



Information Pack

Comhairle na nÓg



Children and young people have a right to participate in decision making that affects their lives, under the National Children's Strategy (Goal 1) and the United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child.

**WESTMEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD IN
CONJUNCTION WITH WESTMEATH LOCAL
AUTHORITIES**



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**Westmeath County Development Board
in conjunction with Westmeath Local Authorities
wish to thank Midland Regional Youth Services and
Athlone Community Taskforce Education Research
Project for their assistance.**

Because children make up between 1/4— 1/3 of our population.

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Why is Participation of Young People So Important?

The National Children's Strategy is a major government initiative to improve the quality of life of all children in Ireland. The Minister for Children and the National Children's Office (NCO) are responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of this strategy.

The strategy sets out a whole child perspective and three national goals to guide children's policy over a ten year period. The first goal is that "*Children will have a voice in matters which affect them, and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity*". In order to achieve this goal, we must ensure participation by children and young people in an age appropriate, inclusive and representative manner.

The City/County Development Boards (CDB's), which were established by Government in 2000, were identified in the NCO strategy, as the key bodies to promote this goal at local levels.

Children's interests are all too often neither seen nor heard in the process of planning, implementation and evaluation of local and national policies and structures. Now with the implementation of this strategy, children and young people can have a voice, and pass on their needs to people that can direct them to air their opinions in a way that counts. Without participation children and young people do not have the option of asking for a better quality of life.

What is child/youth participation?

Participation is the appropriate and meaningful involvement of children and young people in decision making. The process of participation should be empowering and not patronising. Children and young people should be involved in decision making at all stages of any particular process. Children and young people should be involved in planning, consultation, design, implementation and evaluation of projects or activities which effect their lives.

According to research carried out in the UK on the issue, (Yvote/ Ynot, CYPUP, 2003), participation by children and young people:

1. Improves relevance and quality of policies and services
2. Gives young people a sense of civic responsibility
3. Influences young people to become more interested in national and local politics
4. Increases the likelihood that they will vote in elections

What are the benefits of participating in Comhairle na nÓg ?

Because it allows you, the young people of Westmeath to

- Develop personal and social responsibility.
- Engages young people more fully in their community
- Prepares young people for participation in national democracy.
- Improves the relevance of local services for young people
- Assists in improving the social and communication skills of children and young people
- Recognises children and young people as a valuable resource
- Provides an enjoyable way of meeting new people in their peer group and debating issues of concern

What happens on the day of Comhairle na nÓg?

Here is a typical sample of a day at Comhairle na nÓg.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 10:00 am | Delegates arrive/ Registration / Tea/coffee/juice |
| 10:15 am | Official opening by Director of Services
(Westmeath Co. Co) or representative of the County
Development Board |
| 10.20am | Introductions to the team, overview of the day,
context of Comhairle.
Expectations of the day and safety instructions |
| 10:35 am | Workshops on : Topics 1, 2 and 3 |
| 11:50 am | Groups feedback |
| 12:00 pm | Nomination/election of reps for Westmeath
Comhairle na nÓg |
| 12:20 pm | Evaluation and close |
| 12:30 pm | Lunch |
| 1:00pm | Delegates leave |

What does all this mean?

Delegates: = the children or young people involved in
Comhairle na nÓg

Workshops: = co-ordinated activities for children and
young people to express themselves through games, art,
crafts or other planned and supervised tasks.

What do we need to do next?

1. Ensure that you read this with the young person, that they are aware of what Comhairle na nÓg is about and what will happen on the day.
2. Ensure that the relevant forms have been signed and returned to the agency/school.
3. The child / young person should wear comfortable clothes to the Comhairle. School uniforms are not needed.
4. Ensure that it is made known if the child / young person suffers from any medical conditions, illnesses or has any special dietary requirements.
5. Ensure that it is made known if the child or young person is to be dropped and collected to/from the venue and by whom.

Where do our suggestions and views go after Comhairle na nÓg?

