Evaluation of the work of the
Mayo Children's Initiative

Executive Summary
and
Full Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of a formal evaluation of the work of the Mayo Children's Initiative (MCI) undertaken by a research team from the University of Lincoln. The data for the evaluation was collected between May 2010 and April 2011, and as such the picture presented reflects a year in the relatively early life of MCI (established in March 2009). The work has since evolved significantly.

MCI was the result of several years of community organising in which the role of the Mayo Women's Support Services (MWSS) and St Vincent de Paul Society (VDP) had been pivotal. Research undertaken to support this work, most notably the study by Buckley *et al.* (2006), *Listen to Me!* highlighted the importance of taking the specific needs of children affected by domestic violence more seriously, and made a range of recommendations to establish a more comprehensive and coherent structure of support. Specifically it highlighted four areas of priority:

1. To compile a services database.
2. To establish a 'Children's Initiative' providing a coordinated range of services directly to children exposed to domestic violence.
3. To work with schools, providing a programme of awareness raising and early intervention.
4. To act as lobbyists/advocates for young people living with domestic violence.

(Buckley *et al.*, 2006: 60-61)

Some of the research undertaken was supported financially by the Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and since then AP has been central to supporting and resourcing MCI in its current form. MCI was established to meet the specific needs of the target population within County Mayo. County Mayo is a geographically large area within the Republic of Ireland. It is the country's third largest county and occupies an area of 2,159 square miles. The original project proposal (MCI, 2008) identified over 21,000 families with children living within County Mayo, and a population of nearly 31,000 people under the age of 18. Seventy per cent of the population live in rural areas and parts of the county are amongst the least populated and most isolated areas within the European Union.

The original proposal identified the following broad aims:

> This Initiative will allow for the development of an innovative approach to domestic violence and negative family conflict and their impact on children. It will include awareness-raising and information-giving to emphasise the right of children to live free from violence and abuse; to recognise the impact of both domestic violence and negative conflict on families, and provide specific guidance on conflict reduction and resolution skills and information on where and how to access support services. The needs and opinions of children will inform the development of this Initiative (MCI, 2008).

Since its inception MCI's work has been varied, but can be categorised around three priority areas:

1. Providing early intervention and support for young people in relation to issues of domestic violence and negative family conflict. This work has been largely undertaken within schools, and is based around the *Protective Behaviours (PB)* programme. This is a programme designed 'to build safer communities by promoting the right of everyone to feel safe all the time' (Protective Behaviours UK, 2011);
2. Raising awareness about issues of domestic violence, negative family conflict and the concomitant impact on young people. This awareness raising set out to focus on young people themselves, the wider community and professionals working in relevant agencies;
3. Providing specialist support and interventions to young people experiencing domestic violence or negative conflict within their family.

This evaluation is focused on four areas of activity that flow from the above priorities; namely, *PB* work in schools; awareness raising amongst young people, professionals and the community; the development of inter-agency working between relevant organisations and the provision of specialist support and therapeutic interventions.

The findings presented here are the result of a mixed methods research design in which both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from a range of sources. The complete data are presented in the full Evaluation Report, and readers seeking more detail are encouraged to consult this document. The research team were committed to ensuring that the full range of community perspectives were represented in the evaluation and therefore considerable emphasis has been placed on involving young people, parents and practitioners.

Summary of Findings:

Protective Behaviours:

The timing of the evaluation prevented a full pre- and post-test evaluation of the *PB* programme however the substantial data collected does point to this programme being a highly effective element of MCI's work. Data indicated:

- Students enjoyed the *PB* work – they engaged with it and were enthused by it. Post-primary students reported they felt challenged by it. At both primary and post-primary levels students reported that they valued the innovative approaches to teaching and learning. For example, primary students valued the artistic and creative elements of the programme, whereas post-primary students reported that they valued opportunities for open discussion and questioning. One student commented '*I've learnt there isn't always a right answer*'.
- Core *PB* messages were identified, recognised and internalised by students. Where students were surveyed some considerable time after the delivery of the programme there was clear evidence that students had retained the core messages of the programme. For example, primary aged students showed high levels of recognition of the three core messages (see footnote) delivered as part of the primary *PB* initiative, whilst post-primary pupils identified issues relating to domestic violence as the most important aspects of the programme they had received.
- Students valued this work – within focus groups students of all ages indicated they recognised the merit of the work they were involved in. For primary school students benefits were perceived to be more immediate (the need to deal with unsafe situations they may experience now), whereas for post-primary students there was a wider recognition of being equipped with skills for life that may have a relevance in future, if not immediately.
- Some of the most effective *PB* work with young people took place in extra-curricular and out-of-school contexts, indicating a flexible approach to delivery is extremely helpful.

Students typically wanted more time to devote to the issues raised by *PB* activity in schools, with older students wanting more time to discuss the complex subjects raised within classes. This raises wider issues of 'fit' within the curriculum, at both primary and post-primary level. The evaluation highlights the considerable difficulties associated with trying to integrate a project such

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1. *There is nothing so awful or so small that we cannot talk about it with someone;*
2. *We all have the right to feel safe all the time;*
3. *Others have the right to feel safe with us.*

as *PB* into schools that already face substantial pressures from many sources, not least of which is an over-crowded curriculum. These issues are very complex and the full evaluation report includes a supplementary paper that sets out the issues in more detail and invites much wider discussion of the points it seeks to raise.

Awareness raising:

MCI is committed to raising the profile of issues relating to domestic violence and negative family conflict amongst young people, parents, education, health and social care professionals, and amongst the wider community. During the course of the evaluation the point was made by several interviewees that this is not an easy goal to accomplish as many people may, for a range of reasons, be reluctant to engage with the issues raised by MCI's work.

Arguably the most significant aspect of MCI's work in this area relates to the impact on young people and teachers. Coverage of *PB* work in schools has ensured that a very large number of young people have been introduced to the ideas raised by MCI programmes. The ability, for example, to work across whole year groups in post-primary schools ensures that a significant proportion of young people can access the *PB* programme. Where this can be repeated on an annual basis then there is the possibility of ensuring this becomes a core entitlement (see supplementary report for a fuller discussion of these issues). Furthermore, MCI's insistence that training about domestic violence is delivered (by MCI) to all teachers where schools participate in the *PB* programme ensures a heightened awareness of these issues amongst staff. Teachers reported considerable support for addressing these issues in schools, and valued the work of MCI colleagues in this regard. However, against this must be set the danger that coverage of such issues becomes 'compartmentalised' and is perceived to be the terrain of 'outside experts'.

The project was also successful in raising relevant issues with parents, with this generally being achieved indirectly through children. For example, 81% of primary aged students indicated they had discussed their MCI work at school with their parents, whilst the corresponding figure for older children was 34%. In focus group interviews with parents it was suggested that there were wider opportunities to engage with parents through extending *PB* work in schools and this is something for the project to consider. However, MCI's own efforts in this regard had not always met with success, despite their best endeavours, and this further attests to the complexities involved in developing home-school partnerships around sensitive issues. These conclusions were supported by MCI's efforts to raise awareness amongst the wider community through, for example, engaging the local media and presenting talks in local churches. Other initiatives undertaken included significant work during the 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence Against Women and the development of a Young Social Innovators' Project that engaged young people in highlighting

issues of domestic violence. There were therefore many successes in this area, although wider evidence from surveys undertaken indicated that a focus on this work will be an on-going need.

Interagency working:

MCI has connections with a wide range of agencies including statutory, voluntary and community bodies that are working with people at a number of levels. Many of these agencies have shown direct commitment to the project, by providing high level representation on MCI's Steering Committee. The representation of key stakeholder groups on the Steering Committee means that it functions effectively as a form of multi-agency working, whilst also ensuring representation from across the geographical area.

> *Certainly … it has enhanced the workings of the agencies together around this issue ... we would have worked with these agencies on different kinds of issues … but I don't think that they have ever [come together] … around this issue for children … they have come together around the issue for adults and for women and things like that but never … not specifically for children … certainly MCI has greatly helped that … I don't think it would have happened without it …* (Steering Committee member).

To some extent the emergence of a new organisation has been seen as an addition to an already complicated network of statutory and third sector agencies. Work in this area had clearly taken a significant step forward following the multi-agency planning day in 2009 and it may be that another similar event will help further develop thinking and practice.

The evaluation has shown that MCI's work to ensure that 'children in Mayo will receive a consistent response from all agencies working to support them' (Medium Term Objective - Logic Model MCI-16391), has been fulfilled in part. However, it is recognised that there is more work needed to establish further connections and strengthen existing relationships where weaker links currently exist.

Therapeutic interventions:

In addition to the work described above, a central element of MCI's work has been the provision of a range of therapeutic interventions to support young people. These were born out of recognition that MCI's *PB* work, and its wider commitment to raising awareness in relation to domestic violence and negative family conflict, were likely to generate an increase in demand for individual support for young people. Three forms of provision have been established: one is the provision of specific

interventions based on play and art therapy; the second is the provision of a more generic counselling service; and the third is the use of a clinical psychologist provided direct by MCI to work with children with specific needs. Both the first two services are based within Castlebar, the former at the Mayo Women's Support Service and the latter at the town's Family Centre. A clear advantage of this approach is that it embeds MCI within existing and robust community organisations, supporting multi-agency working and awareness raising. The third type of provision is brought in on an 'as needed' basis and delivered by a clinical psychologist.

The MCI's support for counselling provision is clearly a valued resource, with MCI supporting a counsellor for two days per week. However, as with other features of the therapeutic interventions, there are some difficulties in trying to assess the impact of this provision, and the direct contribution of MCI. Through its range of therapeutic interventions, MCI has been able to offer services to meet different levels of need. However, this has often been reactive, potentially out of necessity, rather than proactive and strategic. In order to inform the future development of therapeutic interventions it would be useful for MCI to explore the possibility of carrying out a thorough needs analysis with multi-agency partners, to enable a more proactive, planned approach to the enhancement and further development of appropriate services.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Undertake a strategic review of the future development of *PB* work in schools. It is suggested this may be supported by considering the questions raised in the supplementary report to this evaluation. It is strongly recommended that primary and post-primary school teachers and leaders are engaged in this debate.

Recommendation 2: Continue to explore ways in which extra-curricular approaches and contexts may be used to develop *PB* work. Such an approach may involve a mixed economy of *PB* work in school and non-school environments.

Recommendation 3: Develop robust instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, for evaluating *PB* work in schools that will allow student opinion to inform future development. Explore also alternative ways in which the student voice might be more effectively incorporated into the programme's development.

Recommendation 4: In association with teachers in schools, develop a strategy for engaging parents in the *PB* programme. *PB* offers an excellent opportunity to engage with parents and the wider community, but the means of exploiting this potential needs to be developed. Such an approach will need to be flexible, and developed in conjunction with teachers, in order to accommodate the specific contexts of schools and their environments.

Recommendation 5: Continue to raise awareness of MCI's core issues with staff in relevant agencies. This could be achieved in part by organising another multi-agency event, such as the highly successful one in 2009.

Recommendation 6: Reaffirm MCI's purpose in relation to supporting young people who are experiencing domestic violence or negative family conflict. To develop this purpose in order to help better articulate MCI's own distinctive role, and its relation to partner organisations and agencies.

Recommendation 7: Continue to develop links with other agencies, and help develop a shared understanding across agencies of the issues facing young people in relation to domestic violence and negative family conflict. Devote particular attention to where these links may be weaker or less developed.

Recommendation 8: Monitor the implementation of the new formal referrals policy.

Recommendation 9: To consider undertaking a robust community-level needs analysis to inform an explicit strategic plan, if further therapeutic services are to be developed.

FULL REPORT - INTRODUCTION

> *I think it is really important to learn about all this stuff from an early age like ... in case it does happen to you and ... to know what to do ... if it does happen ... you know that you always have somebody to talk to ... and that there is always a way out and stuff like that ... and they just teach you ... how to deal with it ... and how to get help if it is happening ... like in your family like ... and I think it is good that you learn this from an early age ... instead of finding out about it when it is too late ...* (Female student, aged 16, talking about the work of Mayo Children's Initiative)

This report provides an evaluation of the work of the Mayo Children's Initiative (MCI) (http://www.mayochildrensinitiative.com/) in County Mayo in the Republic of Ireland. MCI emerged from community organising in County Mayo in relation to the needs of children affected by domestic violence (see page 12 for further details about the project's history and context). The project was formally established in March 2009 with funding provided by the Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) (http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/), an organisation dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. AP's goals for children and youth in Ireland can be summarised as follows:

Children & Youth Programme Goals in the Republic of Ireland
- Promote the value of prevention and early intervention in the lives of children and young people, and increase the evidence base for effective service delivery.
- Advance children's rights and full implementation of the UN Convention, by supporting advocacy and campaigns, building alliances, and developing youth leadership and civic engagement.

    (details at http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/children-youth-republic-ireland)

To meet the needs of all children and young people there is a need to support the widespread adoption of evidence-based practices that focus on prevention, early intervention and the provision of timely and high quality services. To this end, AP was involved in funding a number of small scoping projects that were instrumental in establishing the need for this initiative. The most significant of these was work undertaken by colleagues at the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College, Dublin (Buckley *et al.*, 2006) – *Listen to Me! Children's Experience of Domestic Violence.* The report by Buckley *et al.* was instrumental in establishing the need for the type of service subsequently provided by MCI. The current report works within the commitment to being research informed, and seeks to add to the evidence base to demonstrate how services for young people affected by domestic violence and negative family conflict might most effectively be provided.

This evaluation was carried out between May 2010 and April 2011. This period was effectively the second year of the project and it is important to note that this represents work in the early stages of the project's life. The report focuses on four core areas of MCI's work as identified by its own strategic priorities:

1. The provision of early intervention and support for young people, in relation to issues of domestic violence and negative family conflict. This work has been largely undertaken within schools, and is based around the ***Protective Behaviours (PB) programme***;
2. The **raising of awareness** about issues of domestic violence, negative family conflict and the concomitant impact on young people. This awareness raising set out to focus on young people themselves, the wider community and professionals working in relevant agencies;
3. The development of **inter-agency work** in order to support a more coherent network of support for children living with domestic violence and negative family conflict;
4. The provision of specialist support and **therapeutic interventions** to young people experiencing domestic violence within their family, or negative family conflict.

In addition, there is a supplementary report which addresses a range of issues relating to MCI's work in schools. This report is added because it raises some wider questions about how MCI, and its work focused on *Protective Behaviours*, might be developed and embedded in schools. It is not an evaluation of MCI's *PB* work *per se*, and deliberately raises questions for discussion rather than seeking to provide definitive answers. Given the exploratory nature of this element of the report it was decided to present it separately.

The research undertaken adopted a mixed methods design. Data were collected in the following ways:

1. Questionnaires to primary and post-primary school children in the target schools
2. Focus group interviews with primary and post-primary school children in the target schools
3. Questionnaires to parents of those children who completed questionnaires in the target schools
4. Focus group interviews with parents
5. Semi-structured interviews with:
   - Teachers
   - Steering Committee members
   - MCI Workers
   - *Protective Behaviour* facilitators who were not direct employees of MCI
   - Professionals from related agencies such as Mayo Women's Support Services.

A full discussion of the research methods adopted and the evidence base for this evaluation are presented in the section 'Research Methodology'.

MCI PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Mayo Children's Initiative (MCI) was established in March 2009, with financial support provided by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). The stated aim of the initiative was:

> To address the needs of children affected by domestic violence and negative family conflict in Mayo by developing and implementing prevention and early intervention programmes and services (MCI, 2008).

The need for the service was identified by key community organisers, principally within the Mayo Women's Support Services (MWSS) and Saint Vincent de Paul Society (VDP), based on a recognition that there was very little specific support for children in families experiencing domestic violence in the area. Community activism with regard to these issues had existed in County Mayo over many years. The first tangible manifestation of this had been the establishment of the MWSS, ultimately in its own premises, under the auspices of the VDP. Following establishment of the MWSS, attention turned to providing services to meet the specific needs of children affected by the prevalence of domestic violence. This work commenced from within MWSS, and it is important to recognise the role of this organisation in creating the conditions from which MCI emerged. Several research studies were undertaken in order to provide an evidence base to support service provision in the County. Again, the role of MWSS in identifying the need for such research, and ensuring it was undertaken, should not be underestimated. Of these, perhaps the most significant and influential was the study by Buckley *et al.* (2006), *Listen to Me!* This report highlighted the importance of taking the specific needs of children affected by domestic violence more seriously, and made a range of recommendations to establish a more comprehensive and coherent structure of support. Specifically it highlighted four areas of priority:

- To compile a services database.
- To establish a 'Children's Initiative' providing a coordinated range of services directly to children exposed to domestic violence.
- To work with schools, providing a programme of awareness raising and early intervention.
- To act as lobbyists/advocates for young people living with domestic violence.
  (Buckley *et al.*, 2006: 60-61)

Some of the research undertaken was supported financially by the Atlantic Philanthropies and during this time negotiations began with AP to establish a specific project, based on a secure footing. Initial two year funding was confirmed in early 2009. AP funding is normally provided on a matched basis, but in this instance AP agreed to provide full funding (AP has provided the vast majority of MCI's support, although support in various forms has also been provided by VDP). Part

of the condition for funding was that the Mayo Children's Initiative would broaden its remit beyond a concern with children affected by domestic violence and include children affected by 'negative family conflict'. This broadening of MCI's role, beyond that originally envisaged by early advocates for the organisation, did cause some confusion about MCI's fundamental purpose and the tensions in this debate are apparent, to an extent, in MCI's current work. Considerable efforts have been made to tease out and reconcile what is sometimes presented as a 'creative tension', which is, however, still capable of generating a degree of confusion in some quarters.

The project was established to meet the specific needs of the target population within County Mayo. County Mayo is a geographically large area within the Republic of Ireland. It is the country's third largest county and occupies an area of 2,159 square miles. The original project proposal (MCI, 2008) identified over 21,000 families with children living within County Mayo, and a population of nearly 31,000 people under the age of 18. Seventy per cent of the population live in rural areas and parts of the county are amongst the least populated and most isolated areas within the European Union.

The original proposal identified the following broad aims:

> This Initiative will allow for the development of an innovative approach to domestic violence and negative family conflict and their impact on children. It will include awareness-raising and information-giving to emphasise the right of children to live free from violence and abuse; to recognise the impact of both domestic violence and negative conflict on families, and provide specific guidance on conflict reduction and resolution skills and information on where and how to access support services. The needs and opinions of children will inform the development of this Initiative (MCI, 2008).

Since its inception MCI's work has been varied, but can be categorised within three broad areas of priority:

1. Providing early intervention and support for young people in relation to issues of domestic violence and negative family conflict. This work has been largely undertaken within schools, and is based around the *Protective Behaviours (PB)* programme. This is a programme designed 'to build safer communities by promoting the right of everyone to feel safe all the time' (Protective Behaviours UK, 2011);
2. Raising awareness about issues of domestic violence, negative family conflict and the concomitant impact on young people. This awareness raising set out to focus on young people themselves, the wider community and professionals working in relevant agencies;

3. Providing specialist support and interventions to young people experiencing domestic violence within their family, or negative family conflict.

MCI's work was deliberately intended to focus on more remote parts of the county, starting in Erris (North Mayo) and then extending elsewhere. Early work was based in Belmullet within Erris, and subsequently developed to include Castlebar. Future plans envisage this work being extended to a range of other areas within the county (MCI, 2010).

From its inception MCI has been governed by a Steering Committee. This group was formed from many of the key stakeholders who had been instrumental in establishing the project in the first instance. MCI's Steering Committee has representation from a wide range of organisations, including the Health Service Executive, the Mayo County Childcare Committee, the Mayo Education Centre, VDP and MWSS. At the time of his research the committee was chaired by the County Childcare Co-ordinator from the Mayo County Childcare Committee. The Steering Committee has met regularly since MCI was established, and is responsible for determining the strategic direction of the organisation. MCI also has strong organisational links with the local VDP, for example formal legal and accountability responsibilities rest with the Castlebar Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and the Society acts as the employer of MCI staff. The Society also supports MCI with the provision of office accommodation.

The Mayo Children's Initiative itself is staffed by a full-time Project Manager, 1.5 project workers and a 0.5 administrative assistant with financial expertise. At different times the project has also been supported by students on professional placements whilst additional staff have been bought in, on a contract basis, to deliver different aspects of the service including *PB* facilitation and specialist counselling services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This evaluation of the Mayo Children's Initiative seeks to assess the work of the project in the light of both the project's own objectives, as set out in the initial proposal, and the subsequent strategic plan. The intention of this research is to form a judgement about the project's work in its key priority areas, and to help inform future planning and decision-making. However, there is also a desire to gain an understanding of the processes at work within the project. In summary, we are concerned with trying to establish 'what works' in relation to MCI's objectives, but also trying to identify and understand what factors help or hinder the achievement of the aspired level of impact. These aims underpin the research design adopted and described below.

In order to capture data relating to both the 'product' and the 'process' of the project, and to do so in a rigorous and robust way, we have collected data in multiple forms and from multiple perspectives. Although it is too crude to link quantitative data with 'product' evaluation, and qualitative data with the evaluation of 'process', it is the desire to capture both that has determined the use of a mixed methods approach. A detailed list of all data sources is set out at in Table 1 at the end of this section. Quantitative data, derived from surveys of all students participating in the *PB* programmes in different schools, has been collected to evaluate the impact of this element of MCI's work. Questionnaires with the parents of children in participating primary schools have also been used to establish to what extent the project has raised wider awareness of relevant issues amongst the parent population.

Interview data were collected to supplement questionnaire data where appropriate, and also to capture the detailed insights of key participants in the project. In addition to the above, documentary evidence was collected where this was relevant to the research objectives. This mostly related to extensive documentation provided by MCI but also included, for example, materials offered to us by schools.

The research design was approved within the University of Lincoln's procedures for granting ethical approval to conduct research. All participants were made aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and appropriate consents secured. Where young people were involved additional safeguards were included within the research design.

An important aim of the research has been to capture in some form the insights of all those involved in MCI's work. This has involved extensive interviews not only with people within the project (employees, Steering Committee members), but also those 'without' (teachers in schools, parents, professionals in related agencies). Given the focus of MCI's work, and its own stated aim to ensure that 'The needs and opinions of children will inform the development of this Initiative'

(MCI, 2008), the inclusion of the voices of children has similarly been central to this research design. All students participating in *PB* programmes were surveyed and, in addition, a significant number of young people were interviewed. There is an established body of research which attests to the quality of data that can be gained from listening to children (Rose, 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2005). Experience from this project supports such an approach. Thirty-three young people between the ages of 6 and 16 years were interviewed, always using a focus group format. Their responses were considered and informative. Where possible, maximum use of young people's views was made when presenting the findings.

The research team made five visits to County Mayo between May 2010 and April 2011.

All quantitative and qualitative data have been converted into electronic format and analysed using data analysis software. Questionnaire data have been input into SPSS[1] and interviews have been transcribed and then analysed using NVivo[2] software. Findings presented in this report are based on all the data collected and identified in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Data sources

Questionnaires – primary schools	95 responses (83.3% response rate)
Questionnaires – post-primary schools	238 responses (84.1% response rate)
Questionnaires – parents	53 responses (46.5% response rate)
Focus group interviews with students	26 students (between 3 and 8 in each group)
Interviews with teachers	11
Interviews with Steering Committee members	9
Interviews with related agencies	7 (includes 1 focus group)
Interviews with MCI staff	4
Interviews with *PB* facilitators	4
Interviews with providers of therapeutic interventions	2

For many of the variables collected cross-tabulations were undertaken, to see whether the age or gender of the pupils provided some explanation for the responses which were given. Hence tables were created to show (for example) what percentage of boys and girls remembered the *Protective Behaviours* programme. Where possible a χ^2 statistical test, which compares the observed frequencies with the expected frequencies, was undertaken to see if the gender and age differences which emerged from the data were significant or whether they were due to random

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[1] Computer software for analysing quantitative data
[2] Computer software for analysing qualitative data

chance. For example, random chance would indicate that when pupils were asked if they liked the *PB* programme, 50% of both boys and girls would answer "yes" and 50% "no". If 45% of boys and 80% of girls answer "yes", these observed frequencies would be compared with the expected frequencies to see if gender differences reflected real differences of opinion. In line with many social science research studies of this nature, the decision was taken to adopt a 95% confidence interval in determining whether the χ^2 results were significant. Whether or not the χ^2 statistic is significant is also determined by the degrees of freedom which vary in accordance with the number of cells in the matrix. Degrees of freedom are calculated as [(number of rows in matrix minus 1) x (number of columns in matrix minus 1)] so, referring to the previous example of gender and the extent to which students liked the *PB* programme, the degrees of freedom would be 1.

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

1. *Protective Behaviours (PB) programme*

Note – this section of the report deals with the impact of the PB programme on students. It is concerned with students' and teachers' perceptions of the programme's impact in terms of learning outcomes and the programme's potential to influence attitudes and behaviours. Within the research it was clear that the answers to the wider questions of how the PB programme 'fits' with the work of schools were wide-ranging and complex. Therefore these issues are dealt with in a supplementary paper to this report. We recommend that the issues raised in the supplementary report are discussed as part of a strategic review of the future development of PB [R1].

Protective Behaviours (PB) is a preventative training process designed for people of all ages, but used primarily with children. As Rose (2004: 25) relates, the ideas underpinning *PB* were developed in the 1970s by Peg West, a school social worker who, while working with children who had been abused, came to believe that the need for children to feel safe was fundamental to their psychological and social well-being and personal development. The *PB* programme is at the core of MCI's work. This programme represents a substantial element of MCI's activity, and affords it access to large numbers of young people. In the initial grant application, early *PB* work in schools was expected to focus on the area of Erris, North Mayo, with a view to its extension elsewhere in the county as a medium term target. Since the project has commenced, work has been undertaken in Belmullet and its environs, and in Castlebar. The programme is delivered in both the primary and post-primary phases. Within this document, reference is made to the intervention in schools as *Protective Behaviours (PB)*, however it is important to recognise that the precise nature of the intervention differs between schools and is being developed over time. The programme, depending on phase, represents a fusion of complementary material from a number of sources including the *PB* programme, material developed by Northern Ireland Women's Aid (*Helping Hands* in the primary phase and *Heading for Healthy Relationships* in the post-primary phase) and material sourced by MCI. The *PB* programme has three core messages which are central to its approach to promoting personal safety:

1. *There is nothing so awful or so small that we cannot talk about it with someone;*
2. *We all have the right to feel safe all the time;*
3. *Others have the right to feel safe with us.*

Within the primary curriculum developed by MCI the issue of domestic violence is not raised directly. However, the issue is included within the post-primary programme.

Considerable effort by the MCI team has been put into developing the *PB* support materials. In particular MCI staff have ensured that there is much greater use of the creative arts in programme delivery. These developments reflect the personal experiences of the project workers as they build up an expertise in delivering the programme, and also the need to adapt the programme to a range of audiences, recognising that pupil ages, levels of emotional maturity, group dynamics and individual school contexts all influence the nature of the delivery. Those delivering the programme need to ensure that

> *… every single person in the class has some sort of … sense of individual meaning … for whatever we are transferring or talking about … because it is so personal … it is so unique* (Project worker).

Whilst this evaluation is able to present data and draw preliminary conclusions about the impact of the programme to date, it is important to recognise that the evolving nature of the programme makes it difficult to make 'like for like' comparisons between the programme's delivery in different schools, or over time. For example, revisions made by the team to the programme in Summer 2010 ensured that the student experience in the academic year 2010-2011 looked quite different from that of 2009-2010. This has some influence on this research as the students' '*PB* experience' could have been different depending on when it was delivered. However, this is not necessarily problematic. Rather, the development work can be regarded as both inevitable and a strength of MCI's work, as the project team take prepared programmes and materials and adapt them over time to better reflect local contexts and needs. There was a recognition of the need for curriculum delivery to reflect cultural context, and to be sensitive to this (Dimmock, 2007). Within the context of the rural West of Ireland there was a recognised need to be knowledgeable about local community issues, and also to be sensitive to community norms. There was also evidence of the specific aims and ethos of MCI's *PB* work beginning to be articulated more clearly. This was expressed as going beyond a traditional concern with 'content' and providing children with a better sense of their emotional self – '*... developing an intuitive sense of yourself ...*' according to one project worker. It was also expressed in terms of the types of pedagogy adopted, with considerable emphasis placed on the importance of creativity and discussion generated through engagement in drama and art for example. We see this articulation of MCI's distinctive pedagogical contribution as a significant feature of MCI's development, and important in terms of a number of issues presented later in this report.

The decision whether or not to participate in the programme is determined by each individual school, and this can result in a slightly uneven development of the programme across particular geographical areas. This is perhaps inevitable in the early stages of the project, where it has

sometimes been necessary to adopt an opportunistic approach to securing access to schools. It was also pointed out in interviews that this is a feature of the Irish education system which is characterised by high levels of individual school autonomy, and that in such instances it can be easy for a school to decline to participate. It was further speculated that such decisions may reflect a reluctance to want to engage with those issues of central concern to MCI. However, it is clear that if the programme is to expand within the school sector then a systematic approach to engagement with schools needs to be developed [R1].

Primary school children's experiences of participating in the *PB* programme

These data are based on survey returns from the three primary schools at which the *PB* programme had been delivered in academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. In one school the *PB* programme was undertaken with a single class, based on a single year group. The other two schools were smaller rural establishments and the *PB* work was undertaken with all the children in these schools. Using disaggregated data to give school-specific results was rejected as some of the resultant cohorts had fewer than 10 respondents, hence the results from the three schools have been aggregated in this report. Survey results presented here are based on responses from 95 pupils, unless indicated otherwise.

Looking first at the demographic characteristics of the primary school pupil respondents, Figure 1 gives a percentage breakdown by gender and Figure 2 gives a percentage breakdown by age. As can be seen, 60% of the primary pupil sample were boys and 40% were girls.

Figure 1. Gender of primary school pupils
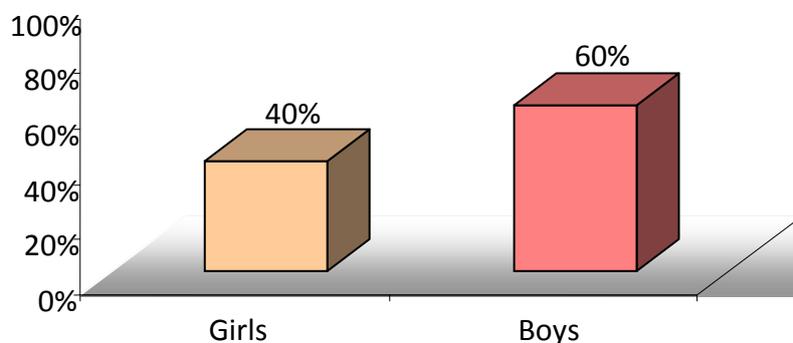
N.B. In this and all subsequent figures and charts in this analysis, the sizes of the individual pictorial elements have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number or to one decimal place. This means that the values ascribed to the individual elements may not sum exactly to 100%
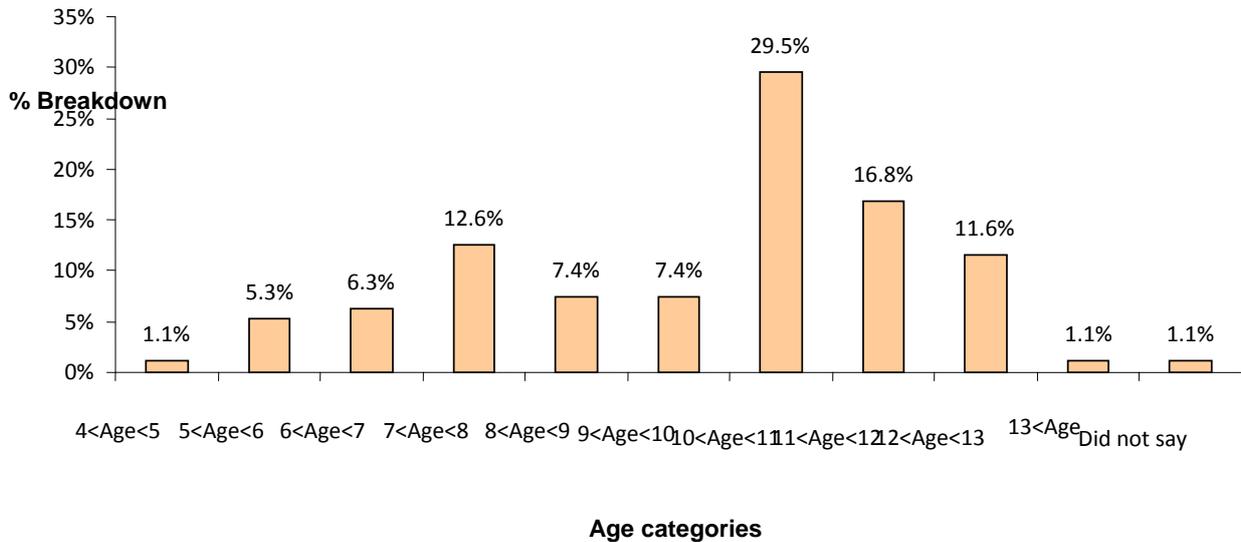
Figure 2. Age of primary school pupils

Figure 2 gives a percentage breakdown of the age of the primary school pupils. As can be seen from this table, a clear majority of the primary school population are in the 10+ age range.

Table 2. Age and gender of primary school pupil respondents

Age	% Boys	% Girls
Less than 9	28.1	39.5
9 and 10	36.8	36.8
11 and over	35.1	21.1
Did not say	0.0	2.6
All ages (n=95)	100 (n=57)	100 (n=38)

N.B. In this and all subsequent tables in this analysis, the column entries have been rounded up or down to one decimal place. This means that the column totals may not sum exactly to 100%.

When the sample is analysed by age and gender, as in Table 2 above, it can be seen that boys are slightly older within the survey respondents than girls. It is difficult to speculate how this difference might influence the data but the research team took the view that, because the differences exist, many of the remaining tables are cross tabulated by age and gender. However, as can be seen in Figure 2 some of the age cohorts are very small, while one cohort (those aged 10) constituted *circa* 30% of the sample. Consequently, it was decided to truncate the data into three more evenly sized age groups. After iterative examination of the possible options, three age cohorts were utilised as

follows: those aged less than 9 (n=31); those aged 9 and 10 (n =35); and those aged 11 or over (n=28).

The second section of the survey was concerned with how well students remembered the *PB* programme and its core messages. It is important to note that, due to the timing of the commencement of the evaluation, some students were being surveyed some considerable time after the programme was delivered. However, later cohorts of students were able to be surveyed immediately at the end of the programme. Data concerning how well students remembered the programme therefore are only drawn from students who were surveyed some time after the programme. This data gives some indication of how effectively key *PB* messages might have been retained. As can be seen from Figure 3, nearly 60% of the respondents 'remembered the sessions well', with less than 8% not remembering very much or not responding. Hence, it would appear that the sessions did have an enduring impact and had stayed in the memories of the majority of children taking them.

Figure 3. How well children remembered PB sessions
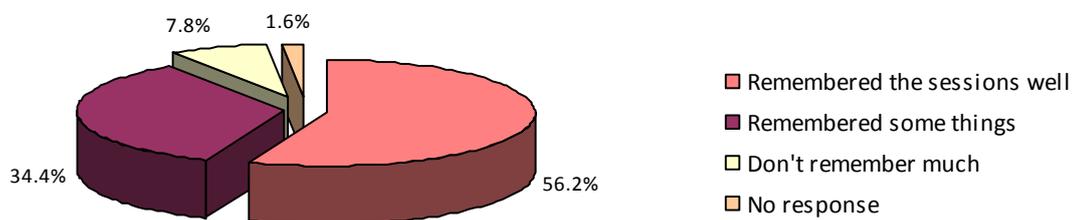
As can be seen in Table 3, girls rather than boys tended to remember the sessions well, while boys seem more likely to remember some things, although the difference is not great and is not statistically significant. Not surprisingly perhaps Table 4 below, which gives an analysis of the results by age, shows that, generally, the children in the two older cohorts tended to remember the sessions better than their younger counterparts but, again, this is not statistically significant. Unfortunately it was not possible within the literature to locate data which might allow for some benchmarking comparisons, although on-going research within this programme will help improve this picture over time.

Table 3. How well the *PB* sessions were remembered, analysed by gender

Response	% Boys agreeing	% Girls agreeing
Remembered the sessions well	51.4	63.0
Remembered some things	40.5	25.9
Don't remember much	8.1	7.4
No response	0.00	3.7
All (n=64)	100 (n=37)	100 (n=27)
χ^2 = 2.724 3df Not Significant		

Table 4. How well the *PB* sessions were remembered, analysed by age

Response	% Age < 9	% Age 9 and 10	% 10<Age<14
Remembered the sessions well	35.3	69.0	58.8
Remembered some things	52.9	27.6	29.4
Don't remember much	11.8	3.4	11.8
No response	0.0	0.0	0.0
All (n=64)	100 (n=17)	100 (n=29)	100 (n=17)
χ^2 = 5.677 4df Not Significant			

Children were also asked to indicate to what extent they had enjoyed the *PB* sessions, and Figure 4 below gives the aggregate % figures; as can be seen, 80% of the children indicated they liked the sessions a lot, and only 2% did not like the sessions.

Figure 4. How much PB sessions were liked

Legend:
- Liked the sessions a lot
- Quite liked the sessions
- Did not like the sessions
- No response

Pie chart labels: 15%, 2%, 3%, 80%
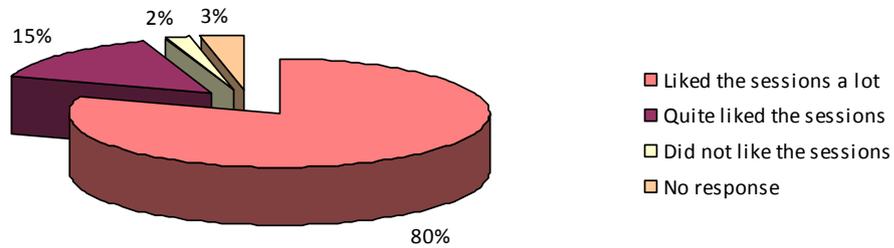
When the data is examined in more depth, it can be seen from Table 5 that girls appear to have enjoyed the sessions more than boys, with a small number of boys disliking the sessions. Table 6 shows that a greater proportion of the younger children enjoyed the *PB* sessions a lot more than their older counterparts. By contrast, some of the younger children (albeit a very small number) reported that they did not like the *PB* sessions. However, the χ^2 tests show that these age and gender differences were not statistically significant.

Table 5. How much the *PB* sessions were liked, analysed by gender

| Response	% Boys agreeing	% Girls agreeing
Liked the sessions a lot	73.7	89.5
Quite liked the sessions	19.3	7.9
Did not like the sessions	3.5	0.0
No response	3.5	2.6
All (n=95)	100 (n=57)	100 (n=38)
χ^2 = 4.111 3df Not Significant		

Admittedly, such is the overwhelming consensus among the children that they liked the *PB* programme, the differences between different ages and gender are largely irrelevant. It is also important to recognise that in some cases students reported they did not enjoy the sessions because they challenged them to work with issues they did not always feel comfortable about. One student, for example, reported that he did not like discussing his feelings and found this difficult. This reminds us that good education can, and should, be challenging. This does not always sit comfortably with concepts of enjoyment.

Table 6. How much the *PB* sessions were liked, analysed by age

Response	% Age < 9	% Age 9 and 10	% 10<Age<14
Liked the sessions a lot	83.9	82.9	75.0
Quite liked the sessions	6.5	14.3	25.0
Did not like the sessions	3.2	2.9	0.0
No response	6.5	0.0	0.0
All (n=94)	100 (n=31)	100 (n=35)	100 (n=28)
χ^2 = 8.507 6 df Not Significant			

As well as being asked whether they liked the *PB* programme, students were asked to identify what it was that specifically contributed to their enjoyment of the sessions. Just over 10% of the pupils did not answer this question, although those that did generated a wide range of answers. Figure 5 below summarises the main responses – as can be seen, the inclusion of art work was the single element most frequently reported as being the reason why the classes were liked (although there were also some contrary indicators, see Table 12).

Figure 5. Why PB sessions were liked
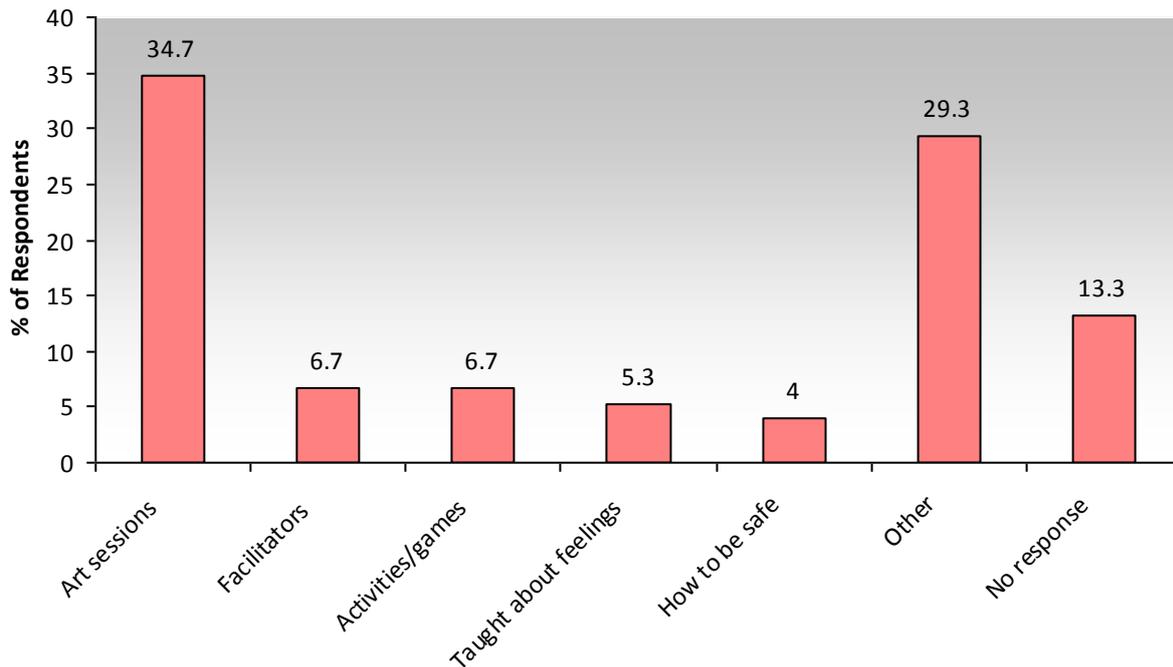
As a validation, and also to see which elements of the programme might be altered, pupils were asked which elements of the programme they disliked, the results are shown in Figure 6 below. The figure shows that for nearly half the children, there was nothing about the programme they disliked, and it is likely that the majority of 19% who did not respond to this question took this action as there was also nothing about the programme that they disliked. Of the remainder, a very small minority claimed to dislike 'everything', and while some thought that there was too much art, others thought that there was not enough art. As before, given the spread of responses and the small number of pupils professing to have disliked the sessions, disaggregation was considered inappropriate.

Figure 6. Why PB sessions were disliked
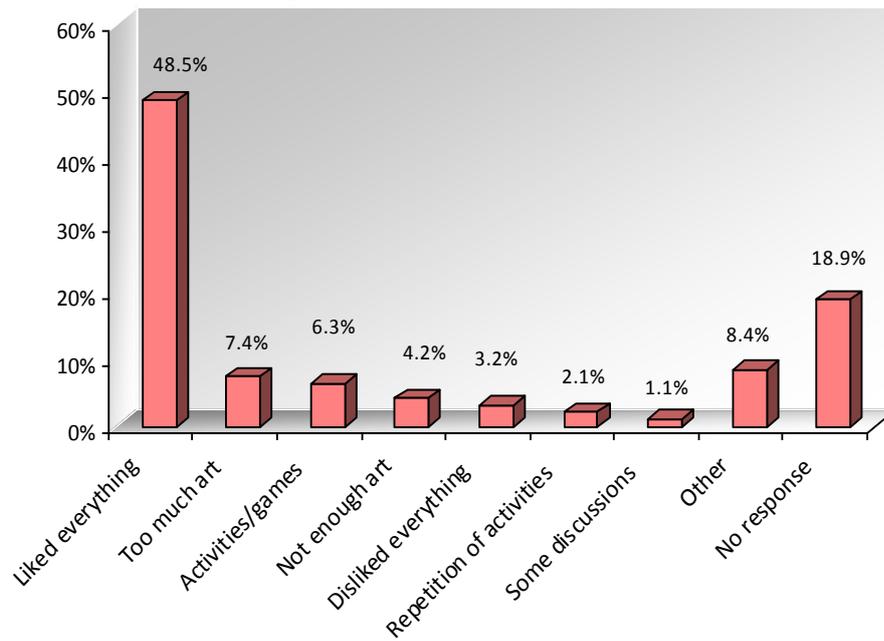
The survey was also concerned with whether children had discussed their *PB* sessions with anyone at home (parents, siblings, etc.). As Figure 7 shows, nearly three quarters of the children had talked to someone at home about the *PB* sessions which suggests that, for most children, in addition to raising awareness about personal safety, the sessions also acted as a catalyst in promoting discussion about these issues within their home. One mother of three children who had participated in the *PB* sessions explained that *'they all enjoyed it and they are coming home every evening and telling us what they are doing'.*

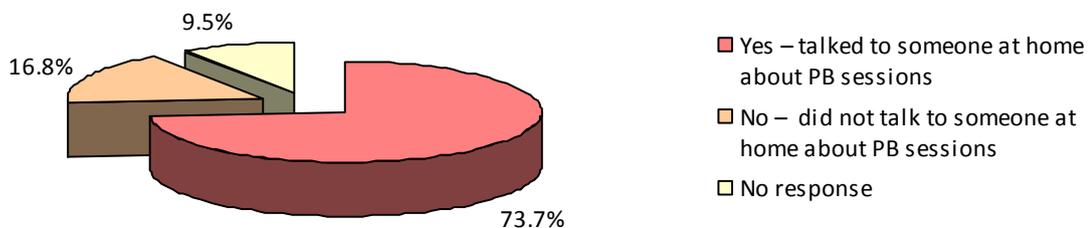**Figure 7. Did pupils talked about PB sessions at home**

Table 7 shows gender differences with respect to the willingness of pupils to talk to family and friends about the *PB* sessions. More than one quarter of the boys showed reluctance to discuss the *PB* sessions with friends and family, compared with less than 3% of the girls; this difference was statistically significant. A parent of a 10-year-old boy explained that her son initially told her very little saying only *'it was all right'*, she suggested that this was because *'he is a typical boy – he is gone, playing football or something'*.

Table 7. Did respondents talk to anyone at home about the *PB* sessions? (Analysed by gender)

Response	% Boys	% Girls
Yes - talked to someone at home about *PB* sessions	66.7	84.2
No - did not talk to someone at home about *PB* sessions	26.3	2.6
No response	7.0	13.2
All (n=95)	100 (n=57)	100 (n=38)
χ^2 = 9.454 2df Significant at 5% Level		

Table 8 indicates that younger children (aged 8 or under) are less likely to have discussed the *PB* programme than their older counterparts, and the χ^2 test reveals this to be statistically significant. However, these figures may be skewed by the larger proportion of children in the youngest cohort that did not respond to this question. When these missing cases are disregarded, the proportion of children in the youngest age cohort who discussed these matters with family and friends rises to 83%, making it comparable with the figures for the two other cohorts.

Table 8. Did respondents talk to anyone at home about the *PB* sessions? (Analysed by age)

Response	% Age < 9	% Age 9 and 10	% 10<Age<14
Yes - talked to someone at home about *PB* sessions	64.5	80.0	78.6
No - did not talk to someone at home about *PB* sessions	12.9	17.1	21.4
No response	22.6	2.9	0.0
All (n=94)	100 (n=31)	100 (n=35)	100 (n=28)
χ^2 = 12.156 4df Significant at 5% Level			

As a supplementary question to that of whether the *PB* sessions had been discussed at home, children were then asked whether it would be a good idea for family and friends to also have sessions related to the *PB* programme. The responses to this question are given below in Figure 8. The results show that half of the respondents thought that it would be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* related sessions, while less than 5% thought it would not be a good idea, with the remainder being unsure about offering *PB* related sessions to family and friends, or offering no response. Given that three quarters of respondents had talked about *PB* sessions at home, and half thought it would be a good idea to extend the *PB* provision to include family and friends, this is a development which might usefully be explored by the MCI team. In addition, evaluation work on *PB* by Briggs and Hawkins (1994: 282) in Australia and New Zealand concluded that 'without parent participation in child protection education, children may learn of their rights but the knowledge remains academic unless they have evidence that their parents will be supportive and protective'.

Figure 8. *PB* sessions for family or friends
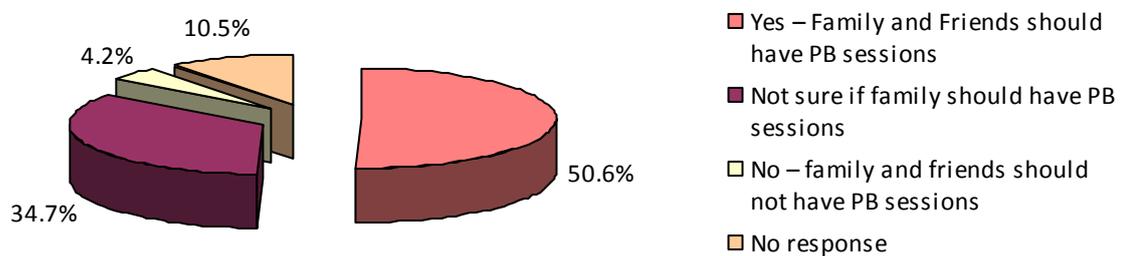
Tables 9 and 10 show these figures analysed by age and gender. As can be seen, just over half of girls and just under half of boys think that it would be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* related sessions, with none of the girls, and less than 10% of the boys opposing the idea. Table 10 suggests that the older pupils view such an idea more favourably than the younger pupils, and the χ^2 test shows this to be significant. However, as before, the figure for the youngest cohort is depressed by dint of the larger number of students not responding. However, even when the missing cases are discounted, only 43% of the youngest student cohort believes that giving *PB* related sessions to friends and family is a good idea.

Table 9. Would it be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* sessions? (Analysed by gender)

Response	% Boys	% Girls
Yes - it would be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	49.1	52.6
Not sure if family should have *PB* sessions	33.3	36.8
No - it would not be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	7.0	0.0
No response	10.5	10.5
All (n=95)	100 (n=57)	100 (n=38)
χ^2 = 2.803 3df Not Significant at 5% Level		

Table 10. Would it be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* sessions? (Analysed by age)

Response	% Age < 9	% Age 9 and 10	% 10<Age<14
Yes - it would be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	32.3	60.0	60.7
Not sure if family should have *PB* sessions	35.5	31.4	39.3
No - would not be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	6.5	5.7	0.0
No response	25.8	2.9	0.0
All (n=94)	100 (n=31)	100 (n=35)	100 (n=28)
χ^2 = 18.060 6 df Significant at 5% Level			

In order to make some assessment of the extent to which primary school students had internalised the key learning messages from the *PB* programme, students were asked to indicate up to three things they had learned from the *PB* sessions; the results are summarised in Table 11 below. This question proved challenging to students, especially the younger ones. The responses to these open ended questions were collated and checked and then, where possible, put into commonly recurring categories, with those responses which appeared infrequently (usually once) being coded into the "other" category. The figures show that the three central messages of the *PB* programme (nothing is so awful it cannot be talked about, the right to feel safe all the time and others' right to feel safe with us) had clearly been internalised by the respondents. For example 47.4% of the

sample had learnt that everyone has a right to feel safe, while more than a third stressed the importance of concern for others' welfare. These findings reflect that, within the primary school *PB* programme, domestic violence and negative family conflict are not explicitly referred to; rather the focus is on key safety messages and the identification and management of emotions. It is significant, and encouraging, to record the high degree to which students had engaged with *PB's* core messages. Given that the table below is collated from free text responses, the clarity with which certain messages emerge is significant, and does appear to attest to the success of the programme.

Table 11. Students asked to identify three things they learned from the *PB* sessions

Response	% Reporting
Everyone has a right to feel safe	47.4
Helping and caring for others	36.8
Talking to other people for help	31.6
How to deal with our feelings	24.2
How bullying affects people	23.2
How to deal with emotions and anger	16.8
There is nothing too big or small to talk about	12.6
Other miscellaneous responses	27.4
All (n=95)	n=95

(NB As children were asked to name three things they had learned, the sum of the reported percentages is greater than 100. Of those who responded 59% identified three items, 28% identified two items and 13% identified one item.)

In the next section of the survey, children were asked to indicate their attitudes towards a range of issues associated with key *PB* themes by indicating, on a 5 point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements relating to personal safety issues. As can be seen from Table 12, nearly 90% of the pupils agreed that everyone has the right to feel safe, and that they had the right to feel safe at all times.

Table 12. Pupils attitudes towards various themes within the *PB* Programme

	% Agree Strongly	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Disagree Strongly	% No Response
Everyone has the right to feel safe	78.9	8.4	1.1	1.1	1.1	9.5
I have the right to feel safe all the time	65.3	21.1	1.1	0.0	2.1	10.5
If I do not feel safe, I know what to do	61.1	20.0	6.3	2.1	0.0	10.5
I know who I can talk to if I do not feel safe	60.0	23.2	4.2	0.0	2.1	10.5
If I see someone being hurt I know what to do	57.9	28.4	0.0	3.2	1.1	9.5
If someone hurts me I know what to do	57.9	20.0	9.5	1.1	2.1	9.5
I can help other people be safe	51.6	26.3	8.4	0.0	3.2	10.5
I am good at letting people know how I feel	34.7	22.1	20.0	5.3	7.4	10.5
It is OK to feel angry	26.3	25.3	12.6	10.5	14.7	10.5

Over 80% thought that if they did not feel safe or saw someone being hurt, they knew what to do and to whom they should talk. In the interviews students were able to explain how the programme had made them better equipped to manage some emotions, in particular anger. One student commented:

> *Before they came … we didn't know how to deal with [anger] … and we were like taking it out on everyone else ... and then they came and they like showed us how to calm down and what to do if you feel angry …*
> *And if you are angry … they taught us how to get rid of your anger ... and how to get calm again …*

In the context of evaluations of the study of the use of *PB* and similar programmes elsewhere, the results from MCI are encouraging. Indeed, the outcomes of the MCI intervention seem comparable with, if not better than, those obtained in Ruddick's evaluation of the *Taking Care* scheme in Warwickshire, which utilised questionnaire data from 328 children aged 8-10 (Ruddick, 2008). For example, Ruddick (2008: 13) found that 73% of boys and girls who had taken the *Taking Care* programme thought it had helped them to know about their right to feel safe. The most comparable figure for this MCI evaluation, those who agreed with the statement 'I have the right to feel safe all the time', is 86%. Similarly, 81% of girls and 85% of boys recently having the *Taking Care* programme in Warwickshire thought that the programme had helped them know who they would talk to if they felt unsafe; the comparable figure for MCI, drawn from the table above, is 83.2%. Finally, Ruddick found that 84% of girls and 79% of boys who had recently taken the *Taking Care* programme felt that the lessons had helped them know what they could do if they felt unsafe, the comparable figure for the MCI study of primary pupils being 81.1%. These figures are generally much better than those reported by Briggs and Hawkins (1994: 276) in Australia and New Zealand, where a study of 378 children aged 5-8 found that only 30% of the Australian pupils provided affirmative responses to statements like those shown in the table above. By contrast, those in New Zealand showed substantial gains in understanding, at levels similar to those in this evaluation.

These results are very much in line with the findings of a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of teaching personal safety skills to young children undertaken by Wurtele and Owens (1997). Their study involved pre- and post-testing of over 400 children and revealed that children who were given a personal safety programme showed greater knowledge and higher levels of personal safety skills compared with controls, thereby demonstrating that pre-school aged children can benefit from participating in a developmentally appropriate personal safety programme like MCI. Clearly, comparative analysis of the effectiveness of such different programmes is problematic, given the variety in socio-economic conditions and home circumstances of individual children, and differences in national child protection policies and support networks. Notwithstanding such

caveats, the MCI programme has shown results comparable with similar programmes undertaken elsewhere.

The final section of the survey allowed the pupils to add further comments about the programme if they wished to. Most students felt they had nothing further to add and did not provide any additional comments. In total there were 48 comments; of these the single most frequently raised point (35% of students) referred to the fact that the *PB* programme was '*good'*, '*great fun*' or '*enjoyable*'. The only other point mentioned consistently was the wish to increase the extent of artistic activity within the programme, which was voiced by 12%. To give a broader impression of these comments, they were input into a word cloud programme. A word cloud is a visual representation of text data, typically used to visualize free form text, such as that obtained through the request for comments from pupils. Within a word cloud the importance of each tag is shown with font size or colour. This mode of depiction is especially useful for quickly perceiving the most prominent terms. The word cloud for the comments is shown below, and is self explanatory.

Post-primary school children's experiences of participation in the *PB* programme

This data is based on survey returns from the three post-primary schools at which the *PB* programme had been delivered in academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. In two schools the *PB* programme had been delivered once, and in the third school it had been delivered in each of the two academic years. In all 238 students completed this survey and results are based on this number of responses unless stated otherwise.

Looking first at the demographic characteristics of the post-primary school pupil respondents, Figure 9 gives a percentage breakdown by gender, Figure 10 gives a percentage breakdown by age, while Table 13 is a composite breakdown by both age and gender.

Figure 9. Gender of post-primary school children
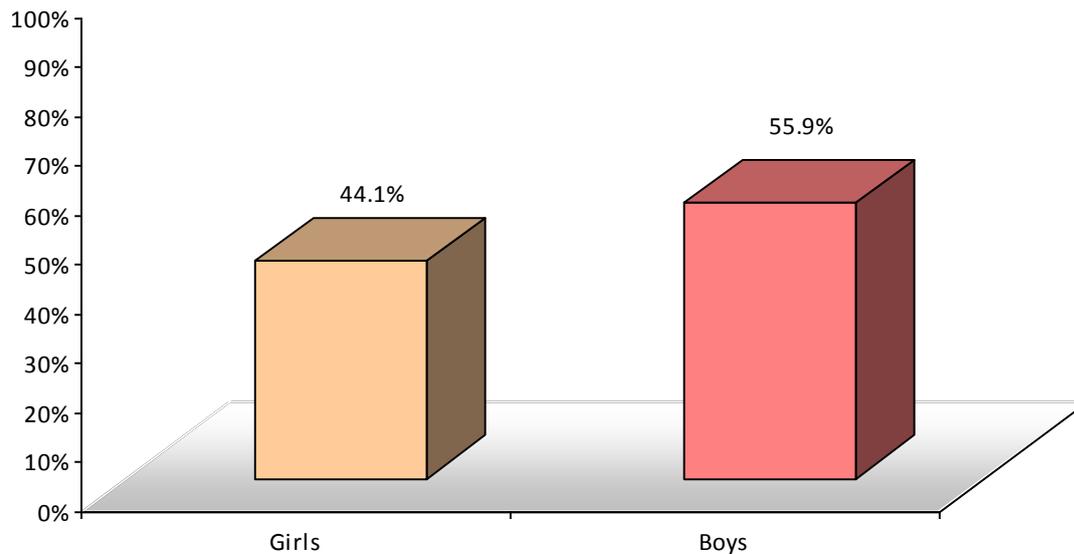
As can be seen, 56% of the post-primary pupil sample were boys and 44% were girls; the preponderance of boys was also apparent, albeit to a greater degree, in the sample from the primary schools. Hence, as with the primary school sample, the larger size of the male cohort may need to be taken into account when looking at children's reported experience of the *PB* programme. Figure 10 gives a percentage breakdown of the age of the post-primary school pupils. As can be seen from this figure, the three main cohorts (those aged 14 to 17) are much larger than the two outlying groups, one of which (those aged 13) comprised only one pupil. Consequently the decision was taken to group the two small outlying cohorts with their larger adjacent cohorts.

Figure 10. Age of post-primary school children
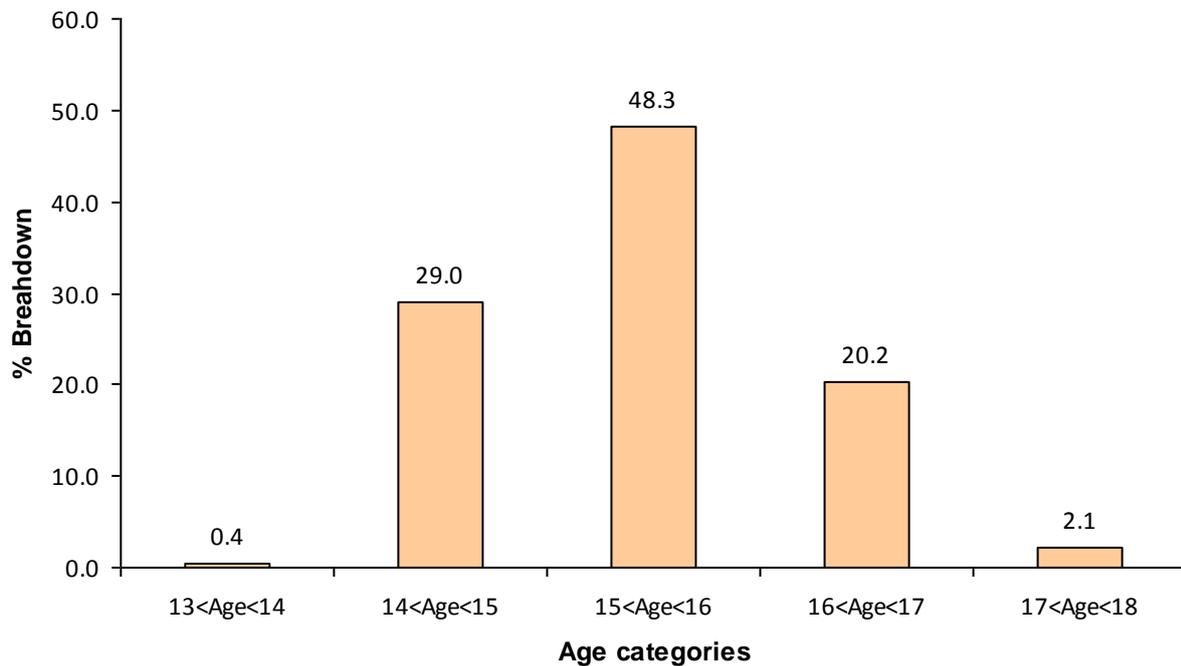
When the sample is analysed by age and gender, as in Table 13 below, it can be seen that the boys in the sample tend to be older than the girls, although this difference is not statistically significant. However, to maximise the explanatory utility of the data gathered, many of the remaining tables are cross tabulated by age and gender.

Table 13. Age and gender of post-primary school pupil respondents

Age	% Boys	% Girls
13<Age<15	25.6	34.3
15<Age<16	48.1	48.6
16<Age<18	26.3	17.1
All ages	100 (n=133)	100 (n=105)
χ^2 = 3.737 2df Not Significant at 5% Level		

The next section of the survey asked to what extent children remembered the work undertaken in the *PB* sessions. As with the primary school sample, many students were being surveyed about work in which they had been involved some months prior to the survey, while pupils at another school undertook the survey immediately at the end of their *PB* sessions. Therefore, as with the

primary pupil data, responses relating to how well students remembered material from sessions refers only to students who had undertaken the work months previously (therefore n = 182). Similarly, as with the primary pupil data, this material is useful as it gives some illustration of the 'durability' of the key messages. As can be seen from Figure 11, just over a quarter of the respondents remembered the sessions well and nearly 60% remembered some things, with 16% claiming not to remember very much or not responding. Hence it would appear that the sessions had a significant effect, with over three quarters remembering some of the elements of the programme.

Figure 11. How well children remembered *PB* sessions
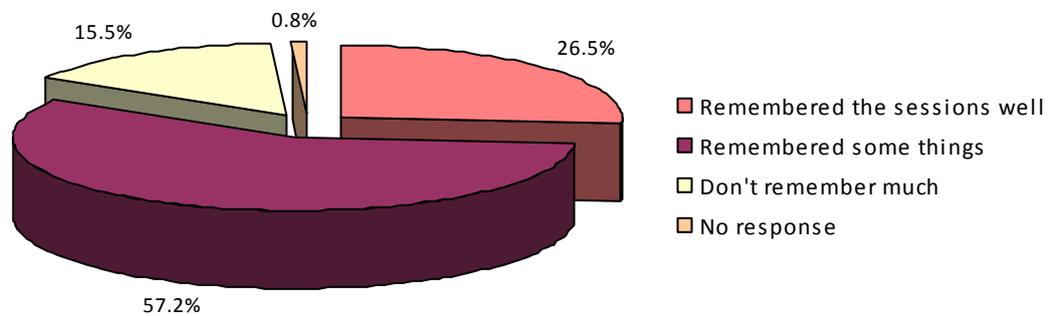
As can be seen in Table 14, girls rather than boys claimed to remember the sessions better, and this is statistically significant.

Table 14. How well the *PB* sessions were remembered, analysed by gender

Response	**% Boys agreeing**	**% Girls agreeing**
Remembered the sessions well	25.5	34.5
Remembered some things	52.0	63.1
Don't remember much	21.4	1.2
No response	1.1	1.2
All (n=182)	100 (n=98)	100 (n=84)
χ^2 = 17.583 3 df Significant at 5% Level		

Table 15 below gives a breakdown of the results by age and shows that, generally, younger children tend to remember the sessions better than their older counterparts; this relationship, however, is not statistically significant.

Table 15. How well the *PB* sessions were remembered

| Response	% 13<Age<15	% 15<Age<16	% 16<Age<18
Remembered the sessions well	32.7	28.6	27.9
Remembered some things	60.0	56.0	55.8
Don't remember much	5.5	15.5	14.0
No response	1.8	0.0	2.3
All (n=182)	100 (n=55)	100 (n=84)	100 (n=43)
χ^2 = 5.060 6 df Not Significant at 5% Level			

An open ended supplementary section followed this question, in which pupils were asked to indicate what they most remembered about these lessons. All the pupils provided a response to this open ended question, and some referred to more than one of the themes of the *PB* programme, so that there were 272 responses from 238 pupils. These responses were scrutinised and the most frequently mentioned elements identified, these were used as categories to code the text responses to this open ended question. Table 16 below provides a summary breakdown of the elements of the *PB* programme which were most remembered, ranked in order of most frequent recall. It should be noted that as some pupils recalled more than one element, the percentages in the table sum to more than 100. The three major elements which were most frequently recalled were domestic violence, bullying, and relationships. These were mentioned, in one form or another, by 57% of the sample; and all are core elements of the *PB* programme. The high profile accorded to domestic violence issues highlights the differences between the post-primary and primary school versions of the programme. In primary schools the issue of domestic violence is not directly addressed. However, within the post-primary context this is not the case and these results suggest that work within the programme relating to has a high profile with young people. This data highlights the effectiveness of the programme in dealing with a complex, and sometimes uncomfortable, issue.

Table 16. Which *PB* elements were most remembered

PB Elements	% Remembering
Domestic violence	31.5
Bullying	13.9
Relationships	11.8
Feeling safe	9.7
Abuse	8.4
Violence	5.5
How to deal with violence	4.2
Talking about problems	3.8
Hitting girlfriend example	2.9
Websites/contacts	2.5
Unwritten social rules	2.5
Nothing remembered	2.1
Peer pressure	1.7
Behavioural problems	1.3
Drugs and alcohol problems	1.3
Anger management	0.8
Protective Behaviours	0.8
Other	9.7
All (n=265)	N.A.

The survey also sought to establish to what extent post-primary school children had enjoyed the *PB* sessions, and Figure 12 below gives the aggregate percentage figures. As can be seen, one quarter of the pupils liked the sessions a lot, and 62% quite liked them, with nearly 10% stating that they did not like the sessions.

Figure 12. How much *PB* sessions were liked
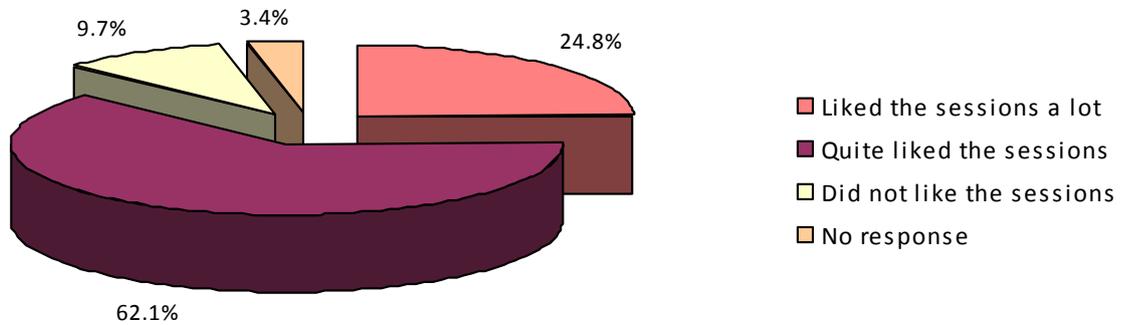
When the data is examined in more depth, it can be seen from Table 17 that girls enjoyed the sessions more than boys, while Table 18 shows that the older children enjoyed the *PB* sessions more than their younger counterparts. The χ^2 test results show that whereas the impact of gender is statistically significant, that of age is not.

Table 17. How much the *PB* sessions were liked, analysed by gender

Response	% Boys agreeing	% Girls agreeing
Liked the sessions a lot	18.0	33.3
Quite liked the sessions	64.7	59.0
Did not like the sessions	14.3	3.8
No response	3.0	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=133)	100 (n=105)
χ^2 = 12.606 3 df Significant at 5% Level		

Table 18. How much the *PB* sessions were liked, analysed by age

Response	% 13<Age<15	% 15<Age<16	% 16<Age<18
Liked the sessions a lot	21.4	27.0	24.5
Quite liked the sessions	62.9	61.7	62.3
Did not like the sessions	12.9	7.8	9.4
No response	2.9	3.5	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=70)	100 (n=115)	100 (n=53)
χ^2 = 1.775 6df Not Significant at 5% Level			

As well as being asked, as a supplementary question, whether they liked the *PB* programme students were asked to indicate specifically what they liked or disliked about the sessions. As with the previous open ended question these responses were scrutinised and the most frequently-mentioned elements identified; these were then used as categories to code the text responses to this open ended question. This proved difficult as many of the responses were very personal and individual and hence appeared only once - for example one student wrote '*I liked how [PB facilitator] was not afraid to give information to the class*'.

Table 19. Why the *PB* sessions were liked/disliked

PB Elements	% Agreeing
Interesting for me	8.4
Learnt about domestic violence	8.4
Sessions were practical and educational	6.3
Informative	5.9
Able to express my opinion	4.6
Sessions were fun	4.6
Liked facilitators	3.4
Liked working in groups	3.4
Break from school classes	2.5

Boring	2.1
Liked everything	1.7
Information about bullying	1.7
'Sexist'	1.3
Learnt about behaviours	0.8
Learnt about feeling safe	0.4
Other	16.0
No response	28.6
All (n=238)	100

The figures in Table 19 above summarise the main responses. As can be seen, the key reasons why the sessions were liked was because they were interesting; pupils learnt about an issue they recognised as serious (domestic violence), and the sessions were practical, educational and informative. There were two reasons reported as to why the sessions were disliked; first, a small proportion of students claimed the sessions were 'boring'; and second, some students took issue with, and appeared to resent, the suggestion that domestic violence is a phenomenon experienced overwhelmingly by women. However these expressions of antipathy were isolated – only 8 students out of the 238 in the sample gave reasons for disliking the classes. Some of the reasons given included in the "Other" category, were highly idiosyncratic and included, *inter alia*, the interactive mode of teaching, the enjoyment at listening to other people's stories, engaging in team work, making diagrams, charts and pictures, and having and experiencing enjoyment in a session which was considered 'more fun' than a normal SPHE lesson. Given the reduced response rate and the spread of responses, a disaggregated analysis was not attempted.

After asking what students liked or disliked about the *PB* programme, the survey then examined the utility of the *PB* programme, by asking respondents to write down the two most useful things that they had learnt from it. The results are shown in Table 20 below and, as can be seen, quite a high proportion of students did not respond to this question. Amongst those who did respond, there was no single element which was mentioned especially frequently. The most useful elements were how to deal with inappropriate behaviour and domestic violence, with these being mentioned by just under one third of the students. Table 20 suggests that post-primary pupils often found very different elements of the *PB* programme to be useful to them. This is probably a reflection of their individual circumstances. For example, we can surmise that students who face bullying at school will be more likely to find this aspect of the programme to be useful to them. Again, some of the

responses were very individualistic and included getting advice on useful helplines and websites, awareness of peer pressure and the observation that verbal abuse can be more wounding than physical abuse.

Table 20. Most useful elements of the *PB* sessions

Response	% Agreeing
Dealing with inappropriate behaviour	18.9
Dealing with domestic violence	9.2
The right to feel safe	5.9
Who to contact	4.2
How to deal with bullying	4.2
Dealing with relationships	4.2
Dealing with violence	3.4
Abusive behaviour	2.9
No abuse or violence is to small	2.9
Finding someone to talk to	0.8
Other	10.9
No response	32.4
All (n=238)	100

The survey was also concerned with establishing whether the young people had talked to anyone at home (parents, siblings, etc.) about the *PB* programme sessions in which they had participated at school. As Figure 13 shows, one third of the children had talked to someone at home about the *PB* sessions. This proportion is significantly lower than the comparable figure for primary school children, but this should not be surprising or unexpected. Our view is that a figure of 33.2% for this age cohort represents a very positive outcome.

Figure 13. Did pupils talk about *PB* sessions at home
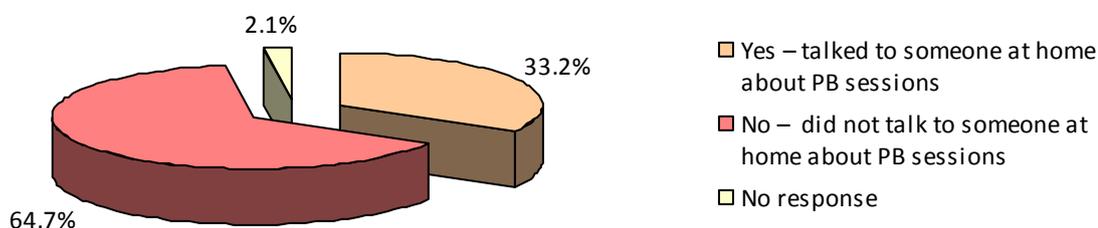
When this data is analysed by gender, as shown in Table 21, it can be seen that girls are twice as likely to talk to someone at home about the *PB* sessions than boys – only one boy in four talked about the *PB* sessions with family members. Not surprisingly, the χ^2 test shows this to be statistically significant.

Table 21. Did respondents talk to anyone at home about the *PB* sessions? (Analysed by gender)

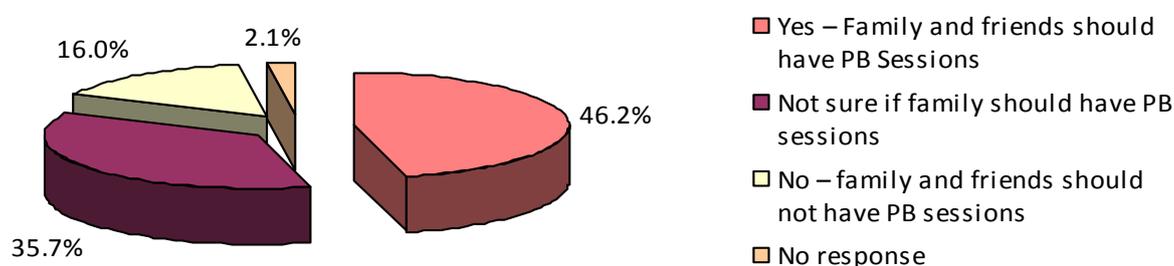| Response	% Boys	% Girls
Yes - talked to someone at home about *PB* sessions	24.8	43.8
No - did not talk to someone at home about *PB* sessions	74.4	52.4
No response	0.8	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=133)	100 (n=105)
χ^2 = 13.402 2df Significant at 5% Level		

Table 22 shows the same data, but analysed by age. The oldest cohort proved less likely to discuss such matters although this is not statistically significant.

Table 22. Did respondents talk to anyone at home about the *PB* sessions? (Analysed by age)

Response	% 13<Age<15	% 15<Age<16	% 16<Age<18
Yes - talked to someone at home about *PB* sessions	30.0	33.0	37.7
No - did not talk to someone at home about *PB* sessions	67.1	66.1	58.5
No response	2.9	0.9	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=70)	100 (n=115)	100 (n=53)
χ^2 = 2.686 4df Not Significant at 5% Level			

As a supplementary question to that of whether the *PB* sessions had been discussed at home, children were then asked whether it would be a good idea for family and friends also to have sessions from the *PB* programme. The response to this question is given below in Figure 14. The results show that nearly half the respondents thought that it would be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* type sessions, while 16% thought it would not be a good idea, with the remainder being unsure about offering *PB* type sessions to family and friends, or offering no response. As only one third of pupils had discussed the *PB* programme with their families, yet nearly one half think that the sessions would be beneficial for family and friends, this may be something for MCI to consider. This support for engaging with families also echoes both the data generated by the primary school students and that provided by the parent focus group interviews.

Figure 14. *PB* sessions for family or friends

16.0%   2.1%   46.2%   35.7%

- Yes – Family and friends should have PB Sessions
- Not sure if family should have PB sessions
- No – family and friends should not have PB sessions
- No response

Not surprisingly, given their apparent reluctance to discuss the *PB* sessions at home, Table 23 shows that only one third of the boys thought that it would be a good idea to extend the *PB* sessions to friends and family, while nearly two-thirds of the girls thought it would be a good idea. Consequently, the χ^2 test revealed that this relationship was statistically significant. Additionally, more than 20% of the boys thought it would not be a good idea to extend the sessions in this way, compared with less than 10% of the girls. When the same data are analysed by age (Table 24), they indicate that the older the young person the more likely s/he is to believe that extending the *PB* sessions to include family and friends is a good idea. However, as the χ^2 value demonstrates, this relationship is not statistically significant.

Table 23. Would it be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* sessions? (Analysed by gender)

Response	% Boys	%Girls
Yes - would be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	34.6	61.0
Not sure if family should have *PB* sessions	43.6	25.7
No - would not be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	21.0	9.5
No response	0.8	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=133)	100 (n=105)
χ^2 = 21.582 3 df Significant at 5% Level		

Table 24. Would it be a good idea for family and friends to have *PB* sessions? (Analysed by age)

Response	% 13<Age<15	% 15<Age<16	% 16<Age<18
Yes – it would be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	40.0	46.1	54.7
Not sure if family should have *PB* sessions	37.1	40.0	24.5
No – it would not be a good idea for family to have *PB* sessions	20.0	13.0	17.0
No response	2.9	0.9	3.8
All (n=238)	100 (n=70)	100 (n=115)	100 (n=53)
χ^2 = 6.992 6 df Not Significant at 5% Level			

In the next section of the survey young people were asked to indicate their attitudes towards a range of issues associated with key *PB* themes by indicating, on a 5 point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements relating to personal safety. As can be seen from Table 25, over 90% of the pupils agreed that everyone has the right to feel safe and that they had the right to feel safe at all times, with only 2% disagreeing. *Circa* 80% indicated that they knew what to do if they, or someone else, was being hurt and who to talk to if they did not feel safe, and that it was OK to feel angry. Pupils were less certain about what to do if they did not feel safe, and how to help others feel safe – although in every instance over 60% agreed with these statements (this also mirrors data generated by the primary age students). There was only one statement 'I am good at letting people know how I feel', with which less than 50% agreed. This last figure highlights the difficulty of making progress on some of these issues. The statement is, after all, one that many adults would have difficulty agreeing with. Clearly, these overall positive statements reflect well for the effectiveness of the MCI *PB* programme. However, a consistent minority (varying between 4% and 31% with a mean of 14.7) either have no opinion (positive or negative) or do not wish to respond to the statement. Moreover there is a smaller, yet consistent, minority that responds negatively to all of the statements. Some of these responses relate to a lack of awareness – for example those who disagree that they know what to do if someone hurts them. However, there are some pupils in the sample who claim to disagree with people's right to feel safe. As with all surveys, it can be difficult to establish the motives behind particular responses. Sharply negative responses may be someone 'having a bad day', or be an outlet for feelings of anger about a wider range of issues relating to the school. However, they may also reflect deep-seated negative feelings that have been challenged by the *PB* programme. Inevitably, there is a limit to the extent to which a general, whole class programme can tackle the feelings of individuals of this nature, but the data does suggest a need that requires addressing in some form.

To gain further insight into this data, the positive and negative responses in Table 25 were aggregated (so that 'agree strongly' and 'agree' were put in one category and 'disagree strongly' and 'disagree' were put in another). Resultant variables were then analysed by gender, the results of which are then shown in Table 26.

Table 25. Pupils' attitudes towards various themes within the *PB* programme

PB Statement	% Agree Strongly	% Agree	% Not Sure	% Disagree	% Disagree Strongly	% No Response
I have the right to feel safe	75.6	17.6	2.1	0.8	1.7	2.1
Everyone has the right to feel safe	72.7	19.7	4.2	1.7	0.4	1.3
I know what to do if someone hurts me	50.4	31.1	11.3	2.9	2.1	2.1
I know what to do if someone is being hurt	42.0	45.4	9.7	0.8	1.3	0.8
I know who I can talk to if I do not feel safe	41.2	45.8	7.1	2.1	1.7	2.1
It is OK to feel angry	34.9	45.0	16.0	1.7	0.0	2.5
I can help others to be safe	28.2	43.3	22.7	2.9	1.7	1.3
I know what to do if I do not feel safe	27.3	42.9	18.1	5.9	3.4	2.5
I am good at letting people know how I feel	12.2	37.8	29.0	14.7	3.8	2.5

Table 26. Pupils' attitudes towards various themes within the *PB* programme, analysed by gender

PB Statement	Boys				Girls				χ^2	
	% Agree	% DK	% Disagree	% No response	% Agree	% DK	% Disagree	% No response	Value	Significant
I know what to do if someone hurts me	84.2	9.8	3.8	2.3	78.1	13.3	6.7	1.9	1.942	x
I can help others to be safe	76.7	17.3	5.3	0.8	64.8	29.5	3.8	1.9	5.925	x
I know what to do if I do not feel safe	72.2	15.8	9.8	2.3	67.6	21.0	8.6	2.9	1.216	x
I am good at letting people know how I feel	54.1	27.1	16.5	2.3	44.8	31.4	21.0	2.9	2.118	x
I have the right to feel safe	89.5	3.0	4.5	3.0	98.1	1.0	0.0	1.0	7.564	x
Everyone has the right to feel safe	88.0	6.8	3.8	1.5	98.1	1.0	0.0	1.0	9.461	✓
I know what to do if someone is being hurt	85.0	12.0	3.0	0.0	90.5	6.7	1.0	1.9	5.664	x
I know who I can talk to if I do not feel safe	84.2	9.8	3.8	2.3	90.5	3.8	3.8	1.9	3.222	x
It is OK to feel angry	79.7	17.3	0.8	2.3	80.0	14.3	2.9	2.9	1.965	x

For many of the statements there are few differences between boys and girls, indeed in only one instance is the gender difference statistically significant. However, there are also some interesting gender related variations. Boys appear more confident about helping others to be safe, and about letting people know how they feel, while girls attach greater importance to their, and other people's, right to feel safe. The same data was analysed by age categories and the results are shown in Table 27 below. As the χ^2 statistics show, none of these age related differences are significant. Nevertheless, the table shows that in six out of the nine statements relating to *PB* sessions listed in the table, the oldest cohort are more likely to agree with the *PB* statement (for example 'I have the right to feel safe'), when compared with the other two younger age cohorts. Conversely, pupils in the oldest cohort are much less likely to disagree with the *PB* statements detailed in the table, than are the younger pupils. It is likely that the *PB* sessions will have had a positive effect on such individual development and acted as a catalyst both in stimulating thinking around these issues and in promoting debate, both with peers at school and with parents and siblings at home.

Table 27. Pupils' attitudes towards various themes within the *PB* programme, analysed by age

PB Statement	% 13<Age<15 (N=70)				% 15<Age<16 (N=115)				% 16<Age<18(N=53)				χ^2	
	% Agree	% No opinion	% Disagree	% N.R.	% Agree	% No opinion	% Disagree	% N.R.	% Agree	% No opinion	% Disagree	% N.R.	Value	Significant
I have the right to feel safe	90.0	0.0	4.3	5.7	95.7	2.6	1.7	0.0	92.5	3.8	1.9	1.9	10.478	x
I know who I can talk to if I do not feel safe	80.0	10.0	4.3	5.7	89.6	5.2	5.2	0.0	90.6	7.5	0.0	1.9	11.424	x
I am good at letting people know how I feel	45.7	30.0	18.6	5.7	50.4	26.1	22.6	0.9	54.7	34.0	9.4	1.9	8.875	x
It is OK to feel angry	72.9	20.0	1.4	5.7	82.6	14.8	1.7	0.9	83.0	13.2	1.9	1.9	5.784	x
I know what to do if I do not feel safe	62.9	21.4	10.0	5.7	71.3	16.5	11.3	0.9	77.4	17.0	3.8	1.9	8.016	x
I know what to do if someone hurts me	78.6	10.0	5.7	5.7	80.9	12.2	7.0	0.0	86.8	11.3	0.0	1.9	10.792	x
I know what to do if someone is being hurt	85.7	10.0	2.9	1.4	89.6	9.6	0.9	0.0	84.9	9.4	3.8	1.9	3.806	x
Everyone has the right to feel safe	88.6	8.6	2.9	0.0	94.8	2.6	1.7	0.9	92.5	1.9	1.9	3.8	8.684	x
I can help others to be safe	65.7	28.6	5.7	0.0	76.5	17.4	5.2	0.9	67.9	26.4	1.9	3.8	8.447	x

The last substantive question asked students to consider two ways in which the *PB* lessons might be improved. In response, 141 pupils wrote down one suggestion and another 61 provided a further suggestion, giving 202 responses in total. Many of these suggestions were put forward by only one student, such as (for example) 'less drawing' or 'I think there should be discussion about drugs', although there were some suggestions, which appeared (albeit in different guises) more than once. All the suggestions were sorted and those which were mentioned on more than three occasions appear in Table 28 below.

Table 28. Pupils' suggestions for improving the *PB* sessions

Improvement suggestions	%
School trip	1.3
Use drama	1.7
Book on DV	2.1
Games	2.5
More detail on DV needed	2.5
More information on bullying	2.9
Real life stories	3.8
Longer lessons	4.2
Less boring	5.5
Student involvement	8.4
Use videos	9.7
More lessons	11.8
Guest speaker	13.9
All (n=202)	

Many students believed that guest speakers, especially those with real life experience of, for example, domestic violence, would add value to the programme, while a substantial group also thought that there should be more *PB* sessions and that sessions should be longer. Other prominent suggestions were to make more use of videos in the *PB* sessions, and also to try to secure greater student involvement in the sessions. Some respondents indicated that they felt that the student involvement was limited, and that their role was passive. This view was not supported

by the focus group interviews and the qualitative data. Data from focus groups and interviews revealed high levels of engagement with the teaching methods adopted. Students reported that they enjoyed the different ways of working promoted within the programme. The emphasis on art, drama and discussion were valued by many students. However, it is the case that such approaches to teaching can be more challenging to those who do not wish to engage, and therefore some negative responses are, perhaps, to be expected.

The final question was an open ended invitation for students to provide any other comments about the programme. Sixty-six students chose to exercise this option, and many chose to make similar points as were raised by the previous question. To gain an aggregate appreciation of this free format data collected by the last two questions all the neutral statements (e.g. 'Don't know') were removed and the remaining text (some 2,000 words) was used to make a word cloud, which appears below.

One important aspect of the development of *PB* work in the post-primary school context was the nurturing of initiatives that did not fit the formal *PB* model. Early in MCI's inception the project had enlisted the support of young people in defining the group's identity, for example by organising an MCI logo competition. This was also associated with a range of extra-curricular and community-based initiatives for the young people involved. The young people we interviewed who had been involved in these activities spoke very positively about their experience. They clearly enjoyed the freedom associated with being 'out of school', and they also had considerable pride in the work they produced. Another example of work outside of the conventional *PB* model was work undertaken in one of the schools with students in their transition year (the first year of post-compulsory schooling). These students were participating in the *Young Social Innovator* (YSI) initiative and, arising directly from the *PB* work they had been involved with the previous year, they

decided to focus their work on an awareness raising campaign relating to domestic violence. MCI was contacted about this work and as a result MCI staff visited the school to work with the students. Students' selection of this topic as the focus of this work attests to the impact of *PB* work in the school the previous year. The YSI initiative is a significant undertaking and represents a considerable time commitment on the part of the students. That they wished to devote this time to issues which had been brought to their attention by MCI's work is arguably further evidence of impact. In both these instances, student engagement was high and they were clearly successful projects. It would seem that these less orthodox environments may provide rich opportunities for undertaking aspects of MCI's work, perhaps in contrast to traditional classrooms. One MCI project worker indicated that working in these ways often provided opportunities for young people to reflect on complex issues in a manner that was not always possible in a classroom lesson. Some of the limitations of traditional classroom work were described as follows:

> *It felt like working in the west wing for a little while like ... as you would be running from class to class ... and you would do you 35 minutes ... and you knew ... 'bam ... bam ... bam ... get the message across' ... but what felt unsatisfactory about that was there was no 'mooch time' to kind of ... you know ... 'shoot the breeze' ...*

More recently, MCI has been exploring the possibility of working through Neighbourhood Youth Projects. These initiatives are compatible with traditional *PB* work in schools and we would encourage MCI to continue to exploit these opportunities as they clearly offer considerable potential [R2].

Students were often highly engaged with the *PB* programme, particularly so when the methods of delivery allowed more time for participation and reflection. Students had a strong sense of ownership of these types of projects in particular. Student involvement in this way affords excellent opportunities for engaging students in helping with programme development, and we would recommend that consideration is given to how the student voice might be made use of to support programme development. Until now the programme team has used short questionnaires to gauge student opinion, and this has been helpful in assessing student views. However, it may well be that students might be more integrally involved in evaluating and developing the project. The use of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to engage students can provide rich data to inform programme development, as well as giving students a sense of ownership in relation to the future direction of the programme [R3]. There is now considerable evidence to indicate that involving students in these ways can create a powerful momentum for change and development (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Ruddock and McIntyre, 2007).

Recommendation 1: Undertake a strategic review of the future development of *PB* work in schools. It is suggested this may be supported by considering the questions raised in the supplementary report to this evaluation. It is strongly recommended that primary and post-primary school teachers and leaders are engaged in this debate.

Recommendation 2: Continue to explore ways in which extra-curricular approaches and contexts may be used to develop *PB* work. Such an approach may involve a mixed economy of *PB* work in school and non-school environments.

Recommendation 3: Develop robust instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, for evaluating *PB* work in schools that will allow student opinion to inform future development. Explore also alternative ways in which the student voice might be more effectively incorporated into the programme's development.

2. Awareness raising

During the course of the evaluation it became increasingly apparent that the nature of the issues raised by MCI, in particular those relating to domestic violence, means that it can be difficult to discuss these issues in a highly visible and public way. Several interviewees referred very explicitly to a community reluctance to confront issues of domestic violence and negative family conflict. For example, one interviewee from a local welfare agency asserted:

> *I think we are in very strong denial ... in relation to the existence of the level of domestic violence … that I know to be there … I <u>know</u> to be there [emphasis] … because I see it every day here … and I think as a society ... it is too painful for us to admit to ourselves ...*

Whilst we encountered no visible signs of hostility to the project itself, it was clear that trying to raise issues such as domestic violence, in very visible ways, can represent something of a 'swim against the tide'. It was put to us that such resistance was not restricted to individuals in the community, but could manifest itself institutionally. It is difficult to overstate the significance of problems arising from a societal reluctance to engage with wider questions of domestic violence. Domestic violence might be described as an 'iceberg issue'. It is widely acknowledged that only a small proportion of the domestic violence experienced within families is known about, much less is ever reported. Furthermore, there are powerful societal pressures that cohere to perpetuate this silent suffering. Responses reported to us directly or indirectly included denial ('it doesn't happen here'), discomfort ('we'd rather not talk about it') and avoidance (for example the school principal who feared that engagement with MCI might raise issues that (s)he would be unable to manage). Clearly, an element of MCI's work has been to confront this state of affairs, but it is vital to recognise the scale of this challenge. Our perception, based on the research undertaken, is that work relating to domestic violence and associated awareness raising requires considerable patience. There are unlikely to be dramatic breakthroughs. Progress tends to be slow, and the direction of travel is not always forwards. It is important to recognise this reality when assessing work of this nature.

Despite the challenges identified above there was clear evidence that the project has had considerable success in raising awareness about issues of domestic violence amongst young people. In those schools where the *PB* programme has been presented, children reported a significant understanding of issues relating to domestic violence and negative family conflict. Within these schools there was also evidence of an enhanced understanding and awareness of these issues amongst teaching staff.

Teaching staff within the participating schools were offered domestic violence awareness training provided by the Project Manager of MCI. This represented a significant continuing professional development input on issues about which most staff acknowledged they had very little experience, in a professional context. They had not received training on these issues previously and, for a range of reasons, the issues had tended to be low in their consciousness. Teachers openly acknowledged these were issues they felt uncomfortable dealing with in the classroom, and they lacked confidence in relation to them, *'because it is a very hard and personal kind of topic and a difficult topic to do with … you know, with youngsters'* (Post-primary school teacher).

Similarly, within the primary setting, there was evidence of the *PB* programme enabling teachers to address sensitive and complex issues with individual students, that may previously not have been easily surfaced. Several teacher interviewees reported that the training had helped them see issues of domestic violence, and its potential impact on their students, in a very different light.

Where teachers were present in the *PB* classes, then awareness raising was further enhanced. There was some evidence that this then cascaded into wider discussions amongst staff across the school and, combined with the initial whole staff training input, collective understanding across the school often developed considerably. It is also important to note that the Director of the Mayo Education Centre is represented on the Steering Committee and an in-service training course on issues relating to domestic violence, tutored by the MCI Project Manager, was offered to all teachers in County Mayo in July 2010. Unfortunately, teacher take-up of this programme was insufficiently high for the course to proceed. This arguably illustrates the challenge of progressing issues of domestic violence higher up the agenda when professionals such as teachers face multiple demands on their limited time (see issues raised in the attached supplementary paper).

Clearly the *PB* work in schools is a key way in which issues of personal safety and domestic violence are raised with young people. The extent to which this is achieved is not dealt with in this section, but is addressed in the section relating to *PB* activity.

Awareness was also raised significantly within the families of the school children. This emerged through a number of routes. For example, all children involved in the *PB* programmes received a letter for their parents/carers informing them of the programme and 81.4% of primary pupils reported that they had discussed the *PB* work they had undertaken at school with people in their families. This figure fell appreciably for post-primary age children (33.9%), reflecting the well documented changing nature of students as they grow older. However, the evaluation still identified up to 149 families in which these issues were discussed as a result of the *PB* programme (this figure may, however, be overstated slightly because of the sibling factor and there may therefore be some double counting). Some of the parents who were interviewed indicated that they had seen the *PB* workbooks their children had brought home, and these generated discussions about the issues raised.

The survey of parents only relates to primary schools and is relatively limited in scope (53 respondents), it nevertheless indicated considerable support for the programme and its aims. Several parents indicated that their child had enjoyed the sessions greatly and gained much from them. Parents in their survey and interview evidence were most supportive of these issues being dealt with in the curriculum. Additionally, contact with schools (via letters home, newsletters, and

examples of students' work) had also served to highlight the issues to parents and raise awareness of services:

> *It made me aware of how vulnerable children can be and how important it is that they have the courage to stand up for what they believe is right behaviour. It also helped them to identify early warning signs about not feeling safe and assuring them that nothing is too small to tell* (Parent).

The parents that were interviewed indicated that awareness of MCI's work might be further enhanced by combining *PB* work in schools with children with a related event or function designed for parents. It was argued by parents that schools provide a powerful link into the community, and that this opportunity to work with parents might be better exploited. This had been tried previously with the post-primary schools but the response from parents had been disappointing. There does appear to be considerable potential in using *PB* as a vehicle to engage parents, but this is likely to look very different in different schools, and strategies will need to be developed with teachers to take account of this contextual diversity [R4]. Home-school collaboration, in relation to curriculum issues, does have considerable potential, and can be a powerful mechanism for supporting both student and parent learning. However, it has long been recognised as slow and difficult work, requiring considerable groundwork to ensure it happens effectively (Atkin *et al.*, 1987).

The survey of parents of primary school children who had participated in the *PB* sessions revealed that 92% of parents were aware of the *PB* programme, and over one third recalled getting information from school about their child's involvement. Other methods of communication which figured prominently were the MCI newsletter, which was mentioned by 19%, and the local media (TV, radio and the local newspapers), which were mentioned by 15%. In addition, more informal channels like the local church (5.7%) and discussions with other family members and friends (7.6%), were also mentioned. The success of MCI's campaign in raising awareness of the *PB* programme, and of issues surrounding domestic violence, is borne out by the survey of parents - nearly 60% of respondents agreed that MCI was effective in raising awareness. Parents also made some useful suggestions about how awareness could be raised by other means. Among the ideas mentioned were: giving talks in the workplace; providing information at local GPs' surgeries and clinics; distributing MCI leaflets to schools, churches, community groups and youth centres; attending parents' committees at schools; and through visits to mother and toddler groups.

The MCI manager's work speaking in the rural Catholic churches has been described as having significant impact by several interviewees. It is recognised that the church remains a key conduit to the local community, and engaging in this work was seen as innovative and important.

A key area in which awareness of domestic violence and negative family conflict issues was raised was that of many of the statutory and third sector agencies involved in working with MCI. Whilst it was recognised that it was concern about these issues that had given rise to the move to establish MCI in the first instance, it was also recognised that MCI had subsequently helped raise the profile of these issues considerably, within both the organisations and across the local community. One tangible manifestation of this relationship was indicated by the County Childcare Committee Co-ordinator, who reported that Child Care Providers in the county were now being better prepared in relation to issues of domestic violence and negative family conflict, as a direct result of his own involvement with MCI. In contrast, concern was expressed that some statutory agencies lagged behind in this regard and that MCI, and other organisations working in the field, still had a job to do to ensure further progress on these issues [R5]:

> *we are getting there … and certainly people in the know … are certainly well aware of MCI … and the general public … we still have work to do … but it is early days …* (Steering Committee member).

In terms of wider community awareness, there are acknowledged challenges that arise from local history and culture, with further challenges in particular pockets of the community (for example, the traveller community):

> *… as an Irish population … I don't believe we are unique in this but … I think that as an Irish population we have not dealt with DV or DA ... between spouses for example ... we have not dealt with it well … and I think there is ... and we still have a very strong denial system … working on that and on the very subject of MCI … will be an uphill struggle in many ways* (Steering Committee member).

It is clear therefore that MCI has had some considerable success in raising awareness of domestic violence issues as they impact on young people, and also in raising awareness about MCI itself and the service it provides. This awareness raising might be considered to have been most effective amongst young people in schools where the *PB* programme had been delivered and amongst professional staff working in both schools and in relevant health and welfare agencies. The project has had some success in raising awareness amongst parents, and this is arguably an aspect of work with considerable further potential. Finally, MCI has had more limited success with awareness raising across the wider community. Several channels of communication have been used and these have had some impact but overall, as might be expected, progress in this area has been more limited.

Recommendation 4: In association with teachers in schools, develop a strategy for engaging parents in the *PB* programme. *PB* offers an excellent opportunity to engage with parents and the wider community, but the means of exploiting this potential needs to be developed. Such an approach will need to be flexible, and developed in conjunction with teachers, in order to accommodate the specific contexts of schools and their environments;

Recommendation 5: Continue to raise awareness of MCI's core issues with staff in relevant agencies. This could be achieved in part by organising another multi-agency event, such as the highly successful one in 2009.

3. Interagency work

This section of the report focuses on assessing the extent to which agencies have worked collaboratively with MCI and also the mechanisms in place to facilitate effective information sharing and co-facilitation of service delivery. Additionally, the evaluation explored whether agencies have developed a shared understanding of the work of the MCI and a standardised approach to domestic violence and negative family conflict. An important aspect of interagency work of this nature is the way in which cross referrals are made between agencies/services and how these referrals are monitored, processed and managed; this was also a key element of the evaluation. In considering interagency work the research focused on the notion of collaboration as an active, practice-led process of 'partnership in action' (Whittington, 2003: 16).

MCI has connections with a wide range of agencies including statutory, voluntary and community bodies that are working with people at a number of levels. Many of these agencies have shown direct commitment to the project, by providing high level representation on the Steering Committee. The representation of key stakeholder groups on the Steering Committee means that it functions effectively as a form of multi-agency working, whilst also having representation from across the geographical area. Several Steering Committee members indicated that enhanced communication across a wide range of services was one of the useful outcomes of participation on the MCI Steering Committee. Whilst it is acknowledged by some that there is scope for MCI to build more relationships and become more embedded across the whole community to facilitate sustainability, the MCI project is seen more generally as having secured success in bringing together agencies interested in supporting victims of domestic violence and negative family conflict with specific reference to the needs of children. This is an aspect of activity where there has not previously been this high level of communication and co-operation. Buckley *et al.* confirm that 'the crucial element is co-ordination which must be in place to ensure that children do not slip through the net of fragmented services' (2007: 306). Interview evidence pointed to clear progress in multi-agency collaboration:

> *Certainly … it has enhanced the workings of the agencies together around this issue ... we would have worked with these agencies on different kinds of issues … but I don't think that they have ever [come together] … around this issue for children … they have come together around the issue for adults and for women and things like that but never … not specifically for children… certainly MCI has greatly helped that … I don't think it would have happened without it …* (Steering Committee member).

The data show how MCI have established connections with different agencies through a range of mechanisms. For example, in Erris MCI work has included an emphasis on community participation. Through the project worker based in Belmullet during the evaluation, MCI was represented on a number of local committees in the area, such as the Local Area Network and a local group looking at developing an 'anti-bullying strategy' for Erris. In a similar way, MCI is actively involved in local initiatives to raise awareness of violence against women. Through the *PB* work MCI has developed connections and has experience of cross-referrals with other projects such as the '*Big Brother, Big Sister*' mentoring project.

Case example

MCI were working in a primary school delivering the 'Helping Hands Protective Behaviours' programme. A child in the school was identified by the teachers as having behavioural problems in school and at home – without any evidence of a specific link to domestic violence or negative family conflict. The child was referred by the MCI to the 'Big Brother, Big Sister' youth federation mentoring project to access mentoring and a summer programme. The MCI also explored the possibility of art therapy for the child.

To some extent the emergence of a new organisation has been seen as an addition to an already complicated network of statutory and third sector agencies. There was a recognition of the need to develop greater clarity regarding the function and role of different organisations, *'where one line finishes, and another one starts*', as one interviewee referred to it. Some of the professionals responding to the research also acknowledged that '*a lot of work needs to be done in Mayo in terms of working together and loosening up about the whole issue and how we support women and children'*. There was also a view that such issues were an inevitable feature of a new organisation emerging, and that generally these were being resolved as they arose, but that there is a need to constantly recognise, review and address issues as they arise. Work in this area had clearly taken a significant step forward following the multi-agency planning day in 2009 and it may be that another similar event will help further develop thinking and practice [R6].

The evaluation has shown that MCI's work to ensure that 'children in Mayo will receive a consistent response from all agencies working to support them' (Medium Term Objective - Logic Model MCI-16391), has been fulfilled in part. However, it is recognised that there is more work needed to

establish connections where weaker links currently exist, for example with the Rape Crisis Centre in Castlebar, and to sustain and develop those networks that are well established [R7]. Effective interagency working in complex contexts, such as MCI work in Mayo, simply cannot be achieved for all time by putting professionals together or demanding that they work to particular processes; successful collaborative partnerships take time and resources to develop, maintain and grow (Crawford, 2011).

In exploring whether agencies have developed a shared understanding of the work of MCI and a standardized approach to the issues there is evidence that it is felt that, because the Health Service Executive and the Gardai have a clear focus on child protection issues, where a person experiences domestic violence individuals often feel more comfortable making referrals directly to community-based services. This is perceived to happen frequently where statutory services are discerned as 'the source of control and oppression' whilst other agencies are considered to be 'neutral or more benign' (Bentovim *et al.*, 2009: 293). In other words, in these instances community-based services are considered more attractive by service users who have concerns about dealing with formal bureaucracies. Whilst there are clear procedures for dealing with children experiencing abuse, there is recognition that matters relating to domestic violence and negative family conflict do not automatically generate the same set of child protection issues. Related to this, some professionals working in the community-based services express concern that '*other agencies would put it [domestic violence] with family conflict or relationship problems, rather than … name it Domestic Violence'* as they view family conflict and domestic violence as being different levels along *'a very distinct continuum'*. Further to this, the data show that there are potential differences of opinion across agencies in relation to the language used and understanding of this area of work. Some of this may relate to each agency having very different priorities, objectives and approaches to responding to the issues:

> *… there is something about the language and I think the whole thing with the term "Domestic Violence" automatically brings it into the home and sort of sanitises it in some way and I think … from my experience … agencies tend to use "Family Conflict" or "Relationship Problems" rather than naming it* (Support worker).

These contributions from professionals in the field point to some of the on-going confusions about the relationships, and sometimes the tensions, between concepts of domestic violence and negative family conflict. This confusion can then inform perceptions of MCI and its role and function as an organisation providing support to young people experiencing domestic violence *or* negative family conflict. This is an area where MCI has done a considerable amount of work and attests to

the need to continually make explicit MCI's role in relation to these issues, and the nature of the service it seeks to provide [R6].

Within the interagency working environment, co-ordinated services need to 'effect as far as possible a fit between the children's different needs and the response being offered' (Buckley *et al.*, 2007: 306). Thus the management of cross-referral processes is of key importance. These processes are understandably complex, yet this evaluation shows that referrals, both into MCI and those emanating from its work, are embedded in an interagency, collaborative community approach.

During the period of this evaluation MCI developed a formalized referral policy that seeks to set out the framework for referrals both into and from the project. The policy includes procedures that enable the MCI team to audit and track referrals that they generate to other services, including the specialist and therapeutic services. This is an important development that will generate a number of benefits in terms of assessing service effectiveness. Monitoring the implementation of this development will help assess whether this process is itself effective [R8]. At this stage it is important to point out that throughout the period of this evaluation, including prior to the adoption of the referral process, all members of the team were fully cognisant with, and robustly working within, well-established child protection procedures and policies. This included an agreed MCI procedure for dealing with any disclosures, both through and beyond any work in schools.

Case example

A specialist counselling service, commissioned through the work of MCI, was quickly able to identify potential child protection concerns for a number of children in a family, when working with one of the older children. It is possible that, without the specialist intervention, these concerns may not have been disclosed for some time. However, the service instigated immediate referrals to statutory services, whilst the support of MCI and the service it had put in place were able to provide continuing support to this family.

Where referrals related to non-child protection needs arise through the work of MCI, it is not possible to track reliably the source or outcome. This is in part because individuals may self-refer to services as a result of MCI's awareness raising work or the work in schools but, as stated by one service provider, *'we might simply get a phone call from somebody saying that they are in this*

'level of distress' about domestic abuse or something like that and we many never know whether it was raised by an awareness that started through the work of MCI'.

MCI's role is, in part, to help bring together a range of agencies providing support to children living with domestic violence. However, there were also examples of how MCI had intervened in a situation to provide support when other agencies had apparently been unable to do so. One school principal identified a particular child experiencing some difficulties in a classroom context. This was emerging as inappropriate, sometimes violent behaviour, and was having a concomitant impact on the student's peers. The principal had been seeking specialist support for this child, but none had been forthcoming. At this point MCI were contacted and were able to respond immediately. The principal was particularly appreciative of the rapid and flexible response. She expressed her feeling as follows:

> *Well my initial thing was "Oh my God … I am so glad that there is somebody coming in to help me" .. because I was there screaming … "help … help … help" and really there was nobody really providing me with any help … in any shape, size or form … so I was delighted …*

MCI's ability to respond to immediate need, and to do so in a way that is not mired in bureaucracy, is perceived as a significant strength. However, there is a danger that the service can be drawn on in order to compensate for a lack of service elsewhere, when alternative services would be more appropriate. In a time of significant cuts in public services this may become a more pressing issue and the priority must be to remain vigilant, with MCI focusing on its core purpose and not becoming a crisis-driven replacement service compensating for cuts in provision elsewhere.

Recommendation 6: Reaffirm MCI's purpose in relation to supporting young people who are experiencing domestic violence or negative family conflict. To develop this purpose in order to help better articulate MCI's own distinctive role, and its relation to partner organisations and agencies;

Recommendation 7: Continue to develop links with other agencies, and help develop a shared understanding across agencies of the issues facing young people in relation to domestic violence and negative family conflict. Devote particular attention to where these links may be weaker or less developed;

Recommendation 8: Monitor the implementation of the new formal referrals policy.

4. Therapeutic interventions

In addition to the work described above, a central element of MCI's work has been the provision of a range of therapeutic interventions to support young people. These were born out of recognition that MCI's *PB* work, and its wider commitment to raising awareness in relation to domestic violence and negative family conflict, were likely to generate an increase in demand for individual support for young people. Three forms of provision have been established: one is the provision of specific interventions based on play and art therapy; the second is the provision of a more generic counselling service; and the third is the use of a specialist counsellor provided direct by MCI to work with children with specific needs. Both the first two services are based within Castlebar, the former at the Mayo Women's Support Service and the latter at the town's Family Centre. A clear advantage of this approach is that it embeds MCI within existing and robust community organisations, supporting multi-agency working and awareness raising. The third type of provision is brought in on an 'as needed' basis.

Within the Mayo Women's Support Services, MCI has supported two therapists (one play therapist directly funded by MCI and one art therapist, the latter being a student on a 12 week placement with MCI). The art therapist provided individual one-hour sessions for four children each week, for 12 weeks. Referrals to the art therapist came through staff based in the MWSS, as the result of a weekly meeting/discussion. This was individual rather than group therapy. It provided *'a space for the child to be themselves … without any judgement … and that would be the nature of the therapy'.* The art therapy student reviewed her work with each child and with the mothers, and felt there was some success, for example she was able to assert *'there seemed to be a change in behaviour … and a change in communication'.*

Workers in the Mayo Women's Support Service were particularly appreciative of the additional support provided through MCI's therapeutic interventions:

> *… for me, on the ground working with a woman who is looking for that extra support, the Children's Initiative is a very, very quick step to that support and there are a number of women with whom I am working availing of that through the Family Centre and through the counselling service set up for family therapy.*
> (Support worker)

There was some evidence of similar benefits deriving from the counselling support provided through the Family Centre. The MCI's support for counselling provision is clearly a valued resource, with MCI supporting a counsellor for two days per week. However, as with other features of the therapeutic interventions, there are considerable difficulties in trying to assess the impact of this provision, and the direct contribution of MCI. This is inevitable, given the complexity of the issues and the diverse nature of the referral processes. For example, a family may decide to seek assistance as a direct result of contact with the *PB* programme in schools. However, they may self-refer to the Family Centre (the single most common form of referral) and there is clearly no obvious way of linking the referral to the work of MCI. For this reason it is not possible to provide clear statistics on the numbers of individuals accessing Family Centre services as a direct result of MCI's work. The Director of the Family Centre reported a 30% increase in demand for the Centre's services in the preceding year. He argued that there were clearly multiple explanations for this trend, not least the deteriorating economic situation, but that the work of MCI was likely to have had some part to play in this development. The number of direct referrals to the Family Centre from MCI was limited; however, for the reasons identified above, this may be as expected.

As with other features of MCI's work, we identified divergent views relating to the optimal location for therapeutic services. Some interviewees argued that outreach services should be available in Erris, whilst others countered that cost and efficiency arguments suggested a 'standing presence' in Erris was not cost-effective. It was also argued that in a small community, some individuals seeking support may prefer to access services outside of their own community. Furthermore, it was highlighted that where there was an identified need therapeutic interventions could be provided locally:

Therapeutic services are available to people from [Erris] and they will come out and do it in [Erris] … but nobody has been referred to them yet … but they have made it clear that they will come and, they will provide the service here. (Project worker)

Additionally, more recently MCI commissioned the services of an independent counselling therapist to respond directly to the very specific and complex needs of two young people who had come to their attention.

Case example

A 16 year old, with a background of living with domestic violence, found herself in an abusive relationship and was self-harming and had attempted suicide. On receiving this referral MCI was able to arrange for the provision of a time-limited counselling service to be provided within school. The teenager was supported to work through her past experiences, and explore the current situation that was mirroring her past. The counselling service and MCI have remained as a point of contact for this young person, should she feel a need for further support.

Through its range of therapeutic interventions, MCI has been able to offer services to meet different levels of need. However, this has often been reactive, potentially out of necessity, rather than proactive and strategic. In order to inform the future development of therapeutic interventions it would be useful for MCI to explore the possibility of carrying out a thorough needs analysis with multi-agency partners, to enable a more proactive, planned approach to the enhancement and further development of appropriate services [R9].

Recommendation 9: To consider undertaking a robust community-level needs analysis to inform an explicit strategic plan, if further therapeutic services are to be developed.

REPORT SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayo Children's Initiative has established itself quickly as a significant organisation working to support children and young people in County Mayo. The organisation grew out of existing community provision and a recognised need to support more effectively young people exposed to negative family conflict and domestic violence. As such, the new organisation has been able to exploit links with existing organisations, and has rapidly developed good working relationships with such organisations. Additionally, the organisation benefits from effective governance and skilful project leadership.

The organisation remains relatively young, and is clearly still developing. Hence, in terms of both its internal governance, and its wider relationships with external agencies, issues are still being 'worked through'. Several people expressed a view that MCI was now emerging from this embryonic phase and was moving into a new phase of organisational maturity. However, it is important to bear in mind that the work being reported on here is based on MCI's work in its very early stages of development.

It is also important to recognise that MCI faces considerable challenges in raising the profile of an issue that many would at best seek to avoid and, at worst, to deny. Findings from this research have highlighted the complex nature of the issues with which MCI is concerned. Making progress on these issues, by their very nature, is difficult and slow. However, within a short space of time the organisation has secured some significant achievements. In particular, we would highlight:

- The *Protective Behaviours* programme is at the heart of MCI's work. This has given MCI a clear presence in local schools and provided access to substantial numbers of young people. Our research evidence indicated that the programme was very popular amongst students, and that it has been highly effective in communicating MCI's core message to young people. This work has been supplemented by a range of related extra-curricular activities, which have further engaged young people and contributed to their personal development. The *PB* programme has been delivered in both primary and post-primary contexts, and is adapted to reflect the needs of differing age groups. Teachers in schools where *PB* has been provided value its input and rate highly the quality of the input by MCI staff. However, organisationally it can be difficult to integrate an external curriculum initiative within schools, and some of the issues raised by this are discussed in a supplementary report to this evaluation.

- Raising awareness of issues relating to negative family conflict and domestic violence, with particular regards to the needs of children. Perhaps inevitably, this has proved

more difficult to achieve in the wider community, but there is clear evidence of progress within professional services such as schools and welfare agencies. In the schools where MCI has worked there are high levels of awareness amongst both students and staff. In some cases, there is also raised awareness amongst parents. Professional agencies working with vulnerable children also report a raised awareness of the issues with which MCI is concerned.

- MCI has clearly facilitated more effective cross-agency working with regard to its issues of core concern. MCI's own Steering Committee acts as a *de facto* cross-agency network, in which key statutory and third sector organisations are represented, and this is supported further by events such as the highly successful multi-agency workshop. MCI workers are represented and active within a range of community organisations, and this ensures that the issues with which MCI is concerned attain an appropriate profile.

- MCI has been able to support a number of therapeutic interventions, based within the Mayo Women's Support Service and the Castlebar Family Centre, that enhance provision for young people experiencing negative family conflict and domestic violence. These services are intended specifically to meet the needs of young people, and represent a distinctive element of local provision. Although there can be a difficulty attributing some of this work directly to the intervention of MCI, there is no doubt that this provision, offered through MCI, makes a valuable contribution to local services and support for young people. This provision is emerging as an increasingly important aspect of MCI's work.

Given our assertion above that MCI is now in transition from its 'emergent' status, it may be appropriate to review some features of existing provision, with a view to developing strategic priorities for the future. Within this context we make the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Undertake a strategic review of the future development of *PB* work in schools. It is suggested this may be supported by considering the questions raised in the supplementary report to this evaluation. It is strongly recommended that primary and post-primary school teachers and leaders are engaged in this debate.

Recommendations continued:

Recommendation 2: Continue to explore ways in which extra-curricular approaches and contexts may be used to develop *PB* work. Such an approach may involve a mixed economy of *PB* work in school and non-school environments.

Recommendation 3: Develop robust instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, for evaluating *PB* work in schools that will allow student opinion to inform future development. Explore also alternative ways in which the student voice might be more effectively incorporated into the programme's development.

Recommendation 4: In association with teachers in schools, develop a strategy for engaging parents in the *PB* programme. *PB* offers an excellent opportunity to engage with parents and the wider community, but the means of exploiting this potential needs to be developed. Such an approach will need to be flexible, and developed in conjunction with teachers, in order to accommodate the specific contexts of schools and their environments;

Recommendation 5: Continue to raise awareness of MCI's core issues with staff in relevant agencies. This could be achieved in part by organising another multi-agency event, such as the highly successful one in 2009.

Recommendation 6: Reaffirm MCI's purpose in relation to supporting young people who are experiencing domestic violence or negative family conflict. To develop this purpose in order to help better articulate MCI's own distinctive role, and its relation to partner organisations and agencies;

Recommendation 7: Continue to develop links with other agencies, and help develop a shared understanding across agencies of the issues facing young people in relation to domestic violence and negative family conflict. Devote particular attention to where these links may be weaker or less developed;

Recommendation 8: Monitor the implementation of the new formal referrals policy.

Recommendation 9: To consider undertaking a robust community-level needs analysis to inform an explicit strategic plan, if further therapeutic services are to be developed.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

Developing *Protective Behaviours* as a curriculum entitlement: the challenges of integrating and embedding an external curriculum initiative in schools

A key feature of MCI's work has been its use of the *PB* programme in schools in the Erris and Castlebar areas. This work was undertaken with young people in both primary and post-primary schools. The work draws primarily on the programme established by Protective Behaviours UK, but has been developed using materials from Northern Ireland Women's Aid (*Helping Hands* in the primary phase and *Heading for Healthy Relationships* in the post-primary phase) and material sourced by MCI. Delivery of the programme was based on a planned series of 10 weekly sessions, provided by MCI project workers. Two MCI project workers deliver the programme, based on a team teaching approach. In some cases non-MCI people have been employed on a contract basis to support delivery. The class teacher is present in the classroom, but is not expected to participate in delivery.

The project evaluation report provides details of the impact of the *PB* programme in relation to the young people participating in the initiative. From the evidence provided in the report it is clear that the *PB* programme has had a significant impact on the young people involved, and that there were a number of identifiable benefits relating to the programme's implementation. However, as researchers we also became aware of a number of complex issues relating to the delivery of an external curriculum initiative, such as *PB*, in schools. Some of these may be considered issues of practicality, whilst others are more philosophical in nature and raise fundamental questions about purposes and processes. The purpose of this supplementary paper is to 'surface' these issues as a means of encouraging more wide-ranging discussion. In our view, many of the issues defy 'right or wrong' responses, and therefore it would not be appropriate to present and propose specific recommendations. Rather, it is important for those involved to have a thorough discussion of the issues so that a collective decision can be made as to the most effective future strategic direction. The issues that emerged, and that are discussed in this supplementary report, relate firstly to questions of school coverage and range; secondly to issues of personnel and delivery; and finally to questions of 'fit', by which we mean the extent to which the *PB* programme can be effectively integrated into schools at a range of levels. In presenting this supplementary paper we are in no way questioning MCI's work in schools. There is no doubt that the *PB* programme is an important and powerful curriculum intervention. However, our view is that this potential only becomes fully realised when a curriculum experience becomes an entitlement, available to all young people to access. For a curriculum initiative to become an entitlement it needs to be both integrated and embedded within a school's wider curriculum plan. This research revealed a number of obstacles

to that process and this supplementary paper is intended to highlight these obstacles and generate discussion capable of providing potential solutions. The issues identified fall within three broad areas:

- School coverage and range – which schools should MCI work with, and why?
- Personnel and delivery – who is best placed to deliver *PB* in schools?
- 'Fitting in' – how best can *PB* be integrated into a school's curriculum?

School coverage and range

The attractions of working with schools are obvious. Investment in working with young people offers the potential for a lifetime of benefit, whilst schools appear to offer a ready-made infrastructure for working with young people in an educational context. There is no doubt that working with schools helps facilitate coverage, with the project being able to impact on significant numbers of young people. However, there are questions as to what is the most effective strategy to ensure coverage is not only maximised, but systematic. This raises wider questions of *PB* in schools as a curriculum entitlement. MCI has worked with both primary and post-primary schools since its inception. In the case of primary schools two different models have been adopted: in a larger school MCI worked with children in a single year group but in the smaller, rural schools MCI worked with all the children in the school. This latter model has some problems as it raises questions about future inputs from the project. If all the children in a primary school have received the *PB* programme does it become problematic if the programme was to be repeated within the timeframe of a child's time at the school, as some young people would potentially receive a duplicate experience? In this sense, there does seem to be some merit in focusing on the secondary sector, as this lends itself to working on a 'year group' model with significant numbers of young people. Building the *PB* initiative into the same year group's curriculum each year would facilitate an approach that is both systematic and provides broad coverage, thereby creating a sense of curriculum entitlement. Alternative approaches tend to be less systematic and appear more *ad hoc* in their coverage, although a 'year group' approach is possible within primary schools, including schools with mixed age classes. It is also important to recognise that post-primary delivery generally allows for domestic violence issues to be considered within the programme. That said, a primary perspective may be more effective as it is working with children from a younger age. As MCI's work has developed it has become more clearly focused on issues of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005) and the development of emotional literacy; there may then be a compelling case for prioritising these issues with younger people at an earlier stage in their development (Bruce, 2010).

Question 1: *Protective Behaviours* is most effective when it becomes an entitlement embedded within the curriculum. What is the most effective strategy for ensuring young people gain access to the *Protective Behaviours* programme in schools? Should this be focused on primary schools, post-primary schools or some combination of the two?

Personnel and delivery

The model adopted by MCI has been for two project workers to work with each school and to deliver the programme over a 10 week period. The classroom teacher is present in the classroom, but is not expected to participate in delivery. Throughout the evaluation it was clear that the quality of this delivery was not in question. The project workers were praised for their professionalism and the high quality of their work with young people. However, as a research team we were also made aware of a number of issues relating to the relative merits of an 'internal vs external' model of delivery. It is not our intention in this report to provide a view about which approach we deem to be 'correct' or 'preferred'. Rather we present the arguments here for two reasons. The first is that the issues raised are significant and profound, and in themselves it is important that they are periodically reviewed and discussed. Secondly, it is clear that the current model of delivery is necessarily a constraint on growth. If a curriculum entitlement is to be developed then this is not possible based on a model of 1.5 project workers delivering *PB*. If *PB* is to become integrated and embedded, and hence sustainable, it is essential that wider thought is given to the models of delivery. This discussion may inform that debate.

Schools welcomed the support of MCI, and their external input, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most common was that the MCI workers were seen as specialists and as having an expertise, particularly with regard to issues of domestic violence. Classroom teachers indicated a lack of confidence when dealing with such issues, and this was partly born out of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the issues. The phenomenon of the general classroom teacher and/or subject specialist being uncomfortable with managing sensitive aspects of the pastoral curriculum is well understood. Teachers are secure and comfortable in relation to their areas of specialism, but feel correspondingly less secure when covering issues outside of their specialism. When the issues being addressed are difficult or sensitive, then often problems of insecurity are compounded. Furthermore, it can be difficult for teachers to develop their confidence as teaching this material

may form only a small part of their teaching. There is less incentive to invest time in developing resources when, for a range of reasons, such work may not been identified as a priority.

Drawing on external providers can counter many of the problems identified above. In some cases schools were appreciative of 'new faces' and argued that young people respond positively to someone different (this was especially the case in small primary schools where many young people may have the same teacher for more than a single year). One parent interviewee commented, '*I think for children is great to hear another voice because in the classroom they get so used to the teacher's voice and at times they just switch off … and I think "yes" another voice is so much appreciated …*'. However, the benefits were wider than this. MCI workers had a confidence born out of knowledge of the subject, but also confidence with the learning materials. Given MCI's focus it has been possible for MCI staff to fine tune *PB* materials to suit their own context and teaching styles. Confidence is further developed through multiple deliveries of the programme. Therefore, although this was considered difficult subject matter, the confidence of the MCI project workers in managing difficult material and ambitious resources was clearly a source of benefit.

Finally, it was recognised that there were sensitivities related to some of the subject content and a view was expressed that young people may be more likely to share their feelings or experiences with adults who were not also their classroom teacher. This was considered to be a particular issue in small schools, where the teacher is often also a member of the local community. One principal commented: '*In a small community everyone knows what's going on. Children don't find it easy to approach someone in their own locality*' and argued that a person external to the school may be more helpful in terms of encouraging a child to share a potential disclosure. However, to illustrate the complex nature of these problems, the same principal expressed concern that a child might make a disclosure and then the school would be obliged to act. The principal knew this was the right thing to do, but was also acutely aware of the potential fallout from such a development, particularly in a small community.

The arguments for a delivery focused on classroom teachers derive in part from an educational philosophical argument that emphasises the need to integrate the pastoral and academic curriculum. Such a model of integration is arguably commonplace in the primary curriculum, where the classroom teacher has responsibility for the whole curriculum. However, it is less common in the post-primary phase where the divisions between traditional subject content and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) material can become much clearer. Arguments in favour of integration emphasise the teachers' role in educating the whole child. It is argued that creating divisions between different aspects of the curriculum (such as between the cognitive and affective

domains) are both artificial and unhelpful. In this model, effective teaching recognises the complexity and interdependent nature of young people's learning and encourages a pedagogical approach that reflects this interdependence. Such a pedagogical approach is critical of attitudes that accord a lower priority to the affective domain by, for example, prioritising subject teaching over the pastoral curriculum or tutoring role. This approach does not deny the potential benefits of drawing on external expertise, but would be critical of an approach that did not acknowledge the absolutely central role of the teacher in the welfare of children, or which appeared to be 'contracting out' a key area of the curriculum.

A view was expressed that teachers may be happy for someone else to deliver aspects of the SPHE curriculum, because this removed a potentially difficult and problematic area of teaching. The argument was presented that the use of outsiders may reflect what was pragmatically desirable rather than what was pedagogically sound. A concern was also expressed that external agencies may come into schools to deal with complex and difficult issues, but then not be around or available to deal with any consequences of their intervention. There was a concern that the school would be left to 'pick up the pieces' without necessarily having the expertise to do this. It is possible to see how this has the potential to be an issue. However, we would point out that nobody we talked to in any of the schools shared this concern. All the schools felt that appropriate procedures were put in place to deal with any issues that arose from *PB* work in schools, that these procedures were robust and that there were no concerns about students being left exposed or vulnerable following *PB* work. The most obvious support provided was that *PB* staff remained in the school immediately after the taught sessions and were available to any young person who wanted to discuss issues arising from the session and their own personal circumstances. There were no cases reported to us of any young person raising any such issue, either with *PB* staff or with their teachers.

Question 2: At present the *Protective Behaviours* programme is delivered by MCI project workers. To what extent is this model compatible with the long term development of *PB* as a curriculum entitlement? What models of project worker, teacher, or project worker and teacher *PB* delivery offer the best outcomes in terms of pedagogical practice and long term development/sustainability?

Protective Behaviours in schools and the concept of 'fit'

Both of the above points have raised questions about *PB* work in schools and the most appropriate way to target this work and deliver it. During the course of this research we also became aware of a number of related issues which highlight the complexity of integrating a programme such as *PB* within schools. In simple terms, we identified problems of 'fit', whereby it was sometimes difficult to locate the *PB* programme within a particular institution. We would identify problems of 'schedule fit', 'curriculum fit' and 'cultural fit'. These are discussed separately, but are frequently inter-related.

'Schedule fit' refers to the practical difficulty of finding time within the school day and the school year to accommodate a 10 week programme. Both the primary and post-primary schools described the difficulties of accommodating a substantial, 10 week curriculum project. This was particularly problematic in post-primary schools where the traditional timetable imposes a major structural constraint. MCI's development of *PB* work places considerable emphasis on the discussion of complex personal and emotional issues amongst students, often facilitated by the creative use of art as a means of supporting self-expression. The nature of this work delivered in *PB* sessions (discussion work, addressing complex issues, artwork) made it difficult to deliver in a traditional single lesson, the usual format for SPHE. *PB* work tended to require a double lesson and making such a structural adjustment to a secondary school timetable can be extraordinarily difficult. At very least such an adjustment often has to be made in the academic year *prior* to the year in which the programme might be delivered.

Within primary schools the problems created by formal timetables were less of an issue, as the primary school day is less constrained by such structural inhibitors. However, the less obvious timetable problems do not conceal that the primary school curriculum is no less pressured than the post-primary curriculum. Within primary schools the problem of 'schedule fit' was more closely linked to that of curriculum overload and this is the next issue to be addressed.

'Curriculum fit' refers to the extent to which the *PB* programme offered by MCI aligns with the existing curriculum plans of the individual school. The problem of curriculum overload in both the primary and post-primary curriculum is widely recognised and well understood. It is not unique to the Republic of Ireland but represents a global phenomenon, based on societies' increasing expectations of schools. This is partly in terms of rising expectations relating to improving standards (especially in relation to literacy and numeracy), but also in terms of expectations that schools must equip children with the appropriate social skills to function in an increasingly complex world. *PB* offers an important opportunity to engage with many of the issues that schools are encouraged to address. However, it is competing for scarce time in a crowded curriculum. Within

the primary curriculum some concerns were raised as to how *PB* related to the *Stay Safe* initiative (http://www.staysafe.ie/) and whether there was an element of replication between the two programmes. *Stay Safe* is not a statutory requirement, but it is a Department of Education and Skills endorsed and supported programme that deals with similar issues to those covered by the *PB* programme – one teacher interviewee described *PB* and *Stay Safe* as being '*along the same lines',* although he did not see this as problematic. The same teacher went on to argue that *PB* replicated elements of *Stay Safe,* but that it was possible to look at the same issues in more detail:

> *It [PB] replicated and probably developed it more than sometimes we have time to do … as we have a very big curriculum … so it was great to have that block once a week where there was over an hour's work done.*

The *Stay Safe* programme is well-established and evaluations have demonstrated its effectiveness (MacIntyre and Carr, 1999). MCI staff were clear about the differences in the aims and style of *PB*, as compared with *Stay Safe*. However, this arguably needs to be articulated more clearly, so that it can be better communicated to teachers in schools. Principals reported that they have a 'dense curriculum', in addition to which they sometimes receive several offers to provide additional or enhancement programmes such as *PB*. All of these may be worthy, but the time is not available to participate in them all. Principals can face complex moral dilemmas as they seek to reconcile competing, and sometimes incompatible, demands on the limited time within the curriculum (Stevenson, 2007). For example, one principal indicated that the time available for work of the type covered by *PB* would typically be 30 minutes per week, based on her curriculum plan. She had made a decision to pilot the *PB* work, but the requirement to find an hour per week generated considerable pressures on the school curriculum. Her comments merit presenting in some detail, as they articulate some of the key issues facing schools:

> *The only reason a school might have difficulty with it is the pressure on us to teach 11 subjects ... and we are already teaching a lot of SPHE and a lot of similar material to what was in that course. We only have half an hour a week to cover SPHE and because we gave that programme an hour and it took an hour out of every week of our timetable and because we have to teach 11 subjects then **time** was our problem – not that we didn't think the programme was very beneficial.*

This principal presented a complex picture of the pressures on schools to deliver a large curriculum, keep up with a large range of new initiatives and to meet expectations for key areas such as literacy and numeracy. The situation she describes reflects the experience of teachers

presented in the work of Ball (2003) and highlight the tensions between what teachers *want* to do, and what teachers feel they *have* to do. Perhaps ironically, post-primary schools identified less of a problem accommodating *PB* work within their curriculum plan. *PB* was identified as fitting well with the aims of the SPHE curriculum, and as this curriculum had considerable flexibility then finding the space for the *PB* work was not presented as inherently problematic. The central problem for post-primary schools was the inflexibility of the timetable.

'Cultural fit' refers to a wider problem, by which it was recognised that *PB* work did not always sit comfortably within what might be described as the wider cultural context of the school. In the main report we have already identified some evidence that some schools were reluctant to engage with MCI and its *PB* work because of the association with domestic violence. It was put to us that despite curriculum guidelines to the contrary, many schools still prefer to avoid dealing with complex personal issues in a systematic way through the curriculum. In that sense there can be a cultural mismatch between the aims of MCI's work and an individual school's preferred way of working. However, it was also clear that in those schools where MCI was delivering the *PB* programme there was sometimes a cultural dissonance between the philosophy and approach of the *PB* work, and the general ways of working within particular schools. It is important to emphasise that, by its nature, this issue varied significantly between schools, indeed *within* schools. Some schools embraced the *PB* work, and found that its way of working aligned well with the school's own ethos and style. However, in other instances this was not always the case. *PB* work, as it has been developed by MCI, places considerable emphasis on group work, critical questioning of assumptions and students' active engagement in the lesson, often facilitated by the use of art. In some cases this ran counter to students' more usual experience, where there is an emphasis on the teacher as the regulator of classroom conduct and the source of knowledge. In such institutions learning tends to be more passive. In these cases students often struggled to make the adjustment between what they were used to and the apparently less constrained but more challenging nature of the *PB* work. One primary teacher highlighted the issues of external input potentially upsetting the *status quo*:

> *I just suggested to them [the project workers] once one or two things that maybe could have made it easier for them. One particular example was the use of clay - they came in one day to do clay. If I had known in advance I could have made it an awful lot easier for them - and then you had clay statues or whatever they made they had to sit in the room and sit for a while .. whereas I would have done a more structured lesson there … if it was coming down to me … some teachers would not have liked it because they said that the room was left in a mess… it wasn't in a mess it was just different … I don't mind that … but depending on the*

teacher they might find it not as structured … do you know what I mean. All teachers are different … I am easy going like that … but ...

All the above issues highlight the difficulties of integrating an external curriculum initiative within a school setting. King's (2011) work in the Republic of Ireland confirms many of the issues raised by this research, and in particular the question of curriculum overload and the pressure of competing initiatives that can prevent external initiatives getting any place in the curriculum, let alone becoming established.

Question 3: How can the *Protective Behaviours* programme be integrated within the primary and/or post-primary curriculum experience? This question needs to be considered at three levels. The first relates to the ability to 'fit' the programme within the school timetable. The second level is a more substantial question of 'curriculum fit' and reflects the extent to which *PB* aligns with, and complements, the total curriculum plan of the school. The third level is more complex again and relates to the extent to which pedagogical approaches are consonant with the ways of working that students experience in their school.

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