Introduction

This is a report of a consultation carried out with a group of young people aged 12 to 14 years of age in a suburb of Dublin in February and March 2012. The primary purpose of this report is to assess the views and understanding of these children regarding their rights as individuals, as part of their local community and Irish society. This section gives some information about their local context in addition this section also outlines the background and methodology used in the study. The second section of the report presents the findings and recommendations from the project.

Background Information

This study was carried out in a school in a south west Dublin Suburb. It has a population of approximately 4,000. It is primarily a middle class Roman Catholic community. The children attending this session live in this area and attend the local secondary school. It is a mixed school but for the purposes of this study and in keeping with our first consultation with Travellers only the young girls attending the sessions. The school principal and staff were very supportive of the ‘Speak Up’ initiative for which we are very grateful.

Pavee Point conducted this consultation on behalf of Speak Up. Pavee Point is a voluntary, or non-governmental, organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers. The group is comprised of Travellers and members of the majority population working together in partnership to address the needs of Travellers as a minority group experiencing exclusion and marginalisation.
The aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement in the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers, through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights.

The work of Pavee Point is based on two key premises:

- Real improvement in Travellers’ living circumstances and social situation requires the active involvement of Travellers themselves.
- Non-Travellers have a responsibility to address the various process which serve to exclude Travellers from participating as equals in society.

**Background**

The consultation was held in the Secondary School. An appropriate space was provided by the school for the consultation and the children. An initial meeting was held with the children in the school for selection purposes. Two classes attended the information session and twelve young people volunteered to be part of the consultation. All permission forms were signed and returned to the school for the purposes of the consultation. Over a two week period two consultations were carried out in the school. There were three female workers facilitating the consultation. Two workers with the children and the sessions were recorded. The 12 young people attended all sessions.

It took a considerable amount of time to set up the initial meeting with the school. However once we established contact and met with the staff we were given every support for the implementation of the project. Staff members were available to us during the session if required. While we did not need assistance during these session this was very valuable support in case of emergency or indeed practical assistance.

**Methodology**

The session began with an informal lunch which included an overview of the project as the lunch finished. The ‘Speak Up’ DVD and selected imagery was used to support the young girls understanding of the project. Creative methodologies and group work were used as forums for addressing the key areas chosen by the children.
**Preparation of the children**

An initial meeting was held with young girls from two classes of first year students. Approximately 40 attended the meeting. The children were given background information and details regarding permission forms and instructed on the importance of a commitment to completing the consultation. We then had a question and answer session. One of the first questions the children asked was why the boys were not involved as it is a co-educational school. They also asked questions about the Traveller children. Questions about the project and the European connection were also abundant. Finally, the children wanted to know what food we would be providing for them on the day.

**Methodology of the programme**

The Project team used a variety of tools and activities that were most conducive to enabling the young people express their views depending on their level of ability, interest and concentration. The tools included offering information using visual tools including the Speak Up film and other images to explore the European, national, local and individual dimensions to the project (see photos attached). To illicit their views a number of activities and methodologies were used including games, art activities, group work, drama and personal interviews. The information was recorded through video, photos, voice recorder and written documentation. The session began with a sit down lunch and general chat. Once in the group we developed a group contract.

The children came up with the following areas for the contract:

- Listen to each other
- Cooperate and work together
- Wait for someone to finish talking
- Respect for each other
- Don’t laugh at each other
- Turn off mobiles

Our request to them included:

- If you talk we listen
- If we talk you listen and
If you want to say something to your neighbour you do it quietly so as not to disrupt the group.

**Location of the Workshops**

The workshops were held in a large room in the school. We had to set up the food and the activities in the room and this worked very well. The children initially had their food around the table but they were free to snack during the sessions also. During the second session we also used another room to conduct individual interviews.

**Key Findings**

The children were very excited and interested in the project. Compared to the Traveller session many of the children did not know each other as they came from different classes and did not have relationships with the children in the broader community. The children were both very interested in the European connection and also in what the Traveller children did in their session. They asked if as part of the feedback from Brussels session that we could do the session together with the Travellers. As outlined previously the session began with a general discussion around the table while the children were having food. While they were still eating we began the introduction to what was meant by children’s rights. The areas identified by the young people included: ‘Children are being abused ... they have a right not to be abused, they have a right to a house and family, right to fresh water and good surroundings, right to education, they have rights and responsibilities and democracy.’

Questions from children: ‘Is it illegal to be deprived of their rights. Developing countries they don’t have access to fresh water or education do they? Are children’s rights the same as adults rights?’

They felt the government has falling down in some areas in particular education for Traveller children as ‘they don’t go to secondary school and they don’t have good living conditions.’

**Children’s Awareness of Children’s Rights**

The Children’ Rights Game was very successful. The young people engaged thoroughly with the process. It took quite a considerable amount of time to identify the rights as they constructively engaged in deconstructing the arguments for and against the right’s as relevant
to their lives. We worked in two groups and the children choose 4 rights per group. We came back into the main group and worked to choose the most important 4 rights for the group collectively. We engaged in discussion, identifying pros and cons for each right and voted to secure a consensus on the 4 chosen rights from the small working groups and in the larger group. When we came back to the large group we had 7 rights to choose from as both groups chose the right to their voice Article 12.

**The Rights chosen by the small groups included**

The right to information Article 17

The right to play Article 31

The right to your voice Article 12 (picked by both groups)

The right to health Article 24

The right to identity Article

The right not to be maltreated Article 19

The right to be equal Article 2

**The final four rights selected included:**

The Right to information Article 17

The right to your voice Article 12

Right not to be maltreated Article 19

Right to be equal Article 2

The children gave reasons for choosing their various rights and again engaged in a pros and cons before they had a vote on their final rights. The young people were *well capable of engaging in constructive conversations on the rights they felt were relevant to their lives.* While they discussed areas such as education, disability, protection from torture and deprivation of liberty and children in conflict with the law have the right to special assistance, they felt that while they were *very important issues they were not directly relevant to them at this time as they had access to a good education, they didn't have a disability, they*
had their liberty and they were not in conflict with the law. When whittling down the 7 rights to 4 rights the arguments for and against each right were heard and each opinion was treated with respect. Following the discussion on each right the children voted for the four preferred votes. Below we outline some of the arguments for and against the 7 rights discussed.

**Right to play:** The young people argued that it was better to be able to play rather than have an identity as ‘you have that anyway and it’s no good being a child if you can’t play’. Their arguments included: ‘as a baby you learn through play so you need to be able to play’.

‘Play is more related to hobbies that you do in your private time rather than free play’.

‘If you have to care for sick parents you wouldn’t be able to have free play. So everyone has the right to play’.

While there were compelling arguments for play when it came down to a vote it was not perceived as important as other rights.

**Right to identity:** ‘If you don’t have it you are kind of like a nobody’. ‘If you don’t have a name you could be called anything, it’s disrespectful’.

‘In our area we all have an identity and nationality, we are not being deprived of this but other people are but as we are discussing our own connection with rights it is not that relevant to us’.

Identity is more than a name and nationality it’s about who you are.

How is it relevant to who is here? *People can bully you because of the way you dress so then you are not able to express your own identity.*

Identity was perceived as very important and a difficult one to let go of.

**Right to health care:**

There was a very mixed discussion on health care. The young people felt it was very important in general but again was it relevant to them? Comments included: ‘I have never been in a position where I haven’t got health care. I don’t think it’s been so bad that we died
or something. We all have access to health care. I don’t think it’s relevant to us cause when you go to the hospital we are treated.’

The children who had experience of going to hospital talked about waiting for long hours and seeing very sick or very old people waiting on trolleys for long periods for treatment.

However the final word on health care made the case ‘as long as you get treated it shouldn’t matter that you have to wait. It is your health after all’.

All children are equal.

‘People should be treated equally’ ‘Treat children like you want to be treated yourself.’ The children were aware that many people in society are not treated equally but their main focus was on colour, Travellers and disability’. They identified positive and negative situations:

‘My brother worked in a shop and all the Travellers were treated differently; for example, they were told to watch all the Traveller that came into the shop but not told to do that with settled people’.

‘We have a very good system in our country for being treated equally. We had a system in our school where a child with disability was treated equally in the school. She was treated the very same’.

The focus on their own situation and being treated equally brought another dimension for them.

‘You can experience bullying for who you are. Some people experience not being treated equally because of their colour but while it is not relevant to us it is when it comes to bullying’.

When we started secondary school first the sixth years are so mean to us. It shouldn’t make a difference how you look or how popular you are you should be treated equally.

Children have the Right to Information

‘Parents need to tell us the truth’

‘You don’t know if the parents are hiding things from you’

‘Why do people tell you things very late’
‘More information about the world how important it is that you have access to information around the world’

‘People should be upfront’

The Right to information seems to be linked with children’s suspicions or experience of adults not sharing what the children consider important information. In general these issues are related for adults to protection issues however the children feel that they should be trusted and not patronised.

SESSION TWO

We began the second session with an informal lunch chatting and catching up. As a group we revisited our contract and briefly recapped on the Rights chosen at the previous session. Following an explanation of the societal structure i.e. EU Commission, Irish government, community and the children themselves we moved into discussing the rights chosen in detail. An arts session and personal interview on the video for the ’Speak Up’ Television station completed the consultation.

Right to Information Article 17

Honesty and power were big themes in this discussion. The young people felt that they had a right to ‘family information’ and ‘information on what is going on in the school’. They also felt they should know what is going on in the world however their focus was on their own lives. They reflected on how ‘we don’t know what goes on in individual families’ and there may be many things that parents do not tell children for example regarding, ‘adoption, family separation, local information on children’s issues’. They felt they were very out of the loop and were expected to put up with adult decisions on the information made available to them. They felt they were entitled to information and at the same time they should be consulted on issues and information which affect their lives in school for example.

Right to your Voice Article 12

In the discussion on the Right to a Voice the young people felt that they should have the right ‘to speak our mind’. The discussion centred again on two main areas; school and home. They felt that there should be more programmes like ‘Speak Up’ to allow children to have a voice. They also felt that many people say ‘it is important to consult with children’ however they
felt that their voice, opinions and feelings were rarely heard. There was again a sense of powerlessness and frustration. In the school setting they gave examples of what they considered token consultation, for example they had a mock vote for the President of Ireland and while they felt it was interesting their also felt their opinion didn’t really matter. There was no concrete outcome in terms of their voice. Hence the notion that their voice would be taken to Brussels appealed to them. They hope their voice will be represented in Europe and there will be an outcome. Regarding their experiences in the school setting the young people gave examples of:

'not being listened to, teachers ignoring you', being silenced around issues of conflict with a teacher, teachers expecting them to behave in a certain way and yet the teacher doesn’t set a good example, you even get given out to for asking a question’.

The conversation branched into the children who talk too much and the more silent children in the school setting. They talked about having their hand up for ages and not being asked, about teachers picking certain children to respond and never getting a chance. They also outlined situations where people talk over you and then you feel too embarrassed to bring up the topic again.

In the general in the school setting the young people felt they didn’t have a voice at all despite having a class representative. They felt the sixth years put them down and didn’t treat them with respect. Older students pushed past them in the line for food and told them they were in the school longer so had the right to pass them out.

The feelings identified by the young people included: ‘really annoyed, angry’.

‘The teacher doesn’t see you, you are invisible, makes you want to ask why but you know you won’t get anywhere’.

In their home environment many of the children felt they were not heard

Many children felt they weren’t listened to by their parents or older siblings and felt frustrated when parents had no time for them:

Parents would say:

‘no speaking, end of story’
‘in another five minutes, just another five minutes’

They expressed feeling totally fed up with excuses and one child described being driven insane by having to wait.

The children felt that they had something to say about matters affecting their lives but they were powerless in many situations to have their opinions heard. This led to a level of disrespect for adults. They felt the messages they got from adults about how they should behave wasn’t modelled by the adults themselves.

**Right Not to be Maltreated Article**

Being bullied was a big theme in the discussion. In their tableau the children (see photos) in the first session the children portrayed the consequences of being bullied which included: isolation, sadness, lack of confidence. They also portrayed the actions of bullying in their stance and facial expressions, ignoring a child, leaving people out and physically pushing children away. Some children discussed this from a personal perspective of having experienced bullying and isolation and the consequence of it on their lives. The children talked about internal and external bullying. Internally they described being bullied in the home by older siblings and socially with their social group. Externally they described being fearful of teenagers on the streets or in their estates and some children had experienced being chased or intimidated by these groups. In school they talked again about sixth years putting them down. Many of the young people felt while this wasn’t necessarily their direct experience they felt it was an issue for their age group and an important one for the school and for society generally.

**Right to be Equal Article**

‘If people are treated badly they may feel that they are not treated equally’

The discussion centred on issues of respect, power, oppression and fear. The young people described how they felt they were not given due respect and in particular from teachers. They felt that ‘being put down’ or ‘making an example of you’ was a strategy by many teachers. They also felt that it ‘just didn’t work’. In any disputes they felt that the ‘teacher was always right’ and that it was futile to offer your opinion as you were ‘just seen answering back and being cheeky’. They criticised the use of punishment of the whole class for the acts of a few
and saw this as being unequal treatment. They felt that there was a considerable amount of misuse of power. They felt that young people would respond better to being treated more fairly.

They give examples of inconsistencies in the messages from adults regarding behaviour. The expectation that the pupils must follow the rules that some teachers break was perceived as unfair and didn’t lead to respect for adults.

They also stated ‘People older than you think they can boss you around’

Proposals for Policies or Actions

The children found the whole experience of ‘Speak Up’ very empowering. They mentioned many times during the consultations that all children should have the experience. They found it informative but it also gave them an understanding of their rights as young people.

General Comments:

‘Children’s voices should be heard. Our rights are as important as any other person’

‘All children have the right not to be maltreated ...it’s horrible. People in schools should be informed about the right not to be maltreated by anybody’

‘Everyone is equal: All people should be treated the same and not treated differently because of their colour, their clothes etc.’

‘Sometime people don’t really think about children’s rights and they should’

‘Children have the right to speak up and say what it going on in the world’

‘No children should be maltreated: Bullying is not only in school but is also at home. Being hit or stuff being said to you’

‘Teachers don’t really listen until it gets to the extreme. Teachers don’t care’.

‘Sometimes children are ignored’

‘We have a right to our opinion: teachers tend to move on without listening’

‘Children are not being heard as much as possible’
‘I want to share my opinion. Saying what is on your mind instead of keeping it in’

**Policy and actions**

‘Pay more attention to us. We do have a very big voice and not just because we are small and stuff doesn’t mean we haven’t’ things to say’

‘Concentrate more on the children because we are here and we are not invisible’

‘More stuff like this (Speak up) so that more children know what are their rights’

‘Give children more of a chance rather than it being all about the adults’

*Make sure our rights are heard and children should know what their rights are*

‘There should be more facilities for teenagers. Not paying facilities. Just areas to sit and talk and be together and not have to hang around the streets’

‘Traveller are not treated equally. They should be treated equally’

‘Everyone should get a fair education’

‘We need to be treated equally there is a lot of bullying going on in schools. I don’t think teachers observe enough what is going on and they should be more aware’

**Reflection**

The young people engaged in this consultation were highly engaged in the process. They took their roles seriously and critically reflected on the issue presented to them. During the initial rights game they deconstructed each right ‘as relevant to their lives’ and came to the conclusion while many or all of the rights were important that they had many privileges such as the right to education and hence they didn’t need to address it in this consultation. The negotiated their way through all the rights with good humour and with serious intent enabling them to come to a consensus which reflected their personal position currently. The rights they choose reflect their desire to be heard and to feel equal as young people in family, community and Irish society. Their experience tells a story of concern regarding these key issues. Their concern generally regarding maltreatment of children was evident on the world stage but it was also tangible in their discussions of bullying in both their internal and external worlds.
Their need for information appears to be largely linked with trust or honesty from the adults who inhabit their world. These children recognised their privilege although they didn’t name it as such and while they are critical of the adult roles and relationship around them it is clear they have very positive relationships with adults and they have developed strong views and the ability to question and deconstruct issues at various levels.

**Some questions**

Power is a critical issue when addressing children’s rights for all children. For the more privileged children power is more directly linked to their personal experiences with adults or older youth. That is not to say that the institutional mechanisms of the school do not impinge on their lives they do. The powerlessness of privileged children is striking in the lack of voice and in terms of equal treatment they identify. How much more striking are the needs of marginalised children when you observe the powerlessness of privileged children and their need in this report to be heard and to be visible in their daily lives.

The issue of respect and fairness in the institutions of the state ‘school’ is highlighted. However how we model as adults makes for more emphatic, respectful and engaging relationships with children.

**Evaluation comments from the children attending the two day consultation**

“These two days have been great fun! I have made new friends and found out a lot about time. I now find myself listening to the news and hearing horrific stories about children in other countries that are being deprived of their rights, and thing of how lucky I am. I also wonder why things like this are allowed to happen. Why? I heard a story in my group that really opened my eyes and made me think. I hope that Colette, Jackie and Grainne bring what we have discussed to Europe and more Groups like this will help to spread the word of children’s rights. I think it would be a good idea to talk a bit stuff like this in S.P.H.E. or C.S.P.E. Thanks sooooo much’.

‘I have really enjoyed the past 2 days. It was interesting to learn what rights we children have. I also enjoyed the different opinions my friends have on things. I feel like the government need to look a bit more at children because we are here to stay. I would love to
take part in anything Eurochild decided to do so you can come straight to me for anything. I hope to join in again soon’

‘I think these two day have been really fun and informative Colette, Jackie and Grainne have taught us so much about children’s rights that most of us never knew. I think it’s important that children know about their rights and this programme helped us all to better understand the concept. I would love to participate in anything to do with this in the future. Thanks so much for the experience!!’

‘I think these two classes have been very educational. I have got the chance to speak up about what I think of children’s rights. Colette, Jackie and Grainne have been AMAZING teachers! I have heard some very emotional stories of people being bullied or left out. I think it gave all of us a better understanding of right for people and got to see what others think about them. Xoxo’

‘In this 2 sessions I had so much fun. I felt it was my opportunity to speak my mind about children’s rights. I think I have a better understanding about right of children. I’m looking forward to the next them we meet I think Brussels would be a great opportunity not just for the holiday but to learn more about rights. Thank you so much: Colette, Grainne, Jackie.’

xx

‘To Colette, Grainne and Jackie
The two days for me were sooooooo good. I became friends with people I never thought I would. I learned all about my rights and I will stand up for myself and others. It was an amazing experience. I loved the food! I know that not everyone can go to Brussels but i would be so grateful. I had such an amazing, exciting fun and education experience. I’m so grateful. I love the interview! And Brussels just sounds amazing. But I won’t be offended if I don’t get picked! And Colette use the first picture you took of me! I can’t wait to see you all again Lots of love’

XOXOXO
‘I think during the two sessions I learned a lot about rights and how they contribute to my life and how they contribute to my community. I want to thank Colette, Grainne and Jackie for helping me understand. Any other activities that you need us for I would be interested in helping.’

Thank you

‘I think the 2 days were really fun and interesting. I learnt a lot about children’s rights.
Thank you sooooooooooo much for the laughs and cake xx cake!!!! I Love CHOCOLATE’

CAKE

‘Colette, Jackie and Grainne this experience has taught me so much. I was all light-hearted and never dull. It gave us a rare opportunity to talk about our opinions and feelings on our rights. I would love to take part in any other things your organising. You were all so friendly and it was never uncomfortable. I have learnt so much more about my rights and how I am entitled to my opinion no matter what. These two days were amazing and I loved them. Thank you so much for taking the time to make this such a wonderful experience Thanks again’

‘Thanks Colette, Grainne and Jackie I think the 2 days were very helpful as they helped me to understand all the rights and that everybody’s equal. I love painting.’

‘I felt these tow day were very productive and made my really think about my rights. I loved being here. I am very aware of my rights now and realise how we don’t have all of them. This experience has really made me think.
I think these classes have been brilliant they have let us express our opinions and have our voices heard in Europe. It’s also been a lot of fun and we go to know people around the school better.’