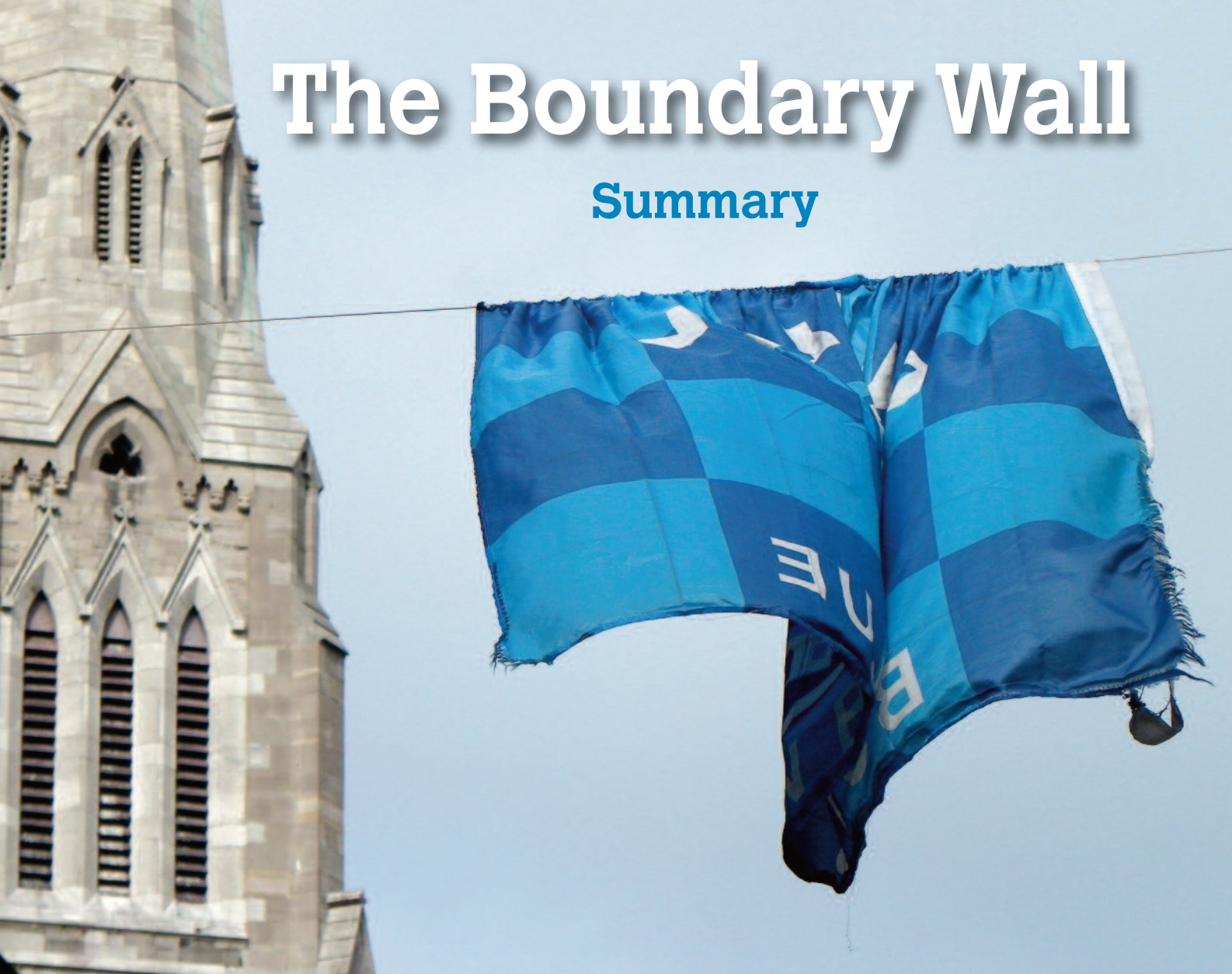


The Boundary Wall

Summary



A needs analysis in the North Wall area of Dublin with a particular focus on education and young people

March 2013

The Boundary Wall

The Boundary Wall was commissioned by the North Wall Education and Welfare Group and carried out by Deirdre McCarthy from Community Technical Aid.

Thank you to the trainees in the Community Training Centre North Wall and Una Collins for their excellent photography.



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Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

This document does not necessarily represent the views of Pobal or the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Foreword

This report was very generously carried out by Deirdre McCarthy, following discussions within the NWEWG, a group of workers from local schools, youth groups, specialised support services, child care services, etc, in the North Wall area, with a strong commitment and concern for the children and young people with whom they work.

The group was developed out of this concern and has met since 2009 to look at how services can better meet the needs of the children and young people in their community. An important part of this discussion focused on how services and groups could work more effectively together with children, young people and their families.

As part of that process workers met together every month during the school year and explored the needs of children and young people, and how their service could best meet those needs and looked at what was needed to work together for their benefit. It looked at how this could happen in the most respectful, confidential way, and in a way that included parents, children and young people. It shared information about what each service provided and how they worked, offered support where it was requested, and sought to prevent overlap in services and events.

Arising from these discussions the need for a clearer understanding of what young people needed, what was available to them and where the gaps lay became obvious. It was also agreed that the people who best understood those needs

are the people living in the North Wall area, particularly the young people themselves, and they needed to be asked directly, as did the adults in the community who have knowledge of the community, its resources and needs.

This report is a clear, respectful and professional record of the contributions of the people consulted, with really skilled use of information from a wide range of sources as well as real and compassionate reflection of the experience shared by people throughout the research, and here Deirdre's generosity, with time, and openness must be recognised and appreciated, as it is by all members of NWEWG.

Thanks and respect must be given to the young people and older adults who contributed their time, shared their perspective and represented their community so openly, and to the workers and services who facilitated the work throughout.

Finally this report was commissioned for the purpose of more clearly understanding the needs and views of young people and families in the North Wall area, as an aid to developing the work of the existing services, identifying the gaps that exist, providing a basis for the development of new services, supporting more effective inter-agency work, and giving a voice to the people who use the services.

**North Wall Education and Welfare Group
February 2013**

A black and white photograph of a street scene. A tall, dark tree trunk is on the left. A stone wall runs along the right side of the street. A utility pole with a parking sign is visible. The word "INTRODUCTION" is overlaid in white text at the bottom.

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of a needs analysis of the North Wall area of Dublin with a particular focus on education and young people. A full copy of the report can be obtained from a range of websites listed below.¹ The work was conducted on behalf of the North Wall Education and Welfare Group.²

Community Context

North Wall is in Dublin's north inner city. It is a small, tightly knit community with an historical connection to Dublin's docks which for many years provided employment for the local men and women.

There are an estimated 1,847 people living in the core North Wall area, with 25% of these, or 462, being under 20 and 36% or 670 under 25.³

54% of the population of North Wall have left formal education early and only 6% have a third level degree. 30% are unemployed (either looking for first job or unemployed having lost or given up previous job).

Despite being surrounded by new, affluent populations, the community continues to experience significant socio-economic decline and increasing social problems, including all of the problems associated with drug use and distribution.

1 www.stlaurenceotoolesgns.ie; www.cta.ie; www.ypar.ie; www.swanyouthservice.org; www.nicdtf.ie; www.iconnet.ie

2 The North Wall Education and Welfare Group was formed in 2009 to develop stronger links, trust and sharing among all those working with children and young people in both a statutory and non-statutory capacity in the North Wall area.

3 All information can be obtained from the Central Statistics Office at <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2011smallareapopulationstatistics.aspx/>



FINDINGS

Outlined below is a summary of the key findings of the research.

Community Issues

Findings from both the community and services/organisations highlighted the very closely knit nature of this community, which provides enormous internal support for its inhabitants. This is a community with a strong sense of its own history and place within the Docklands. It is also a very indigenous community, with much of the population coming from families that have lived there for generations.

However, the findings also highlight a complex and contradictory view of the community. The residents, the young people in particular, described their anger at how the community is portrayed by those who do not live there, particularly in the media. They feel discriminated against and describe how the behaviour and actions of one member of a community are frequently used to make assumptions about the community as a whole. The young people noted that the media are only interested in stories about violence or problems and do not want to talk about anything positive in the community.

The focus groups also noted that over the years of the boom this community was promised a lot, new schools and jobs, which didn't materialise. Even now the jobs that local people do get in the IFSC are low paid and insecure. Many of the older members of the community are very concerned about unemployment for their own children and

grandchildren and wonder what will be there for them.

The service providers and community organisations consider this community to be one of the most disadvantaged areas in the city with all the resulting problems that emerge, such as educational disadvantage, issues with anti-social behaviour including criminal activity and in particular drugs related activities, poverty and unemployment, and the physical degradation of the community. These issues fundamentally affect the services / organisations with more work and commitment required of them than would be standard elsewhere. However, positive and useful relationships have been established where services/organisations have successfully linked together to develop and provide additional supports, such as programmes between the Early Learning Initiative in the National College of Ireland and the local schools and early years services.

Anti-social Issues

Despite the strength, love and support that people receive living in North Wall, there are problems with anti-social issues within the community. While those who engage in anti-social behaviour are very much in the minority, the consequences of their behaviour affect the whole community.

One element of the problem is the visibility of anti-social issues, particularly those relating to violence, drug use and distribution, as well as vandalism. While the older focus groups constantly link the anti-social issues with the

young people, this problem has been going on for over thirty years.

It was found that the consequences of the anti-social activities include:

- Intimidation of both the community and staff of the local organisations/projects.
- Damage to community resources.
- Trauma and stress to everyone in the community, including both perpetrators and victims of violence.
- Anti-social behaviour has become normalised.
- The community has become labelled, with members of the community feeling that they are discriminated against, as it is assumed that they engage in or condone the behaviour.

Issues specific to young people of North Wall

While there was a willingness from the young people in the community to contribute positively, they expressed frustration at services and community representatives who they argued excluded them and tried to prevent them from becoming part of the community in a positive way. They raised the following issues:

- Not having the opportunity to express their views outside of settings particular to themselves.

- The positive work that young people engage in is seldom acknowledged, supported or appreciated.

The older young people (16-24 years) were angry. They recognised their own damaged education and its negative impact on their life chances. While aware of their part, they can see how they are products of their environment and the lack of opportunity that it afforded them. It was stated that community elders are hypocritical as it was within this community that young people learnt the behaviour that is considered problematic.

Policing

Given the extent of anti-social issues, the relationship between the community and the Gardaí is important. However, this relationship is described by the community as fraught, with both adults and younger members of the community emphasising that the community does not talk to the police.

The young people in the focus groups were very vocal on what they described as harassment from the Gardaí and outlined how they are:

- Corralled and cordoned off into their own community.
- Identified as a problem, with the underlying assumption that they are guilty or up to some criminal activities before they are even spoken to.

- Not treated with any respect by the Gardaí.

Community members and some organisations argued that the community is policed differently from other areas. If something happens within the North Wall it is ignored, but if it happens in the IFSC it is addressed straight away. Despite there being police on the street there is still visible drug dealing on the streets. It was argued that the police focus on young people and not on the real problems in the community.

Community Services / Supports

The majority of those involved in the focus groups were very aware of the wide range of services and organisations working in the community. However, there were gaps in understanding what specific organisations or groups do or how to access their services.

Gaps identified in relation to service provision include:

- No post-primary school within the community.
- Limited options for the 16-24 year olds in relation to education, training and activities.⁴ The young people felt that these facilities are the protective factor for young people.
- Need for more men to get involved in community work.

Education Issues

All of the parents had ambitions for their children to stay on in school, but many were not certain that this would happen. While more young people from the area are staying on in school and completing their Leaving Certificate, very few had the ambition to attend third level. Some, even while still in school, were aspiring to the FÁS training centre.

Education in the Community

There were a range of community education issues raised, including:

- The supports available from the non-formal education sector are vital, particularly as many of the older generation left school early, and did not have an extensive or positive experience of education. This has an impact on their confidence and ability to engage and support their children in education, particularly as the children get older.
- Poor literacy skills throughout the community.
- Children starting primary school with weak language, cognitive and comprehension skills.
- Parents and families who are most in need of support are often the hardest to engage.

There was a lack of awareness of the role and support required from parents to ensure that their children get the best outcomes from schools. Parents often lacked the skills and resources to support their children.

⁴ Since the completion of this work a new Local Training Initiative has been started in the North Wall CDP.

Pre-School and Primary School

In the North Wall, preschool children (0-4 years) are attending three different types of early years' structures: local community pre-schools; Parent Child Home Programme (NCI) and the local primary schools (reception year). A range of respondents emphasised the need to prepare children to start school with the skills that are necessary to have a successful primary school experience.

In order for this to be the case the following must be maintained and developed further:

- All providers must be constantly up-skilled and supported.
- Good communication between all early years' providers to support both the education of children and a positive transition from preschool to primary school.
- The educational needs and best interests of the child should take precedence when decisions are being made by parents and providers about where and when to place a child.

There was general happiness and satisfaction with primary schools in the community. The following traits were highlighted as valuable:

- They were small, with good teachers.
- They are within the community.

- Parents are well supported and the schools are very approachable.

Great strides have been made educationally at pre-school and primary level, and while issues remain there have been positive developments. However, it will be difficult to garner any further improvements in the educational outcomes of the children in this community without more radical supports. The formal education system cannot tackle the wider issues of educational disadvantage. It is also important in this economic climate to ensure that the supports that the pre-schools and primary schools receive are maintained and ring fenced.

Post-Primary Education

The majority of the children in North Wall attend the local primary schools up until sixth class. At this stage all of the children transfer to a range of schools outside of the community as there is no post-primary school in North Wall.

However, this transition is not successful for many of the young people and their educational outcomes are poor as a result. This was a significant issue of concern, particularly for the young people themselves. Some of the issues appear to be structural and linked to wider issues of transfer between primary and post-primary education, while some are specific to the community of North Wall.

Key issues include:

- The young people were very animated and angry about their experiences at post-primary, particularly the large number of young people from the area finishing post-primary early and/or without relevant qualifications.
- They felt that the focus should be on the phenomenon of young people being put out of school rather than on those leaving school. While the assumption is that young people leave voluntarily, many leave because they feel unsupported by school, home and community. They leave before they are pushed out.
- Suspension was a significant issue raised, with young people feeling that they were suspended for very little.
- For the parents there was the added stress of watching their children struggle. Some parents spoke about how they had to constantly battle to keep their child in school, both with the child and the school.
- There was a significant information deficit in the community. Many of the parents had very little understanding of the school system at post-primary. They didn't understand about subject choices, the implications of programmes such as Leaving Certificate Applied and third level, or how school was organised.

The cultural differences between primary and post-primary were repeatedly highlighted. Young people moved into post-primary schools where the system is more individualistic, schools are bigger, they are not known, they are with young people they do not know, and the additional supports that they had at primary level are not available. It was acknowledged that the post-primary schools that the young people attend are often aware of their needs and aim to support them, however, the system at post-primary level is less conducive to a supportive response.

Therefore, the transfer to post-primary school can be a very difficult and lonely step for a young person from the community. Young people who are doing well, with support, at primary level are failing at post-primary and their educational career is damaged when they transition.

Third Level / Further Education

Transfer to third level education featured very little in the respondents' concerns as the majority of young people were not getting the outcomes that would enable them to attend third level.

Key issues include:

- Attending third level in this community is seen as a bonus and not an expectation.
- Most in third level feel like outsiders both in the community and in the third level institutions. They are the first in their families to go to college, or part of the first generation to go. These young people are breaking the mould which takes strength and requires support.
- Having the NCI nearby was a great bonus as the transition to third level was considered momentous enough without making the students travel.
- There are also issues about the lack of income/ payment when a young person is in third level compared with other options such as social welfare or training courses.
- Finances were a huge issue for those at third level and their parents. More information is needed about the grants and supports that are available for third level.

In terms of further education and training there is a range of FETAC training (levels 3-5) on offer in the community, but respondents noted that gaps remain, in particular:

- The lack of information and awareness of progression options for young people, for example, young people who have done their Leaving Certificate and did not do well enough to progress into third level directly.
- The provision of appropriate further training and education options for all in the community.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Current Service Provision

- To continue to develop and promote the coordination and cooperation of current service provision and projects in the North Wall area and beyond.
- To improve the information that is available in relation to current service provision and organisations.
- To develop further the progression routes to and from all of the services.
- Develop a structure/driver with the specific responsibility to forward the above recommendations and the Community Education Action Plan.

A Community Education Action Plan

There is a need to develop a community education strategy for the community of North Wall. This must include all of the key players and educators from preschool to third level and adult and community education providers.

North Wall should be included as one of the new area based poverty initiatives announced by Minister Fitzgerald on the 5th of December 2012.⁵

At all stages in the development and implementation of the action plan it is vital to include young people and the wider community with a specific focus on prevention and early intervention programmes.

The specific recommendations as outlined in the main report are vital and should be incorporated into the action plan.

5 <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=2516>



