

‘Waiting, Waiting, Waiting’

Stories of Young People Living in Direct Provision Centres

Background

In 2021 Youth Work Ireland and IHREC began working on a project that would gather the voices and stories of young people aged 14-24 years living in Direct Provision Centres in Ireland. The aim of the project was to provide a safe space for these young people to talk about their lives, the challenges they face and their hopes and aspirations for the future. The short film ‘Waiting, Waiting, Waiting’ was launched in August in the Irish Film Institute by Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and ex-Miss Ireland and ex-DP Resident Pamela UBA

This resource will support teachers to talk about the Direct Provision Centres in Ireland with their class groups, and to provide a space for young people to reflect more on the human rights of all young people growing up in Ireland today. It also features a number of activities that teachers can do with their classes to raise the awareness and understanding of human rights issues

The UN Declaration of Human Rights states that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. However, for a young person seeking asylum this is not always the case, even in Ireland, with this group of young people facing isolation, discrimination, racism and infringement of their human rights.

What is an asylum seeker - Asylum seekers are people who have fled their country and arrive in Ireland seeking refugee status. This is a legal process that can take several years.

Why do they come to Ireland - Asylum seekers come to Ireland as they fear persecution in their home – this can be due to war, political unrest, economic insecurity or more recently climate change.

Where do they come – The majority of asylum seekers come to Ireland from Syria, Nigeria, Georgia, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Myanmar, Eastern Europe and more recently Ukraine

What is the International Protection System in Ireland - The IPS (International Protection System) in Ireland grants asylum seekers similar rights to Irish residents such as the rights to

education and health. Recently they have also been granted the right to work – but with some stipulations. People seeking asylum are housed in Direct Provision Centres around Ireland.

What is the Direct Provision System – The Direct Provision System (DP System) is a system of state provided temporary accommodation for asylum seekers where they stay in while their applications are being processed. The DP Centres tend to be hotels, hostels and other accommodations units run by privately owned companies. People living in DP Centres are provided with accommodation and a small allowance - As of April 2020 adults received €38.30 per week to live on and children €29.80. People living in these centres get to attend Primary and Secondary schools. There are restrictions on young asylum seekers getting into Third Level.

DP Centres were introduced as an emergency measure back in 2000. There has been much criticism about the human rights of people living in the centres and in 2020 the Government announced plans to phase the out-accommodation centres by 2024. However, in 2022 Minister O’Gorman announced that this deadline will not be achieved.

Criticism of the DP Centre System

The DP Centre system has been widely criticised by human rights organisations and bodies both in Ireland and internationally because of some the following –

- Length of time people are there – it was originally to be 6 months, but people are living there for years and years with the average waiting time to have your application processed is about 2 years with many people living there for much longer
- The standards of living and accommodation is very bad – considered inhuman and degrading
- People are required to share facilities / rooms
- Lack of independence – with unannounced room inspections by guards and sign in and sign out requirements – with residents not having their own keys.
- Quality and choice of food is bad– with most having canteen style cooking facilities – so residents don’t have any choice over food.
- Locations of the DP Centres – these tend to be outside of towns with limited transport which had a detrimental effect on young people taking part in extra curricula activities or social outings.
- Centres are operated on a ‘for profit’ basis
- There is very little access to leisure facilities for children such as playgrounds.
- When a young person reaches 18 they have to transition out of the DP Centre and can be send anywhere – which can mean they lose contact with their friends, social workers, etc..
- It can be difficult to find a doctor who will take on new patients – many centers are located in rural areas where there is a shortage of GPs – some young people suffering trauma from their lived experiences need a more multi-disciplinary care and this is hard to source.
- If a young person gets into college and don’t have their residency stamps they will be considered an international student and so face huge fees.

Some Facts about the DP Centre System in Ireland

- There are currently approximately **7000** people living in DP Centres with children making up **30%**
- Young people from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds including asylum seekers and refugees make up approx. **17% of all young people in Ireland**
- Asylum seekers are 10 times more likely to suffer from PTSD and 3 times more likely to suffer from psychosis
- **53%** of asylum seekers in DP reported to have been **tortured before their arrival in Ireland**
- Young asylum seekers and refugees have been shown to have **higher levels of stress and anxiety including post-traumatic stress disorder**
- A number of asylum seekers and refugees will have missed out on schooling in their home countries due to **war, conflict and displacement.**
- Average length of time spent in Direct Provision Centres is **4 years** with many people living there for up to **8 years**
- Asylum seekers are provided with basic needs such as **food, medical care, education.**
- The Irish Government has spent up to **€1B** on Direct Provision since 2000 with much of this going to private contractors and businesses



Activities to Support Young People's Understanding and Awareness of Human Rights

Exploring My Identity

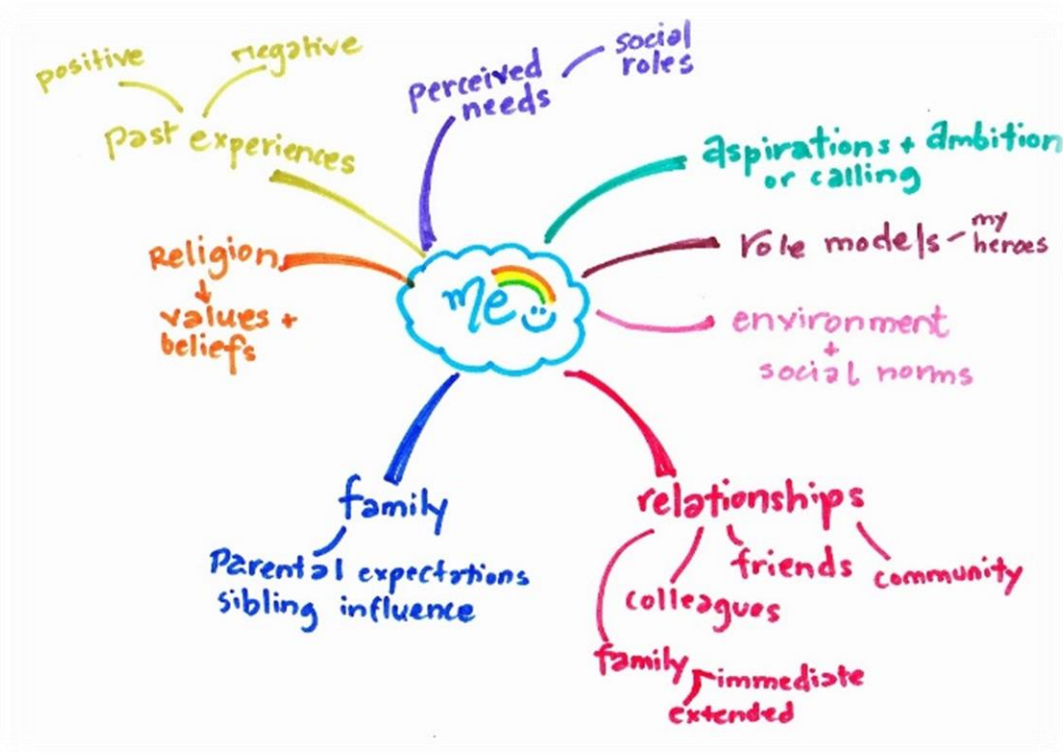
Our Identity plays an important role in how we see ourselves and how we connect and relate to others. Social identity (who we are based on membership of a group such as family, sports team, ethnicity etc...) gives us a sense of belonging, however young asylum seekers can sometimes be categorised as 'other' or grouped into an identity that they don't recognise in themselves. These activities can help groups or individuals to begin to tease out their identity / identities and surface not only what makes us our self (qualities, belief, personality) but also what we have in common (belonging, culture, family values).

What is Identity?

Aim: To explore our identity

Materials: Flip chart paper, pens and markers

- Ask young people to brainstorm what they think 'identity' means.
- Write identity on the whiteboard and ask young people to identify elements or categories that create our identity.
- Ask the young people to create their own identity chart using the elements or categories that they have come up with.
- They can add their own words or categories as they see fit.
- Ask them how it was doing their identity chart, was it easy, difficult, how did it make them feel, how did they view themselves?



Who Am I?

Aim: Identity is an ongoing process, and, in many cases, identities are formed within relationships. This activity gets young people to think about their identity.

Materials: Paper and pens

- Give each of young person several sheets of paper and a pen and have them write “**Who Am I**” in the centre of each of the pages.
- Get them to do a series of mind maps where they write down / sketch / doodle / draw who they perceive themselves to be in various areas and relationships of their life.

Spend a few minutes on each of the following mind map topics:

- Relationships – List all the different relationship roles that they have, such as brother, sister, son, daughter, friend, student, etc.
- Cultural – List cultural aspects of their life like religion / faith, ethnicity, language, nationality, etc.
- Likes – List their favourite activities, hobbies, music, sports, TV shows, etc.
- Dislikes – List the activities, music, sports, TV shows, etc. that they don’t care for
- Concerns – List what worries or concerns them.
- Hopes – List things that they want to do in the future, such as careers and personal goals.

Who are You?

With their mind maps in hand, have them go around the group and compare who they are with the other young people. Who do they have most in common with? Are they surprised by what they find?

The similarities will help the young people find common ground, gel more as a group and learn about each other’s cultures and traditions. Sharing concerns and hopes for their future will build empathy and understanding among the diverse groups.

Exploring our identities: Individual and Group Identities

Aim: Exploring individual and group identities and recognising commonalities

Materials: Pens and post-it notes

Ask the young people to write down five things about themselves on post-it notes. These five pieces of information about themselves can be about their individual characteristics (colour hair, eyes, etc), hobbies, likes/dislikes, teams/groups they belong to, interests, etc. Explain that these are all aspects of identity.

Once they have written these five things, ask them to stick the post-its to themselves. They then walk around the room and look for post-its which have similar information written on them. They form groups with the young people they find things in common with. In the new groups, they decide which aspects of their identity fits in with the group and which don’t. Use the following questions to aid discussion..

- What aspects of your identity did you focus on?
- Was it difficult to find others with similar identities?
- Which aspects of identity are people born with and which ones do we choose?

Exploring Culture and Interculture

Cultures are built upon pillars of music, dance, dress, food, beliefs, traditions etc... Cultural awareness and sharing activities of different cultures can help us learn about other cultures.

Cultural Baggage

Aim: To raise awareness of cultural differences, norms and practices.

Materials: Printout of a suitcase, pens & markers.

- Introduce the idea of cultural baggage which is habits, beliefs, customs etc.. that we carry with us from our culture that influences our outlook that can be positive and negative influences.
- Some examples would be dress, language, ways of greeting people, food, traditions, religious rituals, music etc....
- Share some of your cultural baggage as an example and ask the group to draw a big suitcase on the provided piece of paper
- Ask the young people to write down 3 examples of cultural baggage they are carrying in their suitcase
- Ask if anybody wants to share reflecting on how greater awareness of culture can help us understand and accept differences.

Just by Looking at Me

Aim: To encourage young people to understand the importance of looking beyond appearances, and to show that there is much more to a person than what we see from their appearance. It also provides a safe space for young people to ask respectful questions about different cultures and traditions

- Explain to the group that when we allow ourselves to judge someone based on their appearances, we miss out on getting to know the real person and important information about them.
- Ask them to think about why certain parts of their identity are important to them, and important to share.
- Form a circle with chairs or sitting on the floor if participants are able.
- Ask the group to think of the following statements.

“My name is ___ and I am from ___.

One thing you cannot tell just by looking at me is ___.

One thing that people assume about my religion / culture / ethnicity?

This is important for me to tell you because ___.”

Activities Human and Social Rights

My Human Rights

Aim: To support young people to think and learn more about human rights and their entitlement to them.

Material: Worksheets, pens and markers

- Print out the selection of statements from the UNCRC and cut them into individual notes.
- Put them in a hat or bowl and ask each person to pick out one (like a lucky dip).
- Ask the young person to read it out and ask them what they think it means.
- Can they think of when or if this right has been withheld from someone

UNCRC Overview Statements

Every child has the right to life.	Every child has the right to privacy.
Every child has the right to a name and a nationality.	Every child has the right to education.
Every child has the right to be with their family or with those who will care for them best.	Every child has the right to be kept safe and not to be hurt or neglected.
Every child has the right to enough food and clean water.	No child should be used as cheap labour or as a soldier.
Every child has the right to an adequate standard of living.	Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly.
Every child has the right to health care.	Every child has the right to speak their own language and practise their own religion.
Every child with a disability has the right to special care and support.	Every child has the right to say what they think and to be heard.
Every child has the right to relax and play.	Every child has the right to meet their friends and join groups.

Human Rights Through Pictures and Actions

Aim: To discuss and raise awareness about human rights and to begin to explore the role young people have in promoting human rights.

Materials: Pictures from magazines, the internet or newspaper and the Issues sheet

- Collect and print out pictures that represent human rights and issues that relate to asylum seekers.
- Distribute them among the young people and ask them to pick 1-3 pictures that touch them somehow or raise questions.
- Then you do a round so that everyone can present what pictures they picked and why.
- You can add what you think picture really represents (for example if it is from a certain situation or represents a campaign or certain human right) and you can then discuss about the topics of the pictures.

Following on from this what can young people do to promote human rights? Give each young person a printout of the issue sheet and ask them to fill it in – alternatively this can be done as a collective if the young people wish.

Human Rights Issues

WHAT is your issue? What is wrong and what needs to change?
What human rights are involved? Are any rights being denied?

↓ ↓ ↓

WHY does this issue occur?

↓ ↓ ↓

WHO can help sort out this issue?

↓ ↓ ↓

HOW could you persuade them or work with them to bring about change? What action could you take?

Exploring Human Rights

Aim: To initiate debate and discussion among young people around the UN DHR

Materials - Print out of the below

- Ask the young people to vote or choose what they perceive to be the most important human right.
- Lead the group in a discussion about rights and their rationale for choosing

SUMMARY OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

What do you think are the most important rights? Mark your top five here.

Rank	Right
<input type="text"/>	Every child has the right to life
<input type="text"/>	Every child has the right to a name and nationality
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to be with their family or with those who will care for them best
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to enough food and clean water
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to an adequate standard of living
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to health care
<input type="text"/>	Children with a disability have the right to special care and training
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to play
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to free education
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to be kept safe and not to be hurt or neglected
<input type="text"/>	Children must not be used as cheap workers or as soldiers
<input type="text"/>	Children must be allowed to speak their own language and practise their own religion and culture
<input type="text"/>	Children have the right to say what they think and to meet together to express their views

References and Further Reading

[8 Steps to Inclusive Youth Work, NYCI](#)

[Access All Areas, NYCI](#)

[Bridges and Barriers to Unity: A toolkit for youth work to promote diversity and inclusion](#)

[Croc doc April 03 \(amnesty.ie\)](#)

[Learning About Human Rights, Amnesty UK](#)

[Music for Youth ad A4 \(amnesty.ie\)](#)

[SCI Building Bridges](#)

[The Youth Work Ireland Support and Advocacy Model of Practice](#)

[Youth Work with Young People in Direct Provision and those Seeking Asylum](#)