



Annual Youth Conference Report

Longford Comhairle na nÓg 2024
Longford Arms October 24th



Introduction

Overview of the conference goals and objectives:

- Identifying youth issues in the local area
- Prioritising issues for the following year
- Presenting the previous year's outcomes
- Recruiting new members



Conference Planning and Outreach

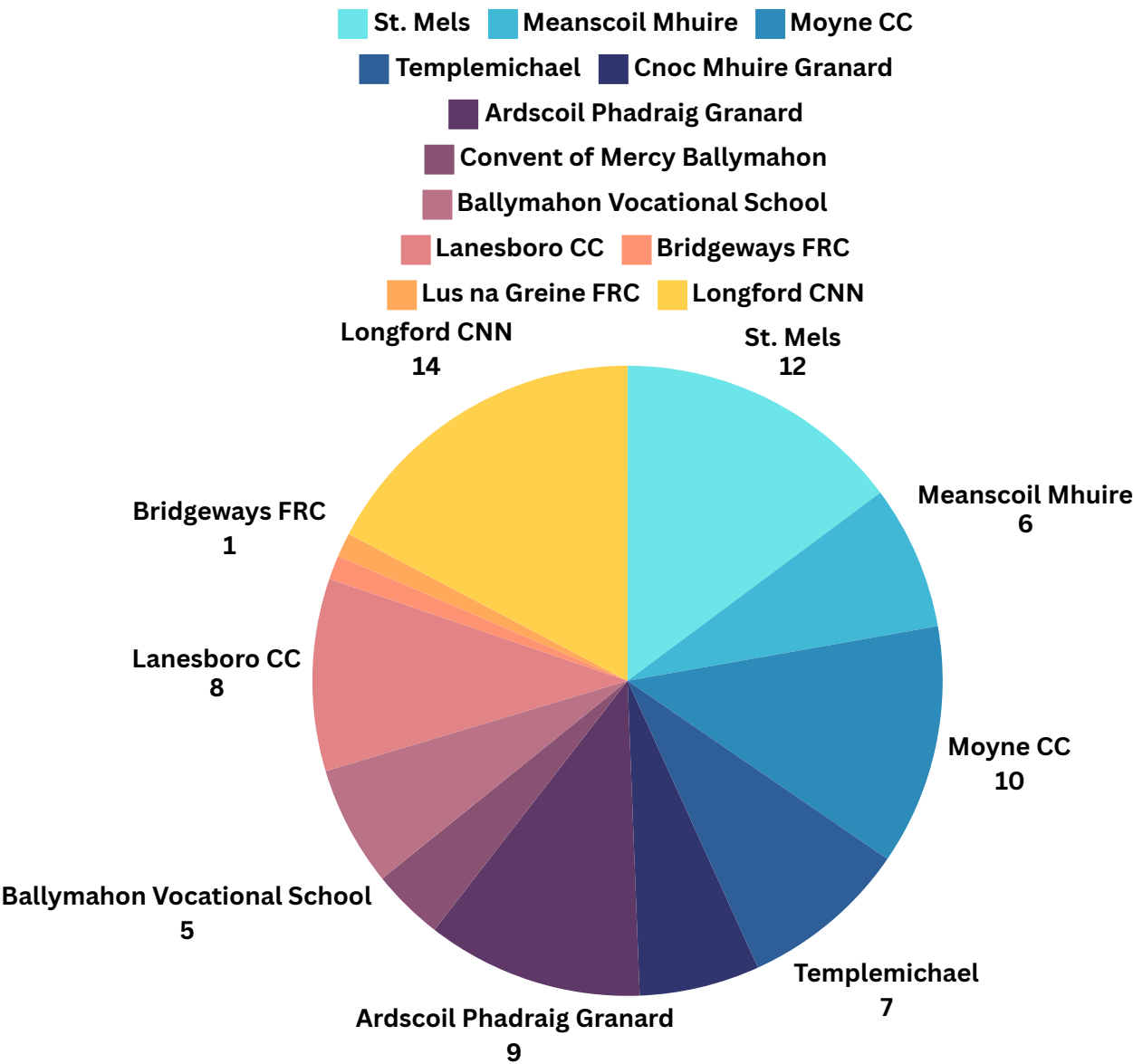
Following a change in coordinator, preparations for the 2024 Annual Youth Conference commenced in September. The first step was connecting with key contacts from schools, youth services, and community organizations to establish introductions. In person meetings were arranged with all those who were available. 'Save the date' emails had already been sent out by the previous coordinator. Reminder emails were sent to all key contacts, along with google registration forms. The main expectations were that each of the 9 schools would be represented, which were met. Numbers were surpassed, with some schools sending more than 10 students. Despite efforts to engage with Youthreach organisations and encourage participation, unfortunately, no young people from these services chose to attend. Word of mouth from Comhairle members was a key factor in getting young people, both through schools and youth organisations, to register. We would also like to thank the contact person from each school in supporting and facilitating the young people to attend.

In the planning phase, Comhairle members collaborated to assign various roles, including hosts, workshop facilitators, registration personnel and speakers. Each member received a comprehensive folder containing essential materials such as the agenda, a venue layout, and a step-by-step facilitator guide. Additionally, the group brainstormed and organised engaging icebreaker games, ensuring that the materials required for each activity were prepared in advance. Merchandise with the new Comhairle na nÓg logo was printed, and goodie bags were prepared for the attendees, including a pen, badge, printed drawstring bag and sweets. To ensure a smooth event, the group conducted a site visit to the venue, to identify and address any potential challenges for the day.



Delegates and Attendee Information

TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 81



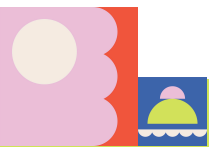
The following organisations were also invited to attend the Annual Youth Conference:

- Youth Reach Longford
- Youth Reach Ballymahon
- County Longford Youth Service
- The Attic House
- Foróige SAFE Project
- Travellers Health Project
- Roma Project

Decision-Makers and Services in Attendance

List of decision-makers and community representatives attending the conference.

- Longford County Council Cathaoirleach Mark Casey
- Cllr Niall Gannon
- Longford County Council Staff
- An Garda Síochána
- Fóroige
- LEAP
- Bridgeways FRC
- Lus na Greine FRC



Event Agenda

09.30 – 10.25 Registration

10.30 – 10.35 Welcome speech from the hosts

10.35 – 10.40 Opening speech from Cllr Mark Casey

10.40 – 10.45 What's Comhairle All About? Presentation

10.45 – 10.55 Open space sticky notes topic vote

**11.00 – 11.45 Access to workshops - Drum Circle, Circus Skills,
Team Building Exercise**

11.45 – 12.45 World Café

12.45 – 13.15 LUNCH

13.15 – 13.25 Final topic voting

13.25 – 13.35 Evaluation and express of interest form

13.35 – 13.40 Topic result

13.40 – 13.55 Closing speeches with Cllr Niall Gannon & hosts

Topics of Discussion and Selection Process

Participants sat at their designated colour zone tables, with a total of nine tables divided into three colour zones: pink, purple, and green. Each table was facilitated by members of Comhairle, with support from adult facilitators available when needed. The discussion topics for this year's conference were chosen directly by participants during an Open Space session. Participants were asked to write down 3 topics on 3 separate sticky notes which they felt were most important or had the biggest impact on the lives of young people in County Longford. The sticky notes were collected by the facilitators and gathered and counted by the counting team. The topics identified during the Open Space session were:

- Mental health
- Bullying
- Transport
- Exam & school stress
- Lack of supports & facilities in schools
- Safety in our community
- Body image
- Fitting in
- Youth facilities
- Gender equality
- Discrimination
- Homophobia
- Substance abuse - drugs & vaping

Once the key themes were identified, the top three topics were taken as the focus of the day's workshops. The top three topics selected were:

Mental Health

Exam Stress

Facilities

These topics became the subjects of workshops held in a World Café format, where every participant had the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their concerns on each issue. Comhairle facilitators guided the discussions, helping young people explore these topics in depth, identify barriers, and brainstorm potential solutions. At the end of each session, participants voted on the solutions that resonated with them most, allowing everyone to have a say in determining the constructive steps forward for these key issues.

World Café Workshop

Workshop set up:

The groups were divided by random in order to mix young people from different schools and youth organisations. As young people registered, they were given a name tag which already had the table number and colour written on it, and the young person could fill in their name themselves. This way, as the young people mostly came together with their school or youth group, the tables were mixed up.

The three topics were then discussed in each colour zone, using the World Café mats. 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 are the challenges or barriers? (mid)
- 3) What could be done to help improve the issue? (outer)



World Café

Recommendations

These recommendations were taken from the world café mats.

Mental Health

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overthinking Lack of support Loneliness Jealousy Insecurities Comparing yourself to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are afraid to open up Afraid of what people might think Lack of trust Social stigma around talking about personal issues Being accused of lying, not being believed Judgment from peers Feeling that you're weak Losing motivation and not feeling heard, seen, understood People not listening People might not know what the issue is People not understanding Not being comfortable to talk about your problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More safe spaces & more opportunities to talk about it Surround yourself with positivity Try and open up to one person and then go from there Explain what actually happened Keep your head high More personal resources - cheaper or free therapy & counselling Dedicating one class per week towards mental health Breaking the stigma that people who seek mental health help are weak Education & awareness Explain how you feel in a different way Doing stuff/hobbies you enjoy & going for walks to clear your head

Mental Health

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety, stress Not enough care towards mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of therapist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More HSE funding Therapy should be free
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family problems or issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of family encouragement Teachers & parents putting too much pressure on kids & teens Adults assigning teens and children's mental health problems to simply being young, or to using phones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk to someone you trust Use childline Take something positive from what they say & believe in yourself Take some time for yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying Cyberbullying & harassment online Bullying and toxic friendships; negativity on social media Exclusion Society's standard of beauty Sexism & body shaming Influencers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media has a lack of control on the consequences of cyberbullying Tiktok & snapchat Not enough research is done on the topic People are made to feel like they are not good enough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harsher consequences for bullies STOP, BLOCK, TELL Don't accept anyone you don't know, block users & tell a trusted adult More funding around this topic Resources in school, bring awareness - do presentations in school

Mental Health

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friend issues • Relationships & breakups • Peer pressure • Social life • Drugs • Vaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing friends • Keeping things to yourself for too long • Doing bad things as a result of peer pressure • Judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get new friends - surround yourself with like minded people • Seek support • More trained mental health officials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School • School stress from bullying • Being judged • Discrimination • Homophobia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know who to talk to about issues at school • Fear of going to school & missing out on learning • Constantly worrying • Test results declining • Discrimination towards minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to teachers or people • To have a room people can leave and go to relax during class • Make presentations and have talks for everyone on teen mental health • Use family resource centre • More designated study time for students • More accommodation to students with disabilities more talks • Safe spaces for people to talk to someone and provide more support in place when a student is struggling • Confidentiality

Facilities

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough facilities for young people Existing facilities not being used to full extent or in poor condition. Some are unhygienic or not clean and are not well maintained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No funding for new facilities, upkeep or renovation of old ones Not enough money to keep them in good condition Actions of others prevents the usage of facilities for those who need them Government funding is wasted on other less-important things instead of voiced problems Sometimes it's seen as a waste of money to spend on old buildings / facilities or even new ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use abandoned buildings for facilities Government needs a lot of funds for the upkeep and construction of new facilities for the schools FUNDRAISING: raise awareness or hold fundraisers to help build or renovate the facilities More understanding by government departments of the needs of young people Hire more cleaners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinions of young people not being listened to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness of developing different types of facilities for young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government needs to act on the suggestions of the youth Allow people over the age of 13 and under the age of 18 to be allowed to vote for these kinds of things
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospitals & health care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of funding - more doctors & nurses needed Long waits for medical procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need more doctors in the surgical field & better pathways to education for low income families Build more hospitals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not much 'difference' within sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difference sports/cultures are sometimes not accepted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add more culture/sports

Facilities

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport Rural sports facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not many facilities for watersports on Shannon, Lough Ree, to encourage water sports e.g. kayaking, canoeing etc. Need for more floodlighting for pitches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Sports Capital Grant, Longford Sports Partnership - funding & grants Funding for transport, not just a pitch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport facilities are not accessible to all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long waiting lists to join clubs & you have to join a club to use the facilities, which costs money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay a small fee e.g. 2 euro to give access to those who want to use it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transport - lack of public transport, bad timetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of funding Not enough bus routes and drivers Not being able to get into town due to lack of transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better pay for bus drivers, so they will want to work in the transport industry More bus links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People having to go to town due to lack of adequate facilities in the countryside Lack of infrastructure Lack of things to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create new infrastructure Fund the creation of new groups



Facilities

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough social facilities • Lack of free facilities that promote socialisation in young people • Having no place to be with friends • Not enough youth clubs • Need for more recreational activities with spaces for young people to socialise • Older young people go to the pub as there is no where to socialise at night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding an upkeep of the places • Wasting money • Not much integration between different people • Money might affect a child joining a club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise money & create a committee of volunteers • More youth clubs • More support for mental health in schools • Create spaces for youth to hang out - eg Granard has a youth club but it's not open all the time • Link with GAA to open club house for all • More free or cheaper clubs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School bathrooms • Smell of vapes • Inappropriate writing/drawing on walls • School bags are too heavy, too many books • No bike shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean bathrooms, have teachers & students check bathrooms a few times a day • School laptops or ipads instead of heavy books • More sensory/quiet spaces/rooms • School libraries • Let student councils have stronger voices to fight for facilities & changes • Activities that aren't sports e.g. chess, debate, book club etc, • Have a study group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing & homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Govt funding, council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build more houses, homeless facilities



Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exams Studying Time management Higher level maths time & workload Too many exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor guides for studying Too much to do in the year and not enough time in class to revise Too much content in subjects Deadlines all at the same time Too much homework on top of study Bad timetables Studying for multiple exams that are happening at the same time Not enough time, too many topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising notes and coursework time efficiently Turn off phone when studying Study clubs & new ways of learning Study timetable Teachers to lessen the homework load & give more time to study Time off from school to study, especially exam students Making grinds cheaper Make some exams longer Don't give xmas exams, Spread exams out more Less subjects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exams are over exaggerated Not given specific topics so we overstudy Too much homework for each subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give more realistically achievable study & work for the time we have Keep up to date with work Need more understanding and support for students A need to run through every subject properly

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much expectation • Fear of failing • Unrealistic expectations • Putting too much pressure on yourself • Nervous • Anxiety • Social media • Self doubt • Distractions • Not succeeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure from parents, family, teachers, classmates • Can be looked down up because of your sibling's mistakes or behaviour • Don't want peers to think you are too try-hard • Friends looking down on you • Being laid back • Mental health issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study groups with friends • Spending time with friends & family • Keep at hobbies to clear your head • Go for a walk • Support from parents • Fairer expectations • Understand that it's not the end of the world • Ask for help at home and encouragement from family • More information around mental health to stop exam stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing sports & social life with exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the right amount to study and finding time to do it • Missing school • Too much pressure missing out on social activities because of homework because it's so time consuming • Being expected to study for long hours • Staying up late & not getting enough sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more time to relax • Less screen time • Catch up • Be organised • Go to sleep early • Find time to study - create a timetable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning disabilities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a different test or exam • Find out what kind of learner you are

Explain elements of the issue:	What are the challenges or barriers?	What are possible solutions?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">School - cold indoors		<ul style="list-style-type: none">More heating needed in some schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Funding -e.g. phone pouches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">use funding on something else e.g. better facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A room where students can use their phone only in emergency
CBAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CBAs don't count and lose class timeToo many class tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Put CBAs towards exams or no CBAsStudy time instead of CBAs

Topic Voting Results

Following World Café sessions, 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 to receive the most votes was Mental Health.

Election of New Comhairle na nÓg Committee

The Expression of Interest forms were handed out after lunch and collected by each table facilitator.



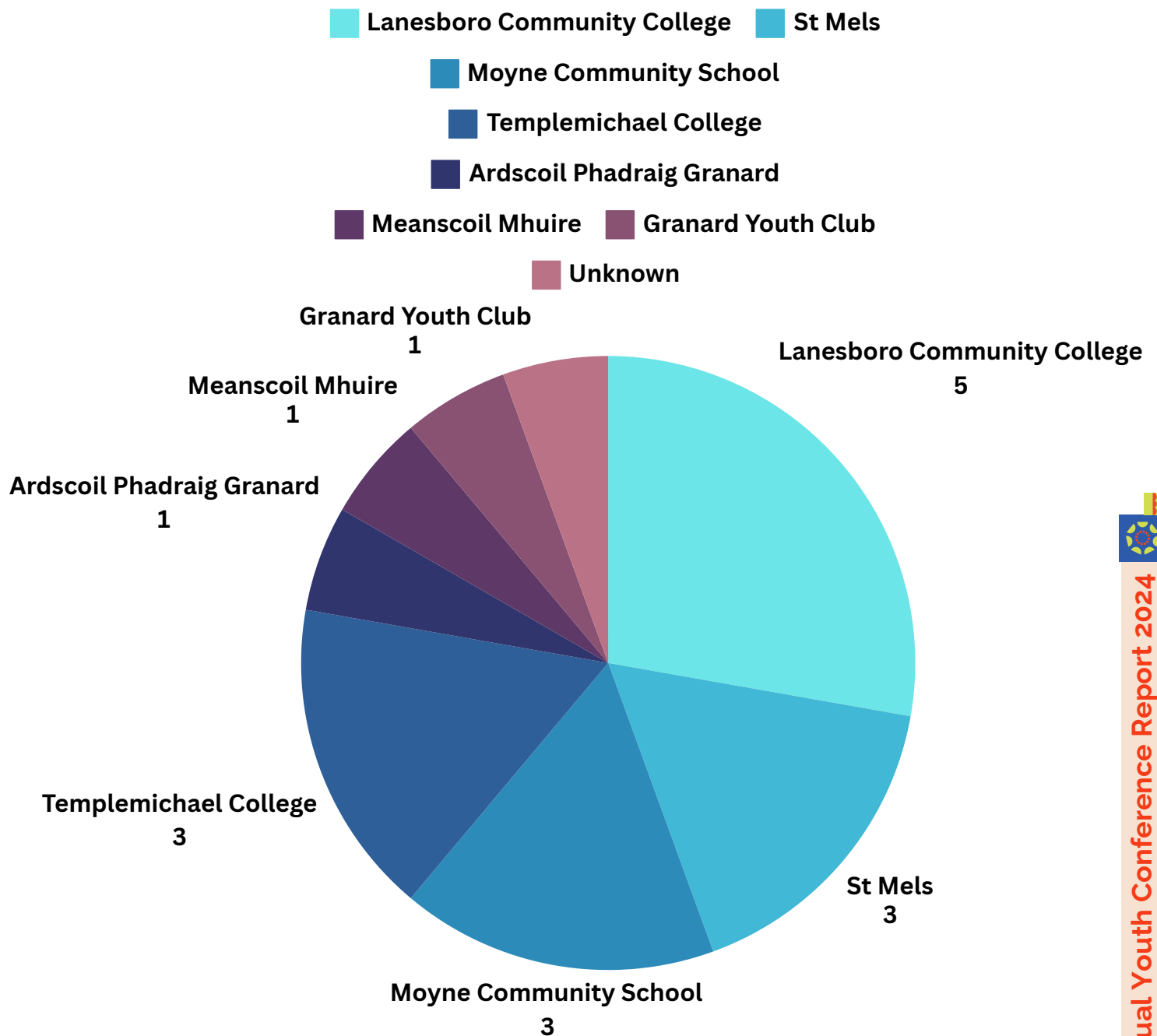
Express of interest to join Longford Comhairle na nÓg

1. Name:
2. Date of birth:
3. Contact number:
4. Parent's contact number:
3. School/learning institution or youth organisation attended:
4. Why would you like to join Longford Comhairle na nÓg?



Expression of interest to join

Total: 18



Conference Evaluation

- Summary of attendee feedback on the event and suggestions for improvement.



Evaluation of Longford Comhairle na nÓg Youth Conference 2024

1. What was your favourite part of the Youth Conference?
2. Do you have a better understanding of what Comhairle na nÓg is all about?
2. Did you feel your opinions on the matters were heard and respected?
3. Have you any suggestions for the work of CNN for 2025?
4. Did this year's AGM meet your expectations, if not, please tell us why?



Conference Evaluation

- 100% of attendees said they have a better understanding of what Comhairle na nÓg is about
- 100% of attendees felt their opinions were respected
- 96% of attendances said the day met their expectations

Feedback suggestions:

- Focus on discrimination & bullying against disabled people as this ties in with mental health
- More facilities needed
- Come to schools so more people are aware & can join
- Facilities
- Do another interactive facilities
- Create more facilities like sport facilities
- Facilities! Mental health problems wouldn't happen if we had facilities
- To help young people with mental health and to raise awareness of mental & physical illnesses
- To help with exam stress for people in exam years
- They could also look into the spaces in and around Longford to make a safe space for youth
- Focus on mental health
- More lunch time
- Increase lunch portion
- More food
- Facilities
- Keeping in touch with recent/occurring issues
- Advertise it more for students to join and get involved

Event Highlights and Comments

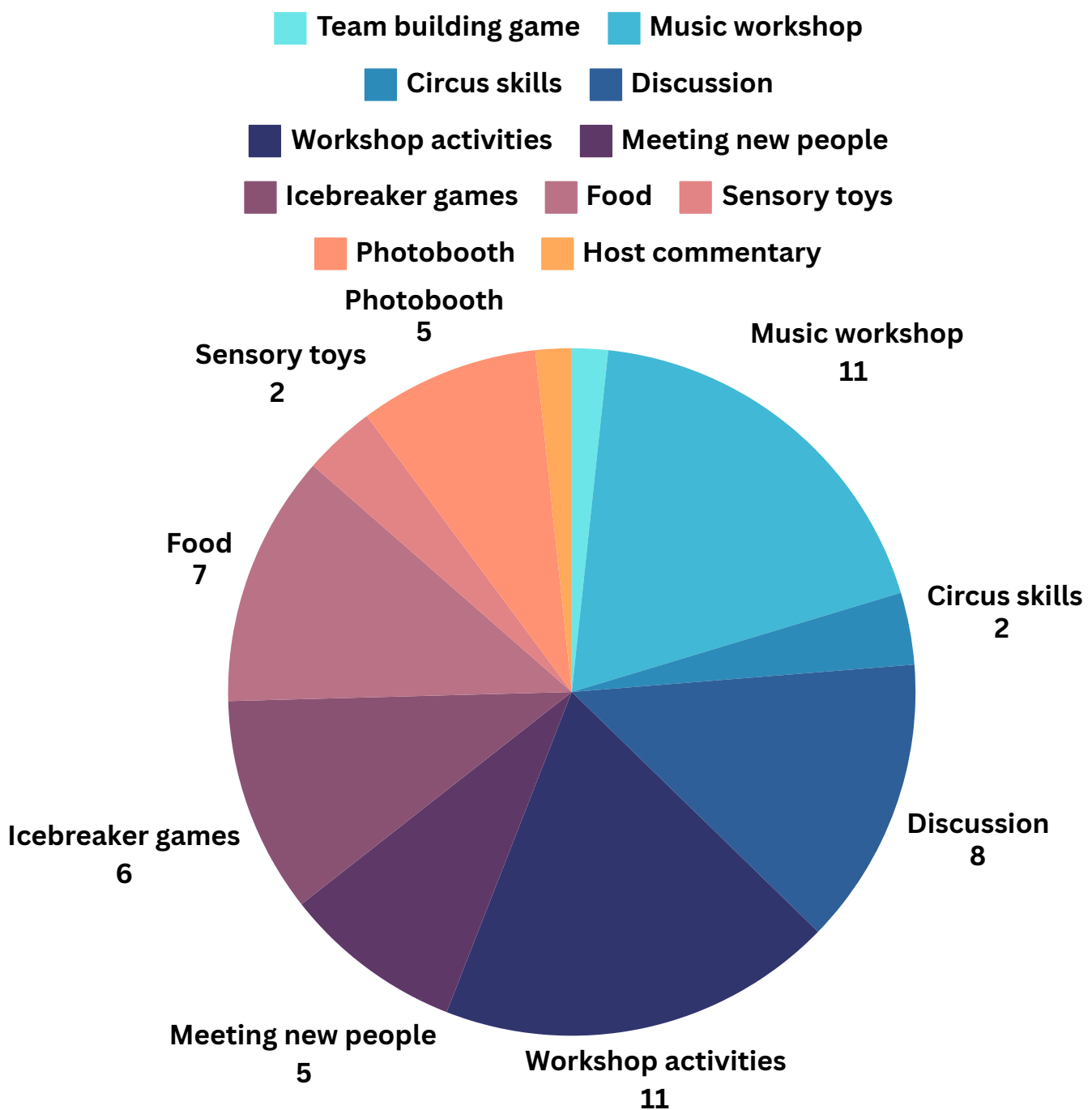


Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



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Comhairle na nÓg

Your Local
Youth Council



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



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