



Responding To Needs, Driving Change

How Is Our Neighbourhood?

**A Study of Community Engagement, Connectivity and
Provision in Tallaght West.**

Executive Summary

CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

2017

Background

'How is Our Neighbourhood?' (HION) aimed to explore the lived experiences of people who reside and work within the physical and social environment of Tallaght West which incorporates Fettercairn, Brookfield, Killinarden and Jobstown, all of which have been designated as disadvantaged. Specifically, it sought to understand views of the neighbourhood (both positive and negative), people's sense of connection to the areas they live in, and their views on key issues for adults and children living in the area.

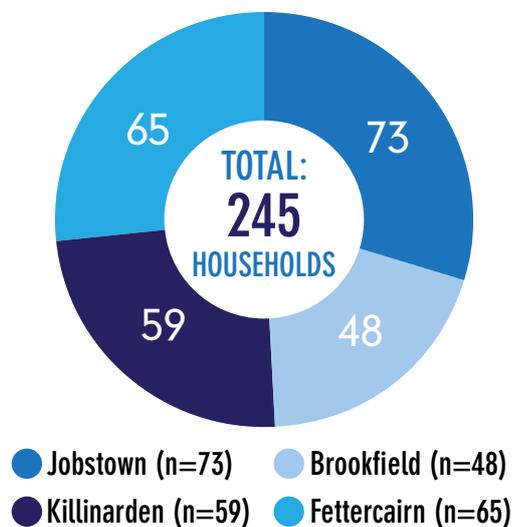
HION is the third in a series of community surveys undertaken by CDI. The previous studies were 'How are Our Kids?' (HAOK; 2004) and 'How are Our Families?' (HAOF; 2012). HION is based on consultation with three core stakeholder groups: residents in Tallaght West; young people in the area, and those working (paid and unpaid) in the community.

Study Method

While each of the CDI community surveys has had a different focus, the methodology has been largely consistent. As in the previous studies, HION took a mixed-methods approach using surveys and Focus Groups, the former being undertaken by local residents (Household Survey) and young people (Youth Survey), and the latter involving young people, service providers and community leaders. Along with items directly relevant to the specific aims of the study, the surveys also included questions from the previous CDI surveys (HAOK, 2004; HAOF, 2012). Where possible, information was collated across all three CDI community surveys/time points.

Study Participants

Household Survey: A quota sampling method was used, which ensured that the sample was reasonably representative of households in the neighbourhood. A sample size of 245 households enabled a meaningful analysis of the data and the generalisation of findings to the neighbourhood. Local residents were sampled from the four areas of Tallaght West, (Jobstown (n=73), Brookfield (n=48), Killinarden (n=59), and Fettercairn (n=65)), totalling 245 households. As in previous surveys and reflecting participatory research methods, the data were collected by peer researchers. These were trained fieldworkers drawn from local residents.



150 SURVEYS

Youth Survey: This survey used a purposive sample of secondary schools and youth organisations. A total of 150 surveys were carried out with young people aged between 15 and 17 in the presence of either the principal researcher and/or a class teacher.

Focus Groups: Focus Groups were carried out with three groups: young people, service providers and community leaders. A total of three Focus Groups with service providers took place, focusing on key issues

faced by frontline staff in their work and were facilitated by the researcher. Three Focus Groups were also carried out with young people, again facilitated by the researcher. Participants for the Youth Focus Groups were drawn from two local schools and two youth organisations in Tallaght West. Two Focus Groups were carried out with Community Leaders, including individuals actively involved in neighbourhood and community groups central to the daily lives of people in the area. They were invited to a Focus Group to explore their own history within the community of Tallaght West; their perceptions of neighbourhood issues and the needs of children and families; how they perceive needs have changed over time, and the impact of a challenging economic environment.



For more information about the methods used in this study, the full report can be downloaded from the CDI website: www.twcdi.ie

Findings

Overall, feedback about living and working in Tallaght West was positive, with community spirit, a sense of belonging and strong local connections all being cited as area strengths. A small but consistent proportion of respondents did not share these experiences, and did not feel the neighbourhood is a safe or welcoming place. There were no clear factors influencing these very different responses. Finally, there were similar dynamics amongst service providers and residents in terms of their perceived capacity to influence decisions. The latter reported limited involvement in their communities and did not feel they had the opportunity to change the environment; whilst the former expressed dissatisfaction with management approaches and suggested a disconnect between front line experiences and high level decision making.

Key Findings from Residents

- Residents had broadly positive experiences and views of their neighbourhood, including neighbours, family and friends, and a strong sense of belonging. Strong informal support structures were noteworthy, both in terms of receiving and giving care and support. Connections with family and friends emerged as an important source of support and interaction.
- Strong connections and attachments were highlighted in terms of shared views and value systems amongst neighbours, with residents tending to feel integrated and a part of the neighbourhood.
- Safety was a significant concern for local residents, with a considerable percentage reporting that they did not feel safe in their neighbourhood.
- Residents believed anti-social behaviour is increasing. Vandalism, crime and anti-social behaviour, including drug-taking and alcohol consumption, were perceived as significant neighbourhood problems that need to be addressed. Environmental issues such as rubbish and littering were also widely perceived as problematic.
- There was very limited participation by local residents in terms of volunteering and taking part in community activities, with many residents feeling they did not have the opportunity to contribute in the way they would like and believing they had little or no influence over what their neighbourhood is like.
- Residents demonstrated significant resilience in the face of personal and life stressors, such as difficulties with neighbours, family members or bereavement.

Key Findings from Young People

- The research demonstrated that young people had largely positive views of their neighbourhood; had a significant sense of belonging, and respondents perceived it as a friendly place comprising supportive friends and neighbours.
- While most young people felt at home in their neighbourhood and perceived it as a good place to live, a significant minority did not share these views, and perceived that people generally do not get along together.
- Respondents broadly believed they do not have influence over what their neighbourhood is like, and often perceived they are stigmatised because of where they live. Feeling a sense of pride in their neighbourhood was challenging in light of a stigmatised identity.
- Young people had concerns about the local environment, safety and anti-social behaviour, including problems with littering, rubbish, crime and local gangs. Easy access to drugs and alcohol were perceived as significant challenges for young people.
- Connections with friends and family were a highly important source of support for young people, and most interaction with friends outside of school took place in informal settings.
- Social media was a highly significant part of young people's lives and an important means of staying in touch with peers. Engagement on social media accounted for a large part of young people's daily activities.
- In terms of education, good classmates were crucial to a positive school experience. Respondents had notably high expectations for their educational attainment and perceived teachers and parents as sharing these.
- While there was significant awareness of local facilities, there were mixed opinions of these, with a need to improve the maintenance and development of facilities in neighbourhoods being suggested in order to meet the needs of young people living there.
- While young people viewed themselves as being in good health, feeling under pressure and stressed was a frequent challenge.
- In spite of perceived neighbourhood challenges, the young people demonstrated resilience, hope and aspiration for their futures, particularly in terms of maintaining relationships, connections and securing employment.



Key Findings from Service Providers and Community Leaders

- Service providers were broadly satisfied with their role, expressing a strong sense of commitment, motivation and passion, and interagency cooperation provided good opportunities to collaborate and respond to needs.
- A strong and established community and a vibrant community spirit were identified as key assets of Tallaght West.
- Improved educational attainment among young people and improved accessibility of vulnerable groups to medical services were identified as significant achievements by service providers.
- An acute disconnect between senior management and those service providers engaged with local communities was identified, and deep frustration concerning the impact of this was perceived as the disempowerment and hindering of community engagement and efficient service delivery.
- A need for a community development model that embraces a community voice and promotes engagement was highlighted. Developing strong relationships with residents and communities was a notable challenge as residents were reluctant to engage with service providers.
- Barriers to community engagement could be addressed by service providers having greater awareness and understanding of residents' perceptions of their own needs, and encouraging greater personal responsibility and motivation.
- Developing a sense of connectedness and attachment among young people within their communities was a challenge which needs to be addressed, in part, by early intervention.
- A lack of resources for service providers was presented as a chronic and persistent challenge which has a detrimental impact on local communities.
- Homelessness and the housing crisis were major concerns among service providers for children and families.
- Deep concerns were raised around the issue of safety in Tallaght West, as service providers presented it as a volatile and intensely unsafe environment in which aggression and violence have escalated in recent years. This impacts on service providers' abilities to carry out their duties in local communities.
- Social vulnerability, drugs and crime, and the exposure of children to such an unsafe environment created further challenges for service providers.



Recommendations

- Service providers reported being under-resourced to meet the needs of vulnerable families and children, and suggested an approach which places a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.
- Earlier intervention was highlighted by service providers and local volunteers as crucial to instilling a greater sense of personal responsibility and confidence in young people.
- There is a need to encourage and promote increased engagement with community services among local residents, through greater awareness and understanding of the specific needs of parents and families, and increased flexibility in meeting their needs whilst encouraging personal responsibility.
- A need was identified for increased Garda resources in the area and more action to tackle anti-social behaviour and local environmental issues such as littering.
- The research highlights a need to articulate and demonstrate a model of community development whereby community members are actively engaged in planning and development, and empowered to take collective action to build stronger and more resilient neighbourhoods. Understanding the factors impacting on the perceived limited engagement to date, and addressing these, needs to be central to any strategy to improve community participation.
- A move away from traditional 'top down' management styles to ones which more closely engage with, and reflect the experiences of, residents and front-line staff, is clearly sought by service providers.
- Significant cohorts of up to 20% of residents have poor connections with their neighbourhood, experience multiple stressors and have limited support systems. Better understanding and identifying of this group is critical to enabling targeted interventions which engage with the most vulnerable families.



Conclusion

In summary, a strong sense of community support and spirit exist in Tallaght West, with residents generally feeling positive about their neighbourhood and having a sense of belonging to it. Responses from adults and young people were very similar, and their key concerns were also echoed by service providers. These focus largely on safety, resources and effective engagement at multiple levels.

Whilst overall, there is positive feedback on the dynamics, connections and engagement in Tallaght West, there is a small but consistent cohort of respondents who appeared to struggle more, connect less, and experience greater levels of difficulty. Supporting families and children requires an in-depth understanding of the challenges they encounter, recognition of the resources and capacities within neighbourhoods, and an understanding of how gaps and discrepancies between challenges and resources can be best addressed and developed.

References:

Childhood Development Initiative, (2004). *How are our Kids?* Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

Childhood Development Initiative. (2012). *How is our Family?* Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

Childhood Development Initiative, (2017). *How is our Neighbourhood?* Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

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