



PROJECT REPORT AND EVALUATION



TSA CONSULTANCY

ON BEHALF OF

KILDARE YOUTH SERVICES

Headspace is a HSE, Kildare Youth Services and Crooked House Theatre Initiative





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I.0 Introduction

The Headspace project is a youth drama initiative established in 2010 as a mental health promotion project in the north-east of County Kildare. It operates under the auspices of the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup, which is a multi-agency group established in 2009 to explore community-based responses to the issue of suicide in north-east Kildare.¹ It is one of a number of community-based actions undertaken by this group in the area.

I.1 The Headspace project

The headspace project (2011) operated in three towns in North Kildare. These are:

- Maynooth
- Celbridge
- Leixlip

Forty-seven young people are involved in the programme in these three areas. The programme operates on a weekly basis in each of the areas (one two-hour session per week) and the first phase of the project (September to February) was delivered over a twelve week period. The programme is facilitated by Crooked House theatre company, which works with the young people in developing dramatic performances relating to mental health issues of concern to young people.

The programme culminated in a public performance which took place on 2 February 2011 in Celbridge. All groups participated in this performance evening. The intention was that the performance would act as a catalyst for discussion around the issue of alcohol use and mental health and, at the performance, facilitated group discussion took place. The outcomes and recommendations arising from this discussion will inform the formulation of next steps and recommendations.

In the Kilcock area, the Headspace programme took place in late 2011, culminating in a performance night held in Scoil Dara on the 26th January 2012.

This report has been commissioned by Kildare Youth Services, which undertakes responsibility for the operational management of Headspace.

¹ The North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup is a substructure of the Kildare and Wicklow Mental Health Steering Group, established to respond to suicide on a regional basis.

The report documents the Headspace project, evaluates it in terms of its stated aims and proposes a number of next steps in developing the programme further.

1.2 The evaluation and report

This report has the following objectives:

- Report on the progress made towards achieving the aims and objectives of the Headspace programme
- Evaluate the process and methodology used in the project
- Document themes and issues arising from the process, including issues arising at the facilitated session
- Make recommendations for future action and next steps
- Establish a framework of best practice principles in community-based youth mental health initiatives from the perspectives of all stakeholders (including participants) in response to the outcomes of the project

1.3 Methodology of evaluation

The methodology for the evaluation comprised a combination of desk research and consultations with key stakeholders. A summary of the methodology used is outlined in this section.

Planning and developing an evaluation framework

The first action initiated was a framework and consultation schedule for the evaluation. A list of relevant individuals and organisations to be consulted was drawn up, including staff within Kildare Youth Services, young people engaged in the projects, the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup and some external interested parties.

Documentary research

Quantitative data used in this report was generated through an analysis of data available from Kildare Youth Services including project data, Headspace project reports, strategic plans and outputs from projects undertaken by young people.

Consultations

The primary research was qualitative: consultations comprising semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were undertaken.

The table below outlines the consultations undertaken for this evaluation.

Table 1.1 Consultations undertaken	
Stakeholder	Method of consultation
Participants	Rehearsal observation (Leixlip, Maynooth, and Celbridge) Feedback focus group with participants post-performance (Leixlip, Maynooth, and Celbridge)
Headspace steering group	Discussion with steering group members and Maynooth Post-Primary School Transition Year Coordinator
North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup	Discussion with the steering group
Headspace performance	Workshop and feedback session following performance in Leixlip, Maynooth, Kilcock and Celbridge.
Drama facilitators and Crooked House	Interviews with six facilitators and Artistic Director of Crooked House Theatre Company

Format of evaluation report

The report provides a description of Headspace project, including its aims, development and operations (section 2.0).

It then reports on the extent to which the project has achieved its aims (section 3.0).

The project is examined in terms of its four interrelated pillars – community, mental health, youth work and drama – and its effectiveness in respect of these four elements (section 4.0).

The final two sections provide an overview of the themes and issues that arose for young people involved in the performance and those in attendance on the performance night in the four areas. This includes recommendations for next steps and future actions (section 5.0) and a series of recommendations for Headspace (section 6.0).

2.0 The Headspace project

2.1 Background and context

Mental health and suicidal behaviour remain amongst the most important public health issues in Ireland. Figures from the CSO² reported 527 suicides in 2009, an alarming increase of 24% on the previous year's figure of 424. The overwhelming majority of cases are male (in 2009, males accounted for 80% of all cases).

In the years 2008 and 2009, there was a particularly high incidence of suicide in North Kildare, particularly in the towns of Kilcock, Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip. Some of these suicides were amongst females of a younger age group, and had a major impact on the local community.

This incidence of suicide prompted the establishment of the Mental Health Steering Group in Kildare and Wicklow to develop responses to this issue. This group was established under the auspices of the HSE³. It established the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup to consider actions in the North Kildare area. This structure was convened as a multi-agency group in 2009 as part of the HSE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Initiative in County Kildare. It was set up to develop, implement and review a range of mental health promotion and suicide prevention measures which were primarily community-based. The North East Mental Health Subgroup has now been expanded to become a regional⁴ youth mental health steering group of the HSE. It is also acting as the Youth Mental Health Subgroup of the Kildare Children's Services Committee.⁵

The NE Mental Health Subgroup had an integrated community-based strategy for the north-east of the county and Headspace constituted an important part of the youth strand of that strategy.

The agencies involved are:

- HSE, Health Promotion
- HSE, Addiction Services

² Central Statistics Office

³ Health Service Executive

⁴ For the region of Kildare and west Wicklow.

⁵ The National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG) in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has established a network of Children's Services Committee (CSC) within the city and/or county development boards in the country. These committees have responsibility for improving the lives of children and families at local and community level, through integrated planning, working and service delivery.

- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- Celbridge Mental Health Association
- Kildare Youth Services
- Maynooth Community Council
- Leixlip Town Council
- Kilcock Community Council
- Celbridge Community Council

The structure has overseen a range of community initiatives and responses, including information sessions for parents and local communities on topics such as bullying, dealing with exam stress and internet safety. A mental health promotion and suicide prevention seminar, research project and a multi-agency meeting with schools in the region to address areas of concern are examples of other activities.

2.2 Policy context and research

Reach Out – National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention

Reach Out was launched in 2005 and provides the policy framework for suicide prevention activities in Ireland until 2014. The strategy calls for a multi-sectoral approach to the prevention of suicidal behaviour through cooperation between health, education, community, voluntary and private sector agencies. The strategy represents one of the first policy development collaborations between the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health and Children and was produced following extensive consultation with all major stakeholders including the general public.

The vision of the strategy is of a society where life is valued across all age groups, where the young learn from and are strengthened by the experiences of others and where the needs of those who are going through a hard time are met in a caring way so that:

- The mental health and well-being of the whole population is valued
- Mental illness is more widely recognised and understood and those experiencing difficulties are offered the most effective and timely support possible
- The abuse of alcohol and other drugs is reduced considerably
- Everyone who has engaged in deliberate self-harm is offered the most effective and timely support possible
- Those affected by a suicide death or deliberate self-harm receive the most caring and helpful response possible

The functions of the National Office for Suicide Prevention are to oversee the implementation of the Reach Out strategy, to coordinate suicide prevention efforts around the country and to speak regularly with agencies and individuals interested and active in suicide prevention.

A Vision for Change – Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy

The Expert Group which reported in early 2006 endorsed the approach to suicide prevention outlined in the Reach Out strategy, stating that 'the strategies recommended to prevent suicide and to improve mental health provision for people engaging in suicidal behaviour should be adopted and implemented nationally'.

Furthermore, the group stated that 'integration and coordination of statutory, voluntary and community activities is essential to ensure effective implementation of suicide prevention initiatives in the wider community. In this regard, the National Office for Suicide Prevention should be supported and developed'.

Consultations with young people on mental health

In 2008, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs conducted a consultations process with young people throughout Ireland on their views on mental health and issues that impact on it.⁶ Eight themes emerged as key when asked what 'hurts' teenage mental health:

- Self-image
- School pressures and exam system
- Family
- Bullying
- Death
- Peer pressure
- Relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends
- Isolation

While 'being judged for how you look' and the pressures associated with school and the exam system were the two most significant areas of 'hurt' in relation to teenage mental health, other key issues cited as having a

⁶ Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2009): Teenage Mental Health: What helps and what hurts? Report on the outcome of consultations with teenagers on mental health. Dublin: OMCYA

negative impact on mental health included the death of a close family member or friend, the lack of youth facilities and the effects of peer pressure.

The report also identifies six key areas under which young people discussed 'what helps' or strategies to help alleviate the hurts identified by them so as to impact positively on mental health:

- School environment and the exam system
- Facilities for young people
- Supports for young people
- Relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends
- Self-image
- Family

While a number of 'helps' were considered particularly important, having a youth café or safe space to socialise with friends was identified as paramount.

A further survey undertaken on behalf of the HSE by Millward Brown Lansdowne (2009) found that:

- Young people list alcohol, peer pressure and drugs in equal measure as the top three problems they face today, while bullying and exam pressure are also in the top five.
- Older young people (seventeen-year-olds) are more likely to name drugs and peer pressure as the most pressing problems, while a higher instance of younger teens (thirteen-year-olds) think bullying is the biggest problem they face.
- While young people highly rate their own readiness to be available to support someone going through a tough time, they are somewhat less inclined to rate the likelihood of their peers to do the same.

2.3 Description of Headspace

The Headspace project was developed and delivered under the auspices of the North-East Kildare Mental Health inter-agency group between 2010 and early 2011.

The project sought to engage young people in four areas in north-east Kildare (Maynooth, Kilcock, Leixlip and Celbridge) and to enable them to look at key issues affecting their lives within a creative, non-formal, educative, safe space with their peers.

Headspace used drama and performance as a medium through which young people could express their concerns. The project sought to use the performance as a catalyst for discussing the issues expressed by young people within the wider community. Arising from this process, a number of sustainable community initiatives could be developed with young people in order to address their concerns on an ongoing basis.

The project's aims are:

- To provide a safe creative space in which young people can explore and analyse social issues affecting their lives, particularly in relation to alcohol use and mental health
- To reduce alcohol and drug use amongst young people and promote positive mental health
- To educate young people about the personal and social consequences of alcohol usage
- To empower young people to influence positive change in relation to those issues within their peer group, communities and key decision makers
- To provide youth and community supports within the communities to address the needs emerging from the drama programme and to influence change in favour of young people

The project also seeks to address the need for communities to understand the social complexities and pressures facing young people as well as to provide an opportunity to discuss these issues. It acknowledges the need for creation of sustainable positive opportunities for and with young people in the north-east of County Kildare. It is crucial to involve adults, parents and the community in order for these opportunities to be relevant and sustainable.

The project identifies a need for specific interventions relating to alcohol and a need for diversion away from alcohol and other harmful or destructive personal or social behaviour that is eroding and destroying the quality of life of young people in north-east Kildare.

The project was overseen by a substructure of the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup. This structure, the Headspace Steering Group, was facilitated by Kildare Youth Services (KYS) and its membership included KYS staff from the Bridge Garda Diversion project in Celbridge, the Leixlip youth project, the Youth Counselling service, the KYS programme manager and the Artistic Director of Crooked House Theatre.

Anticipated outcomes of Headspace are as follows:

- Headspace will be an opportunity for young people to be facilitated, through a creative medium, to explore, highlight and make decisions about social issues for themselves.

- To showcase issues in communities through drama performance and fora events at the end of each of the local drama programmes.
- To showcase the complex personal and social context and pressures that surround alcohol use for young people.
- To create and bond a cohort of young people to influence change amongst their peers, in their local communities and in the north-east of Kildare by linking with agencies, decision-makers and the County Kildare Comhairle na nÓg Structure.
- To work with local communities and agencies to advocate and provide sustainable initiatives highlighted by the drama programme through convening steering groups, local community initiatives, volunteer and other training and linking to and enhancing services in the region.
- To provide a platform for further stages of youth and community development in the region.

2.4 Methodology of Headspace

Headspace used drama as its main methodology. Drama as a creative process in youth work can be used for self-development, social education, social comment and to re-educate the community, particularly in the form of performance. Drama has been previously used in youth projects across Kildare.

Headspace used the drama methodology employed by Crooked House Theatre Company, which is a non-profit-making professional community theatre collective based in Kildare. Crooked House operates from a community development and youth work perspective and, in its work, it aims to:

...galvanise participants into exercising control of [their] own imaginations, by which means we may create, and be creative in, our society – rather than consume, and be consumed by, our society.⁷

The method that Crooked House employs has been termed 'process drama'. This involves participants exploring attitudes, experiences and senses of self through the rehearsal and devising process. The young person

⁷ <http://kildare.ie/crookedhouse/community-theatre.htm>

creates the part themselves (with help and guidance from drama facilitators). According to Crooked House Artistic Director Peter Hussey⁸:

[The participants] draw on their experiences, personality traits, knowledge of themselves and of society, and their attitude and observations in order to create the part. This is done through discussion and through various rehearsal techniques. It takes time but is invariably worth it as the young person has complete creative control and owns the 'part' as a valid, imaginative expression of their own.

Crooked House also notes the role of this approach in mental health and suicide prevention:

It also assists hugely in alleviating feelings of isolation and estrangement, and it builds high self-esteem. It also effectively acts as a measure for suicide prevention ... by developing key skills and aptitudes in the participants that contribute to positive mental well-being. Some of these skills and abilities are regarded as key deficiencies in young people with suicidal tendencies.

The method does this by providing the following skills and abilities:⁹

- **The ability to channel impulsive behaviour:** In the drama practice utilised by Crooked House Theatre, young people are encouraged to express and channel impulsive reactions and behaviour. They are encouraged to use their feelings and impulses to create improvised and devised performances in safe and encouraging surroundings.
- **Taking control over one's life:** The young people create their own characters, performances and expressions and are therefore in control of the process. This may be a departure for some young people from how they normally engage in a process.
- **Collaboration and teamwork** is necessary in the drama workshop environment, which may be one of very few environments where teamwork takes place, given the solitary nature of many young people's activities. The collaboration in youth theatre builds very strong friendships and provides opportunities for engagement with others.
- **Creating, not consuming:** The key skill in process drama is teaching young people how to be active creators (of meaning, of identity and of viewpoint) as opposed to being passive consumers of opinion, of culture and of commodities. The dramas they create

⁸ Drawn from an article written by Peter Hussey, Artistic Director of Crooked House, available online: <http://trapped-radical.blogspot.com/>

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are expressions of their concerns, their attitudes, and their points of view. This facility helps them to have a critical engagement with the world around them; to name their concerns, joys and interests and to formulate their own opinions.

- **Active Citizenship:** When creating scenarios and characters, the process can engage young people with their surroundings, concerns and issues, and Crooked House maintains that many young people then go on to become involved in organisations and work that help create a more just and equal society.
- **Accessing the Imagination:** Drama helps young people to use their imaginations to solve problems, to imagine different sides to a complex argument and to imagine alternatives to set ideologies.
- **Using information:** The drama practice with young people helps them to access and use information, usually about the other person acting with them, the environment they are in, the context of their situation and scenario or the likely outcomes of saying or doing something. Thus the process supports the development of skills in problem-solving and dealing with unwelcome situations in life.

2.5 The development of the Headspace project

Programme description

The original plan for the Headspace project was to deliver it in the four main towns of north-east Kildare, namely Kilcock, Leixlip, Maynooth and Celbridge. It was planned that, in each area, fifteen to twenty young people aged between 14 and 17 would engage with the project.

The project was described as a 'Social Analysis Drama Programme' which would use a drama methodology to enable young people in the four locations to explore social issues affecting their lives, placing a particular emphasis on alcohol use and its impact on mental health. Inclusion of alcohol as a theme was one of the funding criteria of the programme. The programme also represented an opportunity for young people to showcase the issues affecting them and to establish a forum for presenting the issues in their local communities.

The drama element of the programme was delivered by Crooked House Theatre Company which uses drama in a youth work and community settings and whose methodology is described above. A team of six facilitators delivered workshops.

The programme also sought to work with local communities and agencies to advocate and provide sustainable initiatives highlighted by the drama programme. This would include such actions as convening steering groups,

local community initiatives, volunteer and other training and linking to and enhancing services in the region.

Pre-development of Headspace and management structures

A pre-development phase for the project in each of the four areas started in the period between March and April 2010. This phase was focused on the development of the project and recruitment of young people to it.

It was envisaged that Local Implementation Teams (LITs) comprising a range of community and youth organisations (including youth workers, drama facilitators, schools and other stakeholders) would be established and would drive the project in the individual areas. LITs did not develop in Leixlip and in Maynooth (in these areas there were good links already in place). In Celbridge, the LIT did not continue meeting to the end of the project. The primary reason for this was time commitments for those involved in the Celbridge LIT. In Kilcock, a LIT was established comprising representatives from the post-primary school (Principal, Vice Principal and Career Guidance teacher), Kildare Youth Services, and the Artistic Director of Crooked House¹⁰, and it met on approximately four occasions.

The LITs did not take a lead role in delivery as originally envisaged in all areas and, as the project developed, individual youth workers and drama facilitators in the areas generally took on this role in most of the areas. However, the process did establish contact with some key local contacts who assisted in the organisation and promotion of the programme.

The overall management and oversight of the project was undertaken by the Headspace Steering Group¹¹ which was facilitated by Kildare Youth Services. Its membership included Kildare Youth Services staff from The Bridge Garda Diversion project in Celbridge, the Leixlip youth project, the youth counselling service, the KYS programme manager and the Artistic Director of Crooked House Theatre.

The fall-off of the LITs meant that the drama facilitators did not have a formal input into the management of the project as they were not members of the steering group, which was noted as a drawback in the consultation process. The point was also made that there was no formal opportunity for young people to have an input into the decision-making structures of Headspace, either at local or steering group level.

¹⁰ The artistic director of Crooked House Theatre also undertook the workshop facilitator role in Kilcock.

¹¹ The Headspace Steering Group reports to the inter-agency North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup.

Recruitment of participants

The recruitment of young people to Headspace during the first phase of the project took place primarily through second-level schools as well as community organisations, youth services and projects, schools and other contacts. This process was managed by youth workers in each of the local areas and, in the case of Maynooth, by the Transition Year Coordinator in Maynooth post-primary school. In Kilcock, Maynooth and Leixlip, contact was primarily initiated through second-level schools in the area. In Celbridge, young people were recruited through community and youth organisations as well as schools, mainly because of timing: recruitment in Celbridge took place in September and local schools were quite busy as it was the start of the school year.

There was no outreach or detached youth work undertaken as part of the project and the timescale for its set-up did not allow for extensive recruitment in this manner.

The mechanism for engaging young people was taster drama sessions and workshops. These were delivered by Crooked House drama facilitators and included the following activities:

- Team-building, group exercises and ice-breaker exercises
- Warm-up games and physical games
- Some character work using costumes and exploring physicality
- Role plays, improvisation, games

In some of these workshops, discussions about issues affecting young people arose but it was not explicitly pursued.

The taster workshops took place at different times and were of different durations, for example, in Kilcock and Leixlip, taster workshops took place in May with a further workshop in Kilcock in September 2010. In Leixlip, a two-week workshop period completed as part of a summer programme followed taster workshops. In Celbridge and Maynooth, taster workshops took place in September and October respectively. Attendance at taster workshops varied significantly: it was estimated that approximately 100 individuals attended taster workshops in Celbridge, 40 in Maynooth, 40 in Leixlip and 15 in Kilcock. In all areas, word of mouth was important in recruiting young people: by the end of the taster workshop period, the number of young people involved was generally higher than that at the outset.

The time and location of taster workshops also varied, with Maynooth holding taster workshops within the school day amongst transition year students in Maynooth post-primary school. The workshops themselves took place in the school premises. Other taster workshops took place during the free time of the young people.

In all areas but Kilcock, the taster sessions progressed into drama workshops during the first phase of Headspace in 2011. A number of reasons were proposed for the situation in Kilcock: firstly, after the taster sessions, the project was promoted in the schools and was explicitly identified as a mental health programme, which was believed to have deterred young people from engaging. Secondly, the gap between the end of the taster sessions (May) and the proposed start of the programme in July may have lost any momentum for the programme. Finally, the point was made that Kilcock does not have as strong a youth or community infrastructure and that young people are more engaged in sport than in youth projects, which may have affected participation during the first phase of Headspace.

However, Headspace in Kilcock did take place in late 2011, following an approach by KYS to Scoil Dara (the post-primary school in Kilcock) in May 2011. A presentation was made to students in Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in September 2011, after which students expressed an interest in participation. The management and staff in Scoil Dara were regarded as particularly supportive of the process.

The recruitment process in all areas might also have benefited from an element of detached youth work. A targeted approach to the recruitment might also have ensured that more isolated young people, including those 'at risk', might have engaged. It is likely that those young people who come forward to participate in an event are interested and are more engaged with activities anyway, whereas those young people 'at risk' are less likely to volunteer or participate. However, while this may be likely it is also speculative, as we do not have the views of those who did not participate.

Many young people became engaged in the project through their friends and contacts. The point was made that a pre-consultation process with young people in the areas might have identified a range of recruitment methods which could have optimised participation.

Profile of programme participants

A total of forty-seven young people from three areas participated in the first phase of the Headspace programme¹² (aside from taster workshops). There was some attrition in the number of participants for a range of reasons, primarily to do with exams and other activities taking place. The largest group was Maynooth, where twenty-four young people from transition year (TY) in Maynooth Post-Primary school took part in the programme during the school day.

Most of the participants in the programme were TY students; however, the mixed groups of Leixlip and Celbridge included students in third, fifth and

¹² That is, in Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge.

sixth year as well as TY and participants were from different schools. There was a gender bias towards boys in Leixlip and Celbridge (in the latter, the final group were all boys), whereas in the TY group in Maynooth there was a slight gender bias in favour of girls.

Most of the participants in the Leixlip group had some prior experience and interest in drama. In the other groups, there was a mix of young people with and without prior experience in drama. It was generally agreed that an interest (rather than experience) in drama was a significant factor in young people's engagement with the project. The exception to this was in Maynooth, where a group of transition year students participated as part of the school day, and most did not have prior experience of drama. However, while the group responded very well to the project, some participants felt that other members had joined simply as a way of getting out of class and subsequent 'messing' had occasionally interrupted the group. This may also have been because of the large size of the group, which some viewed as 'too big'; an optimum size of twelve to fifteen was indicated.

In the second phase of Headspace that took place in Kilcock in late 2011, there were approximately 35 participants - 20 students from TY and 15 from LCA - there was an even gender balance across the two groups. This was the largest number of participants across all four areas. The performance rehearsals and workshops took place as part of the school day, in Scoil Dara, between September and December 2011.

Performances and forum

The Headspace project culminated in two performance nights: one on 2 February 2011 (for participants from Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge) and one on 26 January 2012 (for Kilcock participants). At the performance nights, the drama pieces devised by the young people were performed. The performances were followed by an open forum to further explore the issues raised with those in attendance. This considered the relevance of the issues raised to young people and the community and how these issues should be addressed and recommended next steps for the Headspace project. The intention of the performance night was both to showcase the work of the young people and to act as a catalyst for a series of future events.

Approximately ninety people attended on the first performance night, comprising forty young people who performed or attended, teachers, HSE representatives, facilitators, youth workers and staff of Kildare Youth Services, staff of local authorities and agencies, elected representatives and some parents and members of the community.

The second performance night took place in Scoil Dara in Kilcock. There were approximately 100 people present, about half of which were adults (parents, school staff, HSE representatives, KYS, North East Mental Health

Subgroup; elected representatives and the remaining half were students and friends of the participants. The public performance in Kilcock was preceded with an in-house performance in December 2011, which was believed to help develop confidence for the group. The Kilcock audience had a higher proportion of adults (including parents) than the first performance, and this was partly facilitated by the timing of the performance, as it directly followed a parent-teacher meeting on the same day.

The findings of the consultation process at the performance night are discussed in a later section of this report.

Status of the groups as at January 2012

Leixlip

Following the final Headspace performance, the young people from the Leixlip group visited Kildare Youth Theatre in Newbridge and performed a short piece for that group, which was followed by a joint workshop. The group expressed an interest in participating in two future initiatives: to bring the issues raised by the drama performance into the local Comhairle na nÓg and to participate in the formation of a Leixlip youth theatre group. This group worked with Leixlip Comhairle na nÓg to advocate for the issues raised in their performance and arising from the forum on the first performance night.

Celbridge

The Celbridge group also decided to participate in the local Comhairle na nÓg to bring forward the issues raised by the Headspace programme, and become integrated with the Celbridge Comhairle na nÓg in raising issues of concern in their local area.

Maynooth

The in-school Maynooth group disbanded in its current form at the end of the school term. The school expressed an interest in conducting a similar drama programme for next year's TY students. Kildare Youth Services worked with the local community in Maynooth in developing a youth café (one of the issues of concern arising for young people in the area). The group in Maynooth developing the youth café received volunteer training from and is now affiliated to KYS. The Maynooth youth café opened in November 2011.

Status of Kilcock

The group in Kilcock have expressed an interest in continuing to meet with Crooked House, and it is likely that this may take place on an after-schools basis, rather than as part of the school day.

2.6 Management and delivery of Headspace

As stated above, the Headspace Steering Group took overall operational responsibility for managing the programme. The steering group reported to the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup through the Kildare Youth Services Programme Manager, who partook in both structures.

Kildare Youth Services undertook the administrative and logistical management of the programme. In the four areas, Crooked House facilitators¹³, youth workers and school staff (the Transition Year Coordinator in Maynooth Post Primary school and career guidance teacher in Kilcock) delivered the programme. The role of youth workers was to oversee the recruitment of young people, identify premises and locations for workshops, ensure insurance for the programme was in place and that child protection and ethical policies and procedures of Kildare Youth Services were adhered to throughout the programme (this included maintaining a register of attendance, administering consent forms, etc.). A representative of Kildare Youth Services was present at each workshop while the facilitators took the lead role in working directly with the young people. The support provided by KYS staff and the youth worker in the Garda Diversion project in Celbridge was rated very highly.

In Maynooth the delivery of Headspace was undertaken in close collaboration with Maynooth post-primary school where the Transition Year Coordinator was the link person and took a key role in recruitment of young people and delivery of the programme from the school's perspective. One of the issues was that while the programme was facilitated within TY, it was not a formal part of the TY schedule. As a result, it clashed with other activities taking place, which impacted upon attendance at workshops. There was a view that an earlier and longer planning phase would have allowed the project to be more integrated into the TY programme.

In Kilcock, headspace was delivered in close collaboration with Scoil Dara with the strong support of senior management and staff there. The main point of contact was the career guidance teacher who also helped to lead the recruitment process in the school. The school Principal and Vice Principal also joined KYS and Crooked House Theatre Company in a local implementation team for Kilcock.

However, as mentioned previously, it was originally envisaged that Headspace would be delivered locally through the establishment of more Local Implementation Teams. As these did not transpire, there was an

¹³ In Kilcock, the artistic director of Crooked House undertook the drama facilitator role.

acknowledged lack of involvement of drama facilitators and young people in the oversight of the project.

Finally, the location of workshops was a very important factor; in particular, the youth café in Celbridge was regarded as an excellent location.

3.0 Headspace – achievement of aims

Headspace has five main aims:

- To provide a safe creative space in which young people can explore and analyse social issues affecting their lives, particularly in relation to alcohol use and mental health
- To reduce alcohol and drug use amongst young people and promote positive mental health
- To educate young people about the personal and social consequences of alcohol usage
- To empower young people to influence positive change in relation to those issues within their peer group, communities and key decision makers
- To provide youth and community supports within the communities to address the needs emerging from the drama programme and to influence change in favour of young people

In this section, each of these aims is discussed in terms of whether and how they were achieved. In doing so, it is important to note that Headspace is a project which has just completed its first phase, and so this evaluation does not take place at the end of the project. In this regard, the aims are considered in terms of how the process to date may have progressed each aim.

3.1 To provide a safe creative space in which young people can explore and analyse social issues affecting their lives, particularly in relation to alcohol use and mental health

The project utilised a drama and youth work methodology in exploring and analysing issues of concern to young people. Hurley and Treacy (1993) define youth work as the social education of young people in an informal context.¹⁴ This learning occurs through the social relationships in the group between the adults and the young people and between the young people themselves, through the content of the programmes and through the opportunities provided for young people to be involved in decision-making and taking responsibility in the running of the activity itself.

¹⁴ Hurley, L. and Treacy, D. (1993): *Models of youth work – a sociological framework*. Dublin: Irish Youth Work Press.

The methodology used in Headspace was developed by Crooked House Theatre Company and involved the following approaches:

- Team-building and group exercises
- Discussing issues of importance to young people
- Developing characters
- Brainstorming storylines and 'weaving a story' around characters
- Developing storylines and characters through improvisation

This was undertaken in small groups (three to four young people).

The participants in Headspace in Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge were consulted after the performance and showcase night and were asked how the drama methodology had enabled them to explore issues relating to mental health and alcohol. The overriding view was that the drama approach enhanced their capacity to explore these issues in the following ways:

- The creative process allowed them to explore different scenarios and the development of characters allowed them to express their views and thoughts through these characters. This allowed young people to take risks and to go beyond what they might otherwise discuss.
- The drama process provided legitimacy to their views. Many young people expressed low expectations about how they would be judged for expressing these views in formal environments, such as in a school environment.
- The creative process had an enlightening effect: taking on and exploring characters had the effect of 'stepping into someone's shoes', which gave the young people a greater understanding of and new insight into different perspectives.
- Developing drama pieces in a group setting gave insight into other young people's views. For example, some made the point that the experiences or views of young people that they would not normally socialise with or those of a different gender were captured in this process. According to one of the female participants:

[it was a] chance for us to see what guys and other people think about alcohol

Moreover, there was significant variance in the experiences of young participants around alcohol and mental health (including suicide issues).

This provided a good base for group learning. One facilitator made the point that:

Definitely the best bit of the project was watching the young people learn, not from us, but from each other, from their different circumstances, interests and opinions.¹⁵

This occurred as a result of the performance night itself as well as in the creative process. One young person present at the performance night made the point that

It was good to see other people my own age with the same problems I had and how they got through it

This insight into shared experiences amongst other young people could facilitate young people to understand their own situation as well as helping to de-stigmatise mental health issues.

The programme did not proactively explore themes relating to suicide and suicide ideation¹⁶ and it was conscious of the need to establish boundaries around this issue. The point was made that in order to demystify suicide ideation, the issue should be addressed if it arises. However, it needs to be carefully approached and a protocol should be developed to ensure that facilitators with specific expertise in this area be in place to work with the young people around the issue.

Moreover, in a formal school setting, some students may not feel comfortable or confident discussing certain sensitive issues. However, this was not felt to be the case in Kilcock, where a wide range of issues including drug and alcohol use, class issues, drink-driving, bulimia, bullying and other issues were included in the performances. The aforementioned protocol needs to explore ways in which sensitive issues can be explored in these contexts with the support of skilled facilitators.

3.2 To reduce alcohol and drug use amongst young people and to promote positive mental health

This project aims to address alcohol and drug use amongst young people – alcohol use in particular is a major concern in all areas where the programme was run. This aim is a longer-term one which could be monitored in terms of a series of progress indicators, such as changed

¹⁵ Headspace Facilitators' Reports, December 2010

¹⁶ Suicide ideation refers to thoughts about suicide, which may be as detailed as a formulated plan, without the suicidal act itself. It is believed that although most people who experience suicide ideation do not commit suicide, some go on to make suicide attempts.

attitudes towards alcohol and drug use amongst young people who participated.

In terms of this evaluation, alcohol use arose in the consultations and performances to a greater extent than drug use. The extent to which alcohol use has changed is not possible to establish. Moreover, it is understandable that young people would not directly disclose their own experiences of alcohol and drug use. Attitudes towards alcohol were expressed to some extent in the performance night; these are addressed in the next section.

3.3 To educate young people about the personal and social consequences of alcohol usage

This aim relates to young people who participated in the drama process as well as those who attended the performance and showcase event. Again, Headspace has just completed its first phase and, as such, this process will be ongoing and will be progressed as the project develops.

The discussions that took place during the performance evening indicate that young people gained an insight into alcohol use and its role in their lives. This can provide a strong basis for future actions for Headspace:

Alcohol is a major issue amongst our age group and more awareness of the long-term effects [is needed] – more information and awareness for first years

It was explicitly stated that the message of the performance for some young people was that it was important to 'think of the consequences of your actions'. The same group suggested that 'not drinking at all' was a response to this issue. Young people considered the consequences of alcohol use to include exacerbating tensions in groups, causing fights and conflict and leading to young people making bad decisions. Pregnancy as a consequence of alcohol use was noted by some young people and risk of pregnancy arose explicitly in one of the performances.

Nonetheless, attitudes towards alcohol other than prohibition were promoted by some in the feedback sessions and one recommended action included:

Accepting that teenagers drink and promote [sic] 'safe drinking'

Others felt that drinking alcohol was part of the process of growing up:

Alcohol not the problem – young people are pushing boundaries, which is natural – adults need to understand this.

Older people tend to forget the drive to belong when you are young

It was also felt that representations and perceptions of young people and alcohol were not always realistic, either in the media or in general:

Young people [are] more responsible than given credit for

While alcohol featured in all performances, this was a feature of the Headspace programme and therefore it is not possible to establish whether it would arise independently. Some young people put greater emphasis on stress (including exam stress), peer pressure and relationship problems and made connections between these and mental health to a greater extent than between alcohol and mental health.

The forum findings indicate that many of the major concerns of young people of both genders in relation to alcohol are issues that give rise to its use such as peer pressure, the importance of fitting in and being accepted by peers and fears around isolation and loss of friends. In this sense, there was a strong view that alcohol use is a consequence of these issues.

The findings point to the complexity of the issue of alcohol use and how it and other issues affecting young people do not have the same consequences for all individuals.

Headspace has started a process of discussion and exploration of the issue in the north-east Kildare area, which was welcomed by young people, both in feedback generated from the performance night and in the consultations with participants:

Importance of being listened to and not being judged

Adults and teachers know about drink but don't feel comfortable talking about it

In this respect, the project has started the process of educating the wider community about young people's perceptions of alcohol use, its antecedents and its consequences.

3.4 To empower young people to influence positive change in relation to issues within their peer group, communities and key decision-makers, and To provide youth and community supports to address the needs highlighted by the drama programme

Two objectives are discussed together in this section because they are likely to overlap with each other: the positive change that young people will influence will arise from the issues highlighted in the drama programme and will be addressed to the wider community.

The Headspace project has achieved three key steps which will be important in achieving these aims. First, the project provided young people

with the tools and opportunity to express the issues that concern them through the creative drama process and the performance night. The project legitimised these concerns.

This is at odds with participants' usual experience: young people consulted during workshops and the forum were quite clear that they do not commonly have the opportunity to express their views, or that their views are not listened to:

[We] normally wouldn't talk about drink or drugs in class and this project allowed it to be discussed

[If discussed elsewhere] we would get into trouble with parents or the school would tell parents

You might be in trouble for saying these things ... we might be judged

Second, this in itself supported young people to advocate on their own behalf, publicly and in the presence of their wider community. They noted the impact of expressing themselves in the public forum:

[It was] an eye-opener for adults to see our world and social lives

Third, at this forum, young people were candid in their views about these issues and how adults and the wider community currently view them, and they were clear about how the issues should be addressed in future.

The extent to which this will 'influence positive change in relation to those issues within their peer group, communities and key decision-makers' will become a focus going forward. All groups planned to continue their involvement in articulating and advocating for issues of concern for young people. Groups have contributed to research undertaken in the area of mental health under the auspices of the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup. They expressed their future intentions as:

- To continue developing drama pieces for performance
- To develop skills in drama, writing and performance
- To explore more themes, such as eating disorders, bullying and its consequences, drugs and teenage pregnancy

In terms of engaging with the wider community, the following possibilities were identified:

- Performance to peers and younger teenagers, for example, those in first and second year. Some had a preference for performance in their own school while others would rather perform in schools other than their own.

- Performance to adults including teachers (although one group was somewhat reticent about this). There was a suggestion that this could be done within the SPHE¹⁷ programme as part of its training and support service for teachers regarding substance abuse and mental health. The programme and performances, if used in this context, would need to be developed for a school context and in reference to SPHE best practice guidelines.
- One group would like to pursue collaborations with the other two groups in future (primarily through joint performances).
- Other options include recording future performances and discussions amongst young people for broadcast (for example, in the form of podcasts) to allow for wider dissemination.

As regards the young people engaging with the wider community and agencies to advocate on their behalf, their capacity and openness to articulate issues of importance to them should be developed both within a drama context and in other fora, including the Comhairle na nÓg structure.

It should be noted that the needs identified by the young people relate to social opportunities and facilities (e.g., the need for a youth café), awareness-raising and practice and attitudes of parents and agencies (these are discussed in greater detail in section 5.3 of this report). This implies that changing practice and perceptions amongst the community as well as securing new facilities are important considerations.

The following activities should be considered:

- Supporting young people's engagement in structures that devise local strategies and responses, including a consultative role with the Headspace Steering Group.
- Offering opportunities for young people to engage in dialogue with the wider community, agencies such as the Gardaí, schools and parents to explore their responses to issues arising (the issues are reported in section 5.0). Again, this could take place through further performances or using the DVD and this report in any future suicide prevention awareness-raising activities.
- Continue to build alliances with communities through existing structures and groups including Comhairle na nÓg, youth projects and groups such as the one which has established a youth café in Maynooth.

¹⁷ Social, Personal and Health Education

There is a barrier to developing community responses outside of existing structures, namely:

- There is not as strong a community and youth infrastructure in the four target areas as there are in other areas. For example, there are no family resource centres operating in any of the four areas.
- The experience of the Local Implementation Teams suggests that time and availability may be an issue in establishing structures.

However, the point was made, particularly in Celbridge, that one positive outcome of the process was greater networking amongst youth organisations which could be used as a basis to coordinate area-based responses such as supporting advocacy and recruitment actions.

In the case of Kilcock, there was an interest among parents and young people around working together to establish a youth café and support for such an initiative would be available from Kildare Youth Service. Moreover, at the performance night, the school principal stated the school's support for the provision of space and facilities for youth activities that could take place after school hours.

Finally, while young people did demonstrate a commitment to Headspace, more formal involvement by them in the planning, development and oversight of the project might lead to greater ownership of the process.

4.0 Key elements of Headspace

4.1 The core elements of Headspace

In this section, the findings of the evaluation and views of young people are drawn together under the four key elements of Headspace, namely, drama, youth work, mental health and community.

Drama

In very simple but important terms, young people enjoyed the drama process. There was a consensus that it exceeded their expectations and that it was fun to take part in. All young people consulted wanted to continue with the process.

As mentioned above, the creative and drama process enabled young people to explore and express sensitive and personal issues. Young people were clear that this would not otherwise have happened, and the development of characters provided young people with the security to explore these issues. For most young people, the introduction to the project without emphasis on mental health was important.

At the start of the process, facilitators and youth workers made the point that many of the young people were shy. Team-building and relationship-building supported them to develop the confidence to address issues. Those involved for longer in the earlier stages of the project (for example, in Leixlip) felt that this was important in bringing the group together.

As the project developed, the creative process and use of drama was transformed from a challenge for many of the young people into a tool to express embarrassing feelings which otherwise might not have been expressed. The process would appear to have allowed young people to take risks in expressing these issues, but in a safe and unthreatening environment:

You can portray embarrassing feelings ... helped to express these feelings.

Everyone can talk about their lives.

Youth workers and participants alike pointed to the improved confidence, self-esteem and personal development arising from the participants' experiences.

Shyer members become more confident and louder members really give [their] focus and attention to something.

Young people [have] grown in the process, and the realism and grittiness of the performance was a testament to their commitment.

Youth work outcomes

The project adopted a youth work approach and the drama method is firmly rooted in youth work practice. In this regard, the youth work element of the project is intertwined with the drama element. The contribution of the process to youth work outcomes included the following:

- Personal development outcomes were reported, including new skills development and improved confidence of young people. The young people gained new insights into issues from other members of the group, including young people with different views and perspectives and of different genders. The effects on participants' confidence was noted by one youth worker:

I have seen young people walk in with heads hunched into jackets and at the end of the process to be able to stand confidently and competently to deliver a performance of a role that they have created in front of an audience of 100 people.

This was evidenced in the response of young people to the performance, which exceeded their expectations.

Facilitators noted that with improved confidence came greater collaboration with each other. Discussion in a group setting led to greater understanding of mental health issues.

- The facilitation approach adopted during the project maximised young people's opportunity to take control and ownership of the process. Many of the young people involved had no previous experience of youth work and taking ownership over a process was new for them. In some instances, young people would look for instruction or ask what was expected of them. However, as the project developed, the participants gained ownership of the project and its activities.
- Young people noted the opportunity (including the performance night) to express their views to a wider audience and to advocate on behalf of themselves. This legitimacy of their views was new to many young people and many made the point that this was a new way of engaging with adults.
- Young people expressed an interest in bringing their performance to their peers and also to younger students in schools (first years).
- According to young people consulted, drama enabled them to express their views and experiences of alcohol, which would otherwise not have been possible in the school system. This was a result of the youth work process, which enabled them to take control of the outcomes and issues, as well as the use of drama, in particular the characterisation, which allowed them to express views through an intermediary (the character).

- Young people all report an interest in continued advocacy and in bringing this project to a wider audience. They have identified other issues affecting young people that they would like to explore in a drama context (for example drugs, teenage pregnancy, eating disorders).
- The engagement with other groups could, in time, facilitate social development outcomes. For example, after the performance, one group expressed an interest in holding joint performances with the two other groups, and greater collaboration between groups.

The views expressed below are those of the young people:

[The performance night] allowed us to get our point across.

[I was] not surprised by the success of the performance night ... it normalised issues and enabled us to talk about issues in our lives.

Stuff for young people needs to be done by young people rather than for young people.

Mental health and well-being

As mentioned in an earlier section, the drama and youth work elements contribute to confidence-building, empowerment and skills development amongst young people, which provides them with tools to address and analyse issues that affect mental health and well-being.

In exploring themes and issues relating to mental health and well-being of young people, key issues were revealed to be peer pressure, stress, relationships and alcohol. These issues are broadly consistent amongst young people across the areas.

For those young people present at the performance evening as well as those performing, the discussion and expression of these issues enabled greater understanding of how they affected others. The universality of the issues was also commented upon by some young people: there was some evidence of young people being reassured that others had experienced the same things as they had. This is particularly important in light of young people not having opportunities to express these issues as well as a reluctance noted amongst young people to discuss issues to do with mental health:

Young people don't know a lot about mental health and it's not really talked about.

The point was made that the project did not fully explore the implications of these issues, as the drama pieces focused on resolving the issues facing young people. The point was also made by one group at the first

performance night that resolution in the form of a 'happy ending' is not always the case in real life.

As regards alcohol and its mental health implications, it would appear that the young people who participated in the discussion after the performances focused more on why young people drink than on its consequences:

Other issues affecting alcohol use: school, home – people drink to get away from pressure.

There was also a view that interventions for educating young people about the dangers of alcohol would be best targeted at young people in first year in secondary school on the basis that by transition year, many students will already have started to drink.

Community

Headspace provided an opportunity for young people to confidently articulate the issues that affect them. In so doing, it can provide the community with an insight into how young people perceive issues of importance to them, and it should therefore lead to more responsive services.

In terms of the impact of the project, those organisations involved responded very positively and have expressed an interest in proceeding with the project. Maynooth post-primary school expressed an interest in further integrating the project into the transition year programme and sees the benefit of engaging all TY students through offering more taster workshops to groups.

In Celbridge, greater networking amongst youth groups was an outcome which was not expected at the outset of the project. This could be used as a basis for developing an area forum to explore opportunities for developing responses to mental health issues in collaboration with young people.

In Kilcock, a larger proportion of the audience was accounted for by adults (including parents) than the first performance night. Adults and parents expressed an interest in working with young people to develop opportunities and facilities (including developing a youth café as well as making use of vacant buildings for youth purposes). The principal of Scoil Dara re-iterated his support for making available the school facilities on an after-schools basis for youth activities.

Widening the engagement of the community in the project as a whole would be beneficial, particularly as the young people expressed their views about how the wider community and organisations should respond to their needs. The point was made in the consultations that some of the young people wanted to keep the first performance event small and that the

performance event could be brought to a wider audience in future. This widened engagement should include agencies (for example schools, Gardaí and others) as well as parents. In addition, discussions could take place with schools as to how they could address the issue of cliques.

4.2 Group dynamics

According to Rogers (2004)¹⁸, groups that form around drama are informal and fluid and are influenced by those who join them. This means that the group is highly influenced by individual members.

...if someone joins or leaves, the nature of the group and the activities it can undertake will also change. If someone from a drama group leaves or a new person joins, the whole team is affected and the kind of plays which the group can perform will also be different.

Group dynamics arose as an influencing factor in all groups. There was a view that the size of group could have a bearing on the success of this action. In the view of some facilitators, there is a critical mass needed in order to generate discussion and stories, and at times a small number in a group could militate against this. For the Celbridge group, participants expressed an interest in extending membership of their group in future to overcome this. However, a group can also be too large, and there was a view that in the case of Maynooth, because it was a large group, smaller groups and cliques could form which could undermine a positive group dynamic. For some of the participants in the Maynooth group, the point was made that 'messing within the group' was one of the low points in the process. However, this was also acknowledged as possibly arising from shyness. For the Leixlip group, interpersonal difficulties arising at one point was said to have threatened the continuation of the group. However, the group recovered and is now very strong.

Previous acquaintance between group members would also appear to have played a part, however, in different ways. The shared interest in drama was important: one group made the point that they knew each other from before from this shared interest, which had a binding effect. For larger groups, such as Maynooth (who all knew each other from school), smaller groups or cliques formed in some instances. Where individuals in a group had different experiences, views and perspectives, and where they did not know each other socially, the learning experience for all members was positively noted by facilitators and by group members alike.

¹⁸ Rogers, A. (2004): 'Looking again at non-formal and informal education - towards a new paradigm', *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*. www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm.

Finally, a question can be posed as to who should be the target group for Headspace. The challenge for Headspace is to engage with those young people who are hard to reach and perhaps more detached as well as those who have prior experience or interest in drama. This might best be done by extending a pre-development phase of the project through exploring opportunities for detached youth work or additional taster workshops that engage with a wide range of young people.

5.0 Open forum – themes and feedback

5.1 Introduction

At both Headspace performance nights on 2 February 2011 and subsequently in Kilcock on 26 January 2012, each of the groups performed the drama piece that they devised. Following the performances, those present divided into groups and discussed the performances keeping in mind three main questions:

- Do the themes and issues arising in the performances reflect their experience?
- What are the experiences of young people in their areas?
- What key recommendations would improve the situation for young people in their communities?

The groups predominately comprised young people, including performers and other young people who attended on the night. Adults were also present in some groups (in addition, some parents were present in the Kilcock performance). Group members were given individual sheets and asked to submit their individual recommendations for their areas separately.

In this section, themes and issues arising from the open forum and individual recommendations are outlined.

5.2 Themes and issues

There was a general view amongst the groups that the issues in all performances were similar and that they broadly reflected the experiences of the young people in all areas. The issues dealt with included:

- Relationships with parents and friends
- Looking for approval and trying to 'fit in'
- Peer pressure
- Exam stress
- Alcohol
- Consequences of pressure and alcohol use
- Boredom as a driver for alcohol use (and ease of access to alcohol)

For young people in the discussion groups, key themes arising from these issues included:

- The importance of fitting in and pressure to conform to other people's expectations: the fear of losing friends was a key issue identified for young people.
- The prevalence of alcohol: the point was made that in Maynooth and Celbridge in particular, a lot of young people drink, starting at around 15 years of age. There was one view that this is tolerated by some authorities. While peer pressure is identified as a significant driver of alcohol use in all areas, so too is boredom and lack of alternatives. Drug use also arose in some performance pieces.
- Alcohol and its consequences: alcohol can exacerbate tensions, cause fights and conflict and lead to young people making bad decisions. Pregnancy as a consequence of alcohol use was more relevant to young people from Celbridge than those in other areas. Drink driving arose specifically in the Kilcock performance.
- The importance of thinking about consequences of actions was a learning point for young people from the performances.
- For some, there was a view that young people are either not conscious enough of the issue of alcohol (and its long-term impacts) or are complacent about it.
- There was an alternative view that alcohol is a part of life in the towns and that it is not the problem. The point was made that young people push boundaries, which is natural, and that this should be acknowledged. Alcohol was viewed as normal ('everybody drinks').
- The pressures that lead to alcohol use were a greater focus for some than the alcohol use itself e.g. using alcohol as a way of alleviating pressures at school and home.
- Young people stressed the importance of acknowledging that some cope better than others in different situations.
- The impact of cliques on young people is significant: they can lead to intimidation and isolation. One group felt that this impacts more on girls than on boys.
- The relationship between young people and their parents is very important.
- The happy ending and positive outcome of some of the performances is not always the case in real life.

5.3 Recommended actions

Groups

The groups' recommendations in response to these issues are summarised as follows:

- **Alcohol and parents:** Parents need to remember what it is like to be young and to develop a greater understanding of their children. It was proposed that 'parents should listen more'. The balance between tolerance and strictness as well as parents' overall attitude towards alcohol needs to be considered. The point was made that media representations of young people as regards alcohol can invoke fear in parents despite not always being realistic. There was a view amongst some that instead of demonising alcohol, adults need to trust that young people can act responsibly. One group felt that it was important not to stereotype young people: this group felt that alcohol is used differently than can be portrayed or perceived, that it is part of experimentation, and that the impact and extent of issues will depend on the person and different groups of friends.
- **Awareness regarding alcohol use** needs to be targeted at younger age groups such as those in first year of secondary school, as many older groups may already have started to drink.
- **More social opportunities for young people:** Teenagers need their own space, separate to space for young children. This space needs to take account of their different and changing interests and needs to be designed and planned by young people for young people. Some young people highlighted the type of space they would like in their individual areas; this is outlined in the next section.
- **The views of young people should be listened to:** at the Kilcock performance, some young people felt that their views are not listened to or needs responded to by authorities. Young people wanted to see more action arising from their needs and expressed preferences (for example, the development of a skate park). There was also a view by some parents that young people are not given adequate consideration by local councillors.
- **Opportunities around use of vacant premises:** the need for youth spaces (such as youth cafés, etc) could be facilitated by use of vacant spaces and buildings, particularly in the Kilcock area. There was an interest in developing a youth café premises in Kilcock, which would involve young people and adults, and which KYS would support.

- **Access to activities:** a lack of public transport and access to social venues in the specific areas is a problem. As a result, young people need local responses as an alternative to 'hanging around'.
- **People need someone to talk to:** Services including 'low key' counselling are needed for young people. However, the point was also made that young people are aware of who they can speak to when they need help.
- **Gardaí** should develop relationships with young people of all ages and one way of doing this would be to come to drama performances such as the Headspace one.
- **Schools** should be more aware of cliques within classes and should be conscious of this when arranging classes and group activities. One way of doing this would be to mix classes and students more to stop cliques forming, and to promote students mixing to a greater extent.

Individuals' recommendations

Individuals who attended the performance night identified a range of recommendations for their individual areas. While we do not know how representative these views are of young people as a whole in north-east Kildare, there was a recurrent need identified across all areas for a youth-specific space. This could accommodate a range of interests and provide a space for young people to socialise, play music or listen to music, like a youth café. Those in attendance on the night from Athy and from Naas also identified this as a need in their areas. Many of the other needs expressed could be facilitated in such a space.

The list of the most frequently arising needs for the individual areas are presented in the table below.

Maynooth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More facilities for young people on weekend nights • Youth group – place to meet and feel safe • Youth café • Shuttle bus (to McDonalds) • Cinema • Drama • Skatepark¹⁹ • More on-street cameras (to cut down on crime) • Stricter laws on ID when buying alcohol

¹⁹ During further consultations with young people in Maynooth, the point was made that skateparks were a space used by a minority of people and it was asserted that there is no consensus around this as a priority for the area.

Celbridge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places to hang out • Fun sports evenings • Youth groups and drama groups • Social club for non-drinkers, sober Saturdays • Youth café • Discos, gigs (place to play music) • Skatepark • Music store
Leixlip
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comic book café • Skatepark • Swimming pool • Cinema • Graffiti walls • Local radio station • Arts-based space (e.g. modern art museum) • Sports space (free gym) • Cinema • Music (gigs) for teenagers
Kilcock
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth café run by young people and adults • Drama, theatre, stand-up (comedy) • Youth discos (for older teenagers 14-18 yrs) • Skatepark • Organised transport to activities in adjoining towns • Graffiti wall • More information on what is available • Space for young people - alternative to alcohol and alternative to sport to hang out (e.g., chat, DVDs, music, games, pool) • Drama group

5.4 Emerging themes

It is important to remember that the issues identified in the performances are not exhaustive. The consultations undertaken with young people in Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip following the performance night indicated that young people wish to explore further themes in a drama context, including:

- Drugs
- Eating disorders
- Teenage pregnancy

One facilitator made the point with regard to drugs as an issue that:

The boys seemed quite interested in bringing drugs into every piece, but when I tried to discuss it with them they were not willing to develop or commit to these ideas.

On this basis, it could be expected that further development of the programme would enable young people to engage with more sensitive

issues. It was found that more sensitive issues tended to arise in the Kilcock phase of Headspace.

Moreover, the issues affecting young people who did not engage with the project are not captured, and so the representativeness of the views of these young people cannot be ascertained.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Five main conclusions can be drawn from the project to date:

- The drama and youth work methodology has been very effective for young people in helping them to express and articulate the complexity of issues affecting them.
- Young people responded very well to the project and reported high levels of satisfaction from their engagement with it.
- The project has made significant progress in achieving its aims.
- Groups all intend to continue meeting and have views on their engagement with the project as well as with their peers, other students and adults.
- Headspace is an innovative and creative project which successfully engages young people and has strong potential as a model for other communities and areas.

The development of a regional strategy for mental health involving the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup provides a good opportunity to widen and develop the practice of Headspace. As at February 2012, a proposal has been submitted by Kildare Youth Services to the HSE for the project's continuation into 2012.

In this section, we draw upon the findings of the report to outline a framework for community-based youth mental health initiatives which could be used in the future development and replication of Headspace.

A number of recommendations for the project are also made.

6.2 Framework for community-based youth mental health interventions

A summary of good practice elements identified throughout the evaluation and in the consultations is outlined below.

TABLE 6.1: Framework for community-based youth mental health interventions	
Stage	Action
Exploratory and pre-planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A period of approximately four months should be set aside to explore how the programme would operate. Young people and other stakeholders would be involved in this exploratory phase. • Establishment of planning groups with representation from local community groups, schools, youth groups and young people. These may be once-off planning groups to identify needs and approaches to delivery, rather than ongoing groups. • Interventions should include engagement with schools in time for planning and integration within the school timetable, for example with regard to transition year and/or leaving certificate applied. This should also include a review of practice guidelines for the programme within schools. • Consultation process with young people around their views on the programme and how it should be structured (time, location, duration, etc.). • Preplanning stage would give consideration to how detached youth work could play a part in the recruitment of hard-to-reach young people.
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities should be exploited to engage young people at events taking place as part of the school year and in the community. • Taster workshops of varying duration should be held in different locations based on identified interests and needs of young people. • Consideration should be given to the location and venue. • Groups should be approximately 12–15 participants in size.
Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timescale of twelve weeks is adequate for workshops. However, some would like to gain practical drama skills (acting skills, writing) in future activities. • The format and approach of the workshops developed by Crooked House and delivered by facilitators is very highly rated by the participants. • It is proposed that themes are left as open-ended as possible and that alcohol as a theme would not be a prerequisite for future programmes. • A protocol should be devised and put in place where the issue of suicide ideation arises in future programmes. This protocol would ensure that skilled facilitators with expertise in this area are available to support young people.

Stage	Action
Further development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities for young people to perform, record and film drama pieces. For example, short recordings of performances and/or discussions as podcasts as well as DVD for wider dissemination could be considered. • Replication of the performance and open forum discussions should be used in any future projects or performances. • A peer support programme with peers as well as younger students should be pursued. • Support and training for teachers (e.g. with SPHE programme, guidance counsellors, etc.) should be pursued as a basis for greater understanding of issues affecting young people.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategy to engage with the wider community could build on networking with youth groups in areas where a strong youth and community infrastructure exists. • Area-based groups could be considered to engage agencies around identified issues and to pursue advocacy actions with young people. Youth projects could take the lead in collaboration with community-based organisations. Young people would engage with this process. • Three priority actions or issues that could be developed in collaboration with these structures should be identified. • Other mental health and related activities, including those developed by the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup, should be audited and, where possible, Headspace and the findings and views of young people should be integrated into their activities. • Opportunities for engaging with the wider community, including parents and agencies, could be pursued through performance and forums in the short term. Longer-term strategies could be developed on the basis of issues raised and priorities identified. • The DVD could be used as a basis for engaging the wider community and parents, subject to the consent of the young people. • In Maynooth, consideration could be given to engaging with NUI Maynooth as part of its 'access' actions, in the form of resources, space, etc.
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people could collaborate with youth projects in devising a position paper which would be used to lobby for facilities and services for young people. • Headspace could facilitate the establishment of a formal link between the young people with the Comhairle na nÓg in Kildare around the issues raised in the forum, in particular in relation to the establishment of a youth café. • Young people from the four groups could come together to kick-start/ identify potential for joint working around issues which affect the groups.

6.3 Recommendations for Headspace going forward

The overarching recommendation is that the Headspace programme should be continued and groups should continue to be supported. This assumes the availability of resources for groups to continue their work. Recommendations are also made for practice within Headspace and for the further development and replication of the model.

Framework for Headspace

1. The framework for developing community-based youth mental health interventions based on the consultation process and good practice, as outlined above, should be considered for the future planning and roll-out of Headspace.
2. Planning, oversight and decision-making structures for Headspace should include youth representation and participation.
3. Provision for specific expertise and facilitation around suicide ideation should be in place where the issue arises in future programmes. A protocol for engaging expert facilitation around this theme and other sensitive issues should be developed.

Further development of Headspace with existing groups

4. The four groups should be supported in developing new drama pieces for performance amongst their peers (peer education programme) as well as pieces for younger age groups. One finding of the consultation process was the need to promote alcohol awareness to younger age groups. However, for new activities, it is recommended that alcohol and drug use not be mandatory themes for inclusion in drama pieces.
5. Consideration should be given to disseminating the DVD documentary of the performance event and the Headspace model, as documented in this report, to youth agencies and schools and other groups who wish to replicate the Headspace programme.
6. Discussions should take place with Maynooth post-primary school and Scoil Dara, Kilcock to explore whether Headspace could be formally integrated into the transition year timetable next year and to plan how best this could take place. Alternatively the programme could take place as an after-schools programme hosted by the schools.

Extending the programme

7. Further use of the Headspace programme model within a school context could be developed in consultation with the school staff and SPHE/RSE best practice guidelines.
8. In any future development of the programme, consideration could be given to prioritising the engagement of young people who are deemed 'at risk' as this group are likely to be hard to reach. Detached youth work could be investigated for its suitability in engaging with this group.
9. It would be worth undertaking a consultation process with young people who did not engage with Headspace in order to ascertain barriers to these young people participating and to establish whether the findings and issues that arose are representative of the views of other young people. A screening of the DVD documentary could be used as a means of engaging these young people.

Engaging with wider community

10. The issues raised during the forum discussion (on the performance night) should be considered by each of the groups. This could be done using the DVD documentary of the performance event and the findings of this report. Groups could be asked to provide feedback and to identify three key issues for their areas as well as a series of practical actions towards achieving these. This could be used as a basis for identifying advocacy actions and building alliances with other youth and community groups.
11. Consideration should be given to engaging with the wider community through hosting an information and discussion session using the DVD and this report. Attendees might include a range of community, health, education, welfare and intercultural groups and other groups and agencies in the areas. The objective would be to raise awareness of the findings of the project and also to advocate for these services to review their own practice to ensure that they take into account the issues arising from the programme. This could be facilitated by young people.
12. Similarly, a scoping exercise of services delivered in north-east Kildare (including those relating to young people, mental health, well-being and education) to explore whether practical measures could be taken to integrate the findings of Headspace into their activities (e.g. through greater consultation with young people, use of the DVD documentary in training activities, etc.).

Representation

13. Mechanisms for young people's contribution and input to decision-making structures, for example, the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup or the Headspace Steering Group should be explored.
14. Opportunities for young people's engagement with and participation on the Mental Health Subgroup should be explored.

Sustainability and supports

15. Under the auspices of the North-East Kildare Mental Health Subgroup, a sustainability strategy should be considered for Headspace.
16. In the event that funding is not secured to maintain the project at current levels, an application for funding through other sources should be pursued, e.g. through programmes such as the ESB's Electric Aid, National Lottery funding, HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention and other funding programmes.