SCP	2 1

[1] Not applicable

3. Special Needs Initiative

The Special Needs Initiative (SNI) was developed to assist the most vulnerable families to access educational psychological assessments. In the academic year 2005-2006 a pilot action research project was commenced regarding the young person's experience of the educational psychological assessment at the time of the transition from primary to post-primary school. A follow up with the young people, their parents, school personnel and the educational psychologist in the early 2006-2007 was completed. The pilot project made a recommendation to expand the Project (See Table 4.3)

In the academic year 2006-2007 the expanded Project was initiated involving families at both primary and post-primary level. The completed research document was submitted to the Board of ACT with a proposal to continue the SNI. During the academic year 2007-2008 the SNI was administered jointly by ACT and WCD Limited in the Athlone area as standalone Project. One person within WCD Ltd was allocated responsibility to operate this initiative. Therefore, the SNI was no longer under the remit of the EAR Project. In 2008-2009 the SNI Project will progress as a standalone initiative administered by WCD Ltd and ACT.

Table 4.3

Details of Progression of Special Needs Initiative

Academic Year	Number of Young People	Number of young people from Primary Schools	Number of young people from Post-primary schools
2005-2006 Pilot programme	6	6	
2005-2006 Full programme	16	8	8

4. Sports and Education After School Programme (SEA)

There was a three-fold purpose to the Sports and Education After School Programme (SEA) 1) to promote sport as part of a healthy life style; 2) to provide a positive experience of 3rd Level education for young people who may not view 3rd Level as an option for themselves and 3) to provide practical experience for 3rd Level students to work with young people and connect their practice to their own studies.

Some details relating to the numbers participating in the programme are offered in Table 4.4. A change in a personnel member at Athlone Institute of Technology during the academic year 2006-2007 led to a renegotiation of the programme. The programme was incorporated into the curriculum of the Social Care degree in the college during the academic year 2007-2008. This involved the EAR Project Manager providing two training sessions in the college to 2nd Year students regarding the EAR Project and the SEA Programme. For the 2008-2009 academic year, the programme has been mainstreamed as an initiative of the WCD Ltd and will be co-ordinated by the afterschool service manager.

Table 4.4
Details of Progression of SEA Programme

Academic Year	Number of Young People	Community-based afterschools projects	AIT students	Project Partners
2005-2006	30	6 afterschools projects	15 volunteer mentors from Sports and Recreation, Tourism and hospitality, computing, accounting and social care	Westmeath Sports Partnership (Grant aid for one year only) AIT
2006-2007	NA[1]			
2007-2008	30	6 afterschools projects	2nd Year social care students	AIT

[1] Not applicable

1. Multi-dimensional Summer Camp

This group was targeted at the 12 to 15 year olds and aimed to provide opportunities for social interaction; to encourage the use of literacy and numeracy skills during summer break; to encourage skills for self-care into adulthood; to provide skills to consider future options of employment; to provide a continuity between June and September; and to produce pieces of work which can be celebrated with parents/guardians and other guests. The programme was designed and delivered as a pilot project in 2006. Some 61 young people participated in the summer camp from 2006 to 2008 (See Table 4.5). A number of different options are being examined regarding the potential mainstreaming of the Project in 2008/09.

Table 4.5

Details of Progression of the Multi-Dimensional Summer Camp

Academic Year	Number of Young People	Referring Agencies	Project Partners
2005-2006	21	Social Workers, Schools, MRYS	HSE-health promotion team, Health and Food Project, Lough Ree Yacht Club, Local Photographer, Recording studios, MRYS. Tonnta and Volunteers,
2006-2007	21	Social Workers, Schools, MRYS, Barnardos	Health and Food Project, Lough Ree Yacht Club, local photographer, beauty therapist, Tonnta, volunteers and students
2007-2008	19	Social Workers, Schools, MRYS, Barnardos	As above

2. Enhancement of Existing Summer Camps

This involved a one-day workshop with youth leaders and providers to enable them to enhance existing summer camp activities with literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore young people by participating in these activities would be practicing their literacy and numeracy potentially preventing the deterioration of these skills during the summer months. . This programme was delivered as a once-off initiative. Further details are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Details of Enhancing Existing Summer Camps

Academic Year	Representatives	Number of participants	Project Partners
2005-2006	MRYS	7	NALA
	After schools projects	1	County Westmeath VEC
	Athlone Community Services Council	1	Literacy Service
	Irish Wheelchair Association	1	
	West Offaly Partnership	1	

1. Youth Event

The Youth Event was a one-off event arranged to highlight the range of services that are available to young people and families in the Athlone area, to create links between service providers and young people, and to create links between different service providers. It ran in December 2005 and brought closure to the initial year of the EAR research.

2. Web Information Regarding School Activities

The purpose of this programme was to provide up-to-date information about school sporting fixtures and other school activities. A decision was taken to amalgamate the web information into the website for the ICT project, which will be presented next.

3. Connect Us – ICT Pilot Initiative

There was a five-fold purpose to the ICT initiative 1) to create an opportunity for 6th Class pupils to gain an insight into the Post-primary school they were transferring to; 2) to increase social (virtual) interaction; 3) to promote a sense of belonging to the post-primary school; 4) to build links between the Primary and Post-primary school; and 5) to increase usage of IT. A total of 35 primary school children and 15 post-primary young people have participated in the programme to-date (See Table 4.7). The initiative is currently being evaluated by the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Table 4.7
Details of Progression of the ICT Programme

Academic Year	Number of Primary Pupils	Number of Post-primary Students	Number of Adults
2004-2005	NA[1]		
2005-2006	NA[1]		
2006-2007	0	15	6 trained in website administration
2007-2008	35[2]	15	Currently being delivered parents trained in basic computers

[1] Not applicable

4. Study Skills Programme

The study skills programme was developed to provide out of school study motivation for young people, to encourage self-management of their school day, to encourage the self-management of their homework and to increase opportunities to socially interact in small groups. The study skills programme was offered in two different settings 1) Lisseywoolen accommodation centre for asylum seeker and refugees, and 2) a post-primary school in Athlone and adapted for each context. Table 4.8 shows that during the 2007-2008 academic year, 12 young people participated in the programme from across these two settings

Table 4.8

Details of Study Skills Programme

Academic Year	Number of Young People	Project Partners
2007-2008	8	Lisseywoolen Accommodation Centre
2007-2008	4 (2 completed the programme)	NEPS Psychologist Post-primary school

5. Advocacy/Mediation Service

In 2005-2006 a literature review research project was conducted regarding different models of advocacy, mediation and mentoring available at the time. The findings of this literature review identified the Big Brother Big Sister programme as a model of mentoring that was compatible with the holistic approach promoted by the EAR Project. A proposal to establish BBBS in Athlone was agreed with Foróige and the HSE and the service commenced in 2006. This is a standalone project which is managed by Foróige, but the EAR Project sits on the local steering group. Table 4.9 below provides a breakdown of the participant numbers to date.

Table 4.9

BBBS Participant Numbers

	In-community strand	In-school strand
Academic year 2007-08	5	27
Academic year 2008-09	3	27
Total	8	54

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[2] A further 11 young people participated in the film-making project

d. Spin- Off Initiatives

As an action research project, on-going evaluation and continuous planning to respond to child-centred identified need is a core activity of the EAR Project. As a result of this, a number actions and spin-off initiatives, in addition to the original eleven initiatives outlined above were developed and implemented. These were:

1. Student placements;
2. Volunteers;
3. Policy Development;
4. Lisseywoolen Pilot Summer Programme 2007;
5. Lisseywoolen Weekly Service;
6. The ACT Connected Winter Programme;
7. The film Project;
8. The peer education programme (males 14 to 16 years of age);
9. IT and Media Skills training programme (females 13 to16 years of age).

1. Student Placements

In 2006 the Project Manager approached the Athlone Institute of Technology to consider the EAR Project as an appropriate placement for Social Care students. The Project Manager met with the AIT placement officer and a member of the Social Care Department to discuss this proposal. It was agreed that the EAR Project would be included on the placement list for students. In total, six students have been accommodated to complete placements as learning requirements of Social Care Programmes.

2. Volunteers

The Project has also attracted volunteers. One male volunteer wished to gain experience of working with youth in preparation for make an application for the Garda Síochana. Two qualified social care practitioners volunteered to gain experience of working on a specific project as they sought employment in the social care sector.

3. Policy Development

All adults working as paid or non-paid staff with the EAR Project are required to complete induction training. The EAR Project developed the Quality Assurance policy and procedures for FETAC purposes. The lack of awareness among programme participants regarding the safe usage of IT prompted the development of an IT policy and safe use programme.

4. Lisseywoolen Pilot Summer Programme 2007

As a result of delivering the Going to Secondary transition programme during the academic year 2006-2007, young people residing at Lisseywoolen Accommodation Centre for asylum seekers and refugees revealed that they had limited services. As a result, the EAR Project formed a partnership with New Horizons Support Group who worked with asylum seekers and refugees and the Lisseywoolen Accommodation Centre. A five day pilot activity programme working with 5th and 6th Class national school and 1st Year post-primary schools was implemented to ascertain the need for a service to respond to the needs of young people residing on the site.

5. Lisseywoolen weekly Service

As a result of the pilot project it was decided to establish a weekly service that operated one evening a week. The programme commenced in September 2007 and operated one evening a week until May 2008. New Horizon approached Foróige to provide on-going youth service and the participants of the Lisseywoolen EAR Project programme provided a starter group to establish the Foróige club. In September 2008 the weekly service will be operated by Foróige.

6. ACT weekly service

The internal evaluation of the Summer Connected Programme 2006 identified that the young people wanted a continuous weekly service. This was established and operated one evening a week during the academic year 2006-2007 from the beginning of October until the end of May 2008 and the same months during 2007-2008. The internal evaluation of at the end of 2007/2008 identified a need to readjust the service to work with 5th and 6th Class as a group and 1st Years and above as a group.

7. The Film-making Project

This project came about as a result of recruiting schools for the ICT project during the 2007-2008 academic year. A national school wanted to take part in the ICT project, but none of the pupils were transferring to the post-primary school in which the ICT project was working. As an alternative a film making project using the digital cameras and the laptop computers was offered to the national school. A student was also on placement at the time in the EAR Project and was set a task to design a four

session programme on film-making. The student was then asked to be involved in the delivery of the programme also.

The film-making project was piloted and internally evaluated. The programme operated successfully and is now available as a package to be used by other groups. The after-schools project is going to avail of this package during October 2008.

8. The Peer Education Programme

In 2007 a number of young males who had participated in the Connected Summer Programme 2006 and the transition programme returned to the project and requested a service to work with them and other 14+ year olds. At the time the Project did not have funds to develop such a service. In preparation a meeting was held with the MRYS to ensure that if a service was to be established that it was not duplicating any available provision. A successful funding application enabled the Project to employ two part-time workers to develop and initiate the peer education programme as an action research project. The programme worked with eight young males. The Project workers helped the young people pick an area of interest (career in the Army), which they then researched and wrote a report on the experience.

9. IT and Media Skills Programme

As a result of the recommendations of the ACT winter programme to work with 1st Year a new initiative utilising IT and Media skills to respond to the needs of young women was initiated in September 2008.

4.3 The Transition Programme –A Tracking Exercise

In an attempt to provide a snap-shot of the EAR Project, the Board of ACT requested the Project Manager to design and conduct a tracking exercise, regarding participants of EAR Project initiatives, during the summer of 2008. The tracking exercise utilised a quantitative method of data generation. The research population chosen was the past participants of EAR Project, during the academic years 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07. The entire sample totalled 486 young people. A sample of one in three participants was chosen, resulting in a total potential sampling frame of 168. This cross section provided a representative sample of the whole population with young

people drawn from different socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities, the Traveller community and young people with special needs.

All 168 potential participants were contacted in the following manner:

- An explanatory letter and questionnaire was sent by post;
- A follow-up phase of telephone calls to request the return of forms was conducted;
- House calls were then also conducted by the Project staff.

When collated, the findings showed that 98 of the 168 (58.3% response rate) partook in the exercise. The Tracking Exercise Report presents details on the sex of the respondents and the breakdown of the sample by academic year. An interesting finding was all but four participants on the EAR Project made the transition to second level, with one of the four not making the transition and the remaining three accessing alternative, non-mainstream education.

Coupled with this, of the 38 young people eligible to commence 2nd Year in September 2008, 100% of them indicated they would be returning to school. For 3rd Years, a similar situation was found where all but 1 of the 40 students eligible for 3rd Year intended returning to school in September. In relation to this one 3rd year, the person in question displayed resistance to returning but it is expected that they will return to school. These figures indicate that the EAR Project is associated with positive retention rates at Junior Cycle as well as successful transfer to second level.

The Tracking Exercise Report also noted the innate link between school attendance and school retention. To track this for the EAR Participants, each parent or guardian was asked for permission for the EAR Project to access school attendance records for this purpose. Of the 98 participants, permission was granted for this to occur for 60 of the young people (61.2%). The procedure and process for this has still to be worked out by ACT and the EAR Project Manager. Finally, the tracking document calls for a tracking framework to be put in place in the future for any subsequent EAR based programmes.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented specific information on the Project model operated by the EAR Project. It revealed the background to the EAR Project as well as providing information on the original and spin-off initiatives within the Project. The information presented on the Tracking Exercise conducted during the summer of 2008 showed that the EAR Project is associated with positive retention rates at Junior Cycle as well as successful transfer to second level.

Chapter 5
Testimonial Data – EAR Project

5.1 Introduction

In addition to the description of the Project Model contained in chapter, a core task of this evaluation was to listen to the views of the various stakeholders who link with the EAR Project. Therefore, firstly, this chapter describes the methodology used to collect the required data from the various stakeholders. Secondly, the chapter presents the data on their perceptions and views of the EAR Project. A summary of the key points raised by each stakeholder group is given at the end of each of their respective reports.

5.2 Designing the Methodology

The initial step in designing the methodology for this evaluation involved identifying the various stakeholders who would be invited to participate in the evaluation. After a discussion at a RAG meeting, a full list of stakeholders was arrived at which was later categorised into two main groupings, Non-Participant Stakeholders and Participant Stakeholders.

A total of five distinct groups made up the Non-Participant Stakeholder group, ranging from parents to staff to the management group (See Table 5.1). After reviewing the list, it was agreed that a mixture of focus group and telephone interviews would be used to collect the required data. Subsequent to this, a set of topic guides and schedules were designed for each group (See Appendix 6 for a sample of these).

The second group of stakeholders, the Participant Stakeholders, was made up six distinct groups of young people which the EAR Project had worked with directly. These ranged from those involved in activity groups, to the transition programme to the peer education programme. Apart from the latter group which saw a mix of a focus group and telephone interviews being used, the data were collected from the other participant stakeholder groups by focus group (See Appendix 7 for a sample of the topic guides used).

Table 5.1

Sources and Methods of Data Collection – EAR Evaluation

Stakeholder Group	Specific Group	No's Participating in Research	Method of Data Collection
1. Non-Participant Stakeholders	**1.** Parents **2.** Staff of EAR **3.** Stakeholder Agencies **4.** Education Sector (x 6 Schools) **5.** Management Group **Total Number of Participants**	5 4 10 6 8 **33**	Focus Group Focus Group Telephone Focus Group & Telephone Telephone

2. Participant Stakeholders	1. Activity Groups x 2
	2. Summer Connected
	3. Primary Schools x 4
	4. Past Participants
	  - Group 1 (random selection)
	  - Group 2 (x 3 schools)
	5. SEA Programme
	6. Peer Education Programme
	Total Number of Participants
		9
		8
		30
		
		7
		18
		5
		4
		81
			Focus Group
			Focus Group
			Focus Group
			
			Focus Group
			Focus Group
			Focus Group
			Focus Group & Telephone

Overall Number of Participants	**1. Non-Participant Stakeholders** **2. Participant Stakeholders**	**33** **81** **114**	

5.3 Findings

In this section, the findings relating to the 108 individuals discussed above will be presented under the headings Non-Participant Stakeholders and Participant Stakeholders.

5.3.1 – Non-Participant Stakeholders

The data obtained from the various Non-Participant Stakeholders is presented in this section.

a. Parents

As noted earlier, a focus group was conducted with a group of parents who had children attending the Summer Connected Programme. The interview started by asking the participants how their children had come to be involved with the Summer Connected Programme. A mix of answers were forthcoming, ranging from being referred by the secondary school their child was attending or commencing in September, to being told about the programme by a neighbour, to finding out about from their child's support worker.

The group was then asked to explain their understanding of what the Summer Connected Programme was about. The overarching answer was that the programme was about preparing them for secondary school and the transition from primary to secondary school. Another parent noted that the programme also helped the young people work together and take responsibility for things they wanted to do:

> *"...it was great to get them to work together though because in primary school they just do their homework and there isn't a whole lot for them to do together in primary school, apart from playing out in the break but at least here together that's organised their activities. I think it taught them a lot about taking responsibility for things. Because my lad wouldn't have picked up the phone and rang anybody apart from friends but they had to organise their trips and they had to organise everything that they were doing. I think that was very good".*

Another parent noted that they had noticed their child had become more mature after having participated in the programme. In addition, the programme helped them to socialise and mix in with other young people their own age. Another participant stated that the summer programme had given the young people great opportunities to do things, such as photography, film making and baking, things they would never have had a chance to do otherwise – "*Because there's no way my son was using my oven to bake anything*".

Another participant noted that during the early teenage years, it is often common for boys in particular to withdraw into themselves and not discuss their lives with their family. This parent noticed that with the help give on the summer programme, their son was "*all talk*" every evening about the activities from the programme earlier on –

> "*My fella was a type of a child where he was x-box or the Playstation, it was always, or the laptop and now it's, he actually telling me about what happened - I mean he's a very outgoing child now*".

Similarly, another parent pointed out that their son was reluctant to join the summer programme, but after the first day, the fear had disappeared –

> "*So I just dumped him outside [The EAR Project] and drove off, see you at three o'clock...I picked him up that evening and he said to me, I can't wait to go in there now tomorrow. Because he's meeting new people...*"

There was also agreement in the group about the absolutely brilliant staff group involved in providing the summer programme. For one of the participants, their child had got into some trouble during the course of the programme. However, the parent was delighted with the professional way the Project Manager dealt with the issue –

> "*…my fella got into a bit of bother one of the days but the way they dealt with it - I was brought in and the respect that I got…from the staff here…They didn't just shun the child, like they gave him a chance to explain what happened and he apologised and it's not as if he was shoved out of the summer camp*".

In relation to the organisation behind the summer programme, the parents also pointed out that the planning was so good that they even asked the young people what they wanted to eat each day. One parent welcomed the fact that all the activities on the programme went without a hitch – "… *when the buses were supposed to be back*" they were.

In terms of suggestions for the programme, the parents suggested that perhaps a similar programme could be run during the mid-terms from school – *"Give them a day or two and they're bored out of their heads, they've been up town and they've done the cinema…"*

b. Staff[3] in the EAR Project

The interview started by asking the participants to reflect on what they saw as the aim of the EAR Project. They all agreed that the Project was established to help young people in primary school make a successful transition to secondary school. They went to explain that the types of work undertaken on the Project is varied:

> "*A lot of the clubs, like, we don't just do arts and crafts or whatever, we do sessions where they're doing their internet safety and doing about themselves and relationships and, just different types of things. There's a variety of stuff like that*".

They pointed out that the ideas for the various programmes come from listening to the needs of young people. For example, many of them were unaware of the dangers of using BEBO, so the Project ran a session on internet safety for them. One of the major benefits of a programme such as the Summer Connected is that those on the programme get to make new friends – "*They've already made some links for a new school before they ever get inside the front door, so you know; it takes the edge off it for them*".

The staff group was then asked about the level of induction they received when they started work on the Project. The general finding was that without exception, the Project Manager had gone through all the key information:

> "*...she went through all of the information, the background, what the policies, procedures were, to the method you were working with the kids. Then she was reviewing after two to three weeks how you were getting on, what are you doing and then questioning why you'd be doing certain things, I don't think it was really to try and see if you were doing it right or wrong but to see what was working for you as well and how you were getting on*".

The researcher then progressed the interview by asking the group how could they gauge if the Project was successful or not. In terms of the profile of the Project in the wider community, the staff pointed out that from their experience on the ground, the EAR Project had a very good reputation and was well respected. It was their experience that the schools welcomed the transition programme. In addition, the profile of the Project had opened doors for other agencies to help out with the work. In relation to the young people, the fact that the Summer Programme had a waiting

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[3] The Staff Group which was interviewed included both paid staff and volunteers. The Project Manager was not included in this group.

list illustrated the success as well as the fact that not many of them ever drop out of the programmes in which they are involved. Also, the fact that the young people talk to the Project staff is a sign of success –

> "*And even when they come in they want to come in and sit down and chat to you like, just tell you things, you know, they've gone on holidays. [One of the young people] the other day couldn't wait to come in and tell us about his near death experience on holidays! It's good because normally they keep to themselves …*"

In relation to the transition programme, the staff felt that success was when the young person got to a stage at the end of the programme, where they could stand up and speak in pubic.

When asked about the impact of the transition programme on the young people when they made the move to second level, the general consensus was that the programme did help:

> "*I suppose the last year of the transition programme I would have linked with the young people who would have done it and gone on to first year and I think a lot of them were coming back and saying the first couple of weeks are very hard for them to settle but then after that it's fine. You'll always have one or two that's still, you know, are struggling with it but I think a lot of them have said that the fact that they got to do timetables, you know, they were able to run through, get their questions answered before they ever went in, took an awful lot of the, you know, the pressure off them when they got into the school itself like*"

Major Challenges

The interview then focussed on what the staff regarded as the main challenges they had to face. The first common problem that was cited was the fact that a lot of the staff work a 20 hour week. The group felt that this was not enough time to get all the work done. They noted that doing the groups is fine but the amount of time spent on pre-group recruitment is massive and very time consuming. Another challenge faced by the staff was the often small space made available to them to work with specific groups. In particular, the fact that the EAR Project is based among other offices, it is often difficult to keep the young people quiet. It was their view that the Project needed the use of a community centre which would overcome these two issues. A further issue noted was the unruly behaviour of some of the young people involved with the Project, which was often difficult to deal with.

Related to that point, the staff praised the professional way the Project Manager worked with them to overcome any issues that arose -

> *"I think she kind of makes you an awful lot more reflective on what you're doing. I suppose it almost becomes natural to you after a couple of months of working with her because you get so used to having to look at both sides of the coin and everything. You're looking at how you're working and how you're affecting the kids and how the kids are affecting you and how the kids were affecting each other like so, like".*

The group indicated that due to the guidance of the Project Manager, being reflective in their work becomes natural.

Inter-Agency Partnerships

The subsequent section in the focus group asked the group to consider how well the EAR Project had collaborated with other agencies in the delivery of the various programmes. The group agreed that the Project was very well linked in with agencies such as Social Work, the Midlands Regional Youth Service, Barnardos and Home School Community Liaison to name just a few:

> *"...there are a lot of agencies there that when you send a letter will write back immediately or ring immediately and get on the phone, even if it's only to say well no, we don't have anyone at this moment in time".*

They also suggested when asked, that this level of collaboration between the Project and these agencies had been developed over the time of the Project by the invaluable work of the Project Manager. One of the staff did note, however, that they had a difficulty in the past with a representative from an agency who had a very specific attitude about who should or should not attend the Project. This had the potential to exclude the most vulnerable children.

Child-Centred Practice

One of the core ways of working for the EAR Project is that it is child-centred and youth-led. When asked to comment on this, the participants agreed that the approach is based on a holistic approach to the child -

> *"I suppose it's more of a holistic way of working with the child and the family as well and the community and trying to integrate the three of them together do you know. But it is about trying to get that approach together, that you know, the activities are being done in the community, the family are involved and that the child is attending so we try and make sure that it's like that and I think as well, I know with the peer programme a lot of it evolves naturally as*

the programme is going along, you have a basic plan but we've often said to the workers like you have to be flexible with the timetable if something, do you know, if it's raining you can't bring them sailing, you know, we have to have something else. We do reviews, we've just done a mid plan review today with the kids so it's looking at what they're saying, what their experience is and then acting on what they're telling us, what's working and what's not working and changing it again then afterwards".

Related to this, the participants pointed out that the young people are enabled to choose the activities they want to do. During the Summer Programme, one staff member commented how the staff had divided the young people into groups and given them a budget to use to plan and pay for their activities. They ended up *"planning a day out for themselves"*, which shows the level of youth-led practice. On the funny side, the staff noted that "… [one] *group realised that team work is best because the other two decided to combine the two budgets together; they have three hundred quid to go and spend on whatever"*! The group agreed that activities such as these are good for the young people as they learn about the consequences for their actions.

The Future for the Project

The last part of the focus group asked the staff to comment on what they saw as an appropriate future for the EAR Project. The overwhelming reply from the group is that the Project should be kept going into the future, simply because it is serving a need in the community. They did agree, however that there were plans for many of the initiatives within to the Project to be mainstreamed. This would then allow the Project to evolve and develop new areas of work. A key issue for the staff for the future of the Project was their security in employment:

> "*Yeah, you can't really give it your all because you know it's going whereas…if you could be given the guarantee that well come September that contract will be gone and even if they said, look at, we have to lay you off for three months until we find funding but as soon as funding is re-found your position will be open back up to you again for x amount of time, that in itself would, do you know what I mean, at least you know*"

c. The Stakeholder Agencies

This set of telephone interviews were designed to elicit views on the EAR Project from the key stakeholder agencies engaged with the Project. The first question presented to the interviewees asked them to consider if, in their view, the EAR Project had created conditions that supported young people making the transition to post-primary school. The group's initial response was to focus on the aim of the Project. Specific comments related to the aim noted that the Project was designed to *"Initially...examine the reasons why young people don't make the transition and why they don't stay on in school"*. It also was created to *"To support young people in 6thClass and 1st Year to make the transition from primary to secondary. Putting supports in place. Helping young people identify their own supports and the places to get the supports they need"*. The group also agreed that the EAR Project worked to :

> *"... provide children with the tools they need to make the first days and weeks easier. To give them the awareness of what happens in secondary and make the transition easier. Practical, talk through with friends...give them the knowledge. That it's no big scary thing"*.

The interviewees were asked to focus on what they saw as being the practice principles that underpinned the work of the Project. The responses offered were:

- *"It's all client-centered. Young people at the core of all decisions and given the chance to make a choice. They can withdraw at any stage. They decide on the activities"*;
- *"Respecting children and their opinions, their individual experience, siblings, all the children listened to, ground rules, confidentiality, freedom to speak and non bullying"*;
- *"Non judgemental"*;
- *"A research process which uses a model of 'children as researchers' to create the conditions where children manage the situation themselves. Also about providing a safe place for children to explore their questions around transferring to secondary level. About looking at the 'rites of passage' aspect of the transfer to secondary and how this was integrated into the presentations children made to peers parents and teachers"*.

Most Successful Components

The next area discussed was what the agencies saw as the most successful aspects of the EAR Project.

- In addition to the comments cited above, the group identified that summer connected programme as a great success. It kept the young people "*…connected … throughout the summer. They didn't slip away from the group and lose direction. It was easier to move back into the school situation and keep up the group dynamics and sense of direction*".

- The fact that the primary and secondary schools were co-operating in preparing for the transfer of students and identifying those children who might fall out of education.

- "*The group support and bonding. Youth led way - issues dealt with in a planned program looking at social, emotional and educational* [aspects]".

- The Project allowed for a myriad of organisations to be brought together, which were all dealing with same young people.

- The Project enabled young people to develop their self-confidence.

- The child-centred approach inherent in the Project enabled agencies to find ways to co-operate with different young people.

Inter-Agency Collaborations

Another area of interest to the evaluation was whether or not the EAR Project had facilitated the development of inter-agency collaborations. The general feeling coming from the group was that between being involved in programme planning with the EAR, the delivery of specific programmes, providing funding and resources, referring to the Project or providing training to staff on the EAR, there was good collaboration between their agency and the Project. They also agreed that this collaboration had happened due to the work of the EAR's Project Manager, as there was "*…easy, open communication between our department and the Project Management*". The collaboration between agencies fostered by the EAR Project allowed a number of agencies to make new links with agencies they had not worked with before that. When asked what did this collaboration mean for broader outcomes for children and young people, one participant in the group suggested that:

> "*I suppose it means that you have lots of people with skills and different knowledge sharing these and has an impact for young people. If anything is identified by one project ..sharing knowledge and using other projects resources to work in the best interests of the young people*".

Another participant noted that it is one of the few opportunities agencies get to work together in a specific way. The collaboration has also allowed workers to become more aware of children's needs and refer them to the relevant agencies.

When asked if they had any challenges in relation to this co-operation, half of the participants stated they had none. However, for the remainder, they cited the following:

- "*Not always easy to get people to turn up. Everyone has their own workload and is busy. Difficult to move on from the meeting and to carry out the work of the Project as well as own workload*".
- "*The biggest challenge is about communication in meeting the needs of the children*".
- "*The biggest was deciding where to go from here. The challenge was around funding issues. It was a difficult session around moving forward*".
- "*The challenge is always in the design of language around trying to help people to understand the way a young person experiences the world is very different to what an adult may intend. The challenge is to help agencies to see the young people's worldview and to create linkages that have not happened before* [for the young people and for the agencies]".

Implementing Youth-Led Practice

One of the core tenants of the EAR Project is that it provides situations where young people can lead and shape the programmes in which they engage. The group was asked if they had evidence that the EAR Project was enabling this to happen. The majority of participants agreed that this end was being reached by the Project. "*It definitely did – it was all youth led planning/implementation and evaluation for example on the issue of bullying, the Project brought in other services to provide a speaker*". Following this, the agencies were asked if they had made any changes to their way of working with young people (more youth-led), in their respective agencies because of the experience of the EAR Project's way of working. The results showed

that nearly all the agencies were already using youth led practice in their work already. However, they did note that working in this fashion was very challenging – *"I think there are. – challenges for workers handing over a lot of responsibility to young people keeping on the challenges for the young people but a huge amount of learning"*. Another participant noted that:

> *"Yes there is work being done around youth led practice – it's very easy to talk about youth led practice where it's youth leading youth but more challenging where it is youth leading adults. It takes time for organisational culture to adjust and begin to be open to hearing young people and understanding they may have some of the answers.'*

The Future Sustainability of the EAR Project

The final line of questioning saw the participants considering the future sustainability of the EAR Project. The main current challenges facing the Project, in their view were:

- Resources in relation to staff;
- Getting other agencies involved to run the different initiatives;
- *"The building /location is an issue and more staff for bigger groups at moment can only work with 21 young people on the summer programme"*;
- *"To get people to take responsibility for the Project - My fear is if EAR is to be finished I just think it will be a tragedy for the vulnerable children. Whose going to pick them up and look out for them? There are fantastic services around town but this Project had a buzz and kept all the agencies on track"*.

Despite these difficulties, the sector identified a number of opportunities it saw for the EAR Project:

- *"Huge advantage in informal and non-formal [educational sectors] working together more creatively and professionally to the benefit of young people"*.
- *"Opportunities for other agencies to take on different initiatives of the Project"* and opportunities for the Project to expand to other schools.
- *"The main opportunity for agencies is to use the Project to enhance their service to young people"*.
- Another participant suggested that there needs to be a longitudinal study into the outcomes for the young people to track them. *"Continuity. The kids really really really appreciate someone sticking out for them. Certain children*

really reap the benefits of making a trust relationship and sticking in there if possible. Kids really appreciate that and reminding them of their positives and strengths"

d. The Education Sector

Core Areas of Work

As noted at the start of this chapter, representatives from six schools added their views on the EAR Project to this evaluation. The participants were asked to comment on what they regarded as the core areas of work engaged in by the EAR Project. One participant suggested that it provided opportunities for children, which they may never experience otherwise, for example the summer camp – it was regarded by them as an excellent idea – "*all the parents were delighted with the work of the camp*". Another participant discussed how the EAR Project was about helping young people make a successful move from primary to secondary level. This is particularly useful as in some cases, parents may not be aware of the school system at second level. The group also agreed that another core area of work engaged in by the EAR Project was where it enables a number of secondary school students to go out to talk to 6th Class pupils about their experiences in 2nd Level. *"It gave them a dignity and self-confidence… and they certainly got something from doing it"*. For another participant, the educational assessments organised by the Project were excellent. "*Schools tend to get the younger children assessed and often the 6th Class pupils never got assessed. It gets them the help they need in 1st Year*".

A number of participants also noted that their respective schools had access to various services such as the EAR Project, Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. Through the work of the EAR Project, over the last few years, all the groups in question sat down and examined any potential overlap between their services. As one participant suggested, the view in the group was that "*there is no point trying to run solo – the collaboration helps an awful lot*". The process of collaboration has allowed each school to see and access personnel from these various services, which they may not have been aware, were in existence. There was agreement that this form of collaboration in service provision for young people, as aided by the EAR Project needed to continue.

Suggestions for the EAR Project

The discussion then progressed to look at areas in which the participants felt the EAR Project could be further developed. One of the participants raised the point that they had some reservations about the transition programme in school:

> *"The concept is excellent and what they discuss is excellent…but it doesn't work in our school ... because the teacher is not present and the people who come in from this programme who have the best will in the world, do not have the authority or discipline on the bold disruptive [pupils] and the whole things fall asunder…"*

This participant, along with others suggested that there was a need for more skilled people to be working with the young people for the transition programme. Another participant discussed how in the 1st Year if the transition programme in their school, there was *"bedlam"* as the programme went on for too long and the young people got bored of it. In addition, they noted that sometimes, the young people in the school know those presenting the transition programme, outside of school and so it is hard to control the group. The group agreed that *"If there is no discipline in it, there is no learning"*. One way to overcome this difficulty they thought would be to make sure that the class teacher or other representative from the school is present – *"...no need to take part, just be present…"*

With regard to the future of the EAR Project, there was general agreement that the work being done by the Project still needs to be done, but how it should be done was debated. One participant suggested that *"If I was to prioritise the work of the Project I would say ... the assessments and the transition programme last"*. Regarding the transition programme, there was agreement that the EAR Project should ask the secondary school to be directly involved in the delivery of the programme.

Another point raised by a participant was the need to have a formal contact person in each secondary school, whose job it is to link with the primary schools to find out about *"Jack and Jill"* [Referring to new students starting at Second-Level] and the issues they may have entering secondary school. They pointed out that the most at risk young people need help as they enter second level, as that is when they run into trouble. However, much of the contact between schools is ad-hoc and informal. This participant also suggested that the secondary schools need to ask *"what can we do to help"* with programmes such as the Transition programme. It was felt that a more co-

ordinated an inclusive approach between all key players would be more beneficial. [In response to this claim, the Project Manager praised the schools and said that they had been tremendous help to the EAR Project].

A final point was that the EAR Project needs to continue working with the parents and the broader community as, without this support, the eventual success of any programmes offered by the EAR Project will be limited.

e. The Management Group

Role of the Management Group

One of first areas investigated in the interviews was whether or not the participants were satisfied with the workings of the Management Group and their role in the process. One participant indicated that *"...there is a dynamic there* [in the group] *that is there to advance and promote the Project and discuss it and monitor it…"* Agreeing that there was "*good healthy debate at the meetings*" around specific issues, another participant pointed out that the Management Group felt more like an Advisory Group rather than a Management Group and did not make that many management decisions. Another member of the group suggested that the Management Group's role was to offer suggestions to the Board of ACT on the work of the EAR Project.

There was general agreement among the participants that until relatively recently, the Project Manager of the EAR Project was unhappy at length of time taken to get decisions made. Many of the participants agreed with this viewpoint. After teasing out the possible reasons for these issues within the Board of ACT, one participant suggested that due to the time needed to manage the cohesion process, ACT did not perhaps have sufficient time to make decisions relating to the EAR Project. Therefore, innate difficulties in the running of ACT worked their way into the running of the EAR Project and the overall functioning of its Management Group.

> *"The Management Group of EAR was not as good as it could have been due to the nature of ACT. There was a difficulty around organising meetings for the Management Committee – quite a tricky progress. Where it has worked, it has gone well"*

The participants were also asked to relate any indicators that the work of the EAR Project had been successful. One participant pointed to the great turn out for the Summit Meeting in 2008 as arranged by the EAR Project, as an indicator of the development of a collaborative space for debate about issues affecting young people. It was felt by one participant that the initial impact of the Project Leader and her ability to communicate and generate interest, was key to the success of the Project and the Summit.

Some of the participants had more detailed knowledge of the actual programmes offered by the EAR Project. A number of them raised the question about how success is measured. During their time on the Group, they had been presented "*subjective information*" regarding the overall success of individual initiatives, and so concluded that it is difficult to gauge to what extent these initiatives are successful. However, as noted by other participants, the EAR Project was set-up as a qualitatively based Project, thus resulting in this subjective type information being generated.

- They did agree, however, that the Summer Connected Programme was regarded as being very useful and successful; that gap was not being filled by any other agencies and the "*work wouldn't have happened without the EAR Project*".

- In Athlone, the Group agreed that there were piecemeal programmes offered in some schools by other voluntary Projects. However, the EAR Project pulled these together a lot better than they were as the EAR took on the transition programme. The participants agreed that there is some evidence, therefore, that collaboration has happened but there is no concrete evidence that "*it has rooted itself*". It is not as if "*everyone has come on-board to say 'Let's all pull together and make this thing work'*".

- The Peer Education programme for the 14 to 16 year olds widened the remit of the EAR Project – as the Project went on, the young people identified a need for this age group during the summer.

- The Special Needs Initiative provides access to educational psychological assessments and has clearly illustrated a greater demand for assessment than the Department of Education and Science is currently providing.

- Another participant noted that there is "*evidence*" that young people involved in the Project, who might have dropped out of school, now see themselves as having a "*future*". This is a huge sign of success for the Project. They noted that as of now, it is very difficult to prove the success of the Project, but "*things look as if things are going in the right direction*"

Challenges faced by the EAR Project

The participants were subsequently asked to consider any challenges facing the EAR Project. Again, a number of responses were offered:

- One participant stated that one of the greatest challenges facing the Project was the need to get its programmes "*bedded down*" or given the chance to establish themselves, in particular the transition programme. The view was that this programme needs to be given time as change cannot be achieved in a year – "*...it needs time to be nurtured and bedded into the whole system like a seed...*" The relationship with the schools needs to be built up over time and then somebody to oversee it to make sure it succeeds.

- It was the perception of one participant that another challenge was the lack of capacity of some agencies to take on programmes offered by EAR. This was due to the insecure long-term funding many agencies received on a yearly basis. However, the participant felt that it takes vision among these agencies and a creative mindset to "*say 'This will be our strategy for the next two years…'*". Another participant noted that with regard to the partnership group – "*...no one has the whole jigsaw puzzle. If ACT could hold the ring to keep the group together, the agencies could work with greater freedom*"

- The Management structure and decision making process in ACT, until recently caused problems for the EAR Project and the Project Manager. This was resolved when ACT appointed a new CEO.

- A participant also pointed out that there is a need to track the progression of the young people who have been involved with the Project. With this longitudinal tracking and knowledge, the future of any such initiates may be in jeopardy.

Future Direction of the EAR Project

Despite the existence of varying opinions on what should happen to the EAR Project in the future, it was possible to agree a common ground. The starting point for the Management Group on this discussion was simply that ACT would no longer fund the EAR Project to the same extent in 2009 as it had done up to this point. As a result, the nature of the EAR Project would have to change. The following points summarise their suggestions for the future:

- There was agreement that the work started by the EAR Project in the form of the various initiatives and related activities needs to continue. There was general consensus that it is important that the contact made with young people via the Project is maintained over the coming years. The development of this initial trust between them and the Project will help their overall progression. However, "*it is a long road for many of these projects to take root*". It needs huge energy and finance to make it work. "*To get a true reading of it* [the success of the Project], *it needs time*".

- The Management Group agreed that by December 2008, the EAR Project will have completed the work it set out to do. As indicated in Chapter 4, some initiatives have already been taken on by agencies in the area. Where possible, then, the remaining initiatives started and developed by the Project need be taken-on by and embedded in the practice of the various agencies part of the current partnership group.

- In order for the initiatives to be successfully embedded by these agencies, the majority of the Management Group believed that the best way this could occur would be for ACT to fund a co-ordinator for a hand-over period, with this period probably being two years. The co-ordinator's job would be to chair the partnership group and ensure that appropriate measures were put in place to gauge the on-going success of each initiative. The role of the co-ordinator would be that of a facilitator and thus radically different from the management role undertaken by the current Project Manager. The co-ordinator could link in with organisations taking charge of the various programme "*...to have an overview of the master plan...to give advice and direction on occasion ... a co-*

ordinator is crucial to it". This would help eradicate the risk of the smaller initiatives waning over time.

- The new co-ordinator would also identify further areas of work for ACT, which would then be developed and handed-on to other agencies over time, similar to the original EAR initiative process of embedding.

- One member of the Management Group was of the view that if the current line management structures were adequate in the agencies going to take on the EAR initiatives, there maybe no need for an actual co-ordinator post December 2008.

5.3.2 – Participant Stakeholders

This section presents the findings obtained from interviews conducted with young people who have engaged with the EAR Project through the various programmes on offer.

a. <u>Activity Groups</u>

1. Lisseywoolen Activity Group

The Lisseywoolen activity group met once a week over the course of the year. To start the interview, the participants were asked to describe the types of activities they had done in their activity group. They described how they had completed some art based activities as well as using clay to make various things. In relation to this one participant noted how much they had enjoyed the experience with the art by stating, "*Art is very good, like brilliant*". The group also noted that they had gone swimming together, gone on a few trips, gone to the cinema, played football, taken part in the St. Patrick's Day parade and had a great party together.

As part of the activities undertaken by the group, one involved writing a report on their mother country. This was then used to form a presentation and their parents and family were invited to come and see it. As part of this, each participant had to explain a little about the native dance in their country. When asked, all of the participants stated that they had really enjoyed being part of the activity group, "*enjoyed it very much*", "*I thought it was very good, brilliant. The teachers were actually good to us, kind and friendly*"; "*they helped us with school, it was lovely*".

After discussing the types of activities engaged in, the participants were asked to consider what they thought was the purpose of their group. They suggested it was about "*having fun*", "*about learning*". Following on from this, one participant commented that

> "*this* [Group] *is about like different people from different countries mixing up different stuff and like we learn how to make like new things that we actually don't learn in school. Actually learn more things here than we get in school… We did this homework thing, I forget the name and like it helped us as well in my school and everything like because it's about mixing in secondary school like, it's telling you about what you're going to learn in secondary school*".

Another participant noted that the activity group is about making new friends.

When asked if they felt anything about the activity group could be improved, some of the participants felt that there should be "*more games*" and sport as part of the work of the group. They also suggested that it would be useful to have a dance teacher to help in the preparation of the any future native dance routines. The group also suggested having a talent show where there would be medals for the winners. In addition, it was their view that the duration of the group needed to be made longer – from two to three hours.

2. Parnell Square Activity Group

There were eight young people involved in this activity group. The participants were asked to describe the types of activities they had done in their activity group. In reply, they stated how they had played soccer, had gone bowling and had undertaken some art work. They also got the opportunity to invite their parents into the Project for a meal.

When asked to score the activity group out of 10, all of the participants gave it top marks. One participant summed up their experience with the activity group by saying, "*The programme was brilliant*". When asked if there was anything else that they would like the activity group to have covered, the issue of bullying came up. They also suggested that the normal two hour slot for their activity group was not long enough and would be better if it was three hours. In addition, the participants stated that the group ran one day per week. However, they also felt that two days per week would be better as they could do more activities and "*learn more stuff*".

b. Summer Connected Programme

During the Summer Connected Programme, a group of participants were asked for their views on the programme. The group was asked how they had come to hear about the programme. The replies varied from hearing about it from their class teachers, by letter from the EAR Project, by recommendation from the secondary school they would be attending, from their parents.

The group then went on to list the activities they had done thus far on the summer programmes. These ranged from cooking to sailing, film making to drama, playing guitars and drums to recording their own music CD, art to going away on trips. With regard to the music, one young person commented that prior to doing the music on the programme, *"I wasn't really interested in like doing any instruments but when I did the guitar I wanted to start it. I've started lessons now"*. The participants were then asked why they thought they were being encouraged by the Project to engage in these activities. One of the participants noted that it is *"so we know how to do stuff in the future"*, illustrating the link between these activities and the development of life skills.

The participants were asked to consider if the they had been given an opportunity to pick the activities they did up to that point on the programme. They responded by saying that for the first month, the Project staff had arranged the activities for them, in order that they would experience a wide range of activities – *"They said, the reason they did the first month so, like we're not like picking just things that we like, so new things that we can experience, that's why they did that"*. One of the participants also pointed out that the summer programme helped them to make new friends and that was really important for young people at their age.

The young people were asked to think about any changes they would like to see happening to the summer programme from their experience of it. The first suggestion was that there could be two weeks of music and two weeks of sailing, which would be an extension of the time they had during this year's programme. Other suggestions were to go shopping, to go bowling and to have the opportunity to play football. The chance to do photography and go on long walks were also mentioned.

When asked about the impact the summer programme was having on them, the general agreement was that the activities undertaken *"gives you ideas for hobbies"* – *"and it gives you experience. We were even deciding to start up a band after the music"*. The group was extremely satisfied with the summer programme and would have no hesitation in recommending it to other young people, if it is to continue into the future. Comments such as *"this club is brilliant", "they helped to make new friends going on trips", "thrilling", "it's the best opportunity...."* summed up the group's feelings on the programme. They also acknowledged that being together in

that format with other young people helped them to develop their self confidence and it helps develop teamwork – *"because it makes you work together, it makes you like, be a team"*. When asked about the staff involved with the programme, they all agreed that they were excellent.

c. Primary Schools

School No. 1
To start the interview, the participants were asked to describe how they felt about going to second level school in September. There was a mixture of responses with some feeling excited while others felt nervous about the prospects. Meeting new friends, going into a new school, getting new books, going on tours, getting summer holidays a month earlier than primary schools, not having to look at the same teacher all the time and free classes, were regarded as the key things to be excited about. For those who felt somewhat nervous, the extra workload, separation from your friends and *"meeting some people you don't like"*, extra homework, more subject and having to get used to more than one teacher, were cited as the primary reasons.

The discussion then progressed to talk about the transition programme they had engaged in as provided by the EAR Project. In general, the group enjoyed their time on the programme - *"I think it was really good like and we got off school time, like they were nice to us and we got, we learned a lot, got a lot of questions asked about going in to secondary school"*. However, on average the group gave 7 marks out of 10 for the transition programme. When asked why this was the case, the majority thought there was too much work for them to do on the programme. Also, for the presentation night at the end of the programme, *"not one parent ended up turning up for it"*. The group regarded this to be very disappointing. The suggestion made by the group was that the programme should write to all parents independently and invite them, rather than depending on the members in the group to ask parents.

When asked about the types of activities they did on the programme, the group stated that they were encouraged by the staff of the programme to write down the key questions they had about going to second level. The types of questions they listed were *"what are the teachers like, what are the subjects"* and details about the lockers

and their uniforms. Students from 5th Year in the secondary school the group will be attending also came and spoke to them about the move to that school. *"It was good; it was fun yeah because we got to meet them"* – *"Yeah. And most of it seemed positive from them so it was good to know that".* The participants all agreed that the staff running the programme were excellent and *"really nice to us"*.

When asked to comment on any improvements that could be made to the programme, the participants suggested that in addition to 5th Years coming into to talk to them, perhaps they could get 1st Years also. The 1st Years would have fresher memories of what it was like to start in a new school. In relation to the actual programme, the group thought that the time allocated for preparing the presentation was too short and that this needed to be longer. Some of the group also expressed the view that there was often too much work to do on the programme and that perhaps there could me more fun activities thrown into the mix.

School No. 2
As was the case for the session with School 1, the participants in School 2 were asked to describe their feelings about going to second level in September. For some of the young not knowing the teachers, not understanding the timetables, walking into the wrong class, getting lost, not being in the same school as their current friends and leaving behind teachers they get on with, were cited as the main reasons for being nervous about going to second level. Others were excited about the move to a new school, making new friends, doing new subjects that they have never studied before.

The group was then asked to consider the transition programme in which they had participated. On average, they gave it a score of 8.5 out of a possible high of 10. Some of the participants noted that their main issue with it was that "*…it was just that like some people in your group didn't want to co-operate…*" To avoid this, the group suggested breaking the group into small groups and giving each group something concrete to do. For the presentation event, it was also suggested that each young person should be allowed to present one sheet showing their own fears, worries, hopes etc, rather than just talk about the group's ideas. The group fully agreed that the transition programme should have more sessions than four and that each session

should be longer also. In addition, they suggested that they needed more time to prepare their information for the presentation event.

Some of the group were also unhappy with the information they received from current second level students who came to talk to them about the experience of moving to second level. These participants felt that the girls who came to talk to them were too shy and were not able to answer many of their questions. The point was also made that the girls who visited the group were from one school, Even though not every member of the group will be attending that school. Therefore, it would be important to ensure that representatives from all the schools come to talk to the group. By meeting with students from their prospective secondary school, they could learn more about such things as timetables and uniforms.

School No. 3

When this group was asked to name their expectations in relation to going to second level, there was a mixed set of responses. They were aware of the fact that they may not always be with their friends from primary school, that the homework would be more difficult and take longer to do, that there would be lots of new subjects, and that the school day is an hour longer. In addition, some of the group were aware of the possibility of being bullied, but knew that the best policy was to try and avoid these types of young people or "*...talk to your year head*". They also stated that in some cases, there would be more peer pressure at second level, where a person might get talked into "*smoking and drinking*". They were aware that they may do certain things just to fit it and *because "You're more self-conscious" and "Yeah, because you're growing up". "And when you're a teenager you kind of get talked into everything older people do*". On the upside, the group agreed that going to secondary school offered them lots more "*cool activities*". "*P.E. is better*", the chance to do new languages, use the canteen and attend the breakfast clubs.

When asked to comment on their experience of the transition programme they had taken part in, their first comment was that four sessions was not enough. They suggested that more time was needed to discuss the range of issues important to them. As they got nearer to the presentation event, the time was too short and placed them under pressure to get the work finished. The group agreed that during the programme,

they did not understand everything - "*they didn't explain it right sometimes but other weeks it was really fun and we knew how to do it but other weeks it was difficult*". Despite this, they found it very beneficial to talk about their feelings about going to second level. Talking with their peers in a group was very useful as it helped them to see that others felt the same way. They also acknowledged that students from a second level school had come to talk them – "*They made us think like it just wasn't going to be work, work, work. There was going to be loads of fun as well*".

They also stated that the presentation event was very good as "*...everyone kind of got to speak*" – "*it was more fair like, just not like one person*". They were also happy with the way in which the preparation for the event was organised:

> "*We got to write what we actually wanted to say our presentation as well. We didn't have to say what they wanted us to say. We could say what we felt and we could be open and they wouldn't mind…*".

When asked to rate their overall level of satisfaction with the transition programme, the group gave it a score of 9 out of a possible high of 10. With regard to the staff, they stated that they "*cared for everybody*", "*And they were all really nice to us as well and listened to all of what we had to say*".

School No.4

The interview started by asking the young people what they thought of the transition programme. The general feedback from the group was very positive, as they all held the opinion that the programme was very useful for them in making the transition to second level. Out of a maximum score of 10, they gave the programme an average score of 7. The programme helped them find out more information about the transition process - "*You found more stuff about what it* [secondary] *was going to be like*". They also got a chance to think about the questions they had about making the move to second level. To help them with this, they met 1st Years from secondary school, who told them about their experiences of the transition, which they found very useful - "*They told us not to be worried*". The programme also involved presenting their fears, concerns and hopes about moving to secondary school to their parents. They really enjoyed this event.

One criticism of the programme centred on the presence of a class teacher in their group, during the programme. The young people felt that the teacher was overly strict on them and *"...bossed us around and told us what to do"*. The young people also suggested that they should have been told about how the de-merits' system works in the secondary school system as well as the fines system that is in place if caught chewing gum.

d. Past Participants

It was decided to source and interview two different forms of past participants. Group 1 was formed after the Project Manager contacted a random group of past participants, who had taken part in the range of activities on offer and asked them to self-select to attend a focus group. Group 2 was made up of young people in the second level system, who had worked with the EAR Project in helping with the visits to primary schools, as part of the transition programme.

Group 1 – Random Selection of Past Participants

One of the primary reasons for conducting a focus group with young people who had previously been involved with the EAR Project was to get their views on whether or not the Project had helped them make the transition to secondary school. The participants in the focus group were from different schools and had different levels of interaction with the Project so their experience of the Project varied somewhat. When asked how they came to hear about the EAR Project, all of the participants indicated they had heard about it from their schools. Most of the participants had become involved in 6th Class and were involved from two years up to three.

The group was asked to consider what was the overall aim of the EAR Project. They agreed that the overall aim was to provide information about secondary school and reduce the nervousness and shock associated with going to secondary school – "*I suppose just to give you an idea what it would be like so you wont be totally shocked*" and "*it helps you like when you're going there that you understand it*". With regard to the activities they undertook as part of the Project, these ranged from crafts, to preparing a presentation about their feelings and thoughts about going to secondary school and presenting it to a group of peers and parents and teachers. "…[The presentation] *it was easy like... you were nervous but you got through it in the end*".

Some of the group had visited second level and then discussed the visit afterwards. They had found this very helpful. Others had not visited second level and felt that this would have been very helpful.

When asked what they considered to be the main benefits of the Project for young people like themselves, they cited the following reasons:

- When the Project worker came back to them in the 1st Year asking participants if second level was what they had expected. This was helpful because some things were not what expected and they could talk about it.
- When one group returned to 6th Class in their old primary school they were able to tell the class about what second level was like this was seen as very helpful. It went very well.
- Another participants said: "*Yeah. It was to show us like that, not to be afraid about going into secondary school that it's not as bad as you think it's going be*".

The participants agreed that the transition programme had helped them an awful lot. As one participant commented, the programme helped them *"not to be afraid and to make new friends in there…. Yeah. I made loads of new friends in school from the first day"*. Another young person noted that *"when you went into secondary school it's easier because, like you knew what you were doing because from in primary school and then they came back and they said, are you doing well and all that and you were, it was easier than I expected like"*. One participant found that they were able to understand more in school "*…because I'd a better understanding of what secondary school was going to be like and I wasn't scared of secondary school when I was going into it"*.

The participants were also asked whether or not they were encouraged to give their ideas on the types of activities they wanted to do while on the Project. All participants stated that they were encouraged to give their ideas, were encouraged to ask for the activities they wanted to do and their suggestions were taken on board, for example, *"We asked them would we be able to show us around school before we went in to secondary school and they did that"*. A suggestion made by one participant was that perhaps the staff in the EAR Project could have asked them how they felt after

visiting the second level school and also how they felt after returning to their old school to talk to the 6th Class.

The final part of the focus group asked the young people to comment on their satisfaction with the staff on the Project. The group described the staff as *"friendly"*, *"nice to talk to"*, *"really understanding"* and *"helpful"*. Participants said that staff made them feel welcomed and respected.

Group 2 – Those Involved in Visiting Primary Schools

Each of the participants in this group had made one visit to a 6th Class group to talk to them about going to secondary school. When asked what they saw as the overall aim of the EAR Project, they agreed that it was there to provide information about secondary school to those making the move from primary level as well as to give the young people a chance to see what secondary was like – *"I suppose to give 6th Class a fair idea what secondary is all about and so they will have people they will recognise when they come to secondary"*.

The participants then went on to explain their experiences of having visited 6th Class in a local primary school. The 6th Class had prepared questions for the session and there was an open conversation, where the *visitors* tried to answer their questions. One participant noted that *"We would have known some of them already* [from the local area]…*it went well and they were asking us about transition year. We visited them in March or April and then they came to visit the school here in May"*.

The group was asked to consider what they saw as the main benefits they got from being involved in this activity. The main benefits cited were:

- *"It was a good experience to promote the school and what's good about it"*;
- *"We can put it down on our CV that we took part in it"*;
- *"It was a good experience answering questions and being in front of a group – a small bit nervous at first"*;
- *"It was a good way to help the young people to come up… [to secondary] …they were not as nervous"*.
- *"…teachers would look to us and give us more responsibility…"*

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The group was then given the opportunity to suggest ways they felt the process they were involved in, could be improved. A number of recommendations were made:

- *"It would be better if there was a representative from different years going to the primary school including those in junior cert, transition year and leaving cert years"*;
- *"It would be better if the sessions were a little more organised/structured as questions were thrown at everyone – a bit confusing. Better to balance out the questions and get the teacher to ask for a question to be directed at 'Robert' next one for 'John' etc…"*.

At the end of the group, the participants were asked if they would recommend the activities they had engaged in to tother young people. There was a resounding *"yes"*, and they stated that they enjoyed the experience and would do it again if asked.

e. SEA Project

A focus group was conducted with young people who had participated in the *SEA After Schools Project*. All of the participants were in 6th Class and attending the after schools homework club. They had taken part in the sports sessions provided through AIT. As part of the SEA After Schools Project, the participants would get their lunch, which was followed by sports activities including football and basketball, which was then followed by homework sessions. This occurred over a three to six week period.

The group had limited contact with EAR Project staff and so they did not seem to have an awareness of the EAR Project. They were more interested in talking about the sports they had taken part in. However, when they were asked to explain the overall aim of the EAR Project, two of the participants thought the aim was provide information about secondary school. The remainder of the group were unaware as to its aim.

The group pointed out that due to the After Schools Project, they had made new friends "*...and talk to new people without getting shy*", a fact they were happy about. They also acknowledged how they were encouraged to give ideas to the staff on the types of activities in which they wanted to participate. Participants stated that the staff made them feel welcome and respected and were very helpful. With regard to recommendations for the Project, the group agreed that they "*would like to do it regularly. I like to do homework first before the sports*".

f. Peer Education Programme

To start the interview, the participants were asked to recount how they had first come to be involved with the EAR Project. Most of them had been involved with the transition programme and were thus familiar with the nature of the EAR Project. For those that had been involved with the transition programme, they stated that they found it to be very useful in helping them make the move to second level. The programme gave them the opportunity to discuss their hopes and fears and taught them not to be afraid of secondary school.

The interview then moved on to examine their perceptions of the peer education programme which they were involved in at that time. When asked to explain what the

programme was about, one participant commented that it is "*something to do for the summer*".   The programme was running over two days per week for them and according to one participant, there were different activities each day: *"Friday we do like full activities and all that and on Thursday we learn about the army and stuff"*. After working with the facilitators in the group, they had decided to base their work on finding out about careers in the army. Some of the participants understood that they would then use this information to inform young people, younger than themselves all about a career in the army: "*Well we're focusing on the army and we're going to tell the younger people what we learned about it*".   However, for some participants, they were unclear as to the exact nature of the programme.

As part of the programme the participants went on a tour of the Army Barracks in Athlone. They also got to read a map and use a compass for hill walking, activities related to those found in the army. They also got to search the internet to help them build up the information a career in the army.

When asked how the peer education programme might be improved, they suggested that it would be better if there were more people in the group, as this would allow them to make more friends. Another suggestion was that the group should be mixed as at present, it was all boys – as one participant noted, "*They should make it mixed 'cause all lads.. would help make confidence better" – "To mix the boys and the girls. Its pretty dull with just boys some things a bit awkward"*. The final suggestion was to give the programme a longer time over the summer period – "*More time…to start earlier in the summer and finish later"*. The group all agreed that the staff were very good and helped them in any way they could.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present the findings from interviews held with the participant stakeholder and non-participant stakeholder groups. In the next chapter, an analysis of these findings, as well as a set of conclusions and recommendations, will be presented.

Chapter 6
Discussion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, figures from the National Educational Welfare Board (2004) show that approximately 1,000 children fail to make the transition from primary to secondary school in Ireland each year. A synthesis of the academic literature revealed that the problems with the transition process mainly occur in a combination of the four key domain areas of academic, procedural, social and the individual's characteristics. Due to the long-term negative impact leaving school early can have both on the individual as well as the cumulative knock-on effect on society, early school leaving is significant and persistent problem that requires practical policy responses by the State.

The EAR Project is one such response. In its initial research year, the Project identified three child-centred central themes, 1) the need to belong; 2) what will the school really be like? and 3) Will I be able to learn?, which impacted upon the transition from primary to post-primary school. These themes support the findings of previous studies and as highlighted by Lucey et al. (2000:203) that the features of the transition during the late 1990s were similar to those that affected children twenty years before that. It appears these features continue to the present, but with the additional dimension of information technologies as part of daily life.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the EAR Project developed a core set of six practice principles 1) child-centred approach; 2) targeted; 3) reflective practice; 4)resilience building; 5) promoting success and finally 6) collaboration to inform the development of the three year strategy. The EAR Project made a series of recommendations to design and implement eleven different initiatives to *"create conditions to support young people to make a positive transition from Primary to Post-primary school"*. Through the continuous reflective process of the Project, scope existed to develop further collaborative initiatives to respond to additional identified child-centred needs. This enabled the design, delivery, implementation and internal monitoring of a further six initiatives as outlined in Chapter 4.

Despite the proliferation of support services such as this, little is still known as to the overall impact of these interventions and whether or not they offer meaningful long term support to the young people and families with whom they work (Canavan, Dolan and Pinkerton, 2000; Dolan Canavan and Pinkerton, 2006).

In April 2008, the process of evaluating the EAR Project began, which set out:

1. *To ascertain is the EAR Project creating conditions, which support young people it directly works with to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school;*

2. *To examine interagency collaborations that have been facilitated by the EAR Project;*

3. *To identify if involvement in the EAR Project has led any agency to implement more child-centred practice;*

4. *To offer guidance on the future sustainability of the EAR Project.*

Some 114 people participated in the evaluation process with this figure being made up of both young people who had participated in the EAR Project *(n=81)* and representatives from the key stakeholder groups linked to the Project *(n=33).* This chapter discuses the key findings emanating from the preceding chapter pointing out where appropriate, recommendations for consideration by the Management Group of the EAR Project.

From the outset, it was agreed that this evaluation would be qualitative in nature. It is important, therefore, to point out that the data which was collected and reported in the previous chapter is subjective in nature. While each group's set of results are valid in themselves, the results only represent their perceptions of the issue at hand by each group. Without the use of independent objective measures used prospectively with the young people engaged with the Project, it is very difficult to offer definitive answers to the four objectives of this evaluation. One participant interviewed as part of the evaluation concurred with this view and made the point that "*things look as if things are going in the right direction*" within the Project.

The remainder of this chapter addresses each of the four objectives of the study in turn and where required, offers appropriate recommendations.

6.2 Has The EAR Project Supported Young People Make A Positive Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School?

In addressing this question on whether or not the EAR Project has helped young people with the transition process, this section uses key points proffered by interviewees throughout the evaluation.

As a child-centred Project, it is clear from the generated data, that across the full range of initiatives on offer, young people had the free will to participate, were listened too, were facilitated in the decision-making process and they felt respected. These are all essential elements of child-centred practice as noted in Chapter 4. The majority of young people understood the main purpose of the EAR Project, which is to support young people at the time of the transition from primary to post-primary school. Similar to the young people interviewed, parents, the EAR Project staff and representatives of stakeholder agencies, all understood the main purpose of the EAR Project. They also possessed an understanding of the EAR Project practice principles. Based on this information it is evident that the overall vision of the Project is understood at three levels of resilience, namely the individual, the family and the community.

Agreeing with the vision encapsulated by the EAR Project is one thing, but analysing how does this actually appear in practice in the form of supporting young people to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school is also key to this discussion. The next section focuses upon the specific initiatives, *Going to Secondary* and the *Connected Summer Programme* in light of this question, but also considers where young people are beginning to identify benefits from a variety of EAR Projects that they have chosen to access.

6.2.1 Perceptions of Primary School Children (Going to Secondary School Transition Programme)

Young people from four of a possible six primary schools who availed of the Going to Secondary transition programme during academic year 2007-2008 provided their experience of the programme. The subsequent data showed that by participating in the Project, they experienced increased levels of confidence about making the transition to post-primary school. This outcome was related to learning about the school they were going too, by asking their own devised questions, getting the chance to meet students from secondary school and gathering information about the school they were going to- *"I think it was really good like and we got off school time, like they were nice to us and we got, we learned a lot, got a lot of questions asked about going in to secondary school"*.

The experience of the programme varied from school to school as demonstrated by the ranking on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) which resulted in the following average scores of 7, 8.5 and 9. The young people were able to articulate the reasons for the ranking of the programme and made recommendations to enhance the transition programme (See Recommendation No. 1)

Recommendation No. 1

It is recommended, therefore, that the EAR Project liaise with both the primary schools and young people involved in the delivery of the transition programme, and search out an innovative way of giving extra time to the transition programme, in order to meet the needs of the young people in question and offer them optimal support via the transition programme.

The chance to meet students from second level and talk to them about specific issues was also found to be very useful by the primary school children. Two comments concerning this process made by the primary school children need to be addressed. Firstly, one group was of the view that the representatives they were introduced to from second level were shy and unable to adequately answer the questions posed. Another group suggested that 5th Year students had attended their school to talk to them about the transition. They proposed that perhaps a mixture of students, from 1st

Years up to Leaving Certificate could be asked to visit primary schools together, as each set if students would have different experiences and advice to offer.

Recommendation No. 2

It is recommended that the EAR Project ensure that all second level students who visit primary schools to help with the transition programme are supported to be confident about their role in the process.

Recommendation No. 3

It is recommended that the EAR Project investigate ways to ensure that a mixture of students from 1st Year through to Leaving Certificate level are asked to participate in the visits to primary school.

There was also a general consensus that the presentation night was a great opportunity to express their hopes and fears of the transition process to their teachers, other students and their parents. However, in some cases, some of the primary school participants in the transition programme did not co-operate with the facilitators, making it difficult for the remaining young people to get full benefit from the programme. This point was also raised by the representatives from the Education sector.

Recommendation No. 4

It is recommended that the EAR Project ensure that all facilitators on the transition programme are proficient in working with a large group of primary school children and have the skills to deal with any negative group dynamics.

It is important to distinguish too between informal and formal education pedagogy in this debate. The EAR programme delivery utilises youth work methods and is informal requiring movement, group discussion, arts and crafts and presentation skills. This is a different approach to the more structured methods utilised by teachers in schools. The element of misbehaviour is a real one and needs to be considered and responded to in a meaning full way. The suggestion that the teacher is present has been operation in a number of schools that have availed of the programme.

It is important that any adults linked to the programme are conscious of the child-centred approach. It could be debate that the presence of a teacher might impact on

the way young people participate in the programme. In one school where a teacher was present, the child-centred approach was not comprised and this is demonstrated by a quote from a young person regarding the presentation *"we got to write what we actually wanted to say in our presentation as well. We didn't have to say what they wanted us to say. We could say* what *we felt and we could be open and they wouldn't mind…."*

Recommendation No. 5

For the schools where a teacher is not present for the transition programme, it is recommended that the Project liaise with these schools, at a scheduling appointment, about the possibility of having a teacher present for the programme. If the choice is not to have a teacher present and mis-behaviour occurs, a procedure should be agreed with the school to respond to the situation, with a child being removed from a session not being a possibility.

6.2.2   *Participants on the Sea Programme*

While the participants on the SEA programme were very happy with the SEA Programme, the majority were unaware of the larger reasons behind the Programme. However, the programme encouraged them to get their homework done, keep fit and healthy and make new friends, generic skills which will be of use to them in the transition process.

6.2.3   *Perceptions of Past Participants*

A cross section of past pupils (drawn from the academic years 2004-2005; 2005-2006; and 2007-2008) recounted their experiences of the programme. All agreed that it had been a positive experience for them and did support their personal transition from primary to post-primary school. The transition programme gave them "… *an idea what it would be like so you wont be totally shocked*" and "*It helps you like when you're going there that you understand it"*. Being involved in the programme gave them the opportunity to address their hopes and fears and then present their findings to their parents, teachers and other peers. For them, the transition programme had helped them not to be afraid of the transition, helped them make new friends, understand things better in school and in general and made the move much easier for them. The also noted that the follow-up session in secondary school with the programme facilitator was particularly helpful.

In addition to this group of past pupils, second level students who had gone back to provide information to 6th Class pupils, also agreed to participate in focus group interviews. The information generated from these sessions provides a valuable insight into cognitive development of these students. All identified benefits for the 6th Class students about to make the transition - *"they will have people they will recognise when they come to the school"* and *"fair idea what secondary is all about"*. In addition, they were able to identify benefits for their school and themselves on an individual level, developing skills and that *"teachers would look to us and give us more responsibility"*. The process gave them confidence and experience. The group agreed that representatives from across the various years in secondary school could be asked to get involved in the visitations, to add more depth to the programme. In addition, they felt that for the actual time with the primary school children, the session needed to be more organised and structured. It would be better if the session was chaired rather than having a free-for-all question session.

Recommendation No. 6

It is recommended that the EAR Project facilitate a template with which the session between primary school children and visiting students from second level can be planned, to ensure that all key areas are addressed and that each child gets to voice their questions and comments.

6.2.3 Perceptions of the Activity Groups

The results from both of the activity groups interviewed revealed that by their involvement in the activity groups, they had become better able to make new friends and that they had learned how to co-operate with each to do the various activities. For one of the groups, they had learned about each other's cultures which helped them to better understand their way of life. These transferrable skills will be of use to these young people in the school system.

6.2.4 Perceptions of the Summer Connected Programme

The data collected from this group clearly indicates that the Project activities had bonded the group together in the pursuit of the various activities on offer. More importantly, it had offered them a chance to develop their talents and abilities and subsequently their life skills. Te experience also allowed them to develop their self-confidence through the range of programme activities.

6.2.5 Perceptions of the Parents

The results from this group showed that parents were aware that the overall aim of the EAR Project was to prepare their young people from secondary school and the transition from primary school. Talking specifically about the Summer Connected Programme, the parents agreed that the programme helped the young people to work together, take responsibility for things, to socialise with their peers and make friends and to engage in opportunities they may not have done otherwise. They were aware how much the Summer Connected Programme had *"matured"* their children and how it had enabled them to become very open and discursive. They requested that the EAR Project would examine the need for the provision of a version of the Summer Connected Programme during the two mid-term periods from school. This would keep their children in touch with the Project and aid their progression trough the school system.

Recommendation No. 7

It is recommended that the EAR Project examines the need for a specific targeted programme aimed at working with young people who made the transition to second level but who are identified as experiencing settling-in difficulties within the first six weeks of second level.

6.2.6 Representatives - Education Sector

Representatives of primary and post-primary schools participated in a focus group and individual interviews. The results showed similarities and differences between their views, based on their knowledge of the young people's experiences. The positives included that the concept was excellent and the discussion that took place during the programme were excellent and the participation of the second level students going back to speak with 6th Class pupils *"gave them a dignity and self-confidence"*. In contrast, it was felt by one respondent that adult facilitators of the programme *"do not have the authority or discipline"* to work with disruptive pupils. Another participant relayed how the programme in the 1st Year went on for too long. It was felt that a teacher should be present *"no need to take part, just be present"*. As a child-centred Project this information provides part of the holistic view of what is occurring (See Recommendations 4 and 5 above)

Has the EAR Project supported young people make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school? From the data discussed above, it is clear that those directly involved in the transition programme were supported to examine their hopes and fears about move. For the young people and in particular the past participants, the transition programme was extremely helpful in aiding their positive progression through school. This also held true with the extremely high transfer and retention rate fond during the Tracking Exercise presented in Chapter 4.

For parents and the young people on the Summer Connected and the Activity Groups, the evidence that their respective programmes had made a direct impact on the transition process was not as clear. This may be due to the alternative, non-specific transition focus to these actual programmes. However, there is ample evidence that involvement with the EAR Project via these programmes led to their personal and social development, tools innately important for their journey, through the school system. For the Summer Connected Programme, the parents were aware of the fact that it provided continuity throughout the summer holidays, created developmental activities and facilitated the participation of young people throughout the programme. Young people and parents and guardians were clearly able to identify the benefits that they young people derived from the programme.

As noted earlier in this chapter, however, these data are subjective and while valid in itself, it allows little scope to offer definite evidence as to the overall success of the EAR Project. As discussed in Chapter 2, the EAR Project has monitored the progress of the various programme initiatives and involvement of young people by recording information such as throughput, take up of programmes by sex and age profile of the young people attending and their general level of satisfaction with the service for example. In addition, the first tracking exercise was conducted during the summer of 2008, which illustrated that the Project is associated with positive transfer and retention rates in Junior Cycle, for the young people with whom it works.

> "*However, over time this soft data would not enable the* [Project] *to adequately assess its progress as set out in its original objectives. Therefore, after a period of bedding-in, it would be envisaged that* [the Project] *would begin to develop robust systems of evaluation, while continuing to monitor key aspects of the Project*"

> (Forkan et al. (2008: 74-5)

6.3 Is There Evidence That Inter-Agency Collaborations Have Been Facilitated by the EAR Project?

As already noted in Chapter 4, the progression of individual initiatives highlights the different collaboration that had been formed to enable the delivery of these initiatives. To address the question more fully, key emergent data from a number of groups interviewed as part of the evaluation, will be discussed. As with the previous section, a number of recommendations will be presented as well as an overall conclusion.

6.3.1 Perceptions of the Staff of the EAR Project

In discussing the question as to whether or not the EAR Project has fostered inter-agency collaboration in the delivery of services for young people, the staff group suggested that the general respect for the EAR Project in the area had encouraged key agencies to get involved in delivering the work with the EAR Project. A very good working relationship had been developed between the EAR Project and stakeholder agencies, with the end result being that:

> *"...there are a lot of agencies there that when you send a letter will write back immediately or ring immediately and get on the phone, even if it's only to say well no, we don't have anyone at this moment in time".*

There was agreement in the group that this level of collaboration had been reached due to the hard work of the EAR Project's Manager.

6.3.2 Perceptions of the Stakeholder Agencies

According to the stakeholder agencies, one of the key pieces of evidence that the EAR Project had enabled inter-agency collaboration was the fact that the primary and

secondary schools were fully supportive of its initiatives and had worked closely with the Project in the delivery of the Transition Programme. In addition, the Project had brought together a myriad of organisations that deal with young people in the Athlone area, in a more unified way. Due to this, their respective agencies linked on a continual basis with the EAR Project on the delivery of specific programmes, providing funding and resources, referring to the Project or providing training to staff on the EAR. They also agreed that this collaboration had happened due to the work of the EAR's Project Manager, as there was "…*easy, open communication between our department and the Project Management*". Data from the group suggested that in some cases, it is difficult to get some agencies to become involved due to their own specific workload. However, the general feeling was that the Partnership Group was very successful, due in part to the way in which it was designed to allow groups be part of it when the need arose.

6.3.3 Perceptions of the Education Sector

When asked to comment on whether or not the EAR Project had facilitated inter-agency collaboration with regard to the delivery of services for young people in the area, approximately half of the education sector group were unable to comment on this, citing lack of knowledge about it as the reason. However, for this group, as alluded to earlier, the provision of various initiatives in schools by the EAR Project illustrates positive collaboration between the Project and the schools.

For the representatives from the education sector who were aware of the inter-agency collaboration, fostered by the EAR Project, the work was seen to be hugely important. As one participant commented, the EAR Project helped the local group of services to meet and discuss their activities to avoid overlap - "*there is no point trying to run solo – the collaboration helps an awful lot*". The process of collaboration has allowed each school to see and access personnel from these various services, which they may not have been aware, were in existence.

6.3.4 Perceptions of the Management Group of the EAR Project

When asked if there was any evidence that the EAR Project has fostered inter-agency collaboration, members of the Management Group pointed to the large turn-out at the EAR Summit Meeting held earlier in 2008. Similar to previous groups above, it was

their view that the work of the Project Manager led to this level of success. However, one participant suggested that despite there being some evidence of collaboration, there is no concrete evidence that this has occurred as there was still evidence that some agencies were still working in a more insular manner.

The general feeling emanating from the group on the collaboration question was simply that there was an immense willingness among agencies to get involved and support with the EAR based initiatives. However, for many agencies, the lack of their own secure long term funding, resulted in them not being able to become practically involved in such initiatives. Therefore, the lack of any collaboration was a practical issue rather than a willingness one. Also, as shown in Chapter 4, the fact that all but one EAR based initiative will be taken on by agencies in the post-December 2008 period illustrates the success of this collaboration.

6.3.5 Conclusion

The data revealed that the EAR staff believed that the Project Manager had worked hard to promote inter-agency collaborations. This factor was echoed by agencies and organisation and the management group. The EAR Project had managed to bring a "*myriad of organisation*" together to respond to the needs of young people in the Athlone area. As one respondent highlighted *"If the EAR is to be finished I just think it will be a tragedy for the vulnerable children. Who's going to pick them up and look out for them? There are fantastic services around town but this Project has a buzz and kept all the agencies on track."* The important role played by the EAR Project in fostering inter-agency collaboration was also supported by many of the education sector representatives.

The essence of a collaborative approach is that different agencies and organisation can work together by bringing specific skills or resources to an initiative to form a holistic response to promote the well-being of young people. The EAR Project internally evaluated and monitored the progress of all its initiatives and conducted a tracking exercise. This information suggests that young people have been supported through the Project to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school.

6.4 Has Involvement with the EAR Project Led to any Agencies Implementing more Child-Centred Practice?

The publication of *Going to Secondary School*, emanating from the action research project as conducted by the current Project Manger, and on which the EAR Project is based, addressed the importance of the EAR Project being based on child-centred practice. The report noted that traditionally adult professionals and experts working with children informed and designed responses to work with young people, known as a "*child-focused approach*" (Hogan, 1997; McArdle, 2006). The utilisation of this approach led to responses to cater for the so-called *typical child*. Therefore, young people who did not correspond with the typical label were at even greater risk of becoming alienated from services and were often viewed as deviant.

In response to this, a child-centred approach is a more appropriate method of working with young people. The approach "respects children's competencies". By capturing expressed opinions, ideas and insights into the lived experiences of young people, this information can inform practice and the development of responses through a youth-led approach. Whereas the child-focused approach starts with adult priorities and the impetus for change is on the child, a child-centred approach starts with children's priorities, listens to children and acts on it and the impetus for change is required of adults and the systems around the child.

In relation to the evidence collected for this evaluation, all of the young people interviewed supported the view that they were treated with respect by the Project staff and always asked about the activities they wanted to do. As noted earlier, with regard to the staff, the young people stated that they "*cared for everybody*", "*And they were all really nice to us as well and listened to all of what we had to say*". These characteristics are very much part of the child-centred approach.

For the non-participant stakeholders, there was a similar view. The staff group commented that all the EAR initiatives were developed in response to the expressed needs of young people. The supportive role of the Project Manager encouraged staff to continually critically reflect on their work and see how it could become more child-centred. This led staff to recognise the more holistic setting from which the child emerged and so made them more aware of the needs of the young people with whom

they worked. For the stakeholder agencies, the view was that the EAR Project is client-centred and has young people at the core of all the decisions. However, the group did suggest that:

> *"The challenge is always in the design of language around trying to help people to understand the way a young person experiences the world is very different to what an adult may intend. The challenge is to help agencies to see the young people's worldview and to create linkages that have not happened before* [for the young people and for the agencies]".

Another participant noted that:

> "*Yes there is work being done around youth led practice – it's very easy to talk about youth led practice where it's youth leading youth but more challenging where it is youth leading adults. It takes time for organisational culture to adjust and begin to be open to hearing young people and understanding they may have some of the answers.*'

Therefore, it is clear that there is some level of understanding and practice among the EAR Project Staff and the agencies, of a child-centred practice.

Recommendation No. 9

To bolster a child-centred approach, it is recommended that the EAR Project work with the Partnership Group in developing a set of indicators to track the impact of a child-centred approach, with the children with whom they work. To this end, the inclusion of AFQuATs (See Chapter 2) and the *Developmental Assets Approach*, as developed by Peter Benson, in the Search Institute in the US, could be incorporated.

6.5 Positioning of the EAR Project into the Future

All of the non-participant stakeholders were aware that the current format of the EAR Project would cease in December 2008. Despite the existence of varying opinions on what should happen to the EAR Project in the future, it was possible to agree a common ground. The overall consensus was that the initiatives of the Project needed to continue. After examining the data, the points raised by the Management Group in this regard adequately reflect the wishes of the others groups, and thus warrant the points being repeated at this point:

- There was general consensus that it is important that the contact made with young people via the Project is maintained over the coming years. The development of this initial trust between them and the Project will help their overall progression.

- Where possible, post-December 2008, the initiatives started and developed by the Project need to be *embedded* in the practice of the various agencies part of the current partnership group.

- In order for the initiatives to be successfully embedded by these agencies, the majority of the Management Group believed that the best way this could occur would be for ACT to fund a co-ordinator for a hand-over period, with this period probably being two years.

- The job of the facilitator would be to primarily work with and supporting the stakeholder agencies to identify what extra help they would need to embed the initiatives in question. The role of the co-ordinator would be that of a facilitator and thus radically different to the management role undertaken by the current Project Manager. The co-ordinator could link in with organisations taking charge of the various programmes *"...to have an overview of the master plan...to give advice and direction on occasion ….* This would help eradicate the risk of the smaller initiatives waning over time.

- The new co-ordinator would also identify further areas of work for ACT, which would then be developed and handed-on to other agencies over time, similar to the original EAR initiative process of embedding.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Assessment Categories for the Quality Dimensions of AFQuATs

Services should be accessible		Yes	No	Action for Improvement?
	Does the service have a reasonable* time period when waiting for first appointment?			
	Does the service have a reasonable time period when waiting for follow-up appointment?			
Administration	Are the service operational hours clearly advertised in a variety of locations and through a variety of media?			
	Is the service tailored to young people's needs? (or does the service have a subsection tailored to the needs of young people?)			
	Is the service available in convenient and appropriate settings (e.g. drop in centre or outreach/mobile service)?			
Geography	Is the service located close to where young people live (or can it be accessed through public transport)?			
Economic	Is the service provided at free or at low cost?			
Access	Does the service have non-discriminatory access regardless of minority status (e.g. Wheelchair access, childcare for teenage parents, translation services)?			

* The term reasonable will vary depending on the nature of the service provided. Services are required to determine an acceptable standard for this dimension.

Services should be flexible

		Yes	No	Action for Improvement?
Administration	Does the service have operational hours suitable for young people (e.g. after school, weekends)?			
	Does the service have suitable appointment allocation for needs of young people (e.g. sufficient time to assess problem, extra time for complex consultations, appointments to suit young people travelling long distances)?			
	Is the there a multi-service approach whereby a range of services are available for young people (e.g. hospitals, health centres, youth centres one-stop-shop etc.)?			
	Are there various points of contact (e.g. health centre or sports centres, outreach)? or Is it a tailored service within traditional provider setting?			
Physical/ Structural	Does the service have adequate space and comfortable waiting area?			
	Is the service appealing for young people in that it acknowledges a youth culture (e.g. appealing decoration, displays, music etc)?			
	Does the service support the young person to have a friend or other person with them when receiving the service?			
Variety of services	Is a holistic model of health adopted in the provision of health care services and treatments to adolescents (range of services, health promotion or signposting to other services)?			
	Are there services for individuals with special needs (e.g. young people with learning disability or low literacy, translations for non-nationals, signing for deaf etc)?			
	Does the service have appropriate provision of staff for the problem presented and the patient attending (e.g. peer counsellors, health care professionals for technical diagnosis, male and female staff)?			
	Is maximum use made of the contact time with adolescents to minimise missed opportunities (e.g. health promotion advice etc)?			

Staffing (Core Competencies and Training)

		Yes	No	Action for improvement?
Staffing	Have all staff received the essential training required for this service?			
	Have all staff (including support staff) ever received any discreet training for working with young people?			
	Are staff trained to prevent any missed opportunities with the adolescents who attend the service?			
	Is there ongoing training for staff to keep them informed and their skills current?			
	Is there a multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach taken by staff?			
Inter-personal relations	Are staff (including support staff) trained in appropriate communication skills when dealing with adolescents?			
	Does the service use have appropriate criteria-based interviewing in the recruitment of trainees or those who will work with or supervise staff to work with adolescent's (e.g. informed attitudes, qualifications, interpersonal factors)?			
	Does the organisation have a member of staff appointed to develop and oversee the adolescent friendliness of the service?			

Quality Information

	Yes	No	Action for improvement?
Type of Information provided			
Have staff received adequate training in the information which is required by adolescents e.g.: - Available health and support? - Accessing appropriate services? - Options, rights & entitlements? - Backup services and after hours numbers? - General health issues? - Health promotion and adolescent health issues? - Process for making complaints (e.g. Ombudsman for Children)?			
Does the service have a system where parents are briefed in relation to information and services offered for adolescents (e.g., information on the health issue, adolescents needs for confidential services, rights of parental consent)?			
How the Information is provided			
Does the service have an agreed format on the provision of information for young people (e.g., accurate, age appropriate, complete, eye-catching, language appropriate, relevant, tailored for special needs, through a variety of media, updated)?			
Does the service provide open access to medical records?			
Is the information complete and are all records present in the service?			
Does the service provide information through attractive and appealing media (e.g. Interactive tools/computers/DVDs, telephone hotlines by trained counsellors, contemporary designed leaflets, through a variety of points of contact)?			
Does the service provide a one-stop-shop approach to provision of information: • on the service provided? • on other relevant services? • on general health information for adolescents?			

A Partnership Approach

		Yes	No	Action for improvement?
Young People	Does the service offer opportunities to involve young people? • In the planning of services (e.g. through focus groups or involvement in management committees)? • In the delivery of services (e.g. peers-led or mentoring projects)? • In the evaluation of services (e.g. consumer satisfaction questions, or in mystery shopping etc)? • In appropriate consultation with established groups? • In the development of new groups?			
Parents/ Carers	Does the service involve parents/carers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services as appropriate through • The planning of services? • The evaluation of services?			
Other Relevant Agencies	Does the service involve other relevant agencies in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services?			
	Has the service formed alliances with other relevant organisations e.g. local schools, youth organisations?			

Appendix 2

Educational Action Research (EAR) Project
Athlone

Terms of Reference – Research Advisory Group (RAG)

1. The CFRC will engage in a research evaluation of the EAR Project, Athlone, starting in June 2008 and finishing in September 2008.

2. The Research Advisory Group (RAG) will advise and support the Project Manager in assisting the researchers from the CFRC to conduct the evaluation. The RAG does not have a management function over the researchers from the CFRC.

3. The RAG should consist of no more than 8-10 people from the following categories:
   - Project , EAR
   - CFRC Representative
   - Young People who use the Project
   - Parents
   - Other Key Stakeholders/Agencies

4. The RAG will meet 4 times during the course of the research, to support and advise at the following stages:

   1. Completing Research Design
   2. Data Collection (Assisting in accessing study populations)
   3. Final Analysis of Research Findings
   4. Format of Final Report

5. The RAG will also raise any other relevant issues pertinent to the research process.

6. Each RAG meeting will last 1 hour.

7. Key decisions only, will be recorded at each meeting, with minutes being forwarded afterwards.

Appendix 3

Consent Form - Adults

1. **I have listened to and understood, the explanation given to me by the researcher about this focus group** ☐

2. **I fully agree to participate in this focus group interview**. ☐

3. **I understand that I am free to leave the interview at any time and, that I am not required to answer any question, if I so wish.** ☐

^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^

Signed: _____

Please Print Name: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your help

Cormac Forkan
(Child and Family Research Centre,
NUI, Galway)

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National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

CONSENT FORM
Young People

EAR Project, Athlone - Evaluation Study

Please tick ✔

I understand why I am being asked to give my views on the Project ☐

I agree to take part in the research project ☐

I know my name will not be used in the report ☐

I know I can stop at any time, ☐

and that I do not have to answer any question
If I don't want to.

Signed (Young Person):_____

Signed: Parent/Project Worker _____

Date:_____

Appendix 4

Members of Partnership Group
EAR Project

Joanne O'Connor   Midland Regional Youth Service
Antoinette Hynes   HSCL, St. Joseph's College Summerhill
Jim Belton   HSCL, St. Aloysius College Athlone
Margaret Egan   HSCL, Athlone Community College
Eamonn Farrell   Health Services Executive
Linda Jo Quinn   Athlone Community Taskforce
Patricia Spollen   National Council for Special Education
Joyce Furlong   Athlone Community Services Council
Mary Kilmartin   Community Representative
Jean Farrell   HSCL, St. Mary's N.S Athlone
Sheila McArdle   Project Manager, EAR Project
Michael Fuery   CEO, Athlone Community Taskforce

Appendix 5
Details of Initiatives within EAR Project

a. Primary Level

Transition Programme – Going to Secondary? Academic Years: 2005-2006; possibly 2006-2007 & 2007-2008	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community
Target Group	6th Class Pupils
Purpose	To deliver Transition Programme with amendments To enable young people to participate and manage their own transition from Primary to Post-primary school
Duration	Four sessions – to be negotiated with the schools
Timing	Depending upon each of the schools which agrees to participate
Indicators	Provision of programme expanded to at least four Primary schools who agree to participate in the programme in 2005/2006 Depending on evaluation expand service to additional schools in 2006/2007
Recruitment of Participants	Schools in co-operation with EAR Project, Barnardos and MRYS
Required Resources	Photocopying of booklets, personnel to delivery the programme
Lead Agency	ACT – Educational Action Research Project, Barnardos, MRYS
Budget	Existing Programme Resources
Evaluation	External Evaluator – call for tenders
Theory	The pilot has provided evidence that the Transition Programme facilitates young people to explore transition issues for themselves and manage their own transition. The young people who participated upon the project recommended that other young people should do the programme
Links to Mainstream	School Completion Programmes; ACT social inclusion targets; Barnardos strategy of working with children and families; MRYS services; The programme is under pinned by the "Whole Child Perspective" of the National Children's Strategy.

Transition Programme – Going to Secondary? Training for Facilitators Academic Year: 2005-2006 possibly 2006-2007	
Resilience Delivery Level	Community (Agencies)
Target Group	Workers from agencies who have agreed to facilitate delivery of the programme
Purpose	To ensure continuity of programme of delivery in different schools by different agencies To promote quality of the programme
Duration	One day
Timing	Late February/Early March 2006
Indicators	Agencies who agree to delivery programme attend the training
Recruitment	ACT – EAR Project
Required Resources	Premises, Trainer – Project Manager – EAR Project
Lead Agency	ACT – EAR Project
Budget	Existing Programme Resources
Evaluation	External Facilitator – from one of the agencies involved but not a participant upon the training programme
Theory	Different levels of awareness regarding resilience among Strand B – respondents To ensure Child-centred theory informs Child-centred practice to promote positive child-development outcomes
Links to Mainstream	Schools Completion Programmes; Programme can be incorporated in the CSPE strand of the curriculum; Builds relationships between agencies and schools to respond to the diverse needs of students.

Special Needs Initiative Academic Year: 2006-2007	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community (Schools)
Target Group	6th Class Primary Pupils waiting for reassessment or presenting for educational psychological assessments for the first time. Parents/Guardians Schools
Purpose	To assist the most vulnerable families to access educational psychological assessments To quantify the level of additional supports accessed by supporting assessment The findings of this initiative to inform a submission to the DES regarding the allocation of resources for students with special needs.
Duration	Academic Year 2006-2007
Timing	To enable support to be accessed for the 2007-2008 academic year for pupils entering Post-primary school assessments need to be completed and submitted by March 2007.
Indicators	Based on previously completed survey figures – potentially 38 young people – but to gain support from this initiative particular criteria is required. This is to ensure the most vulnerable families are supported.
Recruitment	Schools and Special Needs Organiser
Required Resources	Educational Psychologist, Project Staff to form links with schools/parents
Lead Agency	National Council for Special Needs / ACT Educational Action Research Project
Budget	2005-2006 38 assessments @ €330 each = €12,540 2006-2007 38 assessment @ €340 each = €12,920 (allowing for inflation)
Evaluation	ACT – Educational Action Research Project
Theory	Young people who require supports fall behind rapidly in the Post-primary context if not in place when they arrive as first year students. Preventative measure against under achievement and early school leaving Assist students to engage with learning
Links to the Mainstream	NEWB policy to improve school retention; National Council for Special Education to provide supports for students with special needs; ACT social inclusion; School Completion Programmes

Sports and Education After Schools Programme (SEA) Academic Year: 2005-2006; 2006-2007 & 2007-2008	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, families and Communities
Target Group	6th & 5th Class Pupils attending after schools facilities
Purpose	To promote sport as part of a healthy life style To provide a positive experience of 3rd Level Education for young people who may not view 3rd Level as an option for them selves To provide practical experience for 3rd level students to work with young people and connect their practice to their own studies
Duration	Six week programme
Timescale	To be negotiated with after schools and AIT
Indicators	30 young people participate in the programme
Recruitment	After schools
Required Resources	Use of AIT facilities 3rd Level students to become Programme Mentors Participation by After schools Facilities
Lead Agency	AIT – After school Projects and ACT –Educational Action Research, Westmeath Sports Partnership
Budget	Funding Application has been submitted to Westmeath Sports Partnership
Evaluation	Feedback from participants, programme mentors , AIT access officer, etc
Theory	Sport does not need to be competitive and being active is part of a healthy life style Exposure to 3rd Level through fun activities illustrates college is for everyone
Links to Mainstream	National Health Strategy. Higher Education Authorities Equity of Access to 3rd Level, Westmeath Sports Partnership, ACT promoting social inclusion

b. Summer Break Initiatives

Multi-dimensional Summer Camp Academic Year: 2005-2006; 2006-2007 & 2007-2008	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community
Target Group	12 to 15 year olds with limited access to summer activities (6th Class Primary and 1st and 2nd Years Post-primary)
Purpose	To provide opportunities for social interaction To encourage the use of literacy and numeracy skills during summer break To encourage skills for self-care into adulthood To provide skills to consider future options of employment To provide a link between June and September To produce pieces of work which can be celebrated with parents/guardians etc
Duration	3 days per week from June to August (depending upon the lead agency)
Timing	Planning April 2006
Indicators	To be agreed
Recruitment	Youth services, family support workers, posters, school circulars etc
Required Resources	Premises to be provided by lead agencies Tutors possible cool dude programme, sports coaches, etc.
Lead Agency	To be agreed
Budget	To be agreed
Evaluation	To be agreed
Theory	Lack of supports for young people – provides a connection with vulnerable young people at risk of not making the transition to Post-primary
Links to Mainstream	Whole Child-perspective informing programme plan contributing to the National Children's Strategy. ACT working towards strategic aim of supporting young people to make a positive transition to working life. School Completion Programmes. MRYS strategy. ACSC strategy.

Meeting of Youth Service Providers to progress agreement regarding summer camps Academic Years: 2005-2006; 2006-2007 and 2007-2008	
Resilience Delivery Level	Community
Target Group	Potential Service Providers
Purpose	To agree progression of the proposed Multi-dimensional Summer Camp To annually review programme
Duration	1 afternoon
Timing	Planning February Reviews September
Indicators	Attendance of Youth Service Providers
Recruitment	Partnership Group
Required Resources	Premises – ACT
Lead Agency	ACT
Budget	Minimal
Evaluation	Outcome that an agreement is made
Theory	Lack of supports for young people – provides a connection with vulnerable young people at risk of not making a positive transition programme
Links to Mainstream	National Children's Strategy as a framework outlines the need for collaboration and interagency co-operation

Enhancement of Existing Summer Camp Provision Academic Year: 2005-2006	
Resilience Delivery Level	Community –Individuals and Families
Target Group	Youth Leaders and Providers existing summer camps
Purpose	One day workshop to up skill youth leaders and providers to enable them to enhance existing summer camp activities to encourage young people to practice literacy and numeracy skills
Duration	One Day
Timing	Planning February/March Delivery of workshop April
Indicators	Two or more organisation incorporate methods into exiting programmes
Recruitment	Partnership Group, letters, posters, existing network contacts
Required Resources	Premises possibly the youth service, ACT or other facility
Lead Agency	NALA for planning and advise VEC Family Literacy supports ACT – Educational Action Research Project
Budget	Minimal fee to cover expenses of the day
Evaluation	Feedback sheet at end of workshop Follow-up with providers after completion of summer camps Outcome of evaluation will inform the action for the following academic year
Theory	Hiatus or decline in skills during summer holidays, due to lack of opportunities to practice literacy and numeracy skills
Links to Mainstream	NALA strategy; NEWB, Youth Work Organisations, ACT, After school facilities

c. Post-Primary Level Initiatives

Youth Event	
Academic Year: 2005-2006	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community
Target Groups	Young People, Families and Agencies
Purpose	To highlight the range of services that are available to young people and families in the Athlone area To create links between service providers and young people To create links between different service providers
Duration	Once off event
Timescale	December 2005
Indicators	Attendance of service providers
Recruitment	Youth Organisations/Schools
Required Resources	Premises
Lead Agency	ACT – Educational Action Research Project
Budget:	Costs of stands to be covered by individual exhibitors
Evaluation	Feedback from exhibitors
Theory	Research revealed some young people do not access any out of school youth activities. Therefore indicating that some young people have limited sources of resilience to draw upon. This becomes particularly relevant if there are also a range of risk factors present in a young person daily life
Links to research	Involvement in youth activities is seen to meet developmental needs of young people – National Youth Plan

Web information Regarding School Activities	
Academic Year 2005-2006; 2006-2007; 2007-2008	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, families and Communities
Target Group	Primary Students Post-primary Students Family information
Purpose	To provide up to date information about school sporting fixtures and other school activities Provides an insight into the reality of school activities
Duration	On going
Timing	First Entry to be negotiated with schools
Indicators	Information is supplied by schools
Recruitment	ACT –the Educational Action Research Project to liaise with schools initially
Required Resources	Schools to provide information
Lead Agency	Athlone.ie
Budget	Athlone.ie role of information officer
Evaluation	Web survey
Theory	Information sharing and networking promotes the promotion of social capital The usage of IT technologies promotes social inclusion
Links	IT use on school curriculum – National Children's Strategy highlights the need to promote usage of IT

Study Skills Programme
Academic Year 2006-2007

Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community
Target Group	First Year Post-primary Students – who have been identified by school or parents as not settling in or having difficulties managing homework
Purpose	To provide out of school study motivation To encourage self-management of school day To encourage self-management of homework To increase opportunities to socially interact in small groups
Duration	Four weeks – two evenings a week (5.00 – 6.00 approximately)
Timescale	Programme Preparation – May Programme delivery October/November 2006
Indicators	10 to 15 participants
Recruitment	Schools, Families, Family Support Services, Barnardos Partnership group
Required Resources	Premises, Staff, educational psychologist, course materials e.g. examples of marked assignments indicating different grades and why
Lead Agency	To be agreed
Budget	Depending upon availability of Educational Psychologist
Evaluation	End of programme Feedback from schools about students homework and self-management of the day
Theory	Motivation required in and out of the school context to engage in learning
Links	NEWB, school retention policies, ACT, HSE Family Support workers

Connect Us – ICT Project Pilot Initiative
Academic Year; 2006/2007 & 2007/2008

Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Community (School)
Target Group	Post-primary students (possibly media transition project) and 6th Class Primary pupils about to make the transition
Purpose	To create an opportunity for 6th Class pupils to gain an insight into the Post-primary school to which they are transferring to Increase social (virtual) interaction to promote a sense of belonging to the school To build links between the Primary and Post-primary school To increase usage of IT
Duration	To be negotiated with the schools – pre-designed course by the Educational Action Research Project or Students as Transition Students
Timescale	Depending upon schools
Indicators	1 Post-primary school and 3 primary schools
Recruitment	Educational Action Research Project
Required Resources	Access to computers in school with e-mail facilities & IT instructor (Schools or the Project Manager) Task Sheets
Lead Agency	Schools
Budget	Role of Project Manager
Evaluation	Participants upon the programme
Theory	An insight to the reality of the school provides opportunities for students to gain a trust of the system Promotes a sense of belonging prior to entry
Links	National Children's Strategy identified the need to promote the use of IT skills as a social inclusion tool

An Advocacy and Mediation Service – Further Investigation Academic Year 2005-2006 Possible pilot project 2006-2007	
Resilience Delivery Level	Individual, Family and Community
Target Group	First Year Post-primary Students – who have been identified by the transition programme, school or parents as not settling in or having difficulties.
Purpose	To provide a support for young people at risk of becoming early school leavers To provide a space to identify what it is they really need. To have an advocate who can provide this information to the relevant people, be that the school or parents etc
Duration	Academic Year 2006-2007
Timescale	Further Investigation March 2006 Planning April to May 2006 Funding Application Depending upon deadline and potential sources of funding
Indicators	Young people identified as in difficulty are referred to advocacy service
Recruitment	
Required Resources	
Lead Agency	
Budget	To be decided
Evaluation	To be decided
Theory	Young people are often in situations where they may be in difficulty, but they are also aware of a power imbalance. The provision of an advocacy service provides the opportunity for young people to "name" their main issues – in or out of school issues. Child-centred decisions inform the follow up sections.
Links	Lack of services to support young people with emotional and behavioural issues.

Appendix 6

Topic Guide for Telephone Interviews
Stakeholder Agencies

Introduction
- Personal introduction
- Aim of evaluation and their role in process
- Details of data collection, - tape recording, transcription, confidentiality etc
- Ask for their consent (explain options as per consent form)

The questions are ordered under the key objectives as relevant to this set of interviews

1. **To ascertain is the EAR Project creating conditions that support young people it directly works with, to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school?**

   - What do you see as the **overall aim** of the EAR Project?
   - What are the **Practice Principles** that underpin the work of the Project?
   - What do you see as the **most successful aspects** of the EAR Project (Main benefits/Quality of the Project/Successful in achieving its main aims/objectives?)
   - What **indicators** could be used to show that the Project has been successful?

2. **To examine interagency collaborations which have been facilitated by the EAR Project.**

   - How has your agency **linked with/contributed to** the EAR Project?
   - Has your agency ever linked with an agency such as EAR **in the past**?
   - What **facilitated the development** of this link between your agency and the EAR Project?
   - What have been the **main challenges** associated with developing this collaborative work?
   - As a result of the collaboration with the EAR Project, did your agency make links with **any other agencies**?
   - What does this collaboration of agencies via the EAR Project mean for **outcomes for children**?
   - Do you think these collaborations **should continue**?

3. **To identify if involvement in the EAR Project has led any agency to implement more youth-led practice?**

- **Youth-led practice** is a core objective of the EAR Project. Has the project created opportunities for children to **participate** and lead in the Project?
- Is there **evidence** of this?
- Are there examples of ways in which involvement with the EAR Project has changed your agencies **approach** and practice at work – made it more youth-led etc?
- Are there any **challenges** in relation to introducing youth-led practice?

4. **To offer guidance on the future sustainability of the Project.**

- What do you see as the **main challenges** facing the Project – presently and into the future?
- What do you see as the main **opportunities** for the EAR Project for the future?
- What elements of the Project do you feel it is most important to **take forward**?
- Are there any **other suggestions** you would like to make regarding the Project? (areas to be further developed?)

Appendix 7

<u>Focus Group Topic Guide – Past Participants</u>

Introduction
- Personal introduction
- Aim of evaluation and their role in process
- Details of data collection, - tape recording, transcription, consent form, confidentiality etc
- Explanation of a focus group
- Ground rules – respect etc.

In relation to the objectives of the evaluation, this focus group is broadly trying to address objective 1, namely:

"To ascertain is the EAR Project creating conditions that support young people it directly works with, to make a positive transition from primary to post-primary school"?

1. How did you first come to **hear about** the EAR Project?

2. **Length involved** with Project?

3. What do you think is the **overall aim** of the EAR Project?

4. Tell me about the **types of activities** you did on the Project.

5. What do you see as the main **benefits of the Project** for young people like you who have been involved? (most successful aspects)

6. Looking at your own experiences of the Project, **how do you know** that the Project has helped you? (Indicators of success)

7. Were you encouraged to **give your ideas** to the Staff on the types of activities you wanted to do on the Project?

8. Is there any area within the Project that you think could be **further developed** (opportunities) to better meet the needs of the young people who attend? - (Skills, abilities etc – three wishes)

9. How would you describe the **Staff on the Project**? Have they made you feel welcome and respected?

10. Would you **recommend the Project** to other young people?

11. Any **general comments** you wish to make?