



Prevention of Early School Leaving  
Interviews in Ireland



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# PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

## Interviews in Ireland

**Art Ó Súilleabháin**

Mayo Education Centre  
Castlebar Co Mayo Ireland

[director@mayoeducationcentre.ie](mailto:director@mayoeducationcentre.ie)

## **CASE STUDY: Christine**

### **Name, Age, Place**

Christine was born into a Traveller family in Mayo in 1991

### **Case Description**

Christine was a member of the Travelling Community. She went to primary school at the age of four. She was 'good at it' and loved it. She transferred to second level school in a rural town. She settled in well and had many friends. At the age of 17 and following Transition Year she began to have a rise in absenteeism and is presently considering not returning to school.

### **Interviews**

- 1) Interview with Christine's mother Mary
- 2) Interview with Christine
- 3) Interview with Christine's Teacher Maureen
- 4) Interview with Christine's School Principal

1) Interview with Christine's Mother

**MARY**

**Mary is a Traveller Parent – her daughter Christine is at risk of leaving school**

- **How was your daughter at school?**

She was good and she enjoyed it. She's there since she was four years old

- **Why do you feel your daughter dropped out of school / left their course?**

She just wanted to. She's 17 now and wants to leave. She didn't like it any more.

- **Did you identify any signs which suggested he/she had 'had enough' of education / their course? & what were those signs?**

When she came to her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday she said she didn't want to go no more

- **What did the school / college do to try to help?**

They didn't contact me but they helped her to have a different timetable – late mornings and fewer subjects. She wants to be a nurse but she don't want to go no more

- **What more could the school / college have done which would have helped with the situation?**

Nothing

- **Did any other external organisations apart from the school / college contact you to try to help with the situation?**

Philomena (The visiting teacher for traveller education) tried to get her to continue but she doesn't want to

- **Has your son/daughter moved on to receive education / training elsewhere?**

No The traveller centre has boys and girls in the one clás and we don't agree with that.

## 2) Interview with Christine

### CHRISTINE

**Christine is a Traveller girl and a student at Risk of becoming early school leavers**

**Aged 17**

- **What factors are causing you to consider leaving school early?**

I'm 17 now and Travellers leave when they are 17.

She could not concentrate after Transition year - finds it hard to remember things after an easy year.

- **What are your main problems? e.g. Difficult subjects? The relationship with your school friends? Lack of interest in studying?**

Everything

Don't do and homework – don't like it

Some of the teachers push you – when you don't have homework done

- **How does the school organization try to meet your needs?**

They gave me a new timetable. Told me I don't have to come in until 11am on Wednesday and Thursday, and gave me a different timetable with study classes and fewer subjects.

- **What/who would help to convince you to remain in the school and take your final year exams?**

No-one

- **What would be your favourite job?**

If I had my leaving cert. – nursing. I can do childcare without my leaving cert.

- **Do the school courses you are following prepare you for that job?**

The first three years at school I did domestic science. That would be good for childcare and I would use it.

### 3) Interview with Christine's teacher

#### Teacher Maureen

What do you feel where the main reasons why... dropped out of school?

Low self esteem is the heart of the matter

Parent has lost authority/power in the household – young person giving back cheek

Cannot take praise or affirmation

Traveller children have a culture different to settled children – they leave school after a year or two.

Very few do the exams

How early did you identify any signs she was likely to drop out of school before he/she actually left?

The Traveller culture indicates that traveller children will rarely continue through to Leaving Certificate. Its great if they do the Junior Cert and she did it.

What were those signs?

Two sisters had left school. Mother trying to keep third in school

Attendance – come a day, go a day...

Watching TV and play station all night.

Mother drinks – trauma – little interest – drugs also

How important was it to get a school qualification for her?

Very important. They have the ability and need the encouragement to go for it

What impact do you think this will have on his/her future employment prospects?

It will give good possibilities - a job and mostly self esteem, encouragement and affirmation in gaining a qualification

What strategies did you employ to try to prevent him/her from dropping out?

Chatting at break time and lunch time – about make up general things and then school issues

Making the contact, build relationships and regular contact with the pupils

Adapting the timetable to suit students who find it difficult to be here all day long

Do you use a structured approach for any student at risk?

School Completion Programme - homework club

Breakfast Club

Table tennis games and alternative activities to help students to enjoy school

- Were you professionally supported inside the school or from outside?

Learning Support Teacher

- What second chance activities have you organized?

We have a culture of looking after people – a caring approach and giving them every chance possible

- How many contacts did you have with his/her family?

The Year Heads and

Home School Liaison Teacher and the Visiting Teacher for the Travellers

- Were you able to maintain a good relationship with the student and his/her family?

Did visit and built a good relationship with the family – as much as was possible

- How have you monitored and evaluated your activities?

We have targets for each student, attendance records, and regular meetings within the school

With hindsight do you feel there is anything else you could have done to prevent him/her from dropping out?

We did our best. Sometimes they just want to leave and there's nothing we can do. Its down to culture and sometimes they want to go to Youthreach to get the money

Do you have any new strategies to suggest which you would like to try in similar situations in the future?

Texting system in early mornings – blocking  
Support group for vulnerable children.  
Face up to parents if children going to leave  
Visit parents more often

#### 4) Interview with Christine's School Principal

##### Principal – Angela

How many students who are on your official school register drop out of school between the ages of 14 and the end of the compulsory school leaving age of 16 in the last 3 years?

About 4 over the past three years

How many students who register for a post 16 course, either vocational or academic, drop out of that course before completion?

We don't have specific post leaving 16 courses. This is a regular secondary school

How does the position at this school compare with drop out rates at other local schools?

We have few drop outs. I think we are on average with other schools.

How often do you monitor drop out rates?

We check in at staff meetings every month and if any student is in trouble in any way we monitor her needs and address them through the year head who follows up on problems.

What contacts do you or colleagues in school have with families of students who play truant?

The year head would contact a family if a student is missing regularly. Some parents are worried. Others find it difficult to keep the child in school – though they are interested in them staying. Students from The Travelling Community rarely finish school. Some will do the Junior Cert. others will finish after first year. Some Travellers register for first year and hardly ever come in. The Education Welfare Officer follows up on cases where students are not attending. It is a legal affair and the parents can be taken to court if their sons or daughters do not attend. There is a case coming up in the court soon. Families contact us regularly if they need to for any reason. We are open to family input and would know most of the parents from the annual Pupil-Teacher Meetings

What are the 3 main reasons for school 'drop outs' before the age of 16 within this school?

With Travellers it is the culture. Girls want to get married and especially when they get to 16 they start to think about it and want to leave school. Another reason is that there is not a tradition of the parents being at school and therefore they don't realise the value of education. Thirdly, there is little encouragement at home to do homework and to help with subjects. Having said that - the parents always their children to be educated and would like them to continue.

What are the 3 main reasons for young people dropping out of a 'Post 16' course

They are the same reasons generally

How do you identify a young person in danger of dropping out of their course?

They start to have absentee issue. Don't come in for a day or two some weeks. Some come late and get in to the habit of coming in late and lose interest and motivation.

Do you feel that the current educational system has a significant impact on drop out rates?

Some schools have greater system than others. Some schools are in The DEIS system. We

What strategies do you have in place to prevent students identified as being at risk, from dropping out?

We talk to students, encourage them to stay. The year head would build relation ship with the student. With Christine we offered her the opportunity to do fewer subjects and re-arranged her timetable to come in later in the mornings.

What activities do you organise to improve curricular continuity, offer second chance courses, develop innovative teaching methods in order to cope with the problem?

We

How important is teachers' team work to avoid school failure?

We have regular team meetings of year heads. Some teachers have particular interest in Traveller education and give special attention. We also have the Visiting Teacher for Travellers who comes to

the school regularly. She meets with the year heads. So the team work is inside and outside the school.

How do you monitor and evaluate the actions you have planned / strategies you have put in place?  
We monitor each term end. We have a staff meeting and year head meetings. At these we monitor each student's progress and any difficulties that come up. We take action accordingly. We also, as I have said already, have close links with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers.

What part do you think funding plays on your ability to prevent school drop outs?  
The Home School Community Liaison system is great. We do not have very many drop outs so we are not entitled to one. The Department has the School Completion Programme now also which is very good and are very costly.

Can you suggest any other areas of research which may help with our project?  
The Travellers Movement is a good organisation. They may have some research on Traveller Education.



## CASE STUDY: Tom

### Name, Age, Place

Tom, 14, Traveller Community, Mayo

### Case Description

Tom is a member of the Travelling Community. He attended primary school and transferred to a community college for second level education. The tradition among Travellers is to leave school early. Tom wants to follow in the footsteps of his uncles and do the same.

### Interviews

- 1) Interview with Tom
- 2) Interview with Tom's mother Catherine
- 3) Interview with Tom's Teacher Bernie
- 4) Interview with Tom's School Principal

Student at risk of leaving school early - TOM

What is are causing you to consider leaving school early?

I'm not interested in school any more. I don't want to stay and don't want to do the Junior Cert.

What are your main problems? I don't like to subjects. Some of the others slag me. It's hard to study at home and I have no-one to help me

How is the relationship with your teachers?

Some of them are nice. They help me with the subjects

How is the relationship with your parents?

Good. They don't mind me leaving. My mother would like me to stay.

How does the school organization try to help you?

The woman in the School Completion Programme helps me and wants me to go to the homework club. They let me come in late sometimes

What/who would help to convince you to remain in the school and take your final year exams?

I don't have no interest in exams really

What would be your favourite job?

I'd like to do something with me hands. Me father don't work, nor my uncles either.

Do the school courses you are following prepare you for that job?

The woodwork is good. I like that one.

Do you feel that attending school regularly would increase your chances of getting a good job?

I suppose so. The exams are good for getting jobs... But I would get the dole anyway – wouldn't I?

Do you feel teachers are interested in your decisions and want to support you to achieve what you want in life?

They want me to stay in school. They are talking to me and want me to stay so I will get the Junior Cert and get a better job.

PARENT - Catherine

How was your Tom at school?

He liked it. He was good and liked his teachers in the National school. He was good at sums and could read and write a bit. He wasn't so good in Davitt College. He didn't like having so many teachers in one day and found it hard to get on with them all. Tom is full of energy. They said he was a bit giddy too.

Why do you feel your Tom dropped out of school / left their course?

Travellers don't stay in school a lot. I'll be honest with you and say he wanted to be like his father and be around the site and doing jobs and being out and about the place. He made his confirmation and wanted to finish after that I wanted him to stay a bit longer, He hasn't left but I think he will.

Did you identify any signs which suggested he had 'had enough' of education / their course? & what were those signs?

He didn't want to go no more. He wasn't interested no more, and wanted to take days off.

What did the school / college do to try to help?

The school gave him a few chances. They wanted him to stay and did everything to help him in fairness. He could go to the homework club if he wanted. And he did go to some of it.

What more could the school / college have done which would have helped with the situation?

I don't know really. It's a good school.

Did any other external organisations apart from the school / college contact you to try to help with the situation?

They talked about the youth club in Castlebar. He never was interested in going to it - thought it was for girls only. Phil B comes to visit here sometimes. She's nice and she wants him in the school – and the girls too.

Has your Tom moved on to receive education / training elsewhere?

No. He still goes to school – but not every day. I don't know if he'll do anything if he leaves the school.

TEACHER - Bernie R.

Interviewer : What would you consider are the main reasons?

Bernie : Possibly some of the reasons maybe be,  
Lack of motivation from home, Lack of support from home, Lack of interest in seeing their children do well in education.  
Young person experiencing difficulties in school, literacy problems, difficulty fitting in the school community,  
They would be the main reasons.

Interviewer : You are thinking of someone who is at risk of dropping out?

Bernie : Yes, I have a particular student in mind at the moment that is a potential drop out. This particular student would have literacy problems but he is getting special English classes, he seems to be benefiting somewhat from them but it doesn't seem to be enough to encourage him to stay in school. He also has behavioural problems, acting out in school and is disruptive in main stream classes and that is part of the reason why he doesn't want to be in school.

Interviewer : How early did you identify any signs that he was likely to drop out of school.

Bernie : It would be a tradition with this particular child that the family would not continue education after Junior Cert that would have been the first thing, so we would have been aware of that. He began to exhibit behaviour problems in first year, poor attention span in class. His attention span was only about 5 or 10 minutes after that he would become disruptive; looking for attention, have difficulty concentrating on what was going on in the class.

Interviewer : In relation to this particular student how important was it for him to get a qualification?

Bernie : For the student himself he didn't seem to have that vision or have any need to get a qualification to sit any exam. They likelihood of him sitting the Junior Cert would be pretty minimal. However we are introducing a new programme this year, the Junior Cert. School Programme which will be ideally tailored towards his needs and the possibility of him participating in that programme is quite likely so the possibility of retaining him in school is highly likely now.

Interviewer : For the school how important was it for him to have a qualification?

Bernie : We endeavour for all of our students to reach there full potential in school, so it is very important for us. We would be quite adamant and encouraging that he at least sits his Junior Certificate. There were a number of students who we felt we not suited to the Junior Cert Programme so this is the reason why we are now initiating the change and introducing the second Junior Cert Programme, it is a more practical approach to the subjects and will be more suitable for students who are less academic. So we feel this student will do well in the programme if he agrees to join it.

Interviewer : What impact do you think that will have on his future employment prospects?

Bernie : It definitely will improve his prospects cause he will come out with a qualification. He will be certified in certain areas, so will hopefully be helpful for when he joins the workforce and maybe even encourage him to go on and continue the Leaving Cert Applied Programme.

Interviewer : What strategies did you employ to try to prevent him from dropping out?

Bernie : First of all we ensured that he received special English classes and special classes in subjects he was having difficulty in. There was a separate timetable for him in that area and for any student who is experiencing difficulties in their subjects they can attend. Also we provide a counselling service for him just to get to the root of any problem he might be experiencing in school. We have this year introduced the School Completion Programme which provides a home work club, provides sports facilities, activities for students after school. It also provides a mentoring programme which encourages students to adapt to the school community and to get involved. We also have a

breakfast club, we provide a subsidised breakfast for students who may need to avail of them. We also have summer programmes now introduced this year, which would target at risk students. They have been put in place this week at the end of June. These are all strategies if you like that help encourage students to stay in school and enjoy school. That's the most important part really if they don't enjoy it then they are at risk.

Interviewer : Where you professional supported inside and outside the school?

Bernie : Yes, both 100%. There is a team effort that exists within the school. There is a team of people in place to deal with students who maybe having difficulty. The different specialities are brought on board to deal with a specific problem or a student who maybe experiencing difficulty and there is a team approach in addressing any problems that they may have and helping them to adjust to Secondary School.

Interviewer: Supports from outside the School?

Bernie : We have excellent support from outside the school, the Neighbourhood Youth Project are very much involved in our school and has been for a number of years and they help out with the mentoring programme. Foroige of course are very involved as well, we have educational officers with Foroige coming into the school to help out with the different activities so we are in constant contact with them We also have the psychologists from NEPS involved in the school as well. They are very much involved with helping out with us. We also have Phil Browne who helps look after the Traveller Children, she is very supportive. They are some of the outside support and agencies, the HSE as well, we are very close with the Social Services if necessary as well.

Interviewer: Do you have any contact with the Students Family?

Bernie : Yes on a weekly basis, the Retention Officer in the school who is involved in the School Completion Programme has consistent communication with this child's parents particularly the mother and she is very supportive and she works well with the school.

Interviewer: Have you monitored or evaluated your activities in relation to this particular student?

Bernie : Yes they have been monitored again by the School Retention Officer and they would keep an eye on what's going on and the progress that the child is making. If there is any indication that maybe the child is not going to return to school, then she gets involved to see what issues the child might have and the reasons why the child might be having difficulties and address those or employ the services of a person who might be able to help that child address those issues. We have established a very team spirit in the school that works very well. We are lucky we have this expertise in the school Counselling Services, School Completion Programme, involvement with NEPS and Foroige. We are lucky in location wise we are here in Castlebar and they are all close at hand so we are able to have constant communication with them.

Interviewer: With hindsight do you feel there is anything you could have done to assist this student?

Bernie : I think we have explored every avenue and it is an ongoing process, we are constantly monitoring the situation and encouraging the student to stay in school. Every day new contacts are made with different people that might help this student and at this point I think we have exhausted every avenue possible, but we are continuing to encourage this student as we do all students. We address any problems that come to light and they are addressed immediately.

Interviewer: Do you have any new strategies that you intend to apply?

Bernie : At the moment no, if we put in place what we have already I think that they are very productive and they do work and they have worked in the past. The School Completion Programme is something new that has been introduced to the school, it's just a year old now and it has worked very well and this is our first summer with providing summer camp for students in this school.

The Mentoring Programme has been in place for many years and that seems to be growing and growing, this year we had 50 students involved. 25 Transitional Year Students mentoring 25 First Year Students, so that has really taken off and is very successful in the school so we will continue with that. The Junior Cert Schools Programme will commence in September and that will be a new strategy and an extra strategy, which should help retain students in the school.



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Things have improve drastically in the students we really have many drop outs, we have potential drop outs but in recent years we haven't had many at all.

Principal - Terry McC.

Interviewer: The numbers at the minute?

T. McCall: At the moment we have in place in the school, School Completion Programme so we have initiatives in place for the students. Over the last number of years we would have had students whose ambition it would have been to leave school as early as possible to get into Youth Reach. One of the reasons I would identify with this would be the social welfare system, the lack of appreciation for education and how worth while it is in the community. When you get to parents that would be three or four generations unemployed it rubs off on the students and a lot of them come in hoping to leave off as soon as they can. They know the legal age is 16 and they get paid at 16 to go into Youth Reach so their target from 1<sup>st</sup> year on would be to get into Youth Reach and achieve as little as possible. There are also a number of students who don't make the transition over from primary to secondary. There isn't a common enrolment in the town and we would try to check with the primary schools has everybody enrolled, but they mightn't be co-operative on that cause they might be challenging students towards their own secondary school. We don't know where the gap is and we might find out two months later that the student hasn't enrolled anywhere. They may be from a travellers back ground, so their address may have changed and then we are presented with somebody that has been given a bad start. The biggest area to look at would be the transition from primary to post primary and that would be one area that we can't cover. If they start off poorly in first year there is a bigger chance of them dropping out after third year.

Interviewer: Would that be the same for under 16 and over 16?

T. McCall: It would but what we try to do, like we are doing this evening "It's Third Year to Where" and we have LCA as an alternative to the regular Leaving Cert. We try to educate the parents as to what these two courses are about.

Interviewer: How would your school compare to other schools around the town?

T. McCall: We are offering LCA, I know they are not offering that in the other school in town. We would get a lot of people transferring from there to here, so we have to be very careful that they are transferring for the right reasons. One reason might be because they played up in Muredachs and they are at the end of the line and they want to come to another school.

Interviewer: In relation to early school leavers would there be a difference between here and other schools?

T. McCall: It's hard to say as I wouldn't know what the numbers are there. What I would say is that here we had a 100% pass rate at Junior Cert Level. We may not have had the highest but we have succeed in getting everyone to complete the Junior Cert. So in that respect we are successful.

Interviewer: You have the School Completion Programme in place to stop the early school leavers, is there any other way you monitor it?

T. McCall: Identifying somebody in primary school who has come up all the way and has hated school, comes in here and hates this place. Who watches other lads achieve maybe in sports or in something and find that there is nothing there for them either so that's why we are introducing other schemes like an overnight stay in an outdoor centre. Try minority sports like abseiling and rock climbing and bits and pieces like that. Organise competitions on weekends, keep them interested in coming to school.

Interviewer: If they were thinking about dropping out how would you identify them?

T. McCall: Sometimes its behavioural problems and sometimes deliberate behavioural problems just to get into Youth Reach. Other times is that some kids do get lost along the way and have in the past some nice kids. Quiet maybe very little wrong with the kid, it could be violence at home, drugs at home or maybe something that the parents are doing. We try to identify these as well.

Interviewer: What would be your strategy once you have identified these kids?

T. McCall: First of all every student has to be in here for a quarter past nine for role call. If they come in after that we have a late book and if we see names cropping up and another thing if we see visible signs like tiredness, bruising or anything like that. We are not suppose to really and truly investigate under the Child Care Protection, we may have to report it or it may just be that the parents we drinking the night before and there is a hangover or something and the parents may be deliberately keeping them at home and they might be making up a lie to cover for the parents.

Interviewer: Do you think that the present Educational System has a part to play on drop outs?

T. McCall: It has but if you were to ask me the paper work involved now and the initiative involved is nearly taken away from teachers and the enthusiastic teachers have very little room now compared to ten years ago. According to the Department of Education it doesn't happen unless it's written down. The spontaneity is gone, now due to litigation, claim conscience if they fall, a lot of it isn't the departments fault its society as well. This time of year we do an annual report for the VEC and anybody that has done anything has to write it down and give a lengthy report on that and then we have the Whole School Evaluations as well. That will be coming up again next year. If people have to write it down on top of doing it as well they don't bother. That would be maybe one fault in the Educational System as well its getting very, very tight. In the ideal world if parents, parented and teachers taught it would be great.

Interviewer: In relation to the whole issue is team work important in elevating the problem?

T. McCall: It would be, but then you would have to look at the strengths of a teacher. Some are good disciplinarians and others are very inventive so it is a matter of getting the right team in place.

Interviewer: If a child was identified what would the process be?

T. McCall: The Home Liaison person would ring the home, the deputy principal would talk to them. We had the parents in for one child we thought had been threatened or bullied and then sometimes you would have no home contact and that is were it gets difficult where there is no parent or guardian there or who cares. That's where the problem is what do you do?

Interviewer: What new things have you got in place or planning to do?

T. McCall: The School Completion Programme we are relying on that as there is finances there as well. We will be moving into bereavement counselling if there is a death in the family, anger management, grinds if necessary and a home work club. A lot of this is voluntary and not necessary on a one to one basis. If I was to identify the biggest problems it would be the parents and the lack of belief in the Educational System. Another one would be Youth Reach and the way they are feed into Youth Reach and then transition from primary to post primary. Another would be lack of parents or guidance from home. We find the Health Board let us down, as in we report to them and it's very rare that we get the report back. Because of what they hear is on a confidential basis, so we are told to report what is wrong but are not made aware of the intervention. Then we have to be very careful with that parents as we are not aware of what is going on, is it drugs? We haven't a clue where we stand with that.

Interviewer: What is the implication of funding?

T. McCall: There is never enough funding, but its facility maybe extra room space. If I was looking for funding here I would be looking for a mentoring room, some place where somebody has fallen out with a teacher or other member of staff and there is no home to send them to. You know when a student has verbal abused a member of staff or threatened somebody and you know if you send them home they will get a beating or they are not going to be seen, where do you put them? A "Mentoring Room" I'd called it, it would be rewarding in a sense that they could do what they liked but in the same sense it would be somewhere for them to occupy their space for their own health and safety.

Interviewer: What would you imagine would go on in that space?

T. McCall: What I would imagine is that it would be monitored at all times by a person, there would be computers in it, and they could get on the internet under supervision. They could do some reading and maybe catch up on some homework, they wouldn't be following sometime subscribed,



there would be enough activities there that it wouldn't be forced learning. It would be a place for them to be safe, what we would do would be to have their breaks separate as it can't be seen as a place to reward bad behaviour.

Interviewer: Can you recommend any current research on this problem which may help with our project?

T. McCall: The initiatives that are in place with the School Completion Programme, some of the schools that are in don't deserve to be in it. For example a school in Belmullet what they would see as a big problem wouldn't be near as big as what we might have or others schools in the country have bigger problems and they are not being addressed either. Some of these schools would be disadvantaged due to their geography and their actual location and then sometimes that could actually be a strength as the same problems such as substance abuse aren't there. There are advantages and disadvantages as no two schools are the same.

Interviewer: Would you consider substance abuse something very real in the school and society of Ballina?

T. McCall: Yes, it would be very real everywhere not just in this school. In most schools and in primary as well there are suppliers selling illegal drugs and there is very little that the guards can do until they are over 16 or even 18. The users are not often caught they are just wrapped on the knuckles or sent on some scheme. There is very little they can do with these people under the legislation. What they really are after are the big suppliers

Interviewer: Do you think that, that has an implication on early school users?

T. McCall: Yes, it does as I can see it getting worse. When the Celtic Tiger was strong, youngsters had money and as the Celtic Tiger dries up what happens is that it's very important for the drug dealers to get the youngsters than the older people to supply as they know if they get caught there is nothing that can be done to them and you can only get a certain amount of information from them. So the way it actually works in towns is that they go collect something from a car are told to meet them up in a different part of town, go into a pub or somewhere and give over the package and collect a €100 and bring it back to the car and they might be ten euro for themselves. For them its fast money, the adult is not going to be caught, the young person is told to run as fast as they can and do it. The guards no matter what speed car they have won't catch them even if they see them doing it, so they can make an awful lot of money in a very short space of time. These people that use youngsters like that sometimes don't pay them as they get to know what its worth and instead of giving them €10 euros for today will give them €20 euros worth of hash or whatever so what will happen then is that they will sell that off again for maybe €40 euro. So now they have somebody else roped in. It happen here some years ago with French students and e tablets and some fella got tablets wrapped them up in tin foil was selling them for €2 a pop and it turned out it was Anadin. They filed the name of it and in a packet you get 24 and he was getting €48 for his packet of Anadin. Some of them were getting highs out of it as well and couldn't get enough, so this type of thing goes on as well. It might seem harmless but at the same time it's becoming part of culture. Not every kid in the town is into this but at the same time it is a reality.

## **CASE STUDY: Noelene**

### **Name, Age, Place**

Noelene was born in 1992 in a rural area in Mayo

### **Case Description**

Noelene went to a community school in Ballinrobe. She spent two years there and did not settle. She is now in a vocational Training Centre in the town and is very happy with her decision to move to there. She quickly identified that the school was not working for her and left mainstream education at 14 years of age. Her parents were keen that she stayed in school. However her mother supported her in moving to Youthreach – a vocational centre – where she is presently very happy.

### **Interviews**

- 1) Interview with Noelene
- 2) Interview with Noelene's father Thomas
- 3) Interview with Noelene's Teacher Pat Howley
- 4) Interview with Noelene's School Principal

Interview with Noleen O' Hara Youth Reach Ballinrobe

Interviewer: Why did you drop out of your school / leave your Post 16 Course?

N.O'Hara: It wasn't helping me, there was too many in a class and I wasn't getting the help I needed. I was slow at learning and in here they can take me individually and teach me better.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to arrive at this decision?

N.O'Hara: Not long I was in second year when I left. I did the end of the year. I came to Youth Reach in September.

Interviewer: How were your relationships with your teachers and your school friends?

N.O'Hara: Relationship with teachers in the other school - I wouldn't really talk to them. Here it is great. I get on really well,. Relationship with students in the other school was great and most of them are here now.

Interviewer: How did the teachers in the other school react to you dropping out?

N.O'Hara: Alright, the principal didn't really want me leave. The teachers didn't say anything. Friends were disappointed I left.

Interviewer: How did the school organization try to meet your needs?

N.O'Hara: My mother works up there, so they tried to get her to talk to me to stay.

Interviewer: Beyond your teachers did you have contacts with other educational experts inside or outside the school?

N.O'Hara: No.

Interviewer: How did you get involved here?

N.O'Hara: My friend was talking about it and said it was good learning. I came here with my mother for a chat and to see what it was like. Definitely the right decision to come here.

Interviewer: How is your relationship with your parents?

N. O'Hara: It's great.

Interviewer: How did they react when you were going to leave?

N. O'Hara: They were grand as long as I was coming back to go learning again.

Interviewer: What could the school / college have done to persuade you not to drop out / leave?

N.O'Hara: Nothing really, I didn't like it all. I am happy here. Nothing would have persuaded me not to leave I wanted to leave.

Interviewer: With hindsight do you now feel this was the right decision?

N.O'Hara: Yes, definitely no doubt at all.

Interviewer: What future plans do you have to participate in education or training?

N.O'Hara: Hairdressing, I did it for a year and am going back to do it again. I can train here for it in two years.



Prevention of Early School Leaving  
Interviews in Ireland



N° 134309-LLP-1-2007-1-IT-Comenius -CMP

Interviewer: How do you feel the decision to drop out of education or leave your course will affect your earnings levels throughout your lifetime?

N.O'Hara: When I'm qualified I will have a good wage.

Parent : Thomas

How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter?

Very good, I get on well with all my children

How was your daughter at school?

She got on well with the girls but she didn't like school. She was good at subjects but found it hard. She wasn't very interested

Why do you feel your son/daughter dropped out of school?

She thought she was no good. She just wasn't interested. Her brother is still in school and I'm determined he will stay there. Me and Karen (wife) will do everything to keep him there. He's very good. He has loads of brains. She didn't have any initiative.

Did you identify any signs which suggested she had 'had enough' of education? What were those signs?

She never liked it. I always knew she would leave. Her sisters did the same. She was out all night. I had to go and search for her around the town. She wanted to do her own thing.

How did you react?

I knew she would probably get into the centre so I was ok about it. She can get training there.

What did the school do to try to help?

School didn't do much. But they did encourage her to stay on. They contacted us. Karen talked to them. She does that sort of thing.

What more could the school have done which would have helped with the situation?

I think because she came from this area (High unemployment area with council housing), they didn't mind.

Did any other external organisations apart from the school contact you to try to help with the situation?

She was in the Youth Club. They did the homework with her every day and helped her with the subjects. She learned a lot there.

Has your son/daughter moved on to receive education / training elsewhere?

She went to the Limerick Youth Services Centre. She did her Junior Cert there. She's getting on very well there. She did the bakery and the deli and the flower arranging there, and has certificates for it.

Interview with Pat Howley, Teacher, Ballinrobe Youth Reach

Interviewer: How would you describe your relationship with the students?

P. Howley: I have always had a good relationship with students.

Interviewer: What do you feel where the main reasons why they dropped out of school?

P. Howley: Some of them its culture, with a lot of them it's a learning difficulty and they can't keep up with the pace in mainstream schools. No value of education at home, or family reasons. By culture for example, if you take the traveller culture they feel like they shouldn't be in school after a certain age.

Interviewer: How early did you identify any signs was likely to drop out of school before he/she actually left?

P. Howley: First thing is attendance is poor and once you see that you know that it might happen. Also students who don't mix with others and find it hard to take part in activities. There are some who suffer from medical problems like depression.

Interviewer: What was your response when you realised that there was a possibility of them leaving?

P. Howley: We always try to encourage them to wait and receive some sort of qualification. Or we come up with some sort of agreement with three days and two days work experience, something to try to encourage them to wait.

Interviewer: How important was it to get a school qualification for?

P. Howley: In this day and age it's very important, if you don't have that qualification someone else will.

Interviewer: What impact do you think this will have on his/her future employment prospects?

P. Howley: A lot of them would be very used of opting out at the first fence and to get them over that and prove to them that they can do it. They can see themselves that it is achievable, self esteem is low in most of them and pride sometimes can hold them back.

Interviewer: What strategies did you employ to try to prevent him/her from dropping out?

P. Howley: It's not something we set out, this is everyday life with everyday problems and we rise to meet the problem as it arises. We don't let anyone go lightly and we don't send them to anybody. We try to meet any problem they have and react to that problem and there is no book to cover every problem. First thing you do is that you don't not do anything, you have to meet it early. One of the ways we have of forecasting is we would have regular staff meeting and we discuss each student. Open forum, how they are getting on in each subject, how we feel things are getting on and how we can change them. At least then everybody knows what's happening in other parts of the programme and make suggestions. We are lucky the numbers are small so we can see it early.

Another strategy we have is coaxing, encouraging, re-enforcing, supporting and if we have to go to the house we will to re-enforce the message home. It's something new to them to see a teacher arriving home to get them to go to school. That way they see that that person is interested in me and they might be more inclined to come back.

Interviewer: Would there be other supports or organisations that they would use?

P. Howley: We have a counselling service here twice a week who talks to them on rotation and more often if they need. It's very private, none of the staff have an idea of what happens as it's a service for the students and its 100% confidential.

Interviewer: What second chance activities have you organized?

P. Howley: We have a code of discipline, once they go up that there is an end of the line and we would recommend they take a week or two off and start afresh when they come back, we don't close our door to anybody unless we really, really do have to.

Interviewer: How many contacts did you have with his/her family?  
P. Howley: We have very close contact with the families regularly.

Interviewer: How have you monitored and evaluated your activities?  
P. Howley: The best way is seeing the success or failure of activities in the past and the fact that we have full numbers, we get on well with them, they getting on well here. Most of the response I receive would be verbal communication, I could spend a lot of time writing but that would take away from the practical end of things. Also time to time we would send out a questionnaire and they can freely give their opinion.

Interviewer: With hindsight do you feel there is anything else you could have done to prevent him/her from dropping out?  
P. Howley: We really stretch it to the limit, sometimes when they really want to go there is nothing we can do to change it.

Interviewer: What prevented you from applying other strategies e.g. lack of time, lack of training, lack of resources?  
P. Howley: Lack of time can be a result of them not turning up and there is very little you can do. Very hard to fit them into the project easily if they are missing for a few weeks. Lack of training we should have better training definitely we should have more literacy and numeracy training a big problem with all the profile of the students here. I would be a firm believer in upgrading constantly if you can but then that means you are away a lot from the centre. But definitely for dealing with dyslexia, ADHD or literacy or even promotion of self esteem.

Interviewer: Do you have any new strategies to suggest which you would like to try in similar situations in the future?  
P. Howley: There are several recommendations for programmes to be carried out.

Interviewer: Anything you would do differently if there was a student here presently who wanted to leave, anything that you would do differently?  
P. Howley: No I think we are very human here, it's not autocratic, and you would plead with them even in cases. I would feel that there is no student here that would feel that we don't care.

### **Interview - Michael Brett, Principal, Ballinrobe Community School.**

**Interviewer** : How many students who are on your official school register drop out of school between the ages of 14 and the end of the compulsory school leaving age of 16 in the last 3 years?

**M. Brett** : Would have to find that information out for you.

**Interviewer** : How many students who register for a post 16 course, either vocational or academic, drop out of that course before completion?

**M. Brett** : Not information I have.

**Interviewer** : How does the position at this school compare with drop out rates at other local schools?

**M. Brett** : I wouldn't know but my experience from September would be that the drop out rate is very low. Post Junior Cycle students we would probably have lost 3 or 4. In Junior Cycle we have lost 2 who have gone to Youth Reach and another left hoping to get into Youth Reach but was unsuccessful. I have recently been notified of a pupil under 15 who has dropped out, all male except for one female.

**Interviewer** : How often do you monitor drop out rates?

**M. Brett** : Monitor in the standard role, with an official Role Book. Notify National Education Welfare Board when they have an absenteeism of 20. When absenteeism becomes an issue parents are written to, the students are written to and requested to return to school. Of all the students who have left we were only notified officially of 2. The rest just dropped out and made no contact with the school.

**Interviewer** : What contacts do you or colleagues in school have with families of students who play truant?

**M. Brett** : After a small number of absenteeism on the official role, the Year Head would write home, phone or both. When students return they are expected to bring a note informing of the reason for their absence. Frequently parents will ring in and inform us particularly if a student is going to be out for a reasonable amount of time, if in hospital or something like that. There are a core number of students with high absenteeism who don't respond to letters. The National Education Board is working with one family at the moment and has succeeded in getting a third year student who is under 15 back to school after a long absence.

**Interviewer** : What are the 3 main reasons for school 'drop outs' before the age of 16 within this school?

**M. Brett** : Failure at school, Parental Attitude, Difficulty with mixing with class mates.



Interviewer : What are the 3 main reasons for young people dropping out of a 'Post 16' course?

M. Brett: Work, get offered jobs trying to pursue possible apprenticeships. Generally people who drop out after 16 are people for whom the Leaving Cert is too difficult for them. A very small number drop out due to social reasons for example it is very noticeable in the Travelling Community. That they don't pursue education after 16.

Interviewer : How do you identify a young person in danger of dropping out of their course?

M. Brett: The Year Head is able to identify people who are in danger of dropping out from the role and the high amount of absenteeism. Often they would have older siblings in the school with high absenteeism as well so it often runs in family.

Interviewer : Do you feel that the current educational system has a significant impact on drop out rates?

M. Brett: It's not the structure of the Educational System its more to do with the student who experiences failure at school and for them school is an option where they don't thrive, they don't succeed. They often are alienated from the ordinary school. The biggest reasons for drop out is failure at school and family history drop out. Family attitude is also to do with previous failure at school. Certainly agree schools could be doing more for students with learning difficulties. There is a certain amount being done but it needs far more resources. The Leaving Cert Applied is still limited enough.

Interviewer : What new strategies would you have in place in the school here?

M. Brett: We wouldn't have specific strategies aimed at targeting students who are likely to leave and trying to retain them. The general attitude in the school is one of caring, trying to provide resource hours for students with learning difficulties. Very strong encouragement and support for those who are academically weak. We do put very substantial resources into the learning areas particularly in Junior Cycle. The general philosophy is to cater for all students in the school.

Interviewer : Do you actually have Resource Teachers?

M. Brett : Yea we have, we have a lot of resource hours because of our structure in the school. We have quite a high number of children from the Travelling Community and we have a high number of International Students so we have extra facilities for those.

Interviewer: What activities do you organise to improve curricular continuity, offer second chance courses, and develop innovative teaching methods in order to cope with the problem?

M. Brett: We don't really have a second chance course. We do facilitate all students who want to repeat the Leaving Cert and we encourage all students to do Transition Year. Transition Year is a very attraction option for encouraging students to stay in school who are on the verge of dropping out. It's not focused on academic abilities and it has the desired affect of keeping students in school until they are at least 16.

Interviewer : How important is teacher's team work to avoid school failure?

M. Brett: Very, very important a good school shouldn't emphasise failure because there are different stages of success, some students experience great success some experience very little. But the whole attitude of the school should be one of positive attitude, including positive discipline actually. Give students a sense of belonging, which group teaching will create that atmosphere.

Interviewer : How do you monitor and evaluate the actions you have planned/strategies you have put in place.

M. Brett: We would meet as a group and discuss the progress of the students and students can be identified very early if they are having problems. We don't really focus on students who are likely to drop out but we do closely monitor students progress and encourage them in school.

Interviewer : What new strategies have you planned to help the problem in the future?

M. Brett: We introduced major changes this year in relation to discipline policy which is based on penalty points and bonus points which is geared towards positive develops of the students. We have tried to make the school much more student centred and student focused, we are trying to expand our non academic areas for example, we have introduced choir and drama and gymnastics and there will be more hopefully throughout the school within the next two years. Make the school more amenable to students who are likely to drop out by having a few more non academic areas. To emphasis other talents than academic ones.

Interviewer : Does the implementation of this strategy depend on the availability of funding?

M. Brett: All dependant on funding but we have been able to do on our own resources by raising money from sponsorship. A lot of that money has paid for the choir and drama.

Interviewer : What part do you think funding plays on your ability to prevent school drop outs?

M. Brett: Yes, it has but I certainly don't think it is the issue. The problems of school leaving won't be solved by money, it's the failure and family attitude. It's more a cultural problem than a monetary one.

Interviewer : Can you suggest any other areas of research which may help with our project?

M. Brett : Not really I know the Department are trying to reduce the drop out rate but with a little success but I am not aware of any research.

## **CASE STUDY: DAN**

### **Name, Age, Place**

Dan, 16, Ballinrobe Youthreach

### **Case Description**

Dan attended primary school and transferred to second level at the age of 12 years. He found second level school difficult, particularly the large classes and an impersonal relationship with teachers. He transferred to Youthreach – a Vocational Training Centre (termed the ‘funny school’ by his friends). He has been very happy there and has attained his Junior Certificate. Some of Dan’s aunts did not complete second level education and were confident in encouraging him to transfer to Youthreach – where they and his cousins had attended

### **Interviews**

- 1) Interview with Dan
- 2) Interview with Dan’s mother
- 3) Interview with Dan’s Teacher
- 4) Interview with Dan’s School Principal

### Interview with Dan Mc D

Interviewer: Why did you drop out of your school?

Dan: I didn't like the teachers they were too snobby. I didn't like them, if you asked them for help they'd tell you they would help you in a minute and then they forget about you. If you asked them a second or a third time they would be annoyed with you and tell you to do it yourself. I just had very little patience for them. Didn't like being in a school with a lot of people, find it easier to concentrate in a smaller class.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to arrive at this decision?

Dan: About two or three months of thinking about it and then just decided that I will leave. I was half way through the Junior Cert year when I decided and left then about a month before the Junior Cert and completed the Junior Cert here in Youth Reach.

Interviewer: How were your relationships with your teachers and your school friends?

Dan: I still get on with my school friends and see them all the time. Most of them are still in the same school and some are here in Youth Reach.

Interviewer: How did your friends or teachers react when you decided to leave?

Dan: Can't remember about my friends, but some of the teachers who I didn't get on with were telling me not to leave and telling me to stay here and I would get a better education here. The students call this place (The Youthreach centre) school the funny school, but it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: How did the school organization try to meet your needs?

Dan: Most of them tried to get me to change from Honours to Ordinary or even Foundation Level and saying that I might find it easier if I do that. I didn't want to do that.

Interviewer: Beyond your teachers did you have contacts with other educational experts inside or outside the school?

Dan: None

Interviewer: What is your relationship like with your parents?

Dan: It's good, my mother told me to think about it and that's what I did. But, I still wanted to leave.

Interviewer: Was it easy to get a place here, what did you have to do?

Dan: My mother rang and asked them and rang the other school as well to let them know. There are only 40 places in here, so I was lucky.

Interviewer: How did your family react, when they realised you were dropping out?

Dan: Not really bothered as a few of my aunties have been here and my cousins. My mother and her older sister were the only ones who stayed at the other school.

Interviewer: What could the school have done to prevent you from dropping out?

Dan: Nothing I was determined I was going and that was it.

Interviewer: With hindsight do you now feel this was the right decision?

Dan: Yes, but for the first while I was unsure but I am grand now once I got the Junior Cert done.

Interviewer: What future plans do you have to participate in education or training?

Dan: College to do medicine/nursing I'll do a PLC Course for two years and then a diploma and get a degree then, it will take seven years.

Interviewer: How do you feel the decision to drop out of education or leave your course will affect your earnings levels throughout your lifetime?

Dan: Most coming here will just do the Leaving Cert Applied and leave it there, they wouldn't be going on to College.

Parent : Deirdre

How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter?

I have a good relationship with Dan. We have our moments. Sometimes its good and other times its not so good. Tou know teenagers.

How was your daughter at school?

Dan enjoyed primary school but he really never settled into secondary school. He was good at it. He's a good lad and he has brains, but he just couldnt

Why do you feel your son/daughter dropped out of school?

He never really settled after National school. He was good. He did well but he didnt like some of the teachers

Did you identify any signs which suggested she had 'had enough' of education? What were those signs?

He was doing ok and then he said he wanted to leave. He was not interested any more and was inclined to want to take a day off here and there.

How did you react?

I wanted him to stay. I finished school myself and wanted him to do the same. I think its important thant they have an education. I rang the school. The teachers wanted him to stay as well, but he had his mind made up. My sister was in Youthreach and did well out of it. So if he was going there I was happy enough.

What did the school do to try to help?

The teachers wanted him to stay and to don his Junior cert at least. They told him to do the lower courses but he didnt want to.

What more could the school have done which would have helped with the situation?

I don't know.

Did any other external organisations apart from the school contact you to try to help with the situation?

No

Has your son moved on to receive education / training elsewhere?

.He went to Youthreach and is doing great there. He doid the Junior cert and did well in it. He's much happier there and the teachers are nice and friendly. He gets on with everyone there and they have small classes too. He will do well there. He's a good lad. He's learning a lot there.

### Interview with Pat H.

Interviewer: How would you describe your relationship with the students?

Pat: I have always had a good relationship with students.

Interviewer: What do you feel where the main reasons why they dropped out of school?

Pat: Some of them its culture, with a lot of them it's a learning difficulty and they can't keep up with the pace in mainstream schools. No value of education at home, or family reasons. By culture for example, if you take the traveller culture they feel like they shouldn't be in school after a certain age.

Interviewer: How early did you identify any signs was likely to drop out of school before he/she actually left?

Pat: First thing is attendance is poor and once you see that you know that it might happen. Also students who don't mix with others and find it hard to take part in activities. There are some who suffer from medical problems like depression.

Interviewer: What was your response when you realised that there was a possibility of them leaving?

Pat: We always try to encourage them to wait and receive some sort of qualification. Or we come up with some sort of agreement with three days and two days work experience, something to try to encourage them to wait.

Interviewer: How important was it to get a school qualification for?

Pat: In this day and age it's very important, if you don't have that qualification someone else will.

Interviewer: What impact do you think this will have on his/her future employment prospects?

Pat: A lot of them would be very used of opting out at the first fence and to get them over that and prove to them that they can do it. They can see themselves that it is achievable, self esteem is low in most of them and pride sometimes can hold them back.

Interviewer: What strategies did you employ to try to prevent him/her from dropping out?

Pat: It's not something we set out, this is everyday life with everyday problems and we rise to meet the problem as it arises. We don't let anyone go lightly and we don't send them to anybody. We try to meet any problem they have and react to that problem and there is no book to cover every problem. First thing you do is that you don't not do anything, you have to meet it early. One of the ways we have of forecasting is we would have regular staff meeting and we discuss each student. Open forum, how they are getting on in each subject, how we feel things are getting on and how we can change them. At least then everybody knows what's happening in other parts of the programme and make suggestions. We are lucky the numbers are small so we can see it early.

Another strategy we have is coaxing, encouraging, re-enforcing, supporting and if we have to go to the house we will to re-enforce the message home. It's something new to them to see a teacher arriving home to get them to go to school. That way they see that that person is interested in me and they might be more inclined to come back.

Interviewer: Would there be other supports or organisations that they would use?

Pat: We have a counselling service here twice a week who talks to them on rotation and more often if they need. It's very private, none of the staff have an idea of what happens as it's a service for the students and its 100% confidential.

Interviewer: What second chance activities have you organized?

Pat: We have a code of discipline, once they go up that there is an end of the line and we would recommend they take a week or two off and start afresh when they come back, we don't close our door to anybody unless we really, really do have to.

Interviewer: How many contacts did you have with his/her family?

Pat: We have very close contact with the families regularly.

Interviewer: How have you monitored and evaluated your activities?

Pat: The best way is seeing the success or failure of activities in the past and the fact that we have full numbers, we get on well with them, they getting on well here. Most of the response I receive would be verbal communication, I could spend a lot of time writing but that would take away from the practical end of things. Also time to time we would send out a questionnaire and they can freely give their opinion.

Interviewer: With hindsight do you feel there is anything else you could have done to prevent him/her from dropping out?

Pat: We really stretch it to the limit, sometimes when they really want to go there is nothing we can do to change it.

Interviewer: What prevented you from applying other strategies e.g. lack of time, lack of training, lack of resources?

Pat: Lack of time can be a result of them not turning up and there is very little you can do. Very hard to fit them into the project easily if they are missing for a few weeks.

Lack of training we should have better training definitely we should have more literacy and numeracy training a big problem with all the profile of the students here. I would be a firm believer in upgrading constantly if you can but then that means you are away a lot from the centre. But definitely for dealing with dyslexia, ADHD or literacy or even promotion of self esteem.

Interviewer: Do you have any new strategies to suggest which you would like to try in similar situations in the future?

Pat: There are several recommendations for programmes to be carried out.

Interviewer: Anything you would do differently if there was a student here presently who wanted to leave, anything that you would do differently?

Pat: No I think we are very human here, it's not autocratic, and you would plead with them even in cases. I would feel that there is no student here that would feel that we don't care.

Interview : Frank, Principal.

Interviewer : How many students who are on your official school register drop out of school between the ages of 14 and the end of the compulsory school leaving age of 16 in the last 3 years?

Frank : On official school register between 14 and 16 in the last three years at an absolute guess somewhere between 90 and 100. They have left the other school system to come here. We have lost 12 since September and have taken on others so we are now at 40 on the school register. 80% are under 16.

Interviewer : How many students who register for a post 16 course, either vocational or academic, drop out of that course before completion?

Frank : 12 but they wouldn't all be drop outs some would have gone back to school, employment and then there would be some doing nothing.

Interviewer : How does the position at this school compare with drop out rates at other local schools?

Frank : 5 out of 52, 10% typical of the year before and the year before that. 90% are successful, those that are gone are gone for serious reasons even legal.

Interviewer : How often do you monitor drop out rates?

Frank : Not very good, we don't have a formal system.

Interviewer : What contacts do you or colleagues in school have with families of students who play truant?

Frank : Send parents a text, phone them and get them in as soon as possible if there are difficulties. We would write to them aswell as part of our Discipline Procedure. They get two verbal warnings and then there is a letter sent home, explaining what's gone on and why. Highlighting it that way and we send reports home twice a year. We had a parent evening as without parental support we wouldn't make it. Most of the time parents are fantastic but there are exceptions.

Interviewer : What are the 3 main reasons for school 'drop outs' before the age of 16 within this school?

Frank : Lack of parental support, asked to leave due to inappropriate discipline and health issues.

Interviewer : What are the 3 main reasons for young people dropping out of a 'Post 16' course?

Frank : Same as above, they are not leaving to take up fulltime employment. As the opportunities aren't there and they see more gain from the L.C.A.

Interviewer : How do you identify a young person in danger of dropping out of their course?

Frank : Absenteeism, it's that simple. You will see it in the class role books.

Interviewer : Do you feel that the current educational system has a significant impact on drop out rates?

Frank : Educations System is becoming more understanding, Schools and Youth Reach are trying to find different ways of including people. It's a much more positive place then it used to be. We wouldn't survive without drop outs.

Interviewer : What activities do you organise to improve curricular continuity, offer second chance courses, and develop innovative teaching methods in order to cope with the problem?

Frank : Have a simple philosophy have them leave on a good note and feel good about themselves. If they leave on a Friday feeling good they will come back on Monday. Have a more enjoyable day for them.

Interviewer : How important is teachers' team work to avoid school failure?

Frank : Very important we have great staff here.

Interviewer : What new strategies have you planned to help with the problem in future?

Frank : Timetable them to have a more enjoyable day. Have the heavy stuff in the morning e.g., maths and English and lighter activities in the afternoon.

Interviewer : Does the implementation of this strategy depend on the availability of funding?

Frank : Up to a point. We have a five year plan that lies out our strategies. It's not all about funding we can do the best we can with what we have, the young people are given a fair chance.

Interviewer : What part do you think funding plays on your ability to prevent school drop outs?

Frank : Yes, obviously if young people are in a school where they can get special assistance that makes a difference. The Department are helping with readers for Junior Cert and Leaving Cert and that helps young people to stay in school as they are getting that extra help that they need to continue. There is loads of support needed in relation to family and support services. It creates an understanding of why someone is doing what they are. Funding is not necessarily the root, if they are interested in crime then there's nothing you can do.

Interviewer : Can you suggest any other areas of research which may help with our project?

Frank : Look at what Age Project are doing in Castlebar, The Foroige, and the Big Brother Programme. A good role model someone to model themselves on in a positive way. I find them fantastic people to work with.



## CASE STUDY: SHELLY

### Name, Age, Place

Shelly, 16, was born into a family in a high unemployment area in the city of Limerick.

### Case Description

Shelly completed primary schooling at her local Primary School. She transferred to secondary school in the city centre and spent three years. She completed her Junior Certificate exams and passed. She did not continue in mainstream education following her exams. She was surprised she got on so well in her exams and was sorry she had left. She thought she would not be taken back to the school and went to The Limerick Youth Services Centre. She receives training for Restaurant and Baking industry and is considering doing the Leaving Certificate programme next year.

### Interviews

- 1) Interview with Shelly
- 2) Interview with Shelly's father
- 3) Interview with Shelly's Teacher
- 4) Interview with Shelly's School Principal

Student First name Shelly

Age 16

Where she lives High Unemployment area, Limerick city

You are the expert to speak about the reasons of dropping out. Can you describe why you did drop out of your school?

I was always falling behind in my subjects. The teachers would always find something wrong and something I did wrong. I was giddy – was always sent to the principal's office and got loads of detention. They always check your uniform and fined me if it wasn't right. It was costing my mother a lot of money – fines for the wrong shoes, wrong jacket, missing tie, pyjama parts on under my blouse. How long did it take you (approximately) to arrive at this decision?

From first year. I told my mother I was going to leave but she would not let me.

How were your relationships with your teachers and your school friends?

I didn't get on well with the teachers. Some of them I did get on with – the older ones. I had lots of friends and I miss them now.

How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

The teachers tried to get me to stay. My friends helped me with the exams - the practical parts of them

How did the school organization try to meet your needs?

They wanted me to stay. I was giddy so they were probably glad to get rid of me.

Beyond your teachers did you have contacts with other educational experts inside or outside the school?

The Youth Club - that was good. I did my homework there and lots of other things. We went to films, did baking, learned horse riding and lots of things

How is your relationship with your parents?

I get on well with them. My father works here now

How did they react when they noticed you were dropping out?

They wanted me to stay and get the exams. I did the Junior cert and then left. I told them I wasn't coming back.

What could the school have done to persuade you not to drop out / leave?

I had no confidence whatsoever. They let me off. I done much better in the Junior Cert than I thought I would. The teachers were telling me I was falling behind and wouldn't get it. They told me to do foundation level instead of pass. I wanted to do it myself. The teaching assistant stayed with me for the mock exams and was very good to me. I had help finishing the practical parts of the exam and got them done.

What could your parents have done to persuade you not to drop out / leave?

Nothing - I was going to go anyway. They couldn't have stopped me. I wanted to go to the centre

With hindsight do you now feel this was the right decision?

When I got my Junior Cert results I was sorry I didn't stay. But I had already left. I could have done my Leaving Cert and got it. I miss my friends too

What future plans do you have to participate in education or training?

I might do the Leaving Cert Applied in the Centre. I'm fully qualified Deli and Catering Assistant now. They don't let you go here. They help you to get a job and with classes. Here they boost your confidence and tell you that you are doing well and tell you that you can do things.

How do you feel the decision to drop out of education or leave your course will affect your earnings levels throughout your lifetime?

Yes it does affect it. If I do the Leaving Cert I will get more money. I will get a job with more pay.

Parent : John

How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter?

I get on well with her. She is quiet and a nice girl

How was your daughter at school?

She liked it but she found it hard at times. Its a good school. She never really liked school – even in primary school.

Why do you feel your son/daughter dropped out of school?

She thought she was no good. She didn't like the discipline at the school either. She had to wear uniform and have it right every day. Otherwise she was in trouble.

Did you identify any signs which suggested she had 'had enough' of education? What were those signs?

She said it early on – in first year - but I didn't realise she was going to leave until she had the Junior cert done.

How did you react?

I said it was ok so long as she got into the Centre. There was nothing much I could do. She was determined. She knew she would get paid if she was in the youth Centre too. She could do the training and have some pocket money too.

What did the school do to try to help?

Fgh they encouraged her to stay. The Youth Club helped her a lot. She did her homework there. They did all the 'Mocks' (pre Junior Cert exams) with her and helped her with the exam subjects.

What more could the school have done which would have helped with the situation?

Maybe they could have encouraged her more and told her she was good and that she would pass the exams

Did any other external organisations apart from the school contact you to try to help with the situation?

The Youth Club in Moyross was great support and a great club. I worked there too. The club was very good to all my family. They did the homework and all the different activities – in school time and in the holidays too.

Has your son/daughter moved on to receive education / training elsewhere?

She's in the Limerick Youth Centre now. She's doing very well there. She has done the training in the bakery and the deli and she might do her leaving cert. The training is two years and then she can go back and do the Leaving Cert. That would be another two years.

Teacher - Susan

What do you feel where the main reasons why ....dropped out of school?

Low self esteem, feeling she was no good and also she transferred from a different school a year ago. I think it took a long time to settle in a new school. Also she has a boyfriend who is older than her and she wants to work and move in with him

How early did you identify any signs... was likely to drop out of school before he/she actually left?  
3-4 months before she left, although she says she made up her mind n first year.

What were those signs?

Poor attendance; coming to school late; little interest in school and subjects; lack of interest and participation; her mother phoned the school concerned that she might leave.

How important was it to get a school qualification for .....

She had little interest in a qualification and did not see the value in doing the Junior cert. The school staff has a great interest in her completing it knowing that she has better prospects with some qualification.

What impact do you think this will have on his/her future employment prospects?

A great impact. She was very young, may have little self discipline and self responsibility that are important for any work. I think she did not realise what it takes to pay rent, and bills

She said she would try for housekeeping or bar work. For these jobs now a days qualification in Health and Safety, First Aid and Food Hygiene are important. However she went to the Youth Center and was taken on there.

What strategies did you employ to try to prevent him/her from dropping out?

School Completion Programme, Home School Community Liaison Officer, the principal was very supportive. All encouraged her to complete the practical aspects of her Junior Cert subjects and gave her personal attention in doing so. The student was very popular with other students. She got great help and support from them – both in her own class and older students.

Do you use a structured approach for any student at risk?

It is a team approach in the school. Each case is dealt with individually

Were you professionally supported inside the school or from outside?

I was supported very much in the school. I don't think it was necessary to have outside support.

What second chance activities have you organized?

As above. The Youth Club was a great support for Shelly too with the homework club

How many contacts did you have with his/her family?

The Home School Community Liaison had contact with parents and family members

Where you able to maintain a good relationship with the student and his/her family?

Yes. It took a lot of encouraging and being available to her when she needed support. She has a sister doing Junior Cert in another school. I am not sure if that has an implication on this students situation and response to school and exams.

How have you monitored and evaluated your activities?

The school staff monitors students progress regularly. We also kept a diary of the student's activities.

Teachers check in with the Class head or Year Head regularly if there is a problem in teh classroom

With hindsight do you feel there is anything else you could have done to prevent him/her from dropping out?

No

What prevented you from applying other strategies e.g. lack of time, lack of training, lack of resources?

In this case there was early detection. If it was a male student I am not sure that || would have kept such a good relationship going.

Do you have any new strategies to suggest which you would like to try in similar situations in the future?

There is something more needed with the Junior Cycle students who are at risk of leaving. The Junior Certificate Schools Programme is a new programme being brought into some schools. This might be useful to students at risk of leaving school early, and I think would be good in our school.

### Principal – Sean B

Interviewer : How many students who are on your official school register drop out of school between the ages of 14 and the end of the compulsory school leaving age of 16 in the last 3 years?

Sean B : In the last 3 years I would estimate 4 students.

Interviewer : How many students who register for a post 16 course, either vocational or academic, drop out of that course before completion?

Sean B : We don't have any course like that, that are applicable in the school. We are strictly Junior Cert and Leaving Cert, we don't have LCA or LCVP or things like that.

Interviewer : How does the position at this school compare with drop out rates at other local schools?

Sean B : We'd have a fairly low rate of drop outs. I don't know the exact story in other schools.

Interviewer : How often do you monitor drop out rates?

Sean B : We'd look at it over the course of the school year, we'd look at our attendance in December, and we'd look at it again at the Mid Term and again in May. It's the structure we have in the school with Class Heads and as part of our annual review we look at it three time a year and we'd see what our attendance is like and we'd see if people are drifting or whatever the cause may be.

Interviewer : What contacts do you or colleagues in school have with families of students who play truant?

Sean B : We have a system in the school called "Class Heads" it's slightly different to other schools that'd have "Year Heads". That means that each class would have a teacher attached to them, that teacher would meet the class every morning for 15 minutes. If there was an issue at that stage, then that would mean they would call the parents, during the day, next day or whatever the case may be.

We also use a system of the journal for communication it works well, but the fact that we meet the students every morning is a big help. We can see exactly what's happening and keep a record of what's going on. With regards to how we monitor we look at that and say "listen this guy has been absent" and we'd report him to the welfare officer if necessary.

We would ring the parent and bring in the parents. We have a system here a Scale System, a code of conduct. If a student for example gets a

Scale 1 if he does something silly,

Scale 2 if he does something a little more serious. If he gets a

Scale 3 automatically the information will be sent home and the details of that incident and then the parents will be asked to come in and discuss the student's behaviour. If it happened a second time the student will be brought in for a Saturday detention and we have a system where that progresses up along to expulsion. That very rarely happens, in my lifetime in the school of over 20 years we've had 1 expulsion. It takes a long time to get expelled plus the fact that there is a lot of checks and balances in between.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of Scale 1, 2 & 3?

Sean B: Scale 1, would be a guy for example in class that might be causing disruption, for example he might be preventing someone from learning as the case may be at a low level.

Scale 2, then would be a little bit more serious where a guy might be on a regular basis not turning up with his homework or be disrespectful to the teacher.

Scale 3, would be a serious one, and would be something like using foul language or repetitive disruptive behaviour in class or something like that. Scale 3 would be serious, if you get two scale 3's you would be in on a Saturday morning detention. But you would have to get them during a certain period as well. It's very clear and written down, they are given a code of discipline. We are currently reviewing it at the moment as there were aspects of it that we dislike and we are changing it a bit, but as we know that we have in place at the moment works well.

Interviewer: What are the 3 main reasons for school 'drop outs' before the age of 16 within this school?

Sean B: I suppose family circumstances would be the big one, what's happening at home. The young fella hasn't been keeping up with his lessons or his work would be another one and if he's getting into difficulty in school and feels he can't cope with the school and finds the school isn't working for him. A lot of it is down to the parent and guardians at home, that's a big influence. The school can only do so much.

Interviewer: What are the 3 main reasons for young people dropping out of a 'Post 16' course?

Sean B: Question doesn't apply.

Interviewer: How do you identify a young person in danger of dropping out of their course?

Sean B : You can see by the results of their examinations number 1, you can see by their class head and reports from the class head on what their behaviour is like and if he's been getting into difficulty on a regular basis and reports from teachers in general. Obviously the parents sometimes themselves would indicate that the son might be unhappy in school and I'd interview the student and see what we can do.

Sometimes we'd jig subjects around, we had a situation recently, where we had a guy in fifth year, he was 17 years of age and doing 7 subjects for the Leaving Cert and he had opted to do Economics. But he hated Economics and was finding it difficult so we allowed him to attend Economics Classes but do homework and then he's doing just six subjects for the Leaving Cert, in special cases we do that.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the current educational system has a significant impact on drop out rates?

Sean B: Our system here is very rigid with just traditional Junior Cert & Leaving Cert., but we have a great range of subjects available and when students come to us for Leaving Cert in the final two years of their education they would be able to select from 16 different subjects that makes a huge difference. I know there are smaller schools in the area that might have only 10 subjects and some only would have 9 subjects to offer, that would create difficulties.

Interviewer: Giving them great choice.

Sean B: It's easier to do it in a bigger school, obviously we'd have the staff to do it.

Interviewer: What strategies do you have in place to prevent students identified as being at risk, from dropping out?

Sean B: The class heads again, the system that we have in place where we'd meet them on a daily basis and we have a very good record keeping system in place. WE can refer back to results of exams and any incidences that might have occurred in the last few years and what contact we' have had with the parents, be it a phone call. It would be jotted down and recorded; each student would have a portfolio.

Interviewer: What activities do you organise to improve curricular continuity, offer second chance courses, and develop innovative teaching methods in order to cope with the problem?

Sean B: Doesn't apply. We don't have a particular second chance strategy. There are vocational centres that students can attend if they drop out.

Interviewer: How important is teachers' team work to avoid school failure?

Sean B: That's very important we have subject area meetings on a regular basis and teachers would look at how they are actually teaching the subjects and ensuring they are getting the message across. The teachers for example we might have young teachers starting off and teachers who have more experience we try to occur a mentoring system here. The skills that have been learnt from the more senior teachers would be passed on. It's something that has come in with the Whole School Evaluations. They'd look at that to make sure you have subject planning meetings staged at different times throughout the year and that the message is being delivered and that it is working. For example if you take our Maths Department they would meet and they have a system as they move up towards Junior Certificate Examinations where they are actually higher Level and lower Level. The higher level guys are easier to teach, but the lower level teachers they would communicate quite a bit with each other as to what's working. It makes life easier for everybody.

Interviewer: How do you monitor and evaluate the actions you have planned / strategies you have put in place?

Sean B: We also have a Capacity Care Team in place. The Capacity Care Team especially with these students at risk would look at how they would be taught and see if it's working. For example if someone is actually struggling and may drop out in time, he or she is picked up on their screen very fast and then they would look at and talk to the teachers, to see if it's a case that they are not getting the information or understand it. We also have a Learning Support Team in place. The learning support team would withdraw students from different classes if they felt they were falling behind or weren't able to keep up. They'd help them to give them that bit of extra help to get them back in or sometimes they may even stay out and remain in the learning support right up until examination, but then again that depends on what stuff we have available at any give time.

Interviewer: What new strategies have you planned to help with the problem in future?

Sean B: What we have discovered this year is that our Pastoral Care Team is a key element and we are going to try to get them even more involved. We would meet them every one or two months, but we find that this is not enough and we want to meet them now every two weeks. We are going to try to build that in to our timetable next year. The teachers on the Pastoral Care Team would be free at any particular time and timetable them on a Friday morning for whatever it is five past nine for 40 minutes every week or possibly every two weeks.

We feel that they are the key elements because usually those students who are having difficulty finish on their screens anyway.

Interviewer: Who would be on the Pastoral Care Team?

Sean B: We have a guidance counsellor, a number of teachers who are involved in special needs and a couple of teachers who have a background in that, not necessarily teaching but would have a background in that.

Interviewer: When you say that you would hope to do, how many more?

Sean: Five to six teachers, we are hoping to take on, if you make it to big it can be difficult as well.

Interviewer: Does the implementation of this strategy depend on the availability of funding?

Sean B: Depends on funding and also depends on timetable restrictions, we might need a teacher who teaches English and we just can't get them out at that time. Every year it changes.

Interviewer: What part do you think funding plays on your ability to prevent school drop outs?

Sean B: It's basically down to pupil/teacher ratio we have to work within our restrictions of that and whether we are over quoted. We are lucky enough that we've had a big intake over the last number of years, so we are fairly save for the next couple of years. If our numbers were to drop it would have a knock on effect there.

Interviewer: Can you suggest any other areas of research which may help with our project?

Sean B: Talk more to the students involved and the students who have gone through the system, that have experienced this and have dropped out. You learn more from these students I think than anything else. That's the big one there, cause if you get a guy that's dropped out of school he could ear mark little bits and pieces that could have helped him stay in the system. That's the only one I could suggest.