# The Rialto Learning Community
# Out of School Time (OST) Project:
# An Evaluation of Process and Outcomes.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

# Executive Summary

This executive summary summarises the findings and conclusions from an evaluation of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) out of school time (OST) initiative, which was conducted by the Centre for Effective Education (Queen's University Belfast).

**Study aims**

The study sought to address the following overarching research question:

*Can the integration of existing OST services, the development of Individualised Learning Plans for young people using customised profiling tools, the provision of additional quality programmes using a Logic Model approach and the development of structured links between schools and the local community improve the well-being and educational attainment of children and young people living in Fatima and Dolphin House?*

To address these aims the evaluation comprised two main components: an in-depth qualitative look at the process and outcomes associated with the delivery of the initiative and a small, quasi experimental study to determine the potential impact of the RLC initiative on young-people's education and wellbeing outcomes.

**Findings from the process evaluation**

The critical junctures to emerge from the qualitative data as likely to contribute to improved outcomes for young people, coalesced around six main themes:

1. *Building and extending relationships between local schools and the RLC*: the Community School Strategy has potsively impacted upon the historically dysfunctional triangular relationships between the RLC, local families and schools. Through school visits, shared training, structured networking opportunities and a dedicated education coordinator the RLC has sought to build and extend school-community relationships.

2. *Sharing of information and teaching methods between schools and homework clubs*: there was broad agreement that the Community School Strategy, in particular, the Principal, Literacy and Restorative Practice networks have encouraged meaningful changes in practice and skill development, especially in relation to sharing of both information and pedagogy between schools and homework clubs.

3. *Embeddedness of the RLC within the local community*: the Rialto interviews emphasise the RLC's unique influence and reach within the local community.  In particular the range of the programmes and activities that are offered means that they engage on many different levels with varied age groups.  The reported 'disconnection' between schools and local people starkly contrasts with the 'embeddedness' of the Rialto youth projects in the community.

4. *Tools used by the RLC to promote a more evidence informed way of working*: It is clear from the interviews that the Logic Models, Individual Learning Plans and database are essential tools in the successful development, implementation and monitoring of the RLC's day-to-day activities. This outcomes based, child centred ethos appears to be now firmly embedded in the RLC. However, frustrating technical issues and further training were highlighted as issues requiring attention to ensure that monitoring procedures were consistently implemented across the organisation.

5. *RLC strategies - the intersection between the Arts Programme, school and parent strategies*: The effective involvement of parents in their children's educational welfare is imperative, however it presents a significant challenge for many local parents. Collaborative engagement of the Arts Programme with schools alongside effective parental involvement might be an important means through which parents might more readily engage, not only with the RLC but also with schools.

6. *School and the community: historical tensions and shared understandings*: one of the most striking themes to emerge from the Rialto interviews was the disjointed and, often, acrimonious nature of historic relationships between the schools and the community. Collaboration and the establishment of structured links between schools and the RLC have been 'transformative' in terms of inter-personal relations and mutual understanding. Although several respondents argued that there were too many other variables to determine the extent homework clubs have impacted on the literacy and numeracy outcomes, the consensus was that the clubs make a 'valuable contribution'.

**Findings from the quasi-experimental study**

The findings from the quantitative, quasi-experimental study are undoubtedly mixed and, as is frequently the case in studies such as this one, a clear picture has not emerged. Overall, and compared to the control group, the young people in the RLC intervention group are reporting that they enjoy school less and they less strongly believe that they can improve and master new learning or that their hard work will pay off.  Equally, and again compared to the control group, the young people in the RLC intervention group are reporting that their reasons for working hard are more internally motivated i.e. not motivated by what others think of them and they are less likely to avoid hard work or effort. While we cannot conclude that the RLC is the sole reason for these changes we can clearly see that alongside a less positive school experience and less confidence in their ability to master new learning the intervention group is demonstrating more positive outcomes in relation to their internal motivation to learn and their attitudes towards work (no changes were observed in the remaining six outcome areas).

While these are important findings, it is important to bear in mind that this was a small study and not a randomised controlled trial, thus we cannot conclude that the differences between the control and intervention groups are uniquely due to whether the young people received the RLC programme or not.  Furthermore, a high proportion of the control group also attended an after school programme during the study and it is possible that there are other, unknown differences between the two groups that are driving the differences in outcomes.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The data presented in this report concurs with the broader literature and suggests that the family, the community and schools all have individual and collective responsibilities in terms of a young person's education. The quasi-experimental element of the study provides mixed and inconclusive evidence in relation to the impact of the RLC on the measured educational well being outcomes of young people participating in the programme over a two-year period.

The qualitative element of the study however, emphasises the space(s) occupied by the RLC in this learning environment and it is clear that the organisation fulfils a critical role. The

data also make it clear that the RLC's reach, influence and embeddedness in the Fatima and Dolphin estates assures that it is uniquely placed to create the conditions for this triangular support. It is with this in mind that we propose the following recommendations:

1. The RLC should continue to focus on young people's outcomes through continued evaluation and monitoring, supported by the existing practices within the organisation. Future robust evaluations of changes in outcomes for young people as they progress through the RLC should be pursued.
2. The new ways of working that have been developed and implemented by the RLC have received high levels of support from staff. However, ongoing up-skilling and training of staff is required.
3. The evident success of fostering relationships and working practices between schools and the community provides a compelling rationale to maintain and further strengthen these connections - this continues to be an important endeavour.
4. Relatedly, the development of a dedicated parent strategy that will aim to engage parents more fully in their child's educational welfare are recommended as a priority for both the RLC and potential funders.
5. The Arts programme is uniquely placed to engage with young people, parents and schools and given the potential of such a strategy to strengthen existing community-school-parent collaborations the development of such a strategy should be pursued.

It is both commendable and desirable that the commitment, vision and outworking of the RLC remains focused on improving outcomes for young people as well as endeavouring to ensure that their own practices and programmes are evidence informed, targeted and effective in producing positive change in these outcomes. They have developed, and are now implementing, strategies that require them to continually collect evidence and evaluate outcomes and while these new ways of working have undoubtedly been challenging, they have been positively adopted by staff.

RLC are uniquely placed to develop and strengthen school and community relationships. In a changing, and often uncertain, economic and cultural landscape, the consistent and dedicated community underpinning provided currently by RLC remains crucial to those growing and learning in this area.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) out of school time (OST) initiative, which was conducted by the Centre for Effective Education between January 2011 and April 2013.

**Background to the RLC out of school time programme**
The RLC out of school time initiative aims to improve the range and quality of OST activities that are available to young people who are making the transition from primary to secondary school (aged 11-14) and living in the regenerated Fatima, Dolphin House and the wider Rialto areas. The range of programmes that the RLC currently provides includes: homework support (with a focus on literacy and numeracy), sport and programmes in the areas of performing arts including: music, dance, visual arts, drama and street performance. Allied closely to this aim of improving provision is the intention to cultivate and strengthen the linkages between schools and the local community. Collaborative relationships between schools and the community based OST projects are being developed through formal and informal networks and activities, which aim to facilitate and promote engagement between teachers, project workers and parents as well as build capacity in these areas where necessary.

A two year development phase occurred prior to the start of the current evaluation (between 2007 and 2009), during which the following steps were taken[1]:
- The three existing OST services[2] were fully integrated as a single operational and organizational entity
- A range of new OST activities were designed using a *logic model* approach
- Suitable tools for profiling young people and planning and evaluating suitable OST activities were designed and implemented
- Stronger links were forged with local schools in the Fatima, Dolphin House and wider Rialto areas
- Preliminary baseline data was collected with which to make comparisons with the fully operational project.

It is hypothesised that the provision of this set of programmes in addition to the provision of a range of activities and networks aimed at promoting and building capacity for key actors, results in improvements in the education development and wellbeing of young people in the local area. A detailed logic model, which underpins the Rialto Learning Community, can be found in Appendix 1. Thus, the broad aim of the current study is to explore the process and effectiveness of this combination of activities, with a specific focus on how these relate to outcomes for young people. These aims are revisited in more detail at the end of this chapter. An in-depth description of the context and content of the programme are provided in Chapter 2.

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[1] This work was supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Irish Youth Foundation and the Fatima Regeneration Board
[2] The Fatima Homework Club, the Rialto Youth Project and the Dolphin Homework Club

**Existing research on the effectiveness of OST programmes**
Many studies have been conducted which seek to provide evidence of the effectiveness or impact of After-School Programmes (ASPs), also commonly referred to as Out-of School Time programmes (OSTs), which are similar in focus to the RLC programme. This section primarily focuses on the most relevant of these studies in terms of their relationship to the key themes to emerge in this study. It explores the relevant learning around after-school programmes, literacy, homework clubs, family/community relationships with schools and finally, encouraging parental involvement in young people's education welfare.

*After-school programmes*
An examination of the academic literature in this area reveals a substantial number of reports which document the positive impact of ASPs for young people in the areas of social and emotional well-being (Blomfield & Barber, 2009; Broh, 2002; Cosden et al., 2004; Dworkin et al.*,* 2003; Harvard Family Research Project, 2003; Holland & Andre, 1987; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Tweedie, 2007; U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2000) and academic achievement and related attitudes (Darling, 2005; Ecceles & Barber, 1999; Maloney & Cairns, 1997; Schinke et al.*,* 2000). A number of these studies also report decreased participation in a range of other outcomes including anti-social, criminal and/or violent behaviour (e.g. Jones & Offord, 1989; Ross et al., 1992).

While it is accepted that experimental designs, i.e. randomised controlled trials, provide the most robust evidence of impact, it is often not possible for practical and other reasons to use such methodologies.  Hence, the majority of the studies identified above have been conducted using quasi-experimental or non-experimental approaches.  Nonetheless, a small number of trials have been conducted which have evaluated the impact of ASPs.  Goerlich Zief et al. (2006), for example, undertook a systematic review in this area and, using strict criteria, identified five experimental studies conducted in urban and suburban areas of North America.  These five programmes were directly linked to schools serving mainly low-income, elementary level children and a key focus of the included programmes was to promote positive outcomes for children while three of these were also committed to addressing negative behaviours.

The findings from each of the identified studies were examined individually and, where possible, meta-analytical techniques were used to pool outcome effects for similar measures across studies.  Goerlich Zief et al.'s (2006) review shows that a total of 97 different outcomes were measured using a variety of internally-designed surveys and standardised attainment tests.  Of these, 84% demonstrated no significant differences between programme and control children.  However, some key significant findings in one or more of the studies were reported in terms of academic/developmental benefits for participating children.  For example, citing Lauver (2002) and the U.S. Department of Education (2003), they highlight, respectively, notably higher aspirations to attend third level education and the finding that participating children are significantly more likely to take part in creative activities such art, music, dance and drama. The literature also demonstrates that this influence is bi-directional.  In another important review, the value of incorporating of arts-based activities into ASPs is highlighted by Winner et al. (2000) in terms of a positive correlation between young people's participation in the arts and subsequent academic improvement.

Lauer et al. (2004 cited in Biggart et al., 2012) conducted an extensive review of the literature spanning from 1984 to 2002. The particular focus of this review was the impact of ASPs on the literacy and numeracy levels of low-achieving students. Their key findings included:

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- ASPs have positive effects on the literacy levels of low achieving students
- Younger students are more likely than older students to benefit from ASP literacy interventions
- ASPs which provide one-on-one tutoring for low-achieving students have a significantly positive impact

Similarly, Slavin et al.'s (2009b) review of out-of-school reading programmes concluded that the most successful models had a number of common features which included:

- An emphasis on professional development for staff
- Effective communication of specific teaching methods
- Appropriate alignment of ASP literacy and numeracy initiatives to school curricula

Pertinent to a specific focus of this study, the literature also suggests that successful implementation of ASPs is contingent on the development of organisational systems, structures and practices. According to Domitrovich et al. (2008), the complexity of managing such initiatives and their attendant relationships dictates that programme and communication processes need to be continuously monitored and reviewed.

*Literacy*

The importance of the development of early literacy skills is a consistent theme in both education research and policy responses (Senechal & Young, 2008). Since 2001, U.S. education policy has been guided by the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation (2001) which requires all public schools to: annually administer state-wide standardised tests; ensure students achieve a proficient standard in reading and mathematics; and to implement proactive interventions where such standards are not attained (USC, 2008)[3]. In Ireland, this policy emphasis on early literacy and numeracy development is evident in the Department of Education and Skills' (2011) report entitled *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020.* This report highlights the patent need for such a long-term strategic approach by evidencing that one in ten Irish school children have 'serious difficulty with reading or writing'; and that in the most socially disadvantaged areas, this rises to 'almost one in three students' (ibid: 12).

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[3] However, this legislation is likely to be significantly revised as these targets are increasingly seen as 'unrealisable'. In July 2003, the Student Success Act was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives. This Act will allow States and Districts to develop their own curriculum standards (New York Times 2013).

The literature further attests that early literacy skills are significant precursors to academic attainment (Bynner & Parsons 2006), and broader participation in society (Clark et al., 2008). Importantly, Juel's (1988) longitudinal study of children aged six to ten years old (cited in Biggart et al., 2012), demonstrates that young people who do not acquire basic literacy skills at an early stage are unlikely to catch up later. More broadly, three major factors are identified as having a significant effect on early stage literacy development: Firstly, the home environment, particularly, the level and consistency of parental involvement (Park & Holloway, 2013); secondly, the school environment, particularly around teaching methods, behaviour management techniques, and interpersonal relationships (Molina, 2013); and thirdly, child nutrition (Alaimo et al., 2001; Higginson, 2001).

In terms of addressing the needs of children at risk of reading failure, Lauer et al.'s (2006) meta-analysis highlights the benefits of the one-to-one tutoring and the fact that this support is often more commonly available in after-school programmes. Other important studies on the effectiveness of one-to-one mentoring consistently demonstrate positive outcomes in terms of literacy development (Elbaum et al., 2000; Slavin et al., 2009b; Torgerson et al., 2003). There were two consistent findings from these reviews: firstly, the benefits of one-to-one tutoring over class-form learning; and secondly, that such mentoring interventions have a particularly significant impact on the literacy levels of the most at-risk students.

*Homework Clubs*
The role of homework in the educational development of young people is widely recognised. The literature consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between homework and achievement (Connors et al., 2003; Downs, 2005). Cooper (2001) details several specific benefits including: the development of study skills; student cognisance that learning can occur beyond school; and crucially, that homework serves an important link between schools and families. Further studies have indicated the benefits of structured homework support in after-school programmes in terms of academic attainment (Cooper et al., 2006; Cosden et al., 2001; Pierce et al., 1999; Walker et al., 2004), increased self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001), and the promotion of independent learning (Glazer & Williams, 2001). An additional important benefit of structured homework support is highlighted by Bailey (2001) who argues that ASPs help create safe environments for young learners and reduce behaviour problems.

In a later study, Cooper et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of homework students in the United States between 1987 and 2003. Their two main findings were that: firstly, after-school programmes make a significant contribution in terms of supporting young people to complete homework assignments; and secondly, that such programmes are most effective when, in addition to providing time and space for homework completion, they also actively assist students in acquiring study skills.

The literature highlights several key recommendations in terms of designing and implementing after-school programmes. For example, Glazer and Williams (2001) posit that activities should be interactive and directly related to homework and/or academic achievement to foster positive identification with school. In a more recent study, Biggart et al.'s (2012) evaluation of a Dublin literacy programme reported that: firstly, ASP staff are

likely to require additional curricular-orientated training; and secondly, there should be clarification of the roles of teachers and ASP staff and a greater appreciation of their specific, often contrasting, training needs. Similarly pertinent to this study, the *Doodle Den* evaluation also concludes that 'on-going professional training' for ASP staff and regular 'Communities of Practice' meetings involving all stakeholders are critical features of successful after-school programmes (ibid: 3).

*Relationships with Schools*

One of the most consistent themes to emerge in process evaluations of after-school programmes is the often complex relationship between after-school programmes and local schools. Indeed, Miller (2003) argues that in terms of ASPs achieving positive outcomes for young people, the effective integration of family, school, and community is critical (see also Epstein, 2011, 2013; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Molina, 2013; Quezada et al., 2013; Sheldon, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010). Key issues raised in this regard include: aligning the ASP curriculum to the school curriculum; effective communication and trustful relationships between schools and after-school personnel; and, additional training for after-school staff (Lauer et al., 2006; Sanders, 2006).

Further concerns are expressed in the literature around the suitability and limitations of after-school programmes. For example, the potential for negative peer associations (Linden et al., 2011) and the informal setting of many ASPs, which it is argued, may not provide 'an environment conducive to promoting positive behaviours' (Goerlich Zief et al., 2006: 24). Similarly, in terms of after-school programmes which focus on behavioural change, O'Hare et al. (2012: 4) conclude that such initiatives 'have the potential to produce negative effects' and it has been highlighted that effective communication between ASPs and schools is necessary to avoid confusion caused by different methods of behaviour management between schools and after-school programmes (James-Burdumy et al., 2008).

The consensus from the literature is that establishing an effective partnership between ASPs (such as homework clubs) and local schools provides young people with a more consistent form of support (Epstein, 1994; Epstein et al., 1997; Epstein et al., 2009; Grant & Ray, 2010; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) and encourages positive academic results (Diedrich et al., 2007; Sirvani, 2007a, 2007b). Moreover, Henderson and Mapp (2002) detail specific benefits to schools when such partnerships exist including: increased teacher morale, enhanced reputations of schools within the community, and improved performance of school programs.

*Parental Involvement*

There is a substantial body of evidence, which consistently indicates a strong relationship between parental engagement in a child's educational welfare and a child's subsequent adjustment and achievement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Fan et al., 2012; Green et al., 2007; Jeynes 2007, 2012; LaRocque et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2002). For example, in an earlier study, Walberg (1984) found that parental involvement in education was a significantly more reliable predictor of academic attainment than a family's socio-economic status. In 2003, a comprehensive review of this literature was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (Desforges, 2003). This review found that, at primary school age, the home learning environment and the nature of parental involvement was more predictive of

academic achievement than variations in the quality of schools.  In terms of secondary education, the same review conceded that not all studies demonstrated a consistent or direct relationship between parental involvement and academic attainment.  However, there was a consensus that parental interest has a positive impact on secondary school pupils in terms of staying-on rates and subsequent pathways to further or higher education (ibid; Henderson et al., 2007).

In relation to the young person's wider home environment, the (UK) National Literacy Trust (2001) posits that a child's exposure to books and learning-based play has an important impact on their literacy development and subsequent academic performance.  More broadly, the literature clearly shows that the positive effect of parental involvement remains evident even when the influence of background factors such as social class, family size, material deprivation and other forms of disadvantage have been taken into account (Park & Holloway, 2013; Peters et al., 2008).

Significant barriers can exist however which potentially inhibit effective parental involvement in young people's educational welfare (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2007).  These barriers commonly relate to issues such as parents' lack of capacity and confidence, their own negative experiences of their own time at school, and reluctance amongst some teachers to engage with parents.

A study of parental involvement commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003) reported that 34% of parents found it difficult to read a children's book and 18% found it difficult to understand basic numeracy.  The impact of parents' lack of capacity in reading and mathematics is explored by Bynner and Parsons (2006) who analysed the longitudinal data on how parents' literacy and numeracy deficiencies can affect children.  Establishing baselines from the National Child Development Study, these authors concluded that children of parents with the lowest attainment levels in literacy and numeracy are at a substantial disadvantage in relation to their own reading and maths development.  In terms of accessibility, two further barriers to parental involvement were identified as lack of technology fluency and the inability to attend after-school events (Epstein et al., 2002).

It is well established that a significant deterrent to parental involvement directly relates to their experiences as former pupils (Mapp et al., 2010).  The literature shows that negative experiences of parents is commonly preceded by pessimistic attitudes amongst children towards schooling; that many parents are intimidated by schools; and that the 'judgmental' and 'distant' attitudes of some school personnel can heighten parents' anxieties (Pomerantz et al., 2007: 380-382).

There is also long-standing evidence of a class dimension in terms of barriers to parental involvement.  Firstly, Crozier's (1999) study of working class parents found that teachers are commonly perceived as middle class, superior and unhelpful.  The same author concluded that working class parents felt this detachment caused them to feel fatalistic about their ability to influence their children's education.  Secondly, Sheldon (2007) notes that many of the barriers to parental involvement disproportionately affect those who are already

experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and whose children are already at greater risk of poor academic attainment.

To compound the issue, some teachers may be resistant to greater parental involvement in the school life of their children (Sheldon 2009). For example, Walker and MacLure's (2001) analysis of parent evenings found that many teachers see parents as a threat and can feel pressurised by the demands parents place on them. Similarly, Keating and Taylorson (1996) highlight workload tensions, the management of teacher-parent boundaries, and the perceived threat to teacher's authority as the most commonly cited reasons.

In terms of developing engagement strategies for parents, Kakli et al. (2006) argue that after-school programmes can make an important contribution. Among their key recommendations, and most pertinent to this study, were: firstly, that initiatives are designed which focus on family needs; secondly, trusting relationships and leadership opportunities are established by communicating positively and frequently; thirdly, a welcoming environment is created; and, fourthly, parents are encouraged to develop the literacy and numeracy skills necessary to support their child's education.

The role of afterschool programs such as homework clubs in soliciting parental involvement is also recognised by Cosden et al. (2001). Similarly relevant to this study, these authors conclude that such programmes can provide the needed support to parents who lack the skill sets to assist with homework by, firstly, acting as a conduit between schools and families; secondly, by extending professional instruction beyond school hours; and thirdly, by engaging with parents through a variety of communication lines.

**Aim of the current evaluation**

It is clear from the literature discussed above that after school programmes similar in nature to the RLC initiative can play a vital role in the education development and welfare of young people, especially those young people who are most at risk. The current evaluation sought to address the following overarching research question posed by the Rialto Youth Project in their original tender document:

> *Can the integration of existing OST services, the development of Individualised Learning Plans for young people using customised profiling tools, the provision of additional quality programmes using a Logic Model approach and the development of structured links between schools and the local community improve the well-being and educational attainment of children and young people living in Fatima and Dolphin House?*

With this in mind the current evaluation aimed to:
1. Explore the evolution of structured links between local schools and community based OST activities as a means of improving young people's educational welfare
2. Examine the range of profiling and planning tools, which have been implemented to facilitate the planning, monitoring and review of OST programmes and activities.
3. Estimate the impact of the new OST activities on the wellbeing of 11 to 14 year old children living in the Fatima and Dolphin House areas

To address these aims the evaluation comprised two main components, which are reported in detail in the following chapters:

1. An in-depth qualitative look at the process and outcomes associated with the delivery of the initiative (Chapters 3 and 4)
2. A small, quasi experimental study to determine the potential impact of the RLC initiative on young-people's education and wellbeing outcomes (Chapters 5 and 6)

# Chapter 2: Description of the Programme

The following description of the Rialto Youth Project and the Rialto Learning Community has been written and provided by members of the Rialto Youth Project.

**The Rialto Youth project**

The Rialto Youth Project is located in the inner city of Dublin in an area that has experienced significant levels of social and economic deprivation for many decades. In an age of inequality, where working class communities are oppressed, the Rialto Youth Project is working towards bringing about social change, providing an integrated youth service, based on the needs of young people and in particular those most at risk. The Project aims to offer educational, cultural, social and recreational programmes for young people in a safe and secure environment.

***Profile of Rialto: Socio-Economic and Demographic Context***

*Relative Affluence and Poverty in the Rialto Area*

The Affluence Deprivation table below provides a descriptor for each band; the bands are determined by an analysis of a number of indicators including age dependency, ratio of lone parents, employment levels and education levels.

| Description of Affluence/Deprivation in 2006 | Zero-centred score 2006 |
|---|---|
| Extremely affluent | 30 to 40 |
| Very affluent | 20 to 30 |
| Affluent | 10 to 20 |
| Marginally above average | 0 to 10 |
| Marginally below average | -10 to 0 |
| Disadvantaged | -20 to -10 |
| Very disadvantaged | -30 to -20 |
| Extremely disadvantaged | -40 to -30 |

The following table starkly displays the relative poverty of the Rialto area compared to Dublin as a whole. In 1991 Rialto was five times more deprived than the remainder of Dublin and although the margin have narrowed during the intervening 15 years, Rialto is almost three times as deprived relative to the rest of Dublin City.

| South West Inner City EDs | Zero-centred Score | Zero-centred Score | Zero-centred Score | Zero-centred Score | Change Zero Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1991 | 1996 | 2002 | 2006 | 1991-2006 |
| Ushers C | -29.2 | -29.1 | -24.6 | -19.8 | **-9.4** |
| Ushers D | -16.9 | -19.0 | -8.4 | -8.5 | **-8.4** |
| Ushers E | -22.0 | -19.3 | -7.0 | -14.8 | **-7.2** |
| Rialto | -21.1 | -19.8 | -12.6 | -14.4 | **-7.7** |
| Dublin | 4.7 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 3.5 | **-1.1** |

The map below depicts the South Inner City and its relative deprivation and affluence by way of colour coding described in the table beneath the map below.
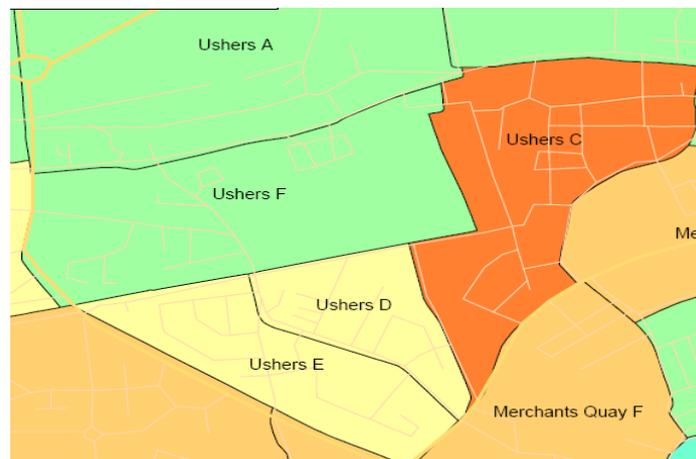


Trutz Haase 2006

The colour coding shows Ushers D and E (Rialto) to be marginally below average and Ushers C (part Fatima) as very disadvantaged. The map is based on Central Statistics Office (CSO) data captured by District Electoral Division (DED), this currently is the unit used for planning and measuring impacts etc. However the unit of measurement is extremely large with a population of almost two thousand in each DED, which allows for pockets of affluence and deprivation in each DED to be hidden.

| Description of Affluence/Deprivation in 2002 | | Zero-centred Score 2006 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Extremely affluent | | 30 to 40 |
| Very affluent | | 20 to 30 |
| Affluent | | 10 to 20 |
| Marginally above average | | 0 to 10 |
| Marginally below average | | -10 to 0 |
| Disadvantaged | | -20 to -10 |
| Very disadvantaged | | -30 to -20 |
| Extremely disadvantaged | | -40 to -30 |

The map below is of the same area but in this case instead of using the DED as the unit of measurement, we are using the areas covered by each individual Census Enumerator as the unit of measurement. For example in Ushers D three enumerators gathered the data for this single DED and by using this as our source of information we obtain are far more realistic image of the area we are dealing with.

Ushers C have four distinct enumerator areas, and Ushers D and E each have three and by operating this scale the three DEDs comprise 10 unique areas, eight of which constitute Rialto. Of these, one is affluent, three are marginally below average, one is disadvantaged, two are very disadvantaged and one is extremely disadvantaged.
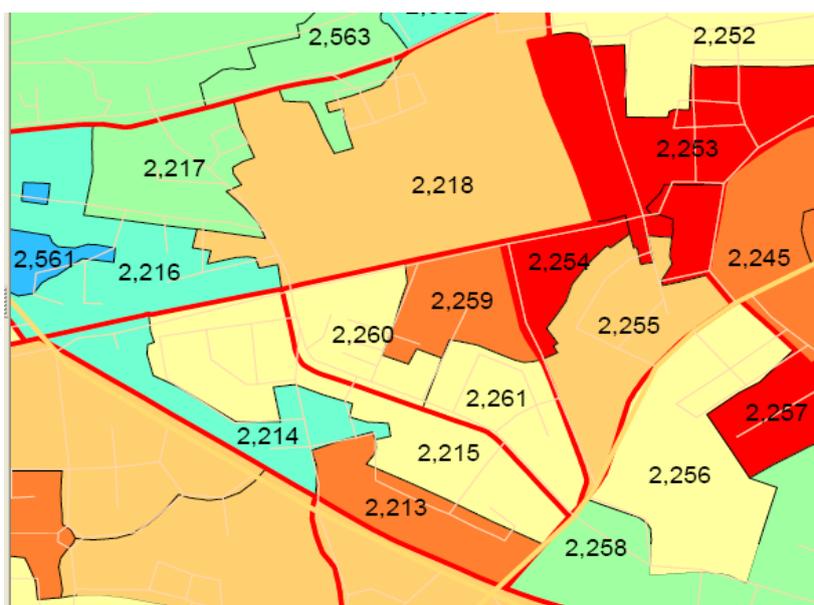
Trutz Haase 2006

The breakdown of the area by enumerator is below and the actual score shows one area almost eight times more deprived than the average for Dublin with an additional three area between four and five times more deprived. Each of these areas is characterised by public housing.

| Index Score | ED 2006 | Index Score |
|---|---|---|
| 2254 | Maryland/Fatima | -33.24 |
| 2255 | Cork St | -8.87 |
| 2259 | Fatima | -24.42 |
| 2260 | Rialto Building | -7.08 |
| 2261 | Ruben St | -2.76 |
| 2213 | Dolphin House | -38.88 |
| 2214 | Herbeton+ | 8.28 |
| 2215 | SCR /Rialto | -11.11 |

*Education*
There has been a continuous improvement in the level of education amongst adults over the past 15 years throughout Ireland. In 1991, 36.7% of the adult population had primary education only. This dropped to half that level (18.9%) in 2006, thus indicating a strong cohort effect; i.e. every successive generation has tended to go on to school for longer than its parent generation. The rate for Dublin City has fallen from 39.7% in 1991 to 22.0% in 2006. This is a reduction of 17.7 percentage points compared to -17.8 percentage points nationally), resulting in 2006 levels remaining about three percentage points above those applying for Ireland as a whole.

The changes for Dublin's inner city, by contrast, have been much more dramatic, involving a drop from 53% in 1991 to 30% % in 2006, a reduction by 23 percentage points within only 15

years. The reverse applies with regard to third level education, which has more than doubled over the past 15 years. In 1991, 13.0% of the national adult population had completed third level education. This grew to 30.5% in 2006.

The proportion of Dublin City's population with third level education has grown from 13.7% to 35.8%, in Rialto went from 6.2% in 19991 to 28% in 2006 a growth of some 22%.  No other data captures the changes that have taken place in Dublin city as a result of both gentrification and inward migration of foreign nationals into the workforce.

*Educational Achievement*

|  | EDLO 1991 | EDLO 1996 | EDLO 2002 | EDLO 2006 | EDHI 1991 | EDHI 1996 | EDHI 2002 | EDHI 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ushers C** | 59.8 | 55.6 | 41.5 | 36 | 5.4 | 8 | 15.5 | 24 |
| **Ushers D** | 51.4 | 44.3 | 28.5 | 27 | 7.7 | 15 | 25.6 | 33 |
| **Ushers E** | 49.6 | 39.6 | 27.5 | 28 | 5.6 | 15.6 | 26.9 | 27 |
| **Rialto +** | 53.6 | 46.5 | 32.5 | 30 | 6.2 | 12.9 | 22.7 | 28 |
| **Dublin** | 33.1 | 25 | 24.8 | 22.9 | 13.7 | 25.4 | 31.2 | 35.8 |
| **Ireland** | 36.8 | 29.5 | 22.2 | 22.6 | 13.1 | 19.7 | 20.6 | 30 |

The proportion of the adult population in the Rialto area with primary education only has dropped by 21.1 percentage points over the past eleven years. The drop is similar to that for Dublin's Inner City (-22.1%), but significantly greater than that for Dublin as a whole (-14.4%), and nationally (-14.6%).

The marked improvement of education levels amongst the adult population has, however, to be interpreted before their extraordinary high starting levels. In 1991, over half (53.6%) of the adult population in Rialto had left school after reaching primary education, compared to 36.8% nationally. In 2006, this figure reduced significantly to less than a third (30%) of Rialto's adult population having attended primary education only. This compares to 22.9 % in Dublin and 22.6% for the country as a whole. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent this represents an improvement of the educational achievement amongst the traditional residents of the area, or to what extent this is an expression of "inward migration" process that has taken place in the area on foot of unprecedented urban regeneration, but it is highly likely that these figures first and foremost are driven by the influx of new and more highly educated people into the area.

At the other end of the educational spectrum, the figures with respect to the attainment of third level education reflect the same trend. In 2006, the adult population in the Rialto area who have attended third level education amounted to 28%, compared to only 6.2% in 1991. This compares to 38.5% for Dublin City and 30.0% for the country as a whole4.

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[4] A note of care needs to be applied to interpreting the above education figures. The figures shown relate to the educational achievement of the *adult* population; i.e. those over 16 years of age. They are not in any way indicative of the achievements of current school leavers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to gain access to local school leaving figures in Ireland

*Education*

|  | Low Education 02 | Low Education 06 | High Education 02 | High Education 06 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maryland/Fatima | 47.5 | 44.9 | 8.4 | 11.7 |
| Cork St | 46.2 | 27.8 | 13.1 | 35.8 |
| Fatima | 36.4 | 35.7 | 12.9 | 17.2 |
| Rialto Building | 25.1 | 28.7 | 33.1 | 33.6 |
| Ruben St | 27 | 16.9 | 26.4 | 48.8 |
| Dolphin House | 40.6 | 43.9 | 13.5 | 7.4 |
| Herbeton+ | 14.3 | 13.2 | 43.8 | 46.5 |
| SCR /Rialto | 27.8 | 26.1 | 24.4 | 26.1 |

What is surprising about the figures above is the relatively high level of third level qualifications in the area as a whole with four subsets returning a quarter of respondents having third level education. The evidence suggests that this relatively high level of third level is due to one factor and that is inward migration, the migration is the result of the gentrification the area and secondly by the arrival of non Irish national many of whom have a far higher level of education the indigenous population.

However the startling figure remains the persistently high level of early school leaving in the area and the seemingly little impact school retention programmes are having, again Dolphin House goes against the trend with an increasing ESL population. These figures are made up of the parents and grandparents of the 11-14 target group for this project.

The increase in the Higher Educational Achievement in some of the areas reflects the areas that are currently in the gentrification mode.

### An Educational and Developmental Focus

The Rialto Youth Project believes in the value of education as a core conviction. The Project believes fundamentally in the right of children and young people to a good education including the opportunity to progress to third level studies. It is committed to encouraging young people to see the education system as an opportunity for them, to encourage young people to participate and achieve within the education system to the best of their ability.

The Rialto Youth Project clearly state their commitment to an inclusive view of society and in equality of opportunity for children and young people. The value placed on equality is underpinned by a belief in the uniqueness, dignity and equal worth of young people and in their right to have access to opportunities to enhance their lives. Young people should be treated equally in a spirit of liberation and fun.

The Rialto Youth Project is comprised of three main teams, which are integrated as part of one overall organisational structure. This includes a core team of face-to-face workers who work with young people aged 10 ten to 19 years and two Homework Clubs in the regenerated Fatima and Dolphin House, which provide educational support and extra-

curricular activities for children aged four years upwards.  In addition to this the Youth Project employs a School Community Coordinator to build and develop linkages between the Youth Project and local schools and a Youth Services Support Worker, whose role is to assist the development of mainstream youth service provision, recruiting volunteers, supporting mainstream youth programmes and helping other youth services to develop their capacity.

**The Rialto Learning Community**

At its essence, the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) is a change management initiative, which has been undertaken by the Rialto Youth Project over the last five years. This change management process has involved a five-stage strategy:

1. The organisational integration of the work of the three local projects providing services to 11 – 14 year olds: the Rialto Youth Project, Dolphin House Homework Club and Fatima Homework Club into a single unified entity.

2. To restate, review and refine youth work practices – and in particular Out of School Time services – which have been developed by the Youth Project over the last thirty years. Here, there has been a shift towards adopting an outcomes based approach to working with young people based on their needs. By seeking to develop a set of core life skills and employing a set of criteria to profile young people, information is gathered which enables the youth project to develop programmes which seek to support young peoples' development and progress.  Evaluation and learning structures are incorporated into this process, which allows the youth project to review and refine programmes, to measure success and to generate the evidence needed to demonstrate that these outcomes are realised as well as to provide the opportunity for our staff to up-skill and reflect upon their practice.

3. To establish a broad based community-schools framework to better enable children and young people to manage the transition from primary to secondary level education and thereby secure improved outcomes for their educational welfare. Here, a strategy has been worked out which supports the development of a set of self regulation skills through homework support that will enable young people to optimise their potential in the formal education system. This strategy has been developed with the support of the schools our young people attend and is based on evidence of best practice documented in the research literature.

4. The development of a computerised database and information management system which allows staff to document and analyse information gathered for the purposes of profiling, needs analysis, targeting, programming, evaluating and measuring the outcomes of our work with young people.  This information gathering and analysis system is built around measurable criteria which have been developed looking to the research literature and best practice on the development of a range of core basic life and self-regulation skills.

5. To develop an innovative and ground-breaking model which has the potential to make a significant contribution to policy making and youth service provision in terms of improving service planning and programme delivery and leading to better outcomes for children and young people alike. The development of a more focused and consistent delivery of quality arts, literacy and homework supports to young people, together with enhanced cooperation between informal and formal sectors can make a real difference to their lives. What is required is for this process to be embedded in organisational practice and systems and to be codified in a replicable model, which can influence education, and youth service policy.

### *Our Core Programmes*

The Rialto Youth Project offers a range of structured developmental activities in the areas of the sports, arts, homework support and literacy.  In addition, through our outreach program, young people may engage in a range of developmental activities such as cooking, outdoor activities. The employment of data analysis and profiling tools to develop Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs) for each young person ensures that a more rigorous and focused approach is adopted to the planning, delivery and evaluation of all of our programmes.

### *The Arts*

The Rialto Youth Project – enabled by the support of the RLC over the past five years – has become a recognised leader in the field of community / youth arts provision in Ireland[5].  It offers a distinct vision of cultural inclusion and a unique set of arts education programmes for children and young people in the context of a wider Rialto Local Arts Development Plan 2012 – 2016.

Structured arts programmes are offered in the visual arts, music, dance and street theatre, which balance the need for structure and progression with the individual needs and abilities of children and young people. Within the arts programmes, we believe in offering real choices to young people, supporting them to explore, develop and grow their creative interests and skills. Our aim is to provide access to the arts, providing young people with the opportunity to develop their creative passions within their community, within the formal education system, and wider society. All of our arts programmes are developed taking account of existing pedagogies and curriculum in the informal and formal education sectors.

The Project has also crucially invested in a three-year process of inquiry to explore, describe and express the Rialto Youth Project's core values and approach to creative work with young people. This work has resulted in the development of appropriate pedagogies, curriculums and other forms of knowledge exchange that now underpin all our programming with young people.

Arts specific programmes are delivered along a continuum of age and ability appropriate progression and are structured around four developmental strands:

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[5] As this chapter was written and provided by the Rialto Youth Project, this is the claim of the Rialto Youth Project and not an assertion of the research team who conducted the evaluation.

1. Little Steps, Big Pathways: an introductory programme in music and dance for 4 - 8 year olds
2. Stepping Stones: a transition programme focused on maintaining a young person's expressed interest in music, street performance, visual arts and dance for 8 – 10 year olds
3. On The Road: a technical and performance skills oriented programme in music, street performance, dance and visual arts for 11 – 14 year olds
4. Lines of Flight: a programme in music, visual arts, street performance and dance designed to develop leadership and the progression of learning into the third level of education.

It is important to note also that, since 2012, the Rialto Youth Project is a key partner in a formal partnership arrangement with the National College of Art and Design. This partnership sets out a seven point plan addressing the development of arts based pedagogy in Youth and Community Development through arts access measures, shared networks, knowledge based workshops and long term collaborative projects. It is due to be formally launched in April 2014.

*Homework Support*
A core element of our Community School Strategy has been to support young people to complete homework on a daily basis by:
1. Looking to educational research on skill development and best practice to identify a set of core life and self-regulation skills which are essential to successful educational completion;
2. Supporting young people to develop these skills through successful homework completion and literacy practices;
3. Up-skilling our staff to enable them to provide homework support programmes that enables skill development across homework completion and literacy;
4. Deepening our relationship with schools so that information is shared and skills are transferred which enable our staff to provide the required support.

The Rialto Youth Project is firm in its conviction that the development of a structured outcome focused approach to youth work, the development of needs based programmes and closer collaboration with schools will result in improved outcomes for young people including improved quality of engagement in our arts, sports and homework support programmes; deeper collaboration, communication and understandings between home, school and community.

The Rialto Youth Project is also firm in its conviction that the Rialto Learning Community initiative is policy relevant through: its innovative approach to developing evidence based models of youth work; promoting school completion by building bridges between the informal and formal sectors; developing tools for more systematically profiling the needs of young people and implementing and evaluating programmes on a more consistent basis in socially deprived contexts.

# Chapter 3: Process Evaluation Methodology

The interviews examined in this chapter provide in-depth qualitative data on the implementation and outcomes of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) initiative. Specifically, the analysis of these interviews provides a detailed qualitative assessment of the current status of the critical junctures that exist both between and within the home, school and community environs.

**Research questions**

The following hypothesis underpins this element of the evaluation and was agreed by the Rialto Learning Community, the Expert Advisory Group and the Research Team.

> *Critical junctures (for example, key strategies, networks, activities, interactions, values) between and within home, school and community are vital to the positive personal development and educational outcomes for young people. Within such a disadvantaged community as Rialto it is however likely to be the case that gaps in practice exist which will require strategic change within schools, between schools, within community projects and between school, community and home in order to realise these outcomes for young people.*

Thus, this process evaluation identifies not only the nature of these critical junctures but also where gaps in practice are perceived to exist. With the above hypothesis in mind, the following research questions were developed as a framework to guide data collection:

1. What are the critical junctures between and within school, community projects and home that are likely, in the long-term, to yield improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion?
2. What are the significant practices/changes in practice that underpin these critical junctures, and what have been the challenges to implementing these practices?
3. To what extent have these significant practices proved effective in creating a seamless learning environment for young people between home, school and community?
4. What space does the Rialto Learning Community occupy in this learning environment, in relation to the schools?

The research questions were explored by focusing on two key elements of the work of the Rialto Learning Community: The Community School Strategy (CSS) and the Arts Programmes.

The Community School Strategy embodies a set of community-school activities, which have emerged from relationships that have been developed and bridges that have been built between schools and community over a number of years. The Strategy includes links between local schools and the Rialto community based out-of-school-time (OST) activities (primarily the homework clubs) as well as practices of information sharing, research, support, training and network activities. The Dolphin and Fatima Homework Clubs (HWCs)

are an important component of the CSS.  Therefore, the extent to which the above activities have been incorporated into the Homework Clubs is also examined. The internal organisational changes and the introduction of working tools on practice within the RLC are examined with a particular focus on the Arts Programme and the Summer Project (which comprises music, dance, visual arts and street spectacles).

The composite interview questions[6] that address the four overarching research questions are based on the underpinning logic models for all of the activities that fall under the auspices of both the CSS and the Arts Programme.

## Participants

The research questions as detailed above were addressed by conducting in depth interviews with the following key actors:

- A total of 15 interviews with RLC team leaders and staff including the Community School Coordinator and coordinators from both the Homework Clubs and the Arts Programme
- A total of 17 interviews with Principals, teachers and school librarians.  The Principals interviewed were part of the Principal's Network.  The teachers and librarians interviewed had prior involvement with the RLC, for example, home-school liaison teachers, in-service training participants, or attendees of the Literacy or Restorative Practice Networks.

## Interviews

The value of face-to face, semi-structured interviews in qualitative or mixed methods research is widely recognised. Silverman (2005) highlights the primacy of the respondents, who are seen as experts and not merely data sources. Sarantakos (2005: 270) emphasises the value of 'flexible explication', where the course of the interview is guided by the direction of conversation, and where the findings that emerge are interpreted concomitantly.  In relation to creating and analysing transcripts of such conversations, a key benefit of producing verbatim accounts of interviews is the opportunity afforded to the researcher to revisit the data in its original form (Bernard, 1995).

In the current study, the interviews with school personnel were conducted between June and October 2012 in five different RLC network schools.  Interviews with Rialto personnel took place between April and May 2013 in several different RLC premises.  Each interview lasted approximately one hour and all were digitally recorded (with the interviewees' consent) and fully transcribed (by PageSix Transcription Services Ltd.) to facilitate detailed qualitative analysis.

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[6] These composite questions can be found in Appendix 1.

**Analysis**

In deductive approaches, data collection and analysis are guided by the existing hypothesis and aims of the research (outlined above) and thus a priori in nature (Sarantakos 2005). Therefore, data collection and analysis in studies such as this are more structured than other analytical approaches which are primarily inductive (Kumar 2011).

The interviews were analysed using the framework approach which Bryman (2008) argues is most applicable in mixed-methods studies where there is a need to analyse qualitative and quantitative findings in parallel. After due consideration, it was decided not to employ qualitative data analysis software such as MAXQDA or NVivo, primarily, because of the relatively small volume of data. The interview transcripts were therefore subject to a thorough manual process of analysis encompassing: reading and re-reading of the transcripts; categorising emergent themes; testing the validity of developing patterns; and refining analytical processes (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

This recursive process was repeated until all the key emergent themes were juxtaposed against all participants' responses. This process is varyingly referred in the literature as content analysis (Stemler 2001), thematic analysis (Kvale, 1996),[7] or recursive comparative analysis (Cooper and McIntyre, 1993). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) at the core of this approach is the 'subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes'. Further evidence of the applicability of this approach in mixed methods studies is provided by Krippendorf and Bock (2001). These authors claim that such processes provide the analytical framework for examining both quantitative and qualitative artefacts of social communication.

The two sets of interviews (school personnel and RLC personnel) are examined in separate sections and the responses have been categorised into two series of emergent themes. At the end of each section, a summation of the responses is presented with specific reference to the four research questions. It is important to note that the qualitative data presented in these sections represents the *views and perceptions* of the school Principals, teachers, librarians and Rialto personnel who were interviewed and have not been extrapolated beyond that in order to prevent misleading and/or unsupported assumptions being made. Furthermore, to protect the anonymity of respondents, general descriptors such as 'youth worker' or 'teacher 'have been assigned to the opinions and quotations expressed in the transcripts and presented in this report.

The interviews with Rialto personnel, Principals, teacher and librarians were conducted by the same researcher.

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[7] For more information on this analysis approach, see the studies by Leitch et al. (2006), Miller et al. (2009), Odena (2001, 2007 and 2009) and Odena and Welch (2007 and 2009).

# Chapter 4: Process Evaluation Findings

**Interviews with Rialto personnel**

During the months of April and May 2013, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Rialto Learning Community (RLC) personnel.  The respondents included: RLC senior management, co-ordinators, team leaders and staff from the Fatima and Dolphin Homework Clubs, Rialto youth projects and the Arts Programme. Thus, this sample encompassed all levels within the organisational structure and represented all elements of the service provided by the RLC.  The overarching aim of these interviews was to provide in-depth qualitative data on the implementation and outcomes of the Rialto Learning Community initiative.  Specifically, this analysis of the RLC interviews presents a broad and detailed assessment of the current status of the critical junctures that exist both between and within the home, school and community environs.  This section of the report seeks, therefore, to synthesise the responses given by the RLC personnel in relation to the following four research questions[8].

1. What are the critical junctures between and within school, community projects and home that are likely, in the long-term, to yield improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion?
2. What are the significant practices/changes in practice that underpin these critical junctures, and what have been the challenges to implementing these practices?
3. To what extent have these significant practices proved effective in creating a seamless learning environment for young people between home, school and community?
4. What space does the Rialto Learning Community occupy in this learning environment, in relation to the schools?

The above questions were examined with a particular focus on two key elements of the Rialto Learning Community:  The Community School Strategy and the Arts Programme. With these foci in mind, interview schedules were designed to explore the key practices and relationships within the RLC's own structures and between the RLC and young people, parents, schools, and external agencies.  The responses from these interview schedules have been organised into the following 10 thematic categorisations:

1. The Rialto Learning Community:  Context and Provision
2. The Community School Strategy (CSS)
3. Homework Clubs
4. Rialto's Relationships with Local Schools
5. Rialto's Engagement with Parents
6. Working with Other Agencies
7. The Arts Programme
8. Summer Projects
9. Organisation and Support
10. The Database, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), Logic Models

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[8] These research questions were established and agreed upon by the Rialto Learning Community and the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's University, Belfast.

Following examination of these emergent themes, the perspectives of Rialto personnel is then summarised in relation to the four research questions.

### The Rialto Learning Community:  Context and Provision
*Social disadvantage*

In terms of the context of the RLC's provision, the staff and management are clearly both cognisant of, and motivated by the acute social disadvantage experienced by large sections of the catchment area.  It was widely perceived that the long standing socio-economic deprivation in the Fatima and Dolphin estates, as highlighted in the latest available census (2006) has 'worsened significantly' during this recent period of financial crises and public service cuts.   There is also recognition that: firstly, even when/if the current fiscal environment improves, such estates will continue to feature regularly in the lowest quintiles of deprivation indices; and secondly, that there will be an on-going need to support residents, particularly young people.

> The reality is that we live in a society which generates disadvantaged areas,
> and so as long as there is disadvantage there's going to be a need for the kind
> of work we do (co-ordinator).

The role and inequities of the education system in perpetuating such disadvantage is also forwarded in terms of framing a context for the work of the RLC.  For example, a senior staff member argued that 'education is the equaliser in Irish society, and not everyone gets a fair cut of it'.  In a similar vein, a youth worker spoke of not wanting to be 'part of a system that makes it more unfair'.  These structural factors combine with and compound the significant local socio-spatial challenges of both estates where school completion and levels of access to further education remain low, while crime, drug use and antisocial behaviour are increasingly prevalent.  Many respondents highlighted the fact that there are 'very few local people with leaving certificates never mind third level education'.  A team leader spoke of 'working in a community where there's a constant struggle for power going on between the law and the alternative'.  While several other interviewees posited, that in the absence of positive employment opportunities, many young people are attracted to dangerous options such as selling drugs.  One youth worker spoke of nascent inter-agency approaches to address a 'difficult and terrifying . . .  spectrum of behaviour'.

> The drugs, new gangs and drug distribution networks have been established
> here, we are into a new protocol with the police and city council around that, at
> least we are being proactive.  Local young men have been drawn into these
> lifestyles.

The scale of local drug use amongst young people and the realism inherent in the responses developed by the RLC were articulated by a youth worker who recounted recently run programmes in 'harm reduction training for older young people who've become involved'.  It was not, she claimed, the job of the RLC to be 'judgemental' but instead to ensure that 'if young people are going to be doing it, then they might as well do it in the safest way possible'.

*Youth Work*

Although a primary focus of the RLC relates to young people aged 10-14 and in particular to their transition to secondary education, there is also a keen awareness amongst staff and management of the need to engage with younger children to avoid them falling, in many cases, further behind in literacy and numeracy.  Therefore, addressing the needs of those under the age of ten is increasingly encompassed in Rialto youth strategies.  Similarly, it was also argued that there is a definite need to continue engagement when young people enter their mid-late teens.  The general view amongst Rialto personnel was that, in particular, 'young men are still struggling in the area', (they) 'don't realise that they can make a choice in life', and that, for many local young people, their youth worker is 'probably their only positive role model'.  There was, however a degree of acceptance that 'there's not that much we can offer . . . for older teenagers and young people in their early 20s'.

Throughout this examination of the Rialto interviews, the methods and impacts of their  youth engagement approaches are outlined, particularly, in terms of homework clubs, community schools strategies and arts programmes.  However, two examples from the interviews give a flavour of the sensitive yet challenging ways issues such as racism and domestic violence are addressed.  One youth worker warned that:

> If we shut down conversations and we shut down behaviour, then young people will only know that example, "I'm not meant to do that because I've been told not to"- so if a young person says something racist, then you ask, "tell me what you mean about that?".  And you actually try to explore it.  So the young person comes to a new understanding.  That's much more beneficial than saying, "don't say the N word".

The second example relates to a youth worker being 'continually' questioned by a young person about her relationship with her boyfriend, 'specifically, around domestic violence'.

> "Would he just tear you around with the hair and would you just say, "Fuck you!" when he grabs you?"   I couldn't even count how many times I've had conversations around how I wouldn't consider verbal or physical violence in relationships acceptable, and why.

The worker then recounted that the young person sent a Christmas card to her boyfriend saying "I know you treat (name) really well and you make her really happy ".

*Embeddedness of RLC in Community*

The above two examples, in their own ways, relate to one of the most consistent and important themes to emerge from these interviews, the embeddedness of the RLC in the broader community.  The data demonstrates innumerable examples of the RLC's 'local identity' or 'organic characteristics', as well as its reach and influence in the Fatima and Dolphin estates.  As will also be evidenced in following sections, there are many contributory factors such as workers living locally, former participants in projects becoming workers

and/or mothers of new participants, and more broadly, the patent commitment of Rialto personnel to the wider community.

It was also argued that local parents are generally receptive to the various Rialto projects because 'the history of the Youth Project is so strong . . . it's been here since 1981'. Additionally, 'there isn't huge staff turnover here', thus, RLC workers are familiar with specific family networks and circumstances.  A further example of this embeddedness relates to RLC provision of community advocacy and conduit work between, for example, parents and statutory authorities such as schools and social services.  More broadly, the role of the two youth clubs in connecting the various projects is also recognised.

> The one in Fatima and the one in Dolphin give the young people a fluid access
> to all the different spaces, arts and crafts, games, sports, cooking going on all
> at the same time.

### *The Community School Strategy (CSS)*
There was broad understanding amongst Rialto personnel of the Community School Strategy both in terms of strategic aims and the rationale for its development.   The consensus here was that key outcomes of the CSS should include:

- Recognition of the 'particular challenges that young people from this area experience in managing the transition from primary to secondary education';
- The building of relationships between the community workers in the projects and the school;
- Improved information flows, awareness, between the schools and the youth project;
- Increased 'troubleshooting capacity' in terms of young people's educational welfare;
- Established and maintained 'links between other services they encounter – community, youth and others – with the school system';
- The creation of 'a better sense of cohesion, a better sense of awareness of the needs of young people in the home, community and school settings'.

There was further consensus in terms of identifying issues which inspired the strategy's instigation.   A second common theme in these interviews is the long standing 'disjointed nature' of the relationship between the community and the local schools.  Many interviewees claimed that, historically, such relationships were either 'non-existent', 'dysfunctional' or 'antagonistic'.  These widely held perceptions and their effects are further examined in the sections on RLC engagement with schools and RLC engagement with parents.  However, in general, the views expressed in the Rialto interviews highlight schools' tendency 'to be quite insular', their 'lack of awareness' of the socio-spatial realities of local families and their general 'distrust' of youth work and its value.

The progression of the various elements of the Community School Strategy will be outlined in the subsequent sections on the Principals, Literacy and Restorative Practice Networks.  In broad terms however, there was agreement that the strategy was being 'successfully implemented' and that it was already affecting positive change.  One respondent, however, posited that despite such successes the strategy 'was too ambitious', that it is 'not as far on

as I thought or hoped that it would be' because it 'takes a lot longer for things to change'. They further conceded that, the parent involvement element of the strategy, particularly in terms of 'parental permission to engage with schools', had, to date, made little progress.

*Field Trip New York*
All the interviewees, whether or not they were part of the delegation, claimed that the 'catalyst' for the Community School Strategy was the visit to New York to witness a number of demonstration projects. Several respondents stated that when initial contact was made with the schools 'there was serious resistance' and that the 'only reason it happened was because there was (Government) money there' to fund and develop this work. There was a consensus amongst Rialto personnel that the New York projects provided 'a great space' for teachers, principals and youth workers and 'really helped to break down the barriers'.

One attendee recalled 'definite tensions' within the delegation in relation to 'how the community viewed the school and how the school viewed the community'. Another worker spoke of 'challenging conversations', the emergent recognition of a 'common cause' and a 'realisation' that 'we were all deeply committed to improving the educational welfare of young people'.

The trip allowed schools and youth workers the opportunity to see, in practice, the closeness between youth projects and schools and how that relationship 'complemented the development for young people'. According to Rialto personnel in attendance, witnessing the work of the New York projects gave the schools and the youth workers 'a real sense of what we could be doing and ideas for . . . engagement between school and community'. The same source then highlighted the contrast in the synchronising of inter-agency activity between the US model and practices closer to home.

> The projects that we visited . . . had almost reached a nirvana level of engagement. We went to some places where it was purpose-built buildings that housed schools and communities in the same buildings, complete.

> It happens here all the time where you wait 18 months for a Speech and Language Therapy appointment and then for some reason the parents are not able to bring the kid on the day and they miss out on the appointment.

There was also general agreement that, firstly, 'key people' from both the RLC and the local schools 'suddenly began to realise that there was value in each other's view'; and secondly, that following the New York trip 'there was the openness then on the part of the schools' to engage more fully around developing the Principals Network and other 'structures for sharing information and collaboration'.

*Principals Network*
Several interviewees claimed that the most important of these structures was the Principals Network. Indeed, one youth worker argued that successful implementation of the school strategy was contingent on 'the principals being on board' and that their participation has a 'profound effect in terms of the interactions'. There was also agreement amongst Rialto

personnel that the key challenge in instigating this network related to the high rate of 'principal turnover' and varying levels of commitment to engage.

> One school is now on its third principle in the same number of years. So, as principles change, they may or may not value the engagement of the community.

In addition to the benefits of engaging with the community, a senior manager highlighted the opportunity for inter-school collaboration, 'principals rarely meet other principals and they rarely do things together'. Another worker was 'amazed that the principals of second level schools have never met principals of primary schools'. The same source went on to example the consequential dichotomy in literacy assessments.

> You still find principals of primary schools who say: "When the kids leave us their reading is not bad". And principals of secondary level or teachers of secondary level who say: "When they arrive here they can't read, can't even sign their name".

Despite the fact that two schools have yet to commit to the process, there was general agreement around its value and future development: firstly, that the Principals Network was central in terms of sustaining meaningful links between the schools and the community; and secondly, of the need for the network to become a 'free-thinking, free-standing, independent powerbase' because of its responsibilities 'in terms of education, and education cuts'. There were, however, some criticisms, chiefly, around schools not being 'as accommodating' as they could be, and more generally, in respect of the network's 'direction of travel'.

> I question, have we bent over backwards more than the schools have? But we were then ones that were looking for a change and usually the one that's instigating that and looking for it have to do that bit more.

> It operates. But in terms of its drive and its energy and where it's going, I'm not quite sure.

*Literacy Network*
This second structure of the Community School Strategy is, in general, viewed as 'probably quite a loose network, because it has morphed into a variety of different shapes and sizes over the years'. At the beginning of this initiative, monthly meetings were held with different school personnel 'to drill down into what aspects of literacy we did need to look at'.

> To look at the literacy surveys that we did and to look at what schools were doing to get a real sense of what can we do, because conscious all the time that we can't teach literacy, we can't take on the job of the schools, so what can we do in the community to support this happening in schools.

Following these investigations and an appraisal of the RLC capacity, processes were agreed with participating schools to engage actively around literacy.

The host liaison in one school comes down to the libraries and the homework clubs and works with them in terms of what books they have, age appropriate material, books that are appropriate to their ability.

More broadly, there was consensus that, firstly, the Literacy Network provided an opportunity to work more closely with the schools around the support that RLC provide; and secondly, that school concerns were allayed when they got a better sense that RLC's intention was to support, not to teach.

*Restorative Practice Network*
There was wide agreement in terms of the value of both the principles of restorative practice and the shared learning experience of teachers and youth workers participating in workshops and in-service training. Indeed, many interviewees claimed that, similar to the New York visitation, such interactions were 'critically important' in terms of building relationships and mutual understanding. An important point to note here is that all the youth workers claimed that they were very familiar with the core elements of restorative practice because 'they are essentially youth work principles, non-judgemental and non-accusatory . . . restorative practice is really about a new way of thinking'.

It's not a million miles away from how we resolve conflict or issues through dialogue and trying to create spaces for that dialogue to happen with young people, and that's always been how we do things.

So, for us, it's about there's an awareness that there's another way of working with young people and it's not punitive.

I think restorative practice is amazing.

Thus, it was felt that the schools 'have a lot of work to do to bring that into the school system. But, for us . . . it will be much easier to bring that into our practice'. Moreover, In terms of future development, there was agreement that 'the next concerted effort' should be around 'how we're going to really put this stuff into practice' and not simply be seen as a 'little tool to be brought in, in emergencies'.

Ideally, I would like Rialto to become a restorative practice community, where parents are brought into it, having more contact and going into the schools, but, that's a long way away. I'm not sure what it might look like yet because we've to tease it out. Because I think overall it would be really beneficial for young people.

### Homework Clubs

*Development*

In terms of day-to-day interactions between schools and the community, the homework clubs are 'very significant'. Their development has been guided by: firstly, an audit of service provision which highlighted that 'existing services were 'quite fragmented' and 'silo based'; and, secondly, a profile of the youth population which showed that 'kids in this area didn't complete second level, they fell out'. Another youth worker spoke of the importance of such interventions being instigated prior to a young person's entry into the second level.

> So if they haven't picked up how to read by the time they're in second class, by the time they hit first year when they get books that are geography books and history they don't understand questions, they don't understand what they're reading and it can be very difficult . . . early intervention is key.

The outcomes-based ethos of the RLC was evidenced by a co-ordinator who said the programme was continually guided by identifying, firstly, 'the skill-sets a young person need to survive at second level'; and secondly, by ascertaining 'what interventions' were needed 'in order to get young people up-skilled'.

> It's much more in line with the overall concept that is the Rialto Learning Community, which is about outcomes. So it's not just about getting the homework done every day, it's deeper than that.

> Instead of can you do homework or not, we're scoring things like following instructions, concentration, listening skills, working under pressure. It's actually do you have the skills necessary to be able to complete your homework, and if not how do we support you to develop them?

In terms of homework clubs interacting with the schools, there were four areas of concern. Firstly, that while some people are require to compete 'ridiculous amounts of homework', others 'don't get any homework', particularly, 'in secondary'. Indeed, one youth worker argued that for schools to say "there's no point in giving them homework because they won't do it anyway" is a 'defeatist attitude'. Secondly, another worker claimed that 'some teachers give punishment homework if homework wasn't done' but conceded that 'what's perceived as punishment homework in the community might be seen as reinforcement homework'. Thirdly, that 'some schools don't want us to correct homework'.

> When a parent sends her child to the homework club they want the child to come out with their homework done and right. But, schools don't want us to do that, they want to know where a child is struggling so we're in a catch 22 situation.

Fourthly, there was a recognition that the homework clubs were 'essentially taking something out of the house that should be in the house' and that 'it's not community work it's homework', therefore, there is a risk that parents are 'disempowered'. However, Rialto personnel were generally positive around the various strands of school and community

collaboration in the homework clubs. For example, the homework journal is seen as a very important 'line of communication' and 'critical in teasing out the differences across schools and homework clubs'. Similarly, the involvement of the Home/School Liaison in homework clubs and reading programmes has been beneficial, particularly in terms of 'pair reading' and the selection of appropriate reading.

*Benefits of the Homework clubs to young people*
The interviewees indicated a variety of positive outcomes for young people who attend the homework clubs. First and foremost, the key benefit is 'getting it done'. Several youth workers and homework staff spoke about the 'panic' amongst young people when their homework is not completed and the contrasting 'relief' when it is – 'then they're going into school and that worry is off their shoulders'. It was also highlighted that 'they get their homework done in the way they should' and that 'it's much easier to check with school exactly what needs to be done'. Of course, the specific needs of young people vary and there are several homework attendees who require one-to-one support.

> If they weren't getting that one to one with their homework, there would be a question mark over whether they could even remain in that mainstream school.

The structure of the homework clubs also further demonstrates the RLC's embeddedness in the Fatima and Dolphin estates. One team leader highlighted the fact that 'the homework club staff are mostly all parents from the community', while a youth worker claimed that some older young people who have come through the Homework Clubs 'have a very warm nostalgic sense of the clubs and they often drop in' and offer peer support. It is also important to note that the homework clubs encourage young people to engage in different RLC activities such as sports, the arts . . .

> . . . or informal, just coming down to the youth project room for a game of pool, or trying to encourage them to be junior leaders in the summer project. So, just because they mightn't come in for homework doesn't mean that we don't engage with them.

Other identified benefits for young people included: the 'opening up' of 'opportunities to have conversations with young people around their experience of school'; 'it (also) takes the whole conflict between the parent and the child out of the equation in terms of doing their homework'; and 'it's a space where they get fed every day'.

*Homework Journals*
In addition to detailing what work is to be done, the homework journals are also an important medium for communication between the clubs and the schools, particularly in terms of providing an effective 'early warning system'.

> The homework journal is key, there are constantly messages giving information from the homework club to the teacher and to the teacher back.

(Issues are addressed) within a matter of days, as opposed to it dragging on
for months, to the point where there are major difficulties.

Occasions were recounted where, following such exchanges, issues have been raised by the clubs and 'schools have responded with different homework patterns'. It was also highlighted that the journals were not solely for communicating problems, 'we write in the journals if a young person is having a great week, we always do that as well.

He shows it to his guardian and then he'll show it to his teacher. So he goes out chuffed on a Thursday if he's after having a good week. Now, even if he's not having an amazing week, there's hope that you can write a nice little comment in his journal, and that makes his day.

In terms of privacy, it was posited that, occasionally, young people may not want to share certain entries with homework club staff. One of the workers articulated a typical response.

"Well, listen, that's not what we are interested in" and we give the young person back their journal and ask them to turn it onto the page where their homework is, because we're not about invading young people's privacy, we're just trying to support them to do better in school.

In terms of collaboration with schools (which will later be more fully examined), homework club personnel highlighted two positive examples, firstly, their hosting of joint training sessions where teachers got the chance to 'come into those spaces' and be 'shown around the flats'; and secondly, the presentation delivered by teachers on 'the way they work around narratives and phonics' which further evidences that 'we're all working from the one page'.

*Homework Club attendance*
The interviews concurringly indicate high levels of attendance amongst the under 12s and a 'significant falling off' thereafter. Workers spoke of 'bedlam' and being 'maxed to capacity' with this younger group.

We had an Easter break and coming back on the Monday the kids couldn't wait to get in to do their homework the first day back in school. They were queuing up at the door.

More generally, it was claimed that some young people's attendance 'was great' while for many others, 'somebody would constantly have to knock their doors to get them in'. It was also acknowledged that it was a significant challenge to retain their participation as they reach their mid-teens. 'Fourth year they're gone, you never see them in fourth year'. However, another worker claimed that many former participants return to the clubs when the realities of their restricted educational pathways become apparent.

Some of them would have gone back. They realise, "I can't get anywhere unless I go back to school", and they do go back.

Moreover, the 'fluid access' between different project activities and the holistic approach of the RLC provide effective methods for encouraging retention in the homework clubs, particularly as the 'big performances' which form part of the Christmas, Easter and summer projects 'start in the Homework Club'.

> They could be involved in another programme, such as music. We'll just say to them, "I've really missed you, where are you?" you know, very informal, "we'd love you to come back into the homework club".

*Educational pathways*
Rialto's youth workers and homework staff routinely have conversations with young people regarding access to third level education. One worker ventured that 'they see our links with the colleges; they see our links with outside agencies'. According to another worker, these processes have engendered nascent attitudinal change.

> There are a lot of younger ones there that would be more open to talking about university, before they wouldn't even think about it.

One of the identified barriers to such pathways is limited awareness of the 'matriculation requirements for university'. It was pointed out that in addition to English, Irish (unless exempt) and Maths, a foreign language is also a prerequisite. The interviews suggest that many young people 'don't realise this until it is too late'.

> They'll give up the language because they think it's hard and they can't get into certain colleges courses, you can't get into university courses, if you don't have the language and they don't know that.

Similarly, it was reported that there was, firstly, a 'serious lack of awareness' in terms of navigating college application processes; and secondly, a pressing need to provide timely information.

> The Central Application Office for college - you need to fill that out quite early in the sixth year. People round here are not necessarily aware of that, working out how many points to do courses etc. You're talking about a co-ordinated approach (to access third level study) as opposed to just stumbling over every block that is there.

> There's information that young people need to get at a younger age so that they know that when you make a decision about your subjects at 12 or at 13, it's affecting how your whole education pathway is going to look.

### Rialto's relationships with local Schools

*Personal Experience*

Given that many youth workers and homework staff attended the local primary and secondary institutions, their personal perceptions of these experiences are important influences on the relationships between Rialto and these schools. Here again, the historical fractious nature of school/community relations is evident. Many interviewees who were schooled locally summarised their time there as 'just a nightmare', while others spoke of having 'such a bad experience' that for many years thereafter 'a lot of people had a fear of getting involved with the schools'. Low expectations and a 'lack of belief' on the part of teachers were forwarded as further manifestations of this disconnect.

> People always felt that teachers were looking down on them because of where they were from; teachers didn't expect much.

> My mother wouldn't have ever had a relationship with the schools when I was young. I don't think the community really believed in the schools.

*Professional Experience*

The relationship between Rialto staff and local schools has also been impacted by some 'pretty negative' professional experiences. Several interviewees claimed that, prior to the establishment of the Community School Strategy schools were 'not interested' and 'didn't want to know what happened outside'. The only contact with schools was via the Home/School liaison and that, often, these were 'superficial conversations' used to keep the community 'at arm's length'. Others doubted whether schools 'believed in' the value of youth work and homework clubs.

> Schools are so caught up in their own issues and school management that I think they genuinely don't have time for community, or they might pay lip service to it.

> Schools were concerned that the homework club staff weren't qualified as teachers, so what kind of support were they providing if they weren't qualified teachers? "Do they know what they're doing?"

Similarly, the interviews indicate that many youth workers had an equally low opinion of some local schools' pedagogic practice and behaviour management techniques, several respondents claimed that such schools 'fail young people' and 'reinforce negative self-esteem'.

> Schools do their bit, we do our bit and never the twain shall meet. They fail our kids and make them feel stupid; we do stuff that makes them feel good.

> There's always been antagonism towards schools because a lot of people would see schools as being part of the problem with young people – they institutionalise them and talk down to them. It's a very penal system.

Although the interviews highlight contrasting approaches in terms of dealing with young people, there is also an acceptance that, unlike the community and voluntary sector, schools have statutory, procedural and curricular obligations. These obligations, it was claimed, compel teachers to 'very rarely step outside of that box'. Extending this analogy, the same source added that 'unfortunately some young people just can't fit into that box so therefore they drop out or they get squeezed out somehow along the line'. However, there was also an admission that youth work too occasionally harboured 'negative attitudes' and 'rigid ways of thinking.'

> Schools at times are stuck in a rigid way of being. For us as well it's challenging because I think sometimes we are stuck in a rigid way of thinking about the schools.

These qualifications notwithstanding, there was also a general view that schools 'maintain a distance . . . to protect themselves', were often 'a bit standoffish' and that teachers 'were nearly on a pedestal'. One of the key differences concerned the 'authoritarian' approach of the school juxtaposed with the 'relationship-based' approach of the RLC; a second is contrasting levels of awareness of social and family circumstances.

> It's not about the relationship, it's about teaching the curriculum, and there is a different disciplinarian approach, so they're like Mars and Venus.

> Schools sometimes still don't understand the fact that it might be very difficult for a young person to get to school with their full uniform on or not to be tired in school. Because you never know what had happened the night before in their house. You have to remind schools that this is real life . . . the young person is here . . . even if they don't have a tie on.

The interviews also highlight 'vastly different approaches' in terms of managing challenging behaviour. Schools, it was claimed, rarely appreciate two important truisms: firstly, that 'young people who don't understand in school, tend to misbehave because it's easier than actually being called the stupid one'; and secondly, the ineffectiveness of solely punitive responses. 'Giving someone a punishment piece of homework for bullying someone else is not going to change anything'. The same source then contrasted this to the restorative practice approach of the RLC. Other workers expresses annoyance that 'the only times you ever met teachers, was when a young person was being . . . kicked out'.

*Challenges*

The Rialto interviews also highlighted additional challenges in terms of a working relationship with the schools. The first relates to issues of demarcation. A co-ordinator recalled a recent 'buddy reading programme' where the 'take up' from young people and parents was 'phenomenal'.

> The reason it was stopped at the end of the six week period was because management viewed that by doing that we were taking on the job the schools

should have done, that schools should have taught literacy to an appropriate level.

Secondly, there was also a widely held view that some local schools are 'dysfunctional' with high rates of suspensions and 'streaming at a very early age'. Another worker spoke of her frustration 'that every 12 year old . . . is streamed for the lowest ability state exam they can sit' which, she further claims, will prevent them from accessing third level education.

> I know that we have young people with serious literacy issues and so on, but not every single one of them has to be streamed at the lowest level straightaway. I can't sit back and not challenge that.

Thirdly, it was acknowledged that due to budget cuts and workload increases such as the Croke Park protocol which increases public servants' working hours, 'teachers are just absolutely demoralised and stretched'. Another worker added 'the goodwill of teachers has been completely eroded'. For example, a co-ordinator recalled that despite a 'great uptake' in previous in-service training for primary teachers . . .

> '. . . last year we got no take up at all and . . . it's not boding well for this year either . . . there isn't a willingness there because of cuts.

*Collaboration*

There was consensus amongst Rialto personnel that the past year has given workers 'the opportunity to really start actively engaging with the schools' and that things are 'starting to shift'. A senior member of staff claimed that the 'most encouraging' aspect of this engagement is that 'team leaders now are going up to the schools' to 'create a synergy between school and community'.

> It can't all just be one person, because then it becomes personality based, whereas a significant feature that is emerging now is that it's processed based.

The most important outcomes of collaboration between schools and the community were identified as improved 'flows of information' and 'sustainable communication structures'. A second senior member of staff spoke of a 'culture of commitment' and argued that 'the key thing is getting the staff liaising with teachers directly' because 'the real work (is) this day-to-day engagement'. Areas identified for further collaboration included engaging with school libraries in terms of literacy enrichment programmes. Such initiatives 'add value' to learning experiences 'as opposed to the homework club ploughing away in its own furrow and the school ploughing away its own'. The same source also highlighted that schools which traditionally 'tend to take a snapshot in time and then move on' could benefit from the youth project approach which instead examines 'trends . . . in terms of particular young people's progression'.

More broadly, the collaborative successes to date are credited to the established 'bridge heads between the school' such as the 'Principals' Network, schools coming into the

homework clubs and . . . staff going into schools', which have 'gone very well'. Having a dedicated worker as the liaison between the community and the school has also 'been really important', particularly since, this individual 'is a very good front for the community and a very good bridge builder'. Moreover, although it was accepted that engaging in this collaborative process has been 'a very challenging piece of work for both sides,' there has been a 'realisation' of shared goals and a growing perception that 'we're pushing an open door with the schools around all of this'.

*Sharing Information*
The interviewees outlined a range of protocols to be adhered to in terms of data protection. Examples were provided which again demonstrate, firstly, the embeddedness of the RLC in the community; secondly, the RLC's capacity to provide advocacy and representation; and thirdly, varying levels of commitment on the part of schools in terms of communication structures.

> There was one school had a deep concern about a young woman's hygiene and felt that they needed to make a referral to social work, so by sharing that information with us, we were able to actively engage with the family and the community and avoid the referral to social work.

> We've always been very lucky here that parents have allowed us to (share sensitive information with schools) because the relationship is quite strong.
> The fact that (some local schools) disclose reading ages and all that stuff here is quite remarkable. However, (some other schools) even with parental consent to share information still drag their feet.

> What we actively seek to share is literacy information, test scores, attendance information and then any other issues that might arise within the school environment.

*Provision of Materials and Guidance*
One of the most important outcomes of collaboration with schools has been their provision of materials, particularly, for the homework clubs. The schools have developed 'really useful' literacy packs for the clubs and have furnished the clubs with 'reading scores' which will help the clubs to create age-appropriate and capacity-appropriate libraries.

> The schools actually have recently given us a literacy pack through games, to develop and support literacy through doing activities . . . one of the things the music group would have done . . . is their song writing and song composition. They would have used that as a literacy development.

A second example of this provision relates to sharing practice in paired reading. Schools have visited the homework clubs and homework staff have attended sessions in the schools. One youth worker spoke about the benefits of 'adopting the same method' and the value of 'getting the balance right'. Similarly, homework club staff claimed that it was 'vital' that they use the 'same systems' in maths and English.

The school teach them a new (maths) system called renaming. We need to know that that's the system they use, because when I would have been in school it would have been you borrow and you pay back.

I was just in an in-service there last month with the homework clubs around the English homework, because there are these new things called recounts, and it's a way of how you have to write the story . . . So you have to know the systems and how to change . . . you have to stay linked with the school.

*Benefits to Young People of RLC / School links*
The consensus here was that the three key positive outcomes for young people were, essentially, homework completion/academic attainment, increased self-esteem, and a greater awareness of a young person's specific circumstances and needs by schools and youth workers.

The much improved, relationship with schools has . . . undoubtedly been a huge factor in our successes with homework completion . . . and there's a lot more young people staying at school now and completing their leaving certificate than ever we've had.

For a young person to know that all these key people are communicating with each other about them, makes them feel more cared for and more supported, so that's got to have a positive impact on their self-esteem and self-perception of themselves as learners.

The teachers are not always aware of their social and family background as much as they probably could be, so therefore tolerance levels are a lot lower when a young person's struggling in the classroom or acting out in the classroom . . . they may not know how else to express themselves.

In terms of other benefits to young people, it was suggested, firstly, that if schools were more aware of domestic situations they would be more likely to respond in a more understanding and compassionate way to behavioural issues in the school, attendance, and homework completion. Secondly, close collaboration between schools and the RLC would make it 'much harder for the young person to slip through a crack' because schools, the RLC and families can 'all meet together and try and come up with a solution'. Thirdly, when young people are aware that youth workers and community workers are 'engaged with teachers in the school . . . that helps them to have more options of discussing issues' that are affecting them in their daily life, 'whether it's home or school or socially'.

*Building Future Links*
Several interviewees identified resource and time pressures as the key obstacles in terms of the future development of relationships with schools. A co-ordinator spoke of the 'massive challenge' to recruit teachers for a recent Restorative Practice training session because 'schools are really limited now in terms of the resources they have, they can't afford to

release teachers on substitution'.  This is, clearly, a significant setback as many of the improvements in terms of the relationship between RLC and the schools are credited to 'the training aspect and sharing the learning, coming together as teachers and youth workers'. These shared learning experiences provide 'opportunities to engage' and should be 'built into their school year and into our planning year'.  Indeed, another worker ventured that 'outside of that (shared training) . . . I don't know how else you can kind of cultivate that relationship'.

In terms of improvement opportunities, it was argued that, firstly, that 'a leap of faith' was required from 'both the youth project and the school . . . because we're probably both carrying ideas about the other'.  Secondly, that there is a need for the Homework Clubs to have 'more contact with teachers around how the curriculum is taught' because it's 'always changing . . . and evolving.  Thirdly, that RLC should demonstrate any initial successes to non-engaged schools – 'we had this problem; we did this'.

Finally, three critical observations were made concerning further developing the RLC/schools relationship around the commitment of Principals, a difficult funding environment, and sustainability.

> It's not going to happen in school, unless the principals kind of embrace it and actually want to do it.

> The problem is that the project itself is under attack (due to) funding just drying up -  that is also incredibly corrosive in terms of "why should we, and we're doing enough", So it's going to be very hard to crank up . . . another front.

> Long term, the goal would be that . . . it's par the course . . . that the school piece is just automatically on the agenda, that the schools will see the community link as a vital part of their work.

### Rialto's engagement with parents
*Parent's experience of schools*

> All the research tells us is the single biggest factor in relation to a young person's outcome in their education is parental involvement (co-ordinator).

The Rialto interviews indicate that in the Dolphin and Fatima estates there are significant barriers for parents in terms of supporting their children's education.  According to one source, these challenges, primarily, relate to 'their own experiences about education'. Similarly, another claimed that it was 'asking a lot' to expect parents to 'engage' and to 'value a system that actually failed them and made them feel stupid'.  These and other responses from staff around parents' experience in the local schools were predominantly framed round recollections of 'fear', 'dread', 'hatred' and 'panic'.

Moreover, unlike most of the Rialto personnel who recounted similar experiences, many parents have been unable to transcend these perceptions, as evident in the indicative comments below.

> Lots of people came out of school and couldn't read. They probably left when they were 13 and 14, as soon as they could, and now wouldn't go near a school if they had to.

> For some parents, going up to the school is a still a huge difficulty.

> Parents still talk about their sense of nervousness and intimidation . . . when they go into school spaces . . . which obviously makes it difficult to support their child.

It was also suggested by a youth worker that because of these experiences parents 'might not have the same value of the school's system' and feel that the homework clubs are 'better positioned to support the young person'. Additionally, there was a general view that parents were happy for the clubs to represent them when dealing with schools, 'maybe they think you're more educated or, more able to talk'.

More broadly, it was argued that although it was difficult to 'teach parents the value of education', it would be beneficial to give them 'another experience of education other than the one they've been carrying for ten or twenty years'. One such example suggested was community based literacy programmes for adults.

> . . . a programme that's challenging the parents where you can actually begin to address their own literacy and educational deficits . . . to allow them to support their kids.

It was also argued that a parent's perception of their own involvement can be 'very, very different' from the schools'. A senior member of staff recalled a situation where a parent with 'very negative experiences of school' was engaged with the Barnardo's Family resource Centre to address her child's behavioural issues. However, the school was 'unaware' of this and assumed that 'she was a really unengaged, uninvolved parent'.

> But, she saw herself as massively engaged . . . she was seeking out emotional and behavioural support for her child, as well as making sure her other kids got in and out of school every day. So the perceptions are completely different.

*Encouraging parental involvement*
The consensus amongst Rialto personnel was that, firstly, 'unless you start building a relationship with the parents, it's hit and miss with the young person'; secondly, that parents' lack of capacity and confidence is perpetuating the 'cycle' of low educational attainment; thirdly, that 'it's easier to maintain contact' with parents of 'younger young people in the homework clubs' because 'they have to be brought in and collected'; fourthly, despite the fact that 'the homework club operates an open door policy – parents pop in whenever', it was

also agreed that once their children 'start getting older . . . the ability to communicate with parents becomes more difficult'.

In terms of encouraging parental involvement, and in addition to literacy programmes for parents, it was also suggested that 'parents might be more open' to 'having parent-teacher meetings in the community'.  However, it was also acknowledged that many local parents are preoccupied with 'quite difficult lives' which are 'sometimes . . . chaotic'.

*Benefits to young people of parental involvement*
While it was generally accepted that 'very few young people . . . would admit that their parent or guardian is the most important person in their world', the consensus was that at primary age 'they kind of love the idea that they're important enough . . . they love that people are working together' around their needs.  Conversely, a team leader claimed that it was 'confusing' for young people in absence of 'holistic approaches' encompassing school, community and family support.  Another youth worker highlighted contrasting outcomes in terms of the different levels of value parents (visibly) attach to their children's education.

> If they know that their parent values what it is that they're doing they will too, and if they don't you can see it.  They'll scribble it down, they'll just write anything, whether (the homework's) right or wrong.  "I don't care what it says, it's done".  So you have to have the parents' involvement for them to take it on, to do it right.

*A Strategy for Parents*
The interviews indicate that the RLC engages with parents on 'a number of levels', primarily around schools, homework and parental consent for project activities.  However, it was also accepted that this engagement was 'not recognised formally' and that 'very few people in the project really record the extent of contact we have with parents'.  The absence of a distinct RLC strategy for parents is, according to staff, due to time and resource pressures.

> We just don't have time to develop a parent strategy.

> I suppose in some ways we're trying to do so much on so many different fronts, (the parent strategy) that's the one that's probably received the least attention.

> We don't have a purposeful strategy around parents, but it is one of the items on the list of things that we recognise we have to actually do.

One youth worker recalled that a secondary school teacher formally attached to the homework clubs 'started developing a parent strategy . . . she was implementing it, but it didn't get anywhere' because 'her hours got cut'.  A team leader spoke of the need to conduct 'a simple mapping exercise before we formulate a strategy - similar to what we did with schools'.  Several staff members claimed that the management committee had recently agreed to establish a new strategy, but warned that 'in practice', it 'might be a challenge'.

> Because there's a perception out there, particularly amongst schools that because we're community based that it's a doddle for us to engage with parents, but we have the same issues engaging with parents as the schools do.

There was also a general view that any new strategy would need to be 'concrete' and 'meaningful'.

> There are often strategies about this or policies about that, and sometimes they get lost . . . it would have to be a realistic one that people would actually read it and not just something that was just written and stuck on a shelf.

*Sharing Information*
In terms of sharing information with parents, it was accepted that 'parents put themselves in vulnerable positions' because 'they share more (with us) than they would with the school'. Similarly, various Rialto personnel spoke of the need to 'strike a fine balance' because young people know that 'it's part of the deal . . . that we don't go behind their backs having chats with the parents'. An example of this 'balance' was forwarded to demonstrate the different levels of information sharing between, in this instance, arts-based activities and more sensitive areas of engagement.

> I think most young people are secretly delighted when you tell a parent about a performance that they haven't told them about, but when you're moving to the more issue-based work maybe I think the primary relationship is with the young person.

There was also a view that when dealing with 'problematic' older teenagers, it would be useful to 'have two different portals' with a different workers being assigned to a young person and their parent, because 'often the conflict can be within the family'. The previously mentioned embeddedness which is a key feature of the RLCs' relationship with the wider community can, on different levels, both encourage and inhibit the sharing of information. The complexity of such issues was articulated by a senior manager.

> If the Homework Club phones social services and the parents know, then the kids won't be sent to the Homework Club anymore. Also, part of the other dynamic here is that you have staff working in the Homework Club who also live in the community, and so if the Homework Club is associated with referrals to social work then it can reflect badly . . . it can cause problems between neighbours.

### Working with other agencies
The embeddedness and reach of the RLC is also evidenced by their inter-agency policies which seek to engender 'a much more systematic approach'. In particular, important linkages and protocols have been established with key stakeholders and service providers from both voluntary and statutory sectors. It was also claimed that because affiliated programmes such as the Rialto Springboard Project and the Rialto Family Centre are statutory funded, the RLC have 'much more structured links with social services'. Three

examples from the interviews indicate the span and complexity of RLC's collaboration with other agencies.  Firstly, a recent project with St Vincent de Paul's youth club which included a 'series of workshops around alcohol awareness, drug awareness programmes, mental health, suicide awareness'.  Secondly, a senior manager spoke about 'inevitable' and regular involvement in the criminal justice system, such as the probation service, the Police and Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs).  Thirdly, another source outlined the key features of the Family Welfare Conference model which he described as 'a really important structure . . .  for bringing all the different players together . . . within well-managed boundaries of information sharing and confidentiality/parental consent.

Data protection and privacy concerns are foremost in RLC's inter-agency activity and a senior member of staff articulated the need for further inter-agency protocols to be developed.

> When we connected with other agencies, then issues came up around confidentiality and other sorts of things, so we need to work out a protocol, which we're in the process of doing with other agencies, in terms of what's shared and what our role is . . .  because that's not clear.

### *The Arts Programme*
The Arts programme forms a key element of the RLC's delivery of youth work projects and community engagement activities.   It was highlighted that although 'there's no mother-ship policy to support the development of community based arts provision in Ireland' there is, nonetheless, a rich local heritage of community-based arts initiatives which was considered an 'important factor' in securing grant aid.

> The arts has an incredible history here, there was always little music groups around the place.  So, when we went to Atlantic . . . that became a key piece of the funding because there was a history of it here.  It's natural to the community.

The current Arts Programme encompasses five elements - music, drama, visual arts, dance and pedagogy.  This fifth element relates to 'a particular commitment' in terms of young people's development and 'spans all of the groups'.  The programmes across these art forms operate on three levels.  The first is 'access . . . art for its own sake, for its playfulness'.  The second is 'focused on particular education intentions . . . (where) the arts are used to improve literacy, confidence and modes of expression'.  The third level is 'where we identify particular needs or talents in terms of progression'.  The same source also highlighted the programme's uniqueness, claiming that 'there isn't a similar matrix of working relationships working anywhere else in the Republic'.

Other workers outlined the scale and popularity of current art programme activity, the expected levels of participant's commitment, as well as the value of giving young people access to 'professional artists'.

> Every year the game gets upped, every year we go "we did too much last year . . . . .  we're going to pull it back".  And every year we up the game more.

In the arts programmes . . . I don't have to outreach any of them for any of it, they're there every week without fail.

The bar is placed quite high with regard to commitment and to evidence of practice and behaviour . . . an inclusiveness that's really based on the idea of genuine interest, ability and respect for others.

Across all of the art forms there are professional artists connected in.  And that's really about giving weight and importance to young people . . . to really try and invest in those skills.

The interviews indicate that the four art forms are guided by 'a set of extrinsic benefits' in terms of 'self-organising' around 'events and platforms' and providing 'a critical voice for young people' allowing them to create 'considered images or responses to life through a variety of projects'.  For instance, arts programme workers spoke of an 'amazing breakthrough in music', primarily, because it is the 'most accessible' and 'most natural' way in which young people choose to express their feelings, particularly around 'hard hitting' issues.

In the beginning, music was about an informal jamming space, but then there was such a response to it, it just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

One young person in Dolphin that I work with wrote a song about her Dad passing away . . .  she might not be able to verbalise it, but she can write it in a song.

Workers also recalled the 'artistic responses' to the recent murder of a young German student in Fatima, where a 'particular sense of occasion' was created 'using the Parade of Light as a medium to acknowledge . . . the hurt'.

We found subtle ways that weren't overt . . . we used Silent Night and Stille Nachte . . . sung it in both German and English . . . people are intelligently using their experiences to address the harder end.

Additionally, it was argued that through acoustic events, concerts and recordings a great 'sense of pride in the possibility of children' was created.  The same source claimed that there was 'no limit to which that could be deepened and improved' and concluded that music 'will be the one' which has the most dramatic impact in terms of 'bringing in the community and the parents'.  It was also suggested that there was added value in framing music around young people's experience of social media because, considered together,  firstly, they 'set up a charge, an easily recognisable one within the minds and imaginations of teenagers in particular'; and secondly, they utilise young people's 'alternative culture as organisers of one kind or another'.

In terms of dance, it was recalled that, historically, this medium was 'very, very weak' within the Fatima and Dolphin areas, extending no further than 'majorettes operating at a community level' and, 'a fringe Irish dance group'. The same source went on to describe the 'exponential growth', the involvement of the 'younger age level', the retention of 'older teenagers' and the fact that 'there are now three or four dance forms including contemporary dance'. He also highlighted the popularity of current dance programmes, claiming that 'there's no coercion . . . they vote with their feet'. In respect of retaining older teenagers, a team leader then outlined nascent attitudinal change, particularly amongst young women in terms of 'progression routes' and self-confidence.

> We noticed that . . . young women . . . weren't dancing any more . . . we've actually improved that that . . . now we've 17 year olds dancing . . . because we have progression routes and we're much clearer about what they're doing. I also think that when they get to a particular age . . . they don't like their bodies.

*Academic Input*

Within the four art forms there is a 'conscious effort' to incorporate literacy and numeracy skill development across the spectrum of activities. Several interviewees highlighted literacy examples such as song composition in the music clubs, script reading and script writing in drama, the under 8s art programme which is based around storytelling and working towards writing their own book, as well as numeracy examples such as 'steps and timing' in dance. A co-ordinator concluded that there were 'loads of ways literacy and numeracy can be purposefully incorporated into the work that we do'.

The general view was that 'everything that we do has . . . an element of literacy in it'. However, two important points were accepted, firstly, that this work was 'informal learning . . . not formal education; and secondly, that there was considerable sensitivity around such learning because one young person's literacy may be 'at a much lower level than other people within the space . . . so, it's not about exposing or embarrassing young people'.

In a broader context, it was also acknowledged that the integration of the Arts Programme into the wider school strategy had made little progress. It was initially envisioned that the programme would commission and assign artists to local schools, however, funding for this element 'simply did not materialise'.

> We haven't had the capacity to try and implement that. We did try a few years ago and it literally fell off the table.

> The (Arts Programme) school piece . . . was strongly made at the beginning, but hasn't been delivered on and still isn't a feature.

*Benefits of the Arts Programme to young people*

Positive outcomes for young people identified in the interviews can be loosely categorised under the following four headings – self-confidence, social skills, addressing difficult issues and progression routes.

In terms of self-confidence, the consensus was that arts-based activity helps young people to 'develop their own interests and skills' and provided unique 'platforms' for young people to 'really express their cultural identity and their experience of living in communities like this'. It was also suggested that the arts 'encouraged conversations' that might not happen 'in a different space' and that the performances, in particular, had a 'transformative' effect on young people.

> We looked at young women over a couple of years through dance . . . from actually standing at the back on the performance to now standing up to the front . . . the smiles on their face and how confident they are.

In term of developing social skills, one worker said that the Arts programme was a 'social space' where young people were 'comfortable with each other'. Another spoke of how 'peer friendships', group skills, and study skills, such as, 'listening, concentration or learning to work on your own' were 'developed and nurtured within spaces like that'.

It was also claimed that the programme was a useful mechanism for quelling teenage 'rivalry' between the Fatima and Dolphin estates.

> At the beginning . . . it was "oh they'll never work together", "I'm not going with them". By the time the group was finished they were all best friends going out to play football together and the rivalry between them was . . . not an issue, never even mentioned anymore.

The third key benefit to young people was the clearly established progression routes within each art form. The consensus here was that the Arts Programme provided the 'support and interfaces necessary' for young people 'to move on'. Indeed, it was claimed the 'musicality' or 'visual arts skills' of many young people is encouraging them to become 'an artist, or to at least go to college'. Another worker spoke of the programme providing 'an alternative to the very middle-class payment based option that is available now', concluding that 'creating and expressing is a right for every young person'.

Finally, it was suggested that the programme created a platform where difficult issues could be addressed. One youth worker recalled a recent occasion where young people were involved in group work around their own 'hopes and dreams'.

> They started bringing in the drug problems around the area and the antisocial behaviour so we started up an arts-based programme with them around that and how they can express how they feel about what's happening outside.

*Parental Involvement*
Although one interviewee expressed that it was 'often a challenge' to get parents to respond positively to 'anything of an artistic nature', the consensus was that parental involvement in the local arts programmes was 'fairly good'. Another worker elaborated that it tended to be 'the more informal spaces' such as 'acoustic gigs' which 'worked better' and enabled 'loads of parents' to attend'.

A further example from the interviews related to the recent 'Parade of Light' where 'every child under ten' had at least one family member with them . . . the thing became so muscular . . . it was extraordinary'. The same source conveyed the sense of pride felt by all concerned.

> There's absolutely nothing like it, if a parent or a guardian (is present) when work is being shared . . . I feel more authentic as a practitioner in that moment than just about any other moment . . . all the other youth workers feel the same . . . because we're surrogates really . . . and when you see the energy and the joy . . . then you know that you're doing part of job reasonably well.

Importantly, it was also claimed that while many young people are 'uncomfortable' with parental involvement in the homework clubs, they have less concerns in respect of the arts programmes, because when it comes to 'showcasing . . . they love to have their parents there to see what they've done'.

There are also initiatives to increase the participation of parents in the arts programme. One worker outlined an example where local mothers are been encouraged to form their own 'majorette group' and that this new group would give these women a 'voice', in contrast to the previous group wherein, it was claimed, parents were 'not listened to'.

*Key challenges*
The interviews indicate that the main challenges facing the arts programme, essentially relate to three issues: firstly, the failure to properly integrate the programme within local schools; secondly, the 'very difficult' funding environment; and thirdly, the absence of national policies in terms of community-based arts.

Several workers recalled their 'disappointment' when the programmes they hoped to instigate with local schools 'failed to materialise'. The RLC conducted a survey of schools to examine their practices and gauge 'how they valued particular art forms'. They were also ready to present the arts programme as 'one of the first major offerings to schools'. Despite, these preparatory exercises, it was conceded that 'we've never delivered on that'.

> When you actually study our circumstances and our resources . . . in the context of the RLC . . . there was no budget for the development of programmes with schools . . . that was the biggest impediment.

In a broader context, it was suggested that *any* community-based arts intervention in schools would entail a considerable amount of resources to establish and that such outlays were 'impossible' in the current economic climate.

> We don't have that sort of money . . . if it wasn't for philanthropy, believe me . . . (funding has) been wiped in the Republic, absolutely wiped. The sense of austerity is so extreme . . . the truth is that local government is actually bankrupt here and there's no funding coming through culture and arts . . . it's just flat-lined.

There were also a series of concerns voiced in respect of 'overarching strategies': firstly, that there is 'no fundamental form of arts policy and culture provision that enables a model like this to develop'; secondly, that proactively interfacing with policy bodies was difficult because there's 'very little energy . . . and a culture of complaint and disbelief'; and thirdly, that youth work, in general, has an 'appalling record' in terms of 'campaign clout'.

> It was never able to describe . . . or convey the benefits to young people or wider society . . . and we're a population that has the highest birth rate still in Europe . . . so it's not going to go away, it's a challenge.

*Future development*
In terms of the future progression of the Arts Programme, several interviewees spoke of the need to 'establish networks and interfaces with relevant arts organisations or educational bodies'. It was also claimed that it was important to challenge 'the dominant arts model' by 'building in' more outreach.

Three further strategic goals were outlined in the interviews: firstly, to 'formalise' RLC's 'strategic partnership arrangements with NCAD' and local colleges in furtherance of the 'overarching objective'- to establish 'a local arts academy'. Secondly, to bring the Arts Council and the city council, the two bodies . . . charged by the state to develop arts and culture into a learning relationship with us'. The same source claimed that the Arts Council 'recognise the distinctiveness of this emerging model' and have intimated an interest 'in attaching themselves to that plan as a learning partner'. Thirdly, it is envisaged that the Arts Programme will 'end up with a highly active website linked to the database' and also 'to a variety of projects that choose to platform their working practice on an on-going basis'. The same source concluded that, 'within that platform', music and film are likely to be 'the most vivid'.

More broadly, it was argued that the Arts Programme was 'something that adds value to young people's lives here' as well as 'providing a model that could be replicated'. In terms of financial sustainability, one worker presented a positive forecast, while another outlined the consequences of the funding 'simply drying up'.

> The great thing is at a time of reduction we've been able to sustain and deepen the level of planning and intention, therefore, I remain optimistic.

If the arts programmes were to go it would be detrimental to the young people. I think maybe every young person we work with is involved in one of the arts, street, dance, music or visual arts. So it's all part and parcel of the youth project – and if it didn't continue, I don't know if the youth project would continue in the same way that it has for the last number of years.

## Summer Projects

The interviews highlighted two particular areas of concerns around the summer projects, firstly, the lack of educational input for young people; and secondly, 'best use' of time and energy for youth workers.

I would like to see a little bit more focus during the summer months . . . on some sort of educational intervention. Last year we piloted a reading corner during the summer projects, so when young people were coming in, they were invited to come in a half hour earlier and they could take up a book and it was very successful.

The same source went on to outline the consequences of young people not reading during the summer break.

A young person doesn't pick up a book in three months, their literacy levels significantly deteriorate over the summer, so already people are constantly playing catch up.

Another Interviewee argued that although 'staff give it a hundred per cent' and 'lots (of young people) show up . . . they disappear', adding that 'the whole thing is frenetic . . . they might be a little bit more selective'. Several Rialto personnel also spoke about the summer projects being 'a huge time consumer' and 'exhausting work'.

I'm not sure what the benefit of them is . . . I'm not sure how much it is a staff-driven curriculum rather than one that's responding to kids' needs . . . I think there just could be better usage of time.

A further valuable insight into the structures and impacts of the Summer Projects was provided by an OST Observation exercise conducted during the field-work stage of this evaluation. During the month of July 2012, two of the five Rialto Summer Projects were each observed on three occasions by a member of the Queen's University research team:

Visual Arts Group: Wednesday 4th July, Wednesday 18th July, Wednesday 25th July
Music Group: Monday 2nd July, Monday 9th July, Monday 16th July

During the third observed session for each project, the Out-of-School Time (OST) Observation Instrument (Pechman *et al*, 2008a) was completed. This evaluation tool aims to:
'Collect consistent and objective observation data about the quality of after-school activities. Grounded in a youth development framework, the OST Instrument is based on two core assumptions about features of high-quality after-school programs'.

1. Certain structural and institutional features (adequate qualified staff, adequate pace and resources, and the availability of varied opportunities for academic and interpersonal skill-building) support the implementation of high-quality programs: and

2. Instructional activities promote positive youth outcomes if they offer varied content, mastery-oriented instruction, and positive youth-to-youth and youth-to-staff relationships'(Ibid: 2).

In particular, 'it assesses activities against the four SAFE [Sequenced, Active, personally Focused, Explicit] features found by Durlak and Weisberg (2007) to contribute to positive social and personal outcomes for youth in OST programs. The OST Observation Instrument includes the following elements:

- **Indicator Item Ratings:** where domains such as environmental context, youth participation and activity content and structure are rated by the observer on a 1-7 scale;
- **Academic and Technology Features:** items related to literacy, numeracy and the use of technology;
- **Environmental Context:** adequacy of the learning context in terms of supervision, space and materials;
- **Observer's Synthesis and Rating:** syntheses of the activity's overall quality, using the SAFE framework as the quality standard and rating each SAFE feature on a 1-7 scale (Pechman *et al,* 2008b: 1-2).

Five excerpts from the two observed sessions are presented below and highlight (a) the benefits of the OST Observation Instrument, specifically, in terms of the range and richness of the information captured; and (b) insightful examples of the structural features of the two summer projects and the impact of their delivery methods. The Visual Arts and the Music sessions observed both received very positive evaluations from the observer and full transcripts of the two Observation Instruments are reproduced in Appendix 3.

The first example relates to the environmental context, specifically, in terms of the work space being conducive to the activity. The observer noted:

> *The physical work space was conducive to the group size and activity type. This was a large-sized room with lots of space for young people to move around if desired. Refreshments (soft drinks and snacks) were freely available.*

The second example concerns relationship building, where the observer was asked to find if OST staff show positive affect towards youth.

> *Both verbally and non-verbal, staff demonstrated a caring and friendly attitude towards all young people. Each member of staff interacted with the young people in an up-beat and approachable manner.*

Thirdly, and in respect of activity content and structure, the observer examined whether the activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically.

*It was evident that young people were being pushed beyond their capabilities in each session but not beyond what they could realistically achieve. There appeared to be the appropriate level of challenge for individual young people, and it was clear that no-one felt overwhelmed by what they were being asked to accomplish.*

In the fourth example, the observer assesses to what level OST staff verbally recognise youth's efforts and accomplishments.

*Praise, encouragement and constructive guidance were regularly and appropriately given to all young people during the painting workshop.*

The fifth example relates to participation, here the observer notes to what extent young participants l*isten actively and attentively to peers and staff:*

*For the most part young people did appear to be interested in the conversations of other peers and staff, making eye contact and providing feedback at times. Certainly, whilst individuals were performing their musical pieces all listened attentively and respectfully.*

### Organisation and Support
The interviews highlighted three areas of concern in terms of the RLC's organisation relating to restructuring challenges, loss of key personnel and governance issues.

*Restructuring*
The consensus here was that the scale of restructuring was 'pretty ambitious' and that the project 'really underestimated . . . the amount of time' restructuring would take. The key challenges identified were: firstly, that the organisation has 'gone from a team of about 10 staff to a team of close to 30 staff'. Secondly, additional tiers of management have been created across each of the three projects, which, according to another worker, have 'proved difficult' because 'you're trying to integrate three very different entities into one cohesive way of working'. Thirdly, it was claimed that the 'overall regeneration' programme 'has created huge challenges, for example, on the Homework Club' in terms of 'adapting to the new premises'.

With specific reference to the integration of the 'school community piece' into the wider youth project, frustrations were voiced that some youth workers' levels of engagement and commitment to the process were inadequate. One interviewee spoke about workers needing to 'make it their business to understand the school piece' and to fully 'engage with it, not to be constantly pushing it away'. It was also suggested that the genesis of this dichotomy between the youth project and the school piece was the initial decision to keep 'the two elements separate, rightly or wrongly'.

They were kept very, very apart, so that kind of put a distance between how
youth workers viewed the school piece of work.

*Loss of key personnel*
It was broadly accepted that, particularly over the past two years, the challenges presented
by restructuring have been exacerbated by the loss of key personnel.  One worker spoke
about the organisation being in a 'vulnerable stage at the moment', that operating without
certain key staff members has 'proven to be more difficult than we thought' and that
'communication has been a weakness'.  In particular, it was felt that a senior figure being on
long term sick leave 'has knocked things  . . . all over the place'.  This individual was seen as
the 'power house' of the organisation and his absence, it was posited, has created a
'vacuum'.

He was the one who kept things tight . . . so there haven't been management
meetings for ages . . . I'm not quite sure of who's managing what now.  I'm not
quite sure how we're pulling things together.

*Governance*
Several interviewees also highlighted that 'another level of challenge' has been presented in
terms of overall governance and that this 'has been a huge issue'.  The general view was
that the existing management committee 'just hasn't been able to give it the time' and that
attempts to widen its membership has been largely unsuccessful.  Primarily, it was claimed,
because 'it's been hard to find people who are interested in youth services and interested in
governance'.  However, there was also an acknowledgement that Atlantic has provided the
organisation with valuable support around 'restructuring, human resources and . . . capacity
ability'. One such example of this support was the 'organisational development psychologists'
which Atlantic funded to help steer the organisation through the restructuring processes.
More broadly, it was accepted that as the Atlantic funding was drawing to an end, sustaining
the work of the RLC was now the key challenge.

Inevitably, some of the staff won't be able to get continued funding . . . But, the
key thing is that we have a system bedded down that will continue over time'.

*Staff Support*
In terms of support structures for Rialto personnel, the general view was that within the
organisation 'there is openness', 'a really good network', regular meetings with supervisors,
and that 'people are able to speak their mind'.  For example, one worker spoke about
receiving 'great support' when completing her college degree, others of a culture of
'constructive dialogue'.

I've never been turned down if I've said, "I think this would be really idea".

In youth work, situations can get very adversarial. Here, I don't see that . . .
here, there's a history of resolution.

However, one respondent claimed to have received 'no support at all' when they approached management over concerns that some youth workers were not fully engaged in the 'school piece'. The same source further recalled that, up until fairly recently, they had often felt 'completely isolated'.

Several other interviewees argued that although the support structures 'were in place' it was very difficult to avail of them because of time pressures. It was also accepted that while professional development is 'an essential part of youth work', it was 'difficult to prioritise . . . in terms of taking away from time'. Similarly, in relation to 'group meetings about the whole school approach', one worker commented that 'it's very hard trying to get the time, especially with so many of us being part-time', another that 'its 25 hours a week . . . you're always going over'. There were also concerns raised that the 'emotional investment' on the part of many youth workers was 'taking its toll' and that 'the weakness in the structure was that people maybe burn out too much'. Additionally, it was claimed that 'there's very few workers here that don't at times take the work to heart' and many have 'trouble sleeping at night'. One such example related to the recent murder of a young German student. Two young local teenagers were involved in this incident and had disengaged from the RLC only a year or so earlier.

> People were really upset, had they only gone the extra mile with them, had they gone back to them – this almost guilt thing about why we couldn't have done more.

### The Database, Individual Learning Plans and Logic Models
*The Database*
There were a range of views expressed in relation to the database which, primarily, fell into two categories: firstly, its value/potential value; and secondly, the 'endless technical problems' which have continually bedevilled its operability. The consensus was that the database provides an important mechanism in terms of 'achieving a more consistent approach' for staff to 'profile, monitor and plan and evaluate interventions, programmes and activities for young people'. Other key strengths identified in the interviews were that the database:

- Provides a very accurate picture of a young person and their needs;
- Encourages staff to look at young people in a 'more objective way and on a systematic basis';
- Makes the youth worker specifically think about the young person in terms of writing actions and putting actions in place;
- Allows youth workers to 'track' levels of engagement across a range of activities, and other trends such as age and gender breakdowns. Indeed, one senior staff member noted that 'one of the real benefits' was documenting that 'if they miss the homework club, they might go on to a music event or something else because they're involved in different groups';
- 'Captures the learning' and addresses the previously 'systemic problem' where when someone left, 'their experience left with them'.

Notwithstanding these accolades, many interviewees claimed that there have been a 'ridiculous amount of technical issues' which have caused significant stress to both the organisation and its staff. The four indicative comments below were very common responses.

> Endless issues - everything, the software, interface, the whole thing, constantly.
> I would say it's the most negative weight on the organisation, on people.
> Because every time they resolve something, another issue comes up.

> The amount of times you've had to retype programmes afterwards where
> you've lost data . . . to be honest, you're doing a shambolic job . . . because
> you're typing something up that you did three months ago.

> I think the physical system itself is a quite archaic and dated system and
> overly complicated.

> It was starting to become an obstacle for staff.

It was also broadly accepted that the main cause of these technical difficulties was the fact that when the system was originally designed 'they didn't realise the extent of how much information was going to be put into it'. Thus, the 'software had reached its limits' and, consequently, the 'system has not been able to reflect the quality of the data that's actually been collected'. Moreover, a team leader recalled that 'we . . . actually sat at home learning the database because we didn't really get any formal training on it'.

> We went off ourselves and, kind of, learnt a lot about it . . . then we trained the
> staff. So the staff didn't really get formal learning, it was us training them.

There was considerable 'relief' amongst Rialto personnel that the database is 'finally' being updated with a 'more user friendly interface . . . while retaining its essential features'. However, it was also accepted that because of the 'transitions and retraining' required, the 'true benefit' of the new system will take some time to materialise.

One of the most important changes will be that, following 'an independent re-evaluation', the new database will be 'web-based so everybody will be able to upload online . . . it should be a lot less complicated' than having to integrate 'a dozen other laptops'. A second strength is that the new system is 'adapted to suit' a variety of funders and other extra-agencies.

> It can generate a report for City of Dublin Youth Service Board; it can generate
> a report for other organisations . . . rather than rehashing all the information,
> you just put in the formats.

*Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)*
All interviewees 'routinely used', or were 'very familiar' with ILPs. According to one worker, these 'plans', essentially, seek to profile participating young people across a 'range of social and intellectual competencies'. A second highlighted a key weakness - that because the

numerical scoring mechanism is 'a very subjective thing', there is a need to 'continually monitor . . . the descriptors . . . what is a one, a two, a three?  A third spoke about the importance of supplementary qualitative information.

> It's numerical, but there's an explanation.  It isn't about just numbers, numbers, numbers.  I would have a huge difficulty with putting in something without being able to back it up.

It was recalled that, prior to the ILPs, 'we all had the opinion that we knew what every child was like everywhere; because they were a certain way with us we assumed that they were like that in other places'.  Other workers contrasted these 'assumptions' by claiming, firstly, that the ILPs enable the youth worker to work 'more strategically' and to see the young person as 'a whole entity'; secondly, that the ILP method was 'children centred' in terms of programme design.

> Because you forget a lot if it's not down in front of you, how they're doing in this area or how they're doing in that area – what area you can help them develop?

> We had programmes running and then we'd just target specific kids for them and it was like whether they were interested or not.  Now we think about building programmes around specific children rather than just putting a programme and putting kids into it.

The interviews evidence a wide application of the ILPs spanning early primary to post secondary education.  A team leader recalled a recent occasion where 'young people who are aged 16-plus' were engaged in ILP processes.  Here, youth workers helped these young people develop their own ILP's allowing them to 'take control over their own development'.  The team leader added that 'we see the ILP as a really good tool to do this', but accepted that 'we are so busy that it can be quite difficult at times to do'.  Another worker highlighted a wider impact of the ILPs in terms the RLC's homework support provision.

> A lot of our homework support has been changed through the thinking of the ILP.  It has changed our thinking.

However, several interviewees also drew attention to some systemic weaknesses in the ILPs concluding that the process should be 'dedicated' more time and resources.

> We should be refining the competencies and domains . . . because some are relevant and some aren't . . . analysing the practice hasn't actually taken place, as it should.

> There has been no formal training of anyone in how the ILPs work.

> There's inconsistency in how people are scoring different aspects of it.

It should consist of doing the scoring, reviewing and deciding on the next programme, with everyone there, so everyone knows what's what.

*Logic Models*

There was broad agreement that Logic Models have made a positive contribution to the work of the RLC.  The consensus was that this 'focus on outcomes' encourages youth workers to 'reflect on what they're doing . . . does it work, and is it effective'?

Start with the outcomes, to start knowing what you want to get out of the work.  I think that's an important place to start from and work back from there.

The logic model is great . . . when you're not sure what you're doing, it just gives it a focus, and it gives it an outcome.

Logic models come up in every session sheet so every time . . . you're reminded of those overall outcomes.

Several respondents claimed that Atlantic instigated the ILPs and have consistently promoted 'this way of working'.  One worker added that **'**the idea of filling out logic models is really embedded now in the project; we do that all the time'.  While another claimed that specific logic models were developed using collaborative approaches.

We do the logic model together.  No one just puts a logic model and says, "This is it," we have our input into that and say, "Well actually I don't think this is going to work . . . I don't think they're at this level yet".

It was also claimed that one of the most important features of the Logic Models was that 'they also show the impracticalities of trying to do too much'.

You can have a great logic model, but when you work it all out, you might have a hundred hours a week . . . you realise the amount of work that's connected to everything that you commit to do.

However, it was also conceded that, firstly, the 'standard and rigour' of logic models across the RLC is 'variable; secondly, that 'they present 'a real challenge for people to embrace' in terms of 'the difference between an output and an outcome . . . the difference between an activity and an input'; thirdly, that there has been inadequate 'on-going support' for staff in terms of training.

There's always room for improvement in terms of the information.  But I think overall, it depends on how well a person *gets* the logic model.

If we've been weak anywhere, I think we've been weak maybe at not spending enough time with staff on learning how the logic models work.

> We probably could have got in some more outside on-going support around logic modelling, like the Centre for Effective Services.

*Summary*

The following précis outlines the perspectives of Rialto personnel with specific reference to the four research questions.

### 1. Critical junctures most likely to yield positive outcomes for young people.

The interviews indicate a broad consensus amongst Rialto personnel that the establishment of improved inter-personal relations and structured organisational links between the Rialto Learning Community and local schools was 'long overdue'. The, often, 'dysfunctional' nature of historic relations between the community and local schools has clearly engendered 'distrust in the whole school system' for many RLC workers. These concerns relate to both the schools' pedagogic practice and behaviour management techniques. Importantly, these perceptions are based on a range of engagement levels, such as: RLC staffs' personal recollections of their own time at school; their experience as mothers of pupils; and their professional experience in terms of engaging with the schools on behalf of the RLC.

The Community School Strategy (CSS) embodies a series of composite strategies, practices of information sharing and network activities, which have been developed over a number of years. According to the Rialto respondents the two homework clubs are an integral element of the CSS. However, it was also claimed that the efficacy of such clubs in terms of yielding positive outcomes for participating young people was, essentially, contingent on both collaborative engagement with schools and effective parental involvement.

The Principal's Network is viewed as a critical forum within which extant practice and relational tensions are mediated and a 'synthesis', in terms of academic content is achieved. It is also clear that this network is an important composite of the RLC's dedicated strategy for engaging with schools. However, it is equally apparent that, in the absence of a similarly dedicated strategy, engaging with parents and encouraging their fuller involvement has become 'increasingly difficult'. The two other networks in the CSS were also identified as important junctures. The first of these, the literacy network, is roundly commended for affording opportunities to the RLC and local schools to engage actively with each other. The second relates to the shared, in-service training in restorative practice undertaken by teachers and RLC staff. This programme has clearly fostered improved relations between youth workers and the local schools.

Similarly, the interviews indicate that the joint visitation to New York was: firstly, the 'catalyst' for subsequent collaboration and the establishment of structured links between schools and the RLC; and secondly, 'transformative' in terms of inter-personal relations and mutual understanding.

More broadly, it is clear that the embeddedness of the RLC in the wider community, particularly in terms of the span of its activities, means that they engage on many different levels with a wide age-range of cohorts. Here the value of the both the Arts Programme and

the homework clubs is most apparent, in particular, the way these elements of the RLC provide continuums of engagement from early primary to post secondary.

The Rialto interviews consistently highlight the pursuance of holistic and long term approaches, nascent examples of collaborative practice with schools, and the RLC's unique influence and reach within the local community. Moreover, the literature and the qualitative data presented here also concur that these are the very factors which are most likely to create improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion.

## 2. Significant practices underpinning these critical junctures

There was broad agreement amongst Rialto personnel that the Community School Strategy (CSS), in particular, the composite networks as detailed above have encouraged meaningful change in practices. For example, many respondents highlighted emergent processes such as schools providing materials (i.e. literacy packs) and guidance for the homework clubs. Generally, this entails sharing contemporary teaching methods (such as phonics and narratives) and information around individual literacy levels (such as test scores). It is also clear that recent initiatives where school teachers and homework club staff have worked and undertaken in-service training together have been highly beneficial. Moreover, the data also indicates that such benefits extend beyond these two groups and that young people have responded very well to such visible collaborations.

According to Rialto personnel, engagement with young people in the homework clubs and Arts Programme have always been informed with a view to facilitate access to third level education or progression routes in the various art forms. However, the recently improved relationship with local schools and a renewed RLC emphasis on educational pathways for young people means that the RLC is now better placed to provide guidance on, for example, the matriculation requirements for university, or, to help talented young artists develop and 'professionalise' their skills. Nonetheless, there have been considerable challenges in fully implementing many of these practice changes. Several Rialto personnel recalled serious resistance on the part of the schools and it is also fair to say that a number of staff remain sceptical, firstly, that the schools are sufficiently aware of many young people's socio-spatial disadvantage; and secondly, that they value, or even understand, youth work. Additionally, many parents continue to harbour negative perceptions of schools related to their own experience as former pupils.

Two other impediments to positive practice changes appear related to the current economic downturn. It is clear that the RLC have been unable establish a dedicated strategy for parents, or to fully integrate programmes, particularly, the Arts Programme with local schools, primarily, because, there was no funding to do so.

On an organisational basis, the interviews convey that the restructuring of the RLC has presented significant challenges, particularly in terms of integrating three very different entities into one cohesive body. It is also clear that the database, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and Logic Models are central to the RLC's day-to-day activities. The outcomes based ethos, which their primary funder Atlantic have consistently promoted, is now firmly

embedded in the RLC. While the consensus was that the ILPs and logic models are user friendly, popular and effective, the same cannot be said about the database. The endless technical issues which have so plagued its operability have also had a 'disruptive' effect on the organisation and a 'demoralising' effect on staff.

### 3. Creating a seamless learning environment between home, school and community

One of the most striking themes to emerge from the Rialto interviews was the disjointed and, often, acrimonious nature of historic relationships between the schools and the community. There was also ample evidence to suggest that, for many young people, there is very little or, indeed, no support at home in terms of their educational welfare. It was widely conceded that, primarily as a result of their own negative experiences and lack of capacity, many parents were incapable of supporting their children's education. Thus, any undertaking to create a seamless learning environment for young people between home, school and community in the Dolphin and Fatima estates appears, at the very least, ambitious. However, the work of the RLC, particularly, in the homework clubs clearly demonstrates the art of the possible. The interviews provide innumerable examples of the homework clubs mediating difficult situations for young people in both their school and home lives. The interviews further attest to a range of social, emotional and educational benefits and it is also clear that young people enjoy the fluid access the homework clubs give them to other RLC activities.

The homework clubs cannot, however, work in isolation and Rialto personnel were clear that they did not exist to perform the work of the schools, but, rather were there to support young people with their schoolwork. One of the most important elements of this support was communication with schools and in this regard, the homework journals are seen as a very valuable mechanism.

### 4. Space(s) occupied by the Rialto Learning Community in this learning environment

Throughout this section of the report, a wide variety of examples of the RLC's reach and influence in the local community have been presented. The RLC engages with young people across a broad range of age groups, and as such have provided a continuum of support, in many cases, from early primary to post secondary. The RLC is also largely credited with the rich local heritage of youth work and community based arts. Indeed, many parents and staff are former attendees of homework clubs and / or youth arts programmes. It is also clear that a significant proportion of Rialto personnel was raised and continues to live in the local area. Thus, firstly, they share, to an extent, the socio-spatial experiences of the families they engage with. Secondly, by sending their own children to the local schools, they can more readily relate to the local challenges many parent face in supporting their children's education.

**Interviews with School personnel**

During the month of June 2012, 14 semi-structured interviews were carried out across 5 of the 7 Rialto Learning Community (RLC) network schools.  A further 3 interviews were conducted in October 2012, two of which, included interviewees from a school within the Rialto area but which currently is not part of the RLC network.  Each interview lasted approximately one hour and interviewees included:

- 8 Principals (including 2 ex-principals)
- 1 Deputy Principal
- 6 teachers (including 2 home-school liaison teachers)
- 2 librarians

Each interview was audio recorded and these recordings were transcribed to allow for detailed analysis.  This report, thus, presents a synthesis of the responses given during interviews in relation to three of the four key research questions[9] which were established for the proposed process evaluation.  These research questions were jointly agreed upon by the Expert Advisory Group, the Rialto Learning Community and the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's University, Belfast:

1. What are the critical junctures between and within school, community projects and home that are likely, in the long-term, to yield improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion?
2. What are the significant practices/changes in practice that underpin these critical junctures, and what have been the challenges to implementing these practices?
3. To what extent have these significant practices proved effective in creating a seamless learning environment for young people between home, school and community?

These research questions were explored by focusing on a key element of the work of the Rialto Learning Community: the Community School Strategy.  This strategy encompasses collaborative activities and communication processes between local schools and RLC after-school activities, primarily, the two homework clubs in the Fatima and Dolphin estates.

In preparation for these examinations, interview schedules were designed with a particular focus on schools' knowledge of the RLC, levels of collaboration, the sharing of information, benefits to young people, and more broadly, school approaches to the community.  The responses from these interview schedules have been organised into the following 12 thematic categorisations:

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[9] The fourth research question was specifically directed towards RLC interviewees and the Rialto Arts Programme personnel only.

1. The Socio-Economic Context
2. Knowledge of the RLC and the Community School Strategy
3. Views on the key features (critical junctures) of the RLC/Community School Strategy
4. Involvement/Collaboration with the RLC
5. Sharing of Information
6. Challenges to the Development of Community-School Collaboration
7. Building further links between the RLC and Schools
8. Benefits for young people of community-school links and community interventions
9. Collaboration between Schools
10. Parental Contact and Involvement (and associated issues)
11. Homework Clubs
12. Restorative Practice Training

Following examination of these emergent themes, the perspectives of the Principals, Deputy Principals, Teachers and Librarians interviewed will then be summarised in relation to the three research questions.

### *The Socio-Economic Context*

Similar to the Rialto respondents, the teachers, principals and librarians interviewed here were duly cognisant of the social disadvantage which so pervades the local environment. Alongside the challenges presented by the current recession in the Republic, one of the first issues raised in terms of this disadvantage was the spatial concentration of deprivation which, it was argued, stemmed from a historic overreliance on the part of the state to create mass social housing projects. Indeed, one principal use the term 'social engineering' and highlighted policy failings and resultant generational impacts.

> The government . . . cluster all the social housing together and over the generations you have a certain element that live in social housing that have no ambition or they don't get out of it. And they expect that their kids will get social housing.

More broadly, there was a consensus that significant sections of the Rialto catchment area were routinely characterised by family breakdowns, unemployment, alcoholism, drug use, crime and violence. One teacher claimed that 'it takes a special type of teacher to teach these children', while a principal spoke about bullying being a 'huge issue', often, made infinitely more complex because of local criminal disputes.

> You would be up against it when you'd be trying to get to the detail of whose doing what to whom. The outside influence and often it would be around drugs families and families living in the same flat complexes.

Class related disadvantage was also raised by another principal who contrasted the high expectations of 'middle class schools' where 'you're there pushing a door which is already open' with low expectations of schools in deprived communities.

Here you've got to shoulder the door and get it open in the first place. And you must want for the children . . . the same high . . . expectations. Otherwise we're excluding people and we're creating elite.

### *Knowledge of the RLC and the Community School Strategy*

Each interview was initiated by asking interviewees if they knew of the RLC and the Community School Strategy. All those interviewed indicated that they were familiar with aspects of the work being carried out by the RLC and it would seem that the individual that was most familiar to all was the RLC coordinator. There did, however, appear to be wide variation in the knowledge of interviewees in relation to the aims of and the services provided by the RLC.

Likewise, there was found to be varying levels of involvement in the RLC networks (Principal's Network, Literacy Network, Restorative Practice Network) and other activities such as in-service training. For example, whilst all principals (including the two ex-principals), bar one, were members of the Principal's Network, involvement ranged from one a year (attending just one meeting) to having been involved from the outset and having taken the introductory trip to New York which had been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. Similarly, whilst some teachers may have only, for example, attended one meeting or in-service training event over the years, others were found to be much more involved by, for instance, helping to design in-service training courses.

An examination of responses revealed that interviewees considered the aims of the RLC and the Community School Strategy to include the following:

- Bringing together available services in the area, including schools and out of school services to improve provision for young people
- Raising awareness of ways to improve poor relations: schools-communities-parents, visiting exemplary schools (in US)
- Raising awareness of the RLC and Rialto area by, for example, being shown the facilities available and the history of the development of the area over recent years
- Effective liaison between community and schools in order to earn each other's trust and communicate more effectively
- Instil confidence in the community and improve educational outcomes for young people e.g. literacy
- Increase school attendance and completion and help young people with their homework, i.e. stress its meaning and importance
- Increase feelings of wellbeing and self-esteem among young people
- 'To have more flow between what was happening in school and what was happening in the community'

### *Views on the critical junctures of the RLC/Community School Strategy*
*Group visit to New York*

It was pointed out that in 2009 a trip to New York had been organised. This trip had been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and those invited to participate included a number of school principals from the Rialto area and community personnel from the Rialto Youth

Project (RYP).  The objective of the trip, as seen by one interviewee, was twofold. Firstly, participants were invited to visit various schools around New York City where partnerships had been established with local youth projects.  The aim of these visits was to allow participants to see how such projects had been developed and how they were currently being rolled out.  One interviewee pointed out that what they saw in New York were 'models of absolutely fantastic practice'.

The second objective of this trip, and of most relevance to this report, was that of providing a space which would enable individuals from Rialto schools and community staff to 'get to know each other'.  This was regarded as a very important factor in the initial development of community-school relations in the Rialto area.  As one participant pointed out, this was where 'began a better understanding between the community people on the one hand and us on the other hand'.  For another interviewee it was felt that this was where she started to see how school and community could work together.  And for another it was felt that this 'was the key thing that bonded the group'.  Similar to the Rialto personnel, many school respondents highlighted the effective synchronisation of inter-agency activity evidenced in the New York projects.

> You know this idea that the health facility, dental facility, psychologist facility, it's
> all actually on site, this kind of thing . . . if you really were to start again . . . in a
> greenfield site, this is what you'd look to see happening I think.

*Continuity of Personnel, Relationships and Communication*
A key feature that was identified as being crucial in the development of the RLC and community-school links was that of continuity of personnel and continuity of relationships. In particular, the RLC coordinator was commended by a number of interviewees for the work and effort that she had contributed in this regard over the preceding few years.  A librarian claimed that if this co-ordinator 'wasn't calling the meetings . . .  the meetings definitely wouldn't be called'.  This was supported by a principal who commented:

> Let me tell you what I think works . . . (the coordinator) . . . has been there
> from the beginning and she's still there . . . she is an excellent communicator .
> . . she has been the thread running through the whole thing.

Another principal highlighted the issue of continuity by recalling that many of the New York attendees are no longer in post.

> New York was great.  But . . . most of the principals have retired, moved on . . . I
> think there's only (name) from Loretto Primary left out of those few.

*Belief in the Process*
A further key feature highlighted in the interviews was that those involved in an initiative such as the RLC must believe that what they are trying to achieve is of vital importance - in this instance, the well-being of young people.  As one interviewee put it, 'your underlying principle is to serve your students  . . . and to do that in the best way that you can'. Ultimately, it was felt that for community-school links to develop effectively a key factor was

that all those involved had to 'buy-in' to the process. It was seen as especially important that those at a managerial level i.e. school principals, were committed to the process. For example, another interviewee commented:

> So it needs people in a certain level of authority, or at the top, to model that and to be open for it to permeate down. If we had a principal that didn't buy into it, it just wouldn't happen . . . And if they didn't have someone like [the co-ordinator] that promotes it at that end, it just wouldn't happen either.

It was quite apparent from the majority of interviews that school staff are of the view that Rialto personnel are highly motivated and committed to doing their utmost to enhance the well-being and educational outcomes for the young people that they serve.

*Principal's Network*
In relation to the Principal's Network, there appeared to be a very positive perception of the work being carried within this forum. One interviewee said that she found the principals' meetings to be 'hugely beneficial'. Firstly, she suggested that these meetings provide insight as to 'what's going on in the community'. Secondly, the principals' meetings were seen as an 'opportunity to meet other people who were doing the same job in the same area with the same challenges'. She felt that there was a 'real eagerness' among principals for such a forum and that this was an essential factor in developing community-school cooperation and understanding. It was pointed out that these meetings allowed for a wide variety of discussions to take place. Discussions during principals' meeting included: school targets; reading surveys; Arts seminars; in-service training for primary school teachers; summer projects; restorative practice training; the current Queen's University evaluation. In addition, as one interviewee pointed out 'a major discussion through the year would be homework and homework policies and methods of communication between school and home and school and homework club, such as the school journal'.

*Involvement in the community*
From the schools perspective, a key feature in the development of positive community-school relations was also seen as the facilitation of direct involvement by teachers in the community and vice versa. One interviewee stated:

> In terms familiarity with each other, I think that made a huge difference . . . me being seen down there, [the coordinator] being seen up here . . . I think that's really important.

Another interviewee suggested that up until approximately two years previously there had been 'a lot of disjointedness . . . between the school and community'. This interviewee felt that this had, 'improved in the last year or two'. That is to say that, prior to this time, schools knew that there were homework clubs within the community but that there was 'no communication between us, the class teacher and what was happening in the homework clubs'. Yet another interviewee similarly referred to the development of her schools community involvement over recent years as a result of the 'courses' provided for teachers by the RLC. Several interviewees, in fact, commented on the recent opportunities that had

been provided for teachers to visit the Rialto area and to see the facilities that are available for young people.  In addition, it was noted just how important it was for teaching staff (who, themselves, did not come from a disadvantaged background) to see, firsthand, exactly 'what sort of housing these children are in'.  One comment made in this regard was, 'it is a bit of an eye-opener to see where some of the girls are living'.  Another interviewee commented that 'you can't but be affected when you actually go into the children's community and see where they live'.  To be aware of this was indeed seen as a 'good thing' and 'important'.

Several respondents conceded that 'because a lot of our teachers aren't from the area' it was important to 'establish a link to get us involved down there a bit more.  The consensus being that involvement in the community was 'a positive thing'.  One principal admitted, however, that a small number of teachers remain resistant.

> We've an extremely committed staff here but . . . there can be a small number who think, "I'm a teacher and I don't really care what goes on," but I do think it's a very, very small number that have that perception.

*Collaboration with the Rialto Learning Community*
One of the most consistent themes to emerge from the interviews was the acceptance among school personnel of the unique role played by the Rialto youth workers in terms of supporting the educational welfare of young people.  One teacher, for example, contrasted in the ways in which teachers and youth workers are perceived by local youths.

> So they see them as neighbours almost, not just support workers for homework. Whereas I suppose they just see us in school . . . they'd box us off a little bit differently – because we're not living in the community . . . The youth workers are more informal and friendly, I suppose.

Similarly, a principal highlighted the pseudo parenting function of the RLC's youth provision.

> The community clubs are really making up for a deficit a lot of the time in the parenting capacity and they're acting as pseudo parents and must keep the children out of trouble.  So I'd see them as massively important within formative years.

As indicated above, in terms of the current status of involvement and collaboration with the RLC it appeared to be the case that for interviewees the main point of contact was the RLC coordinator.  This contact was mainly by way of face-to-face meetings or via email.  More recently however, as will be outlined, greater contact appeared to be underway, with teachers becoming more familiar with the RLC homework club personnel.  The general consensus was (a) that collaboration between schools and the RLC provides 'an extra layer of support in for the students'; and (b) that there was a growing realistion of the interplay between school and community life.

I think now we're beginning to develop the links and develop the perception that what goes on in the community and what goes on in school are so closely intertwined.

Interviewees also revealed a number of ways by which, in recent years, schools had become more involved with the RLC.

*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)*
It was pointed out by several interviewees that since the establishment of the DEIS initiative[10] (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an action plan for educational inclusion), schools are required, as part of this initiative, to put in place three yearly plans for creating greater links with the community (DEIS, 2005) .  Extra funding is provided by government for implementation of these plans.  A number of interviewees indicated that working with the RLC had contributed to their targets in this regard.

*School visits and communication*
Several interviewees indicated that, over the previous year, plans had been set in motion for Rialto staff, particularly from the homework clubs (in the Fatima and Dolphin estates), to visit schools and to interact with teachers for the benefit of young people.  Interviewees in one primary school outlined the progress that had been made in this direction.  For example, within the previous few weeks it was pointed out that homework support personnel from Rialto had visited their school and had had discussions with teachers regarding some young people with whom homework difficulties/issues had been identified. The school had further agreed that, from the beginning of the next academic year (September 2012), homework club personnel from Rialto would be invited to visit this school on a regular basis (e.g. once monthly).  The purpose of these visits would be to enable Rialto staff to meet on a one-to-one basis with teachers of children who were attending Rialto homework clubs and that these meeting would be to, for example, help 'iron out . . . cross communication' in relation to a variety of concerns including young people possibly indicating that they did not have homework when they actually did and the misuse of homework journals (these issues will be elaborated upon later in the report).  It was regarded as extremely important that face-to-face meetings were held and there seemed to be a general feeling that if a comprehensive community-school link were to be maintained then 'all stakeholders in the learning process should know about each other'. At this point it was felt that work was still required in this direction.

*Assistance with development of courses for teachers*
Two interviewees (home-school liaison teachers) indicated that over the previous three years they had been asked to assist the RLC coordinator with designing summer courses/activities for teachers.  They indicated that they had given advice on what they thought teachers would like and what would be useful on such courses.  Thus, for these

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[10] DEIS is an initiative of the Irish State's Department for Education and Skills which aims to promote educational inclusion and address educational needs in areas experiencing high social and economic disadvantage.  Schools that are eligible for the Schools Support Programme through the implementation of this initiative receive additional support and resources according to their level of need.

schools, this involvement had aided in furthering links with the RLC.  Indeed several other interviewees stated that they had attended these courses and had found them to be very useful.  The activities included: visiting the homework clubs; meeting the homework personnel; meeting the 'Fatima Youth Initiative and the Health Initiative'.

*Provision of and guidance with materials*
Two interviewees indicated how the RLC coordinator had requested from them advice and materials/worksheets around literacy and numeracy that could be incorporated into the activities of the RLC summer project.  The objective of this, it would seem, was to try to ensure that young people, 'wouldn't drop down' in these academic areas over the summer break.  Another interviewee felt that this could be a very useful strategy and that, with some thought, a variety of school subjects could be addressed through, for example, Art. She stated, 'Art does open a lot of avenues, I think, to literacy and numeracy'.  Yet another interviewee indicated that, at a literacy network meeting she had attended, discussions had taken place regarding how RLC youth workers could best be helped to see how, for example, literacy could be made 'fun' and incorporated into other activities i.e. 'looking at ways that youth workers could utilise what they did to focus a little bit on literacy'.  Suggestions given in this regard included, for example, 'looking up timetables when planning a trip' and 'map reading'.  It was suggested that youth leaders were probably already doing this but 'didn't even realise'.

*Advice regarding appropriate materials*
A number of interviewees pointed out that they had been further asked for educational advice from the RLC coordinator.  For example, in terms of literacy provision, some teachers in one school indicated that they had been asked for information on the reading strategies used within the school.  The purpose for this, it was felt, was to ensure that there was not 'a dichotomy between what happens there and what happens here' in terms of literacy support for young people.  In another school it was indicated that a homework club leader had also sought advice from the librarian regarding the types of books young people enjoy and had borrowed library books to be made available in the homework clubs.

*Other activities*
Within the previous year in one school it was pointed out that, with the agreement of the Principal, the RLC coordinator had organised an evening course for parents and past pupils. The objective of the course had been to 'instill confidence in people' and to encourage them to 'get back into education first and then into employment'.

**Sharing of information**
*Information on individual pupils*
In terms of the sharing of individual pupil information between the RLC and schools, there appeared to be differences from school to school in terms of what was being shared.  Whilst some interviewees were unsure as to what information was shared, others indicated that they had received literacy assessments and reports from the RLC for specific pupils.  In addition, a number of interviewees mentioned a survey that had been carried out by the RLC in relation to attitudes to reading.  Yet other schools reported that they had provided the RLC with, for example, standardised scores (literacy and numeracy) from school assessments

and pupil information regarding 'attendance and punctuality in school'.  In yet another school it was indicated that Rialto personnel had inquired about the possibility of being provided with information regarding academic difficulties for specific young people and in theory this exchange of information was regarded as being 'definitely a good idea'.  In fact within this particular school there had been discussion regarding the possibility of supplying the Rialto homework clubs with a number of iPads which young people could make use of.  It was suggested by at least one interviewee that possibly the sharing of information was, as yet, 'not as effective . . . as it might be'.

*Confidentiality*

It was also highlighted that an important issue related to the sharing of information was that of 'confidentiality' and ensuring that parental consent was in place for such exchange.  As one interviewee put it, 'what you are depending on is people's professionalism if you do give out information on students'.  Furthermore this interviewee intimated that, based on being provided with confidential information regarding individual young people, some caution had to be exercised to ensure that recipients, 'will not make a judgement on the students or will disadvantage the student in any way through knowing that information or make reference to it inappropriately'.  Thus confidentiality was seen as paramount in relation to sharing of individual pupil information and hence there was seen to be a 'fine line' between what was and what was not appropriate to share.

A small number of interviewees appeared to be familiar with the RLC 'Communication and Information Sharing Protocol' which is completed by parents and, amongst other things, requests parental permission for community-school exchange of information on young people.  This interviewee indicated that this document had been discussed in relation to 'freedom of information' and just how much information it was permissible for schools to share in relation to young people.  As one interviewee claimed, 'it's really, really important . . that the parents have to give permission because, otherwise, we could be in big, big trouble with data protection'.

*Other Issues*

A small number of interviewees indicated that they knew of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) that are in development by RLC.  However, to-date, no-one appeared to have seen them. When asked, interviewees referred to their own Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and indicated that such 'plans of action' are drawn up for young people who are of concern to staff or who had been identified as having 'special needs'.

When asked, most interviewees appeared to be aware of the RLC Arts programmes but no one seemed to be familiar in any way with the details of these programmes.  Interviewees in one school indicated that they had attended a talk by the Arts coordinator and had visited an art room one year previous and appeared to be very impressed with the facilities. Likewise, another interviewee referred to a 'stilts' parade that had taken place two years previous. However, there did not appear to be any involvement from school personnel in these initiatives.

### Challenges to the development of community-school collaboration
When interviewees were asked to identify any potential challenges in relation to working with the community it seemed the view was that, in principle, there were not any difficulties. That is to say, school and community were seen to be 'working with the same type of people, the same parents, the same kids, and the same problems'. Hence, it was said that each faced 'common problems'. However, it was broadly accepted that Schools have, historically, rarely felt the need to communicate with the wider community.

> Schools are independent republics. That's really the way in works. You've got a board of a management . . . and you've got a cohort of students for whom you have responsibility.

Moreover, a number of additional inhibiting factors were identified.

*Minority of pupils*
A challenge suggested by one participant in terms of school-RLC collaboration was that it is difficult to create a whole-school link with the RLC because only a small proportion of pupils from each school actually live in the Rialto area. This interviewee pointed out that, 'any work that you do in school must be for the whole population'.

A solution suggested in this respect was for schools and classroom teachers to become more aware of individual pupils and their background. Thus, it was said that the work of the RLC needs to be 'percolated into the classroom'.

*Staff time*
Another challenge which was alluded to by quite a number of interviewees in terms of further development of school-community relations was that of time. It was said that due to the fact that schools in the Republic of Ireland, especially in disadvantaged areas, have very little administrative support they are, thus, 'full on with what they already have to do'. Hence, a number of interviewees indicated that whilst they had been invited to the various network meetings with the RLC (Principals', Literacy and Restorative Practice), they had often been unable to attend due to commitments within their schools. It was also said that often there was simply a 'clash' with meeting dates and school commitments.

*Changes for schools/teachers in funding and workload*
It was also pointed out by a number of principals that recent changes within schools in terms of funding/pay and workload appeared of have made a difference to the attitudes and enthusiasm of teaching staff. In particular a new governmental arrangement referred to as the 'Croke Park hour' has led to a general lack of up-take by teachers for extracurricular events and courses. In effect, the Croke Park hour means that teachers are required to work one extra hour per week. This hour is to be used for such matters as school/staff development including planning, policy development, staff meetings and in-service training. One principal suggested that 'at the moment, people are exhausted'. In addition, she went on to say that it is becoming 'harder and harder to free people up to attend things'. So, whilst this principal suggested that for school-community relations to be further developed, a vital ingredient would be to keep up the momentum in terms of interactions. She also

pointed out that, 'with the best will in the world, people would want to attend things but it's not possible'.

Interestingly, it was said that prior to the Croke Park hour being implemented teachers were voluntarily very willing to come into work early and often were found to stay behind without question for extracurricular events. However, now that the extra commitment has been enforced by way of the Croke Park hour teachers seem less willing to take on extra work. This principal further stated that there was also a pay cut around the same time as the Croke Park hour was implemented. Thus, she felt that 'the willingness to do other things after school without counting the cost has diminished a little'. This point was similarly reiterated by a further principal.

> At the moment morale is very . . . low in the teaching profession and I think that this has had a knock on effect on teachers' willingness to give a little bit extra.

Another interviewee claimed that 'teachers actually work longer without being told to do it. The same source added that 'when we're then told to work an hour, we're working less'.

It was further highlighted that retaining staff in 'tough' schools was increasingly difficult because, as one principal posited, 'career incentives' are no longer available.

> The reason to stay in a school has kind of gone now, when you're a young member of staff, because you're no longer building up seniority towards promotion in post. There are no promotions, there's a moratorium . . . so if you're going to get paid, say €30,000 to teach in a tough school or €30,000 to teach in an academic easy school, which do you pick?

*Misunderstandings between schools and the community*
It was suggested by a few participants that a challenge or barrier that existed, especially at the outset i.e. when community-school links were being established, was that 'community workers' may have had a somewhat negative perception of schools. As one interviewee put it, schools were seen as 'the bad guys' and that they 'rejected people'. Another interviewee suggested that because of lack of communication community staff would 'have taken the children's side – and the children may have experienced failure in school and would have a negative attitude towards school'. One interviewee, however, felt that a turning point had been made and that this barrier had started to be 'broken down' as a result of the trip to New York, as outlined above. Likewise another interviewee suggested that there was a history of misunderstandings being held on both sides.

> In the same way I think there was a lot of misconceptions among the community about what the schools were doing and from the school what was going in on the community, you know, an ignorance in some ways that we would hear from the children about activities going on in the community but there was no formal way of knowing about them or there was no way of finding out what was going on. I knew there were summer projects, I knew there were homework clubs but I didn't know the people involved in them, and I think, you

know, from the New York trip certainly that idea of going away with the local Principals and the people from the community and all together discussion, I think that brought out a lot.

This interviewee also felt that 'things changed' after the New York trip. She suggested that this event had led to a greater awareness by school principals of the need to be perhaps more inclusive. That is to say, from her perspective at least, she began to realise that if her school was 'doing things for the children' then there was a responsibility on her part to invite individuals from the community to be part of such events. Likewise, after the trip to New York, she noted that the community were issuing invitations to schools to events in the Rialto F2 centre. Hence, the existing barriers were being dissolved further by these interactions. An example given in this regard was the summer courses organised by the Rialto coordinator for primary school teachers.

It was suggested then that a further step towards resolving misunderstandings was for community staff/homework support leaders to visit the schools and to become acquainted with and form relationships with the classroom teachers. A further objective of such visits was regarded as allowing pupils to see 'that there's a connection between the school and the homework club'. In fact, as pointed out above, in one school at least such plans are in place for the incoming school year. Furthermore, it was said that the home-school liaison teacher from this school is now working with Rialto homework club personnel to involve these staff in paired-reading practices as carried out within the school. One interviewee stated 'I think there is a realisation that the school and the community have to work together for the good of the child'.

Whilst the above interviewees felt that communications had changed and developed between themselves and RLC personnel, there still remained a few who appeared to feel that, 'dialogue' remained relatively poor and that schools were not aware of community activities. Again a solution in this direction was for more regular, planned contact. However, as referred to above, it was acknowledged that there were limits to the amount of time that teachers could give over to engaging with community activities. In addition, the question was raised as to what the actual perceptions of community staff were towards schools, would teachers be welcomed, and that it would be very interesting to know this.

More broadly, it was accepted that many teachers make little attempt to connect with the local community.

> Many of the people that I worked with here had never ever, ever set foot outside of the school except into their cars and into their own neighbourhoods. So they had never been down in the community.

*Different Remits*
Several interviewees referred to the fact that schools and the community have different 'remits'. That is to say that whilst it was acknowledged that the central focus, 'the development of students or young people', was the same, it was felt that priorities may differ. For instance, it was said that the object for schools was ultimately the young person's

education whereas the community may have 'different focuses'. The solution here was seen to be that of finding a way to 'intertwine' what both parties are trying to achieve.

*Teachers' willingness to be involved with the community*
For the most part, there seemed to be the view that teaching staff did see the importance of working with the community for the benefit of young people. However, several interviewees appeared to feel that there may be reluctance among some teachers in this regard.

> There would be teachers who would consider it (school/community links) irrelevant. I would think there are other teachers who would be more open to it. But for teachers … teachers work in the school this is their place of work and this is where they carry out their functions really.

It was also suggested by a principal that such reluctance to engage with the outside community was more prevalent amongst 'older teachers'.

> I don't want to stigmatise older teachers but older teachers are less likely to embrace the involvement of outsiders in our school.

However, a second principal noted that many young teachers appear less than enthusiastic about working in socially deprived areas.

> Several of them are especially unhappy working with poorer children and should never have been given a job . . . they've been very unsettling for the staff. Pouring misery on everyone, saying how horrible it is. Three of them have left and the place is so much more upbeat without them.

There were a variety of additional reasons given for schools being reluctant to become more involved in the community. For example, it was suggested that whilst there may be the view that it was 'a good idea', staff did not necessarily want to add any additional workload by becoming actively involved in any way. So whilst they felt that if it were to assist in, for example, classroom behaviour and/or homework completion then they were in favour of community interventions. However, some may not be willing to be proactively involved.

Another reason given was that a small proportion of staff may be of the opinion that schools had not been involved in the community before 'so why should they start now'. The argument here was that schools have 'got on OK for 20 years without it'.

Yet another reason given was that staff may feel that there 'is need for boundaries'. An interesting point was made in this regard. For the most part teachers in the network schools tended to live outside of the area. One principal pointed out that a small number of teaching staff within this particular school had grown up in the Rialto area. However, it was noted that since qualifying as teachers they had moved out of the area.

> When we are ultimately successful with our students and we educate them . . .
> we don't get their children.  So I call it negative feedback . . . we don't reap the
> benefit by having their children back because they always move.

One interviewee gave two key reasons as to why teachers did not live in the area.  The first was that by becoming teachers they then 'had the income to move out' of this disadvantaged area.  The second reason was that, should a teacher continue to live in the area, they may become a 'target'.  This was qualified by saying: 'While you get on with most fellas, there'll always be one'.

Conversely, a principal spoke of the 'street credibility' of the 'one or two' teachers who are former pupils.  The same source also claimed that it was a 'tremendous advantage' to have local secretarial employees who, similar to the Rialto workers, 'know the parents'.

> If I was starting a school from scratch now, the first thing I'd do is I would get
> the secretary and the attendance officer and the caretaker from the area of
> that school, because they know the parents and they actually draw so much
> fire away from the teachers.  (The parents) . . . see the secretary as one of
> their own . . . not some middle class teacher looking down on my son.

Hence, overall it was felt that things were moving in the right direction but there were still a number of 'barriers to be broken' in terms of convincing all teaching staff of the importance of working in conjunction with the community for the benefit of young people.

### Building further links between the RLC and schools

As outlined above, at this point in time, the general feeling appeared to be that there was still some distance to go in relation to building relations between schools and the RLC and, in particular, the homework clubs.  It was indicated that historically there had not been any strategic links created between schools and the community. Furthermore, either consciously or unconsciously, the view of teaching staff may have been that when young people (or staff) 'walk outside that gate in the evening and what happens outside . . . happens outside and is not school related'.  However, it was felt that this perception was almost certainly changing and that this could 'be nothing but positive for the students'.  In addition it was felt that for the building of community-school links ways had to be further sought 'to get the children and the parents to see the school and the community as one and not separate'.

During the interviews a variety of suggestions were made as to the way forward in terms of building greater links.

*Raising awareness through social networking media and school notice boards*
It was acknowledged, for example, that whilst certain school personnel were aware of the ongoing activities of the RLC, these were not always systematically relayed to all teaching staff within schools.  Hence, many staff members were little aware of these activities.  Several suggestions were made in this direction.

It was proposed that each school could have a 'link person' whereby the activities of the RLC could be passed on to all other members of staff. Alternatively, if this were not a feasible option another suggestion was that the RLC could possibly set up an interactive, web-based, 'forum' whereby staff could access information regarding the provisions of the community and how these could be of benefit to schools and teaching staff and vice versa. Other options proposed included the use of Facebook and/or Twitter and/or LinkedIn. It was acknowledged, however, that not everyone makes use of social networking media. Thus, another interviewee indicated that his school would be 'very open' to providing the RLC with an in-school noticeboard whereby activities and events being offer in the community could be displayed. It was felt that in this way 'kids that are passing the notice board' would see what was on offer and this would result in a 'heightened awareness'. It was pointed out that young people are often waiting on corridors between classes or at lunchtime and 'they're looking at noticeboards because they've nothing else to do'.

*School and community interchange*
Another suggestion towards building closer links was that possibly staff from Rialto could come into schools and run homework clubs on one to two days per week. It appeared to be the suggestion here that if the homework clubs were delivered in a 'school environment' they may be more effect. It was acknowledged though that only a small proportion of children in the school attend Rialto. Staff in this school noted that they had already also spoken about the possibility of some staff visiting the Rialto homework clubs 'to see what going on there' and it was noted that 'a number of staff have expressed an interest in doing this'.

Indeed and as already mentioned above, quite a number of interviewees appeared to feel that a key way for links between schools and the RLC to be strengthened was for Rialto personnel to be seen in schools more frequently. This, it was further argued, could be initiated by informal visits to the staff-rooms.

> Let these people come in and sit in the staffroom and have a cup of tea with us. I think that's when people [teachers] start accepting them and their role in the community and in relation to the school. I think when you know people for a while and you get to see them around, you're more likely to take on board their ideas.

Such visits, it was said, could then be followed by the RLC team possibly running short courses or giving presentations on the work being carried out by the RLC which would be of relevance to teachers, in particular which would help meet the needs of the 'DEIS requirements and the disadvantaged schools programme'. In a similar vein it was suggested that possibly the home-school liaison teacher could 'run a course' in the F2 Centre which demonstrated 'how to approach maths and English'. Similarly another interviewee suggested that teachers could possible conduct some 'short workshops' for homework club personnel in regard to how certain school subjects are approached and taught.

For example, it was said that it would be useful for homework club staff in Rialto to know more about the 'First Steps' programme. This programme is the method of teaching literacy for a number of schools in the area. It was felt that whilst Rialto staff had been given

information on this, it would be better for them to see the teaching in action as a way of them to better understanding this method.  As one interviewee put it, 'but until you see it in practice, you don't really completely understand it'.

*Home-school Liaison and parental involvement*
The importance of building stronger relations with home-school liaison teachers was referred to several times in terms of solidifying links, not only between schools and the community, but also to include parents. For example, one home-school interviewee provided an example of the benefit of being able, at one point, to communicate with the RLC co-ordinator in relation to a personal problem which existed with a pupil but where the school was having difficulties communicating with the parents in order to resolve the problem effectively.

In relation to this and other occasions, this interviewee noted how 'daunting' it can be for some parents to visit the schools.  She thus suggested how beneficial it would be for there to be a neutral space such as the F2 Centre in Rialto for teachers to meet with parents who possibly found this space (in their own community) to be much less intimidating.

> I think that I have seen a parent being a totally different person here with me at
> a meeting and down there I was talking to a totally different person in the
> community.

What was meant by this was that the parent was much more 'reasonable' and 'cooperative' when being met in her own community.  Hence, the interviewee felt that there had 'to be benefit in talking to people where they feel comfortable'.

Another suggestion was that schools and Rialto staff should work together in, 'stressing the importance of homework, stressing the importance of schoolwork and stressing the importance of continuing on in education'.  It was again felt though that for such messages to be fully appreciated by young people then parents also 'have to be on board' in this pursuit.  It was argued that somehow ways had to be found to help parents realise just how important this was for their children.  In addition, parents should be made aware that both schools and the RLC were not just interested in the academic achievements of young people but were also 'truly interested in their wellbeing and their futures'.

It was acknowledged for two reasons however that the practicalities of such an approach were difficult.  Firstly, and as mentioned above, only a small proportion of pupils within each school actually live in the Rialto area.  Secondly, it was claimed that possibly Union regulations may pose restrictions on teachers making visits to areas outside of school.

*Changes for schools by becoming involved with the RLC*
There seemed to mixed opinions with regard to whether school practices had changed in any way as a result of building greater links with the community.  In general comments made would appear to indicate that there did not appear to be a massive shift.  For example, one interviewee suggested that it was difficult really to know whether changes within the school had been significantly influenced by greater contact with the RLC.  This was because she felt that practices in schools were 'continuously changing'.  That said, it was pointed out that

schools are always trying to 'fine tune' their practices for the better and any new ideas from Rialto 'would be taken on board'.  Ultimately, one interviewee felt that possibly schools did need to make a bigger effort but felt also that the building of community-school links should be conducted slowly so not 'to scare people away'.

*Other suggestions*

Another suggestion with regard to how schools could be more involved during school hours was of a gardening programme being run by the RLC.  That is to say, it was suggested that the RLC team come to schools and demonstrate how they set up their garden and get schools 'started up' in developing their own gardens.  Alternatively, teachers and pupils could visit the F2 Centre for gardening activities.  In addition, it was suggested that for such events parents could be invited to take part.  Carrying out such activities was also seen as a further way by which teachers could get to know the staff within Rialto at a better level.  In general, it was stated 'there are so many brilliant programmes that are run down there – it would be great to bring them into the school a bit more'.

To summarise, ultimately, the building of community-school links was regarded as being a two-way process.  That is to say, it was important that the interchange between school and community was reciprocal for the best outcome.  Teachers should visit Rialto and Rialto staff should be seen within schools.  Likewise, when targeting parents, it was felt that possibly parents might be more inclined to attend events in the community.  However, interviewees felt that parents still need to lose their fear of visiting the school for the benefit of their children.

### Benefits for young people

*Community-School Links*

Interviewees were asked if they believed that young people benefited in any way from community-school links.  It was regarded by a number of interviewees that it was very difficult to measure the actual impact of community-school relationships for specific children.  Nonetheless, a number of benefits were identified.  For example, one interviewee stated, 'I think it is essential, if in no other way, it is emotionally good for the children to see us in each other's places'.

Another interviewee recalled an event that she had organised in her school in an attempt to, 'get people from the community to come up into the school'. Her objective was to attempt to break down the school-community barrier.  One feature she observed during this event was, 'the high glee . . . of some of the students'.  She felt this, 'meant a lot' to young people in that they could see the friendly relationship that existed between her as a school principal and the co-ordinator of the RLC who young people already knew well from the community.

Likewise another interviewee felt that young people would 'be chuffed' and 'so excited' to know that teaching staff were sufficiently interested in them as to take the time to visit their area.  One interviewee referred to a Christmas event she had attended in the Rialto F2 Centre the previous year.  She noted how good she had felt afterwards 'because you could just see that the kids were just so happy to see you there, for you to see their play'.

Furthermore, it was felt that the visits by teachers to the F2 Centre was of central importance in that it showed the young people that teachers where genuinely interested in them.

> I think they feel like you actually . . . care about them as well because you're showing an interest not just within the school but in what they're doing outside of school in her community'.

The same source went on to claim that, 'they might have low self-esteem and it really does give them a boost'. More broadly, the consensus was that for the children of the area, it was 'very positive' for teachers to be seen 'in and around the area'.

*Community Interventions*

For the most part, there appeared to be much admiration among interviewees for the work being carried out by the RLC and how this is benefitting young people. One respondent claimed that 'they do fantastic work in the homework clubs'. Similarly, another interviewee referred to the work of the RLC personnel as being, 'just fantastic altogether' in relation to their commitment to young people in the area.

Furthermore, the general perception appeared to be that young people very much enjoyed being part of the RLC.

> The children love the activities, they love the projects . . . any children that do tell us about it, they'll be buzzing afterwards . . . and they love all the workers that work with them.

A wide variety of comments were made in relation to the benefits to be had for young people by attending both to the homework clubs and the Arts provision. Firstly, as posited by one interviewee, 'it puts an extra layer of support in for the students . . . whether it's homework or whether it's looking after their social needs'.

Secondly, in terms of the homework support, it was acknowledged that if young people did not attend then they would not have their homework done the following day. As a result they would then be in 'a lot more trouble with teachers'.

Thirdly, it was indicated by several interviewees that by attending the activities provided by the RLC, young people were thus staying 'off the streets' and avoiding 'the influence of negative role models'. The after-school facilities being provided by the RLC were seen by most interviewees as giving young people a 'safe space'. Another interviewee suggested that staff within the RLC are 'looking after the children holistically . . . and nurturing them'. In addition, it was suggested that the evening provision being provided by the RLC was 'like a second home' for young people. It was regarded as 'somewhere nice to go, somewhere safe to go to and somewhere warm to go to and somewhere that resembles more normal home activities' when they leave school in the afternoon. Similarly, 'just having a place to go after school that had some structure to it . . . and adult input' was seen in a very positive light.

Fourthly, it was felt that in the community there may be more time for staff to sit down and chat informally with young people. In contrast, teaching staff are, first and foremost, obliged to deliver the curriculum and as such there is less opportunity for social interactions. Furthermore, it was suggested that community staff may be seen by young people as more approachable because many of the staff live in the same community and are viewed more as 'neighbours' and not just as 'support workers for homework'. In contrast, it was felt that teachers who are, for the most part, seen only in school are distinguished as authoritative figures and to some extent are 'boxed off'.

*Academic benefits*

In terms of whether there was perceived to be academic benefits for young people by attending homework support in Rialto, there were mixed views. One interviewee's response to this question was that it would be 'practically impossible to prove' whether homework support was impacting on, for example, numeracy and literacy. Another interviewee indicated that 'the level of literacy had improved dramatically' over the last couple of years but was not sure 'whether that is as a result of school initiatives or community based initiative'. There was seen to be too many other factors involved. Examples of these being the various, 'structured literacy and numeracy initiatives' that are already in place in schools. These initiatives, it was said, had been introduced in conjunction with schools entering the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' programme (DEIS 2005). In addition, for those children and young people who were not attending, for example, the Rialto homework club, the majority of schools interviewed indicated that they facilitated homework clubs within their own schools. Some schools appeared to have the homework facility open to all pupils. Others appeared to target those young people who they deemed requiring extra support.

On the other hand, another interviewee suggested that her involvement with the RLC had commenced at approximately the same time as she had been planning for the implementation of the DEIS programme within her school. She felt that discussions with the RLC coordinator illustrated that both parties were working with similar objectives in mind including: 'planning around numeracy, literacy, parental involvement and community and parental partnership and then attendance'. Thus, she regarded the contribution being made by the RLC in the homework clubs as 'extremely beneficial'.

Another interviewee suggested that she believed that the support being provided by the RLC may well be having the effect of helping to keep young people 'within the education system longer' because they are being provided with a 'safe environment' along with 'support'. This 'focus' was seen as being very beneficial for young people. Furthermore, another interviewee stated that he felt that 'any extra time that the kids can get in relation to study or doing homework or the development of study skills is a positive'. This interviewee stated that he 'welcomed' any extra support that was available.

*Social/Emotional benefits*

The RLC was seen to offer shelter and emotional support to at-risk groups of students as well as stimulating students' other talents (artistic and musical) in a more relaxed, attentive and home-like atmosphere. It was said by one interviewee that indeed without first and foremost providing such social and emotional support 'you wouldn't get anywhere'.

One interviewee provided anecdotal evidence from an event that had been hosted by the RLC for teachers, which illustrated the emotional contribution made by community workers for young people. At this event she explained that the 'pupils' were acting as hosts by serving tea/coffee etc. to the teachers in their own community. This interviewee noted the very different relationship that can exist between community workers and young person as compared to the relationship that exists between teacher and young person. That is to say, she saw a much more tactile and 'affectionate' relationship being demonstrated in the former instance. It was quickly pointed out that this was most definitely not of an 'inappropriate' nature but that it demonstrated the difference between what would be permissible within a community context and that of a school context. She regarded this as illustrating how community workers can take on a much more emotionally supportive role with regard to young people and are, in fact, in some instances 'almost like the parents'. Another interviewee commented that, 'they're looking after the children holistically, you know, and nurturing them'.

A teacher noted that she felt that as a result of attending the after-school clubs young people were, 'happier children' and 'more secure in school'. One reason given for this perception, as alluded to above, was that, 'they're going into school the following day with their homework done, so they're not in trouble with the teacher, their self-esteem then is not being eroded'. Likewise, another interviewee stated that 'a child comes in with their homework done starts on the right foot. It makes a huge difference'.

In addition it was felt that through the communication that was had with the Rialto staff children and young people were developing enhanced social skills and their self-esteem was being nurtured. As one interviewee put it, 'even in terms of self-esteem, everything . . . your self-esteem feeds into everything you do'. This interviewee was referring both to academic and social abilities. On a less positive note, one interviewee felt that possibly the young people who partook most of the activities provided by the RLC were 'ones that are maybe very quiet, very shy, intimidated by the type of surroundings they live in'.

> I think in many cases it's fellas who wouldn't leave the house because there's too much trouble outside.

Moreover, several respondents felt that those young people who most needed this type of intervention, who were 'in serious trouble' were the ones who didn't attend. Finally, another interviewee felt that personnel within Rialto were 'really making up for a deficit a lot of the time in the parenting capacity . . . and keeping children out of trouble'. He went on to say that he felt children saw the youth workers as 'mentors' and 'people to look up to; people to aspire to'.

### Collaboration between Schools

Given that an objective of this study was to explore the triangulation in relation to collaboration between schools, community and parents, interviewees were also asked about their links with other schools as well as their direct links with parents. One principal highlighted the scale of the problem and the role of the RLC in improving links between local schools.

> I'd argue there's no communication between schools and we did do a training of youth service down in Rialto which is quite good, where we brought eight schools together for one days' training. This was the first time some of the teachers have met in 20 odd years.

There were mixed views regarding school-school collaboration. Whilst interviewees from several schools provided numerous examples of how they communicate and work with other schools, others suggested that, for the most part, schools in the Rialto area rarely interact.

### Collaboration

One interviewee claimed that 'it's always good to talk to others, no school is an island'. This individual suggested that by working together, schools could share ideas and this was seen as 'a fantastic benefit' and she went on to suggest that information shared included, 'social problems, pupil problems, parent problems, teaching problems, resource problems'. A variety of other, general and specific, examples were given as to how schools collaborate and what information they share with each other including:

Principals frequently communicating informally by telephone;

- Sharing of information on pupils (e.g. literacy or numeracy scores) who would be moving from primary to secondary level;

- Organising events such as Communion and Confirmation together;

- Sharing information about setting up an orchestra;

- Coming together to train in dealing with bereavement;

- Sharing the same home-school liaison teacher or home-school liaison teachers from different schools indicating that they regularly meet to discuss issues related to families which they have 'in common';

- Schools hosting teachers from other schools for workshops and cluster meetings and vice versa. In this regard several interviewees mentioned having attended school cluster meetings in relation to the implementation of the 'First Steps'[11] programme

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[11] First Steps, developed by the Western Australian Department of Education, is a whole–of–school approach to literacy learning and a positive way of planning the next steps for each child's learning. The program includes: frameworks, or maps of development, described as developmental continua; resource books in the areas of oral language, reading, writing and spelling; 'parents as partners'

and they indicated that teachers had shared their experiences of how they found and implemented the programme. One principal felt that teachers actually 'enjoy going to other schools and finding out what people are doing'.

One interviewee also commended a staff development day that had been organised by the RLC. This event brought together teachers from various schools within the Rialto area and it was believed that this was 'a step firmly in the right direction'. However, due to the nature of the event it was believed that there had not been enough time set aside perhaps for teachers to have 'the opportunity to communicate with teachers in other schools and . . . in their evaluation said that they would have welcomed that'. It was felt that in recent times things had significantly changed in this regard whereas, as put by one interviewee, 'we were much more insular 20 years ago'.

*Lack of collaboration*
With regard to comments made in relation to lack of school-school collaboration, one interviewee referred to this by saying that schools are 'independent republics' in that they have their own management board, principal, deputy principal, staff and a cohort of pupils for which they are solely responsible. As such there is not a need for schools to collaborate in any substantive way.

An alternative view given by a few interviewees as to why schools in the Rialto area do not collaborate is that, often, they are in competition with each other. The reason given for this perception was that over the years pupil numbers within individual schools have dropped significantly. Two reasons were given for the drop in numbers. Firstly it was indicated that, in recent years, government has built new housing in a 'satellite suburb' of the city and families have been re-homed in this area. Thus young people have been 'drawn out of the area'. Secondly, it was said that parents were not happy with the education been provided for their children and were sending them to other areas of the city by bus. Detailed reasons were not given for this discontent. Thus, due to the current small numbers within individual schools, amalgamations and school closures are being deemed necessary. Clearly, individual schools are reluctant to have this happen whereby teaching positions may be lost as a result. However, it was felt by a small number that the potential benefits of school amalgamation would include, for example, finances, increased subject range for pupils, more teachers within subject areas, ability to provide greater levels of education from foundation to higher qualifications. Another, interviewee suggested that this competition was more evident at post-primary level. Yet another suggested that whilst local schools were indeed competing 'for the same children' the relationship between schools was 'still quite positive'.

**Parental Contact and Involvement (and associated issues)**
Interviewees were asked about their interactions and involvement with parents and it was indicated that a variety of approaches are taken in relation to trying to engage parents with school activities. These included parents being regularly invited to attend school events

such as parent-teacher meetings, parent associations, pupils' performances, award ceremonies, sports days and a variety of courses and activities specifically for parents.

There were a range of opinions as to why parents would or would not become involved with schools and their children's educational progress. These views ranged from beliefs that parents had great 'aspirations for their children' to the view that parents in disadvantaged areas such as Rialto simply saw the educational years 'as something that they [young people] have to get through'.

It appeared to be the feeling that many of the problems that schools encounter in relation to young people are as a direct result of lack of parental engagement. These problems included, for example, poor attendance, homework issues and a variety of other social problems. Hence it was seen as 'vital' to encourage the involvement of parents. However, getting parents to commit to any school activities on a regular basis was regarded by most as 'an up-hill struggle'.

In all the schools, there appeared to be a designated home-school liaison teacher who takes responsibility for making direct contact with parents should this be required. The general view appeared to be that getting parents involved in school activities along with the education of their children was extremely important. Indeed one interviewee suggested that 'parental involvement in education is probably the biggest indicator of success with the students'. Whilst a small proportion of interviewees suggested that they found a great 'willingness' among parents to visit the school, the majority of interviewees appeared to suggest that encouraging parents to be involved with their children's education was, at times, a very difficult task and this seemed to be more prevalent at post-primary level as compared to primary level.

It was suggested that lack of parental engagement was often directly related to, 'the level of disadvantage' within a family. It was further suggested that parents may often be very caught up in other matters including, 'care issues or social work issues or money issues'. Thus it was felt that parents were 'understandably happy' that their children were in school during the day which gave them time to 'deal with everything else in life'.

Due to this perceived difficulty in engaging parents, in one school, individuals from the wider community were being targeted to help with, for example, paired reading exercises with young people. These individuals included retired members of the community and retired teachers. It was felt that these individuals were more likely to 'commit long-term' by comparison to the commitment of parents. Parents were regarded as more inclined to help out in the early years of their child's education (up to 8 years of age). It was suggested that at this early stage parents have to bring their children to school so they then might 'stay a while' and help out.

This was not to say that all parents were not interested in becoming involved in the activities of schools and their children's education but it was pointed out that it was regularly the same parents whilst other parents could not be reached. It was felt that often those parents who were willing to visit the school were indeed the parents who didn't really need to be there as

their children were already doing well academically.  Of course, it was acknowledged that a number of parents were in employment and for this reason often could not attend events i.e. because of work during the day and because of childcare commitments in the evenings.

In two primary schools the home-school liaison teachers indicated that they try very hard to ensure that they visit the parents of all children in reception classes and that the school had an 'open door policy' which welcomes parents at any time.  One of these individuals also indicated that in a significant proportion of cases she would work in conjunction with a member of the social services team to make such contact as effective as possible.  In other schools that had significantly higher numbers of pupils, it was pointed out that it was not always possible to make home visits for every reception child.  Hence, in these schools teachers are consulted with regard to which reception children and which children in higher classes would benefit most from a home visit by the home-school liaison.

In general it was seen as vital to engage parents for the benefit of young people.  Furthermore, it was seen as especially important to be in contact with those parents whose children were demonstrating 'social and emotional issues' which may be related to family problems.  In this regard, it was said that teachers need to know about such problems in order to, 'make allowances for where children were at'.  Thus, through this knowledge, specific provision could be made for young people by way of activities including, 'homework club or the play therapy or support teacher'.  Unfortunately, it would seem that these are the very parents that are least contactable, who do not attend parent/teacher meetings nor are they represented on school committees such as parent councils.

In addition, it was pointed out by several interviewees that the choice of the home-school liaison teacher was of great importance.  This individual was seen to need the appropriate 'personality' whereby they are 'approachable' and can gain the trust of parents.  Indeed it was said that if the RLC were to enhance their parental contact then the 'personality' of those making contact with parents would be of vital importance.  The experience seemed to be that, in general, if the home-school liaison did need to visit parents at home then parents proved to be 'very welcoming, very open to you'.  Another view, however, was that whilst parents were 'underneath it all' concerned about the welfare of their children, they could be 'quite defensive at times'.  Again this was seen as being due to the fact that these parents were likely to be experiencing a variety of personal social and emotional problems.

A further reason given for the possible resistance of parents to visit schools was that of 'their own memories of school'.  That is to say, several interviewees made suggestions of the nature that parents had had, 'very bad experiences themselves'.  This appeared to suggest that in years gone by the experiences of young people in schools was of a much more 'punitive' system of education.   As one interviewee put it, the parents attitude might be, 'I didn't like school myself when I was in the school so why would I go in now'.

One interviewee also suggested that there was a gender problem in that boys, in particular, did not want their parents involved in their education and schooling.  Hence, it was particularly difficult to engage the parents of boys.  In these cases, not only was there parental resistance to address, but she believed that boys, unlike girls, did not want their

parents to come to the school and might often tell staff that their parents were busy or working when this might not actually be the case.  She felt this was because of a 'macho' image that boys felt they needed to uphold and that it was 'sort of an affront maybe to their masculinity' to have parents seen within the school.  In addition, it was felt that often in the case of boys, parents were being invited to visit the school to discuss some 'trouble' that a particular pupil had gotten into.  In other words, visits were not linked with positive events.  This interviewee went on to say that in the community setting such matters should not pose as great a problem.

Finally, several interviewees alluded to the fact that parental resistance to become involved may be related to feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence.  That is to say that parents don't feel they 'have the education themselves or they didn't have the ability themselves to participate a lot in their children's education'.  In a similar vein, one interviewee suggested that parents often see teachers as 'middle class' and, thus, feel very uncomfortable when communicating with teaching staff.  This interviewee felt that, for this reason, working closely with community staff could be of benefit. It was believed that parents felt more comfortable communicating with community staff in their own community.

Hence, it was believed that ways needed to be found to more effectively relay to parents how community and school were working together for the benefit of their children and to bring parents into this equation.  It was noted by one interviewee how having secretarial and care-taking staff working in the school and who lived in the local community was of great 'advantage' at times because often these staff members could be the 'go-between ' with parents.  This was because, whilst parents may feel unable to communicate with teachers due to feelings of inadequacy' they were in fact open to listening to these staff members.  Hence, information could be relayed in this way.

Overall it did appear to be the case that there had been a significant change in recent years in the efforts made by all schools to further engage parents in school life and in the education of their children.

*Ways of encouraging parents*
Several suggestions were made as to how parents might be encouraged to participate more in their children's education and in school life.  There were varied views with regard to past successes in this regard.  In general, it would seem that attendance by parents was good for main events including various award ceremonies.  However, there appeared to be variable success for other events and commitments such as participation on school committees, concerts, reading groups, 'World Book days', 'art projects', 'yoga classes', 'maths activities', 'science activities', 'flower arranging', 'coffee morning' and 'make-up courses'.  It was thought that providing incentives including food and books was useful in increasing participation.

It was also said that, regardless of the activity being organised, it had to be relayed to parents as being 'easy and non-threatening'.  Furthermore, it was thought that by starting off with small groups of parents and then asking these parents to relay their experience to others was an effective way to encourage other parents.

In terms of strategic plans to help engage parents, various suggestions were made. For example, it was suggested that parents should be targeted when their children are very young. This could be achieved by inviting them to come into the school (or community centre) for possibly a hot breakfast. The room in which these groups meet could contain a variety of books and reading material. One interviewee said that, especially at primary level, she felt that 'children love it when their parents come in . . . and it makes a difference to them and it really does help in their attitudes to school and in their outcomes'. However, it was felt that whatever is done to encourage parents it had to be carried out in 'small baby steps' so as not to 'scare' parents away.

Secondly, it was suggested that parents are more likely to attend events if they know and are comfortable with other group participants. Hence, it was suggested that in the first instance small groups of parents should be brought together, those who have something in common and who know and 'like' each other/are friends. Taking this approach was seen as being possibly less daunting as compared to being invited to a school event and not knowing the other individuals who would be attending. From this starting point larger groups of parents could be brought together.

In saying the above, one interviewee felt that regardless of what schools try to do to engage parents, at the outset they need to do this 'outside' of the school in a 'more casual' setting. This interviewee felt that parents in this particular area find schools to be very 'forbidding' places for reasons as outlined above. She felt that a key factor in parental resistance was 'fear' and that regardless of who was trying to engage parents (school or community) then consideration need be given to this fear somehow. Venues suggested for more casual engagement included, for example, 'a room in a pub' or 'a cafe'.

Another consideration put forward was that if attempting to engage parents then timing was of great importance. That is to say, events or invitation should be issued for times when parents were most likely to be available such as mornings or early afternoons when children would be in school and parents were more likely to have free time.

Yet another suggestion was that grandparents rather than parents might be an easier audience to encourage. It was noted that at one point a 'maths for fun' event had been organised by the RLC for grandparents. Furthermore an interviewee indicated that within her particular school a reading club had been facilitated and had been attended solely by grandparents and not parents. Hence, the possibility of reaching parents through the grandparents. Finally, it was felt by one interviewee that engaging parents was a matter which could be worked on between schools and community thus building a further link between both parties along with engaging parents in the process.

In terms of summarising such challenges, an important consensus to emerge from these interviews was the valuable role the RLC can play in encouraging parental involvement in young people's educational welfare. One teacher, for example, articulated a commonly held view.

I think it's a very positive thing to create links between communities and the school, because I think a lot of parents come down here and they don't see us as equals. They see us as strangers and, for want of a better word, middle class. I mean, I had a parent coming in from that area and she was shaking talking to me.

### Homework Clubs

Although it was accepted that the homework clubs do 'great work' and have made a 'marked difference' for many participants in terms of 'literacy development' and 'self-confidence', several areas of concern were highlighted.

*Qualifications of homework club personnel*

The subject of whether homework club staff were suitably qualified to support young people with their homework was raised. Responses to this matter revealed mixed opinions. It was firstly acknowledged by a number of interviewees that the RLC staff who assist in the homework clubs were 'very committed' to the young people. However, some interviewees alluded to the notion that there may be concerns among teachers regarding how these personnel actually helped in this regard. Questions asked or statements made around this issue included: 'Did homework club personnel have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum in order to assist with homework effectively?' The fear here being that, if they did not then, homework support might actually be 'at cross purposes with what was happening in the classroom, causing confusion' for young people. Several interviewees posited that 'in an ideal world' those helping with homework should be 'qualified teachers'.

It does make a difference because the teacher is very much au fait with the stages of whatever it is ... and I don't know how much as yet training the girls in the homework clubs have had in supporting children with numeracy and literacy.

In particular, it was noted that, especially at more senior levels, assistance with numeracy could be difficult if one was not a trained teacher. Hence, as suggested above, more communication between teachers and Rialto staff might alleviate this problem whereby Rialto staff could be instructed in 'the methodologies' used in schools for numeracy and literacy and then both parties would be using the 'same approach'. It was suggested that these staff should come into the classroom and 'join in the lessons'. On the other hand, it was acknowledge by one interviewee that the Rialto homework clubs were catering for young people coming from a variety of different schools who each may be taking different approaches in their teaching methods. As such, it may prove difficult for staff to work in different ways with different young people.

Other questions raised regarding homework support included: What way do they assist with the homework? Did they do the homework for the students? Were Rialto staff 'over-helping the kids' with their homework?

In terms of the latter, it appeared to be the general opinion that the service provided by Rialto was of benefit. However, young people 'shouldn't be getting too much assistance with their homework'. Instead they should be 'supported' to do the homework. It was suggested

that teachers were 'getting very frustrated that the quality of homework coming from the homework clubs was very poor, that students weren't doing their own homework'. It was acknowledged, however, that the same question could be asked of parents and, in effect, it had to be remembered that 'these people were acting in loco parentis really'. Hence, it was suggested by one interviewee, and reiterated by several others:

> You've either got people who are helping out or doing that in the way that any reasonable parent does. You either see them as reasonable parents who are helping . . . or they are qualified teachers. I don't know if there is any in-between.

Another interviewee said that the qualifications of community workers regarding homework support actually depended very much on what one was expecting from them.

> Whether you think they're just helping the kid blast through a bit of homework, or whether you're trying to educate within the curriculum. Is it about holding somebody's hand . . . or is it about adding something beyond that?

One interviewee who had spoken with the homework club personnel regarding children's homework indicated her awareness that, for example, 'children were in a panic' and saying to the homework personnel at times 'oh no, my teacher will give out to me tomorrow'. Hence, personnel were, 'feeling for the children'. It appeared to be the suggestion that personnel were at this point possibly over helping so the children would not get into trouble because of not done homework. However, she continued to say that it was not beneficial if homework was being carried out but not understood yet the teacher thinks it has been understood. She further pointed out that, clearly, sometimes parents are at fault for doing similar and concluded that, for many pupils, 'getting it done at all' was an 'achievement' in itself.

> For some students, if we could get them to take their bags home at all it was a great achievement. And the idea that they would actually be doing homework somewhere, anywhere, any kind of homework, knowing what homework was about, knowing it had to be done and the reasons it had to be '.

Another interviewee, who expressed similar concerns continued, however, by saying that the communication that had been built up over the last couple of years with personnel within the RLC had proved to resolve some of these issues and misunderstandings. She concluded that, prior to the establishment of improved linkages, 'there was just a complete lack of communication between schools and the homework clubs'.

It would seem that since then discussions had been held between RLC personnel and some schools as to how homework could more effectively be facilitated within homework clubs. It was indicated by one interviewee that a template had recently been 'designed . . . showing how to *assist* without *doing* someone's homework'.

*Homework Journals*

A related topic of conversation was that of homework journals being used between the Rialto homework club and schools. It would seem that an awareness of a discrepancy between what young people told the homework clubs regarding their homework load and what they actually did have for homework had lead to an agreement between schools and the RLC to develop a homework policy and related homework journals to ensure that 'everybody was singing off the same hymn sheet'.

Some interviewees seemed to be unaware of the use/sharing of the journals. Others were aware of this facility but suggested that, at times, this was misused. One interviewee stated, 'there would have been issues where kids would have gone and said "we don't have homework''. Several other interviewees made comments of a similar nature. It was suggested that this would be because the young person would have produced the journal but would not have actually documented their homework in the journal. It was further suggested that some young people were in fact using two journals simultaneously. One of these journals would be that completed in school, the other would be one which would be shown to the homework club staff and which would indicate that no homework had been assigned. One suggestion as to why young people do this is because they feel that after-school time is 'free time' and that they do not want to 'waste their time' doing homework in the evenings. It was felt that possibly the building up of links between schools and the homework club personnel (and their visits to the schools as mentioned above) might resolve this problem to some extent given that the young people would realise that schools and homework personnel were in communication. Furthermore, this would allow teachers and community staff to discuss those young people that they may be having difficulties with in terms of miscommunication regarding homework and homework journal completion.

Interviewees in one school indicated that they felt that the use of homework journals was of great benefit to them. They also indicated that personnel from the Rialto clubs made notes for the teachers in these journals on occasion and that this was of great benefit to them in knowing where young people were having difficulties.

*In-school homework clubs vs community homework clubs*

It was ascertained through interviews that most of Rialto network schools actually run after-school homework clubs of their own. It was indicated that the homework club in one of these schools was in fact funded and run by an outside agency known as the South Inner City Dublin Development Association (SICDDA). This agency effectively rent a room from the school and undertakes this work independently of the school and teachers. It appeared to be the case that eligibility for attendance was based on a measure of economic disadvantage which was assessed by personnel from the agency. In all schools, parental permission is gained at the beginning of the school year for various participatory activities including homework clubs. It was said that these homework clubs are conducted in 'a very structured environment' as would be the classroom and if parental permission has been gained then pupils are committed to attend. Should they not attend then a parental note is required. Should a pupil not 'turn up' and no parental note has been submitted then the afterschool teacher will follow this up by telephoning the parent in order to ascertain where the pupil may be.

In terms of comparing the provision of homework support given in schools to that given in a community setting such as Rialto, there appeared to be the view that possibly 'school is an easier place to provide a quiet structured environment for homework'. Indeed a number of interviewees suggested that a key factor to homework completion was to have a 'calm environment'. It was acknowledged that staff in homework clubs such as Dolphin and Fatima may find it more difficult, 'if children are coming from different schools as well because some may have more homework than others or maybe they are trying to complete it and they [homework club staff] are trying to entertain some while others are getting it done'. Several interviewees made suggestions of the nature that possibly the Rialto staff should consider a way whereby they can get a greater commitment such as that outlined above for schools: parental consent; notes for absenteeism; and home telephone calls should the young person not turn up as expected. In this regard it was said by one interviewee that, 'the more serious you are about . . . school work and that, the better parents perceive a place. If they see a place as casual they will treat it as casual'.

Similarly, several interviewees seemed to feel that the homework clubs needed to find a way to enable parents to understand that the work they were doing with their children was 'serious' and 'important' and as valid as that of schools. Furthermore, it was argued that possibly the homework clubs needed to, 'look at their structure' and find ways to ensure that young people were aware that attendance at the homework club was 'not a choice', that if they have signed up for assistance with homework then they are required to attend daily. Ultimately, it was argued that homework provision had to be seen as 'important ... because people do respect that long-term'. One interviewee also suggested the homework clubs within Rialto should commence directly after school and not at 4.30pm. It was suggested here that 'it's just too late' to start homework at this time, that 'they're tired' and in no mood for anything academic at that stage'.

In addition, it was felt by some interviewees that due to the closer relationship that RLC personnel had with parents they were in a position where parents may listen to them more so than they might listen to teachers.

*Parent/home involvement*
Another matter raised by several interviewees was that of parents being involved in their children's homework. It was felt that regardless of whether a young person received assistance with homework, whether from school or community-based setting, it was desirable that parents at a minimum ask their children whether homework had been done and ideally that parents would look over this with their children. Interviewees indicated that they had at times raised this matter with parents. However, some felt that a possible reason for parental reluctance was that they themselves did not 'feel competent enough to support the children with their homework'.

A difficulty raised in regard to children doing homework in their own homes was that of space. Some interviewees felt that many young people might not have a home environment that was conducive to carrying out homework. Difficulties indicated in this regard included: having a proper table; having a quiet space with no distractions; parental attitude to

homework. Hence, homework clubs in school and community could offer these facilities such as the 'quiet space that they need'.

*Attendance by Young People*

A few interviewees indicated that they did believe that the services provided by the RLC could certainly benefit young people in a variety of ways. However, it was indicated that this was wholly contingent on young people attending events, whether they be homework support or other sports/arts based projects. The solution to attendance problems was perceived to lie with parents and ensuring the support of parents in helping to encourage young people to fully participate in these services.

Indeed, there appeared to be the general opinion that there were three types of young people. The first being those young people who did not require either school or community support because this was provided by parents anyhow. Secondly there was a group of young people who did require intervention and who, to various degrees, did access this either through school homework support or by way of the support provided by Rialto. In the case of this group, one interviewee felt that these were the young people 'who could go either way' in relation to longer term achievements and employment. Finally there was a small group of young people who did not engage at all no matter what strategies were employed. These young people were referred to by one interviewee as 'feral'. They could not be 'attracted because they preferred their freedom . . . to rove the streets and do as they wish'. It was said that the parents of this particular group were, likewise, not contactable and that these young people had developed the attitudes of their parents. It was felt that these young people came from families usually experiencing the most extreme social and economic difficulties to include drug problems and in some instances, due to criminal activities, parents may be serving prison sentences. Whilst it was said that in the 1980s and 1990s there had been significant drug problems in the Rialto area, this appeared to change for the better during the years of the Celtic Tiger along with the regeneration of the Fatima area. However, it was felt by some that the current recession had seen yet again an upsurge in such problems. This then was having a knock on effect for young people currently in the education system.

**Restorative Practice Training**

Quite a number of interviewees mentioned the training provided by the RLC in Restorative Practices which had taken place approximately 18 months previously. This course was highly commended. For some interviewees it was felt that having completed this training they subsequently realised that the approaches suggested were actually what they were already doing when trying to resolve conflict issues between young people. Nonetheless, the course provided them with a more formal framework for such intervention. In addition, it was felt that having this more formal training gave them more confidence to deal with potential conflict situations. Furthermore, interviewees in at least one school indicated that they had since included the guidelines of the Restorative practice training into their school plan/'code of behaviour' for the school using 'those questions when . . . investigating conflict'. It was mentioned that the full training had not yet been completed and that some sessions on working with parents were still to be delivered.

In terms of such in-service training, the consensus amongst teaching staff was that (a) teachers already felt familiar with the principles of restorative practice; (b) such courses are more effective when they are limited to 2-3 hours; and (c) as valuable as they are, such events impact in terms of a school's management of staff time.

> Well we found that we're already doing it, we just didn't know it was called restorative practice.

> They hate being the school children . . . they hate being the listeners. Death by PowerPoint! So it's got to be short and snappy and not taking up the whole day. Six or seven teachers took part . . . so it's quite hard because you're crippling your school for the day to send them on it and I know some of the other schools have declined. Okay, you either all buy in or you don't.

*Summary*

The following précis outlines the perspectives of the principals, teachers and librarians interviewed with specific reference to the three research questions.

**1. Critical junctures most likely to yield positive outcomes for young people.**

These interviews indicate a broad understanding of the work of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) and the key features of the Community School Strategy (CSS). More importantly, they convey both an appreciation of the value of building improved relationships between schools and the community and also a cognisance of the challenges thus presented. Two important and consistent themes emerged from these interviews. Firstly, that there has been a historically 'disjointed' relationship between some schools and sections of the wider community; and secondly, that the school experiences of many local parents is a significant barrier in terms of them supporting their children's educational welfare.

There was a broad consensus that prior to the initiation of the CSS, many local schools were perceived as 'detached' and 'disconnected' from the wider community. Additionally, given that very few teachers live locally, there are few opportunities for relationships to form. Many respondents spoke about the need to 'set boundaries' while others suggested that, given the levels of crime and deprivation in the most disadvantaged areas, it would not be safe for them to live amongst the pupils they teach. It was also clear from the interviews that in the past there has been little communication between local schools. Many of which, it was claimed, continue to regard themselves as 'independent republics'.

However, the data presented here makes a persuasive argument that all stakeholders in the learning process should collaborate to ensure positive outcomes for young people. The practices of information sharing and network activities embodied in the Community School Strategy (CSS) and evidenced in these interviews have provided the formal structures for this collaboration to develop.

Several respondents highlighted the value of the Principals Network where issues such as school targets, reading surveys and in-service training are discussed. It was also claimed

that this network has created a unique opportunity for local schools to engage with each other.  Similarly, the collaboration between schools and the Rialto Homework Clubs within the Literacy Network was seen as 'extremely beneficial', particularly, in terms of aligning the support given in the clubs to the school curriculum.  The third network relates to the in-service training which is roundly commended for providing a formal framework for teachers and Rialto youth workers to (a) have shared learning experiences in, for example, restorative justice, and (b) to develop relationships and mutual understanding.

These interviewees concur with the Rialto respondents' view that the joint visitation to New York was the catalyst for improved relations between the schools and the RLC.  Again, the two key outcomes were identified as (a) the chance to witness 'fantastic' models of practice; and (b) an opportunity for school personnel and Rialto youth workers to learn about the work of each other.

The principals, teachers and librarians interviewed here appreciate that schools' perceived 'detachment' from the community is a serious impediment in terms of creating conditions conducive to young people's educational welfare.  Indeed, several teachers commented that many parents are reluctant to engage with schools as a result of their own experience as pupils.

Of course, this 'disconnection' between schools and local people starkly contrasts with the 'embeddedness' of the Rialto youth projects in the community.  Several respondents also spoke about the 'tactile' and 'affectionate' relationship RLC youth workers have with young people and their role as 'pseudo parents'.  Therefore, the RLC clearly has a unique capacity to engage with 'harder to reach' young people and parents.  It is equally clear that local schools are cognisant of this capacity, their own limitations and the value of collaborative practices with the RLC.  One such example relates to the provision of RLC venues for teacher / parent interactions, which are, commonly, seen as neutral and less intimidating than school premises.

### 2.  Significant practices underpinning these critical junctures
The consensus amongst these school-based respondents was that the composite networks embodied within the Community School Strategy (CSS) have engendered significant and positive changes in working practices.  For example, the provision of materials and guidance for homework clubs such as literacy packs as well as literacy and numeracy worksheets which can be incorporated into a variety of local arts-based projects.

Similarly, regular and structured contact between schools and the RLC provides opportunities for (a) schools to gain a deeper understanding of community/family circumstances; (b) homework clubs to be made aware of curricular requirements; and (c) for homework policies to be designed to address these realities.

It is also clear that this is a particularly difficult time for teachers across the Republic of Ireland. Government cutbacks, pay freezes, the spectre of imminent closures and amalgamations, a moratorium on promotions and the extra burden of the Croke Park hour have, according to many respondents, 'demoralised' the teaching profession.  When these

factors are considered alongside schools' acceptance that they are widely perceived as the 'bad guys' who routinely 'reject people' it is hardly surprising that some teachers are less than enthusiastic about community involvement and the attendant extra-curricular activity. To their credit, the vast majority are keen to foster and improve community links and throughout these interviews have extolled the virtues of such collaboration.

Although several respondents argued that there were too many other variables to determine the extent homework clubs have impacted on the literacy and numeracy of attendees, the consensus was that the clubs make a 'valuable contribution'. The general view of school personnel was that the clubs provide valuable support and a safe environment, that attendees are 'happier' and 'more secure at school' and that, more broadly, they encourage young people to stay in education longer.

### 3. Creating a seamless learning environment between home, school and community

The data here concurs with the RLC interviews and suggests that creating a seamless learning environment in the Rialto catchment area is a significant challenge. The disjointed relationship between the community and many local schools coupled with social disadvantage/troubled family circumstances means that schools often find it difficult to engage with parents. Conversely, many parents lack the capacity and inclination to engage with schools. These interviews evidence a wide range of examples where teachers and principals, in cognisance of these realities, have adopted collaborative approaches with the RLC to address issues, particularly around homework, behaviour management and encouraging parental involvement.

It is also clear that the RLC has been at the forefront in terms of establishing the composite networks. The Principals Network, for example, has provided forum for local primary and secondary schools which did not exist previously. In terms of supporting young people's transition from primary to secondary education, this development is clearly advantageous. Thus, any attempt to establish a holistic learning environment must encompass collaboration between both sets of schools.

# Chapter 5: Quasi-Experimental Study Methodology

**Design**

This element of the study employed a quasi-experimental design to address the following research question: how does the RLC out of school time programme affect a range of education welfare outcomes for participating young people aged between 11 and 14 years?

*Intervention and control group matching*

The young people in the intervention group were recruited directly from the RLC programme and all 11 to 14 years olds attending the RLC programme at the start of the study (April 2011) were invited to take part. Eligible children and young people who joined the programme after this time were also recruited into the study. It should be pointed out that the maximum available number of children that could be recruited to the intervention group was always going to be small. Based on the 2006 statistics from the Central Statistics Office and the number of 11 to 14 years olds living in Fatima and Dolphin House areas, it was estimated that the intervention group could potentially consist of up to 129 participants (with a possible further 84 eligible young people living in the wider Rialto area).

To create a comparable control group, a similarly aged cohort of young people was recruited from the schools attended by the intervention group. This cohort was designed to be as large as possible in order to provide a sufficient pool of potential control candidates from which to draw the best matches to the intervention group. This facilitated the use of a statistical technique called propensity score matching, which can provide a closer and more sensitive 'match' between the control and intervention groups than other commonly used matching, or balancing, methods (Guo & Fraser, 2010). Thus, suitable control participants were selected from the larger pool of potential control candidates and matched to intervention participants not only on the basis of whether they were eligible to participate in the programme but also on typically unobserved variables that relate to the internal, motivational reasons why someone would take part in the programme or not. In order to maximise sample numbers the entire control group were also tested at the second and third data sweeps. The matching process is described in more detail in the analysis section.

**Ethics**

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Queen's University Belfast School of Education Research Ethics committee on 25 March 2011.

**Sample**

*Recruitment and consent*

A total of seven schools were recruited to participate in the survey. This included three primary schools and four secondary schools. Schools were identified following consultation with the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) and were selected on the basis of volume of attendance by RLC young people, proximity to RLC and membership of the RLC School Community Partnership.

School principals were contacted in writing by the research team to formally request their permission to allow the research team to administer the questionnaires to 5th Class, 6th

Class, 1st Year and 2nd Year students in the school setting and to provide the research team with basic information about the young people.

Principals were asked to distribute parental information and consent letters to all the parents of children in 5th Class, 6th Class, 1st Year and 2nd Year and to designate a member of staff to take responsibility for collecting these prior to the survey. For a small number of parents whose child attended the RLC programme it was not possible to obtain consent through the school. In these cases parental consent was obtained through the RLC instead in order to maximise participation from an already small group.

Young people were read an information statement and were asked to indicate their consent prior to participation in the study by a trained member of the research team.

**Outcomes and measures**
The final outcomes and measures (Table 1 and Appendix 4) were agreed and finalised in collaboration with the RLC team. All measures were fully piloted before use to ensure suitability and to identify any issues arising related to administration such as timing and ease of comprehension.

The data collected in this study were used for one of two purposes. The first purpose was to collect data that could be used to create a well matched control group to act as a reasonable counterfactual to the intervention group. Participants were matched according to characteristics which were deemed to represent important features of those who come into the intervention but are variables not directly impacted (in the short term) by the intervention. Thus the logit model for estimating the propensity scores (described in greater detail in the next chapter) included the following variables: gender, age, employment status of the father, prosocial and difficult behaviour, wellbeing and bullying. Intervention participants were matched to control participants on the basis that they shared a similar propensity score and thus shared a similar profile of characteristics in relation to the variables included in this model.

The second purpose for which data were collected was for use as outcome data. The data from these more focused, education welfare variables were used to determine whether the RLC programme has made an impact across the following outcome areas: attitudes and motivation towards learning (i.e. self-efficacy, challenge avoidance, active learning strategies, curiosity, mastery orientation, performance orientation and work avoidance), educational aspirations, school enjoyment, and homework difficulty.

All the variables and measures are described in more detail below and summarised in Table 1.

*Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)*
The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman et al., 1998) is a well validated and brief behavioural screening questionnaire for assessing emotional and behavioural strengths and needs in children and adolescents. It is composed of 25 items divided into five subscales of five items each, including:

- Emotional symptoms
- Conduct problems
- Hyperactivity/inattention
- Peer relationship problems
- Prosocial behaviour

A total difficulties score is based on the combined scores of each of the scales, except the prosocial scale, and provides an indication of the extent of the combined difficulties a young person is experiencing.

Scores on each of the five subscales can range from 0 to 10 whilst the scores on the Total Difficulties scale can range from 0 to 40. A higher score on each of the four difficulty subscales and a higher total difficulty score reflect higher levels of difficulty. A higher score on the prosocial behaviour subscale indicates a higher level of positive social behaviour.

*Wellbeing*
The Kidscreen questionnaire (The Kidscreen Group Europe, 2006) is a widely used measure of quality of life for children and young people and the version being used in the current study is the ten-item version, which results in a single global quality of life (wellbeing) score. A higher score, closer to 5, indicates that the respondent feels happy, fit and satisfied with regards to family life, peers and school life. A low score, closer to 1 indicates the contrary.

*Bullying*
In addition to the ten-item version of the Kidscreen questionnaire, two subscales from the longer 52 item version have also been used to measure both bullying and school enjoyment and environment (see below for a description of this subscale). The social acceptance or bullying subscale consists of three items and measures feelings of rejection by peers. A low score on the bullying subscale indicates that the respondents feel tormented and rejected by their peers.

*The Assessment of Learner-Centred Practices*
The Assessment of Learner-Centred Practices (ALCP) scale (McCombs & Lauer, 1997) measures cognitive and motivational dispositions and attitudes that are associated with a positive orientation to learning and ultimately with positive progress in school (Alexander & Murphy, 1998). Seven subscales from the ALCP suite were used for the children's self-evaluations. These subscales cover a number of dimensions including motivation, attitudes to work and learning strategies. The motivational subscales include:
- Self-efficacy: the belief that one's own actions can affect one's future learning outcomes
- Performance: wanting to do well to gain recognition, approval or rewards
- Mastery orientation: wanting to master a task or problem in order to get better at it, or out of interest

The attitudes to work subscales include:
- Work avoidance: avoidance of work completion, guessing or asking friends
- Challenge avoidance: avoidance of putting in effort and of doing difficult work

The learning strategies and seeking out knowledge subscales include:
- Curiosity: curiosity, knowledge-seeking behaviours, seeking out knowledge because it is interesting or new
- Active learning strategies: having proactive, metacognitive and independent learning strategies

Mean scores on each of the seven subscales can range from 1 to 4. High scores on the Active Learning Strategies, Self-Efficacy, Mastery Orientation and Curiosity scales are predicted to be associated with a positive orientation to learning. Conversely, low scores on the Challenge Avoidance, Work Avoidance and, to a lesser extent, the Performance Orientation scale are predicted to be associated with a positive orientation to learning and higher scores with a more negative learning orientation.

*School enjoyment and environment*
This subscale of the Kidscreen-52 consists of six items and measures the young person's feelings about school and their perception of their own cognitive capacities, learning and concentration. A high score indicates that that the respondent feels happy at school and is doing well and enjoying school life.

*Homework*
This measure was devised for the purpose of the current study and includes six items which assess the level of difficulty that participants experience around their homework (see Appendix 4). Items focus on whether homework is completed on time, whether help is needed or received and how well homework is understood. Means scores range from 1 to 4 with a low score indicating that the young person needs and gets help and generally doesn't understand their homework and a high score indicating that the young person doesn't need or get help and understands their homework.

*Educational aspirations*
By way of exploring young people's expectation of their educational potential they were asked whether they expect to take the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate exams and whether they plan to continue their education or apply for an apprenticeship after they leave school. These items were based on those used in the original baseline survey which was conducted prior to the current study.

*Family Affluence Scale*
The Family Affluence Scale (Currie, Elton, Todd, & Platt, 1997) asks children and adolescents to provide an indication of family socio-economic status based on material markers. It asks students about things they are likely to know about their family using the following indicators:
- Family car ownership
- Own bedroom
- Number of holidays with parents
- Family computer ownership

Total scores on this scale can range from 0 to 8 with those in the range 0 and 3 indicating low family affluence; those ranging between 4 and 5 indicating medium family affluence and; those between 6 and 8 indicating high family affluence.

*Table 1.  Summary of outcomes and measures*

| Variables used in the matching process | | Reliability (Cronbach's alpha[12]) |
|---|---|---|
| *Emotional and behavioural regulation* | **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire** (Goodman et al 1998) Difficulties and prosocial behaviour | 0.66-0.80 |
| *Quality of Life* | **KIDSCREEN 10** (The KIDSCREEN Group 2006) is a measure of quality of life | 0.76-0.83 |
| *Bullying* | **KIDSCREEN 52** (The KIDSCREEN Group 2006) Social acceptance (Bullying) subscale | 0.82-0.91 |
| **Outcome variables** | | |
| Behaviour and motivation | **The Assessment of Learner-Centred Practices (ALCP)** (McCombs, 1997) 7 subscales: *Motivational subscales*: | |
| | • Self-efficacy | 0.71-0.77 |
| | • Performance orientation | 0.82-0.84 |
| | • Mastery Orientation | 0.82-0.84 |
| | *Attitudes to work subscales:* | |
| | • Work avoidance | 0.49-0.57 |
| | • Challenge avoidance | 0.49-0.60 |
| | *Learning strategies:* | |
| | • Active Learning Strategies | 0.74-0.77 |
| | • Curiosity | 0.68-0.78 |
| School enjoyment | **KIDSCREEN 52** (The KIDSCREEN Group 2006) School environment subscale | 0.81-0.87 |
| Homework | Scale developed as part of the current study to determine the level of difficulty encountered with homework | 0.51-0.58 |

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[12] In order to judge whether the scale (or test) being used is a good indicator of the attitude being measured, it is possible to calculate its reliability (or internal consistency) using a statistic called Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha can vary between zero and one, with values greater than 0.6/0.7 indicating acceptable reliability.

| Variables used in the matching process | | Reliability (Cronbach's alpha[10]) |
|---|---|---|
| Educational and future aspirations | – Expectations of taking Junior Cert and Leaving Cert examinations (as per baseline survey)<br>– Future aspiration (post school) | 0.44 - 0.57 |
| **Demographics** | | |
| Age | – Age and date of birth | |
| Gender | – Male/Female | |
| Nationality | – Country of birth (child, mother, father) | |
| Household | – Who lives in home | |
| Parental Occupation | – Mother/Father have a job<br>– If yes, what is the job | |
| Family Affluence | – **The Family Affluence Scale** (Currie et al., 1997). | |
| School Details | – Primary/Secondary School | |
| | – School name | |
| | – Class | |
| **Engagement In OST Activities** | | |
| Attitudes to OST activities | Contains items developed for the baseline survey and additional items.<br>– Attended after school activity?<br>– In school or in community?<br>– Length of attendance<br>– Activities<br>– Reasons for taking part<br>– Reasons for not taking part<br>– Future interest in OST activities (if not currently attending)? | |

**Data collection**

A questionnaire containing the measures described above was administered to young people in the classroom setting by a trained researcher three times over the course of the study in: April/May 2011 (baseline/Time 1), April/May 2012 (Time 2) and April/May 2013 (Time 3). A number of intervention participants were not in school when the data were being collected and where possible these data were collected in the RLC setting either by the researcher or, when absolutely necessary, by a RLC youth worker.

**Approach to analysis**

The quantitative data from the outcome measures used in this study were analysed by intention to treat which means that the data were analysed according group membership rather than whether or not they received the programme. Data were analysed using Stata version 12.1. Data preparation involved checking the proportion of missing data, and that minimum and maximum values were within the appropriate range of each scale. Descriptive statistics were generated for each variable, and the distribution checked. The validity of

measures was assessed using factor analysis, and internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha.

The initial characteristics of the intervention and control groups were compared at pre-test in relation to their core characteristics and mean scores on the main outcomes. Propensity score matching was used to create a matched control group from the larger pool of control participants. The logit model used to estimate the propensity score included the following independent variables: gender, age, employment status of the father, prosocial and difficult behaviour, wellbeing and bullying. Nearest neighbour one-to-one matching without replacement was used. Prior to matching, missing data on the matching variables were imputed using Expectation Maximisation. Multiple Imputation (MI) was not used in this instance because MI in Stata does not support propensity score matching.

The main effects of the intervention were estimated using multivariate regression analysis with robust standard errors to take account of the clustered nature of the data. Hierarchical linear models were not used since there were too few clusters and the sample size was small. A series of models were estimated for each outcome measure. For each model, the relevant outcome measure at post-test formed the dependent variable and a number of independent variables were added including: a dummy variable representing whether the participant was a member of the intervention or control group (coded '1' and '0' respectively), gender and participants' pre-test scores for the outcome variable in question.

The main focus for the analysis was the estimated coefficient associated with the dummy variable that represented the difference in mean scores on the respective outcome variable between the intervention and control groups, once pre-test scores were controlled for. This coefficient was then used to estimate the effect size of the programme in relation to the respective outcome variable as the standardised mean difference between the two groups (Cohen's d).

**Sample characteristics**
In total 400 young people took part in this study: 82 (20.5%) were in the intervention group and 318 (79.5%) were in the control group.

The aim of any control group is to provide an estimation of what would have happened to the intervention group had they *not* received the intervention (also referred to as the counterfactual). Random allocation is a powerful tool in creating two statistically equivalent groups that are similar in every way (on both known and unknown variables) except for the fact that one group gets the intervention and the other does not. This design allows us to be confident that any differences between the groups at the end of the study are due to the intervention and not some unknown factor (since any unknown factors out there are similarly distributed between the two groups, thus having an equal (and ignorable) effect on both groups). Since random allocation was not feasible in this study a control group was created by matching them according to a reasonably complex profile of *known* characteristics. What we cannot know however is how the groups differ on *unknown* characteristics and the influence these might have on the outcomes in addition to any effect of the programme. This means that any differences in outcomes at Time 3 may well reflect the influence of these other 'confounding' (unknown) variables and not represent the true impact of the intervention.

With this in mind, propensity score matching was used to create a smaller control group that would provide a good 'match' to the intervention group. Logistic regression analysis was used to estimate a 'propensity score' for each participant. This score represents the likelihood that the participant belongs to the intervention group according to a certain profile of characteristics that are thought to be predictive of whether a young person takes part in the programme or not. This profile of characteristics included a range of demographic, behavioural and wellbeing variables including: gender, age, employment status of the father, prosocial and difficult behaviour, wellbeing and bullying. Control and intervention children were then matched according to their similarity in relation to this profile of characteristics.

The key to propensity score matching working well and creating a comparable comparison group that is a good estimation of the counterfactual, is having a model that is a reliable and robust predictor of group membership. This is acknowledged to be difficult to achieve (Guo & Fraser, 2010) and the current model was no exception as its ability to discriminate between those in the control and intervention groups was relatively weak (Tjur $R^2$ = 0.13[13]).

The propensity score matching process appeared to work well to create two relatively comparable groups with 82 participants in each. Table 2 describes and compares the characteristics of the unmatched control group (n=318), the matched control group (n=82) created through the propensity score matching process, and the intervention group (n=82).

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[13] Tjur $R^2$ is a coefficient of discrimination (Tjur, 2009) and is an indicator of how good the model is at predicting whether a participant is in the intervention or control group. Its value can vary between 0 and 1 and the closer the value is to 1, the better the model is at predicting group membership.

| Variable | Unmatched control group n=318 | Matched control group n=82 | intervention group n=82 | Significance of difference between matched control group and intervention group[14] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child's nationality | Born in Ireland n=254 (80%) | Born in Ireland n=69 (84%) | Born in Ireland n=77 (93%) | p=0.001 |
| Mother's nationality | Born in Ireland n=245 (77%) | Born in Ireland n=67 (82%) | Born in Ireland n=76 (93%) | p=0.004 |
| Gender | Male n=66 (21%) Female n=252 (79%) | Male n=28 (34%) Female n=54 (66%) | Male n=37 (45%) Female n=45 (55%) | p=0.15 |
| Father's employment status | Employed n=266 (71%) Not empl n=92 (29%) | Employed n=30 (37%) Not empl n=52 (63%) | Employed n=34 (41%) Not empl n=48 (59%) | p=0.52 |
| Age | Mean(SD) 12.42(1.30) | Mean(SD) 12.28(1.43) | Mean(SD) 12.24(1.37) | p=0.87 |
| Family Affluence scale | Mean(SD) 4.58(1.66) | Mean(SD) 4.35(1.77) | Mean(SD) 4.30(1.80) | p=0.86 |
| Bullying | Mean(SD) 4.07(1.18) | Mean(SD) 3.93(1.35) | Mean(SD) 4.01(1.15) | p=0.67 |
| Prosocial behaviour | Mean(SD) 1.54(0.36) | Mean(SD) 1.47(0.43) | Mean(SD) 1.44(0.42) | p=0.64 |
| Difficult behaviour | Mean(SD) 0.65(0.30) | Mean(SD) 0.70(0.33) | Mean(SD) 0.67(0.28) | p=0.55 |
| Wellbeing | Mean(SD) 3.94(0.63) | Mean(SD) 3.97(0.63) | Mean(SD) 3.99(0.63) | p=0.84 |

As can be seen from the table above, there were no significant differences between the matched control and intervention groups on any of these characteristics with the exception of nationality. Although it was the intention to also match the groups on the ethnicity variable,

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[14] A p-value less than 5% (0.05) is considered statistically significant and means that the finding (e.g. the difference in group means or proportions) is unlikely to have been caused by chance. P-values greater than 0.05 indicate that any differences observed are likely to be due to random error (i.e. chance). Chi$^2$ tests were used to test group differences on the categorical variables and linear regressions using robust standard errors were used to estimate group differences on the continuous variables.

this was not possible due to there being zero participants in the intervention group who were not born in Ireland (i.e. they were either born in Ireland or their data on this variable was missing). This meant that nationality could not be included in the logit model. While this difference in groups has the potential to affect the validity of the study's conclusions, the threat is small given that previous research has not shown ethnicity to be a significant predictor of social-emotional or educational outcomes (e.g. Raver, Gershoff, Aber, 2007; Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzo & Pituch, 2010).

Every effort was made to test each participant at all three time points. To try and minimise attrition and ensure that children absent from school on the day of testing were included in each data sweep, schools were revisited and if possible the questionnaire was administered in the OST setting. Unfortunately however it was not possible to capture every child recruited and this is reflected in Figure 1 which depicts the flow of participants through the study. Both baseline and Time 3 data were available for only 56 of the 82 control participants and 50 of the 82 intervention participants (bearing in mind that 12 intervention participants only joined the study in 2012 and thus the study had ended before Time 3 data could be collected). It is these numbers on which the analyses reported below are based on.

*Figure 1: flow diagram of young people through the study*
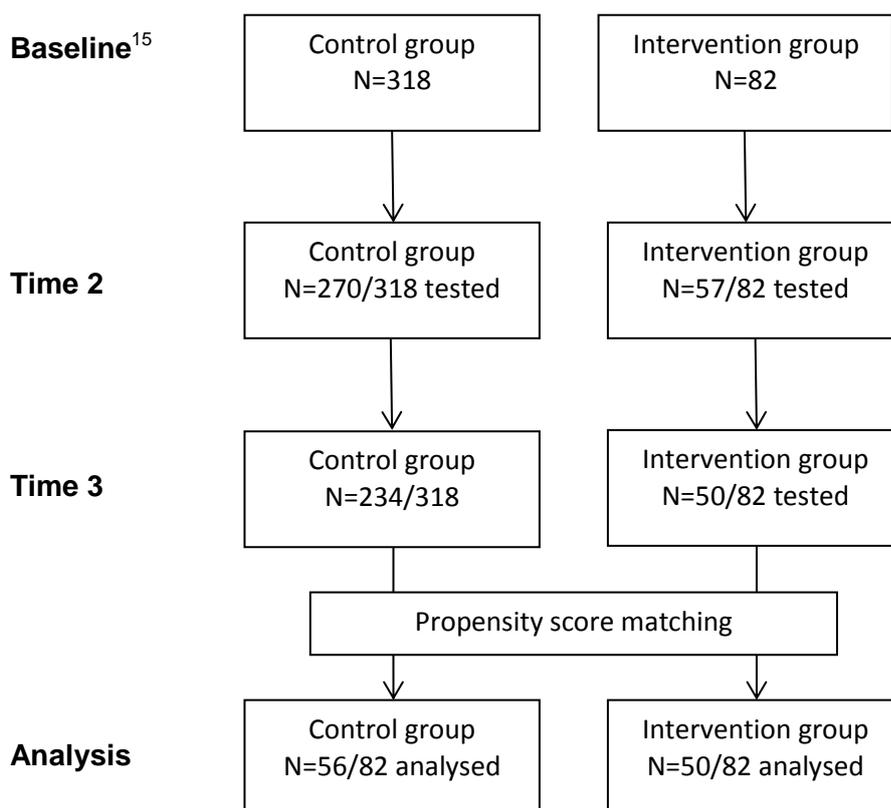
*Attendance of after school clubs*

At baseline (the first point of data collection) all participants were asked whether they attended an after school club and if so, for how long had they been attending.

Of the 82 young people in the intervention group, 74 indicated that they *were* attending an after school club (two said they were not and six did not answer the question). Of these 74 young people, over 70% (n=53) reported that they had been attending their after school club for more than one year.

Although the young people in the control group were not receiving the intervention, it is reasonable to speculate that at least some of them would be attending other, but similar, after school clubs elsewhere in the local (or wider) area. We often refer to the control group as receiving 'business as usual' but it is important to fully capture what 'business as usual' actually means, because frequently it does not mean *no* provision or an absence of services. This becomes especially important when we start drawing conclusions from comparing the intervention and control groups on the outcomes of interest, because when doing so we must bear in mind that the programme being evaluated is *not* being compared to a vacuum i.e. no provision at all. Instead the comparison, as is the case in the current evaluation, is between the intervention programme and alternative provision rather than a comparison between the intervention programme and no provision. Thus the contrast between what the two groups are exposed to might not be as stark as it could otherwise be and this has implications for the interpretation of any differences in outcomes between groups at the end of the study. In order to get a sense of what the control group were receiving in terms of after school provision, they were asked the same questions as the intervention group above.

It emerged that 66% (n=54) of the 82 young people in the newly created control group reported attending an after school club (25 reported that they did not attend a club and three did not answer the question). The majority of these 54 young people (n=39) attended a club outside of school (but in the local area) while the remainder attended clubs in school (n=13) or elsewhere (n=2). The proportion of control participants attending an out of school club increased to 72% at Time 2 and decreased to 63% at Time 3. An important point to note is that at baseline, over one third of the control group (28/82) reported that they had already been attending an after school club for more than one year (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Duration of attendance at after school clubs for both groups at baseline (Time 1)*

| Duration | Participants in the intervention group who reported attending an after school club (n=74) | Participants in the control group who reported attending an after school club (n=54) |
|---|---|---|
| *A few weeks* | 8 | 11 |
| *2-3 months* | 1 | 9 |
| *4-6 months* | 3 | 2 |
| *7-12 months* | 5 | 3 |
| *1-2 years* | 14 | 10 |
| *3 years or more* | 39 | 18 |
| *Don't know* | 1 | 1 |
| *Missing* | 3 | 0 |
| ***Total*** | **74** | **54** |

To get a better sense of the similarities or differences between the after school provision that both the intervention *and* the control group were exposed to and received, each participant was asked what activities they take part in at their after school club and to indicate as many activities as were appropriate.

The types of activities that children told us they took part in were then rank ordered according to the frequency with which they were cited. It can be seen from the two lists below that the type activity and the rank ordering of these are very similar for both the intervention and control groups. This suggests that the after school clubs attended by the control group had a very similar focus, activity wise, to that of the RLC out of school time programme attended by the intervention group.

*Rank order of most frequently cited activities in the after school clubs attended by the intervention and control groups:*

**Intervention group**
Homework (1st)
Sport (2nd)
Computers (3rd)
Arts and crafts (joint 4th)
Trips away (joint 4th)
Music (6th)
Dance (7th)
Drama (joint 8th)
Reading (joint 8th)
Maths (10th)

**Control group**
Sport (1st)
Homework (joint 2nd)
Arts and crafts (joint 2nd)
Computers (4th)
Trips away (5th)
Music (6th)
Dance (7th)
Drama (8th)
Reading (9th)
Maths (10th)

Related to this, young people attending after school clubs were also asked to tell us the reasons *why* they attended their after school club. These reasons are ranked and listed below for each group.

*Rank order of most frequently cited reasons for attending an after school club, broken down by intervention and control group:*

**Intervention group**

*To have fun (1$^{st}$)*
*It's near where I live (2$^{nd}$)*
<u>*To finish my homework (3$^{rd}$)*</u>
*They do activities that I like (joint 4$^{th}$)*
*Meet my friends (joint 4$^{th}$)*
Try new things (6$^{th}$)
To get help with school work (7$^{th}$)
Mum and/or Dad want me to (joint 8$^{th}$)
To feel more confident about my schoolwork (joint 8$^{th}$)
To read and understand more (9$^{th}$)
My brother(s)/sister(s) go there (10$^{th}$)
I feel safer after school (11$^{th}$)

**Control Group**

*To have fun (1$^{st}$)*
*Meet my friends (2$^{nd}$)*
*They do activities that I like (3$^{rd}$)*
*It's near where I live (4$^{th}$)*
<u>*To finish my homework (5$^{th}$)*</u>
Mum and/or Dad want me to (6$^{th}$)
To get help with school work (7$^{th}$)
To try new things (8$^{th}$)
To feel more confident about my schoolwork (9$^{th}$)
To read and understand more (10$^{th}$)
My brother(s)/sister(s) go there (11$^{th}$)
I feel safer after school (12$^{th}$)

It can be seen that the most frequently cited reason for attending an after school club is to have fun. Furthermore, the intervention group are reporting more frequently than the control group that they attend their after school club in order to finish their homework. Notwithstanding, the top five reasons for attending an after school club are very similar for all children, irrespective of whether it is the RLC after school club or an alternative club that is attended.

For those young people in the control group who indicated that they did *not* take part in an after school club (n=28) the most frequently cited reasons for not doing so included: they liked being at home (57%), their friends didn't go there (14%) and they had to help out at home (14%).

**Baseline differences in outcome variables**

It will be recalled that the outcome variables of interest in this element of the evaluation are: attitudes and motivation towards learning (i.e. the ALCP subscales: self-efficacy, challenge avoidance, active learning strategies, curiosity, mastery orientation, performance orientation and work avoidance), educational aspirations, school enjoyment, and homework difficulty.

There were no differences between the control and intervention groups on any of the outcome measures at baseline (see Table 4) indicating that the groups were comparable on the outcomes. However, there was attrition in the sample between Time 1 and 3. To explore whether this attrition affected the degree to which the two groups were comparable (or balanced) on pre-test characteristics at analysis, further analysis was conducted. Differences in pre-test scores between intervention and control groups for only those individuals still included in the analysis at Time 3 are reported in Table 4. Even after accounting for attrition there were no significant pre-test differences in measures between the groups included in Time 3 analysis with the exception of the Challenge Avoidance variable. This finding suggests that despite attrition, the intervention and control groups analysed at Time 3

remained largely balanced on pre-test scores and it is unlikely that pre-test differences resulted in a Type 1 error in the data presented.

*Table 4: Group differences on outcome measures at baseline for both the full matched sample and the analysed sample*

| Outcome | Full matched sample (n=156) | | | | Analysed sample (n=106) | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Baseline mean score (SD) | | | | Baseline Score (SD) | | |
| | Intervention group (n=76) | Control group (n=80) | min, max values | Significance[16] | Intervention group (n=50) | Control group (n=56) | Significance |
| *Homework* | 2.61 (0.61) | 2.71 (0.65) | 1, 4 | p=0.306 | 2.59 (0.60) | 2.68 (0.63) | p=0.484 |
| *School enjoyment* | 3.46 (0.83) | 3.59 (0.80) | 1, 5 | p=0.304 | 3.42 (0.80) | 3.37 (0.78) | p=0.792 |
| *Educational aspirations* | 2.36 (0.87) | 2.42 (0.73) | 0, 3 | p=0.639 | 2.37 (0.93) | 2.44 (0.69) | p=0.636 |
| **Motivation to learn** | | | | | | | |
| *Self-efficacy (ALCP)* | 2.90 (0.65) | 2.90 (0.67) | 1, 4 | p=0.994 | 2.83 (0.68) | 2.69 (0.66) | p=0.291 |
| *Performance orientation (ALCP)* | 2.45 (0.93) | 2.42 (0.92) | 1, 4 | p=0.836 | 2.40 (0.90) | 2.23 (0.88) | p=0.339 |
| *Mastery orientation (ALCP)* | 3.03 (0.70) | 3.03 (0.77) | 1, 4 | p=0.989 | 3.00 (0.65) | 2.82 (0.79) | p=0.200 |
| **Attitudes to work** | | | | | | | |
| *Work avoidance (ALCP)* | 2.21 (0.56) | 2.31 (0.63) | 1, 4 | p=0.322 | 2.22 (0.55) | 2.21 (0.63) | p=0.960 |
| *Challenge Avoidance (ALCP)* | 2.06 (0.60) | 2.19 (0.58) | 1, 4 | p=0.160 | 2.09 (0.61) | 2.33 (0.56) | p=0.039 |
| **Learning strategies** | | | | | | | |
| *Active Learning Strategies (ALCP)* | 2.68 (0.78) | 2.67 (0.71) | 1, 4 | p=0.944 | 2.63 (0.78) | 2.52 (0.71) | p=0.463 |
| *Curiosity (ALCP)* | 2.63 (0.62) | 2.52 (0.73) | 1, 4 | p=0.295 | 2.62 (0.68) | 2.40 (0.78) | p=0.127 |

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[16] The p-value tells us the probability that the difference in means is simply due to chance and random variation. If this probability is less than 5% (0.05) we can conclude that it is very unlikely that these findings are simply a chance occurrence instead they reflect a real difference between the intervention and control groups. If the p-value is greater than 5% (0.05) then we conclude that in fact any differences in means are likely to be due to chance variation rather than any real, systematic difference between the two groups. The p-value doesn't necessarily tell us anything about the magnitude of the difference between the groups however; just how likely it is that the difference in means is due to chance rather than an outside influence (like, for example, the intervention or something else that the intervention group is exposed to and the control group isn't).

## Main analysis

After controlling for baseline scores and other covariates,[17] including gender and age, the mean scores on each outcome at Time 3 are reported in Table 5 below. This was a complete case analysis.

*Table 5: Adjusted mean scores for the intervention and control groups at Time 3*

| Outcome | Adjusted Time 3 mean (SD) | | Effect size[18] (95% CI) | Significance[12] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Intervention group | Control group | | |
| *Homework* | 2.69 (0.60) | 2.85 (0.57) | -0.28 (-0.66, 0.10) | p=0.15 |
| *School enjoyment* | 3.21 (0.81) | 3.52 (0.81) | -0.37 (-0.77, 0.01) | **p=0.03** |
| *Educational aspirations* | 2.55 (0.68) | 2.68 (0.63) | -0.20 (-0.63, 0.23) | p=0.37 |
| ***Motivation to learn*** | | | | |
| *Self-efficacy (ALCP)* | 2.61 (0.56) | 2.79 (0.64) | -0.29 (-0.68, 0.10) | p=0.09 |
| *Performance orientation (ALCP)* | 1.97 (0.80) | 2.35 (0.89) | -0.45 (-0.84, -0.06) | **p=0.01** |
| *Mastery orientation (ALCP)* | 2.54 (0.75) | 2.87 (0.74) | -0.43 (-0.83, -0.05) | **p=0.01** |
| ***Attitudes to work*** | | | | |
| *Work avoidance (ALCP)* | 2.25 (0.60) | 2.51 (0.54) | -0.30 (-0.69, 0.09) | **p=0.02** |
| *Challenge Avoidance (ALCP)* | 2.30 (0.48) | 2.37 (0.61) | -0.12 (-0.51, 0.27) | p=0.55 |
| ***Learning strategies*** | | | | |
| *Active Learning Strategies (ALCP)* | 2.40 (0.68) | 2.56 (0.67) | -0.24 (-0.62, 0.15) | p=0.18 |

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[17] Everyone will have different baseline scores on each outcome, which is likely to influence their Time 3 score. However, we want to know what the unique contribution of the intervention is to the Time 3 score, ignoring any (confounding) contribution that the baseline score, gender or age is likely to make. We can do this by statistically *controlling* (or holding constant) these variables (or covariates) so that we can see what added benefit the intervention makes to the Time 3 score, irrespective of the value of the covariates.

[18] To get a sense of the magnitude of the difference between mean scores we look at the effect size, which varies between 0 (no effect) and 1 (a large effect). On rare occasions effect sizes can be greater than 1. It is a standardised value, which means that we can meaningfully compare effect sizes of different outcomes even though different scales were used to measure them. A positive effect size indicates that the intervention group had a higher mean score than the control group. A negative effect size means that the control group had a higher mean score than the intervention group.

| Curiosity (ALCP) | 2.42 (0.62) | 2.43 (0.64) | -0.01 (-0.40, 0.37) | p=0.94 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

It will be recalled that at the start of the study (baseline) there were no differences between the control and intervention groups on any of the outcomes. By the end of the study however there was a statistically significant difference between these groups on four of the ten outcomes, three of which were related to young people's internal motivation and attitudes towards learning: mastery orientation, performance orientation and work avoidance and one related to school enjoyment.

*Enjoyment of school*
Compared to the control group, the intervention group reported less enjoyment of school (ES=-0.37, 95% CI: -0.77, 0.01) as measured by the Kidscreen School Learning subscale. This means that the intervention group reported that they were less happy at school, did not get along as well with their teachers, did not enjoy going to school as much and were not able to pay attention as much as the control group were.

*Motivation to learn*
The findings in relation to young people's motivation to learn are mixed. The control group reported higher mastery orientation beliefs compared to the intervention group (ES=-0.43, 95% CI: -0.83, -0.05) with high scores on this subscale associated with seeking to improve competence, increase knowledge and believing that hard work and effort pay off in relation to mastering new tasks over time (Elliot & Dweck, 1998). In this respect the control group reported better mastery orientation, than the intervention group. This is important to note because better mastery orientation is related to better educational outcomes such as greater engagement in the classroom and higher achievement (Wolters, 2004, Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002).

In contrast however, the intervention group reported better outcomes on the performance orientation subscale as, conversely, lower scores on this scale are associated with more positive educational outcomes (ES=-0.45, 95% CI: -0.84, -0.06). Higher scores on the performance orientation scale are associated with 'showcasing' knowledge and being motivated by external assessments and rewards. Individuals high in performance orientation tend to see learning as beyond their control and can attempt to avoid failure by avoiding risk.

*Attitudes to work*
In addition, the intervention group reported more positive attitudes to work than the control group, which was demonstrated by their lower scores on the work avoidance subscale of the ALCP (ES=-0.30, 95% CI: -0.69, 0.09). High scores on this subscale are associated with taking a less effortful path and actively choosing work that is easy and less challenging, suggesting that the young people in the intervention group are less likely to avoid difficult work than their control group peers.

*Non significant findings*
No significant differences were observed for the remaining outcomes. It may be the case that the study is not sufficiently powered to detect differences in these outcomes, or it may

be that these outcomes, as they were measured, are unaffected by the intervention. It is not possible to know for certain the true reason for this, however the measures for educational aspirations and homework displayed relatively low internal consistency, which suggests that they might not have sufficient psychometric properties to reliably detect differences, should they exist.

**Summary**
The findings from this element of the study are undoubtedly mixed and, as is frequently the case in studies such as this one, a clear picture has not emerged. Overall, and compared to the control group, the young people in the intervention group are reporting that they enjoy school less and they less strongly believe that they can improve and master new learning or that their hard work will pay off. Equally, and again compared to the control group, the young people in the intervention group are demonstrating that their reasons for working hard are more internally motivated i.e. not motivated by what others think of them and they are less likely to avoid hard work or effort.

To try and better understand these findings it is useful to draw on the research literature as well as the findings from the process evaluation. According to Eccles' (2009) expectancy value framework, people choose to take on a task if they believe that they have the skills and characteristics to succeed and if they value the task. The findings of the quasi-experimental study suggest that the intervention group are lagging behind the control group in relation to their enjoyment of school and their belief in their own ability to do well in school (mastery orientation). Despite this however it seems that they are less likely to avoid difficult work (work avoidance) and are not motivated by what others think of their ability (performance orientation). It is possible that this might provide fertile ground for beginning to focus on enhancing young people's belief in their capabilities as well as potentially increasing their motivation to take on more challenging tasks (Harackiewicz, Rozek, Hulleman, & Hyde, 2012). From the qualitative interviews it is evident that this is already a focus for those who work in the homework club, as they are keen to encourage young people and praise them for their endeavours using the homework journal as a means of doing so.

The value that a person places on a particular behaviour or task can change over time as competence and enjoyment increase. However value can also vary as function of perceived cost (for example limited time or energy) and can be affected by anxiety or fear of failure. In relation to raising the value young people place on their school and homework, parents have an important role to play (Harackiewicz et al., 2012) and existing evidence already demonstrates a strong, positive relationship between parental engagement in a child's education welfare (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Fan et al., 2012; Green et al., 2007; Jeynes 2007, 2012; LaRocque et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2002). As the qualitative data from the process evaluation amply demonstrates, the importance of triangulating the role of schools, community and parents in relation to improving educational outcomes for young people cannot be underestimated and the RLC are in a central position to build on what has already been achieved but also to drive forward the work in this area that is still to be undertaken.

*Limitations*
It is important to bear in mind that this was a small study and not a randomised controlled trial, thus we cannot conclude that the differences between the control and intervention groups are uniquely due to whether the young people received the RLC programme or not. Furthermore, a high proportion of the control group also attended an after school programme (ASP) during the study and a large proportion of both groups had been attending an ASP for more than one year at baseline testing. Despite the careful matching process, it is very possible that there are other, unknown differences between the two groups. For example,

and for a number of reasons, the intervention group may experience greater disenfranchisement and greater exposure to a variety of risk factors compared to the control group, as they get older. It may well be these confounding factors that are driving the differences described above rather than the programme itself.  In addition, given the small number of participants in the study, it has not been possible to estimate the true differences between the groups with any degree of precision and a larger, more powerful study design, ideally an RCT, would be required to achieve this. This notwithstanding, the study serves as a very useful point of insight into the current school and learning related issues that the intervention group are reporting and how these have changed, relative to the control group, over the last two years.

# Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions

**Introduction**

The data from both strands of this study clearly underline the importance and value of the work that the Rialto Learning Community (RLC) undertakes on a daily basis in their local area. It is an organisation that is firmly embedded in the community, engaging with young people, schools and parents on many different levels through the homework clubs, Arts Programme and the strong collaborative links that have been forged between the community and schools. Its holistic and long-term approach has contributed to the unique influence and reach that the RLC has within the community.

The quantitative, quasi-experimental study has provided a mixed picture of what might be occurring for the young people who attend the RLC programme. While we cannot conclude that the intervention is the sole reason for these changes, or indeed estimate the potential mitigating effects of the programme, we can clearly see that alongside a less positive school experience and less confidence in their ability to master new learning the intervention group is demonstrating more positive outcomes in relation to their internal motivation to learn and their attitudes towards work (no changes were observed in the remaining six outcome areas). While these are important findings, the limitations of the conclusions that we can reliably draw from this element of the study have been discussed in the previous chapter. It is useful therefore to turn to the findings from the process evaluation to provide further clarity and a more in-depth exploration of the process and outcomes of the work of the RLC.

The Rialto Learning Community has been described as a *change management initiative* that has been developed and implemented over the last five years. It consists of five related yet distinct components that are summarised here (and described in greater detail in the introduction section of the report):

1. The integration into single unified entity the three local projects providing services to 11 – 14 year olds: the Rialto Youth Project, Dolphin House Homework Club and Fatima Homework Club.

2. The reappraisal and development of youth work practices in the context of adopting an 'outcomes based' approach that is continually informed by evidence and evaluation.

3. The formation of a community-schools framework to promote positive change in young people's educational welfare and facilitate the transition from primary to secondary level education.

4. The development of a computerised database and information management system to facilitate the ongoing collection of data to enable profiling, needs analysis, targeting, programming, evaluating and measuring the outcomes of the RLC's work with young people.

5. The development of an innovative model which aims to make a significant contribution to policy making and youth service provision in terms of improving service planning and programme delivery and leading to better outcomes for children and young people alike.

This five-year process of change and development represents a prodigious undertaking for individuals involved in each tier of the organisation and it is clear that the restructuring of the RLC has presented significant challenges, particularly in terms of integrating three very different entities into one cohesive body. Two other issues have compounded these challenges, loss of key personnel and funding cutbacks, which have prevented the development and implementation of a dedicated strategy for parents and the integration of arts programmes with local schools. It is evident from the qualitative element of this evaluation however, that as the Rialto Learning Community emerges from this period of reconstitution and transition that considerable gains have been made in accomplishing the objectives that they have set themselves (outlined above).

**Critical junctures likely to yield positive outcomes for young people**
The key practice changes, initiatives and values that emerged from the qualitative data as likely to contribute to improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion, coalesced around six main themes:
1. Building and extending relationships between local schools and the RLC
2. Sharing of information and teaching methods between schools and homework clubs
3. Embeddedness of the RLC within the local community
4. Tools used by the RLC to promote a more evidence informed way of working
5. RLC strategies: the intersection between the Arts Programme, school and parent strategies
6. School and the community: historical tensions and shared understandings

The benefits and challenges encountered in implementing the practices and enterprises associated with these themes are explored in greater detail in the sections below alongside recommendations for future and continued practice.

*1. Building and extending relationships between local schools and the RLC*
It is clear that the Community School Strategy (CSS) and its composite network strategies have had a positive impact on the historically dysfunctional triangular relationships between the Rialto Learning Community (RLC), local families and schools. The CSS has provided a vehicle by which the RLC have developed and engaged in a number of targeted activities and networks with schools. Through school visits, shared training, structured networking opportunities and a dedicated education coordinator the RLC has sought to build new school-community relationships and extend existing relationships. The Principals' Network has made an important contribution in terms of providing a forum for both local primary and secondary schools, mediating practice and relational tensions, and achieving a synthesis of academic content. The literacy Network has provided opportunities for the RLC and local schools to actively engage with each other and the third Network, around in-service training in restorative practice, is also commended for improving relations between youth workers and the local schools. Recent initiatives where schoolteachers and homework club staff have

undertaken in-service training together have been similarly beneficial. It is clear that regular and structured contact between schools and the RLC has created three important opportunities: firstly, that schools gain a fuller understanding of family circumstances; secondly, that homework clubs are made aware of curricular requirements; and thirdly that homework policies are designed in cognisance of these realities. Whilst acknowledging the associated challenges and the length of time that change can take, both teachers and the RLC staff valued the continuity of personnel and continuity of relationships and identified these as a pivotal factor in the development of the RLC and community-school links. A key component of this process of relationship building however was the specific role of the RLC education coordinator, including the work and effort that they had put into this role over recent years.

## 2. Sharing of information and teaching methods between schools and homework clubs

There was broad agreement amongst Rialto personnel that the Community School Strategy (CSS), in particular, the composite networks as detailed above have encouraged meaningful changes in practice and skill development, especially in relation to sharing of both information and pedagogy. Schools' provision of materials such as literacy packs and guidance to homework clubs has been important; in particular, the sharing of contemporary teaching methods (such as phonics and narratives) and information around individual literacy levels.  This has resulted in homework programmes becoming increasingly synthesised with school curricula as well as literacy and numeracy activities being incorporated into a variety of local arts-based projects.

The work of the homework clubs is further enhanced by the 'fluid movement' between homework club staff and teachers.  It was consistently suggested that (a) sharing practice methods was 'hugely beneficial'; and (b) that teachers being seen in the clubs and homework staff being seen at schools instilled within young people a sense that a 'genuine interest' was been taken in their educational welfare.  One of the most important communication lines between schools, families and homework clubs is the homework journal.  In addition to synchronising academic content and assessments, the journals also perform an 'early warning system' role; and in so doing, the journals encourage the addressing of social / family issues before they become major difficulties.

## 3. Embeddedness of the RLC within the local community

The Rialto interviews emphasise the RLC's unique influence and reach within the local community.  In particular the diversity and scope of the programmes and activities they offer means that the organisation engages on many different levels with a wide age-range of cohorts.  Here the value of the both the Arts Programme and the homework clubs is most apparent and, according to Rialto personnel, engagement with young people through these enterprises has always aimed to facilitate access to third level education or progression routes in the various art forms.  The recently improved relationships with local schools and a renewed focus on educational pathways means that the RLC is in a much stronger position to provide guidance on, for example, the matriculation requirements for university, or, to help talented young artists develop and 'professionalise' their skills.

These practice changes have not been without their challenges however and a number of Rialto personnel spoke of their scepticism, firstly, that schools are sufficiently aware of many young people's socio-spatial disadvantage; and secondly, that they value, or even understand, youth work. The principals, teachers and librarians interviewed here however appreciate that their 'detachment' from the community is a serious obstacle in terms of creating conditions conducive to promoting young people's educational welfare.

This 'disconnection' between schools and local people starkly contrasts with the 'embeddedness' of the Rialto youth projects in the community. In fact, the schools do acknowledge and recognise their own limitations and the value of collaborative practices with the RLC and one example of this relates to the provision of RLC venues for teacher / parent interactions, which are, commonly, seen as neutral and less intimidating than school premises.

Several respondents spoke about the 'tactile' and 'affectionate' relationship RLC youth workers have with young people and their role as 'pseudo parents' suggesting that the RLC clearly has a unique capacity to engage with 'harder to reach' young people and parents. A significant proportion of Rialto personnel were raised and continue to live in the local area, which means that they share, to an extent, the socio-spatial experiences of the families they engage with. In addition, by sending their own children to the local schools, they can more readily relate to the local challenges many parent face in supporting their children's education.

### 4. Tools used by the RLC to promote a more evidence informed way of working
It is clear from the interviews that the Logic Models, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and database are essential tools in the successful development, implementation and monitoring of the RLC's day-to-day activities.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm and support among staff for using a logic model approach to plan and develop activities and programmes. There was wide recognition that this consequent 'focus on outcomes' encouraged youth workers to mindfully consider their practice and 'reflect on what they're doing . . . does it work, and is it effective', making a positive contribution to the work of the RLC. This outcomes based ethos appears to be now firmly embedded in the RLC, however, it was also conceded that, firstly, the 'standard and rigour' of logic models across the RLC is 'variable'; secondly, that they can present 'a real challenge for people to embrace'; thirdly, that there has been inadequate 'on-going support' for staff in terms of training.

The Individual Learning Plan is an additional tool that the RLC has been developing to produce an evidence informed 'child centred' profile for each participating young person across a 'range of social and intellectual competencies' and to identify trends over time. This profiling tool has been very much embraced by youth workers, enabling them to work 'more strategically' and to see the young person as 'a whole entity', allowing areas for development to be more easily identified. The ILP is a numerical scoring system, however Rialto personnel highlighted the importance of also attaching qualitative descriptors to the rating scores in order that these have more context and meaning. Similar to the logic model

approach, some weaknesses of the ILP method were identified, including: inadequate training to develop the necessary skills in terms of using and completing the ILPs; inconsistencies in the scoring of young people across the different domains, and; the need to refine the competencies and domains contained within the ILP.

While the interviews clearly highlight the value, efficacy and user friendliness of the RLC's Individual Learning Plans and Logic Models, it is equally apparent that the 'endless' technical 'bedding in' issues with the old database have had a 'disruptive' effect on the organisation and a 'demoralising' effect on staff.  Although the interviews convey relief that a 'vastly improved' system will be in place soon, there was also a patent sense of frustration and dismay that these 'serious problems' were not properly addressed far earlier.

This new way of working has received a high level of support from Rialto staff however, in order to maximise the potential of this way of working, the RLC needs to ensure a that a high level of consistency and reliability is achieved and maintained in the data that is being collected through the ILPs and the database. The interviewees suggest that further, formal training in both the use of ILPs and the database would help to achieve this aim.

### 5. RLC strategies: the intersection between the Arts Programme school and parent strategies

The Arts programme forms a key element of the RLC's delivery of youth work projects and community engagement activities.   It is largely credited with the rich local heritage of youth work and community based arts and many parents and staff are former attendees of homework clubs and / or youth arts programmes.

The interviews indicate that the four art forms (music, drama, visual arts and dance) are guided by 'a set of extrinsic benefits' in terms of 'self-organising' around 'events and platforms' and providing 'a critical voice for young people' allowing them to create 'considered images or responses to life through a variety of projects'.  Within the four art forms there is a 'conscious effort' to incorporate literacy and numeracy skill development across the spectrum of activities, examples of which include: song composition in the music clubs, script reading and script writing in drama, the under 8s art programme, which is based around storytelling and working towards writing their own book, as well as numeracy examples such as 'steps and timing' in dance.  Other positive outcomes for young people identified in the interviews include self-confidence, social skills, addressing difficult issues and progression routes.

It was additionally argued that through acoustic events, concerts and recordings a great 'sense of pride in the possibility of children' was created 'bringing in the community and the parents'.  Although one interviewee expressed that it was 'often a challenge' to get parents to respond positively to 'anything of an artistic nature', the consensus was that parental involvement in the local arts programmes was 'fairly good'.  Another worker elaborated that it tended to be 'the more informal spaces' such as 'acoustic gigs' which 'worked better' and enabled 'loads of parents' to attend.

It has been with regret that the RLC have been unable to fully integrate programmes, particularly, the Arts Programme with local schools, primarily because, related to the current economic downturn, there has been no funding to do so. Similarly, due to funding restrictions, neither has it been possible to establish a dedicated strategy to encourage parents' fuller involvement in their children's educational welfare, which has become 'increasingly difficult'.

The interviews concur with the literature that the effective involvement of parents in their children's educational welfare is imperative. However, as the data from the interviews makes clear, this presents a significant challenge for many local parents. The school experience of many local parents serving as a significant barrier in terms of supporting their children's educational welfare.

Thus, in terms of creating a seamless learning environment, the data suggest achieving such a goal is a significant challenge. The long-standing disjointed relationship between many local schools and the community continues to have a negative impact in terms of creating conditions conducive to young people's educational welfare. However, collaborative engagement with schools and effective parental involvement is an important means through which teachers have become more aware of community and family circumstances.

There is, therefore, a clear need for interventions aimed at encouraging increased and improved parental involvement in the educational welfare of young people, in a non-stigmatising way. Here again, the RLC seem uniquely placed to design and deliver initiatives such as the adult literacy programmes which seek to (a) help parents address their own educational deficits; and (b) furnish them with the necessary skills to more ably support their children's learning.

### 6. School and the community: historical tensions and shared understandings
As has been previously discussed, one of the most striking themes to emerge from the Rialto interviews was the disjointed and, often, acrimonious nature of historic relationships between the schools and the community. The nature of these relationships has clearly engendered 'distrust in the whole school system' for many RLC workers. Importantly, these perceptions are based on a range of engagement levels, such as: RLC staffs' personal recollections of their own time at school; their experience as mothers of pupils; and their professional experience in terms of engaging with the schools on behalf of the RLC.

The interviews indicate that the joint visitation to New York provided an invaluable opportunity for teachers, principals and youth workers to witness models of good practice together. It was: firstly, the 'catalyst' for subsequent collaboration and the establishment of structured links between schools and the RLC; and secondly, 'transformative' in terms of inter-personal relations and mutual understanding.

It is clear that this is a particularly difficult time for teachers across the Republic of Ireland. Government cutbacks, pay freezes, the spectre of imminent closures and amalgamations, a moratorium on promotions and the extra burden of the Croke Park hour have, according to many respondents, 'demoralised' the teaching profession. When these factors are

considered alongside schools' acceptance that they are widely perceived as the 'bad guys' who routinely 'reject people' it is hardly surprising that some teachers are less than enthusiastic about community involvement and the attendant extra-curricular activity. To their credit, the vast majority are keen to foster and improve community links and throughout these interviews have extolled the virtues of such collaboration.

The general view of school personnel was that the clubs provide valuable support and a safe environment, that attendees are 'happier' and 'more secure at school' and that, more broadly, they encourage young people to stay in education longer. Although several respondents argued that there were too many other variables to determine the extent homework clubs have impacted on the literacy and numeracy of attendees, the consensus was that the clubs make a 'valuable contribution'.

The data here concurs with the RLC interviews and suggests that creating a seamless learning environment in the Rialto catchment area is a significant challenge. The disjointed relationship between the community and many local schools coupled with social disadvantage/troubled family circumstances means that schools often find it difficult to engage with parents. Conversely, many parents lack the capacity and inclination to engage with schools. These interviews evidence a wide range of examples where teachers and principals, in cognisance of these realities, have adopted collaborative approaches with the RLC to address issues, particularly around homework, behaviour management and encouraging parental involvement.

**Conclusions and recommendations**
The findings from this evaluation concur with the broader literature and suggest that the most important aspect of a young person's learning environment is the triangular relationship between school, community and home. The quasi-experimental element of the study provides mixed and inconclusive evidence in relation to the impact of the RLC on the measured educational well being outcomes of young people participating in the programme over a two-year period.

The qualitative element of the study however, emphasises the space(s) occupied by the RLC in this learning environment, it is clear that the organisation performs a critical role. As previously stated, one of the most consistent themes to emerge from these interviews was the embeddedness of the RLC in the wider community. The qualitative data presented here amply demonstrates three important points. Firstly, that this embeddedness has afforded to RLC a peerless position in the community in terms of supporting the educational welfare of disadvantaged young people. Secondly, that, particularly in light of previously 'dysfunctional' relationships between local schools and the community, the RLC has a crucial role to play in terms of creating and maintaining collaborative linkages. The third point concerns similarly fractious historic relations between parents and schools. The data presented here concurs with the broader literature and suggests that the family, the community and schools all have individual and collective responsibilities in terms of a young person's education. The data also makes it clear that the RLC's reach, influence and embeddedness in the Fatima and Dolphin estates assures that it is uniquely placed to create the conditions for this triangular support.

It is with the above in mind that we propose the following recommendations:

1. The RLC should continue to focus on young people's outcomes through continued evaluation and monitoring, supported by the existing practices within the organisation. While it has not been possible to provide conclusive evidence of positive changes in young people's outcomes in this study, as the processes employed by RLC continue to embed and develop, further robust evaluations to evaluate changes in outcomes for young people as they progress through the RLC should be pursued.

2. The new ways of working that have been developed as part of the RLC's commitment to improving outcomes for young people have received high levels of support from staff. However, it is apparent that in order to maximise the potential effectiveness and efficiency of such processes ongoing up-skilling and training of staff in relation to both pedagogy and technical use of ILPs and the new database is required.

3. The evident success of fostering relationships and working practices between schools and the community provides a compelling rationale to maintain and further strengthen these connections.  This continues to be an important endeavour given that a 'disconnect' between schools and the community is still a relevant issue, there can be a high turnover of staff in some schools and that the buy-in and commitment from teachers and principals remains varied within the existing network.

4. Relatedly, the development of a dedicated parent strategy that will aim to engage parents more fully in their child's educational welfare, both through the community and through empowering parents to engage with schools, is recommended.  It is acknowledged that lack of funding has thus far impeded the progress of this strand of the RLC's work, however the evidence provided throughout the literature and the data from this study indicates that this should be a priority for both the RLC and potential funders.

5. The Arts programme forms a key element of the RLC's delivery of youth work projects and community engagement activities and is uniquely placed to engage with young people, parents and schools. Currently however the programme does not have strong links into the schools and, similar to the parent strategy, this work has been hindered due to a lack of funding. Given the potential of such a strategy to strengthen existing community-school-parent collaborations, in addition to making the programme more widely available it is recommended that the development of such a strategy be pursued.

It is both commendable and desirable that the commitment, vision and outworking of the RLC remains focused on improving outcomes for young people as well as endeavouring to ensure that their own practices and programmes are evidence informed, targeted and effective in producing positive change in these outcomes. They have developed, and are now implementing, strategies that require them to continually collect evidence and evaluate outcomes and while these new ways of working have undoubtedly been challenging, they have been positively adopted by staff.

RLC are uniquely placed to develop and strengthen school and community relationships. In a changing, and often uncertain, economic and cultural landscape, the consistent and dedicated community underpinning provided currently by RLC remains crucial to those growing and learning in this area.

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# Rialto Learning Community – Concluding Phase 2013-14

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Short-Term Outcomes (2014) | Long-Term Outcomes (2015-) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Investment & support from The Atlantic Philanthropies & the F2 Centre & Enterprise Management Board<br>• Suite of Database Tools to facilitate Profiling, Programme planning, delivery and evaluation<br>• School Community Partnership<br>• The resources of the Rialto Youth Project<br>• The experience of youth leaders and residents | **Quality OST programmes**<br>• Development of Database Tools for use by Project Workers<br>• Delivery of quality programmes in the arts, sports and homework support in community and school settings<br>• Refining structures for school- community collaboration<br>• Parents strategy<br>• In-service training for teachers and community workers<br><br>**Learning and Evaluation**<br>• Evaluate OST<br>• Develop and implement a Communications Strategy to promote OST activities | **Quality OST programmes**<br>• Suite of Database Tools<br>• OST programmes delivered & documented<br>• Principals Network, School Community Forum in operation<br>• Staff training/mentoring<br><br>**Learning and Evaluation**<br>• Final OST Evaluation Report<br>• Communications Strategy to promote dissemination and mainstreaming of OST activities | **Improved:**<br>• Capacity of Youth Project staff to plan, deliver & evaluate quality OST programmes<br>• Quality of engagement between children and OST staff<br>• Quality and consistency of arts, sports & homework support to young people<br>• Coordination between schools/informal sector<br>• Parent engagement in children's educational welfare<br>• Teacher sensitivity to community contexts | **Improved:**<br>• Exemplary evidence-based OST services influencing national policy<br>• Child Educational Welfare<br>• Ability to advocate for local children and youth while delivering specific programmes and policy reform that will improve their lives<br>• Learning and models created that will contribute to creating in Ireland a society that is socially and economically just. |

# Appendix 2

**Research question 1**

*What are the critical junctures between and within school, community projects and home that are likely, in the long-term, to yield improved outcomes for young people's well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion?*

1. What do participants perceive to be the key factors (critical junctures) that originally led to the development of the *Community School Strategy/Arts Programme*?
2. With this in mind, how were these key factors specifically addressed in the development of the *Community School Strategy/Arts Programme*?
3. Was the development of these programmes informed by models of best practice and the available research evidence? If so, in what way?
4. Were the key components of the *Community School Strategy/Arts Programme* (identified above) agreed upon collaboratively by everyone who is involved in their delivery?
5. What have been the main challenges that have been encountered in relation to setting up the *Community School Strategy/Arts Programme*?
6. What have been the main successes of the *Community School Strategy/Arts Programme* for the young people in terms of their well-being, school attendance, educational participation and school completion?

**Research question 2**

*What are the significant practices/changes in practice that underpin these critical junctures, and what have been the challenges to implementing these practices?*

*Community School Strategy*
1. In what ways do participants currently engage with the RLC, schools and other agencies (to improve the educational and personal development outcomes for young people)? i.e. what is the nature of communications and networking as it currently exists between school, homework clubs, the youth project and young people?
    a. Is there a structured/systematic approach taken by schools and the RLC in this regard?
    b. Has the Community School Forum been established? Who are the members of this forum?
    c. Has a 'Community Induction in service programme for schools' been designed? How often is the programme run? What is its content? Is it perceived as being useful? In what ways?
    d. Do participants believe there have already been significant systematic changes in practice and engagement made over the last number of years?
    e. Do participants believe these changes have been effective in helping to improve the educational and personal development outcomes for young people?

f. What might help to improve engagement and collaboration (from both a school and community perspective)?

2. Do participants think relationships between schools and community have changed over the last number of years? Why and in what ways?
   a. What changes to practice have been made by Rialto Learning Initiative to try to improve these relationships?
   b. What changes to practice have been made by Schools to try to improve these relationships?

3. How much sharing of relevant information occurs between the school and the Homework Clubs?
   a. How effective has the Communication and Information Sharing Protocol been?
   b. What roles have the Literacy Network and Homework Support Learning Networks played in facilitating the collaboration process between school and community?
   c. What information is shared, by whom and how is it used? What internal processes in schools are triggered by this information? Is this information incorporated into teachers' practices and if so, how?
   d. Are school learning targets shared with the Homework Clubs?
   e. What are the benefits (to schools, the homework clubs and young people) and/or challenges associated with this information sharing?
   f. What could be changed to improve sharing of information?

4. What is the nature of the contact that youth workers and/or homework clubs have with parents?
   a. Is there currently a planned/systematic approach to this contact?
   b. Have plans been made to engage more with parents? How?

5. How much sharing of relevant information occurs between the homework club and the family?
   a. What are the barriers to sharing information? (Are parents engaged in their child's education and/or club activities? Why do you think this might be?
   b. What are the barriers to developing or implementing a parent strategy to improve information sharing? (What could be changed to improve sharing of information?)
   c. What are the barriers to involving parents in the homework clubs' activities?

6. In general, what have been the main challenges and barriers participants have faced when engaging/collaborating with the community, schools, parents and/or other agencies?
   a. How have participants tried to address the challenges and barriers associated with engaging with community, schools and parents?
      i. Has this worked? If so, why? If not, why not?
   b. What changes still need to be made?

    c. What would help these changes to happen? (Different approaches to communications? More resources?)

7. What has been done to improve the homework support skills of community workers and parents?
    a. Has this been effective in improving skills?
    b. What are the benefits and/or challenges associated with improving homework support skills?
    c. What is still needed?

*RLC/Arts Programme*
1. In what ways do participants, i.e. and their projects, currently engage with the schools and other agencies (to improve the educational and personal development outcomes for young people)?
    a. Can participants identify particular activities and approaches to their work that have proved effective?
    b. What have been the main challenges and barriers participants have faced when engaging/collaborating with these groups of individuals?

2. How do participants think their own internal practice has changed in response to the challenges and barriers to effective collaboration between schools and the home environment?
    a. What have been the main benefits/impacts/challenges of these changes?

3. Specifically, do participants use Session Evaluation Sheets and Outreach Sheets?
    a. How is this information used?
    b. How useful are they?
    c. Do they help to evaluate participant's own practice?

4. Have you a Code of Conduct for your programme?
    a. How do you deal with challenging behaviour?
    b. What are young peoples' perceptions of the nature of their participation in the various programmes?
    c. What are the different types of Learning Networks that are taking place?
    d. What has been the main benefit/challenge of these?

5. How do participants identify and respond to real time issues for young people within the new methods of working?

6. How supported do participants feel to do their work?
    a. How helpful are the weekly team meetings/monthly supervision?
    b. How much are participants aware of what other teams are doing within the RLC?
    c. How well has the training and support from the RLC met the needs of the participant's post?

d. Are there any areas in which the participant would like to receive additional training or skills that they would like to develop?

**Research question 3**
*To what extent have these significant practices proved effective in creating a seamless learning environment for young people between home, school and community?*

*Community School Strategy*
1. What do you think the RLC/Principals/teachers/librarians of the Literacy and Restorative Practices networks perceive the benefits/impacts/effects of the community based informal contribution to education to be?
   a. Has this perception changed since the implementation of the Community School Strategy?
   b. What has been done to raise awareness of community life among teachers? Has this had an impact? (to include in-community teacher training)

2. What impact has the 'homework support' had on the young people attending?
   *For RLC participants:*
   a. How have the 'homework support plan', 'homework completion template', 'attendance register' and 'homework profiles' contributed to this?
   b. Which of these has been the most/least effective and why?

3. What has been the impact of the various networks?
   a. What are the benefits and/or challenges associated these networks? (attendance, participation and engagement of members)
   b. What could be changed to improve the dialogue between members of the networks?
   c. Is there a particular approach that has been found to be effective when dealing with issues between young people and school/community personnel?

4. Overall, has the Community School Strategy resulted in a greater culture of collaboration and information sharing?
   a. How has this benefited young people?
   b. Can you think of an example from your own practice?

*RLC/Arts Programme*
1. In what ways do participants think the programme they are involved in delivering has benefited the well-being of and learning environment for young people?

2. Have outcomes for young people's participation in the programme been set?
   a. What elements of a young person's participation in the programme do these outcomes capture?
   b. Has the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved been established?

    c. What is attendance like in your programme? (What do participants think are the reasons for good or poor attendance)

3. Do participants believe their programme has improved their engagement with schools and parents? If so, how? If not, why not? How has this developed over time?

4. How effective do participants believe the implementation of the Individualised Learning Plan has been in terms of:
   o Ease of use for staff
   o Generating an accurate picture of the well-being of the young person
   o Accurately identifying areas for development
   o Identifying suitable programmes and/or interventions
   o Evaluating the participation, engagement and performance of the young person
   o Evaluating the impact of the effectiveness of interventions for the young person
   o Accurately identifying and capturing crisis interventions as they arise?

5. How helpful has the development of a logic model been in terms of planning, delivering and developing your programme?
   o How did you develop your logic models?
   o How easy were they to develop?
   o What challenges did you face in developing a logic model?

6. In the participant's view, what still needs to happen or be done in order to fully address the challenges/barriers to collaborating with schools/parents/other agencies that have been mentioned?

**Research question 4**
*What space does the Rialto Learning Community occupy in this learning environment, in relation to the schools?*

*RLC/Arts Programme*
1. Development of the Homework Support Strategy (through the Homework Support Learning Networks):
   a. How was the strategy developed?
   b. How has it changed what is done in the homework clubs?
   c. What challenges were encountered during its development?
   d. What are the benefits of the strategy?

2. Restructuring of the Summer Projects:
   a. What re-structuring was undertaken and why?
   b. What were the challenges associated with the re-structuring?
   c. What are the benefits?
   d. Is any further development of the projects required?

3. How was the arts programme developed?
    a. What is the nature of the process within which arts programmes are developed, from the emergence of a young person's interest or need, through the arts coordinators meetings/working groups, to evaluation of the completed programme?
    b. Who is involved?
    c. How is it coordinated?
    d. What are the main challenges?

4. How do you think your project uniquely contributes to a young person's educational and personal development?  (can you think of an example?)
    a. What does RLC/Arts programme do that schools cannot, or do not, do?
    b. How does it do this?

**Out-of-School Time Observation for the Music Group - Monday 16th July 2012**

**Cover Sheet**

Activity Name: Music Group 6pm - 7.30pm

Activity Overview:     The music group sessions took place 6-7.30pm on Monday evenings throughout the month of July. Their aim was to consolidate the musical practice that had taken place throughout the previous year and to prepare for a final concert where parents and the local community would be invited.

Activity type:              Music: Instrumental and vocal lessons, practices, performance

Type of Space:                      Other: Large, open, suitable space within St Andrews

Total Staff:             Specialist/Other professional:      1 Musician
                                                                          2 Community Youth Workers

Total Participants:     11 girls
                        2 boys

Grade Levels:           Age range 10-17 years

Participation Type:     By interest

Skill Development:      Both Skill Building and Skill practice/Reinforcement (dependent on the

Primary Skill Targeted in Skill-Building:
In relation to this area the primary objective was **'Artistic'.** However, there was clear evidence that staff were also assisting young people in the development of **'Decision making/Problem solving skills'** and **'Interpersonal Communication'** skills

**Environmental Context**

1.  Is the level of adult supervision appropriate to activity and age group?

    **Yes**    The number of adults in the room did allow for safety, activity implementation, and individualized attention to youth

2.  Is the work space conducive to the activity?

    **Yes**    The physical work space was conducive to the group size and activity type. This was a large-sized room with lots of space for young people to move

around if desired. Refreshments (soft drinks and snacks) were freely available.

3.  Are the necessary materials available and in sufficient supply?

    **Yes**  Participants did appear have an adequate supply of the musical instruments etc. needed to make progress on the tasks and activities.  All instruments appeared to be of good quality and in full working order.

**OST Indicator Item Ratings**

**Relationship Building:**

*Are friendly and relaxed with one another*                                                          *6*

A few of the young people appeared slightly more shy and quiet than others. However, everyone appeared to be relaxed in their interactions with each other and enjoying one another's company.

*Respect one another*                                                                                           *6*

In general disruptions were minimal during the session. When individual young people were practicing/performing all other young people in the group listened with apparent interest. No derogatory comments were noted. When working in small groups it was evident that each individuals view point was being genuinely listened to and considered.

*Show positive affect to staff*                                                                              *7*

All young people, without exception, appeared to interact with staff in a very positive, friendly and respectful manner. It was evident that the young people felt relaxed and comfortable with staff.

*Assist one another*                                                                                           *4*

In small ways young people did appear to help each other out. This may have been, for example, with the words for a song or in how to play a guitar cord. These instances of helping did not, however, appear to be prolonged.

*Are collaborative*                                                                                            *4*

It was apparent that, where some young people had already formed groups to sing/perform together, collaboration involving planning and acting as equal partners had taken place at an earlier time.

**Participation:**

*Are on-task* 6

Some young people appeared to be more easily distracted than others. However, overall the level of attention given to staff and focus on the musical tasks was good.

*Listen actively and attentively to peers and staff* 5

For the most part young people did appear to be interested in the conversations of other peers and staff, making eye contact and providing feedback at times. Certainly, whilst individuals were performing their musical pieces all listened attentively and respectfully.

*Contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions* 6

There was clear evidence of young people being able to express their opinions and views regarding the songs they were singing or instruments that they were playing. This included how they were feeling about and what they would perform for the up and coming concert.

*Have opportunities to make meaningful choices* 7

The young people were consistently given the opportunity to make choices regarding their activities. This included whether or not they felt they wanted to publicly perform and, if so, what song they would sing or musical instrument they would play they would and whether they preferred to be supported in this (for example, with the backing support of staff or other peer - vocal harmony or instrumental support).

*Take leadership responsibility/roles* 3

There did not appear to be significant evidence of leadership roles within the group. In this regard young people tended to work together rather than some leading others.


**Relationship building:** **Staff**

*Use positive behaviour management techniques* 7

It was evident that staff had control within the group and that young people were aware of behavioural boundaries. When necessary, staff dealt with any potentially disruptive behaviour in a warm but firm manner.

*Encourage the participation of all* 7

Respect and attention was given to all young people on an equal basis. Staff appeared to be very aware of each individual within the group and, where necessary, the more quiet young people were consciously drawn into conversations and activities.

*Show positive affect towards youth*  7

Both verbally and non-verbal, staff demonstrated a caring and friendly attitude towards all young people. Each member of staff interacted with the young people in an up-beat and approachable manner.

*Attentively listen to and/or observe youth*  7

At all times staff attentively listened and responded to young peoples' questions, comments and performances and provided understanding, meaningful and constructive responses.

*Encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions,*  7
*and concerns about the content of the activity*

At all times young people were engaged with in an interactive way. All conversations involved listening to what the young people had to say before providing constructive and respectful feedback.

*Engage personally with youth*  5

From earlier discussions with staff and on listening into post-activity reviews, it was clear that staff were very aware of and interested in young people's backgrounds and personal interests beyond the music group. It was evident that staff regularly engage with the young people regarding other life events and activities.

*Guide positive peer interactions*  5

It was clear that staff actively encouraged young people to work together to form musical compositions/groups. During the observed sessions there where no instances whereby it was necessary for staff to directly address negative behaviour such and bullying or teasing. However, the impression would be that, should, this be necessary, staff would be capable of carrying out planned activities which would address such issues.

**Instructional Strategies:**

*Communicate goals, purpose, expectations*  7

Prior to the session beginning, staff discussed their ideas for the evening session i.e the content, what they planned to achieve and ensured that the appropriate equipment was available and ready. In addition, at start of the session young people were told what staff had planned and were consulted as to the appropriateness of the plan and whether young people had further thoughts.

*Verbally recognise youth's efforts and accomplishments*  7

Praise and encouragement was given repeatedly throughout the session. Constructive comments and guidance/demonstrations were also made as a means of encouraging further advancement. Young people appeared to welcome this feedback and it seemed to motivate them in relation to added effort, confidence and self-esteem.

*Assist youth without taking control*                                        *7*

Staff consistently coached young people in their efforts with singing or playing musical instruments. Young people were guided to advance and, only when completely necessary, did staff, for example, take an instrument and demonstrate what they intended. Hence, young people were consistently guided and encouraged to do the work themselves.

*Ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas*                           *6*

As with all other interactions, it was clear that staff tried to encourage young people to verbalize their thoughts and desires and to elaborate on what they felt they wanted to achieve and how they might go about achieving this. One example of this would be, asking the young person if they would like to sing with or without the backing of a guitar and/or harmony from other members of the group.

*Challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency*           *6*

Staff were consistently noted to be encouraging the young people to move beyond what they could do already. Examples of this would be asking the young person to play a more complex musical piece or an unfamiliar musical piece or to move beyond singing an popular song to singing a piece which they had written themselves. This was achieved by way of constructive feedback and suggestions.

*Employ varied teaching strategies*                                          *6*

It was evident that staff were familiar with the capabilities of each individual young person. Staff were noted to use varied teaching strategies with individual young people depending on, for example, their age and level of competence (language, lyrics).  Encouraging writing of songs, help with spelling, using computer.

*Plan for/ask youth to work together*                                        *7*

Staff were frequently noted to encourage young people to work together on various tasks/ musical pieces. Varying age groups were encouraged to contribute to each other's work. This included providing others with harmony to their songs or musical back-up.

**Activity Content and Structure:**

*Is well organised*                                                          *7*

It was evident that staff had pre-planned their sessions and had come together at an earlier stage each week to discuss the content of each session. Preparations were made before hand to ensuring that all equipment was available.

*Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically*      *7*

It was evident that young people were being pushed beyond their capabilities in each session but not beyond what they could realistically achieve. There appeared to be the appropriate level of challenge for individual young people, and it was clear that no-one felt overwhelmed by what they were being asked to accomplish.

*Involves the practice/a progression of skills*      *7*

During each of the three sessions observed each young person was given the opportunity to practice and develop the skills they have learned in previous sessions.

*Requires analytical thinking*      5

There was some evidence of young people being asked to consider and resolve multiple issues surrounding the tasks they were carrying out. As pointed out above, an example of this would be which song they might sing (a popular piece or one that they had written themselves) and/or whether they would like to sing accompanied or unaccompanied by music and/or harmony.

**SAFE features**

Sequenced:

It was evident that staff were aiming to instruct each young person in the group in a manner which would assist them in progressively building their musical skills vocally and/or instrumentally. Observations indicated the each young person was being appropriately challenged.      7

Active:

There was clear evidence that each young person was being actively encouraged to engage in their own musical development. Several of the young people in this group had been supported in writing and performing their own music/songs both individually and in groups. Leadership positions did not appear to have been established, rather, small groups of individuals worked together with equal autonomy.

6

Personally focused:

The music group comprised young people ranging in age from 10 to 17 years. Given this age range, presumably many would not naturally form friendships in their everyday lives. However, there was clear evidence within the group that some of the younger and older

young people had developed positive relationships and were happy to work together on musical pieces.  Staff were seen to encourage the varying age ranges to contribute to each other's performances. Likewise, it was evident that a mutual respect had developed between young people and staff members.

<div align="right">6</div>

Explicit:

The key focus within this group was musical development and accomplishment (vocal and/or instrumental). It was quite apparent that the young people were fully aware and comfortable with what was being expected of them during the session.  Staff did circulate within the group and young people were evidently ready to engage with staff regarding their practice and progress.

<div align="right">7</div>

**Out-of-School Time Observation for the Visual Arts Group - Wednesday 25th July 2012**

**Cover Sheet**

Activity Name: Visual Arts Group - Wednesday mornings

Activity Overview:

The Visual Arts sessions took place took place on Monday and Wednesday mornings throughout July. Their aim was to give young people the opportunity to: visit various artistic venues across Dublin         City; build on their art skills and; prepare for a final art exhibition of their work which would take place at the end of July.

Activity type:

Visual arts: Each session involved a visit to an artistic venue followed by a practical session within that venue. The session in which the OST Observation Instrument was completed involved a visit to the Hugh Lane Art Gallery to see the 'Home Rule' exhibition and a practical portrait painting workshop.

Type of Space:              Other:  Hugh Lane Art Gallery:

Total Staff:          Specialist/Other professional:        1 Artist
                                                          2 Community Youth workers

Total Participants:    1 girl
                       5 boys

Grade Levels:        Age range years: 12-15 years

Participation Type:    By interest

There was a notable absence of adults in this setting. The young people were largely left to their own devices to work on their art. However when staff did engage with the young people there seemed to be a positive and warm manner between them.

*Receive support and guidance from staff*                 5

When staff did engage with the young people it was to offer support and guidance in their art work. However given the size of the room and the ratio of staff to young people many of the young people did not receive a lot of individualised support and guidance. They were largely self-directed.

**Youth Participation:**
*Contribute opinions, ideas and/or help to the activities*         5

For the most part the young people worked on their individual pieces of art work. There was limited opportunity noted for the young people to contribute opinions and ideas towards the activity. However they were engaged in their individual art pieces and did have the freedom to be creative and choose their own content and design.

*Have an impact on the nature or the content of the activity*       4

The young people did not have an impact on the nature of the activity as the activity was art and this was pre-determined. However they did have a lot of freedom within this to determine the content and design of their own individual art work.

*Take on responsibilities and/or leadership roles*             3

There was limited opportunity noted for young people to take on responsibility or leadership roles within the session. The activity was quite individualised and self-directed.

All young people, without exception, did appear to respect staff, were friendly with staff and, when necessary, accepted staff comments regarding potentially disruptive behaviour. At times, however, some were not listening whilst staff were speaking or explaining things.

*Assist one another* *0*

Given the nature of this session - individual portrait painting - this item was not applicable. Hence, there was no instances observed of young people assisting one another in significant ways.

*Are collaborative* *0*

This item did not appear to be applicable on this occasion given the nature of the workshop. Each young person had their own materials available at their work station.


**Participation: Youth ...**

*Are on-task* *5*

A few of the boys seemed to be easily distracted and not quite on-task whilst others were much more focused on the exhibition and on their painting.

*Listen actively and attentively to peers and staff* *6*

Young people did appear to listen to what each other were saying. They also did listen when staff were speaking but sometimes this was not in an overly attentive way. Other young people did appear to be paying attention and interested in staff advice.

*Contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions* *5*

Evident to a small degree. Some young people definitely showed an interest in sharing their ideas about what they would like to do and how they would like their painting to turn out.

*Have opportunities to make meaningful choices* *5*

Young people were noted to make choices regarding the colour schemes they chose for their paintings and how they would paint. It was difficult to hear the conversations that were occurring between individual young people and staff members.

*Take leadership responsibility/roles* *0*

This item was not applicable on this occasion. It would be the impression that possibly further interpersonal development would be necessary with some of the boys in this group before providing them with opportunities to take on leadership roles.

**Relationship building:**

*Use positive behaviour management techniques*          *6*

Staff spoke respectfully to young people at all times. Conversations and negotiation was noted to take place with difficult/unhappy young people as to, for example, what painting they wanted to try and how they would do it. Disciplinary discussions were necessary at times with some of the boys in this group. This was undertaken in a firm manner but in a respectfully and explanatory way,

*Encourage the participation of all*          *7*

All young people were regularly assisted with their work through discussion and guidance. No favouritism was evident at any time.

*Show positive affect towards youth*          *7*

Staff were frequently noted to engage in friendly and jovial conversation with the young people throughout the session.

*Attentively listen to and/or observe youth*          *7*

Staff regularly listened to and demonstrated genuine interest in the young people when they engaged in conversation. Staff clearly considered any questions young people had and responded in meaningful ways.

*Encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content of the activity*
         *7*

Staff regularly asked young people what they wanted to do and how they would like to do it - within the bounds of the activity - in relation to, for example, painting on canvas. Any concerns young people may have had were jointly discussed and potential solutions agreed.

*Engage personally with youth*          *7*

By listening in on post-activity reviews, it was clear that staff were aware of, concerned about and interested in young people's lives and personal interests beyond the art group. Throughout the session staff were observed to chat with the young people regarding life events and activities outside of the group.

*Guide positive peer interactions*          *5*

Though this painting workshop did not necessitate young people to work together, it was clear that staff actively encourage them to interact with each other in a respectful manner. During the observed session it was sometimes necessary for staff to directly address disruptive (noise and teasing) behaviour. Though, on this occasion staff did not enter into

lengthy discussions regarding inappropriate behaviour, the impression would be that staff would be capable of carrying out planned activities which would address such issues.

**Instructional Strategies:     Staff ...**

*Communicate goals, purpose, expectations*                                    *7*

Before setting off to Hugh Lane Gallery and also prior to the painting workshop staff clearly outlined the plan for the day and what they hoped young people would achieve during the visit.

*Verbally recognise youth's efforts and accomplishments*                       *7*

Praise, encouragement and constructive guidance was regularly and appropriately given to all young people during the painting workshop.

*Assist youth without taking control*                                         *7*

During the workshop staff appropriately guided each young person in relation to their painting. Sometimes this simply involved words of encouragement. For other young people this may have entailed discussion regarding, for example, materials to be used, colour schemes or painting techniques. Where necessary, the artist provided assistance by contributing to a painting in order to demonstrate a useful technique.

*Ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas*                            *5*

Staff were observed to encourage young people to discuss their thoughts in relation to their painting and what paints, colours and techniques they would use.

*Challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency*            *5*

This item was evident with the young people who genuinely appeared to want to progress in their painting techniques. With some other young people in the group who appeared to be more easily distracted this was simply about keeping them on task.

*Employ varied teaching strategies*                                           *6*

This item was evident throughout the workshop with staff using 'direct instruction, coaching, modeling, demonstrating' as perceived necessary with individual young people.

Plan for/ask youth to work together                                            0

As the portrait painting workshop required young people to work at an individual level, this item did not appear to be applicable on this occasion.

**Content and Structure:      Activity**

*Is well organised*                                                                                                7

The 'painting on canvas' workshop had been planned in advance and all necessary materials were available for young people to use.

*Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically*        5

The workshop appeared to be appropriately challenging for those young people who demonstrated a strong interest in developing their skills. With some boys in the group it was difficult to ascertain whether they were being challenged due to their less attentive behaviour.

*Involves the practice/a progression of skills*                                                          7

This session, as with all the summer project events, aimed to support young people in building upon the skills they had developed in art classes throughout the previous year.

Requires analytical thinking                                                                                    3

It was difficult to determine whether young people were required to apply analytical thinking in any substantive way during this session.  Possibly it could be said that decisions regarding choice of colours, painting materials and painting style constitute evidence of applying multiple decision making skills and solving 'meaningful problems'.

**SAFE features**

Sequenced:

It was evident that staff aimed to instruct each young person in the group in a manner which would assist him/her in progressively building on the artistic skills that had been previously learned and practiced. This was clearly a difficult task with some of the boys who, at times, seemed to find it difficult to concentrate.                                                              5
Active:

There was clear evidence that each young person was being actively encouraged to engage in their own artistic development.

                                                                                                                              6

Personally focused:

Staff regularly engaged in personal discussions with the young people throughout the session. These discussions were notably warm and supportive in nature.

                                                                                                                              6

Explicit:

The key focus within this group was artist development and accomplishment.  It was quite apparent that the young people were fully aware and comfortable with what was being expected of them during their painting workshop. Staff regularly moved from one young person to the other, providing guidance and support as necessary.

7

End.

**Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire**
(Goodman et al., 1998)

*Rating scale*
Not true (0)
Somewhat true (1)
Certainly true (2)

*Emotional symptoms scale*
1.      I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
2.      I worry a lot
3.      I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful
4.      I am nervous in new situations, I easily lose confidence
5.      I have many fears, I am easily scared

*Conduct problems scale*
6.      I get very angry and often lose my temper
7.      I usually do as I am told
8.      I fight a lot, I can make other people do what I want
9.      I am often accused of lying or cheating
10.     I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere

*Hyperactivity scale*
11.     I am restless, I cannot stay still for long
12.     I am constantly fidgeting or squirming
13.     I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate
14.     I think before I do things
15.     I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good

*Peer problem scale*
16.     I am usually on my own, I generally play alone or keep to myself
17.     I have one good friend or more
18.     Other people my age generally like me
19.     Other children or young people pick on me or bully me
20.     I get on better with adults than with people my own age

*Prosocial scale*
21.     I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings
22.     I usually share with others (food, games, pens etc.)
23.     I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill
24.     I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)
25.     I am kind to younger children

**KIDSCREEN 52**
(The KIDSCREEN Group 2006)

***Social acceptance (bullying) subscale***
Thinking about the last week, please circle your response to the questions below.

*Rating scale*
Never (5)
Seldom (4)
Quite often (3)
Very often (2)
Always (1)

*Items in the subscale*
1.      Have you been afraid of other girls and boys?
2.      Have other girls and boys made fun of you?
3.      Have other girls and boys bullied you?

***School (enjoyment and) environment subscale***
Thinking about the last week, please circle your response to the questions below

*Rating scale*

| For items 1-3 | For items 4-6 |
|---|---|
| Not at all (1) | Never (1) |
| Slightly (2) | Seldom (2) |
| Moderately (3) | Quite often (3) |
| Very (4) | Very often (4) |
| Extremely (5) | Always (5) |

1.      Have you been happy at school?
2.      Have you got on well at school?
3.      Have you been satisfied with your teachers?
4.      Have you been able to pay attention?
5.      Have you enjoyed going to school?
6.      Have you got along well with your teachers?

**KIDSCREEN 10 INDEX**

*Rating scale*
Not at all (1)
Slightly (2)
Moderately (3)
Very (4)
Extremely (5)

1. Have you got on well at school?
2. Have you been able to pay attention?
3. Have you felt fit and well?
4. Have you felt full of energy?
5. Have you felt sad?
6. Have you felt lonely?
7. Have you had enough time to yourself?
8. Have you been able to do the things that you want to do in your free time?
9. Have your parents treated you fairly?
10. Have you had fun with your friends?

**The Assessment of Learner Centred Practices**
(McCombs, 1997)

*Instructions*
A number of sentences that pupils in school have used to describe themselves are shown over the page. Please read each sentence carefully. Decide how often you feel as described by each item while in this class. Do you feel as described almost never, sometimes, often, almost always? Please answer carefully, but don't think too hard about any one question. Please answer EVERY QUESTION and only mark ONE RESPONSE for each question. Your responses will be kept private. They will NOT be shown to your teacher.

*Rating scale*
Almost never (1)
Sometimes (2)
Often (3)
Almost always (4)

*Items in each of the seven subscales used*
*Self-efficacy*
1. I am sure I can do even the hardest work in this class if I try
2. I am certain I will be able to learn the work in this class
3. I am sure I will get good marks in this class
4. No matter how much I try, there is some work in this class I'll never understand
5. Even when the work is hard, I can learn it

*Challenge Avoidance*

1.	I do my work without thinking too hard
2.	When I have a difficult piece of work in this class I skip the hard parts
3.	When I have trouble with a piece of work I give up
4.	In this class I only learn things that will be a test
5.	When I don't understand my work in this class, I get the answers from my friends

*Active learning strategies*

1.	When we have difficult work in this class, I try to figure out the hard parts on my own
2.	I go back over schoolwork I don't understand
3.	When I have trouble figuring out a piece of work, I try to think about it in different ways
4.	When I make mistakes, I try to work out why
5.	I spend some time thinking about how to do a piece of work before I begin it

*Curiosity*

1.	Schoolwork is very interesting to me
2.	I find it difficult to keep my mind on my schoolwork
3.	I feel that schoolwork will be boring
4.	It is really interesting to me to learn new things
5.	I find myself losing interest when difficult work is given to me

*Mastery orientation*

1.	I do work in this class because it helps me to learn new things
2.	I want to learn as much as possible in this class
3.	An important reason for why I do my work in this class is because I want to get better at it
4.	I do the work in this class because it is interesting
5.	I want to do my work because it really makes me think

*Performance orientation*

1.	I want to do well in this class so my family will think I am clever
2.	An important reason why I do my class work is to get better marks than the other pupils
3.	I want to do well in this class so other pupils will think I am clever
4.	The main reason I do my work in this class is because I want to get the highest marks
5.	I want to do well in this class so the teacher will think I am clever

*Work avoidance*

1.	I feel I have done well in this class when I can do my work without much effort
2.	I feel I have done well in this class when I get out of doing my work
3.	I try to do as little work as possible in this class
4.	In this class, I prefer work that is easy so I don't have to work very hard
5.	I feel I have done well in this class when I get a good mark without working too hard

**Homework**

*Rating scale*
Yes, always
Yes, sometimes
No, no that much
No, never

*Items*
1.      Do you get your homework done on time?
2.      Do you write your homework in your homework journal?
3.      Do you ever need help with your homework?
4.      Does a family member ever help you with your homework?
5.      Do you get help with your homework from a homework club?
6.      Do you always understand the homework you get?

**Educational aspirations**
1.      Do you think you will take the Junior Cert exam in 3rd year of secondary school? (yes/no/don't know)
2.      Do you think you will take the Leaving Cert exam in 6th year of secondary school? (yes/no/don't know)
3.      What do you think you will be doing when you finish school?
a.      Go on to further education
b.      Take up an apprenticeship or trade
c.      Start a job
d.      Unemployed
e.      Don't know

**Family Affluence Scale**
(Currie et al., 1997)

1.      Does your family own a car, van or truck? (yes/no)
2.      Do you have your own bedroom for yourself? (yes/no)
3.      During the past twelve months, how many times did you have a holiday with your family? (none, once, twice, more than twice)
4.      How many computers (including laptops) do your family own? (none, one, two, more than two)