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UNESCO Chair in  
Children, Youth and Civic Engagement  
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CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



NUI Galway  
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# Volunteer-led Youth Clubs

A Briefing Paper on the Foróige Volunteer-Led Youth Clubs Study Research





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## Introduction

This briefing paper provides a summary of the research into the Foróige Volunteer-led Youth Clubs, known as Foróige Clubs, in terms of type, methodology, results and conclusion.

## Why this research?

Foróige the National Youth Development Organisation was established in 1952, some 60 years ago. As part of the work of Foróige, Foróige clubs, our main volunteer led youth club model, provide perhaps the most typical or generic out-of-school engagement serving a universal population of young people. In order to explore the benefits that young people gain from their participation in volunteer-led youth clubs, Foróige commissioned the National University of Ireland, Galway to carry out an independent piece of research on these clubs.

## What are Youth Clubs in Foróige?

Foróige Clubs focus on enabling young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. They are for 12 to 18 year old boys and girls. The club meets weekly for about 90 minutes to 2 hours and carry out a variety of self-directed activities. This is Foróige's most used volunteer-led club model and is distinguishable from other youth club models by its structure, and a focus on knowledge attitudes and skills for effective living and contributing to society. This club model democratically elects club members to a club committee who then direct the activities of the club. Clubs have the support of voluntary adult leaders who act as guide, mentor and facilitator to the young people in the club. Some Foróige clubs get involved in activities such as citizenship (making a practical difference in the community) while others use the space to safely connect with their peers.



## Nature of the research

This study involved mixed methodology approach involving both quantitative and qualitative research. The qualitative research was carried out by way of focus groups and the quantitative research was carried out using a survey. Foróige clubs were randomly selected for inclusion in the exploratory study. Young people were given a questionnaire at the beginning of the club year (September/October 2010) and again at the end of the club year (May 2011). Of the eleven clubs at the start of the year, nine clubs returned questionnaires for 118 members (mean age 14.8 years) at time one. At the end of the club year, time two, six clubs returned questionnaires for 71 club members (mean age 15 years). Three focus groups were held with participants with attendance of between 6-10

★ young people in each group to further elicit the views of club participants.

The measures of youth development include: Problem Solving-Cooperation; Goal Setting-Planning; Self Regard; Self Efficacy; Community Awareness-Connectedness; Self-reported changes; Well Being; Social Support; School Liking and Academic self-rating. Additional measures were included in the study at the end of the year on Foróige club atmosphere and climate.





TALENT  
ENERGY  
TIME



## What are the key findings?

The key findings of this part of the research were as follows:

### Quantitative evidence

- Self-reported changes among members show that approximately two thirds to three quarters of respondents felt that they fared better on these youth development measures as a result of being a club member.
- Club involvement appears to promote a stronger sense of 'Community Awareness-Belonging' among members. The improved sense of 'community awareness-belonging' is likely to be attributed to the way clubs are actively involved in community-voluntary activities, such as charity fund raising, clean up days, environmental improvements, etc.
- The overwhelming majority of members at the end of the club year said they enjoyed being in their club.
- More detailed analysis shows that the main influences affecting how strongly members feel this 'community awareness-belonging' are their gender (girls do better), their problem solving-cooperation characteristics and their sense of self regard. This is linked to problem solving-cooperation which are key to any of the projects, activities or trips that young people decide to do collectively over the club year. Such activities can create a sense of responsibility and pride in their achievements and are likely to promote a sense of self regard; a factor which is also related to general well being.
- A high proportion of club members felt a greater sense of enjoyment working with peers their own age as a result of being in the club. Being able to work with others in a problem solving capacity is a core skill which young people report they have gained from being in their club. This may arise from to the club committee structure in setting up task related sub-committees which provide a ready made route to practicing skills and working with peers.

### Qualitative evidence

- Indicate that friendships and activities are a key factor in why young people get involved in Foróige clubs.
- Goal setting and problem solving skills were reported to have improved from involvement in the club which many believed helped them to work together.
- Confidence and a sense of contribution to their community also emerged as having improved amongst the young people.
- When considering what makes a good climate or atmosphere within Foróige clubs the research points to several aspects: club participation and fairness; support-help from peers and leaders and feelings of belonging and acceptance.



5,125



VOLUNTEERS





## Conclusion

In summary, the research offers an initial, relatively comprehensive framework and potential set of measures for future effort to document changes in youth development among Foróige club members. At club level, the findings in this report are encouraging in that they suggest considerable self-improvement on key measures as self-reported by members. Comparisons of two time periods (start and end of club year) suggest that key scores among members show improvement at the end of the club year, with a distinctly increased measure of 'community awareness-belonging'. In the qualitative aspects of the study, friendships are reported as significant for why young people join and return to clubs. Club activity is a safe retreat from adults, particularly parental surveillance and fulfils a very important role in the lives of youth.

## Quality Assurance Statement

*This is by way of confirmation that the independent research of the Volunteer-led Youth Clubs was conducted to a high level and reviewed by subject matter experts. The results accruing from the study indicate a rigorous evaluation of the programme and are presented in a fair and unbiased manner.*

### Professor Pat Dolan,

UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, NUI Galway.

### Professor Mark Brennan,

Leadership & Community Development, Penn State.



### Foróige

Block 12D, Joyce Way  
Park West  
Dublin 12

Phone: +353 1 630 1560

Fax: +353 1 630 1568

Email: info@foroige.ie



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Educational, Scientific and  
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