

Hearing the Voice of Ballymun



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Introduction

The Ballymun Development Group (BDG) was brought together by Atlantic Philanthropies in December 2003 and given the exciting task of developing a long term plan to improve outcomes for children and young people in Ballymun.

From the outset it was intended that this plan would be different from any that had gone before. To be called youngballymun, this plan would be innovative, imaginative, based on evidence of need, best practice and, most importantly the views of the children and adults living and working in the area – the voice of Ballymun.

This report sets out the results of the consultation process with the local community which has been ongoing since July 2005. Two open days were held at which 528 questionnaires were completed. 11 focus group sessions were facilitated with people living and working in Ballymun and 10 consultation workshops were conducted with children and young people from Ballymun. Out of this process emerged a shared vision for the children of Ballymun – one where they would be educated, optimistic and happy, healthy and drug free, safe and respectful and with access to opportunities for full participation.

Youngballymun will be different from other plans developed in that it will be a plan 'for the children and young people of Ballymun'. It will target children and young people between the ages of 0 to 18 years. The purpose of this report is to present the priority outcomes that emerged from the various discussions that took place between the BDG and local residents, parents, children and young people and the working community of Ballymun.

The collective wisdom of the Ballymun people as captured in this report, along with needs analysis studies, has shaped the focus of youngballymun. We will continue to listen to the voice of Ballymun as the strategy is finalised and brought to life.





Who Did We Speak To?

Between July 2005 and January 2006 the BDG set out to answer the question “what future do the parents of Ballymun want for their children?” and “what future do the children of Ballymun want for themselves?”

The BDG hosted two open days in Ballymun Town Centre during the summer of 2005. These events incorporated different types of children’s entertainment and provided the BDG with the opportunity to speak to over 500 local residents about their hopes and aspirations for children living in Ballymun. 528 people completed a questionnaire designed by the BDG and administered with the help of a number of people working in local development and community groups.

The questionnaire asked people to complete the sentence:

“It is my hope that in 10 years time the children and young people of Ballymun will be...”

Across the 528 questionnaires there were 58 different responses. The most popular responses were:

Happy/optimistic	266 respondents
Safe	239 respondents
Healthy/drug free	239 respondents
Educated	167 respondents
Have opportunities/be better off	160 respondents

The BDG also carried out 11 focus group sessions with various community groups which facilitated a more in-depth discussion of what local people wanted for their children and the challenges facing

them. In total 107 people either living or working in Ballymun met with the BDG and invested much valuable time in these discussions.

Local organisations that helped facilitate this process included:

- The STAR Project
- The Women’s Resource Centre
- St. Margaret’s Traveller Project
- The Childcare Working Group of Ballymun Partnership
- Ballymun Regional Youth Resource Outreach Team
- Ballymun Regional Youth Resource Youth Workers
- St. Pappin’s Ladies Club
- The Aisling Project
- The Education Working Group of Ballymun Partnership
- Lifestart
- Community and Family Training Agency

In these sessions, the BDG invited the participants to complete the same sentence:

“It is my hope that in 10 years time the children and young people of Ballymun will be...”

Respondents finished the sentence with one or other of the following outcomes:

- Educated



- Literate
- Drug free
- Motivated
- More active/participating
- Nurtured
- Optimistic/with high self esteem
- Happy
- The 'new generation'
- Proud
- Healthy
- Respectful
- Looked after by parents

The most frequently noted was “educated” (8 out of 11 focus groups). In joint second place, “drug free”, “optimistic/with high self esteem”, and “happy” were rated highly.

Finding out the hopes and dreams of the young people of Ballymun was very important to us. The BDG spoke to 69 children and young people from the age of 6 to 20. We also spent time in a crèche with 3 year olds playing with them and finding out through play and art what was important to them. Local organisations that supported us in this endeavour included:

- Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
- The Aisling Project
- Scoil an tSeachtar Laoch
- Ballymun Educational Support Team
- The Women’s Resource Centre Girls Group and Creche
- 1st Class, Our Lady of Victories School

The discussions that took place with children and young people raised very similar priorities. They want to feel safer both inside and outside their homes. They would like education to be more meaningful, particularly secondary education. They want to be able to have confidence in Ballymun and for Ballymun to have a better image that they can be proud of and they want to be part of loving and secure families.

The following pages provide some insight into the discussions held through the consultations as described above and give a flavour of the thinking behind the different priority outcomes as they emerged from parents, children and young people.

This document reflects, in the words of local people, their opinions, concerns and hopes for the future of their children.



An Educated Ballymun

“There is a good deal of optimism about the future development and future prospects for children and young people in Ballymun.”

– Education Working Group, Ballymun Partnership

According to the Education Working Group, if the physical, economic, educational and social aspects of the regeneration can be managed effectively, this should serve to open up a whole range of new opportunities for local residents of Ballymun.

There is concern about the poor educational attainment levels of young people in Ballymun and about the fairly low rates of progression to third level education which indicates the low priority which is given to education in Ballymun.

The low prioritisation of education manifests itself in poor punctuality at school, high levels of absenteeism, and minimal encouragement to stay at school.

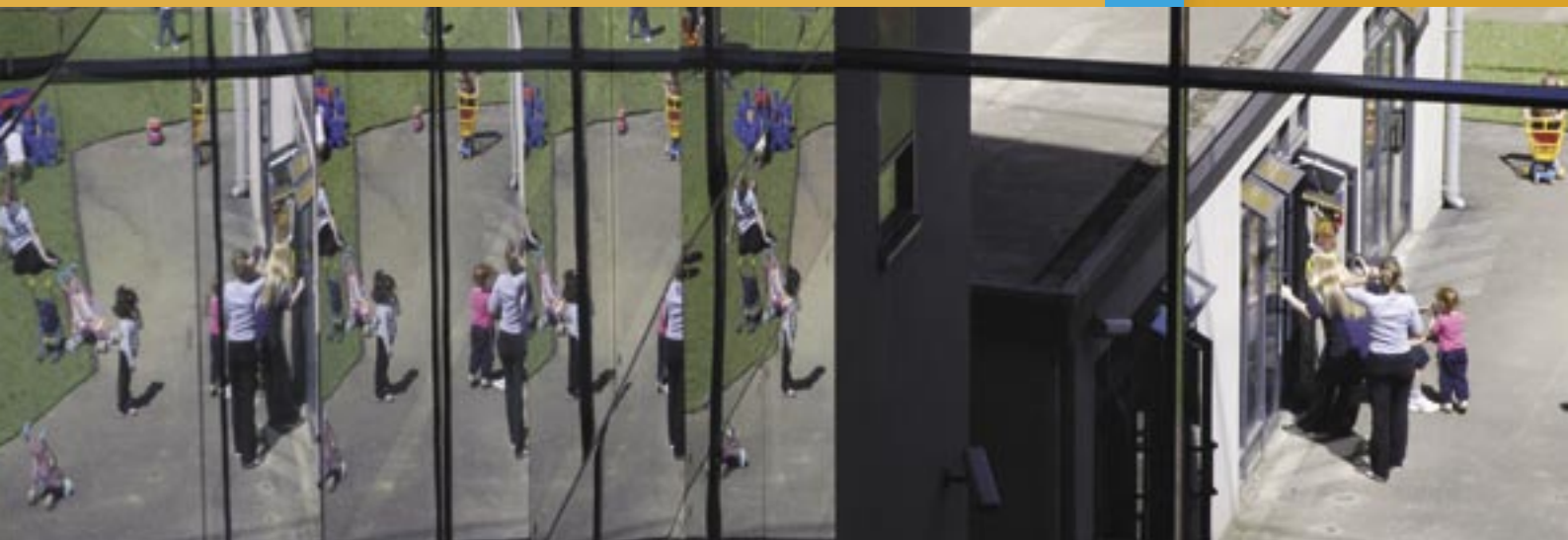
The literacy and communications skills of many children and young people in Ballymun are weak and under-developed. In addition to negative consequences for young people in relation to their progression through the education system, poor literacy and communications skills also impact on future employment opportunities and their own sense of self worth and self belief.

Many children in Ballymun have not developed the skills necessary to benefit from school when they enrol in Junior Infants class at the age of 4 or 5.

It is crucially important to the future well-being of children to break the cycle of educational disadvantage and to provide new learning opportunities both for children and their parents.

To meet the challenges presented there will need to be a high level of innovation and flexibility in the ways in which education is delivered in Ballymun with an increased focus on the needs and circumstances of the learner (both in-school and out-of-school) from the early years through to adolescence.

There is the desire for less focus on the Leaving Certificate points race and more on personal development, education and vocational training. It was felt that through a more meaningful educational experience, the levels of progression to third level education would grow.



A Happy and Optimistic Ballymun

“I’ll be a show-jumper”, “Me too, I’ll have a job”

– Young people, Aisling Project.

Many people living in Ballymun are very proud of their community and are happy with the positive developments that are now taking place. This is helping to build a real sense of pride and self-belief and this in turn is being channelled into combating much of the negative publicity about the area in the past.

The physical changes to the area have to be accompanied by a change in the views of those who make decisions and who influence those decisions, including the media. We know Ballymun to be a vibrant and happening place; we want others to know it as well.

There is much to be proud of in the old Ballymun and we mustn’t forget a lot of the good things that happened and the people who lived there. That vibrant community spirit needs to be celebrated and integrated into the new Ballymun.

A lot of young people in Ballymun are creative and accomplished in many areas including on the sports field and through the arts. This needs to be recognised, encouraged and highlighted.

The levels of self-esteem and self-belief of many children and young people in Ballymun are very low. One of the key challenges for any new initiative in Ballymun is to improve the way in which some young people perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

For some of the people consulted, Ballymun is a dangerous and frightening place to live with all of the construction work taking place and the de-tenanting process presenting real safety concerns to the tenants who are in half-empty blocks of flats waiting to be re-housed.

There is a clear need to look after the longer established residents of Ballymun, ensuring that they do not feel threatened by the new residents arriving to the area who may appear more educated and in better employment.

Feedback from the community meetings suggest that 10% ~ 15% of the population of Ballymun is marginalised, vulnerable and at risk. Children and young people within these groups must be the clear target for any initiatives aimed at tackling social exclusion and disadvantage in the area. In addition, the point was clearly made that “children who are doing well need to be looked after and protected”.



A Safe and Respectful Ballymun

“Everybody should stop being bad and start being friends and make a better place”

– First class child, Our Lady of Victories School

The changes taking place through regeneration present both opportunities and challenges for Ballymun. New people will move into the area, some from countries other than Ireland. There needs to be proper support for integration across and within communities.

We want people to live in the community, contribute toward its development and be proud of it. Knowing your neighbours will help make it a safer place. It is better to have more families and home owners living in the area rather than just those renting.

The physical process of change has left a lot of people frightened. Many feel it is unsafe to live on what is Ireland's biggest building site. They want to be reassured and to feel secure.

The extent of aggressive behaviour and bullying amongst young people is a source of concern to many people in Ballymun. Sometimes peer pressure is a feature when young people get involved in this type of aggressive behaviour and this can present a threat to those young people who might be quiet, shy or more withdrawn. Bullying must be tackled, along with the gang culture which communities feel is growing. The developing rivalry between different gangs also needs to be given attention.

Older residents in Ballymun sometimes feel the young people have an increasing lack of respect (towards others and their property). This

lack of respect can be reflected in rude, abusive and discourteous language and behaviour of some young people in Ballymun.

Concern was expressed about the number of children in Ballymun who do not receive enough supervision and attention from their parents e.g. five-year olds wandering around by themselves, ten-year olds roaming the streets late into the evening.

There is a clear need to support those parents who find it difficult to look after and raise their children; and sometimes due to difficulties in their own lives, cannot give their children the type of physical and emotional care and attention which is needed.

The combination of the ongoing construction work in Ballymun, as well as the lack of supervision for some children within open spaces, can make Ballymun a potentially threatening and dangerous place for children and young people. These problems relating to the personal safety and well-being of children and young people need to be addressed by relevant agencies and organisations.



A Healthy and Drug Free Ballymun

“They need to get rid of the needles and drugs off the streets”

– Woman at the Women’s Resource Centre Consultation

Ballymun has had its problems. Drugs have been the scourge of the community. Things are getting better but it is still not right that children grow up accepting the evidence of drug use as normal. Children should be allowed to celebrate and enjoy their childhood and have access to a healthy diet as well as places to play and things to do.

The use of legal, illegal and prescription drugs is still a huge problem in Ballymun. Children and young people can be at risk on two fronts, if their parents are drug users and they themselves get involved in drug taking at an early age.

Improvements have taken place in recent years in the form of drugs-education and the treatment/rehabilitation services available to drug users. There continues to be an urgent need to tackle and eradicate the drug culture which is still prevalent in Ballymun.

There has been an increase in the range of activities and projects available to children and young people in Ballymun. There is still concern however that many of the more vulnerable and at-risk children and young people are not able to access these activities which add to a healthy lifestyle, helping to develop confidence and self esteem.

There is a need to develop activities and projects which take place during the evening and at weekends which are attractive and appealing to young people (e.g. skateboarding parks, outdoor pursuits,

dance, drama, hip-hop) and which will help keep them away from drugs and alcohol.

There should be a balance between activities which are centrally organised and provided in Ballymun and those which take place on a neighbourhood basis. It is important that, as far as possible, youth activities should aim to break down barriers between young people rather than perpetuating the rivalries and animosity which have existed between different neighbourhoods within Ballymun.



A Family Friendly Ballymun

“There need to be things for young children and parents to do together, parents should be more involved”

– Women from the STAR Project

The development of family support services is a key priority for relevant statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. There is a strong view that the existing services (in relation to areas such as intellectual disabilities, mental health, social work, family mediation etc.) are not adequate to cope with the level of need which exists.

Approximately half of the families in Ballymun are headed up by a lone parent. The physical, emotional and psychological effects of parenting alone needs to be given particular attention when analysing the needs of families in Ballymun over the next 10 year period.

Supporting children and families in Ballymun needs to begin at the earliest possible stage – before birth and during the first couple of years of a child's life. Many of those consulted emphasised the importance of family visitors and family support services to provide assistance to the families or parents of young children within the Ballymun area.

New services and projects focused on supporting families in Ballymun need to be effectively resourced and sustained. There were a number of references during the community consultations to new and exciting initiatives which were terminated after a short period of time because the initial funding had expired or a pilot project had come to an end. There should be a longer-term commitment from relevant government

bodies towards mainstreaming family support services which have proven to be effective and beneficial.



A Ballymun with Opportunities

“There is loads on in Ballymun but it is very difficult to find out what is on”

- **Lifestart respondent**

There are many great community organisations in Ballymun with dedicated volunteers that have helped build the spirit of the area. Those who have worked to provide opportunities as well as raise concerns need to be consulted as the regeneration continues.

Ballymun has seen countless programmes and initiatives but they are often organised from outside and lack community involvement. They are viewed by some as short term and poorly planned. Any new programme must involve all the agencies and groups working together and over a longer period.

Every young person's voice should count in shaping the new Ballymun. Those young people who are a little bit alienated need to be invited to get involved in their community and encouraged to make a difference.

There are a lot of different activities for children and young people in Ballymun; however it is evident that many local residents are not always aware of these activities. The community consultations clearly demonstrate the need for new mechanisms to be set up for the provision of information about the various activities, services and supports which are available to children, young people and families in Ballymun.

Statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and community based groups should work together in providing clear information about

their activities and services. Consideration should be given to the production of a Directory of Services which could be distributed to every household in Ballymun. This directory would need to be updated on an ongoing basis.

As more people from Ballymun gain employment and improve their living standards and overall quality of life, there is a risk that those who are most vulnerable and marginalised will become even more isolated. ‘The people who could get ahead have, but those not able are slipping further back’.

Unless programmes, services and initiatives are put in place for the most marginalised and needy within Ballymun, there is a real danger that the activities of these people could have a disproportionately negative impact on the overall regeneration process within Ballymun.



Final thoughts

The key to the success of youngballymun is integration. Integration of services, integration of evidence, and integration of the voices of Ballymun into the strategy designed to improve the outcomes for the people living here. The BDG would like to thank all of those who gave their voice to the shaping of this strategy and look forward to journeying with you as our plan becomes a reality. We hope that you will continue to hear your voices echoed within the youngballymun initiative and see this strategy as your own.



youngballymun

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