

Annual General Meeting Report 2023

Longford Arms Hotel

Thursday, the 9th of November 2022

9.30 am – 1:30 pm



Foreword

Longford Comhairle na nÓg provides a platform for young people in our region to have their voices heard on issues that affect them. It enables our young people have a voice on services, issues and policies that affect them in their own county. They can identify what is most important and work to progress it further.

It provides the space for the Comhairle members to work on projects to address these topics and influence decision-makers to adapt, achieve or influence policy on these projects. Longford Comhairle na nÓg ensures that young people's voices are heard locally and nationally, with a representative selected among the Comhairle committee to take up a place on the National Executive. Longford Comhairle is represented on a number of national consultative forums, including Senad na nÓg, National Youth Assembly of Ireland, Rural Youth Assembly, Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action and EU Just Transition. On a local level, they have membership representation on the Longford Westmeath Educational Training and are members of The Steering Committee to allow them to voice their opinions to invited local service personnel.

Every two years, members of Comhairle also have the opportunity to represent their county at Dáil na nÓg. We will have 5 members of our Comhairle representing Longford on the Steering Committee, workshop participation and be part of the event on 27th of March, 2024 in Dublin.

The findings of the 2023 Longford Comhairle Youth Conference/AGM are presented in this report

With the support of the Longford Comhairle na nÓg Co-ordinator, the members of Longford Comhairle na nÓg successfully planned and facilitated the 2023 Longford Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference/AGM. It was attended by fifty eight young people selected through their schools and youth services. The topics discussed on the day were selected via the World Café participation method.

The Youth Conference/AGM also serves to select new members for Longford Comhairle na nÓg, and twenty three young people expressed an interest in joining the next term of Longford Comhairle.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this year's Youth Conference/AGM and especially to all the volunteers who helped out at the event. I wish every success to the new incoming members selected for Longford Comhairle na nÓg. Many thanks to all of the schools and youth services for their continued support of our work.

If I can be of any help to your service please contact me at glenda.oreilly@foroige.ie or by phone on 086 0221621. I feel it is very important to support our young people in expressing their views and empowering them to be active in their community. Comhairle na nÓg is a great way for young people to do this and I would welcome their membership.

Glenda O'Reilly, Longford Comhairle na nÓg Coordinator

Planning of Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference

The Youth Conference (A.G.M.) was planned from the outset and was a major part of our meeting agendas from the date I started working with Comhairle na nÓg in Longford. From the beginning the members of the Comhairle were full of advice and reflection of past conferences and suggestions were put forth and opinions were considered. The first areas to be tackled were the date, venue, transport for the students to attend the conference on the day who were out of town, contact with all the schools in the county and all the agencies that all the young people are associated with in Co. Longford.

The decisions were made on the roles to be filled ranging from table facilitators, registration team members, hosts of the conference, coordinating members and contact to be made for adult volunteers to help facilitate with Comhairle members on the day. A new approach was suggested to find out the most important topics of interest to the young people of Co. Longford. So as the young people registered on the morning of the conference they were given three post its to write down the issues that matter to them and that they would like to be discussed on the day. So before the ceremonies of the conference began the young people had submitted their choice of topics to be registered and accounted for. All members were open to this change so by the time the opening speeches were over the topics for voting were in place. The World Café method was then used on the top three topics voted by the Young People at the conference.



All facilitators were equipped with a detailed agenda and manual to assist them to facilitate the World Café and formats of the conference. The members also promoted the event via social media with a poster detailing the date, time and venue and registration details. The promotion within their schools was very effective and with contacts in the youth service and resource centres the word was spread. The members via their

student councils and appointed teachers enabled a number of young people to register and avail of transport provided by Comhairle. Another change was implemented by the introduction of workshops into the agenda instead of guest speakers and members discussed the types available and with the help of Foróige youth workers a series of workshops were planned for the day. The members wanted to inject some fun into the day and enable the young people to be energised to discuss the topics that matter to them in everyday life in 2023.

In order for the day to run smoothly the committee appointed a technical host who was very experienced in keeping the show running smoothly and practiced with the hosts and coordinator to be familiar and confident in the delivery of the agenda.



Longford Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee

Longford Steering Committee is chaired by the Local Authority and comprises of representatives of the agencies below. This group was established as a means of informing key organisations of the work that Comhairle na nÓg do. The committee supports Comhairle members when they work on action projects and provides them with opportunities to engage in decision-making and service development in the county. In the course of recent meetings it was decided that an increase in the number of Comhairle Representatives was to be increased and put on a rotating basis so that all members can experience the workings of the Steering Committee. Representatives from key agencies in Longford hold a position on the Steering Committee.

Agency	Number of Representatives
Foróige	1
Youth Diversion Project	1
Gardaí	2
County Longford Youth Service	1
Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board	1
Comhairle na nÓg Participation Officer	1
Local Authority	2
Comhairle na nÓg members	4
Comhairle Coordinator	1
Children and Young People's Services Committee	1

Schools/ Youth Organisations Represented at the Youth Conference/AGM

Schools

All nine secondary schools in Longford, as listed below, were invited and, in turn, were represented on the day of the AGM.

<u>Schools Represented</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Mel's College, Longford – 6 young people • Mean Scoil Mhuire, Longford – 8 young people • Moyne Community School – 6 young people • Templemichael College, Longford – 6 young people • Cnoc Mhuire, Granard – 1 young people • Ardscoil Phadraig, Granard – 1 young people • Convent of Mercy, Ballymahon – 6 young people • Ballymahon Vocational School – 6 young people • Community College, Lanesboro – 3 young people

Agencies

The following organisations were also invited to attend the AGM:

- ❖ Bridgeways FRC, Ballymahon
- ❖ Lus na Greine FRC, Granard
- ❖ Senior Girl Guides
- ❖ LEAP Project
- ❖ County Longford Youth Service
- ❖ The Attic House

- ❖ Foróige SAFE Project
- ❖ Roma Project
- ❖ Tusla

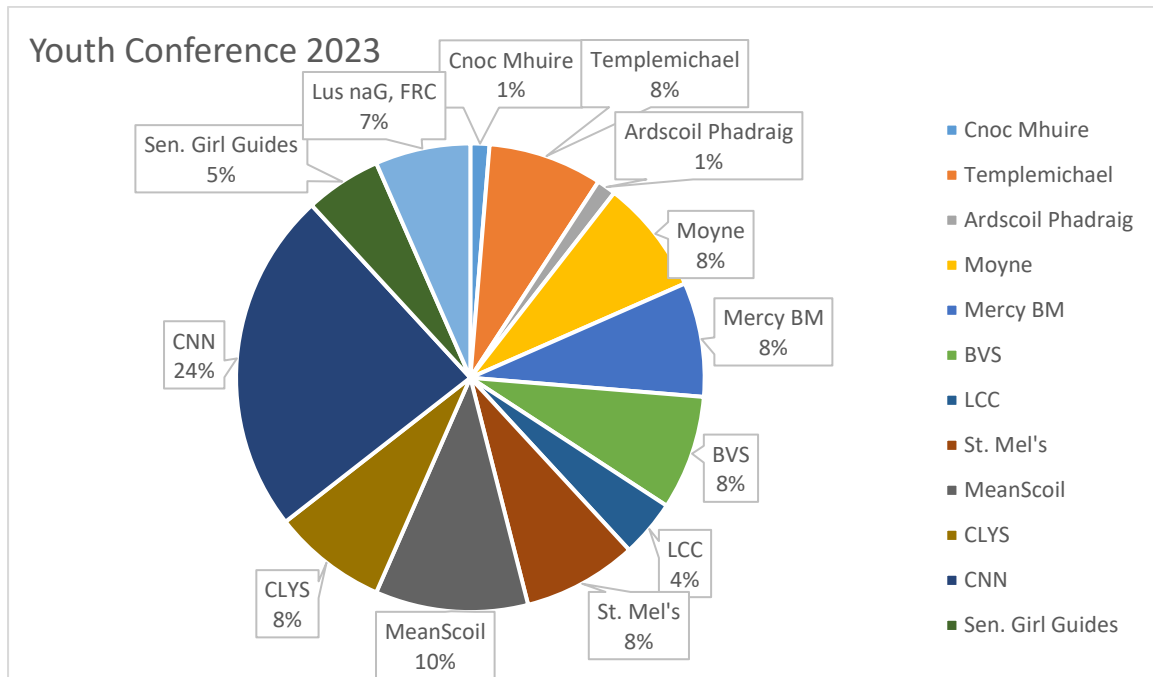
The organisations listed below had young people in attendance on the day.

Organisations Represented

- **Lus na Gréine FRC, Granard** – 5 young people (who attend Ardscoil Phadraig, Granard)
- **County Longford Youth Service** – 6 young people
- **Annaly Area Senior Branch, Irish Girl guides** – 4 young people

Lastly, eighteen Longford Comhairlí were also present on the day of the AGM.

AGM Participants breakdown



Longford Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference/AGM 2023 began as soon as the delegates registered by asking them to take 3 post its and write down three topics that they would like discussed at the conference and then they were asked to return the post its before the official ceremony began. This gave the young people time to think about their topics, chat with new and familiar people and in this way we were able to get the conference started and the agenda flowing so that we could incorporate activities and workshops into the day's proceedings. The young people were invited to make their way to the colour zoned tables, which they had been allocated to. In total, there were nine tables divided into three colour zones: pink, purple and green. Each table was facilitated by members of Comhairle and supported by adult facilitators when needed.



Youth Conference colour-coded zones

The start of the Conference was initiated by the hosts Renata Brown and Emily Bolger as they explained what Comhairle na nÓg is and what the Conference was all about. A quick look at the agenda, a few household rules and Renata invited The Cathaoirleach of Longford County Council Cllr Colm Murray to officially launch the Youth Conference/AGM. Ania Adler, a Comhairle member, then spoke about the work undertaken by the Longford Comhairle na nÓg in the past year, in a presentation on 'What is Comhairle All about?'. This provided more information to the audience about the Comhairle structure and what it is that Comhairle do, where and how often they meet and the fun they have through the work that they do.

Following this the young people were invited to scan a QR code to complete a survey issued by The National Executive on the R.S.E. survey and this was a request made by them for all young people attending the Youth Conferences in 2023.

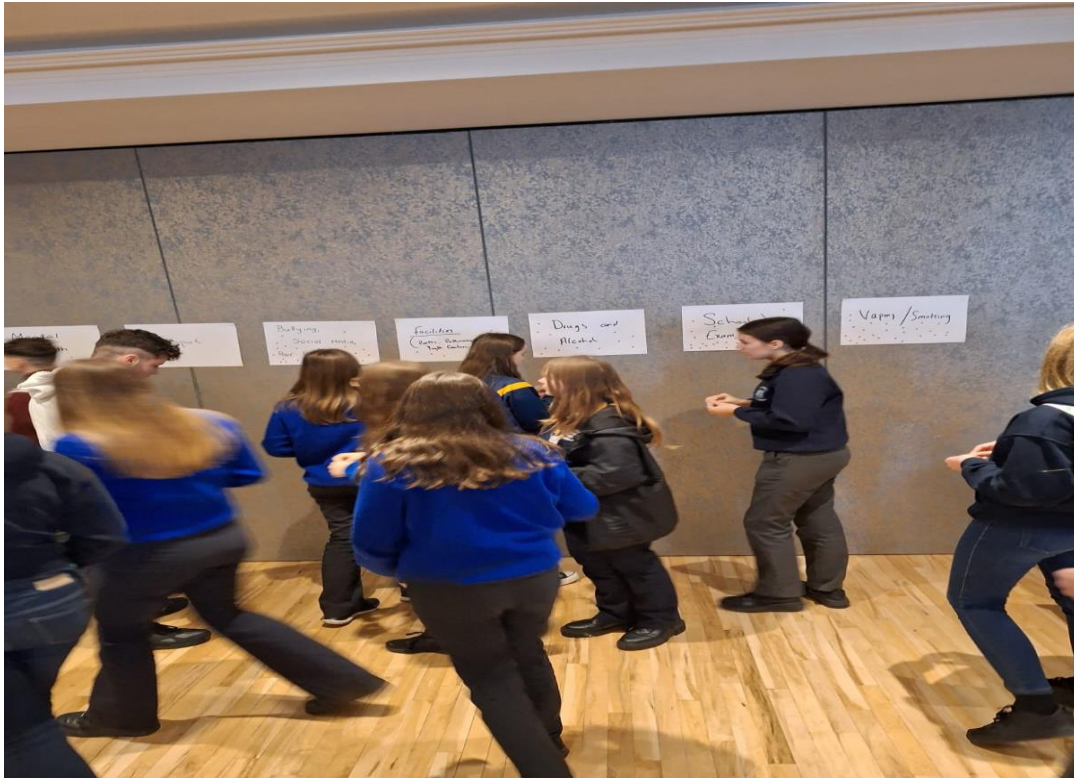
At this point the hosts informed the delegates that all their post its were counted and organised into heading and placed on the wall and they were invited to use their 3 red dots, provided by the Facilitators, to vote on the 3 most important topics that they would like to be discussed at the Conference.

Members of the registration and coordinating team with hosts Renata and Emily and Co. Councillor Laura Mc Phillips



Ania Adler presenting 'What is Comhairle All About' power point

At this point the hosts informed the delegates that all their post its, from earlier on, were counted and organised into headings and placed on the wall and they were invited to use their 3 red dots, provided by the Facilitators, to vote on the 3 most important topics that they would like to be discussed at the Conference.



While the vote was counted for the 3 top issues, the young people had access to 2 out of 3 workshops on a rotating basis. The 3 workshops were the Digital Hub, Circus Skills and a Games Workshop. So over a period of 50 minutes the young people explored their skills and had so much fun.

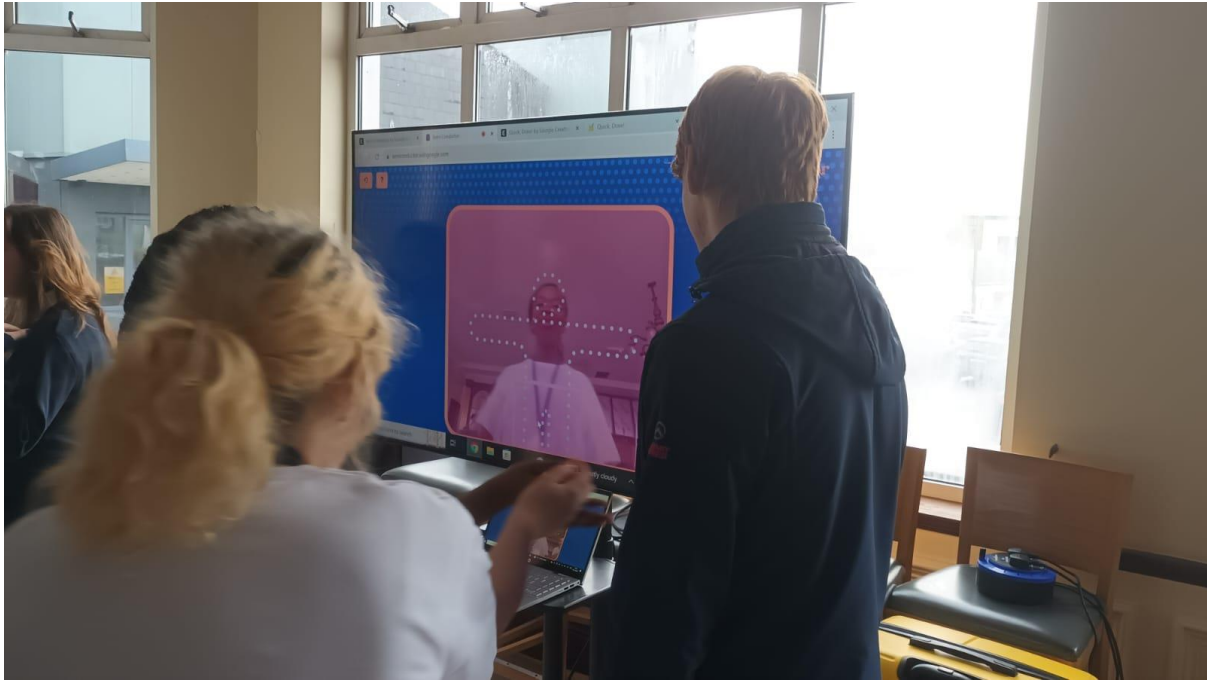
Pictures from the workshops:



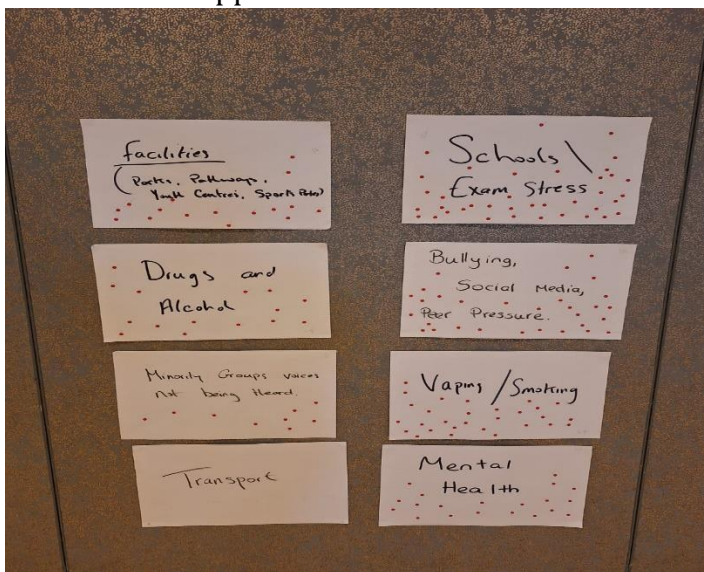








After the workshops finished and when everyone returned to their tables the result of the vote was in. The most voted topics this year included **School/ Exam Stress**, **Vaping/Smoking and Bullying**. These three topics became the subjects of workshops during the World Café. Every young person present at the event got an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns on all three topics. Comhairle facilitators were in charge of helping young people explore the issues in more detail, identifying barriers and coming up with solutions. Each participant was then asked to cast their vote on solutions that appealed to them the most.



Young people sharing their opinions during the World Café



A very well deserved lunch was had by all and the young people ate and chatted and discussed their favourite chocolate from the boxes of Heroes and Celebrations that were at each of the tables

Following the lunch, the young people were asked to vote out of the three topics.....School Stress, Vaping/Smoking or Bullying as the most important to them. While the vote was been collected and counted, the young people interested in joining Comhairle na nÓg completed their expression of interest forms. An evaluation of their experiences of the day was also completed. The result of the most voted topic at the Youth conference 2023 was **School/Exam Stress.**

To close the AGM, participants heard from our two hosts Renata and Emily, who thanked all the young people for their input and hard work during the conference, to all the adult facilitators who made the event possible and for the County council, members of the Steering Committee, Gardai, local secondary schools and youth organisations for their continued support.



Member of Longford Comhairle na nÓg with the Cathaoirleach, Colm Dunne and County Councillor Laura Mc Phillips



Youth Conference participants

Methodologies Results

The first step to identifying 3 topics for discussions was to give every young person who registered on the morning 3 post its and they were asked to write down three topics they would like to discuss at the conference. All post-it notes were then collected before the start of the proceedings and sorted into categories. Each young person was asked to pick three from the list of topics that were important to them by using the sticky dot voting method. The list of topics included:

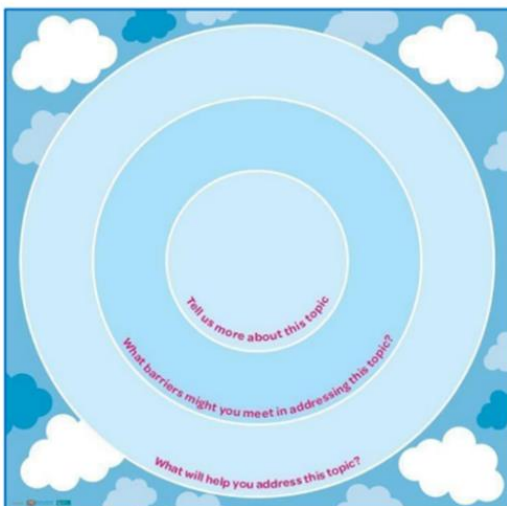
- Facilities
- School/Exam Stress
- Drugs and alcohol
- Minority groups voices not been heard
- Transport
- Bullying
- Social Media
- Peer Pressure
- Vaping/Smoking
- Mental Health

The three top voted topics included:

1. School/Exam Stress
2. Vaping/Smoking
3. Bullying/Cyberbullying

The three topic were then discussed in each colour zone, using the World Café mat. Young people have been instructed to take a marker each and work from inner circle outwards answering:

- 1) Tell us more about the issue (inner)
- 2) What stops this issue from getting better? (mid)
- 3) What could be done to help improve the issue? (outer)



Each colour zone facilitated 3 topics by young people attending the event moving from table to table. On the return to the original table young people were asked to pick the solutions to the issues most appealing to them by dot voting.

Following World Café, each young person was given a voting card and was instructed to pick the most important topic out of the three facilitated during the workshops.

The topic with the most votes was **SCHOOL/EXAM STRESS**

Workshops results – raw data extracted from the World Café mats completed by the consultation participants. School/Exam Stress

The issues raised in discussing School/Exam Stress included the following:

- Parent expectation
- Homework
- Teachers
- Exams/CBA's/Presentation of projects
- Pressure from teachers
- No friends in class
- Problems for students with learning difficulties
- Lack of substitute teachers so left to self-learn
- Time management/lack of preparation for exams
- Bullying
- Lack of exam practice
- Worries about fitting in
- Social stress
- Outdated Leaving Cert.
- Exam papers
- Worries about failing exams/future prospects
- Useless subjects
- Difficult exams
- Lack of interest in boring curriculum
- Not enough free days

Barriers:

- Bad teaching methods
- Incompetent teachers rushing through topics
- Short deadlines
- Too much homework, bad exam preparation
- Clashing of home work with sports and pastimes
- Bullying
- Parental and teacher pressure

- Curriculum needs to be changed, outdated education system
- Holidays and weekends taken up with homework, too much homework
- Teacher shortage
- Timetabling issues that reduce subject choice
- Lack of respect and knowledge for varying paces and methods of learning
- Underdeveloped learning supports for special needs students
- Anxiety, mental health issues and lack of access to guidance counsellors or any other designated member of staff in schools leading to poor school and exam performance
- High points needed for college
- Study resources/grinds too expensive to avail of
- Poor timing and preparation from teachers, equate pressure throughout the year
- Presentation pressure especially in CBA's
- Massive gap in standards from Junior Cert to Leaving Cert.
- Useless exams timetabled very close together

Solutions:

- Active learning
- Longer deadlines
- Shorten homework
- Schools to listen to complaints regarding teachers and students
- Continuous assessment over 2 years for Leaving Cert and 1 exam at the end of this period
- Be less strict on phones
- More facilities for young people with mental health issues during exams and during the school year such as a support worker, fidget toys, extra time
- Have CBA's count as more vital % to the final grade
- Extra, affordable study classes available to all.
- Allowed to drop subjects if not required for future career
- Less homework on holidays and weekends
- Get rid of CBA's
- More support for students to help each other during the year and around exam time.
- More consideration for Young People's interests outside school
- Less emphasis on smaller exams during the school year.
- Improved breakdown of subjects into smaller sections that make it more achievable to study.
- More preparation from Junior Cert. to Leaving Cert. regarding subject choice for future career.

Vaping/Smoking

Issues:

- Vaping is ridiculous
- Copying friends
- Peer and family pressure
- Vaping takes place where young children are present
- People think it's better than smoking
- Lung cancer
- Makes you act stupid
- Addiction, tooth decay, bad breath
- Too many young people vaping
- No proper disposal of vapes

Barriers:

- Peer pressure
- Environmental damage
- Easy access, selling to U-18s
- No idea of damage to health
- Depression, stress reliever
- Cheap and trendy
- Advertising made attractive to Young people
- Young people think it keeps weight down
- Lack of knowledge/education about effects on physical and mental health.
- Family influence
- Accepted socially

Solutions:

- Make it harder for young people to buy vapes
- Make it illegal to sell to underage and impose fines to deter vendors to sell to underage.
- Stop attractive advertising to entice young people
- Educate on the effects of vaping not only for young people but older people too.
- Stop sharing, offering and pressurising to vape
- Market vapes like cigarettes with health warnings, remove enticing colours and flavours, lock away in shops and make them more expensive
- Use alternative methods to replace vapes as a stress reliever
- Fines introduced if vendors don't have a license to sell vapes
- Introduce the law similar to Australia and New Zealand where the age is 21 to buy vapes
- Install detectors in school bathrooms and close areas at break times in schools where vaping occurs.

- Emphasise the amount of money spent on vapes and use it to promote better budgeting for young people.
- Look for help and support to stop
- Take out the nicotine or reduce the amount generally in all vapes.
- Come up with advertising slogans to deter young people from vaping, maybe using celebrities to educate young people.

Bullying/Cyberbullying:

Issues:

- Social media, group chats, cyber bullying, comments
- Racism
- Fear of missing out, to remain relevant
- Drugs
- Gossip, rumours
- Influenced by famous people
- Makes you feel isolated and alone
- Peer pressure
- People too scared to ask for help
- People made to do things by bullies
- Photo editing, no consent to this and photos being taken and put up online, intimate images
- Doom scrolling
- Can lead to mental health issues

Barriers:

- Lack of education regarding cultures, global issues, LGBTI+
- Over exposed to social media
- Not wanting to tell because of being called a snitch
- People covering themselves well so they are not caught bullying others
- Addictive behaviour online and easy access to bully online without repercussions
- Faking happiness to keep family happy
- Pushing friends and family away
- People not being believed and accused of overreacting
- People being 'blackmailed' to keep quiet. Being scared
- Lack of family and/or peer support
- People having numerous accounts online, catfishing very common.

Solutions:

- Young people need to know that 'telling is not snitching'
- Stand up to the bully
- Bully them back
- Proper consequences for the bully

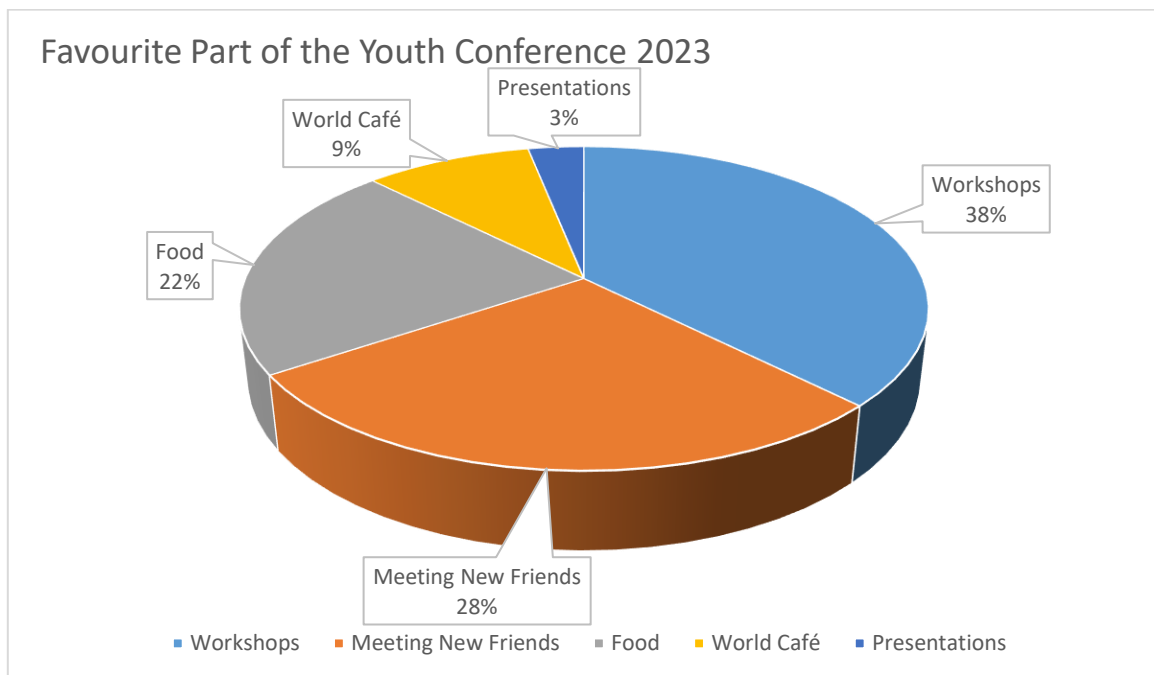
- Stop, Block, Tell
- More informative classes or groups to educate about being safe on Social Media
- Teach kids from a young age that bullying is wrong and to encourage them to stand up and support others that are being bullied
- Stop and think about the effect of your actions on other people.
- Better communication between parents, school management and young people who need to feel the support of these people.
- Don't trust strangers especially online.
- Find some off screen hobbies to reduce time where bullying can occur online and learn how to block unwanted people and where and how to contact the various social media platforms for help and support
- Look for support among friends and family who will listen and help you. Reach out and ask for help.
- Stricter rules from parents/guardians regarding friend groups and online access especially to certain social platforms.

Role and facilitators breakdown:

	TABLE 1	TABLE 2	TABLE 3	Adult Facilitators
PINK ZONE	Julia, Gabrielle	Alesha	Jace	Laura McP Sarah G. Eoin Carberry (Joanna O., Karen B)
GREEN ZONE	Alannah, Warren Anna	Ashton	JP Tia	Linda S. Rebecca P. LorraineB. (CaoimheS, Helen C)
PURPLE ZONE	Anneta Savannah	Kaynisola Karina	Ronan Lara	Lisa McL Mark Nobel Avril G. (Karen D., Gary N.)
Other roles:	Event coordinators: Jace Serwadda Gary Nugent	Child Protection/ quiet room coordinator: Jacinta Brady	Buses: Granard/Moyne: Lorraine Briody and Sarah Galligan Ballymahon/Lanesborough: Eoin Carberry, Avril Gilchrist	Doorman/ Security Marcglory
	CNN coordinator: Glenda O'Reilly	Hosts: Emily Bolger Renata Brown	Registration: Alesha/ Ashton/Kaynisola Linda Sallinger/ Glenda O'Reilly	Tech: Alex Dunne

Evaluation and Expression of interest

Breakdown of the most favourite parts of the AGM/Youth Conference



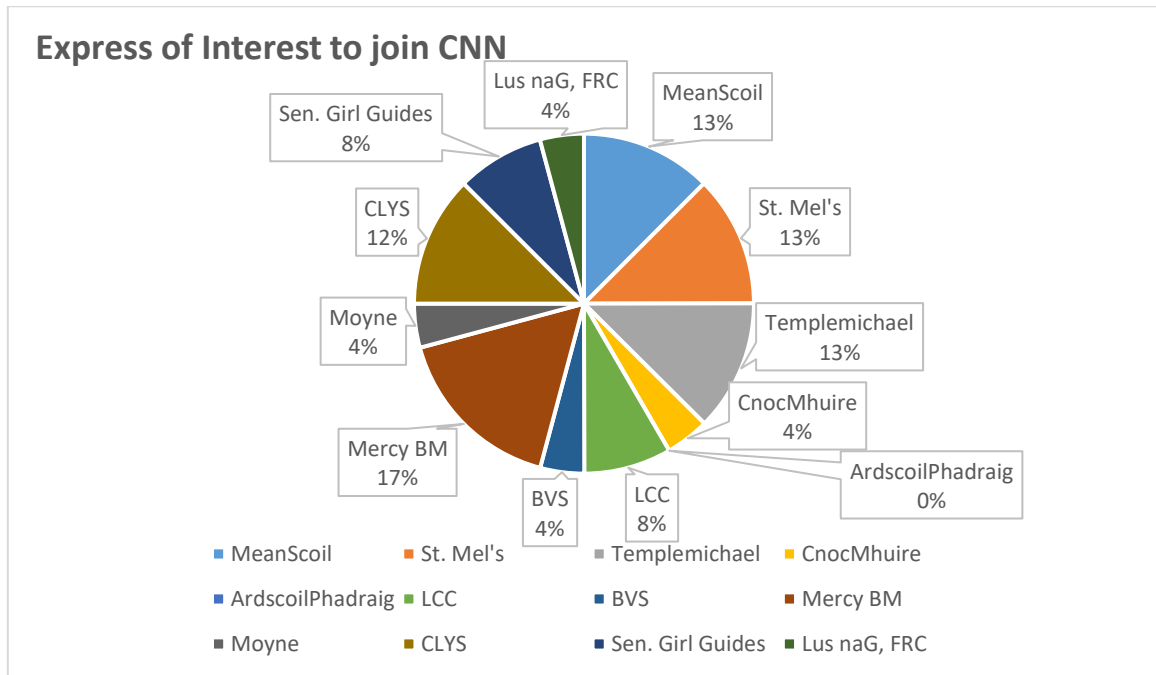
Out of 58 evaluations:

51 young people gained better understanding of Comhairle na nÓg

48 felt their voices have been heard and respected

49 young people felt the event met their expectations

Breakdown of the agencies and schools of young people interested in joining CNN



Total of 23 young people expressed an interest to join with 6 spots allocated.

Topics for progression for 2022:

1. School Stress

2. Vaping

Many thanks to all newly elected members and youth facilitators who were crucial in compiling the data contained in this report on the Longford Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference (Annual General Meeting)

If you have any questions, queries or wish to work with Longford Comhairle na nÓg on a specific topic, you can contact Glenda O'Reilly on 086 0221621, or by email glenda.oreilly@foroige.ie