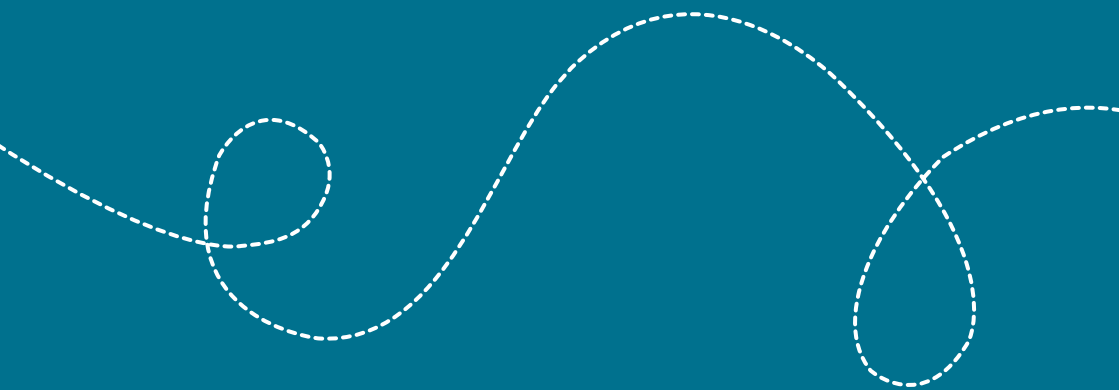




THE STORY OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN'S YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL

How we set up and work with YAP and what we've learned.



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THE STORY AND THE LEARNING



1.0

YAP: THE STORY AND THE LEARNING

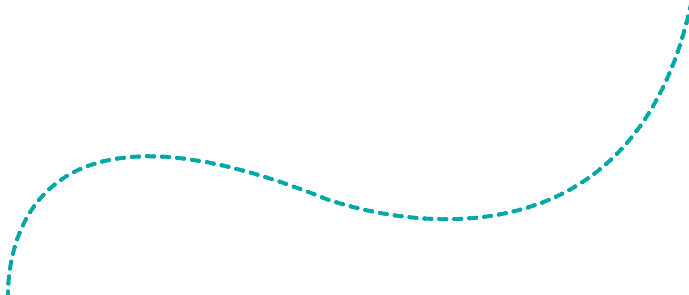
Emily Logan, Ombudsman for Children explains that the Youth Advisory Panel has been a vital part of the Ombudsman for Children's Office [OCO] and why this story of YAP has been written.

My job is to promote the rights and welfare of all children and young people up to 18 years old living in Ireland. Under the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002, I am obliged to consult children and young people and to highlight their concerns. For me, doing so is not just an obligation: it is also an important and inspiring opportunity.

Since the OCO was established in 2004, my staff and I have met with, listened to, and worked alongside thousands of children and young people from all over the country. This work has been a rich and rewarding experience for us and we have learned a great deal from it.

Children and young people have influenced the OCO from the very beginning, participating as they did in the recruitment process for the job of Ombudsman for Children. A panel of young people and three adults interviewed me for the job. It was one of the most challenging experiences of my life and one of the most motivating.

A number of these young people agreed to stay and work with us. In their capacity as youth advisors, they actively supported the development and work of the OCO during those important first years. As such, they helped to shape the organisation that we are today. After three years, this group made way for a new group of advisors. They too have made a really positive and meaningful mark.



WHY THIS BOOKLET?

Well, we receive frequent requests for information about YAP from interested peer organisations, agencies and colleagues both here in Ireland and abroad. So, we decided it might be a good idea to tell the story of YAP and to tell it in a way that takes the questions we've been asked about how we set up and work with our second YAP into account.

As was the case with our first YAP, we are also very proud of members of our second YAP — of their tremendous energy, commitment and work with us. We have learned a lot with and from our YAP and feel that we should share this learning with others who may be thinking about setting up a panel like YAP.

HERE IS WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS BOOKLET:

- an account of the approach we took to establishing our second YAP;
- information about how we work with YAP members and what they do;
- the OCO's and YAP members' views on the benefits and challenges of having or, in the case of YAP members, being part of a youth panel;
- some tips from YAP members for anyone who may be interested in setting up a panel like YAP.

I hope you will find this booklet engaging and useful to your work to include, hear and learn from the views of children and young people. If you have ideas or experiences about involving children and young people that you would like to share with us to improve our information or to assist our learning, please contact us.





"IF YOU HAVE IDEAS OR EXPERIENCES ABOUT INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH US TO IMPROVE OUR INFORMATION OR TO ASSIST OUR LEARNING, PLEASE CONTACT US"

EMILY LOGAN, OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN



A SHORT HISTORY OF YAP



2.0

A SHORT HISTORY OF YAP

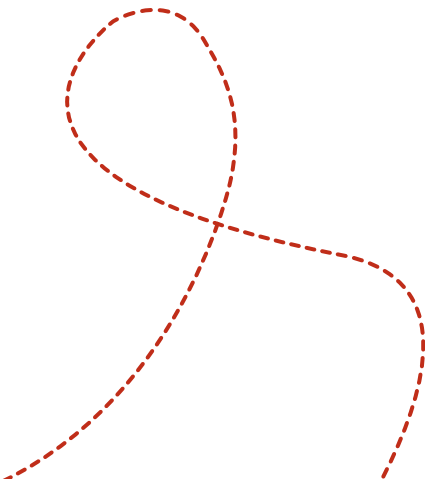
What are the origins of the Ombudsman for Children's Youth Advisory Panel? Here we provide a very concise history of YAP.

GROUND BREAKING BEGINNINGS

In 2003, Government and non-governmental agencies collaborated on a groundbreaking recruitment process for the appointment of Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children. This process was the first time that children and young people were involved in a significant public appointment in the Republic of Ireland.

The process started with an initial consultation day in October 2003 when a group of 70 children and young people had the opportunity to find out about the Ombudsman for Children's role and to share their opinions and ideas about the qualities, knowledge and skills they thought an Ombudsman for Children should have. They then elected sixteen young people from the group who would stay involved to the end of the process. Fifteen of these young people went on to play a key role in defining the job, helping to design the recruitment and media campaign, and sitting on the interview panels.

Throughout, the young people received support and training so they could undertake their roles with confidence. Two months later, on 18th December 2003, they celebrated their significant contribution by attending Emily Logan's appointment as Ombudsman for Children by President Mary McAleese.



THE FIRST YAP

When Emily took up her post in April 2004, she invited these young people to participate in the OCO's development and work programme. The young people decided to call themselves the Youth Advisory Panel or YAP for short. For the next few years, in addition to their hard work, our YAP members brought real commitment, energy, insight and creativity to their work with the OCO at an early and crucial stage in the organisation's development.

Towards the end of 2006, YAP members agreed it was time to give other young people a chance to work with us. They played a key role in designing, planning, implementing and reviewing a process to establish the OCO's second YAP.

INTEREST FROM HOME & ABROAD

This process and our subsequent work with our second YAP have attracted interest from professionals working in a variety of sectors in Ireland (including in health, education, sport and the arts) as well from the OCO's counterparts and other professionals in other countries.

We hope the story of our second Youth Advisory Panel and the learning we gleaned from the experience will provide you with useful information and ideas.





YAP'S ROLES & ACTIVITIES



3.0

YAP'S ROLES & ACTIVITIES

If our YAP is to play a meaningful role in the OCO's work, then it's important to develop a job description for our YAP members. Our YAP has three principal roles.

1. ADVISORS

YAP members advise us on aspects of our work, in particular on our direct work and communications with young people. They also advise us on an ongoing, informal basis of emerging issues and concerns for young people. YAP members also have the opportunity to highlight in various settings both their own concerns and the views of other children and young people. For example, in June 2008 five YAP members presented the results of the OCO's Big Ballot, the largest ever consultation of children and young people in Ireland, to members of the Oireachtas. The Big Ballot enabled children and young people to express their considered views on the key issues the OCO should focus on in our programme of work. In addition to presenting the results of the votes cast by almost 75,000 children and young people in the Big Ballot, our YAP shared their own views on the issues explored and

voted on by children and young people. In September 2008, members of our first and second panels participated in a conference of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) in Dublin. At the conference, they told Emily's counterparts from throughout Europe as well as representatives from the Council of Europe and UNICEF why they think it's crucial that children and young people are heard and what professionals can do to facilitate meaningful participation by children and young people in decision-making.

2. PARTNERS

YAP members are active partners in the design, planning and implementation of a range of activities relating to the OCO's organisational development and work programme. In our direct work with children and young people, for example, YAP members usually share decision-making with us at the design and planning stages and, if they're available and wish to do so, take part as partners in the activity or event. By contrast, if we're undertaking a piece of research involving young people, we may seek the views of YAP members at the design stage without necessarily sharing decision-making with them about how we proceed.

3. AMBASSADORS

One motivation for young people getting involved in YAP is to counterbalance negative images of and stories about young people by contributing to initiatives in which they can participate as active, concerned young citizens. Some of their work with the OCO, including participation in appropriate media activities, enables YAP members to demonstrate that many young people wish to and do play positive roles. They are also ambassadors for the OCO. At events for children and young people, YAP members provide a vital link between them and the OCO.

ACTIVITIES: LEARNING THROUGH ACTION

YAP members' participation is primarily, if not exclusively, activity-oriented. This approach is not limited to the implementation stage of projects. Where possible, we also take an activity-based approach to YAP members' involvement in the design and planning stages. We've found this approach to be more inclusive, engaging and enjoyable and it often leads to more effective outcomes. For example, as part of their task to design a work placement programme at OCO for Transition Year students, YAP members devised and undertook a consultation with Transition Year coordinators and students in their schools. Similarly, when we

worked with YAP to design an OCO stand for a young people's event, YAP members worked together in groups to decide what the stand should include and used a range of materials to create mock-ups of the stand. They then made collective decisions around the content of the finished stand.

RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

The types of activity that our YAP has participated in include:

RECRUITMENT – Our first YAP participated in the recruitment process that led to Emily's appointment as Ombudsman for Children and in the recruitment of staff to other publicly-advertised posts, including senior management posts. Members of our second YAP participated as equals on an interview panel to recruit an OCO Policy and Human Rights Officer in 2008. They also helped to design the application process and to assess applications from young people for our Transition Year work placements.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

– In addition to communicating one-to-one with children and young people, YAP members have played an active role in the design of our publications and materials for children and

young people. These include our annual report for children and young people, a DVD element of our Big Ballot consultation materials and a follow-up DVD about the OCO and the importance to us of hearing directly from children and young people. They have also supported the ongoing development of our website and contributed their views to the development of the OCO's New Media strategy. As regards media work, they have participated in interviews for national and local press and radio as well as for national television.

SUPPORTING OTHER CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE PART

As OCO ambassadors, YAP members have contributed to a number of our events to encourage the participation of other children and young people. These include:

- the Big Ballot national count event held in November 2007 to announce the results of the Big Ballot, where each YAP member had responsibility for welcoming and supporting a group of children or young people to take part;
- an event for young people held at the OCO as part of the Lights Out national film festival for young people in July 2008;
- an event held at the OCO in November 2008 to celebrate Universal Children's

Day, which was attended by student councils from local schools.

FACILITATING WORKSHOPS – YAP members have co-facilitated workshops for professionals working with and/or on behalf of children and young people. One such workshop was for teachers, educationalists and researchers participating in a conference at St. Patrick's College, Dublin. It focussed on our Big Ballot consultation and the related issue of young people having opportunities to be heard. Participants were very interested in this theme, particularly in the context of the formal education setting.

MAKING PRESENTATIONS – YAP members have made formal presentations as well as informal contributions to a range of events. These include talking to children and young people in schools and centres visited by Emily in October 2007 as part of the Big Ballot consultation; presenting the results of the Big Ballot to members of the Oireachtas in June 2008; making a presentation about the OCO and YAP at the Union of Secondary Students' 2008 AGM; and sharing their views on being heard with delegates during a plenary session of the ENOC conference in September 2008.

THE RECRUITMENT

AND SELECTION PROCESS



4.0

THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

So, how did we recruit our second YAP? Well, our first step was to consult with our inaugural Youth Advisory Panel. We also looked at relevant models in Ireland and around the world. A number of additional considerations also influenced our decision-making.

HOW LONG SHOULD YAP'S TERM BE?

Our YAP is a way of ensuring that young people can participate meaningfully in the OCO's ongoing development and work programme. If this was to have real validity, then we felt the young people would need sufficient time to get to know the OCO and to avail of a range of experiences. So, we decided that our second YAP should run for two years.

HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE ON THE PANEL?

Taking into account the prospective roles and activities of the new YAP, our inhouse capacity to facilitate YAP members' participation, and a possible drop in membership of the panel during its two-year term, we decided to establish a panel of 25 young people.

WHAT AGE RANGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD WE INCLUDE?

In light of children's and young people's evolving capacities, the types of activity YAP members might take part in and the primarily collective nature of these activities, we decided that YAP membership would be open to young people between 12 and 17 years of age.

HOW COULD WE MAKE YAP AN INCLUSIVE & DIVERSE PANEL?

Recognising the OCO's position as a national organisation and the diversity of Ireland's young population, we were determined to take an inclusive approach to recruiting our new YAP. So, we decided to raise awareness nationwide. We emphasised that we were not looking for young people to represent their peers or to have specific knowledge, skills or experience. Rather, we would recognise members as individuals who, by virtue of their diverse skills and experiences, could contribute individually and collectively to our work and to our understanding of young people's perspectives, interests and concerns.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS INVOLVED 2 STAGES:

STAGE 1. THE SELF-NOMINATION PROCESS UNDERPINNED BY A NATIONAL AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGN

RAISING AWARENESS

Work to raise awareness among young people of our recruitment of a new YAP took place between January 2007 and February 2007. The main components of our nationwide campaign were:

RADIO ADVERTISING – Members of our first YAP worked with a professional communications agency to make a radio ad inviting young people to apply to the new YAP. They also participated in radio interviews to raise awareness of the opportunity among young people.

RECRUITMENT POSTER – Members of our first YAP recommended the use of a poster to advertise the recruitment campaign. This featured YAP members and was disseminated to post-primary schools, youth projects and other relevant youth services nationwide.

ONLINE ACTIVITIES – We also posted information on our website, and other youth-oriented websites.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

We asked interested young people to complete an application form. The YAP application form requested the following information from young people:

- details of activities and events that they were involved in with other young people;
- their views on what the Ombudsman for Children needs to know about being a young person in Ireland today;
- why they thought they should be a member of YAP; and
- any other information they wished to provide.

We received a total of 199 applications from young people. In their applications, young people were asked to indicate how they had found out about the opportunity to apply to be on our YAP. Based on their answers we learned that:

- the school setting was the most effective route for raising awareness of the opportunity to join YAP;
- youth services working with categories of hard-to-reach young people played an important role in helping us take an inclusive approach;

- the poster was the most effective medium of communicating the opportunity to join YAP to young people.

Other information provided by applicants indicates that the campaign was broadly successful in attracting the interest of a diverse spectrum of young people:

GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD – We received applications from young people in 22 of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. The five counties that the most applications came from were: Co. Dublin [35%], Co. Mayo [25%], Co. Cork [7.5%], Co. Meath [6%] and Co. Wicklow [5%].

AGE RANGE – The prescribed age range for applicants was 12 to 17 years. 15 year olds submitted the highest number of applications [25%]. There was a balanced spread of applications from 13, 14 and 16 year olds. 12 year olds submitted the smallest number of applications [5%].

GENDER MIX – Girls made up the majority of applicants [59% of the total].

DIVERSITY OF APPLICANTS – The information generated through the process also indicated that applicants included young people in residential or foster care,

young Travellers, young people with a physical or sensory disability, and separated young people seeking asylum or with refugee status.

STAGE 2. THE PEER-SELECTION PROCESS EVENTS WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

PEER-SELECTION EVENTS

We designed and planned five half-day peer-selection events around the country based on the geographical spread of applicants. The events were hosted and facilitated by OCO staff and members of our first YAP. They were designed to enable applicants to:

- meet OCO staff and YAP members;
- find out more about the OCO's work and YAP's roles and activities;
- work together in small, age-based groups and in two facilitated workshops to learn about each other and to share ideas about being a YAP member;
- participate in a peer-voting process that involved one young person from each small group being elected by their peers to be part of the new YAP.

ACHIEVING DIVERSITY

The young attendees were informed from the outset that the OCO might select a number of additional applicants from among their ranks to be members of the new YAP. We explained that this would be done to support the establishment of a diverse panel. Workshop facilitators assisted with this process by recommending young people in their groups for inclusion on a reserve list.

OUTCOMES OF THE PEER-SELECTION PROCESS

135 (68%) of the young people who applied to be part of our new YAP attended one of the peer-selection events. 17 young people were peer-selected through the voting process to be members of the new YAP. An additional 8 young people were selected from the reserve list. Overall, the peer-selection process was a very positive experience:

RECRUITMENT PROCESS – Although planning and implementing the peer-selection process was resource intensive, the numbers of participating young people and the corresponding scale of the events were manageable.

ENGAGING PARENTS/GUARDIANS – Effective management of the events helped to engage and reassure the parents/guardians of participating young people. This underscored the importance of giving parents/guardians adequate information and attention.

A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY – The events proved to be a valuable opportunity for us to raise awareness of our work and to hear directly from young people all around Ireland.

DURATION – The duration and structure of the events worked well overall. The half-day event may have been a little too long, however, for some younger participants.

MEETING YAP 1 – Young people clearly welcomed the opportunity to meet with and find out more about YAP from members of our first panel.

QUALITY ENGAGEMENT – OCO staff and YAP members were really impressed by the manner in which young people approached the events. They made an enormous contribution to generating an exciting, positive and cooperative atmosphere. They participated as decision-makers in group activities. The level of discussion was very high.

THE PEER-VOTING PROCESS – Participating young people appeared to regard the peer-voting process as a credible, fair approach and supported it. The explanations given about the peer-voting process at the beginning, the option to vote for oneself and the time/space given to young people to reflect prior to voting all helped in this regard. However, the voting process itself was challenging. Voting was an entirely new experience for some participants. Among some of the young people there was an understandable sense of disappointment at not being selected.

“STAFF FROM THE OFFICE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE HEIGHT OF BRILLIANCE.” SÍONA

“I’M PROUD THAT WE LET MORE PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE OCO.” CIARÁN

RECRUITING OUR YAP: A TIMELINE

SEPT 2006 » DEVELOPMENT OF A PROPOSAL ON THE PROCESS TO ESTABLISH A NEW YAP, FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION AND DECISION-MAKING

DEC 2006—JAN 2007 » DESIGN OF A RECRUITMENT & AWARENESS RAISING STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT OF ASSOCIATED INFORMATION MATERIALS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**LATE JAN 2007 » DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SCHOOLS, YOUTH PROJECTS & YOUTH SERVICES
» RADIO ADVERTISEMENTS PLACED ON SELECTED RADIO STATIONS**

END FEB 2007 » CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

MARCH—APR 2007 » DESIGN AND PLANNING OF PEER-SELECTION EVENTS

MID-APRIL—EARLY MAY 2007 » ROLL-OUT OF FIVE PEER-SELECTION EVENTS IN DUBLIN [3 EVENTS], CORK [1 EVENT] AND SLIGO [1 EVENT]

MAY 2007 » COMPOSITION OF THE NEW YAP FINALISED

END JUNE 2007 » FIRST, INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN OCO STAFF, MEMBERS OF OUR FIRST YAP, MEMBERS OF THE NEW YAP & THEIR PARENTS / GUARDIANS



5.0

HOW WE WORK WITH OUR YAP

How do we make sure our work with YAP delivers for our young advisors and for the OCO? What day-to-day housekeeping do we need to take care of to ensure our YAP members can work confidently and safely?

FIRST STEPS

We held our first meeting with our new YAP in June 2007. This was an informal meeting between OCO staff, members of our first YAP, members of our new YAP and their parents/guardians. The aims of this meeting were to give everyone an opportunity to meet one another and to introduce members of our new YAP and their parents/guardians to the OCO – what we do and how we work with children and young people.

ESTABLISHING CLEAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

We feel it's very important that YAP members' parents/guardians know about the organisation their children are working with. We also recognise the key roles that parents/guardians play in supporting YAP

members' participation. So, following our first meeting with our new YAP, we:

- asked parents/guardians to complete a consent and information form in relation to their child's membership of YAP (consent to participate in YAP, consent to take part in associated media activities, information concerning dietary needs and medical conditions as well as contact details in the event of a medical emergency);
- sent information letters directly to parents/guardians in advance of YAP meetings as well as writing to the young people themselves; and
- encouraged parents/guardians to contact us if they had any queries about YAP's activities or wished to discuss any aspect of their child's participation in YAP with us.

TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE

Young people participate in YAP in a voluntary capacity. The OCO covers travel and subsistence costs. This includes, when necessary, the travel costs of one person (usually a parent or guardian) to accompany a YAP member to and from YAP meetings and other YAP activities if they can't travel on their own.

COORDINATING YAP

The OCO's Participation Team has primary responsibility for managing and coordinating YAP. Other members of OCO staff work with YAP as required and usually on matters that relate to their own area of work.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

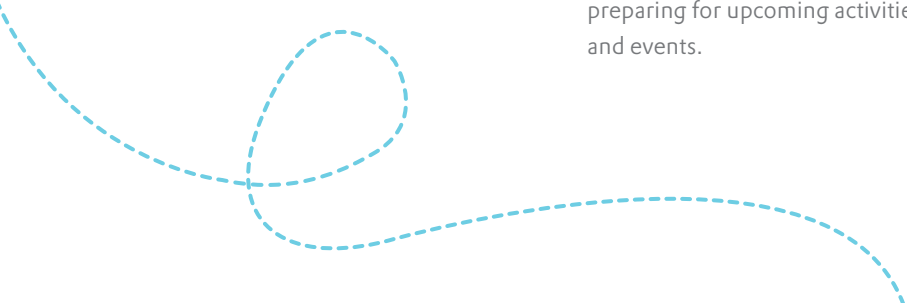
YAP members receive training and other supports to build their capacity to participate in particular types of activity – for example, media training in advance of taking part in interviews. This is to ensure that YAP members are informed, comfortable and confident. In providing these supports, we recognise YAP members as individual young people with voices and views of their own. For example, if a group of YAP members is going to facilitate a workshop at a conference, we work with them to design the workshop, facilitate them to identify the main points and messages they wish to communicate, and encourage them to respond freely to any questions they may be asked.

YAP MEETINGS

YAP meetings take place every six to eight weeks. In order to be flexible and responsive:

- we hold meetings on Saturdays because our YAP members are typically in full-time education;
- we hold YAP meetings at our premises in central Dublin because most of our YAP members use public transport to travel to and from meetings; and
- we typically hold meetings from 11am to 3pm because journey times for YAP members living outside Dublin can be considerable.

YAP meetings provide an opportunity to:

- update YAP members on OCO activities;
 - hear from YAP members about emerging issues for young people;
 - provide YAP members with training or other supports that will facilitate their participation in upcoming activities or events; and
 - facilitate YAP members to work collectively on designing and/or preparing for upcoming activities and events.
- 

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES AND SHARING THE OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to meetings involving the whole group, YAP members work individually, in pairs or in small groups to progress specific pieces of work or to take part in particular events. As it is not possible or necessary to include all of our YAP members in all activities, for example recruitment of a new member of staff or taking part in a media interview, we do our best to ensure that participation in OCO activities and events is shared as equitably as possible among members and that all members have the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities.

TIMING OF ACTIVITIES

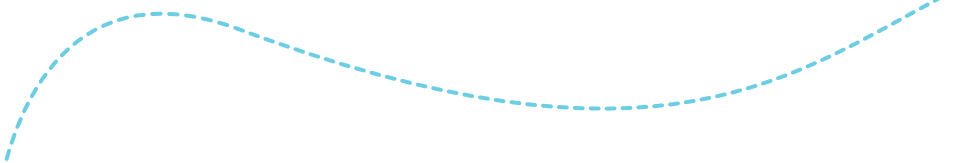
As our YAP members are in full-time education, we try to limit their participation in OCO activities and events to out-of-school hours. Occasionally, however, events do take place during school hours. In these instances, we provide letters to YAP members to give to their school principals.

STAYING IN TOUCH

In advance of each YAP meeting we post information to members. Between meetings, we communicate with YAP members by post, by email and by phone. Text messaging has proven to be very effective. For this reason, we have a dedicated mobile phone number for our communications with YAP. We're currently looking at how we might use new media to further improve communications and enhance participation in the OCO by children and young people.

FEEDBACK AND MAKING CHANGES

We take a proactive, informal approach to facilitating YAP members to review their participation and their experiences. This helps us identify what young people value most about their work with us as well as any changes or improvements that might be needed. Every six months, we dedicate part of a YAP meeting to facilitating YAP members to review their overall experience. In January 2008, some six months after their first meeting, we held a residential session with our YAP members to facilitate team-building, a deeper understanding of the organisation, and to review and plan future work.



BENEFITS



“IT HAS IMPROVED MY SKILLS OF TALKING TO PEOPLE... I FEEL MORE CONFIDENT SPEAKING TO GROUPS, YOUNG OR OLD.” CIARÁN

“GETTING ON THE MEDIA IS A REALLY BIG ACHIEVEMENT FOR US.” PATRICK

6.0

BENEFITS

YAP has been a cornerstone of our work to provide for young people's ongoing participation in the OCO's work and development as an organisation. What have the benefits of YAP been to the OCO? And what about the positive outcomes for YAP members themselves?

I. BENEFITS TO OCO

The principal benefits to the OCO of having a YAP have been:

DEEPENING OUR KNOWLEDGE BANK – Working with YAP on an ongoing basis has contributed significantly to our understanding of young people's interests and concerns.

PROVIDING FRESH PERSPECTIVES – We have benefited from the different perspectives that YAP members bring to our work. In recruiting staff, for example, we've found that YAP members sitting on interview panels bring into focus matters that we, as adult professionals, might not notice to the same extent. YAP members' different and complementary perspectives have enhanced our decision-making in this area and in other areas of our work.

INCREASING OUR CAPACITY – YAP members have enhanced our confidence and capacity to create accessible, relevant and engaging information for children and young people in a range of media.

ENHANCING OCO'S CREDIBILITY – We have noticed that the integrity of our work can be demonstrated more readily to children, young people, adults and professional peers in Ireland and abroad when our YAP members participate with us.

INCREASING EFFICIENCY – Being able to call on the services of our YAP continually – and occasionally at short notice – is an efficient way to facilitate young people's participation in different aspects of our work.

ENERGISING STAFF – The energy, creativity and commitment that our YAP members bring to their work makes our work more enjoyable, energises staff and reinforces the commitment that staff members bring to what they do.

2. BENEFITS TO YAP MEMBERS

YAP members have identified three main benefits to them of YAP membership:

THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK FOR CHANGE –

YAP members value the experience of contributing to work that is focused on effecting positive change for children and young people. In addition, individual YAP members have pinpointed specific changes, which they feel they are helping to shape through their participation:

- “chang[ing] adults’ perception of young people”;
- “show[ing] that we want to take part in decisions which affect our lives”;
- adults “deciding to listen to the voices of young people”;
- “help[ing] decision-makers, adults and others to understand the young people they work with”;
- “making young people’s lives in the future, and even now, a little better”.

**“BEING ON YAP WILL
SHAPE THE WAY WE ARE
AND THE WAY WE WILL BE
IN THE FUTURE.” SHAUNA**

THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN –

For some YAP members, the most valuable learning is linked to the new experiences that participation in YAP has offered them. Others focus on the skills they have developed through their involvement, such as communications, planning and event management skills:

- “the experience of participating in various events”;
- “my public speaking has improved a lot”;
- “being interviewed in stuff like the Big Ballot has given me a great sense of achievement”;
- “developing skills we can use in future careers”.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET NEW PEOPLE & MAKE NEW FRIENDS –

YAP members consider the friendships they have made with one another to be a key benefit of YAP membership. Many of our YAP members have told us that they really value the opportunity YAP membership has afforded them to meet, get to know and work with young people whose lives are very different from their own.





CHALLENGES



7.0

CHALLENGES

When we set out to establish YAP, we knew it would involve challenges. Some of the challenges we have encountered were expected while others proved a little more testing in light of our statutory mandate and national remit.

“I APPLIED BECAUSE I WANTED YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ME TO HAVE A VOICE, ESPECIALLY IN HOW THINGS WORK.” PATRICK

1. CHALLENGES FOR OCO

The main challenges we have faced are:

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

When we first started working with our current YAP, an initial challenge was to manage YAP members' expectations of what they could do and achieve through their work with us. This challenge receded as the young people's understanding of our mandate, areas of work and organisational capacity grew.

BEING INCLUSIVE

Providing for inclusion was a central consideration when we were deciding how to recruit YAP. Despite our efforts, the composition of our second YAP, while diverse, did not fully reflect the diversity of young people living in today's Ireland.

The extent to which this deficit is attributable to the recruitment process itself is hard to gauge. We are aware, however, that participation in a panel like YAP is not going to be possible for, or appeal to, all young people. We are also aware that our status as a national organisation might be a barrier to participation for some young people.

There are some clear obstacles in attempting to share opportunities effectively among our YAP members:

- Geography: Participation is more demanding on YAP members living in more remote areas.
- Availability: Several of our YAP members have many other commitments.
- Age: Older YAP members typically have more independence, which has meant that they are typically able to participate more.

WORKING WITH LIMITED CAPACITY

Recruiting and working with YAP is resource-intensive and there are limits on our organisational capacity to provide for children's and young people's participation. We face an ongoing challenge to ensure that the resources we dedicate to supporting YAP members' participation are proportionate to YAP's role within our broader participation work programme.

MAINTAINING OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

Given the OCO's statutory mandate and roles, it can be challenging to balance the need to be strategic in our work with the need to facilitate YAP members' participation in activities, which are consistent with their capacities, reflect their interests and which they enjoy.

2. CHALLENGES FOR YAP MEMBERS

Several of our YAP members have also encountered challenges. For the most part, these are practical hurdles of the kind alluded to above:

- the impact of other commitments on their availability to participate in YAP;
- journey times and distances, dependence on public transport and, in some cases, on the availability of an adult to accompany them to and from YAP meetings and events.

"I GOT INVOLVED IN YAP COS I WANTED TO SEE WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT AND TO GET A VOICE." THOMAS

"YAP HAS AFFORDED ME OPPORTUNITIES THAT WILL BENEFIT ME THROUGH THE REST OF MY LIFE." BEN



**“I’M PROUD THAT I
FEEL LIKE I’VE CHANGED
SOMETHING... HOPEFULLY
IT’S AFTER MAKING SOME
CHANGE IN PEOPLES
LIVES.” RÓISÍN**

GENERAL LEARNING



“I’VE LEARNT WHAT MY RIGHTS ARE AND TO SAY HOW I FEEL AND NOT TO BE AFRAID TO DO IT.” SAOIRSE

“I’M PROUD OF GETTING MY VOICE HEARD AND HELPING OUT THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN.” SAOIRSE

“I GOT SPEAKING SKILLS... LIKE I TALKED IN FRONT OF THE POLITICIANS!” BEN

8.0

GENERAL LEARNING

With challenges comes rich learning. Many of the key lessons we have learned are noted in the 'Benefits' and 'Challenges' sections of this booklet. Our experience has also taught us some more general lessons.

ORGANISATIONAL PREPARATION

As a preliminary step to setting up an advisory panel of young people, it is very valuable to work with staff at an organisational level to explore the rationale for the panel's establishment, its role, its potential value, and the resources and skills needed to facilitate its work.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

It is essential to have a policy and procedural framework to guide and inform work with children and young people [see Appendix 1 for details].

EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATIONS

In designing an inclusive campaign to raise awareness of a panel like YAP, no single approach is likely to reach, include and be accepted by all young people. It is

necessary to use a variety of tools, media and settings. As regards recruitment, our current YAP members' own views point to strong differences of opinion on which approach young people consider fair and respectful. However, it's clear that being transparent with young people about your approach is critical.

INCLUSIVENESS

An opportunity like YAP does not appeal to or suit all young people. Therefore, it is important to take a multifaceted approach to participation in order to include, engage and work with a diversity of children and young people.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE WILLING AND ABLE

We have learned first hand that children and young people of different ages and living in diverse circumstances want to be heard and wish to play an active role in matters affecting them. They are willing to commit their time, knowledge and skills to participate in initiatives that engage their interest and value their contributions.

TIPS

FROM

OUR

YAP

MEMBERS

“

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9.0

TIPS FROM OUR YAP MEMBERS

Traditionally, adults have been recognised as the accepted holders of learning and wisdom.

In addition to having a right to be heard, children and young people also have insights and acumen, which they wish to share and which adults need to hear and give thoughtful consideration to. We asked our YAP members what advice they would give to people thinking about establishing a panel like YAP for the first time. This is what they had to say...

“I WAS INTERESTED IN CHILDREN’S RIGHTS SO I APPLIED AND LUCKILY ENOUGH I GOT A PLACE.” CIARÁN

“I WANTED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILDREN’S RIGHTS & MEET NEW PEOPLE.” INGA

RECRUITING A PANEL OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Use a variety of ways to raise awareness among young people of the opportunity to get involved.
2. Give young people the information they need to understand what the panel’s roles and work will be.
3. Make sure the age range of young people on your panel isn’t too wide.
4. Use a fair and democratic way of selecting young people to take part.
5. Try to select young people who are interested in and will commit to participating.
6. Make sure you include young people from diverse backgrounds and living in different locations.

WORKING WITH A PANEL OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Make the work interesting and enjoyable: just because it's important, doesn't mean it can't be fun.
2. When dealing with young people: be yourself! They will be more comfortable around you.
3. Remember that each young person is different and has different needs.
4. Link in with young people's parents/guardians: their support is important to young people's participation.
5. When you're thinking about when, where and how often to hold group meetings, keep in mind that young people have other commitments, may have to travel some distance to attend and may be dependent on public transport.
6. Cover the costs of young people's participation [travel, meals, etc.].
7. Be well organised. Young people get a sense of self-worth and achievement through active participation:

outline aims and objectives, plan for regular meetings and make sure communications are good.

8. Encourage young people to express their opinions freely and give them equal opportunities to share their views.
9. Treat young people and their contributions with respect.
10. Facilitate young people to make a meaningful input and show them the outcome(s) of the views they have expressed.
11. Offer as many group activities as possible, but know when to leave the group to itself – it's often more productive without an adult participating directly all the time.
12. Listen to what young people have to say, even if their ideas are sometimes strange or unrealistic!
13. Try not to go back on your word. Disappointments can take away from the fun, enjoyment and success of the group.
14. Have fun with it!





**“I WANTED TO LET PEOPLE
KNOW WHAT PEOPLE IN
WHEELCHAIRS THINK AND
WHAT THEY NEED AND WHAT
ISSUES THEY HAVE.”** SAOIRSE

**“THE BIG BALLOT,
THAT WAS AMAZING.”**
PATRICK

**“I REALLY LIKED THE
GLENCREE TRIP COS WE
GOT TO STAY TOGETHER
AND TALK AND FIND
OUT MORE ABOUT EACH
OTHER.”** RÓISÍN

10.0

WRAPPING UP

In October 2009, we held a special event at the OCO to mark the end of YAP's term.

In doing so, we wanted to recognise and celebrate the committed, energetic and valuable contributions that our YAP members have made both individually and collectively to the OCO's work.

The event was an opportunity for all of us to recall the large number of activities YAP were involved in and for the OCO to express our appreciation to YAP for their hard work, energy and insight that informed their contributions to the OCO.

It was really important for Emily and the rest of the team to be able to share with YAP members the ways in which we and the OCO have benefited from their work with us, and of course for YAP members to catch up with each other, to reflect on the experiences and achievements over the past two years and to tell us what taking part in YAP has meant to them.

We were delighted that so many of our YAP members were able to attend this wrap-up event, which concluded with Emily presenting certificates and tokens of appreciation to YAP.

From our own and others' participation work, we understand that it is really important to mark the conclusion of participative processes and initiatives with the young people concerned and to acknowledge young people's contributions. In addition to being an opportunity to reflect on achievements and to express appreciation to young people for their participation, a dedicated wrap-up event can offer young people an important sense of conclusion and, with that, both of seeing something through and of moving on.

"THE BIG BALLOT WAS THE FIRST TIME CHILDREN GOT TO VOTE... I WAS REALLY HAPPY TO BE INVOLVED IN THAT." CIARÁN

APPENDIX 1 :

The OCO's mandate to provide for children's participation.

The OCO is an independent, statutory body. Our statutory responsibility is to promote the rights and welfare of children and young people under eighteen years of age living in Ireland. Our core functions are set out in the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 ('2002 Act'). These functions are:

- to receive, examine and investigate complaints made by or on behalf of children;
 - to provide independent advice on legislative and public policy developments affecting children and to conduct research relating to children's rights and welfare; and
 - to promote children's rights and welfare, including by providing an independent voice on behalf of children, highlighting issues of concern to them, and creating opportunities for children and young people to play an active role in the OCO.
- The 2002 Act places a statutory obligation on the OCO to provide for consultation with and participation by children and young people:
 - Section 7(1)(e) provides that the Ombudsman for Children shall highlight issues relating to the rights and welfare of children that are of concern to children and young people.
 - Section 7(2)(a) and 7(2)(b) respectively provide that the Ombudsman for Children shall establish structures to consult regularly with children and that children's views shall be given due weight in accordance with their age and understanding.
 - Section 10(1)(a)(i) provides that children are among those who may bring a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

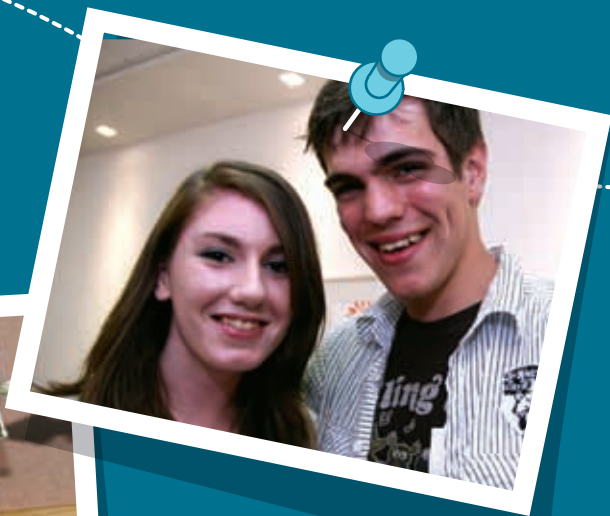
APPENDIX 2:

Laying foundations for children's and young people's participation in our work.

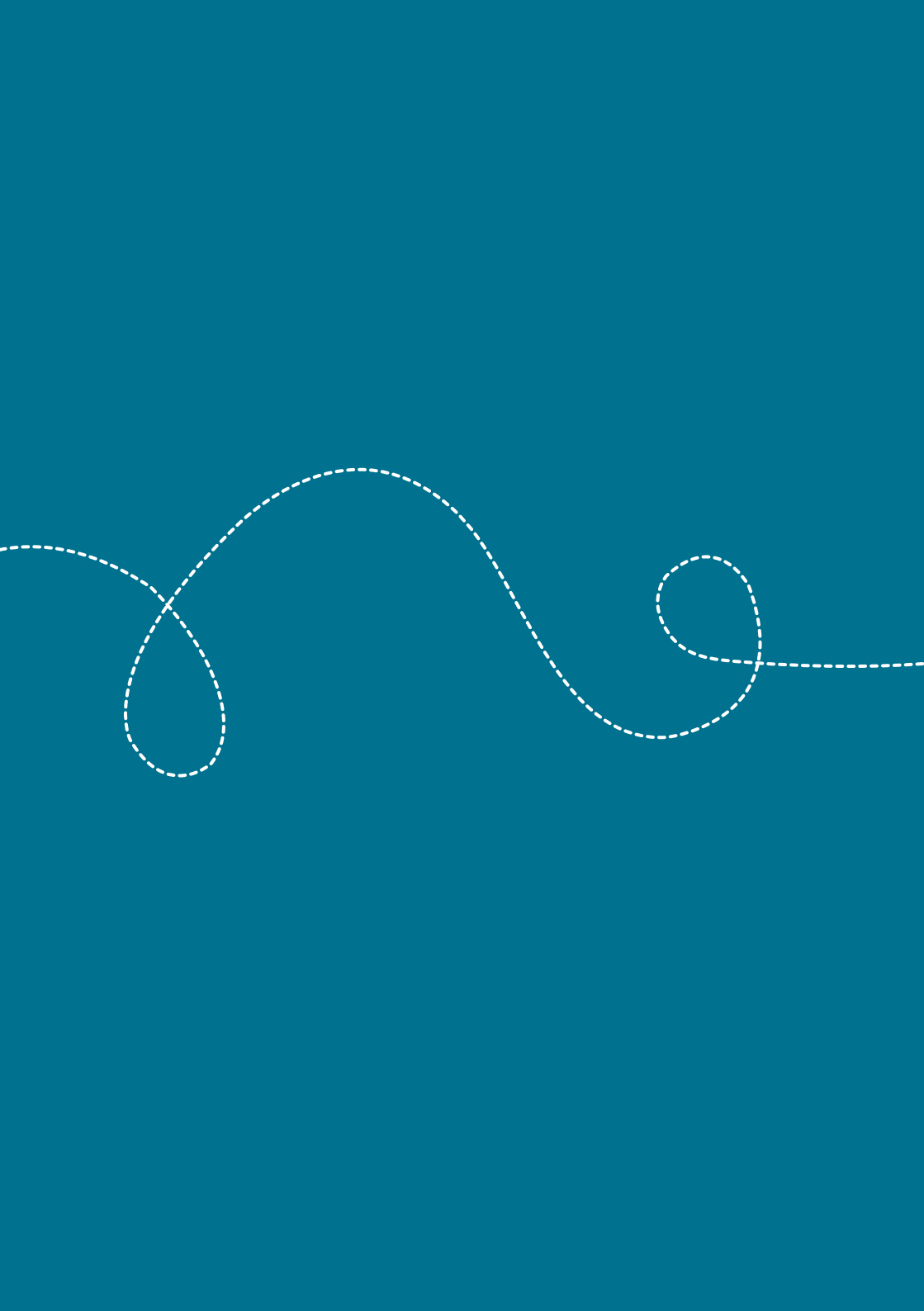
We have taken a number of steps to create a robust foundation for our participation work with children and young people:

- We commissioned action research to support the OCO's development of a model for children's and young people's participation in our work. One strand in this research facilitated OCO staff to reflect on the importance of hearing what children have to say and to explore how we might translate provisions in the 2002 Act relating to children's participation into practice.
- To ensure that our work with children and young people provides for their safety and welfare, we have developed a Child Protection Policy. OCO staff have received Garda clearance to work with children and have participated in child protection training.
- We commissioned action research to identify how, within the parameters of the 2002 Act, we can best handle complaints made to us directly by children and young people.
- We have a set of ethical guidelines for involving children in our research, policy, communications and education work. We have established an ethics committee to facilitate the implementation and ongoing review of these guidelines.
- This policy and procedural framework supports our individual and collective capacity to provide for children's and young people's participation, including the participation of our Youth Advisory Panel members.











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