



**Early school leavers
from the
Canal Communities area
and their
experiences of education**

Lisa Fingleton



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Foreword

As part of our work in addressing social exclusion, Canal Communities Partnership (CCP) places great importance on responding to problems of education disadvantage and early school leaving. By now, most people concerned with these issues are aware of the links between education attainment and longer term life chances. It is clear that leaving school early with poor, or no formal qualifications, often leads on to an adult life of limited opportunities, characterised by unemployment or poorly paid employment. The problem of early school leaving, therefore, is a critical one to be addressed.

Over the next three years CCP will prioritise efforts to address this issue. As part of this work we are publishing this small but important study, which describes and reflects the 'lived' experiences of a number of young people from the canals area who left the school system early. The study does not make for light and easy reading, but it is clear, it is direct and it does come straight from the young people themselves. As such it is valuable and provides important insights which all concerned with this issue can usefully learn from.

CCP will use this study as a basis for promoting debate between schools, young people and the relevant community organizations, on how this problem can be responded to properly. And while there are many good initiatives in place, it does appear that much more needs to be done. Additional responses are needed and if they are to be effective they will require cooperation, honest reflection from all parties and a willingness to work together. It is only in this way that the needs of young people who leave the school system early can be addressed.

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Background and context

Canal Communities Partnership is a local development agency operating in the Rialto, Inchicore, Kilmainham, Islandbridge and Bluebell districts of the south inner city of Dublin. It is one of 38 Area Based Partnership Companies, which have been established in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage, and it aims to tackle social exclusion, disadvantage and long-term unemployment through a variety of programme activities and measures.

Partnerships run their programmes under what are known as 'Measures' – Measure A which develops services to the unemployed, Measure B, which focuses on community development and Measure C, the Community Based Youth Initiative measure which has a particular focus on issues relating to the formal and informal education needs of children, young people and young adults. This measure recognises the critical link between progression within education and increased life chances and thus has placed a particular focus on promoting responses that combat educational underachievement. Over the next three years Canal Communities Partnership remains committed to addressing the needs of young people who are most alienated from the education process.

In attempting to develop responses and initiate action, Canal Communities Partnership has experienced some difficulty in accessing accurate information – both statistical and qualitative – relating to the educational progression of young people from the partnership area.

Two studies commissioned by the Partnership have highlighted some of the difficulties. The first, in 2001, focused on the issue of early school leaving and concluded that, in certain districts within the CCP area, there were very high levels of early school leaving and school absenteeism. The second, in 2003, highlighted poor levels of education attainment for certain children, showing, for example, that in some schools up to 40% of children experience difficulties with core subjects such as reading and maths.

Notwithstanding this information, it has been difficult to build a fully accurate picture, as young people attend approximately twenty-three

different schools between primary and second level, only seven of which are in the partnership area. Therefore, following the educational progression of young people through the formal education system is problematic.

In September 2003, in an effort to further bridge the information gap relating to the educational progression of young people, Canal Communities Partnership initiated this study *Listen B4 | Leave*. The study highlights the school and post-school experiences of a group of young people who left formal education without attaining a Junior Certificate. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the real experiences of young people who have left school early and to use these real-life voices, opinions and stories as the basis for action and discussion in addressing the needs of the young people in the community.

All too often new programmes and projects are introduced for young people without consultation and listening to what young people have to say. *Listen B4 | Leave* demonstrates that young people have opinions on education, they have some suggestions for improvements and these opinions should be valued.

The publication of this local study complements and should feed into policy developments at national level. In the last few years we have seen increasing efforts made to address issues of education disadvantage and the Educational Disadvantage Committee was established by the Department of Education and Science in 2002 to progress work in this area. Partnerships themselves have been asked over the next three years to give more emphasis to initiatives for young people who are out of school as opposed to support programmes for children within the school system.

Regarding school completion, there is an expressed desire nationally to improve on the current situation where up to 20% of students do not progress to Leaving Certificate. The establishment of the School Completion Programme in October 2002 is the most recent Departmental initiative on this issue. This new programme, with which six schools located in the CCP area are involved, aims to increase completion rates to senior cycle through a range of interventions – in school, after school, out of school and during holiday time.

Other sectors also have a key role to play in promoting progression within education. Formal out of school provision is available to young people from the Partnership Area in the Youthreach Centre, Basin Lane, SICCCA

Community Training Workshop in the Liberties area and FAS Training Centre in Ballyfermot. These however are all situated outside the area and are sometimes considered either too inaccessible or not able to take early school leavers of a certain age. Currently, there are no structured, full-time developmental programmes for early school leavers within the CCP area.

Informal provision for young people is available through three local youth projects, in Rialto, Bluebell and St. Michaels Estate. These youth projects funded through the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science operate a range of developmental programmes and engage particularly with young people who are considered 'most at risk' and out of school.

All sectors formal and informal, are currently striving to meet the needs of the young people with whom they work. It is hoped that *Listen B4 I leave* can give a greater insight into the stories behind the young people and in turn can generate positive responses to meet their needs.

Methodology

Research Co-ordination and Implementation

The research was co-ordinated by Lucy Harrington (Canal Communities Partnership) and was carried out by the independent consultant, Lisa Fingleton. It was overseen by a sub-group of the Education Sub-Committee in CCP and some additional workers in the area. Membership of the research sub-group consisted of representatives from youth projects, the Education Co-ordinator in CCP, a Local Employment Service mediator and a School Completion Programme co-ordinator. The overall methodology was agreed in advance with the research sub-group and subsequently with a focus group of early school leavers.

Petra Daly, Samantha Caffrey/Hendo and Christina Barkley acted as liaison people in Bluebell, Rialto and St. Michael's youth projects respectively. This involved identifying and facilitating early school leavers to participate in the process.

Research Sample

It was decided by the research group at the outset, to target young people in the Canal Communities area, who left school without any formal educational qualifications. While there are lots of definitions of early school leaving it was felt that those who left school with no qualifications were most at risk.

The decision was also made to limit the research to those who left in the last five years¹ in order to ensure that current, ongoing issues would be identified. It also facilitated comparative analysis between experiences in a similar timeframe. In addition the group hoped to reach a sample of young people who would reflect a diversity of experience and a reasonable gender balance.

¹ There were two participants who had left school over 5 years ago but were very keen to take part in the process so exceptions were made.

With these criteria in mind, youth workers in the Bluebell, Rialto and St. Michael's youth projects identified and facilitated young people to participate in the process. Young people participated on a voluntary basis.

Seventeen young people engaged in either/and/or the focus groups and interviews. Initially it was intended to individually interview twenty young people but due to various constraints it has only been possible to interview eleven (eight young women and three young men).

Research Design and Techniques

An initial focus group was held with nine young people in Rialto. The group met for two hours and (very importantly) started with pizza and snacks! Small group work, artwork and discussions helped the group to identify common themes and what should be included in the interviews. The young people also suggested questions that should be included in the individual interviews such as 'Do you regret leaving school?'.

It was decided to use individual interviews in order to record the 'voices' of young people and to give them a chance to tell their own stories. With the consent of the participants, each interview was recorded (and subsequently transcribed) so that the report would be based on the words used by the young people themselves. For this reason the findings have been presented in the form of direct quotes from the participants.

Eleven individual interviews were held in the three youth projects. Interviews were held in the evenings and normally lasted about half an hour. The process of both the research and the interview was explained fully at the start of each interview. The interviews were structured around three key sections: experiences of school, reasons for leaving school and post-school experiences. Open ended questions were used as much as possible and participants were given an opportunity at the end to add any other comments they felt were important for the research. The interview template is reproduced in the appendices.

When the first draft was prepared, it was discussed and amended by the research sub-group. It was hoped to have a second focus group with the young people in Rialto to clarify any outstanding issues, provide feedback on the findings and make sure the young people were happy with the

outcomes. However it proved too difficult to get all the young people back together again so feedback was given to some young people on an individual basis. In addition each young person was given a copy of the full report.

In order to maintain confidentiality, young people were offered the opportunity to use a false name. The quotes have also been collated together under the questions posed, rather than under the name of the participant, in order to facilitate comparison but also to preserve anonymity.

Research Limitations

It is important to bear in mind that a limitation of this piece of work is that young people who participated in this process were accessed through youth projects in the area. This research therefore, does not represent the views of those early school leavers who may be totally isolated from services. However the remit of the youth projects is to work with young people identified as 'most at risk'.

Due to various constraints, the research had a very tight schedule and had to be carried out between October and December 2003. This created a lot of pressure for everyone involved due to the time consuming nature of qualitative research.

It is important to remember that the purpose of this research was to listen to the voices of early school leavers. Thus it presents one side of the early school-leaving debate and does not purport to represent any other interests.

The research represents the views of 11 early school leavers at a particular time and location. While the findings offer amazing insights, they cannot of course claim to speak for the experiences of all early school leavers. However neither should they be discredited for this reason as they offer the early school leaver's perspective with refreshing clarity and honesty.

Summary of findings

There is an incredible richness in the diversity of the responses, which challenge any stereotyping of 'the typical early school leaver'. There were however some similarities or trends which are highlighted in this section.

Statistical Details

The following table provides an overview of the statistical data provided by the young people who were interviewed:

Table 1: Statistical Details

F	M	Current age	Age on leaving school	No. of years since left school	School year when left school	Type of secondary school
	•	15	14	1	2nd	Single Sex
	•	22	12	10	Primary	None
•		18	16	2	2nd	Single Sex
•		17	14	3	3rd	Single Sex
•		19	16	3	3rd	Single Sex
•		18	14	4	3rd	Numerous
•		22	15	7	3rd	Vocational
•		20	16	4	3rd	Community
•		16	13	3	2nd	Single Sex
•		21	16	5	3rd	Single Sex
	•	16	14	2	2nd	Vocational

Experiences of School

Transition from Primary to Secondary

Most of the young people said that the change from primary to secondary was a 'big difference'. Some of the reasons given were:

- Leaving a primary school teacher who 'had more time for you'
- Having teachers who were just 'doing their job' or were being 'cranky bitches'
- Having to change classrooms every 40 minutes
- Having a longer school day
- Finding the work much harder
- Feeling it was too strict
- Having a one way arrow system around the school that was 'like Mountjoy'
- Being afraid in case you don't know anyone
- Not getting on with new people
- Being embarrassed for being put into a lower class than your friends
- Losing friends

Only one person described the change to secondary as 'great', describing it as an opportunity to meet more people.

One person had no primary school friends going to secondary school but the rest had either a few or (in one case) the whole class.

Positive Elements of School

Art was deemed one of the favourite subjects but almost all subjects were mentioned at least once (except the sciences). Being good at a subject and having a positive relationship with the teacher were seen as important factors.

A couple of young people mentioned religion as a positive element to school because of having a 'sound' teacher or a teacher who 'let you talk'.

Some of the other positive elements of secondary school included having more freedom and being with your friends.

Negative Elements of School

Irish, maths and French were the least popular subjects but again a vast range was mentioned (interestingly, excluding the sciences again!).

Some of the negative remarks about school were specific to the teachers:

- Having teachers who didn't want to 'deal with messers'
- Changing teachers constantly
- Being picked on by teachers
- Being constantly put outside the class or suspended
- Having boring teachers
- Not having extra help when you needed it/being ignored by teachers

Other elements that people disliked about school were:

- Changing classes constantly
- Being in a lower class to your friends
- Being 'forced' to do honours subjects
- Having too long a day
- Having difficulties with spelling or reading
- Falling behind when you missed days
- Having your nose rings taken

The answers to the question about what people got out of school were perhaps the most overwhelmingly negative. The majority felt that they got nothing out of school. The few who acknowledged some positive benefits, acknowledged that they were pretty basic. Only one person felt that school had had a positive effect, in terms of increasing her confidence by enabling her to meet new people.

Teachers

Young people were asked specifically about their experiences of teachers. Most young people described having mixed experiences of teachers though there was a lot of negative feelings about being picked on by teachers and also being branded by all teachers once you fell out of favour with one.

Some of the characteristics that made a good teacher were:

- Being sound/nice
- Being normal (instead of being a 'teacher-teacher')
- Listening/being understanding/noticing if you weren't ok
- Explaining things to you
- Not doing any work

What would you change about school?

There were lots of positive recommendations about changes that could be made in schools:

- Start the day with something active like PE
- Don't force students to do honours subjects if they don't want to
- Allow students to choose the subjects they want to do
- Be less strict/more laid back-'Relax on the kids'
- Don't expel or suspend students for small things
- Give help to students when they need it/ask for it – don't just give help to the 'good' students
- Start later (10.30)
- Have smaller classes so that teachers have more time to help you
- Have assistant teachers like in primary school
- Allow students out of the school at lunch time
- Get rid of the arrows [the one way system around the school]
- Invite in young people who have left school to tell young people how it is when you leave

In terms of the uniforms, it was suggested that students should be allowed to wear tracksuits. Others felt that girls shouldn't have to wear skirts and shoes and should be allowed to wear nose rings.

Reasons for Leaving

Why Young People left School Early?

The reasons for leaving school were very varied. Being in trouble and getting suspended were cited as reasons for four participants. Some acknowledged that they themselves were bored and messing but others felt they were picked on for not being able to do their homework or for not understanding things in class. A lot of young people also referred to the fact that they didn't feel they could get help when they needed it. If they were sick or absent, they fell behind and there was no way of catching up. One young person felt that those who were 'good' in class got all the help but those who needed the help were ignored. Two young people had their best friends die in the year preceding their decision to leave school. One respondent couldn't get into a secondary school and was therefore forced to leave school at 12 years old.

Most often, the same person identified a number of contributing factors, which included:

- Wanting to go to FAS or Youthreach to get paid and/or to be with friends
- Being embarrassed for being in a lower class than other friends
- Having dyslexia – finding it hard to read and spell
- Getting pregnant and feeling too ashamed to stay in school
- Being made little off in front of the class- being called ‘stupid’ and ‘thick’- being picked on by teachers
- Finding the teachers getting on your nerves
- Starting to move on and mix with older people
- Not learning anything in school

Feelings about Leaving School

Six young people regretted leaving school while the other four said they didn't. While quite a few acknowledged the importance of the junior cert and leaving cert, it is significant that nobody wanted to go back to the school setting to do it. Some are currently doing the junior cert through other routes. Having ‘no money’ and ‘finding the time’, were two of the major deterrents to returning to education.

Influence of Family and Friends

One of the most striking things about the responses was the determination of the young people to leave school once they had made the decision. Those who chose to leave were adamant that friends or family would not change their minds. Most of the respondents referred to the reactions of their mothers or grannies who were mostly ‘disappointed’ or ‘devastated’. However even where they were offered incentives to stay in school, they still insisted on leaving – ‘I'd just end up hating my family then for making me go’.

Six of the respondents said their friends had already left, or left at the same time.

What could the school have done?

Some young people felt that there was nothing the school could have done to persuade them to stay in school. Others felt that they should have been

followed up by the school when they left, they should have been given extra assistance when requested etc. Many of the answers reflect those given earlier (see: What Would You Change About School?).

Post-School Experiences

The following table gives some idea of what the young people in the research have been doing since leaving school. It also looks at their current activities and ambitions for the future.

Table 2: Post School Experiences and Future Ambitions

Activities since leaving school	Current activities	Future ambitions
FAS	FAS	Be a footballer
FAS	Looking for work	Get a job
Football coach training Work (labouring)		
FAS	Full time work (supermarket)	Art or choreography
Work		
Had a baby Youthreach	Studying for junior cert	Be a youth worker
Work	Looking for work	Don't know
Work (pubs) Youthreach	Youthreach Part-time work (pubs)	Nursing or Marine Biology
Youthreach Catering course Work	Voluntary youth worker	Be a drugs worker
Youthreach	Voluntary youth worker	Do a secretarial course
Stayed in bed Youthreach Had a baby	Studying for junior cert	Youth worker
Youthreach Work (CE scheme)	Full time work (computer company) Part-time childcare course	Childcare
Work (Plumber)	Looking for work	Plumber

Only two respondents hadn't spent some time in either FAS or Youthreach. Two of the women had babies. Over half of the respondents had also worked at various different jobs since leaving school.

Two young people are currently in full time work and one is working part time. Two young people are looking for work. Other current activities include going to FAS/Youthreach, studying for the junior cert, doing a childcare course and volunteering with the local youth project.

Despite many young people identifying the difficulties of getting ahead without a junior cert, most identified ambitions for the future. Only one person said they didn't know.

Young people's voices²

This section records the answers from all of the interviews. The answers have been collated under each question asked in the interviews to facilitate comparison and protect the anonymity of the respondent.

Your experience of school

How was the change from primary school to secondary school for you?

- * Big difference because you'd to move from one class to another... during the day an all. It was just mad and you had to follow the arrows all around...the black arrows [the school had a one way system in the corridors].
- * When I left primary, no secondary school would take me...I did a test for Scoil X but that shut down that year...I applied for loads...they just kept saying the schools were full.
- * Big change...I remember when I was in primary school I used to always say I can't wait to go over to the secondary school and then when I got over to the secondary school I thought I'd never get back over to the primary school...it was like totally different...a big change...it made me hate school because my class was separated...higher and lower and all that...I was actually in a lower class...my friends were all in a higher class than me...it was a bit embarrassing...so it made me not go to school an awful lot...I hated secondary... I hated it...
- * It was all right because a few of me friends from primary school were going but I was still afraid in case I didn't know many people but it was grand

² The findings presented are direct quotes from the young people themselves. Square brackets [...] have been used to provide clarification where necessary.

- * Big difference because [in primary] you're in a classroom full of people and you have the one teacher all the time and you get used to that one person...you have that person all the time and they're so nice to you and then you have these cranky bitches...and you're going into different ones every 40 minutes and the pressure is more when you go into secondary school
- * Great. I thought the secondary was better than the primary cos you knew more people. I didn't really like primary school
- * It was very hard...you're losing all your friends...the times are changing and the day is longer...it's very hard...you miss out on all your friends ...you miss out on the laugh...there's no real laugh in secondary school...it's more serious
- * Big difference...the teachers in the primary school had more time for you...the teachers in the secondary school didn't give a shite...they were just doing their jobs whether you learnt or not
- * A lot harder...you were in 9 to 4...and the work was getting harder...cos you have to be listenin' an all in school and it just didn't come to me...I started getting into trouble an all when I was in 4th class [primary] and that made it a bit harder...
- * Well I loved primary...and I loved secondary because I was able to give out...but they got too strict...like if I didn't do me homework or somethin', they'd have me suspended or...put in with 6th years like and that put me kind of back...like I was sittin' there doin' 6th year work when I should have only been in 1st year...like they'd send me up to Ms X and she'd be in 6th class and she'd say 'right there X sit down the back and try and do their work and I'd be like 'Miss but I'm only in first year' but she'd say 'Well you're in my class, you have to do my work' and I'd be like 'Miss you're makin' me run instead of comin''. So I think that was part of why I kind of left...like I'm in 1st year and they're makin me do 6th year work...[that happened] every time I was bold...
- * That's what made me leave...I didn't like secondary school...it was grand in primary school...I just didn't like secondary school at all...just a new school...didn't like the people, didn't like the teachers...they were too strict an' all... didn't like the school

Did other friends from your primary school go to the same secondary school?

- * We all went to same school...it was just next door to the primary
- * Yeah but they were in different classes...we were all separated...my friends from home were in older classes and I thought it would be fun spending time with them on the break an all, but to be honest it wasn't all it was cracked up to be... To be honest I can't remember an awful lot about it... I didn't spend a lot of time in it...I was so embarrassed...I shouldn't have been really embarrassed but I was.
- * Yeah a few of us went from the same primary school
- * Yeah
- * One friend...she wasn't in the same class as me
- * No...it was grand at first...I was in the school about two months and then there was this other girl...and she was my best friend once I got to know her...she was only new, coming from a different school as well and everyone else knew each other...so us two sort of clicked with each other...then it was grand after that... we got to know fuckin' everyone after that
- * Mainly all me friends
- * Yeah...3 or 4
- * Yeah... about 10 of us went...most of them left as well...

What (if anything) did you like about school?

- * PE and art and woodwork...all that sort of stuff and English. I used to like English...I don't know what it was...it was just my own language
- * Just the sports...I was always bleedin' thrown out of me class an' all cos I was a fuckin' little brat...

- * Maths...the only thing I was good at
- * I loved art...our art teacher used to allow us to listen to the radio all the time, and draw deadly pictures and do projects...I liked maths...I paid attention in maths class and religion...I loved them
- * I liked a few of the subjects. For the first year I liked geography but for the second year I didn't like it. I liked English, history and I liked art as well. I liked woodwork.
- * Just history cos that's all I was really good at...cos I was missing days and I didn't really want to go...I liked some teachers but I didn't like other teachers...[the history teacher] learnt you what you needed to know but she wasn't cranky and she didn't have an attitude with you all the time even for no reason...even walking into the classroom and having an attitude with you if you missed a couple of days...she wouldn't slam books and stuff like that
- * History
- * The art, Home Ec, and history
- * Nothin' really....you get an hour break and a half day on a Wednesday... that was about it...
- * Irish and French.
- * Nothing I hated it all...Religion was me best subject because of my teacher. He was dead sound you know what I mean...he was mad...he was off his head...and he was me tutor as well so it was deadly...
- * Me friends...PE that was it really
- * Business studies and home economics
- * More freedom...you're allowed leave an' all...you're allowed go to shops at the break...you're not treated as a kid...they give you a bit more responsibility like...it just wasn't for me... Hadn't got [a favourite subject]...religion was alright...the teacher let you talk ...none of the others did...

What (if anything) did you not like about school?

- * Maths and history and French...because it was hard. The French was hard to get used to but I knew a few little words. Now I don't know one...I was never going to learn that....it was just too hard ...it's hard to learn someone else's language...
- * Things like the way teachers ... never wanted to deal with anyone who was a messer...it was just 'get out of the class' ...that's it
- * [English]...I'm alright at readin' but I'm terrible at spellin'
- * English maybe...because I think maybe I'm a bit bad at English. Maybe that's why I didn't like it...
- * The fact that I was in a lower class...I think that was my main problem...that was the main reason I didn't like school
- * I didn't like maths, science, PE, French or Irish. I was good at the others
- * I was pushed into honours classes when I didn't want to go into honours classes...I hated being pushed into anything...it was all forced upon me when I didn't want to do it...
- * I didn't like being made little of in front of a classroom of people
- * Maths, Irish and French...I couldn't keep up...cos when I'd miss a day....and when they're putting pressure on you saying 'You have to keep up', I just couldn't do it....It was like gibberish that they were writing on the blackboard
- * Irish...I just hated it
- * The day was too long...and then changin' into different classes and havin' different teachers all the time...I don't think you got as much attention as you did in primary school with your work an all...you know there's so many in the class...I was in a mixed class so the boys used to mess all the time so you got distracted from your work and that was it ...there was no one to come along and help you...the way like in primary school they used to have the [assistant] teachers to help you out...

- * I hated geography but I got an honour in it....and business studies and woodwork and art...
- * The attitudes on the teachers ...they were just fucking eejits...they just gave you a really hard time...if a teacher didn't like you then you were picked on for the whole year...
- * History...he didn't make us do anything out of workbooks or anything ...he just sat on his arse reading chapters out of books and we had to sit there and write all the chapters down...that's all we did all through his class...just sit there and right down notes while he read out of a book...he was just really boring....if you complained to him saying 'why can't we use our books?' he'd say 'write out the rules so' and then he'd make us write out the rules 4 or 5 times
- * Learnin'
- * Geography...business ...the teacher I had made it more borin'...we just didn't get on...see when the teachers are alright to you, when they sit and talk to you, you can be alright to them...it makes it easier like when they're all right to you...then other teachers don't like you from day one
- * I did like school but...it wasn't the teachers...it was kinda just me...I get bored very quick...very quick...so if I'm sittin in the class and I don't like a subject I'll just mess...I run around and I get me friends to mess with me...I loved school it was just me...me bein' a little brat...God forgive me...
- * Art and maths...[art because] I didn't know how to draw and then in maths...I didn't know what do you call them?...I didn't know them [theorems]
- * Maths, English and Irish...all the new people...I didn't get on with any of them...didn't like the way you had to keep changin' class...then I didn't like the school at all...the teachers an' all

How were the teachers in your school? Was there any particular teacher who was 'ok'? If so, why?

- * Some of them was all right...your man Mr. X was dead sound...he was thrown out for not giving work like...he never gave us work....he'd write out your yellow ticket and just scrunch it up and throw it in the bin...[if you got three yellow tickets you got suspended]... he'd have you worried and behave for the rest of the class and then in the end when you're behaving, he wouldn't give it to you....he just scrunch it up and throw it in the bin...he knew that you'd stay quiet
- * A fella called Mr. X...he was a very nice teacher and Miss X...she used to always take me into her class...when I got thrown out of the class she'd take me into her class...I used to always listen to her I don't know why but...
- * Miss X...she was a real normal type of teacher...listening and understanding...she'd notice if you were distracted at the back of the class and she wasn't the type to make a show of you or anythin'...like roaring all over the place 'X you're not paying attention' ...she'd chat to you afterwards...'Are you ok?...you're a bit quiet today' ...she'd ask you loads of questions...I didn't think it was nosy...I thought it was nice...
- * The principal...he was really strict... but if you got him in great humour you could have a great laugh with him...we'd be all buzzin'...I didn't think he was too bad...he had his days I suppose like any of us...
- * Some of them were ok but I found if you were in trouble with one of the teachers you were in trouble the lot of teachers...they went to the staff room and discussed [you]... and I wasn't very good in school...I was a messer but in first year...we had a great geography teacher...I passed all me geography...but in second year we got a different teacher and I thought she didn't teach me anything at all and I just failed the class in the test...
- * I liked some of them and some of them I didn't like at all[the one's I liked] were just normal, down to earth, not really 'do this, do that' ...you know the way you can get a 'teacher-teacher' and then you can get just a 'normal person' ...just nice people.

- * Some don't care and some you do like...there's a mixture of people...most of them I didn't like
- * Some were nice and some were pigs...Some of the teachers were real stubborn...if you asked them a question they'd say 'well I told you a minute ago, listen again'...
- * Most of the teachers were fuckers...
- * Some of them were alright...there was one teacher...he was sound...you didn't get anything done with him....you did but he'd let you mess...you didn't really learn anythin'
- * Me religion teacher was brilliant...Me English teacher...she had time for us...if we didn't understand something she'd sit down and explain it to us...like all the class loved her...when she left we were all heartbroken...we got a nun then and she was a bitch....and she was a music teacher...we were in the English class and she was teaching us music. It was fucked up, the school, and it still is to this day...All me teachers hated me...I was a cheeky bitch...I locked them out of classes...I was just really fucking stupid...and then they'd piss me off because they used to keep taking me nose studs off me so I'd just be fuming then cos I'd be going into school with one in. I'd go home for lunch and go back with another one in and they'd be still taking them...it just used to piss me off...I'd have them in my bag...they'd take them and I'd put another one in...I was only after getting my nose pierced and I didn't want it to close up...[it lasted] the whole time I was in school ...nearly 3 years
- * No...I was always in trouble with them all...for just anythin' like I used to get blamed for everyone, for all of me friends...because like my uncles were in that school and they used to say she's one of them....it's like with my brother... they were always pickin' on him because of me
- * I liked one teacher...business studies ...I just liked business studies and home economics as well...but I didn't like the teacher...because she was on me all the time to do me work...and that's probably why I didn't like her...if she let me alone I would probably do me work but she was on me so I did no work... When I was in first year I found it very hard to ask a question but I think that teacher [business studies] knew that I didn't know it or somethin...like I was sittin there and lookin' at me page and

going 'yeah'...and the teacher was saying 'X do you understand' and I was sayin' 'yeah' but she'd come over to me and say 'X you don't understand sure you don't' and I'd say 'No' and she'd sit there and take time to show me so I think that made me then do my work...I loved business studies ...even to this day I help me little brother do business studies...in front of the whole class I go very shy...and if she asked me I'd say 'yeah miss I do know it'...

- * Religion...she was alright...when the door was open she'd be shouting at you but when the door was closed she'd have a chat an' all....when the door was open she'd try to make it look like she was real strict an' all

What (if anything) did you get out of going to school? (What was useful to you?)

- * Nothin'...I left when I was 11 or 12 so nothin'
- * No...I wasn't in it long enough...anything I know and learnt I've learnt myself...I don't know an awful lot but anything I do...I can remember learning myself...I can't remember anything of benefit from school except for getting up early in the morning...cos I'm a lazy bastard
- * I did learn a few things...I learned basic things that I need to know...
- * Nothing...absolutely nothing
- * Don't know...nothin
- * Mixed with different people and built up a bit of confidence in yourself...I got to make all new friends...I was in the class on me own and I had to make all new friends
- * Nothing
- * No cos I was hardly ever in...I was always behind on my subjects because of not goin' in...so I just hardly paid attention after cos there's just no point..
- * No...at primary yeah because I was only a baby but at secondary no, because I wasn't interested whatsoever

- * Not that I know of...maybe later I'll think of something but not now

What (if anything) would you change about school if you could?

- * The arrows 'n' all [the one way system]...following the arrows....like you're to go the long way but the teachers would say to you that's giving the other class a chance to get out of the room....it doesn't matter you know what I mean...[it was] like bleedin' Mountjoy so it was.
- * I'd like to have tracksuits instead of the uniform and the ties and all...like that's like kids' stuff...
- * The classes should be smaller [so that the teachers can help you]...that's probably why people mess cos they can't fucking do it...
- * Maybe if there was more active things to do...maybe if...your first thing was PE first thing in the morning...nobody ever got PE first thing in the morning...but it might have helped you...you'd be a bit more lively...how are you supposed to get an education listening to Irish first thing in the morning...whose going to listen...they say 'well you should have been in bed at 10 o'clock but at 15 or 16 you think that going to bed at 10 o'clock is a kid's thing...I did anyway...I'd stay up as late as I could and I'd be knackered that next morning going to school
- * Uniforms and times. I don't think girls should have to wear skirts...in my schools you had to wear skirts and you had to wear shoes and I don't think in this day and age that you should have to wear them...and times...I think it should be a bit later getting up to go to school...probably about 10.30.
- * In my school you weren't allowed out for your lunch...I'd like to have been allowed out.
- * They should notice a difference in people...when you keep shouting at somebody all the time and telling them 'you're going to fail all this and you're never going to pass into the next year' and everything...it does something to somebody...it damages them...it does damage them...they go home and they think about that...and you're saying it in front of a

roomful of people....don't degrade somebody in front of a roomful of people...bring them outside or something...but don't belittle them even when you have them outside on their own...

- * When you offer them help make sure that they are actually getting the help one to one and stuff...because it's hard for someone to sit in a class full of people and if they can't keep up and everyone else can...you feel two inches tall...
- * I know lots of girls still in school and they're still really depressed...they're in honours classes and they don't want to be in honours classes...when you do your 6th class exam to get into secondary...whatever you get in that you're pushed through for the rest of the 6 years even if you know yourself you're not up for it...when you ask to be taken out of the classes they say 'well we don't think you should. We know you can do it'...it's not left up to the person.
- * You're not let choose your own subjects...they give you a sheet of paper to choose your own subjects but then they put you into the classes they think you should be in...
- * They should not be so strict in catholic schools...we're not living in the 16th century anymore...it should be a bit more laid back
- * I don't know really...I wouldn't expel or suspend people for nothing...they'd have to have done something really bad...but nothing stupid we got suspended over like being late and all that crap....and not having notes for not being in...
- * I'd have less people in the class and I'd have assistant teachers to help
- * No not really I can't remember...I can't remember yesterday....let them wear nose studs..
- * The uniforms...half of them are rotten looking...and the skirts an' all...it'd be freezin' goin' to school...
- * The teachers...some of them, not all of them...cos some of them are very narky...and then some of them are brilliant...even when I used to go school...I'd mess, but not as I used to and the teacher used to throw me

out of the class...there's teachers that look at you and if they don't like the look of you, you're not allowed in their class

- * Wait till you're older to go to secondary...maybe about 14...you realise more...

Reasons for leaving school

Why do you feel you left school?

- * Too much trouble...I was always in trouble...too much messin' ...bein' cheeky with the teachers...not doin' what I was told or anything. And I was sent outside the corridors for misbehaving, walking out of school without telling any of the teachers or nothin...being cheeky, hitting a teacher... and they just kept on takin' me back and back and back and I'd just keep on goin' out and out and out the door until I says to myself 'there's no point in me keeping on doing this- going back and getting thrown out- so I might as well wait until I'm 15 and go to FAS...it's only 2 months away'. So I waited and now I'm in it. I was just sick of going back, being thrown out, being suspended. In FAS most of me mates is there...there's loads from the flats and there doesn't be any messin' in there cos you don't get French or bleedin Spanish or anythin
- * I was bored...I wasn't getting the hang of the French...was being cheeky all the time and they wouldn't let me into their classes...[I said to myself] 'I'm not going to be standing out in the corridor for 45 minutes' so I just left and went to FAS
- * I left school because I wasn't in the same class as my friends
- * Do you know what I think was a great part of me leaving schoolyou mightn't believe it...but my friend died ...she died in the summer and I'd have been going back to school in September...so when I did go back to school I was fucked up...I was never concentrating on stuff...I was always miles away on other stuff... I think that's why...
- * I'm dyslexic I couldn't read or write proper...I couldn't write a full letter

without help...that's bein' honest...I think that fucks up me confidence an awful lot...

- * I was pregnant, that's why I left school...and then when I got the taste of being out, I just didn't want to go back to school...I didn't have to leave...I wasn't the first person in my school to be pregnant but I was scarlet...and I said I was going back after I had the baby but I never went back...I left [when I was five months pregnant] and then me ma went up and told them why I left...but they were alright ...'tell her to come back and we'll look after her' ...but I never went back...like they gave me a bigger skirt so that I could fit into it but I never went back...
- * I just left because of the pressure and I didn't like being made little of in front of people...and when you miss days...and the teachers are calling you stupid and the pupils are saying 'you're thick why can't you learn' ...They say there's help for you when you are weak at a subject...and I was really weak at maths and they put me with a girl to teach me maths but she used to just go 'you're thick...you can't learn anything' ...you're going into school and the teachers are calling you thick...that's why I left...I got very depressed over it...I didn't want to go so I didn't bother going...I'd miss a couple of days and then I'd go in and get grief...it made it harder to go in...I just kept missing the days and it kept getting harder and harder...the work just piled up...and they kept coming down on me harder as well...I was sick in first year for a while and when I came back in second year I was after missing out on loads of stuff...I couldn't keep up and then I didn't bother because when you're going in and someone is just shouting into your face I started just not going in...and making up I was sick...saying to my ma 'I don't want to go' and [pretended to] have headaches and she copped on then...so I was saying I was going but I was walking in one door and out the other...
- * The teachers were just getting on my nerves so I just left...As well I used to be always late and I used to always get suspended so I just left...If I was late I'd just go on the hop and that's how I ended up getting suspended...I never woke up...I just couldn't get up
- * I was just bored...just wasn't into it...started movin' on, mixin' with older people...and they were all left school...Just fed up...I knew I wasn't going back

- * Same as everyone...I wanted to leave and go to Youthreach and get paid for it...that's why I left...I went straight to Youthreach and I was there for 3 years...we weren't getting any education out of it because we weren't learnt anything...the best part of the time I'd be standing outside of the door...I got kicked outside the door one day for biting me nails...I had false nails on and I was biting them off and I was told to stand outside the door...If a teacher didn't like you and the slightest thing she'd catch you doing...well you're fucked, fucked outside the door...or you're sent down to the principal or you're left sitting in the library for the afternoon...if they don't like you they just fucking pick on you
- * The one girl that I was in the school with, that I was best friends with, she died... so then after that, that's when I just snapped out I just didn't like school at all because she was gone and then eventually we were all in Youthreach...the whole class was nearly in Youthreach...we all left school cos we just hated it, we couldn't hack it.....I hung around with her.... after school an all...and the religion teacher an all...the whole lot of them fuckin loved her...We all went mad after that we just didn't give a shit about school...two died in the class...one of them died of leukaemia...none of us could hack it...
- * Cos I wasn't getting anywhere...I just didn't like it...it just didn't click with me...and because I was in trouble an' all it just made it worse...because I was at home as well...I was always in trouble...I was 'I'm not goin' to school'...an' all other shite...
- * [I was] just sittin' me junior cert...sittin at me English and I didn't know a question so I just got up and walked out...how I'm sorry now...I got half way through it and I didn't know a question so I got up and walked out...I didn't even bother to finish off the rest of it...I just walked out
- * I wasn't interested...I was interested in some subjects but others I wasn't interested at all...me mind wasn't with it...it was just...the teachers wouldn't explain it properly they would just go on and on and on...my head does be wandering...or does be looking out the window or be messin' with me friends...I wasn't interested at all
- * Cos I didn't like it... it wasn't for me...it was too hard...and if you didn't do something you got into trouble for it...and if you didn't understand something you got into trouble for it...like they give out [when you say]

'I didn't know how to do my homework'... they start giving out to you...it's not your fault you don't know

Do you regret leaving school?

- * No
- * I didn't leave...I regret not getting into another school...yeah
- * Yeah big time...I'd love to go back but I'm too used to working at the moment...I'd love to go to school in the night time if I could because when you leave school and get attached to money, it's hard to kind of go back...[you think] 'for the next 12 months I'm going to have no money all over again'...
- * Yeah I regret not doing a junior cert and leaving cert because you need them don't you for jobs these days...or for some courses I'd like to do you'd need them...
- * Yeah I do
- * No
- * Yes...cos you need your leaving cert. I have a little one now and when she gets older and needs help with her homework there will probably be things I wouldn't be able to help her with
- * I don't know...cos I didn't learn anything...I wouldn't want to go back...you know what I mean...no I don't regret leaving school
- * In a way yeah cos four years have passed and I would have been doin my leavin' cert...jesus it went that quick imagine if I had a been in school...I'd be nearly finished...I don't regret it yet...I'm after goin' back to do me junior cert...doing it here[at the youth project]
- * Yeah I should a stayin'
- * No...like I'd like to have me junior but I don't regret leaving

Would you like to go back to school?

- * I'd like to go back and do me junior and me leavin' ...that's about it...I wouldn't like to go back and study in the [school] classes or anythin'...
- * Probably to do my junior or leaving cert...I think it's important...I think everybody should have them...I don't have my junior or my leaving but I think it's important...it would be nice because nobody in my house, apart from my ma did her leavin' ...my ma only did her leavin' there last year...she got a merit and everything...she passed all her exams...she was chuffed...she's always saying I should do it...she was on a CE scheme...there you go...I don't think she would have done it if she wasn't getting paid for it...that's honestly...her job was sending her back to school in the mornings...she loved it...
- * I would go back to school again but I wouldn't sit in a class again with younger people...like proper school...I'd do it in college or something where they'd be adults... I always said I'd like to go back but I can never seem to find the time to say 'right fuck jobs, I want to go back to school cos its always like one thing after another...I need money for this...I can't be bothered going to school...I need to be going to work to get money'.
- * I'm doing my junior cert around at the flats [with FGU – Fatima Groups United]...but no I wouldn't like to go back to 'school-school'...I'd like to do a few courses or subjects but not all of the courses that they do the school...Monday and Friday from 9.30 to 12.30 just maths and English....and then movin' onto the leavin' cert when I do that...
- * No...probably some other time but not now...
- * I'd like to get a bit more education but no going back to school...I don't think I'd be able to get me head round it...after bein' out of school for so long...then with the baby and the homework and stuff like that.
- * No
- * No
- * I'd go back just to do me junior cert ...I went back a while ago to do me English...cos I was sorry I left...I passed but yeah I'd love to go

back...down in the VEC...it was every Tuesday night...now it wasn't as hard in the Tech as it was in school cos there was only a few of us...I'd love to go back now but I'd change the school I was in...cos they kind of knew I wasn't interested so they kind of took...well they weren't interested either...'Well if you're not interested we're not going to help you'...I didn't need that at that time...I needed someone to well push me kind of...like 'X you have to do this or you have to do that'...like if I didn't do it they'd leave me there...'It's your choice.. We still get paid at the end of the month'

- * Just to do me junior but I wouldn't go back to school though

Is there anything the school could have done to help you stay in school?

- * They were doin' everything... I just wouldn't work. I just didn't like the school...a big difference from primary to secondary...
- * Primary there used to be football ...[in secondary] they would never let me play the football, hurling or Gaelic because I was always too much messin'...but in primary you were always guaranteed a game, playin' an all, training after school...
- * [Some subjects] I couldn't get a hang of... In the end I got the hang of them because I was one on one [three times a day] with a man doing all subjects like maths, science, English an all...they were the main three...I passed them three subjects and failed Irish and French....he never studied with me for the French...I was just going to normal classes for that...
- * They could have got a school for me...they're fuckin' arseholes....I'm really fucked...all I can get is a labouring job or somethin'...I'm never goin' to get a good job...you can get into a good company...but the work...you can only do it for so long...
- * I think you really do need one to one [tuition]...
- * Me personally I'd have probably stayed in school longer if I'd been kept in a class with my own friends [instead of being put in a lower class]...I think I'd have stayed in school and awful lot longer because when I was in

primary school I hardly missed any days...I loved it...I loved going to school...

- * No there's not...cos it was my choice to leave...cos of my situation [being pregnant]...if I was pregnant nowadays I'd probably stay in school because more and more girls are pregnant...I'd have felt like people were talking about me...I'm a shy person
- * Yeah...they told my mother they'd help me with French and other stuff that I was weak at...they were saying if she comes to school we'll help her with all these things...I was promised it so many times but I never got it...I just got abuse more or less when I went into the class room...I never got any tutors or anything...I was asking for the help but nobody even noticed...I just stopped looking for it
- * Just if they didn't fuckin' suspend me all the time for doin' nothin'...
- * They probably could have sit me down and talked to me and say 'why are you leaving school?' instead of letting people just go...you tell them you're leaving and that's it.
- * Just fucking teach us...instead of sittin' us there makin' us write down notes...that's not teachin' us
- * Just for the teachers to give kids a chance...some of them just look down on them from the day they come in and that makes it a lot harder for young kids to start likin' school cos they're all droppin' out younger and younger now...just for the teachers to give them a chance...

How did your family feel about you leaving school?

- * Disappointed..[but] as long as I get something...go out and get a job...do something...find another school...I said to myself all my friends is in FAS ... why not...you get paid for it as well
- * Me ma didn't want me to leave...she kept bringin' me to schools [to try and get me into one] ...there was nothin' she could do...
- * My nanny was devastated...she was horrified at the thought of me leavin

but she got over it really...same thing as if you get pregnant...they're horrified in the beginning but it's something you grow with...

- * When I started working...my ma didn't mind because I wasn't just lazing around...I went out and started looking for a job straight away...she'd love me to go back but I don't think she thinks I ever would go back...I think she thinks I'm working now for the rest of my life
- * Me ma wanted me to stay in school...she wanted me to go back when I had the baby...but I just got the taste of being out and I didn't want to go back...I wanted to stay out
- * I got to a stage where I just wasn't going anymore even when they were making me so I had a talk with me mother and I was saying I really don't want to go back and she could see that I was really depressed and unhappy about it so she said ok and she let me leave...I picked up a lot in myself...I was working with people who weren't putting you down...I wasn't as depressed but then you get depressed from not being in school when you're doing nothing during the day and your friends are getting their junior cert results and all...you do regret it and say I wish I could have done it different...but at least I'm going back now and doing something that I likes...I hated school, I hated it.
- * Grand because I said I was going to FAS but I never did
- * They didn't want me to leave school. Me ma didn't want me to leave school...she wanted me to stay on and do me leaving....but she knew she wasn't going to get me to change my mind....it was in my head
- * Me ma knew what I was going through....me da wasn't really around but then he came back and he was disgusted with me but he got over it...I was going on the mitch constantly 24/7...constantly on the hop...I think I would go in once every three weeks cos I just didn't like it...Me ma knew I didn't like is so she just says 'fair enough, go to Youthreach and you're going to stick to Youthreach' and I stuck it out for three years...
- * They were all on me back...all me aunties and me nanny live around here so ...my auntie came over with me loads of time...me nanny came over...they were always tryin' it...I promised them I would go back but I just couldn't...they were helpin' me for my sake but I just didn't want to

go back so there was nothin' they could do really...they tried bringin' me over, making deals with me sayin' they'd give me money when you do your junior cert or even stay in school...they tried like buyin' me stuff to stay in school but I hated it that much I just didn't want to go back...

- * Well me ma didn't like it at all...me da...if I had me way with me da, well I wouldn't have went to school at all...me ma...even at the start of 2nd year I would just say 'I'm leaving, I'm leaving'...and she would just say 'go and do your junior cert...you'll be grand'...me ma was very upset when I left school...I was the only early leaver in my family...my 3 sisters did their junior and their leavin' ...so me ma wasn't very happy at all
- * They didn't like it...they wanted me to stay...but I said 'I can't, I don't like it...I will end up leavin'...what's the point...staying until just before me junior and then leavin'...I'd just end up hating me family then for makin' me go

How did your friends feel about you leaving school?

- * What can they say?
- * A lot of them were older than me and out of school...they would have been 16 an all...none of us ever talked about that...we used to come over to the club and do things...we used to have an out of schools group on a Wednesday afternoon
- * My friend... was like 'don't leave, you're a fucking eejit'...but if I was to go back I tried to go back but my class were going into third year and they wanted me to start second year all over again...I was [already] a year older than everyone in my class and I wasn't going back to bleedin' second year again...I thought I was too mature at the time... 'I'm not doin that again'...
- * Well most of them were already left school so it was nothing to them
- * My best friend left school a while before me and she was going through the exact same thing...she was after missing a few days and she couldn't catch up...there were other people saying 'you're so stupid but I didn't really care because it was me that wanted to leave...I didn't care what

anyone else thought...I was going from school and I didn't care.

- * Grand...most of my friends were in school
- * All my friends stayed on and done their leaving. They said 'you're mad' or whatever but I didn't care
- * Me and me friends left together kind of ...we were all the same ...you mess and I'll mess...One of us left then the whole lot of us left
- * One or two of them had left before me...they said 'if you hate it as much as we did just leave...get a job...if it's not for you, it's not for you...'

Your experience since leaving school

What did you do after leaving school?

- * Went straight to FAS...I went down and applied on a Friday and says that me birthday was on the Monday...so they brought me in on the Monday.
- * I worked on the milk...that was only the mornings...I worked in the coal yard until I was 14...I was locked up in Oberstown for a week when I was 14...it was all right...if you're nice to them, they're nice to you...you go to school an all and you come back and you get your dinner...I did a football course for a year as well...bein' teached and how to teach...The football course got me an apprenticeship [as a] plumber. I did that for two years and then they couldn't send me onto FAS cos I'd no junior cert...the fella I was working for was real nice. That's why I went back to do me junior but then the woman was sayin' 'right you're going to have to do another 2 years just to get back'...I was getting no money at all...you know yourself, you need money...even if I was going back after the bleedin' matches I couldn't have a pint n all...I was just sittin' in my house all the time...I couldn't even get part time work cos I wouldn't have the time to do it...
- * I went to a FAS course...my school sent me on a FAS course ...and I was doing me junior [maths, English and computers] out of FAS...but I had an

argument with a girl and they sacked me...we had a scrap...I didn't mind going to FAS...you wore your own clothes and stuff like that...and you get paid for it...

- * Had me baby and then I spent most of my time with her...I had a few jobs here and there since then...I haven't done much with my life since then...she takes up most of my time so I don't have time to do much else
- * Just worked and stuff like that.. worked in different pubs and that...I tried out Youthreach after I left school...I moved down the country and tried FAS down there but I moved back to Dublin...
- * Worked in Texas Fried Chicken for two years
- * I went and done a catering course over in Crumlin College...I wanted to be a chef ...I stuck that out for 3 months and left it...I done Youthreach...I worked in Hickeys...loads of different things...dossed around for a while and collected the labour...I worked at cleaning...
- * I went to Youthreach...when I got pregnant I was there and then I was out for about 2 weeks before I was due to go on maternity leave...I got toxemia and I had to stay out for two weeks and then I was out for the 6 weeks maternity leave and I just never went back after that....me ma and da separated and we moved around...we live down here now...so I couldn't travel up...just didn't bother going back...I was half way though the leaving cert and then I just left
- * Stayed in bed...no I didn't do anythin' for about a year...cos if I started a course or anythin'...I didn't want to leave because of me ma or me nanny...because of what they'd say...that's why I hated startin' anythin' so much like cos they're goin' to be the same every time I leave... I tried Youthreach when I was about 14...I had to stay in that a year and then I was allowed do me junior cert...I just didn't like that either...I stayed there for about 4 months
- * I went to do Youthreach ...I loved it...loved it...until I came to maths and English...don't know what it is...just kind of pushing me away...I was like 'no, like, no' ...it wasn't for me...so I left and went to another Youthreach ...that was great ...it done drama and art, English ...music ...all different things...I loved that...but then I was too messy so they let me go...I even

knew myself I was too messy...I then started working...a CE scheme up...doing childcare and then office work...and then I done cleanin' ...I done all sorts of work...all different things...and then me three years was up this year...so they let me go

- * For the first while I tried to get into FAS but they wouldn't take me because they thought I was going to go back to school...'sure you'll probably go back' ... I goes 'I'm not going back' ...so they says 'well then we can't take you' ...they tried to make me go back but I says no and I walked out...[when I was 16] I got a job but the company closed down...a month after leavin school...plumbin' ...a handy job...he set me up with contacts so I have to see about that...

What are you doing now?

- * I'm in [FAS] a year...woodwork, maths, English, computers...studying for junior cert an all.
- * I'm out of work now...I'm just bored out of me head.
- * I'm actually working in Superquinn at the checkouts...me and my friend...she's 20 and I'm 18 and we're the only full time workers that's kind of our age...the rest are all auld ones...the rest that are our age are all part time and they're all in college and it's kind of embarrassing sometimes cos they say to me 'are you in college?' and I say no 'I work here full time, I don't go to college' ...it's like 'I know, there's no need to rub it in for fuck sake'...
- * I don't have a job now...doin me junior cert that's it...[my daughter's] in playschool from 9-5, so if I want to get a full time job I can....she loves it...she knows all the kids
- * I'm in a Youthreach...I tried so many attempts to do that...I just got lazy after leaving school and I didn't want to do anything...I was working and I was thinking more about the money and I didn't care about the education. But I went back to Youthreach now and I'm going to stick at that so I'll get a [certificate] out of that...you're doing things you need to know outside.

- * ...lookin' for a job
- * I get paid by the [youth] project for working here [youth work]...it's not hard work...you're mixin' with kids and havin' fun
- * Voluntary work [youth work]...starting training tomorrow...once a week for three weeks...the youth club is closed because they haven't enough money to put youth workers into the centre but now that there are voluntary workers, they're going to start back up the youth club....it's better that sittin' around doin' nothing
- * Junior cert ...I don't do anythin' else...I haven't worked or anythin'...since I left school I didn't even got a job so I have to start lookin'...I'm in the young women's group
- * I'm in another job [full time]...its all about computers...packing CDs for computers...it's very good now...
- * [Looking for plumbing work]

Did you do any other courses/study since leaving school?

- * I'm in [FAS] a year...woodwork, maths, English, computers...studying for junior cert an all...
- * I did go back for a year to Kylemore college...cos I was bad at spellin'...to go back up and do a bit...I just did English, maths, computers...It was alright but I don't think I learned anything out of it...[also] I'd no money or anythin'...I used to do night classes...I just got pissed off with it...I told her I wanted it for spellin' but every week I was going she was helpin' me read... I did a year in FAS as well in Basin Lane.
- * FAS for about 5 months...I never got my certificate because of the argument....they never took me back...I apologised about a million times...
- * I was in Youthreach and I done half a course of childcare [5/6 months]...I'd have stayed there if you could do the course but they were

all messers....I'm doing English and maths for the junior cert now.

- * Youthreach
- * No
- * Youthreach, chef's course...I went back to try and do the leaving cert but it was too hard...once you're after bein' out of school for a few years it's too hard to go back and get your head into the books ...[Tried FAS in Basin Lane but]...it never really got up and runnin' cos there wasn't enough people to go...
- * Youthreach [3 years]
- * I'm only doin' me junior cert...I'm only doin' it about 2 months...
- * [Junior cert with the VEC and two different Youthreaches]
- * [No...Tried to get into FAS]

What would you like to do in the future?

- * Be a footballer
- * I'd just like to get a job
- * Art or choreography
- * I'd like to work with disadvantaged/disabled kids... be a youth worker
- * Nursing or marine biology. I'm going to try, I'm not going to give up this time.
- * I don't know yet...I haven't got a clue
- * Be a drugs worker
- * I wanted to do a secretarial course but it's hard cos my ma works...so I have the baby...I'm sitting there with the baby...I don't get any breaks...I

had him in the crèche...for the two weeks he cried...they asked me to keep him out for 3 weeks and then send him back instead of just keeping him there...they were ringing me every 5 minutes getting me to come over...

- * Be a youth worker
- * At the moment I'm in a childcare course [a one year course with the VEC every Friday]...I hope to finish that...I love that...I love kids...I hope to finish that...get a certificate and then go off and do childcare work...[My work].. let me off every Friday...before I got the job I was doin' that so I asked them 'is it ok if I get every Friday off?'...if I get a Friday off I probably work the Saturday and Sunday to cover the Friday...they're very good like that...
- * Plumber

Is there anything else you would like to add that you think should be included in this report?

- * I wouldn't even bother talkin' to them [the school]...they're a waste of time...you learn more out, than you do in...I'm after being in FAS and I'm after passing all me subjects straight away.... well 4 out of 5 of them.
- * I remember when I was young and a few of the other of me friends didn't go to school...for not attendin' school they got letters saying 'if you don't return to school you'll be sent away'...I know a few people that got locked up... Instead of sending [early school leavers] to prison I'd send them back to bleedin' school... 'cos they were caught robbin' an all and they were going to court and the judge was asking why are you not in school...like I think some of the judges... do be thicker than the kids the way they treat them...I don't know...it's stupid...what kind of life are you givin' them by sendin' them there
- * The way they expel kids an all for messin'...that should be all cut out

shouldn't it...that's how some people leave school...they get put on two days a week...that's a joke...the kids are getting used to being out of school...they don't want to go back...I think it's a bit fucked up...the worse thing is the parents get blamed...the teachers say 'keep that up and you'll get expelled'...if they want to get expelled they'll keep doin' it...If you made a kid stay there and do lines I'm sure he'd get pissed off doin' that...he'd probably like to get expelled but if you keep him there and say 'do that'...I'm sure he'd get pissed off doin' that...

- * No I think I've said it all...I think people in the schools should hear it...and they should do a project on it or something...that way they might keep more of the people in school actually in school...
- * I think some schools are too strict...like my school was like that...it was girls only, no boys...like a convent type school...you know nuns and all that...I think they should be more laid back, not as strict...I think more people would stay in school if it was more laid back.
- * Explain more...some of the teachers up there didn't explain things so you couldn't understand them
- * I think there should be more surveys on why young people are leaving school...[I think they leave because of] boredom and they've no really interest...I think it has to do with the background you come from as well...[in my house] there's only one sister out of 5 girls that done her leaving cert. I think it's got to do with money as well...if you've money to go on and go to college and further your career well and good
- * Relax on the kids...they [teachers] go to heaven on them...they give them a lot of hassle...that's why half the kids don't even like going back to school because of the teachers...have a bit more time for them...understand what they're going through...
- * I'd just love to tell them [young people] my experience about leavin' school...how it is affecting me now...I was nearly 16 when I left school...so I'd go in to talk to 16 year olds or even younger, to tell them what it's like...when you leave school there's nothin'...it's hard to get a job or to get money cos you're only 16...the welfare's not going to pay you...you're lucky to get money out of FAS...just to let them know what it's like to leave school and what's going to happen to you in the

future...cos it is very hard even to try and get a job or somethin'...even your CV... know like you have to write your exams an all...I just say I have none and its very hard...People say 'lie on your CV' but that's one thing I wouldn't do cos it's going to catch up with you eventually.

- * Just explain more...make sure the whole class understands...not just pick three people that you like...make sure the whole class knows...don't just pick the people that are good...pick the people that are bad at it...like ask them 'do you understand that?'

Some final points from the report

- Transition from primary to second level is a key issue for many young people.
- For some young people: the more school days you miss, the less schoolwork you understand, the more difficult it is to get back in and 'catch up'. Sometimes it's easier to stay out of school.
- Young people want to be consulted about decisions and treated with respect.
- Young people want to be valued as individuals.
- Most young people in this report would like to gain an education qualification, but not through a formal school setting.
- Despite their difficulties, all have ambitions and hope for the future.

Appendix

Interview Template

Date/time of interview

Location of interview

Name

Research Name (if preferred)

School(s) name(s)

How old are you now?

What age were you when you left school?

What class/year were you in when you left school?

Your experience of school

How was the change from primary school to secondary school for you? (If applicable)

Did other friends from your primary school go to the same secondary school?

What (if anything) did you like about school?

What (if anything) did you not like about school?

What were your favourite subjects in school (and why)?

What were your least favourite subjects in school (and why)?

How were the teachers in your school? Was there any particular teacher who was 'ok'? If so, why?

What (if anything) did you get out of going to school? (What was useful to you?)

What (if anything) would you change about school if you could?

Reasons for leaving school

Why do you feel you left school?

Do you regret leaving school?

Would you like to go back to school? Would you like to do your junior/leaving cert?

Is there anything the school could have done to help you stay in school?

How did your family feel about you leaving school?

How did your friends feel about you leaving school?

Your experience since leaving school

What did you do after leaving school?

What are you doing now?

Did you do any other courses/study since leaving school?

What would you like to do in the future?

Other

Is there anything else you would like to add that you think should be included in this report?