

***Sligo Comhairle na nÓg***  
***Annual General Meeting Report 2022/2023***



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth





### **Cathaoirleach's Foreword**

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is one of the most exciting initiatives to be developed for young people in many years. It is part of a nationwide alliance of 31 Comhairle na nÓg's, which were established to support the implementation of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015 –2020).

Comhairle na nÓg (Irish Child and Youth Council) provides the opportunity for young people under the age of 18 who have no other voting mechanism to have their voice heard. It is designed to enable young people to have a voice and input into the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area.

In County Sligo, the initiative is overseen by Sligo County Council and a Steering Group made up of agencies and organisations that have a remit in the area of children and young people. These include Sligo County Council, Foróige, DCEDIY, MSLETB, CYPSC, HSE, Sligo PPN, and Youth Work Ireland North Connaught. The Initiative is managed under contract by Foróige who provide a dedicated resource to work with and to develop the Comhairle na nÓg, using a "youth led" approach.

In 2022, the Comhairle na nÓg empowered the voice of young people in Sligo to be heard on a number of topics and via a number of forums. These include the National Comhairle Executive event (February 2022) and the Dáil na nÓg event (March 2022) where the theme of equality was discussed on both occasions. It is important to note that themes are selected by the young people and their insightful choices brings much hope for the future.

At the Comhairle na nÓg AGM 2022, work focussed on topics chosen by the young people of Sligo including Mental Health, Transport and Youth Facilities, all of which affect young people greatly. The Comhairle members will be presenting these to Members of Sligo County Council in 2023, which I will be looking forward to hearing.

An important element of Comhairle na nÓg is extending its reach to marginalised young people. In this regard Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is being facilitated to develop a stakeholder

engagement plan for Seldom heard Young People. This is a very important piece of work and will reach groups of people who do not have a collective voice and are often under-represented in consultation or participation activities. Initiatives such as these have the potential to build confidence and provide opportunities for young people to grow and develop in areas that they may not have considered.

The work undertaken in 2022 by Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is testament to all concerned, but most importantly, tribute has to be paid to the young participants. It is encouraging to see young people being so passionate and articulate about the issues that concern them and it makes it possible to envisage positive change both now and into the future.

**Councillor Michael Clarke**

**Cathaoirleach, Sligo County Council**

### ***What is Comhairle na nÓg?***

Comhairle na nÓg ([www.comhairlenanog.ie](http://www.comhairlenanog.ie)) are local councils for children and young people aged 12–18 that give them a voice on the development of local policies and services. Established in 2002, Comhairle na nÓg is the recognised key national structure for participation by children and young people in local decision-making in all 31 local authorities of the country. Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) are required to engage with Comhairle na nÓg. The first National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020 reiterates the fact that Comhairle na nÓg is the nationally recognised structure that enables children and young people to have a voice in local decision-making.

### ***Sligo Comhairle na nÓg***

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg involves a working partnership with Sligo County Council, Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education Training Board and Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation, as the host organisation.

The Comhairle meets regularly to discuss topics of interest and concern to young people in the County of Sligo. These topics range from teenage mental health, climate action and the community. A steering committee, which is made up of key state agencies and relevant non-government agencies links with Comhairle na nÓg members to ensure that the voice and opinion of young people is included in their strategies and policies. With the support of this committee it is envisaged that the issues identified by young people in County Sligo will be heard and the youth council will strive to effect positive changes for the youth of County Sligo.

### ***Department of Children & Youth Affairs Vision for Sligo Comhairle na nÓg***

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is a forum for structured input into decision-making by children and young people in the development of local services and policies in County Sligo. Comhairle na nÓg will not be the only way of seeking the views of children and young people, but will become a key consultative forum, supported and resourced appropriately by all statutory and voluntary organisations in the county.

The priority areas for development are:

- The creation of formal and sustained links with adult decision-making bodies/individuals throughout County Sligo

- Ensuring that membership of Comhairle na nÓg represents all age groups between 12 and 18 – with specific attention being paid to developing strategies to improve the participation of young people between 12-15 years of age.
- Supporting and expanding the Inclusion Programme to develop best practice in participation by seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making structures and projects.

### ***Structure of Comhairle***

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg is made up of young people aged between 12 and 18 years of age. Candidates take up a term of office of two years on the council. They meet fortnightly to discuss and work on youth issues as raised by young people in County Sligo at the AGM. The meetings are youth led whereby the young people set the agenda and chair the meetings themselves. Young people are elected as chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and public relations officer for a term of one year.

Two representatives sit on the Comhairle Steering Committee and report back to the main Comhairle group regularly. Through this group, Sligo Comhairle na nÓg link with relevant professionals working in the area of policy and development in County Sligo from a range of different agencies - state, non-government organisations and the community and voluntary sector.

### ***Annual General Meeting 2022***

Sligo Comhairle na nÓg Annual General Meeting had the opportunity to be held in person after two years of being held remotely online, due to the Covid19 pandemic. The Comhairle na nÓg AGM provides a forum for young people from around the County to express their views on topics deemed important by them. A welcome address was given by Councillor, Martin Connolly, from Ballymote-Tubbercurry Electoral Area.

The event was hosted by Foróige with the support of Sligo County Council. Members of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg played a key role in the development and organisation of the day. They also took on lead roles in; meeting and greeting, registration, interaction with the young people attending the event, facilitation of workshops and as comperes.

#### ***Who Attended?***

Representation from 11 of County Sligo's secondary schools attended as well as young people from community youth groups based in Sligo Town.

***Total number of Young People attended:*** 81 Young People

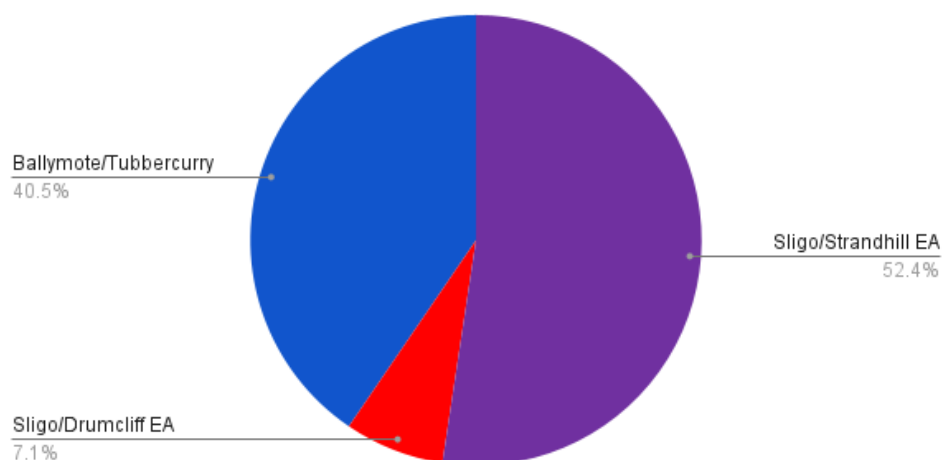
### Secondary Schools and organisations represented:

- Sligo Grammar School, Sligo
- Summerhill College, Sligo
- The Mercy College, Sligo
- The Ursuline College, Sligo
- Ballinode College, Sligo
- St Marys, Ballisodare, Sligo
- Corran College
- St Attracta's Community School, Tubbercurry
- Colaiste Iascaigh, Easkey
- Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Enniscrone
- Colaiste Mhuire, Ballymote

### Youth Groups & Organisations Represented:

- Youth Reach, Sligo
- Sligo Community Training Centre

### Percentage of Young People in Attendance by Electoral Area



### Organisers of the event

The event was held in the Radisson Hotel & Spa, Ballinacra, Rosses Point, Sligo, and was hosted and co-ordinated by Foróige with the support of Sligo County Council and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

The following agencies and people supported the event through facilitation, supervision and reporting on the day.



- **Members of Sligo Comhairle na nÓg:** 10 young people from Sligo
- **Foróige:** Tara Gavin (Co-ordinator), Anne Marie Regan, Elaine Granaghan, Nicola Tuffy, Charlene Gilmartin, Caitriona Clarke, Connor O’Niell, Shane McManus, Jack Cavaliero & Aimee Flynn
- **Sligo County Council:** Cllr Martin Connolly & Kate Gibbons
- **National Participation Office:** Mark O’Dwyer
- **Youth Work Ireland North Connaught (SMILY LGBTI+):** Catherine McCann

### *Welcome Address*

Following arrival and registration the group assembled in the main hall where they were welcomed by Tara Gavin, Comhairle na nÓg Co-ordinator and Youth Officer with Foróige.

After a short introduction to the event, Tara invited hosts of the day and Comhairle members, Anna Quinn and Siofra McElduff, who spoke about what Comhairle na nÓg is, its purpose and the importance of Comhairle na nÓg in Sligo’s Community.



Anna Quinn (Chairperson)



Siofra McElduff (Vice Chairperson)

Cllr Martin Connolly was invited to speak on the day and spoke about the endless possibilities Comhairle na nÓg has to offer, and the expectation to see Sligo Comhairle na nÓg “go from strength to strength in future years”.



National Executive Representative, Alfie Barron, spoke of what Comhairle na nÓg meant to him and encouraged young people to take the opportunity that Comhairle provides as a platform for voicing youth issues. He then went on to discuss his experiences so far, having attended the Áras an Uachtaráin Garden Party in the summer and had the opportunity to meet President Michael D. Higgins.



Alfie Barron (National executive Representative)

### **Top three Topics explored at the World Cafe Discussion tables:**

#### **1. Mental Health (Topic chosen for 2022/2023):**

Most of the groups at the World Cafe Discussion Tables discussed the lack of available Mental Health services and resources for young people in Sligo. The resources that are there, in terms of therapists, is a “slow” process, are “too expensive” and have “long waiting lists”. The Stigma around Mental Health also needs to change, as it’s still “not encouraged enough” to speak out. The most talked about point regarding Mental Health was the guidance in schools. It was reported in groups by young people that Mental Health is not taken seriously in schools and not all education staff are mindful. This creates barriers for young people in schools having the “fear of getting help”, parental consent was also seen as a barrier. Some solutions put forward by the young people at the AGM are as follows; cheaper access to services, “more access to supports in schools” by introducing more school counselling facilities or a class dedicated to Mental Health, teachers needing to be educated more in supporting Mental Health, parents also needing to be educated in how to help and talk about Mental Health, education to the older generation, having mental health facilities in rural areas, more counsellors for under 18 years other than CAMHS, having more activities to take part in, more events around Mental Health in the community and better promotion of early intervention, awareness & advertisement. As Mental Health was the topic that was



voted as most important for Sligo Comhairle na nÓg, this will be the No.1 priority for 2022/2023.

## **2. Transport:**

Transport was widely raised as a concern, in terms of “there isn’t enough” for young people. The groups discussed a number of issues including; the lack of public transport, especially in the rural areas of Sligo and the “irregular and unreliable” bus times and schedules. The price inflation on fuel causing barriers and also relying on parents to transport young people. Additionally, the quality of roads and lack of bus shelters & pathways was spoken about along with the expense of fares on public transport. Young people raised the concern that driving lessons are also costly, as well as insurance for young drivers. Young people stated that “Being able to afford a car” as a young person is just very difficult.

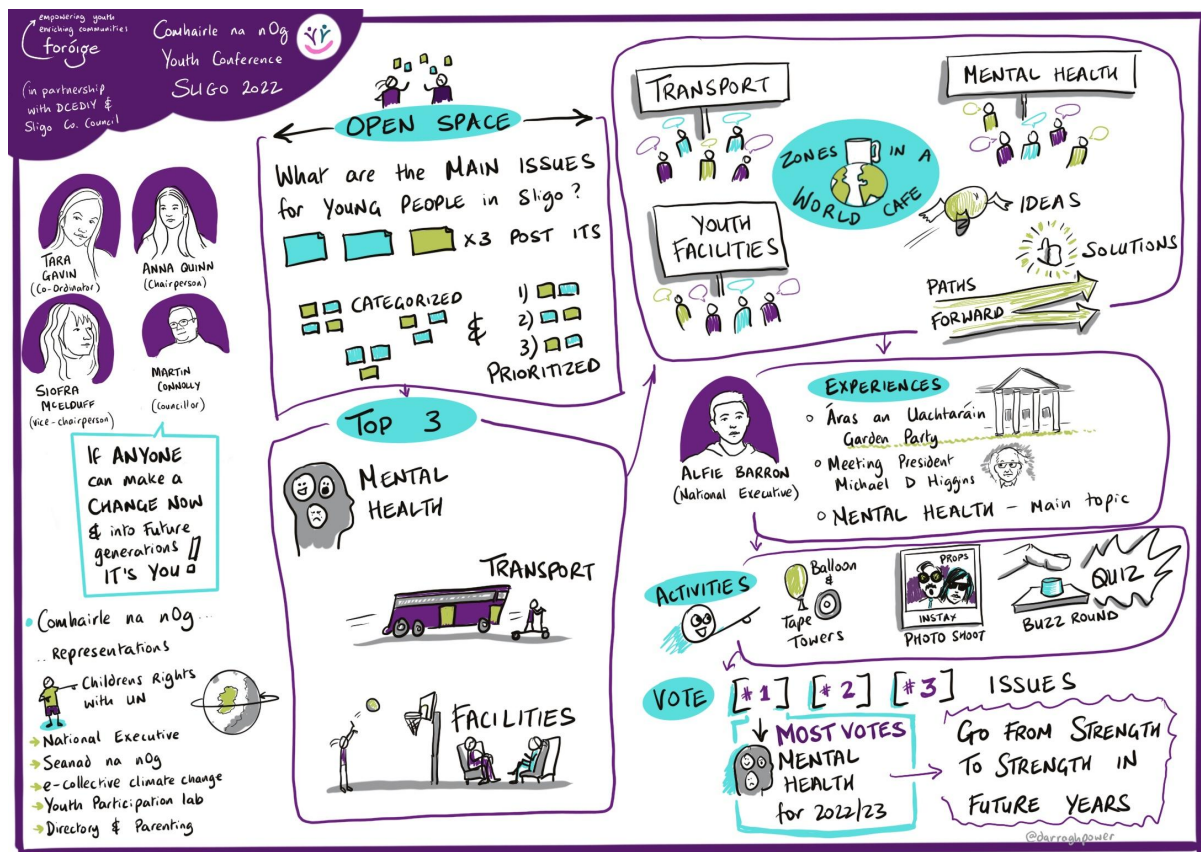
To improve on these concerns, the groups explored possibilities of having “better bus systems” and availability, funding for bus shelters, possibly another train schedule (“other than to Dublin”), introducing more accessibility in rural areas, cheaper bus/train fares, safer transportation (more road safety modules), and more theory test locations (possibly as a school initiative).

## **3. Youth Facilities:**

Many people raised that there is “nothing to do” in Sligo. The demand for more free communal areas for young people to “hang out” at a safe space in Sligo was very high. As regular cafes cost, the groups discussed having a youth cafe in Sligo where young people didn’t have to pay for anything and just hang out with their friends. The lack of access in rural areas also came up for some young people, as well as lack of informative facilities. A group of young people also mentioned that they “don’t know much about any facilities” referring to lack of advertising. There was much talk around the rundown buildings and vacant properties that have the potential to be used as a youth space or hangout area. Barriers that came up were parent restrictions, too much time on school studies, and weather permitting for free outdoor activities with friends.

Some solutions the groups discussed were a form of a community & communal space, better wifi connections around Sligo, a space in the shopping centres for youths, 16-18 year old nightlife events, more arcades, using the derelict spaces as youth spaces, more social clubs, student IDs for secondary students and student discounts, updating the town including more public toilets, better study areas in local libraries, and the demand for a youth cafe!

## Graphic summary production created for Comhairle na nOg following AGM:



## Feedback from Young People on the day:



### *Special thanks*

As Youth Officer with Sligo Comhairle na nÓg, I would like to extend a special thanks to:

- All those who gave up their time to support, attend and facilitate the event. Your encouragement, support and expertise is greatly appreciated.
- The support of the Community & Economic Development staff officer from Sligo County Council, Geraldine Timlin, and a warm welcome to Sligo Comhairle na nÓg's new link person to the Sligo County Council, Kate Gibbons, Senior Staff Officer.
- Schools and youth organisations from around the county for their support leading up to the day and dedication in sending delegates, without which, we would not have had such a great turnout of young people participating in the AGM.
- Sligo Champion Photographer, Carl Brennan, who photographed the event.
- Staff of the Radisson Hotel, Sligo, who looked after our needs both on the day and during the planning stages of the event.
- My colleagues in Foróige who, as always, come up trumps on the day and lend a helping hand - thank you!
- Darragh Power for creating a graphic summary of this year's AGM!

Tara Gavin

Comhairle na nÓg Youth Officer, Foróige

Contact [Tara.gavin@foroige.ie](mailto:Tara.gavin@foroige.ie)