LOOKING OUT FOR LOOKING AFTER LOOKING TO EACH OTHER

Perspectives from and about Black young people
in Balbriggan, Co Dublin

NYCI National Youth Council of Ireland

National Youth Council of Ireland

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National Youth Council of Ireland

‘Looking out for, looking after, looking to each other’

Perspectives from and about Black young people in Balbriggan, County Dublin

Centre for Youth Research and Development

Department of Applied Social Studies

Maynooth University

2023

CENTRE FOR YOUTH RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

> But the thing is, again, if the space is provided for them to hang out, how are they going to do this hang out? Who is overseeing that hang out? Not as if you are micro-managing them in any way, but how is that hang out safe?... What provision are you making for them to be able to say, ok this is my culture, this is where I am now, and this is who I want to be?
>
> Community worker and parent

> [We need something like] a church, but not just your regular church...it would be a 'church' where like Asians, Blacks, whites, every single denomination, every single person like you didn't expect would be in there...that's the type of facility or organisation that I would like to have because...I think it will teach you a lot about other people and other cultures.
>
> Young person

> We need to focus on what we mean by integration... what does that integration look like?...[W]e focus too much on 'Oh we need to just get them into [mixed] spaces'...But when they come into the spaces, like what is the space like, is it welcoming? So it is all around not just...getting more young people [into mixed spaces].
>
> Young adult

> ...up until I moved to Ireland I wasn't even considered Black. And then there is this label of 'Blackness' placed on me now that I have to wrestle with and make sense of and understand with the children [so] they maybe understand in the school system...The children [are having] experiences and the parents are not understanding the experiences. [And yet] they probably really understand it better than anyone else in that moment.
>
> Young adult

Research Team

Tonye Benson-Olatunde, Researcher, Senior University Tutor and doctoral candidate

Maurice Devlin, Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Youth Research and Development

Aidan Farrelly, Researcher, Community and Youth Worker and doctoral candidate

Reuben Hambakachere, Researcher, Community and Youth Worker

Hilary Tierney, Associate Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Youth Research and Development

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Research Advisory Group members

Dr Abiola Muhammed: independent

Áine McGuinness and Eamonn Mullen: Foróige

Eddie Darcy: independent

Fiona Savidge and Darren Farrelly: Garda Síochána, Balbriggan

Martin McEntee: Education Training Board (ETB) Youth Officer

Shane O'Curry: Irish Network Against Racism (INAR)

Marie Claire McAleer, Anne Walsh, Amel Yacef and Alison Fox: NYCI

Contents

Foreword

This research comes at a very timely moment as NYCI and the youth work sector begin a broader discussion on the Vision for Youth Work. Core to that vision and aligning with NYCI's new Strategic Plan is a focus on inclusion and equity. How the youth work sector meets the needs of Black young people in our most ethnically diverse communities in Ireland will be a measure of the youth work sector's commitment to realising this vision.

This research provides a clear direction on what ethnically inclusive youth work provision might look like. What is clearly indicated is the need for diversification. The Irish youth work sectors strength has always been its diversity of youth work delivery, represented in our 50+ members which we look forward to expanding into the future to include more minority ethnic-led youth groups.

The National Youth Council of Ireland has long prioritised the inclusion of minority ethnic young people in youth work. We responded in 2006 to the increased numbers of separated young people reaching our shores by writing a resource for youth workers. The development of an Intercultural Strategy for Youth Work soon followed. As part of its preparation a scoping exercise was completed to capture the practice wisdom from youth work organisations across Ireland who had embarked on intercultural youth work. Although the encroaching recession blocked the formal adoption of the Intercultural Strategy for Youth Work NYCI received government support to set up the Intercultural Youth Work Programme which has grown from strength to strength in the ensuing 15 years.

The Programme completed research into the lives of minority ethnic young people growing up in Ireland in 2017 which recommended the need for more minority ethnic only youth spaces. This new research, funded by Community Foundation Ireland, shifts this important discussion to the local level where similar needs, and other important understandings on place and identity are described by the research authors from Centre for Youth Research and Development, Maynooth University. We look forward to working with the communities in Balbriggan into the future to continue this very important conversation.

Mary Cunningham

CEO NYCI

Preface

“What about the minority ethnic young people in Balbriggan?” It was the end of an INAR (Irish Network Against Racism) network meeting. My ears pricked up; young people were seldom mentioned at the network meetings. The person who had spoken worked with an organisation that had links with Balbriggan.

“What about the minority ethnic young people in Balbriggan?” I asked.

“There is nothing there for them to do and I'm concerned for them” was the response. The word ‘concerned’ was loaded. When it referred to young people it usually meant a fear of harm, young people falling through the gaps, young people acting out, young people being targets, and usually it meant that young people would be stereotyped and misrepresented by others looking on.

I only knew Balbriggan from delivering training to Foróige, I knew it had become a large community wrapped around a small town and that youth service provision hadn’t kept pace with the new demographic. I personally knew people who had moved to Balbriggan from Mosney and from other minority ethnic communities attracted by the lower rents.

I left that INAR meeting troubled – sensing that we needed to act but not sure what that action was. I had met a youth worker from Balbriggan some years earlier whose role was to link minority ethnic young people in the area with the Foróige youth service. She was concerned that she would build relationships and trust with the young people but when the short-term funding ran out she would have to leave, before real connections could be made. Her fears were not unfounded, I had seen the same thing happen in many other areas. Long-term funding and commitment were key.

Over the next two years I was to hear the same sentiment expressed at INAR network meetings. “What about the young people in Balbriggan?” I remained concerned but had no additional resources.

When a funding opportunity with Community Foundation Ireland arose Balbriggan was the first thought that came to mind. I knew we didn’t know enough. In essence that original question had remained very real – what about the minority ethnic young people in Balbriggan? Translated more widely it was about everything that our Programme stood for: how can the youth work sector meet the needs of minority ethnic young people? And here was an area with probably the largest demographic of minority ethnic young people in Ireland with

the least youth work resources that I knew of. This research was the obvious first response, to reach beyond the noise and rhetoric, to listen deeply and hear how minority ethnic young people in Balbriggan experienced their lives.

Granting the tender to Maynooth University came with a knowledge that the process would be in safe hands. Many years earlier Maurice Devlin had written a research report for NYCI on the stereotyping of young people and he and Hilary Tierney together completed the Standpoints research on youth work and global justice. We came from the same commitment to inclusion, and to the centrality of minority voices and the importance of deep listening. We are very happy to share this research which we're sure will resonate for other communities across Ireland.

Anne Walsh

Equality and Intercultural Programme Manager, NYCI

Chapter 1: Introduction

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research study into the experiences of young people of African descent in Balbriggan, County Dublin, and the responses to their needs and circumstances by youth work and other services. While Balbriggan, for reasons set out in Chapter 3, is selected here as a case study, it is expected that the findings and recommendations should also have relevance for Black young people and other minority ethnic young people and communities elsewhere in Ireland, and for policy and provision nationally.

This research was conducted by the Centre for Youth Research and Development in the Department of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University. It was commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland and funded by Community Foundation Ireland. There was a Research Advisory Group which comprised a range of people with experience and roles relevant to the research.

The study's research questions are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of young people of African descent living in Balbriggan?

   (1a) What are the positive aspects of their experience, supporting (e.g.) enjoyment, fulfilment, a sense of belonging?

   (1b) What are the negative aspects, associated with (e.g.) discrimination, tension, a sense of alienation?

2. How are these experiences represented in discourse (in the wider community, in media, in policy) and what impact does this have?

3. What responses have there been to date:
   - ✓ by the youth work and community sectors?
   - ✓ through interagency practice?

4. What interventions are required so as to effectively support/enable minority ethnic young people's positive experiences and combat/alleviate the negative ones:
   - ✓ by the youth work and community sectors?
   - ✓ through interagency practice?

Following a brief literature review (Chapter 2) and a description of the context and methodology for the research (Chapter 3), Chapter 4 presents the research findings, structured to follow the order of the questions above. Chapter 5 presents a discussion on the findings. Chapter 6 concludes the report and presents a number of recommendations.

It was acknowledged in discussions with stakeholders at the outset of the research process that public perceptions and representations of young people, and minority ethnic young people in particular, are frequently prejudicial and stereotypical, and it is very important that research into their lives consciously and proactively seeks to counter such prejudice and stereotyping, particularly by enabling their own voices to be heard. This study attempts to do so to the greatest extent possible. However, as we explain in Chapter 3, there were a number of constraints relating to ethical protocols, practical considerations and timing that limited the capacity of the research team to engage directly with as diverse a range of young people as possible, below and above the age of 18.

The research grew out of an initial idea concerning the experiences of, and responses to, minority ethnic young people, but 'minority ethnicity' is an extremely broad concept and contains within it a great deal of ethnic diversity. As explained in Chapter 3, to reflect Balbriggan's high proportion

of people identifying (in census results) as Black or Black Irish compared with the national averages, it was decided that this research would focus on young people and communities of African heritage. However, it is acknowledged here and throughout the report that this too is a very heterogeneous category.

The research team was itself ethnically diverse and because of the qualitative research design for the study, which placed an emphasis on conversation and reciprocity (see Chapter 3), it was possible and appropriate at times for some members of the team to engage in illuminative two-way exchange with discussants about their own experience, personally and professionally, as members of minority ethnic communities. It is hoped that the young people and communities with whom the research is concerned will find that it speaks meaningfully to them about their lives and experiences. It is also hoped that the current research is only one step in a process of engagement that will continue far beyond this report, with multiple opportunities for minority ethnic young people, their families and communities to discuss further steps, building also on other recent and ongoing research and activism at local level.

However, in drafting the report the research team has also been particularly conscious of addressing those in the majority – white youth workers, community workers, educators, service providers, managers, policy makers, funders, media professionals and others – whose overwhelmingly larger numbers place on them the correspondingly preponderant responsibility to pay attention to its findings and act on its recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Minority ethnic young people's lives and experiences in general

There is an extensive and expanding literature on the experiences of minority ethnic young people globally. This is not surprising since for a large and growing proportion of young people in industrialised and 'post-industrialised' societies, a key aspect of their personal and social development is making sense of 'what it means to be a member of an ethnic minority within a society dominated by the majority culture' (Arnett 2017: 182). There are many factors shaping such experiences: psychological, sociological and psychosocial. At the individual level, the young person is developing an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of their experience and identity. Arnett places this in the context of adolescent development:

> *One aspect of the growing capacity for self-reflection among adolescents who belong to ethnic minorities is likely to be a sharpened awareness of what it means for them to be a member of their minority group. Group terms such as African American, Chinese Canadian, and Turkish Dutch take on a new meaning as adolescents can now think about what these terms mean and how the term for their ethnic group applies to themselves. Also, as a consequence of their growing capacity to think about what others think about them, adolescents become more acutely aware of the prejudices and stereotypes that others may hold about their ethnic group* (Arnett 2017: 182).

At a sociological level, the shifting legal, policy, administrative and institutional contexts as children make the transition towards young adulthood (e.g. through differences in the nature of second-level

education as compared with primary; or different expectations and assumptions about unsupervised access to public places for older children as compared with younger ones) interact with majority-minority dynamics (including at times the prejudices and stereotypes referred to above) to throw the experiences of minority ethnic young people into sharper relief. The lives of specific individuals and groups is then further influenced by factors related to gender, class, sexuality, dis/ability and so on, through manifestations of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; 2016).

Young people can respond in a range of ways to being part of a minority ethnic group. A well-known framework for categorising their responses is Phinney's fourfold classification - based on degree of identification with their ethnic group and with the majority culture - into separation, marginalisation, bi-culturalism or assimilation (Phinney 1992; Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997: Phinney & Ong 2007). The third of these, bi-culturalism may form part of – or be understood in the context of – a broader pattern whereby young people all over the world are influenced by a range of forces, from the local to the global and from their own culture(s) of origin to others with which they come into contact, in a process of cultural hybridization. Looked at positively, this means that 'different and contrasting cultures can be part of a repertoire of collective voices playing their part in a multivoiced self' (Hermans and Kempen 1998: 118).

It is not always a positive experience for young people, however, and many may not feel that there is a 'repertoire' at their disposal at all. Research shows that, of the categories outlined above, separation is the most common ethnic identity status among African American young people (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Drawing on research by Seaton et al. (2011) and once again highlighting the interaction between social context and individual development, Arnett suggests:

> *The separation response is, at least in part, a result of the discrimination and prejudice that minorities often face in American society and that young people become more fully*

> *aware of as they reach adolescence…African American adolescents tend to be more in favour of separation than adolescents from other ethnic groups, perhaps because most of them are from families who have been in the United States for many generations and who have experienced a long history of slavery, racism, and discrimination* (Arnett 2017: 184).

There is also now a growing body of research into the experiences of minority ethnic young people in Ireland. Useful summaries are provided in McRea and Mahon (2015) and Walsh (2017), both of which are themselves valuable additions to the literature. Machowska-Kosiack and Barry have recently conducted a critical scoping literature review (covering 2007-2020) of research on the experiences of second-generation ethnic minority young people in Ireland, while also themselves carrying out focus group research with 20 young people. Some of the major themes emerging in the literature are summarised below.

A consistent theme arising is that of identity and belonging. Minority ethnic young people, regardless of where they were born and/or (if born elsewhere) how long they have been in Ireland, are regularly made to feel that whatever they are they are not Irish. They face what has been termed 'identity denial', very often expressed in the form of the question 'Where are you really from?' (Cheryan and Monin 2005). This makes it clear that the identity 'options' set out in Phinney's fourfold classification are not simply or exclusively about individual choices on the part of young people and their families. Prevailing attitudes in the majority white society, regarding among other things fixed notions of Irishness, offer minority ethnic young people a very 'restricted identity option, built around simplistic interpretations of faith, race, dress and so on' (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 33).

On the other hand, minority ethnic young people are not passively at the mercy of external forces. Like other young people, their sense of identity

and their choices about their lives and lifestyles are the result of a complex interplay of individual agency and multiple aspects of social structure, as captured by Walsh when she says: ' In negotiating a sense of belonging in Ireland young minority ethnic people are significantly impacted by the attitude of people around them alongside navigating their own journeys of self-understanding and discovery' (Walsh 2017: 12). This is borne out in McGrath and McGarry's study (2014) of young Muslim women, in which the participants are portrayed 'as resourceful and exercising agency, albeit in the context of restricted public lives' (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 33).

A common experience for minority ethnic young people, closely related both to issues of identity and belonging and to the complexity of their place within social structures, is the challenge of dealing with differences and frequently tensions between the expectations of various groups in their lives: their parents and family, their minority ethnic peers, majority ethnic peers and the wider community and society. The tensions can relate to relatively 'superficial' behavioural expectations but frequently also reflect fundamentally conflicting values and assumptions (and of course the behavioural aspects are themselves expressions of underpinning values). McGarry (2012) suggests that young Muslim people in Ireland engage in a number of 'identity performances' within separate but co-existent systems of home, the Muslim community and the broader majority society. Szlovák and Szewczyk (2015) found that for at least some young migrant men tensions were often experienced because their family's culture of origin had more deferential attitudes to parents, the elderly and authorities generally, a less tolerant approach to alcohol and a stronger emphasis on religion than the white majority (see also Gilligan et al. 2010). Walsh's (2017) research found that an important part of the function of migrant-only youth groups and spaces was to allow young people to support each other around intergenerational conflict and tension.

An important part of intergenerational dynamics within minority ethnic communities and families is a strong sense of duty and even

'protectiveness' on the part of young people. In McGrath and McGarry's research (2014) the young female Muslims were not typically allowed to socialise outside the home but they did not resent this and tended to see themselves as having an ethical responsibility to uphold their parents' wishes. In Wang's study (2013), young Hong Kong Chinese people frequently went into the restaurant business not because of interest but out of a sense of duty and 'to pay back their parents' hard work' (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 37).

It is clear that patterns of experiences and responses vary from one group of minority young people to another, based on a wide range of factors. The significance of gender has already been mentioned. Research throws light on the different patterns of experience for young men and women in schools (Devine 2009; Kitching 2010), families (Szlovák and Szewczyk 2015; Wang and Faas 2021) and in leisure contexts and public places (McGarry 2012; McGrath and McGarry 2014). In McGarry's study of Muslim young people the girls experienced less overt racialised hostility than the boys, but Allen and Neilson (2002, cited in Soni 2011) found that Muslim women were particularly at risk of racist attacks, attributing this to the identifiability of the hijab.

In both the above cases the presence of 'visible signifiers' of difference can be seen to come into play. Skin colour and physical features, but also material artefacts and symbols, can be 'key signifiers for cultural and racial stereotyping and [exclusion] from developing a sense of belonging and Irishness' (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 33). There is ample evidence for this in the data collected for iReport.ie which is a racist incident reporting system for Ireland. In an analysis that focuses specifically on racism against people of African descent, Michael (2015) writes:

> *…Black Europeans and Africans are repeatedly not distinguished from each other by perpetrators of racism, relying only on skin colour in their identification and*

> *stereotyping about cultural traits on that basis. The same is true across Europe* (Michael 2015: 8).

Some research has suggested that the experience of minority ethnic young people, and how they are perceived and treated by others, can change significantly as they grow up. Dhala et al. (2019) conducted a study of 'how people of African descent [PAD] and service providers experience diversity in Dublin 15'. The 'visibility dimension' also arose in this research, with respondents saying 'that they are easily identified as "outsiders" by the colour of their skin'. The authors report:

> *The PAD community talked of discriminatory policing and racial profiling on the part of Gardaí and described security personnel following them around in the shopping centre and in shops such as Lidl. 'We are always stopped, irritated, agitated, shouted at, made to feel uncomfortable, picked on because of the clothes I wear'.*
>
> *Young PAD were unanimous that this kind of response was not what they experienced as children*: *'what has changed is maturity, becoming an adult creates the difference. Without you speaking they look at you as a stranger'* (Dhala et al. 2019: 14).

Other factors shaping the experiences of individuals and groups include country of birth, whether (and when) young people moved to Ireland as opposed to having been born here, and how long ago their parents/ families migrated. Within the male group of respondents in McGarry's (2012) study, there were differences in the experiences of young people from newer migrant communities and more established ones. The fact that 'young men from the latter group had attended the local primary school and were deeply involved in GAA sports acted as a sort of "cushion" against racialised "slagging"' (McCrea and Mahon 2015: 20). But it is not possible to make hard and fast distinctions between 'first generation' and 'second generation' (and other) migrant experiences. This is why Rumbaut

(2004) coined the terms '1.75 generation', '1.5 generation' and '1.25 generation' in an attempt to better capture the dynamic and processual nature of the experiences of migrant families and children.

Social class is another key factor stratifying the experiences of migrant communities as it does all of society. Nineteen of the twenty-five participants in Wang and Faas's study (2021) of young Hong Kong Chinese in Ireland were attending higher education institutions and the group as a whole was 'heavily supported by the economic capital of their parents' (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 37). Wang and Faas's study also illustrates how class and 'migrant generation' can interact, a point borne out in the research by Molcho et al. (2011) who analysed data from the much larger *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children in Ireland Study* (Nic Gabhainn et al. 2007). Here, second generation young migrants were reported to have more social ties and higher levels of social capital than first generation ones, and correspondingly the latter were likely to be from less affluent families. The interplay of these factors and the others that have been referred to confirm the relevance of the concept of intersectionality, mentioned earlier, to the lives of minority ethnic young people (Kitching 2009).

As is clear from the references above, racism emerges in the literature as a constant part of minority ethnic young people's experiences. It is a 'normal' feature of these young people's lives (Walsh 2017: 14). It takes 'two principal forms, "virulent and overt racism" such as harassment and name-calling in public places or school and "naïve stereotyping and misunderstanding" such as impressions and opinions of people's countries of origin' (McCrea & Mahon 2015: 19, citing Gilligan et al. 2010). It is also possible to distinguish between individual and institutional racism, the latter ranging from tacit assumptions and prejudices (such as reflected in aspects of the school curriculum) to more blatant examples of differential treatment, for example 'the social and geographical isolation which separates young people [in the Direct Provision system] from non-asylum-seeking peers and the lack of play space for children within the system' (McCrea and

Mahon 2015: 20). The Irish Network Against Racism extends the classification to four categories:

> *Historical* racism 'has to do with the specific histories of domination and subordination of groups (i.e. the racialisation of their relationships) in any given society'.
>
> *Structural* racism, sometimes called societal racism, 'refers to the fact that society is structured in a way that excludes substantial numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds from taking part equally in social institutions or for having equal life outcomes'.
>
> *Institutional* racism is 'expressed in the practice of social and political institutions…[in how they] discriminate against certain groups, whether intentionally or not, and [fail to] have in place policies that prevent discrimination'.
>
> *Individual* or interpersonal racism refers to the 'most visible forms of racism [and] covers all interactions or behaviour between individuals that are racist or have racist content' (INAR 2020).

Whatever type of racism might be at play, as already stated above minority ethnic young people are never entirely without agency in the face of it. Gilligan et al. (2010: 68) note that young people 'are rarely passive targets of racist abuse' and, in exploring the strategies that are adopted in response, they cite the classification presented by Tizard and Phoenix (1993) in a seminal British study of British young people with 'mixed-race' parentage:

1. *Mentally defusing the threat* – Not modifying the situation itself, but modifying how we think about it in order to reduce its painful impact. For example, we might 'not notice' the threat, ignore it or [reinterpret] it to ourselves by treating it as a joke, degrading the user or reinterpret their negative as a positive.
2. *Avoiding or escaping* the threatening situation.
3. *Tackling the situation directly* by means of verbal or physical attack, humour or enlisting the help of some authority.

4. *Taking steps to prevent or reduce the effects* of the threat in particular by means of personal achievement.

Gilligan et al. confirm that they observed examples of all the above and continue:

> *Two strategies for dealing with racism particularly worth noting are the strategy of 'not noticing' or 'minimising' and that of tackling the situation through physical attack. Both of these are recognised as being potentially problematic in the long term, either to the individual themselves or to inter-group relations more generally* (Gilligan et al. 2010: 69).

The strategy of 'minimising' can also be seen in the study by Ní Laoire et al. (2011), who found that many young African-Irish participants disavowed the significance of racism in their lives and 'framed racist incidents as individual acts of ignorance or bigotry' (McCrea and Mahon 2015: 19). Similarly, the study by Dhala et al. (2019) of the experiences of people of African descent living in Dublin 15 reported that research participants 'have developed responses to racism that include internalising and normalising their experiences [meaning that] racist incidences are not being reported, there is a "keep your head down" approach' (Dhala et al. 2019: 13). Taken together these findings provide considerable cause for concern and highlight the necessity for carefully designed and nuanced approaches by those who work with young people, including in the context of youth work.

2.2 Experiences and responses in youth work and other services

In their report published in 2015, McCrea and Mahon pointed out that 'as yet there appear to be no Irish studies which provide detailed empirical analyses of the challenges and successes of everyday youth work with ethnic minority young people' (2015: 23). Their own study included

interviews and focus groups with both youth workers and young people involved in youth work and identified lessons learned from the Canal Communities Intercultural Youth Project which ran from January 2014 to June 2015 as an initiative of the Canal Communities Regional Youth Service. However, the need remains to build on their work through a detailed empirical study of youth work with minority ethnic young people, preferably involving a substantial element of participant observation and with an action research orientation and design.

Based on a review of previously published strategies and resources (including Foróige 2008, Lynam 2009, NYCI 2012; NYCI/Youthnet 2012), McCrea and Mahon identify a number of measures that have been advocated so as to ensure a 'multi-faceted approach to intercultural youth work'. These include:

- The establishment of systems to monitor uptake and outcomes of minority ethnic communities in youth work;
- Ongoing needs analysis at local level;
- A range of outreach strategies to establish meaningful contact and engagement with children and young people from ethnic minority communities;
- Anti-racist/intercultural organisational policies;
- The need for 'buy-in' from across the organisation, including management;
- Anti-racism training and measures to ensure protection and redress against racism for children and young people;
- Pre-development work with existing participants in youth services [to ensure that groups are experienced as welcoming and safe by minority ethnic young people joining them];
- Collaborative working among relevant youth and community organisations;
- The appointment of staff and volunteers from ethnic minority communities;
- Strategies to build the trust of parents;

- Sensitivity to gender issues and to differing cultural and religious values;
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress towards inclusive youth work.

McCrea and Mahon's own research confirms the importance of these measures and furthermore highlights 'a number of issues, such as identity, religious/cultural value systems or parental expectations, which were not centrally addressed in detail in previous strategies but which are directly relevant to youth work' (2015: 55). They conclude:

> *The experience of [Canal Communities Regional Youth Service] Intercultural Youth Project and its partner youth organisations also suggests that while equality/anti-racist policies and training remain critical, 'on-the-ground' trial and error is a key source of learning. It further demonstrates that having a specific project or worker dedicated to integrating young people from ethnic minority communities can help catalyse relationships between different organisations and keep intercultural youth work 'on the agenda'. Finally, while this report has emphasised the position of ethnic minority young people, we also argue that inclusive youth work can assist young people within the ethnic majority to relate to the culturally diverse society in which they are growing up* (McCrea and Mahon 2015: 56).

Sustainability is also a 'significant concern for those doing intercultural youth work' (Walsh 2017: 12). Sustainability refers to the maintenance of focus and impetus relating to intercultural work and it may relate to matters of funding and strategy. Dedicated projects or workers with a specific remit for intercultural youth work can make a very important contribution but if the funding is time-bound and if the sense of responsibility and engagement is not shared among all workers then there

is a risk that the impetus will not be sustained and valuable initiatives will not be developed further.

The National Youth Council of Ireland's *8 Steps to Inclusive Youth Work* (Walsh and Yacef 2020) is an updated version of a resource first published in 2016. The development process included interviews with 16 youth organisations, projects and groups working to promote inclusive youth work. The eight recommended steps begin with an organisational review:

> *An inclusive youth service will work toward having young people, staff, volunteers, and management that reflect the diversity of our communities. It usually involves including young people from minority and marginalised groups in our mainstream youth groups but can equally involve working with, or creating spaces for, single identity groups where requested by the young people from minority groups themselves. An organisational review will collate data on diversity in the community and will explore ways to measure the levels in the youth organisation to assess the relative degree of diversity that is present* (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 14).

Further steps relate to policy and guidelines ('An Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Policy – or alternative document such as Practice Guidelines, Statement of Practice, etc. – lays out a route to inclusion for us and others to follow…[stating] what we stand for, what our values are, and [documenting] the practice we believe in', p.23) and the spatial and environmental aspect of youth work:

> *Making our youth centres safe, approachable, and welcoming is critical to engaging with young people from minority and marginalised backgrounds. Try to imagine how your space and environment looks and feels to someone who is unfamiliar with it and who may well think that it is a*

> *space for other young people and not them* (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 32).

A consideration of the backgrounds and identities of the adults who work with young people is the fourth step. An interview from a Neighbourhood Youth Project is quoted as follows:

> *'We have volunteers and staff from diverse backgrounds to help ease parents' concerns. A parent will often listen more if they hear something from a youth leader from their own background. It will also encourage greater participation of young people from minority and marginalised backgrounds and in turn be a positive role model to them. Hosting volunteers from abroad has introduced cultural diversity to our youth groups where it was absent (e.g. through the Solidarity Corps)'* (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 40).

The diverse backgrounds and identities of young people (and youth workers) should also find expression in the nature of the activities and programmes that are available:

> *Activities need to be culturally and critically responsive. Factors such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities, culture and language, abilities, special needs, literacy skills and age need to be considered. For example, this could equate to disability access or adaptability; relevance to different learning and reasoning styles; cultural and religious appropriateness; challenging heteronormativity etc* (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 48).

The sixth step to build inclusive and responsive practice is ensuring that 'resources are consistent for the young people from minority and marginalised identities that we work with [which] is difficult if inclusion related activities rely on irregular project funding rather than core costs'. It

is therefore proposed that several key questions are asked in the process of allocating resources to areas of work:

- What inequalities does this group face and why?
- What structural, institutional, historical and personal discriminations do members of this group face?
- Who holds the power – in our relationship with them, and in the wider community toward this group?
- Do we have privilege compared to this group and how do we use it?
- How will our practice challenge discriminations, fight inequalities, create equities, and empower members of this group? (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 60-61).

Walsh and Yacef suggest that the measure and effectiveness of equality and inclusion practice 'pivots on how well we collaborate and network with others', which is the next step highlighted. It is stressed that this takes time and care. As an interviewee from a local youth centre puts it:

> *'Give partnerships time to work. We spent two years visiting a Traveller site on a weekly basis before the young people trusted us enough to get involved in the Youth Centre. The two-year commitment was sustained through their partnership with the local Traveller Action Group'* (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 67).

The final step concerns monitoring and evaluation, with the central point being that 'whatever tools we use to evaluate our work, the key to assessing our inclusive youth work is to incorporate questions that put an equity, inclusion and responsive lens on it' (Walsh and Yacef 2020: 71).

A number of other studies have thrown light on the experiences of minority ethnic young people and their families of engaging with a range of types of public service. Reference has already been made to the fact that young people of African descent living in Dublin 15 felt that they were being racially profiled and treated in a discriminatory manner by the police and

security staff in shops. A Garda interviewee responded that 'all teenagers think Gardaí are harassing them, it is across the board Irish white teenagers will say the same thing' (Dhala et al. 2019: 14). The response by the Garda National Diversity and Integration Unit seemed more open to hearing the Black young people's perspective:

> *'It's wrong because teenagers are always going to be out and about in open spaces. You can't stop and search them. When young people are gathered in public spaces work positively with them, don't treat them as second-class citizens'* (Dhala et al. 2019: 14).

The subject of policing is also dealt with in the Flemington Community Research Project, a participatory action research project involving eleven trainee researchers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, all living or working in Balbriggan (Michael and Prontera 2019). With an overall focus on 'liveability', the report sets the policing context as follows:

> *A general question of satisfaction with policing in the neighbourhood is a common feature of liveability surveys internationally. The police provide important advice and normative functions (setting local standards for behaviour) as well as control functions. Police services have to balance these functions to create adequate levels of trust amongst the resident population to allow them to police neighbourhoods peacefully and effectively. Because of the impact of fear of crime on residents' place attachment and commitment to maintaining local standards, it is important that police and residents have strong communications and positive regular interactions* (Michael and Prontera 2019: 28).

As in the Dublin 15 research, the Flemington study draws attention to perceptions of differential and discriminatory treatment of minority ethnic young people:

> *Disproportionate surveillance and arrest of young people by Gardai was also raised by respondents. The treatment of Black and mixed race young people in particular by Gardai was questioned by parents, who would like to see greater training of Gardai and liaison with young people in a positive manner. Parents are open to facilitating positive conversations on this issue with local Gardai and encouraging better communication on both sides. This demonstrates that there is some level of trust in the service, even if satisfaction levels are currently low in relation to the persistent problems [relating to community safety issues and failure to investigate reports of crime promptly]* (Michael and Prontera 2019: 29).

The *Being Black in the EU* report (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023) includes data on respondents' experiences of being stopped by the police in 13 member states. It found that, of those countries for which data was available, Ireland was one of only three in which the rates of reported 'police stops' among people of African descent had not decreased between 2016 and 2022. In Ireland, Black men were twice as likely as Black women to have been stopped by the police within the last five years (38% as compared with 19%). Ireland had the highest rate for police stops within the previous 12 months (15%). Young Black people (aged 16-24) were much more likely to have been stopped by the police than any other age group in the survey overall, both in the last five years and in the last 12 months, but separate figures for Ireland are not provided (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023: 73-74).

Not surprisingly given how much of young people's time is spent in educational settings, the experience of school features prominently in the research literature on minority ethnic young people. A common finding is that some teachers may have a limited understanding of racism and show a limited ability (or outright failure) to deal with it. There have been undoubted improvements at the level of policy and guidelines dealing with

equality, diversity, inclusion and respect, but many minority ethnic young people still report discriminatory treatment by teachers (McClure 2016). A number of studies (including Smyth et al. 2009; Gilligan et al. 2010) found that school principals were unaware of the extent of racism within their schools, *'as the majority believed that pupils of ethnic minority backgrounds had the same risk of experiencing bullying as everyone else'* (Machowska-Kosiack and Barry 2022: 40).

In the study by Gilligan et al. (2010) the young respondents often had very positive things to say about their educational experiences: 'Many participants spoke with great warmth about their schools and their teachers' (Gilligan 2010: 23). However the findings also confirmed that 'racism definitely does appear to be an issue at school for many migrant young people' (Gilligan et al. 2010: 68), and the response among teachers is mixed:

> *...some teachers noted that bullying and racism were present and that there may be reluctance on the part of newcomer students to approach a teacher. In part, this may be due to a reluctance by students to raise peer issues with a teacher. However, in the present study, we also see that even when students raise such issues with teachers they often feel that teachers do not react appropriately* (Gilligan et al. 2010: 68).

In the most recent *Reports of Racism in Ireland* from iReport.ie, there were 20 cases of reports of repeat harassment from students at school and colleges.

> *Schoolchildren are likely to experience repeat harassment in association with attendance at school or youth clubs as well as in their neighbourhood. College and university students also report harassment...A 15 year old Black girl reported multiple incidents of bullying by other students on her way home from school. Verbal racial abuse had been*

> *used by other students and one student in particular targeted the girl and physically assaulted her* (Michael et al. 2023: 11).

A very positive view of the education system among Black young people emerges in the study by Dhala et al. of the experiences of people of African descent in Dublin 15, in the context of a positive and optimistic view overall of their lives and futures. Non-formal and informal education through youth work came up in the same focus group with young people:

> *There was an overwhelming sense of positivity and hope for the future in the young peoples' focus group discussion regarding their experiences in education and their sense of community. Young peoples' experiences in education were described in terms of fairness and equality. It was felt that with the right attitude, hard work and study that a sense of enthusiasm for the future is justified. Young people of African descent, many who were born in Ireland felt that they have been granted the same opportunities as their peers. They noted that diversity is promoted in general and encouraged in schools. Foróige was also highlighted as doing very good work in promoting unity and inter-cultural communication* (Dhala et al. 2019: 19).

Significantly, the researchers were presented with a contrasting view by adult respondents:

> *For parents on the other hand there was a heightened sense of vigilance in relation to ensuring that their child or children are treated fairly within the education system…Integration of children of African descent was considered by parents as poor. Others went so far as to indicate that there is racism in the school system…Some expressed concerns about the treatment of people of African descent by individual teachers in specific*

> *educational institutions. It was felt that integration was hampered by the fact that many children of African descent are attending one or two schools in the area (Dhala et al. 2019: 20).*

In the research for the *Being Black in the EU* report (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023), Ireland had the highest rate for parents of African descent reporting that someone had made offensive or threatening comments to their child(ren) at school, in person, because of their ethnic or immigrant background (39% compared with 23% across all countries surveyed). In a particularly worrying finding, Ireland also had the highest rate for Black parents saying their children had experienced racist violence at school, with the figure of 23% being almost three times the average for the EU member states surveyed (8%) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023: 45, 56).

Not surprisingly, it is clear from the research literature that the perception among minority ethnic communities of the extent to which the institutions and services with which they interact are hospitable, equitable and respectful is closely related to their perception of whether such institutions and services include within the workforce people like themselves. This matter was addressed in the *Flemington Community Research Project* and the findings (which are broadly in line with other similar research in Ireland and elsewhere) suggest an urgent need for response at the levels of both policy and practice:

> *Approximately 20% of participants believe that the diversity of the community is reflected in the people working within community roles such as teachers, Gardai and youth workers, while approximately 80% of the women and men who took part in the questionnaire do not believe such diverse representation exists. These roles represent the people who establish standards for the community and provide guidance and mediation if social conflict arises. In*

> *other sections, participants have provided a lot of evidence to support the finding that both teaching and policing most need to change to reflect the diversity of the community, in terms of recruitment and training, particularly to support positive interactions with and role models for young people in the area* (Michael and Prontera 2019: 31).

In the light of the findings and conclusions in the study by Michael and Prontera, and the composition of the population of Ireland today, it might be argued that national policy to date regarding the employment profile of minority ethnic communities has been strikingly unambitious. The *Migrant Integration Strategy* (Department of Justice and Equality 2017) included the following action: 'To make the Civil Service fully representative of Irish society we will aim to have 1% of the workforce from ethnic minorities'[1]. The adequacy of that target can be assessed in the light of the findings and discussion presented later in this report. But before that, the following chapter sets out the context and methodology for the research.

[1] The 1% provided for in the Migrant Integration Strategy is not in fact intended to refer exclusively to people from ethnic minorities. It includes 'the employment of EEA migrants and people from minority ethnic communities…(in most cases civil service employment is not open to non-EEA nationals)' (Department of Justice and Equality 2017: 4).

Chapter 3: Context and Methodology

As already explained in the Introduction, this study is concerned with the experiences of young people of African descent in Balbriggan, the responses and opportunities provided to them by youth work and other services and institutions, and the ways in which those responses might be developed and enhanced.

3.1 Balbriggan as a case study

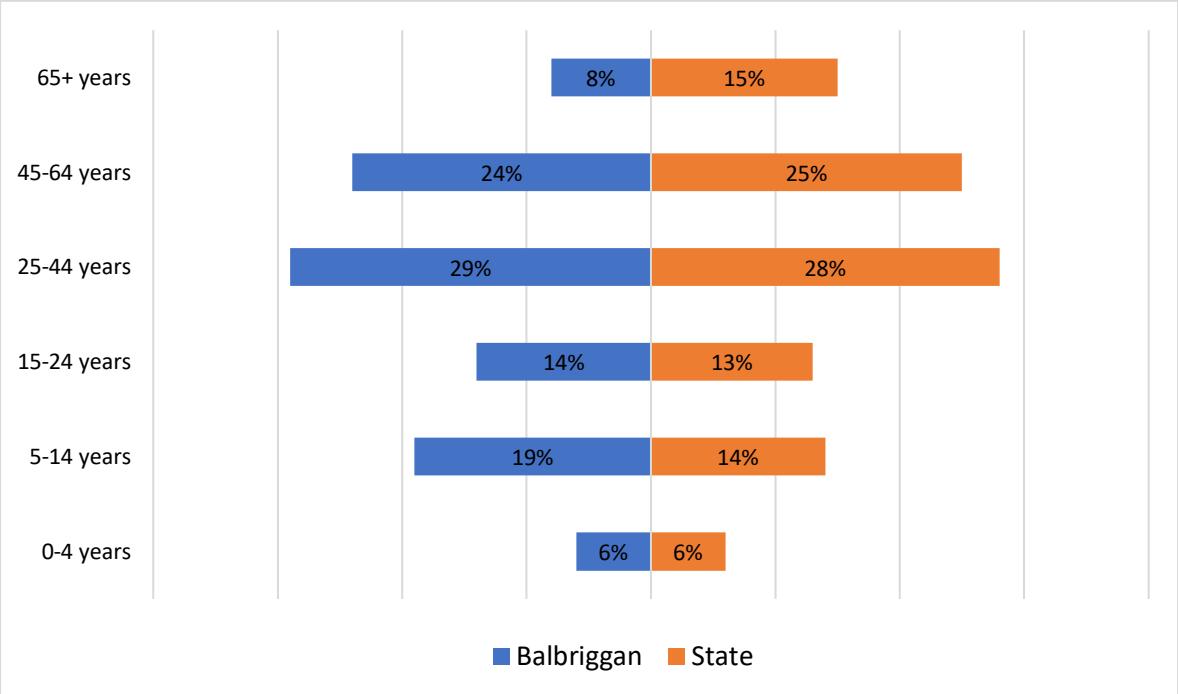
In consultation with the commissioning organisation (NYCI) and the Research Advisory Group (which comprised a range of people with experience and roles relevant to the research and met three times over the duration of the project) it was decided that a case study approach would be the most appropriate research design to address the research questions and that Balbriggan provided the most suitable site for such a study. According to Robert K. Yin (2019), a leading international expert on case study research, such an approach recommends itself particularly when one or more of a number of factors or considerations apply. These include situations where a case can clearly be seen to be 'extreme or unique', 'representative or typical' or in some significant way 'revelatory'. A further relevant consideration is whether the case might have a 'longitudinal' dimension, in other words might lend itself to research over a longer period of time.

Given the key elements of the research questions, there are very obvious reasons for selecting Balbriggan as a case study. The first is that it is the 'youngest large town in Ireland' (large towns being classified as those with populations of 10,000 persons or more). In the 2022 Census of Population the average age of the population of the Balbriggan urban and rural

Electoral Districts was 33.6 years, in comparison to 36.2 years in Fingal and 38.8 years across the state. The comparison between Balbriggan and the state by age group is provided in Figure 1, which shows 39% of the population of Balbriggan to be aged under 25 compared with 33% nationally. The difference is accounted for in particular by the much larger proportion of 5-14 year-olds in Balbriggan (19% as compared with 14%).

Figure 1

Demographic comparison



Source: Census of Population 2022

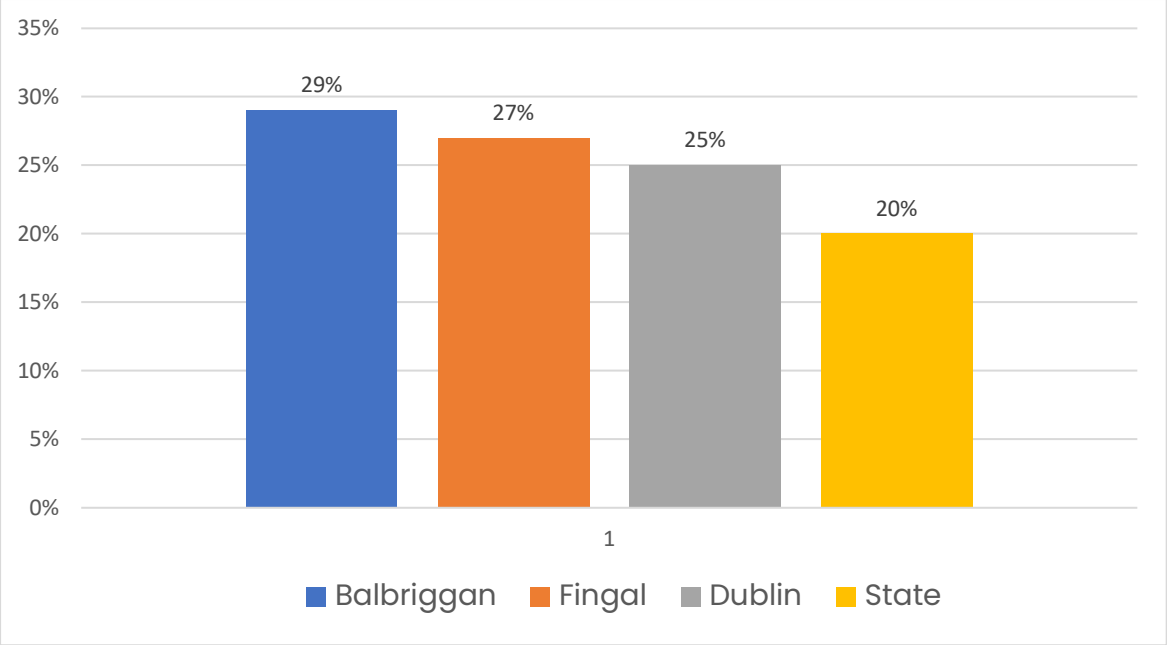
The second reason for focusing this study on Balbriggan is the extent of ethnic diversity in its population. As of 2022, 29% of Balbriggan's population was born outside the country, significantly higher than the national figure of 20%. Almost one in five people (18%) said they had a citizenship other than Irish. The fact that this is lower than the 'born outside of Ireland' figure is attributable at least in part to the number of people who have been awarded Irish citizenship in recent years. A high proportion of these have come through the International Protection System and settled in

Balbriggan due to its proximity to Mosney Accommodation Centre. According to the 2022 census results, almost 4% of the population of the 'Balbriggan urban' electoral division identifies as Black or Black Irish and the figure for 'Balbriggan rural' is 11%, compared with a national figure of 1%.

Figure 2 compares the 'born outside of Ireland' proportions for Balbriggan, Fingal, Dublin and the state.

Figure 2

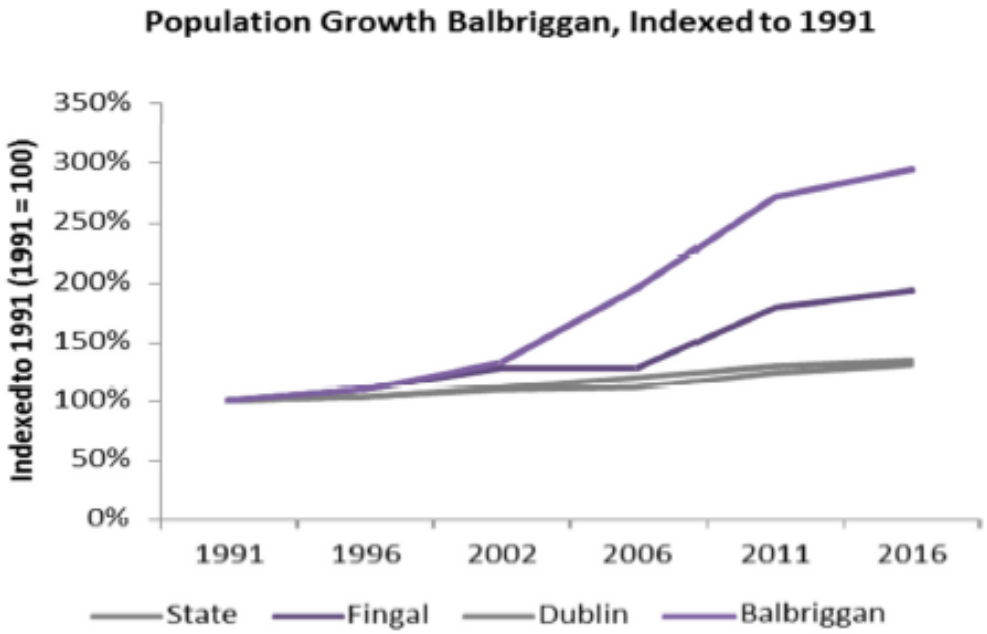
Comparative percentage of populations born outside of Ireland



Source: Census of Population 2022

In addition to the fact that Balbriggan conforms to Yin's criterion of being distinctive (in terms of the variables of age and ethnicity, two key themes at the heart of this research) it is also striking for how quickly its population has grown, as demonstrated in Figure 3. Balbriggan's population grew by 94% over a 25 year period in comparison with a figure of 35% for the national population and 31% for Dublin.

Figure 3



Source: Fingal County Council 2017: 4

Finally, while this study does not have a longitudinal research design, it is hoped that the youth work, community development and other relevant initiatives underway in Balbriggan, and the relationships developed through this research between the various organisations involved and between them and the researchers, might help to facilitate further relevant study over time, which is another of Yin's criteria for selecting case studies.

3.2 Methods – elements and stages

It was decided at the outset that the research should adopt a qualitative and participatory approach with the key methods being semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In order to provide information and help to optimise local involvement the study began with a preliminary forum, which was attended by 18 participants (of necessity online because of the Covid-19 pandemic) in October 2021. This forum had a key influence on the project because it suggested significant amendments to the research questions, leading to the version of questions as presented at the outset of the report.

Prior to commencement of formal fieldwork, as part of the 'orientation' phase of the project, five informal discussions were held with people in a position to offer relevant guidance and advice to the research team. Four of the five discussants (listed below) were Black.

- Activist/worker with a number of intercultural and anti-racism organisations
- Young person, African-Irish identity, volunteer and activist
- Coordinator of intercultural organisation
- Social worker in Dublin and former Balbriggan resident
- Academic and researcher

As these were not formal research interviews they were not included in the fieldwork data or analysis, but two of the discussants were subsequently among the fieldwork interviewees and overall the research team found the discussions very useful in exploring a number of dimensions of the research and becoming alert to relevant issues and opportunities for later stages. There was a high level of consistency in the themes and issues highlighted by the five discussants and the participants in the fieldwork 'proper'.

The fieldwork phase of the research extended over a one year period from May 2022 to May 2023. The first element consisted of interviews with eight key informants, whose professional backgrounds and roles included:

- Youth work services
- An Garda Síochána
- Education & Training Board
- Social work
- Individual professional perspectives (including youth work, counselling, training).

Five of the key informant interviewees were white and three were Black. Two of these were interviewed a number of times, individually and jointly,

including in the latter stages of the research as part of the process of validating the findings (see below)

The second element of the research methods (running in parallel with the interviews) consisted of focus groups with adults and young people. One focus group, which was set up with the help of Cairde, was held with a group of three community development practitioners in Balbriggan who were all Black and were also all parents. The research team returned to the members of this group for further informal discussion in the latter stages of the project (see below). The other focus group, set up with the help of Foróige, was held with a group of seven youth workers, all white.

Two focus groups were held with local young people. Both of these were with young people involved in local church-affiliated, volunteer-led youth groups. Because they coincided with times that the young people would normally be gathering for their regular group activities rather than being arranged separately, the numbers in both were considerably larger than is the norm for focus group research (Bloor et al. 2001), and this presented challenges relating to the time required for in-depth exploration of issues. The findings should be interpreted in this context, as well as taking account of other considerations mentioned below.

The interviews and focus groups were all audio-recorded and transcribed, then subjected to thematic analysis following the approach to the identification of themes set out by Braun and Clark (2006) and Lochmiller (2021). In terms of the balance between 'inductive' and 'deductive' approaches (Matthews and Ross 2010: 37), the analysis had an inductive element in that it attempted to remain open to unanticipated or surprising content and insights, but it was also deductive insofar as it was guided by the main research questions which had in turn influenced the interview and focus group protocols. However, while the themes identified were therefore (in Braun & Clark's terms) 'researcher-generated', there were a number of distinctive features to the process of data analysis. Firstly,

because the research team was itself ethnically diverse and two of its members had both life experiences and professional experiences directly relevant to the topics being researched, the interviews and focus groups sometimes included illuminative two-way exchange between team members and research participants. In the process of analysing and discussing the audio and text transcripts within the team, it was therefore decided on a few occasions to include contributions from the relevant research team member in the research report. Where this is the case it is specifically pointed out to the reader. Secondly and as mentioned above, a final validatory stage in the analysis and interpretation involved sharing the draft findings and having follow-up discussions with a number of research participants, which led to a refinement or nuancing of a number of aspects of the research findings.

3.3 Ethics

Ethical approval for the research was sought from and granted by Maynooth University's Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee (SRESC). Because of the different considerations involved in research with adults and children and also because of the ongoing delays and disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, separate applications were made and approved for the interviews and focus groups with adults on the one hand and the focus groups with young people on the other. Informed consent (based on online and/or written information and communication) was sought and secured from all the adult research participants, from the parents of those participants under 18 and (in terms of assent) from the under 18-year-olds themselves.

Were it not for the complexity of ethical processes and protocols relating to consent (including parental consent where necessary), the study would have ideally included an outreach dimension directly seeking and exploring the responses of young people not involved in any organised groups, but this was not possible, which is one of the limitations of the study indicated below.

3.4 Limitations

As already mentioned, the researchers were not in a position to directly gather and explore the insights, experiences and perspectives of young people who are not already participants or members of organised youth groups. A full and comprehensive exploration of the key research questions for the study would elicit and communicate the views of these young people. Furthermore, as the study was being conducted, young people who participated in the youth groups led and facilitated by local professional youth workers were also involved in another, separate research study, and for that reason access to those young people was not made available to the research team for this study. We were however given access to young people in church-affiliated youth groups through the kind cooperation of their respective pastors and leaders and are very grateful for their help.

As mentioned above the discussions with these young people took place at the same time as their regular youth work gatherings and personnel involved in the leadership of the groups were present at the time. There is evidence from youth research and from youth work practice that there are clear patterns relating to which young people become involved in different types of youth groups and services. Because of this and also because of the point just made about young people who are not involved in groups, it is very important to acknowledge that the researchers did not have direct contact with a representative sample of minority ethnic young people in Balbriggan. A more comprehensive and robust research design, had it been possible, would also include opportunities for young people to discuss the relevant issues with fewer constraints of time and numbers and with the greatest sense of freedom possible that they could say what they want. All of the above factors must be borne in mind in interpreting the fieldwork findings (this point is reiterated later in the report).

Finally, because the research is a case study it is not possible to generalise authoritatively beyond the Balbriggan context. However, there is good reason to believe (based on the experience of the researchers and stakeholders and the findings of other studies) that some key patterns

relating to young people's lives and their relations and interactions with a range of social institutions, apply more broadly to Ireland today, and the recommendations at the end of this report are presented in that light.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Young People's Lives and Experiences

4.1.1 General perceptions and responses

In both focus groups, responding to open-ended questions about living in Balbriggan, young people's immediate responses were broadly positive:

> Q: Could you describe the experience of growing up in Balbriggan?
>
> *R1: I think it's a beautiful town. A lot of transportation, so easy access to go out of town and into town. A lot of education and shops around it. Close and small, so a good community.*
>
> *R2: Like it's not too bad…the shopping centre is good. There's no really clothes shops or like some shops are just not really there, so kind of have to go outside, but like in terms of like lifestyle, it seems to be all right, so.*

> Q: In just one word how would you describe Balbriggan?
>
> *R1: Beautiful*
>
> *R2: A family*
>
> *R3: Strong. Strong.*
>
> *R4: Nice.*

Among the specific features of the town that young people highlighted as positive, one was the education system:

I'd say the education is very good because we have a lot of schools. Even though Balbriggan is a small community, we have a lot of schools. Even people from outside, like people from Skerries, from Drogheda, they all come to school in Balbriggan as well because I think the school system is very good. I mean school, the tech and Balbriggan community. It's an ok school.

Local parents and community workers were also inclined to respond positively when asked what life was generally life in Balbriggan.

Balbriggan is peaceful…It is peaceful for me, I don't know about others and some of the things we hear from the social media, you know [are wrong]… I love Balbriggan and I don't think I want to move from here.

The young people feel this is their home, you know, and it is their home.

It did not take long however for the young people to turn to the fact that there was not 'enough to do' in Balbriggan:

Q: Where do people hang out now? Where do people have fun now?

R: They don't!

Q: Where do people enjoy [themselves]?

R: There's nowhere to go!

There was a similar response when the researchers thanked the young people for participating in the focus group itself:

Q: You could be somewhere else tonight, but you guys chose to be here. Thank you so much and we appreciate it.

R1: I have nowhere else to be!

R2: I'd rather be here.

These somewhat ironic and humorous remarks by the young people highlight the importance in their lives of the local volunteer-led and church-affiliated youth group that had facilitated the contact between the researchers and participants. Other young people also spoke favourably of such groups and how they contrasted with other groups they might attend, in terms of their ethnic composition. One young woman mentioned her university experience:

> *I'm not like on the committee, but I just like take part in like the acting society. I also try and take part in the English literature society because I write poetry. But it's kind of hard to like, there isn't really like, I don't really see too many like people that are like from minority groups in there or like it's kind of like hard for me to try to join them because like I don't know where they are to join. Then like right now, I'm also like I'm in the choir in church and like I'm part of the youth group, the youth ministry. That's kind of community based as well.*

A lot of young people, especially young men, referred to their active involvement in sports including football and basketball, but even then there was criticism of what was seen as a lack of facilities.

> *Some of my friends, like I only know them because of sports. And then I feel like if they just give more access, it will make like everyone happy, even if it's just like just football, then eventually they can just open basketball, you know. Lack of access, it's just everyone, like everyone here has kind of agreed that there's nothing for us to really do.*

I just think like activities in general, there's like a big lack of. Like when people go outside, there's nothing to do. Like there's no… Like there's playgrounds and stuff, but like we're too old for them.

Suggestions for making things better included a swimming pool, clothes shops, a driving test centre, a 'proper restaurant', and KFC!

A game centre would be good… There's a lot of like game centres in Dublin. So having a game centre, it's kind of like it would also be a good place for like people like 18 and above to gather round, to hang and to chill.

Further suggestions from the young people for the development of amenities and services are included under 4.4 below. As in the case of positive perceptions and experiences of Balbriggan, their comments were echoed in the discussions with parents and community workers. Here the lack of facilities was linked with the common negative experience of young people – especially young men – of being 'hassled' and 'moved on':

Then there is the issue of lack of amenities, well where do you want them to move, or where do you want them to play? If they are seen anywhere they are moved on, "Oh you can't be here". And the only place they know would be the likes of Tesco, the like of Millfield, eh Castlemill, that's a lot of my area, and then Dunnes Stores and…and so on.

In addition to being 'moved on' with nowhere to move to, mixed messages were received by young people's parents about whether they should or shouldn't be outdoors:

R1: [We had a situation where] kids were being kids at home, [and] some parents were receiving letters from schools that they need to allow their children out more. So

how do you intend to do that when they are not allowed outside?

R2: When they'll be a 'threat' when they're out!

One young Black man explicitly described this experience in terms of being 'treated differently':

I think it's just like the way like the community treats us is different. Like oh, when you stand with the white people, like just standing out something, like it's ok. But if it's a group of Black people, it might be seen as a gang.

This sense of being perceived as a 'threat' or part of a 'gang' was a common one among young men. For young women this was less of an issue, partly because they may feel less free to be in public places in the first place and partly because of being seen as less 'threatening':

R1: I think the chances of girls getting stopped, we're in a shop or something, is less…Though it's still going to happen.

R2: I don't really know because I don't really go outside that much…..But I agree with her. We're less likely to be stopped because I feel like women are seen as less intimidating than men…

Both of these aspects of young women's experiences – not going outside and not being seen as 'intimidating' if they do – are part of a pattern of gender inequality, while the young men's experience – more likely to go outside but likely to be seen as a threat if they do – is itself clearly a reflection of racially based discrimination. Together they highlight issues of intersectionality that will be revisited later in the report.

4.1.2 Pressures on parents and the impact on young people

While the focus of this study is on the experiences of Black young people in Balbriggan, a topic that arose consistently in the interviews and focus groups is the way in which the pressures experienced by their parents, both in the past and currently, are a key factor shaping their lives. The point was made most forcefully (but not exclusively) in the interviews with professional respondents, themselves Black, who work with both parents and young people. Given Balbriggan's proximity to Mosney Direct Provision Centre and other factors shaping its demographic, social and economic development in recent decades (as outlined in an earlier section), many of the Black parents living there are likely to have experienced great upheaval and trauma in their lives. Not only does the International Protection Application process and living in Direct Provision not support them to deal with that trauma; on the contrary, their experience of the system, and in many cases their experiences having left it, serve to compound the distress. The following observations were made in an interview context by one of the research team whose own experience, both personal and professional, provided an 'insider' perspective:

> *I think you [the interviewee] are making a very valid point there… that there is a lot of trauma that people come with, arriving from other countries, and they also don't know what to do with their trauma, and it's not addressed. There is very little service, or no service available to address the trauma. I mean SPIRASI is the only service that is available for victims of torture, but we don't have any mental health support services, they are very limited when it comes to direct provision settings which in turns affects people when they move on to the community and then also we see all sorts of issues that people who have gone through direct provision are experiencing when they move out of direct provision.*

This trauma and the resultant issues can lead to a prevailing sense of fear and anxiety for parents, as the following comments from a Black professional counsellor explain:

> *A lot of parents, especially if they have just recently moved, or relocated to Ireland, they are parenting from a complete place of fear. They are then removed, or they have travelled, but for whatever reason they feel really isolated, away from family members, away from the community they know, away from everything they know and they are in Ireland where things are significantly different. There are poor support systems be it parents, their own parents, be it their own siblings, be it uncles and aunts who would have been really hands on with their children, all of a sudden they are by themselves parenting their child in a very different environment. So, if you think about that firstly for the parent you can see how [it is] anxiety-provoking, lonely, very difficult.*

A Black social worker also spoke about this fearfulness and anxiety and its impact on young people:

> *[There's] the fear of the system, you know, for a lot of people coming here [and] transitioning from direct provision. They are full of fear, of uncertainty of not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow, and that fear, who breaks that fear? You know who works on that, because kids are born in fear…So it's an intergenerational thing, it keeps going, and it keeps going, and how do you get out of it you know? There are things you don't say because people are afraid of deportation. People might even have papers, but they are still afraid of deportation. And be like "I might be deported if this happens" and "Oh, my parents will be, we'll never get a visa for my aunt to come and visit, because they look at that".*

The professional counsellor similarly referred to the ways in which parents' fear and distrust of the system, particularly relating to matters such as social care intervention, can 'sort of trickle down to young people as well':

You know you pick up on it and it's there, sort of either spoken or unspoken.

It was suggested that this can help to account for strong sense of *protectiveness* among Black young people, with 'the teenagers looking after each other and also [aware of] minding their parents'. The different emotions can combine to create what was termed a 'protective fear' among young people, namely '*the fear of selling out your family*'.

As well as (and adding to) such feelings of isolation, anxiety and apprehension, parents were often described as disoriented and unprepared for all the challenges facing them in engaging with education and multiple public services, and were managing multiple work and care responsibilities in Ireland while also often sending substantial 'remittances' to their families in their country of origin. Children and young people could not but be affected by these difficulties, which were then often compounded by the discrimination and racism they faced themselves, something discussed further in section 4.1.5 below.

4.1.3 Culture and identity

The pressures and fears outlined above have a bearing on how people think about and enact both their culture and their personal identity. The experience of being uprooted and unsettled, particularly in an environment that may be perceived as unwelcoming or unsafe, may leave parents with a 'sense of disconnect', in a context where:

…there isn't enough language placed on that experience where you know…most parents…are unable to understand that they are really anxious all the time, or they feel really lonely, or since they moved to Ireland they haven't felt like themselves. So there is that core sense [of disconnect] happening, whereas the child is also experiencing a very

different environment. Again, they have also experienced a huge loss of their own support system, their own families, their own….you know, both people, parents and children, simultaneously going through a crisis of identity.

For the parents this may be associated with a defensiveness in relation to the culture that they grew up with, sitting in tension with a willingness for their young people to thrive in the new cultural environment. A white professional in education and training observed that:

…the parents [are] trying to integrate their young people, but at the same time keep the values of their church and their values of their own tradition where they came from and I think, I think that's where the struggle is, that's the frustration…And that's I think where the worry is. Because they're trying to keep their young people….on the straight and narrow, as best they can…and I think for the women it's harder because in a lot of cases the significant male, for various reasons, is missing.

The circumstances mean that new patterns of family and close relationships emerge, closely bound up with community. From a young Black adult's perspective, looking back:

we all didn't have our grandparents and didn't have our uncles around, so typically we would go, I'd go over to say one of my friend's house and that person becomes Uncle and Aunt, or…and it's that sense of like, because I don't have say my Uncle, my actual biological Uncle and Aunt, I have so many Uncle and Aunts and its different, whereas like when you try to explain that to say like your white friends they are like 'but you're not related', and you're like 'Yes I know, but…'.

In this context religion, or more specifically the churches, play a central role, and the pastor carries considerable authority. One respondent compared this with the historic white Irish emigrant experience, whereby people would congregate in churches at the weekend or in church-related social settings to meet up with people like themselves:

> *That's where you came and you found your identity and these young people are struggling with that as well and we need to understand the complexities of that. And that's a Pastor giving direction, like are you going to contradict them? Our [white Irish] culture probably contradicts a lot of what they believe, and what turmoil does that put a young person in because, you know, they are trying to deal with that complexity, they don't want to let their parents down, they don't want to leave their church, and they want to be part of Irish society and yet some of Irish society's culture is probably absolutely contrary to [what] their church believes.*

A key difference is that many if not most of the young people in this case were born in Ireland:

> *…how do you understand what the issues are for a lot of young people coming here, or their family, like they're Irish, they were born here, they have their own Irish identity and yet they have their own culture which is coming from their other experience from the parents.*

Another white respondent made a related point:

> *You know sometimes people forget that you know a lot of these young people were born here. They are not all immigrants you know or whatever, or asylum seekers. Like I mean there is people came, they have been here for years, grew up here.*

The position of having more than one cultural frame of reference – an experience of 'cultural hybridity' as discussed in the literature review – is not inherently or necessarily a difficult one, and in the case of young Black people in Ireland (and elsewhere) contemporary music provides a powerful example of how it can find positive expression. A young Black adult professional commented:

> *And then say, with the Afro Beat, for many black people who may be from African countries it's this sort of like oh, I can actually have a form of connection to say my parent roots, or… this can have some sort of meaning through me. So on the one hand it feels like you've bridged the gap that was missing…. And even so much so that like within the Irish music industry now, you'd see say black people who would have elements of like the US music, and the UK music, and the Afro Beat music, and that's coming up and up in Irish music industry as well. So it really captures what's been happening for young people in Ireland.*

Some of the specific musical examples arising in discussion involved the use of different area codes or telephone codes in Ireland, in the same way as Black music has done in the UK, US and elsewhere. Another was the work of the Zambian and Irish poet and musical artist Denise Chaila, whose first EP was entitled *Duel Citizenship* (2019). One of her songs ('Chaila') makes fun of the inability of many (white) people to pronounce her surname correctly. Another has an Irish language title and refrain ('Anseo') and humorously references everyday Irish cultural icons ('…spicebox, taxi by the Centra…').

The experience of cultural duality or hybridity can be a difficult one for Black young people if they, like their parents, feel that the majority culture around them is not accepting (or will only accept them on certain terms) and/or if they have a sense of – in the words used earlier – 'letting their parents [or families] down'. This can be a matter of something as basic as how they speak. A Black social work commented:

These kids have two accents, they have one that they use with the [white] Irish kids and they have one that they use back at home. So there is a lot of struggle for these kids, constantly, you know.

A young Black counselling professional interpreted such patterns of behaviour as follows:

The use of two accents can be a learnt way of having to operate the structural whiteness. [Black young people] learn very early on that their parents' accents are not respected or valued and only use them in spaces where they are understood and valued.

This struggle for young Black people also came up in a focus group discussion with white youth workers:

Then that whole conflict between having [white] Irish friends and trying to fit in in Ireland but then having to go home and do what's expected at home. And so it's like having two different cultures. They're trying to please everybody. That's the conflicting thing and I think it's a real challenge for some young people.

A specific source of tension can be young people's experience of parenting styles and parental authority, and how this compares with their white Irish peers. A young Black professional described the issue as follows:

Most black people who moved to Ireland – I am speaking mostly first generation – their parenting styles are typically different and as such the young people growing up within that environment experience very different parenting styles from their peers. So there is almost this disconnect that they begin to experience for themselves [between] how they

perceive themselves within the wider community and how they perceive themselves at home. And, you know, there is different terms that people use for it, the code switching…So, for a lot of black people in general, there is this sort of space of always feeling that they can't bring their home self into certain environments, and then that gets a lot more complicated as, you know, they go through their teenage years.

This 'code switching' can pervade all aspects of young people's lives and was related by respondents to a pattern whereby Black young people would be conscious of a need to 'manage' and 'check' their own behaviour and appearance in a way that white young people would not (or to anything like the same extent). Picking up on the point made earlier that young Black men are often stereotypically perceived and treated by white people as threatening or intimidating, one young man said:

So you form whichever version you think is more palatable or [will seem] less threatening or less aggressive….because you don't want to be targeted, or how shall I say… noticed too much. You don't want to stand out too much.

A young Black woman reflected on the fact that her brothers and husband would automatically take their hoods down when entering a shopping centre or other indoor setting.

…they can joke about it and there is a language [they use to] make fun of it, but at the very core of it is this real fear of being 'othered', of being persecuted, this fear of like….'as soon as I walk in I'm expected to be…', you know, and all the labels that come in, that they are criminal or whatever…

For his own part, a young Black man confirmed the overall pattern:

> *Every person from a minority ethnic background and who is in a predominantly white space code switches. That performance is necessary for survival or integration, and just to adapt and fit into that community. So the way we would speak to each other when it's just us friends, is completely different from the way we would speak when it's… when we are in mixed company. Within families even. The way you would speak to your siblings outside is not the way you would speak to them at home.*

The same young man commented that the need to code switch 'can be alienating and also just exhausting' and that it makes it very important for young people to have a 'strong family and support system':

> *If you lack those supports it is very easy to get lost. It is very easy to get lost. So support and community is integral to the care you show yourself. Whether that support is family or usually it is friends.*

Code switching, self-checking and the uses of humour mentioned above can all be seen as examples of the strategies used by young people in response to racism, and they also raise questions about structure and agency as touched on in the literature review. These matters will be returned to later in the report.

4.1.4 Intergroup relations

The researchers were interested in finding out more about the patterns of relationship between different groups of young people in Balbriggan: which groups 'hung out' with which other groups, whether and in what context young Black people and young white people (and other groups) tended to mix or not mix, what if any points of tension and conflict existed between different groups, and specifically whether there was any presence or emergence of a gang culture.

One white professional interviewee stressed that young people's behaviour, in this as in many other respects, would necessarily be influenced by, and possibly reproduce, the patterns of behaviour among adults, and that to date there has been insufficient mixing among parents and families from different ethnic groups:

> *[There are Black] kids who have never visited [a white Irish] family, ever in their lifetime….and they still live in the island of Ireland, you know, because they never had an invite, or vice versa. There is an Irish family who probably lived next door to an African family but they have never, never even stepped foot in that, or they don't even know what they do. You know, it goes back to that formation again. You know, separation…*

This point was reiterated by a Black community worker and parent:

> *Where is the level playing field? If we as adults cannot integrate, honest to God, when people say 'oh the children have integrated' it's true to an extent but if we leave them alone, if we stopped to instil our biases in them at home, then the kids would be fine.*

When the topic was raised in a focus group with young people, the most vocal response was from the only young white person in the group, but his Black friends did not disagree with this view:

> *I'd say people don't really talk about it, but like the town is like, the groups are like, it'd be like the Black young people and then the white young people and they rarely ever mix. Like I rarely ever see them mix and like I kind of, I'd hang around with more Black people since I live up by an area with more kind of young Black people, right? But I'm like one of the only white people in most of my groups. So if I go to like a group with more white people, I wouldn't see like, I'd only see one or two Black people. They don't really mix.*

One white adult interviewee expressed the view that separation was to a large extent the result of an unwelcoming attitude on the part of the majority white community:

> *And to be fair to our African group of young people, some spaces aren't friendly to them at all. So they do have a real sense of, you know, being hard done by in that space. Because…and it's not the young people's fault, it's the perception that they are going to cause trouble, or the perception that 'I don't want them here because if I have them here then the other people won't come in'.*

A white youth worker highlighted the way in which the young Black men she worked with 'look to each other', especially in times of adversity, such as when one of them was in jail:

> *I can only speak for the group of lads that I have coming in, and their strongest influence and pull factor is each other. And they're like it's ok. We don't need you. We have each other. It's ok, we don't need her because we have each other. So the thing is that they've nowhere else to look, so*

they're looking internally, but those that they're looking at are the ones that are kind of, so it's a bit sick like because I know even we were trying to say like there was one of the lads was in jail. He was on remand and the other lads were like no, no, it's ok. You don't need to worry because we got this. We'll look after him…

A young Black man confirmed what he saw as the 'insularity' of different ethnic groups in Balbriggan but described it as 'mild' in comparison with the extreme tensions that exist in some other places.

In Balbriggan the Black people hang out with Black people because of course there is lot of integration at the school but like the communities are still segregated. Not as bad as let's say like in the States or anything but very mild segregation but like our communities are still very insular.

A white professional also referred to the relatively high degree of integration in schools, but also took a broadly positive view of the mixing of different groups of young people in other contexts:

And particularly among young people like I mean…they are all at schools together and you do see them like, it's not that you see just groups of Black people, groups of white people, I mean, you see them mixing together, you see them playing basketball together, kicking a ball together, hanging around in groups together as well. It's not that they are completely segregated or completely, you know, not mixing with each other… Now you do see them in groups of Black people, groups of white people, but you do see you know mixed groups all the time as well. That would be my observation anyway.

Another white interviewee working in the education sector believed that more steps should be taken to encourage and extend the high level of mixing that effortlessly happens among young children in primary schools:

> *So how, and the earlier we do that I think the less threatening it is, because young people are very open, particularly the primary school kids. They are all mixing away together there…they just integrate with each other. They don't care who you are, what you are, they take you as you are. But when we get them into secondary school then, all the other stuff that comes with teenage puberty and everything else gets in the way and then also I want to know who I am, so I start learning back about my own culture or whatever…I think those young people are struggling in that space.*

A Black community worker and parent made a similar observation:

> *…you see that once they're primary they are well integrated but you see the divisions starting when they go to secondary school. And you see the cliques then building, you see that. The Blacks on their own and the whites are on their own… I can see that you know, not with my son that much but with my daughter…She got a few friends at university but in secondary school, all her mates and maybe because it was, you know that they had a common goal, a common interest to achieve, that they kept themselves that way, that they were all Africans.*

This raises the question of whether the very fact of having a shared position as part of a visible minority in a white majority context can have a kind of bonding effect on young people who might otherwise be more conscious of their differences. A white policing professional suggested that 'people feel safe with people like themselves' and added:

> *I think at this stage, for the Black young lads, granted ok I think there can be challenges between say the Christian versus Muslim because I think the home lives are quite different, but other than that…they are so far removed from Africa and the cultures that they came from even though there is 50-odd countries in Africa, and then you've got all the sub-groups within those countries, I think when they come here, you're Black, you're Black. I think that almost brings people together, particularly the young people. You know their tribe is…the skin colour.*

Another white interviewee suggested that individuals and institutions in the majority community should make more effort to understand and be sensitive to the 'very complicated dynamic' that can exist among minority ethnic groups who have both things in common and things that divide them, and drew the following parallel:

> *We only see them as Black African young fellas and we don't realise well actually these are equivalent to our Protestant and Catholic situation in Northern Ireland. You wouldn't get them normally in the same room and we're sitting down in a classroom and you're wondering why it's kicking off, because they are carrying this stuff with them.*

In relation to the patterns discussed above, a young Black professional respondent emphasised the fact that:

> *White majority spaces can be harmful and the visible minorities have to bond and connect with each other in [response to] that trauma.*

As regards the question of whether gangs are prevalent or emerging, it became clear that (as in many other contexts) the term 'gang' was often

used loosely by respondents to refer to the ways in which groups of young people often develop a strong sense of shared and distinctive identity:

> *…what happens, then also then you see gangs forming. Gangs form because they know, you know, we belong here. We understand each other, you know, we are A92, the Black boys from the A92. So they start forming….it's the only way that they will find belonging… and these are my boys because we have something in common. And then, yes, it's just friends, and it's friends. It's an easy route to find confidence and identity.*

A white policing interviewee agreed that the question of '*where you're from'* in terms of town or postcode played a large part in delineating different groups of minority ethnic young people, especially young men:

> *Like there was essentially the Drogheda, Balbriggan, and Blanchardstown crews were the three main groups of young lads that would be challenging each other, be it drill music songs on social media posts and that kind of stuff, and I think there's a hint of one growing in Lusk. You know, there's bits and pieces growing, but they tend not to be huge.*

The same interviewee noted that there is a small number of Black young people, as is the case with any other group of young people, who do pose a threat to others: *'they feel comfortable enough to do things like carrying knives, they will carry them, and they will stab each other, and we can't allow that to happen'*. It was the fact that the young people in question were visibly different from the majority that played a large part in influencing the public response.

> *Why is there a hint…and I only say a hint of, but there is a hint of a growing gang culture, this gangster type thing, with the drill music, carrying knives and stuff, it's a small group of people and they are a very visible group of people because*

they look different. So it seems like it's a big thing and it's not. But it could be a big thing, and even if it's only a small group of people we've seen what one row on YouTube can do to a town. Largely because of wider media, racism, and the fact that – you know – the reality is there is white people engaging in behaviour like that every day of the week and no one notices.

According to a Black professional with a background in voluntary youth work, this type of differential response could be seen as a typical example of the 'White Lens' at play:

It takes a phenomenon that is common across all races of young people… and labels it gang-related [in the case of Black young people].

4.1.5 Racism and discrimination

Accounts of experiencing and witnessing racist attitudes and behaviour were presented consistently throughout the fieldwork for this research, and they were invariably presented spontaneously by the respondents even before they might have been prompted by specific questions from the researchers relating to this topic. This brings home the extent to which encountering and dealing with racism is a central part of the reality of Black young people and communities in Balbriggan, as in so many other places.

In a focus group with young people, the young white man explained how not only could he observe racism at play in the community around him but he could see and feel it even within his own family:

I feel, like I feel some of the lads I'm with, like Black people, they kind of get like very unnecessary hate. Like my family

had a dinner [out] the other day and I walked in and they started going, oh, spit some lyrics and they started making fun of me. And then they started like saying you want to be a Black guy or whatever. And I didn't, I just walked out. Like I actually went and walked home.

He believed that the problem was most acute among adults:

But I feel like if I kind of dressed more like a white person, like nothing would be said, even if I went out and I was like always messing on the streets and stuff. I feel like they get a lot of unnecessary hate, especially from adults. I don't even think our age is like that racist, but I feel like adults, especially in Balbriggan are very, very racist sometimes.

A Black parent and community worker spoke of how she could see a lot of 'anger and frustration' among both Black young people and adults because of what they persistently 'experience in the community, whether it's social welfare, whether it's schools, whether it's the Guards'. A white youth worker picked up on such anger and frustration regularly from the Black young people in her group and gave a specific example relating to language:

Young people are still feeling that like, that there's like a systemic racism. So within the education system, by the Guards, by the community…One young lad was in school and he was challenged by a teacher about how if it's ok if he used the word that we're not allowed use, [and asked] if he was allowed say it about themselves, why can't she say it? So that white teacher challenged him saying that it should be ok for everybody to be allowed use that word.

A Black community worker frequently worked with parents who were attempting to support their children dealing with racism in schools:

I've heard a lot of complaints from parents, how their children are treated in schools, you know by the teachers, by the Principals… So, you know, they are labelled, 'these are trouble makers'…and do you know what, their [white] mates in school will tell you that, if I do this I wouldn't be called to the Principal's office, but when this person does it, when my [Black] friend does it, they are called to the Principal's office. Do you know they grow up with all this in mind, they are being discriminated, they are being victimised all the time.

Both Black and white participants in the research commented on differential treatment of young people when it came to educational standards and grading. For a Black parent:

I think it's hurt so many and it's so disgraceful that I will tell, when my child would come say, 'why is it that I know that I can perform better than this person, but we never have the same grades, his grades are always higher', and then you tell your child, you have to do two times as hard as him. Why should we even have that conversation with our children?

A white educational professional made a similar point and related it to Irish experience historically:

Because, like ourselves when we were back with the Christian Brothers and the nuns, you know, education was the way forward, education was the way to move forward and I think there's a lot of pressure on [Black young people] who are in school to achieve, and to achieve highly so that they can move on, because they are going to have to do twice as much work to get the same recognition because they are not naturally….seen as being Irish. Which is wrong.

It has already been noted that a frequent part of the experience of young Black men is being 'moved on' in public places, and stories about being stopped by the Garda, whether on foot or while driving, arose consistently in the research. In the words of one white youth worker:

> *I just know [from the young people] that a lot of them, their relationship with the Guards for example wouldn't be, they wouldn't see the Guards as, there would be no positive views of the Guards for a lot of them…they would feel, a lot of them would feel targeted.*

The same worker's own personal view was that most of the members of An Garda Síochána behaved well, and that its local leadership was exemplary, but that there was a problem of inequitable treatment and 'profiling' among a minority:

> *…it would be very unfair to brand the whole of the Guards, all the Guards in Balbriggan, there's really fantastic Guards, we've brilliant community Guards, great Super, really really good people you know, who have really good relationships with lots of young people in the community, but there are that sort of probably couple who don't treat young people that well and because of that then you know, you know…yes a lot of them probably would be justified in the opinions they would have of the Guards, I would imagine.*

A Black community worker and parent also referred to racist and discriminatory treatment by Gardaí as part of a wider problem, but also commented – as did several other respondents – that relationships between the police and the Black community were significantly less strained than they had been, a development attributable to proactive initiatives on the part of both:

> *…like my own main concern would be the children. And the youths, especially the boys…Yes, and the racism is there,*

from school, from the Guards, but that has died down I think, obviously due to some of the work that [named individuals] [have put in] and how they have come together in that.

A policing interviewee acknowledged the concerns expressed above and noted the link with the issue of class:

We tend to have more challenging relationships with the working class communities than we do with sort of middle class communities. Particularly communities where we meet people on the street a lot.

The same interviewee said that insofar as there was an issue of targeted 'stop and search' of Black young people, it related to a small number of specific individuals and from a policing point of view was deliberate and justified:

…our stop and search incidents…are recorded on Pulse. So yes, there is a lot of them that would have people that are Black on them, but they are the same people every day. They are not random kids going to school being stopped by the police…we have a core group of people in two parts of the district that are involved in street dealing on an ongoing basis and have been for years. There is a bit of a knife culture in there and I think one of the reasons we don't have more stabbings or anything like that is because we are fairly intrusive in our approach to those particular individuals.

A local youth worker spoke about roundtable consultations with young people and indicated that racism continued to arise as a topic but in the context of a broader range of issues that concerned young people:

> *…completely different topics are coming up. One is to do with gender equality…Young people's voice is coming up as [in], you know, we're not taken seriously. We're not listened to…and there has been lots of incidents of racism, but [it is] from a minority within the community, that one person has said something or done something. So we're seeing that, but it's come up with Black Irish, but also the Irish Travellers are really speaking out this time, which is great…And then the other thing is just kind of other discrimination in relation to disability or sexuality, things like that. So completely different themes [including racism].*

This suggests both that racist attitudes and behaviour continue to represent a challenge and that there is an opportunity to explore further with young people how racism towards different groups is related and how racism relates to other types of inequality, in keeping with patterns of intersectionality as mentioned in the literature review.

4.1.6 Gender and sexuality

An earlier section included an extract from a focus group discussion in which two young Black women agreed that they were less likely than young Black men to be stopped by the Garda (or other authority figures) in public places. This does not mean that they are at an 'advantage' over young men, because they may not even feel that they have the right to be out in public in the first place. One of those young women said *'I don't really go outside that much'.* A white youth worker commented:

> *I think [young Black men] may have more freedom when they get to a certain age than the young females… Sometimes they don't have to answer to their parents as much or something, whereas I think the young females do still. But yes, you definitely see more young males out and about.*

A Black social worker made the following observations about the experiences of young Black women:

> *…probably the Black girls, they suffer a lot in silence…there is a stereotype, by white men seeing black women just as objects or whatever, you know, sexual objects and all that… Now these are stories that I hear all the time. The fear of going in and out there by themselves, because of harassment, guys stopping cars and whistling "Oh, come on, come on, come on" …there is, you know, black women are associated with prostitution and whatever else that can go with that… So, it might not be out in the news. They might not be part of the gangs, but they are also tormented in one way or the other.*

A youth worker referred to the experience of young Muslim women experiencing difficulty because of wearing the hijab:

> *…they've experienced racism from the teachers in school and they said there's definitely bias and…they've felt really uncomfortable in the school setting because of that and being picked on because they wear the veil as well, you know. So they find it in their community, but definitely in school as well, so.*

Another youth worker made a similar observation and reflected on the impact on the young women:

> *And you have to wonder what's going on with that young person's confidence and why is their confidence so diminished, you know.*

That youth worker used the same idea – 'diminishment' – with regard to the pressures faced by young Black men because of the need to be guarded about their behaviour in public:

> *…they find that they too have to diminish themselves in public rather than be admonished, or is that the word, for this kind of, they're just gesturing and being together in a very sort of convivial and just like they're just like, they're just like being lads, you know…That checking themselves, it's diminishing, you know…*

A policing professional confirmed the view of other respondents that young Black women were much less likely to spend time in public places than young Black men, but went on to comment on the contrast when it came to community leadership:

> *Like we rarely see the girls. You just don't see them. Like we had an incident there where we arrested a young black girl and it ended up all over social media recently, but that was like….very rare. Like the girls stay at home and…the lads go out and hang out. And even, sort of the way the young black men interact with young black women versus young white women is quite different. So there is…gender plays quite an interesting part or role in this. But like I'd always say if you want something done in the Black community in Balbriggan you ring the women…*

Related to the points made in an earlier section about the tensions between the cultural origins of some people of African heritage and the majority cultural (and legal) context in which they are living and bringing up children, youth workers gave examples of how issues relating to sexuality and gender, including transgender, arose in their practice:

> *So that's another cultural thing that I suppose I've seen in the last couple of years here as well…some young [Black*

Irish] people questioning their identity and trying to get me to advocate on their behalf to their parents to talk about it and the parents then telling me, no, there must be something mentally wrong with my young person. They are the gender they were born with or this is, you know. So there's that kind of cultural thing as well.

In UBU where I'd be [with] more targeted young people and offer a safe space for LGBTI community, I'd have a few young people from the Black Irish community and we would be very mindful that we always talk to their parents [using] their birth name, not their chosen name and we don't out them to their parents as well. And there's that kind of cultural thing where they're not going to come out to their families because their families might be homophobic.

Of course, youth workers might also face the same issues in the case of some white Irish families. The intersectional and intercultural challenges in youth work and other professional practices and services will be taken up again in later sections.

4.2 Discourse and stereotyping

Even before being invited to comment on public discourses and representations of the lives of Black young people and adults, respondents tended to bring the topic up spontaneously as part of their observations on the everyday reality of living in Balbriggan. It was usually couched in terms of stereotyping. A young white man who joined (and was welcomed in) one of the focus groups as an 'ally' of his Black friends made the following comments.

I feel like people kind of exaggerate how bad it is. They'll talk about it like it's a really bad area when if you really look at it, it's not really. Like nothing, like not a lot of bad stuff really happens, but people talk about this like it's one of the worst areas in the world and I find it really funny. I actually think it's a really nice town.

A Black community worker highlighted the gap between the way she experienced the town in her daily working life and the way she would hear about it through mainstream or social media:

And I will say that, whatever we hear about Balbriggan, I get shocked, I go home and somebody is texting 'oh something happened in…', I say 'What? There's nothing there, I've been there all day. There's nothing there'. And they're just pockets [of incidents], but how it's magnified is something else. How it's taken out of proportion.

A white professional in the education sector related the discourse of 'trouble' to the visibility of Black young people, especially young men, on the streets, largely because there was nowhere else to go.

So, I think what happens there is that the lads bond together as a group and then what happens is it's a group of African lads hanging around together, and the perception is that, you know, they're up to no good or whatever – and to be fair to the young people – they're not. They're just hanging around as a group of lads, just as a group of ordinary lads from Balbriggan.

He added that there had been instances of public disorder involving Black young people, just as there had involving white young people, and that while they were 'rare' they stuck in the public mind in a stereotypical way:

So to be fair to the young people I think they get a bad press, just because they're together as a group…the young African lads that…now there was a point…where there was something going on between the schools and they were, you know, chasing each other up and down the road and bashing each other and the Guards were trying to prevent it. But that's very rare… but yet that's what gets the publicity – you know, African [lads] running riot in the middle of Balbriggan, and to be fair, it's not [common at all].

A white youth work interviewee spoke about how such isolated incidents were taken up by people on social media, including people attempting to promote racist and far-right ideologies.

[T]here was a couple of occasions there in the past couple of years where maybe there was anti-social, you know anti-social behaviour taking place, recorded, put up on Facebook and then you see all those comments…all that [racism] coming through, you know, 'but why are they even over here anyway', 'send them back to their own country'…. and worse, lots worse than that like, you know.

In a focus group discussion with youth workers the same topic arose and participants commented both on the presence of far-right discourse and activism at local level and also on the ways in which this had helped to galvanise more positive voices, 'unifying' people as a result. A far-right activist had 'barged' into a public event in the youth club 'calling on the patriots of Ireland to stand up [against immigration]':

Thankfully myself, the local politician Joe O'Brien and people from Balbriggan Integration Forum, there was young people there, there was school members, all turned up that night that she had said that this was going to happen. And we were all there with our signs, 'no pass' and all this, you know, and stopped this from happening. And we were kind of

saying you're coming to this community to divide it and thinking we're a working-class community and you can kind of get this sort of like working-class white Irish against the working-class Black Irish here. And actually it unified a lot of people.

A focus group with community workers included a discussion of how actions under the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) needed to address racist discourse on a whole range of fronts. Positive representations of cultural difference in school curricula are essential, as is a recognition of multiethnicity and interculturalism in youth work contexts (discussed further in the next section):

How it's going to change in terms of a representation even in the books, the images that are going to be seen in the books, because that's some of the things that we are pushing forward for that we need to see a difference in the images and artefacts in the books to represent the diversity in Ireland today…the education system needs to change.

Other necessary changes relate to workforce diversity across the full range of professions and occupations, including the social professions and media, a topic revisited later in this chapter. Representations of diversity are required, in schools, youth work and throughout society, so as to challenge, among other things, the stereotypical homogeneity of 'African culture', as a group of youth workers discussed:

R1: Do you know, even like that people think Africa is a country. And you're like it's actually a continent.

R2: It's huge.

A young Black female professional spoke powerfully of the 'homogenising' and the 'othering' involved in such reductive discourses (both of these

common features of stereotyping more generally) and of the difficulties this creates for Black individuals and communities. She placed herself in the shoes of a Black parent as she spoke:

> *Because up until I moved to Ireland I wasn't even considered Black. And then there is this label of 'Blackness' placed on me now that I have to wrestle with and make sense of, and understand with the children [so] they maybe understand in the school system, with the parents…trying to understand [it] in the work system, and all of that is happening simultaneously, there is not that much language or understanding around it and the parents are parenting from that space. The children [are having] experiences and the parents are not understanding the experiences. [And yet] they probably really understand it better than anyone else in that moment.*

4.3 Current responses

4.3.1 Youth work

An earlier section outlined a number of ways in which there can be not only differences but also tensions between the majority white Irish culture and the range of cultural heritages of the Black adults and young people living in Balbriggan. One set of such differences - and tensions - relates to experiences and perceptions of youth work. Youth work is by no means a universal practice or service. It originated within, and is still primarily associated with, the global North, where its origins lay in the process of industrialisation and the concomitant changes in the relationship between the family and other social institutions, particularly the economy and the education system. Over time the family's role in the socialisation of children and young people, and in their lives generally, became less all-embracing and they spent increasing amounts of time in other institutional settings for

the purposes of education, training, economic activity, leisure and so on. Youth work emerged as part of this process of 'structural differentiation' of social institutions, and in those societies where such a process has not taken place or has not advanced to the same extent (for example where the idea of formal education in schools has become well established but that of non-formal or informal education has not) it may be hard for people to understand what it is or why there would be any need for it in the first place.

This helps to explain why many parents of young Black Irish people, parents who themselves were born and brought up in Africa, would be unfamiliar with youth work and – more than that – wary of allowing their children to become involved in it. There are a number of factors at play. One is the concern to preserve their own original culture and not encourage their young people to spend any more time than necessary in institutional settings that might dilute that culture, all the more so when they can see that the institutions in question are overwhelmingly white (a point returned to below). Another is the perception that youth work is for 'troubled kids'. A Black community worker and parent said:

> *Like the ethnic minority understanding of [the local youth service] Foróige is very different [from the majority understanding]. And they wouldn't want to send their kids to Foróige, to become troubled kids, because that's the place where they send troubled kids.*

A white youth worker confirmed that this perception was widespread and that more could be done to change it:

> *And mainly they don't really know what we do and there's a little bit of an apprehension to give consent to engage within Foróige as well sometimes. And we've done lots of different things to try and challenge that and we've held events so parents could come and get information and things like that, but we need to continue to do that because*

there's a real barrier to break down there. But it's good when it happens because they challenge us and then we try and give them as much information as possible. But there's also this perception that Foróige is for the 'bad' young people. So there's three different projects here and they might see YDP [Youth Diversion Programme], that is for young people who are involved in crime and that's not always the case. So there's lot of information to give, yes, a lot of information to give.

It is worth looking in more depth at the reasons that might give rise to apprehension or wariness towards youth work among minority ethnic communities, because in itself the view that youth work is for young people who are 'troubled or in trouble' is also not uncommon among the majority white community. A number of factors can be identified, all of them inter-related.

One factor is that – in youth work settings as in so many others – Black parents or young people may have had negative experiences of the attitudes and practices of white people, ranging from thoughtlessness or intercultural insensitivity to outright racism. One young Black female professional had had contrasting experiences of youth work as a teenager, not in Balbriggan but in another town. One of these experiences was in a group whose leadership and membership were overwhelmingly white:

And there were times where I felt that the youth club leaders could have really intervened with the really inappropriate jokes. And that wasn't done, so I purposely would either have to gauge is it important that I focus on it, or is it one of those things that I can just sort of let…roll over me a little bit. And there was a lot of that sort of judgement that I had to do…throughout that experience.

The same young woman also encountered in youth work the common phenomenon - discussed in a previous section - of Irish people showing little knowledge of the heterogeneity of the countries and cultures of Africa:

> *Even down as far as I think one time one of the youth club leaders sat me down and kept telling me [about] the experience around living in Kenya and I kept saying 'but I'm not from Kenya' [laughter], but the conversation continued on for like a full half an hour.*

She also found that what might be called the 'curriculum' of this youth group reflected only the dominant culture. Her interest in drama was one of the reasons that she was interested in attending that group:

> *…remember I told you I was really interested in the drama at the time. Most of it would have been very, it would have been just predominantly western, and it was that sense of like, even when I would be playing a certain role, I would be playing a white role as a Black woman and it was there but we weren't talking about it.*

As well as in the selection of plays, ethnocentric assumptions prevailed in the approach to drama and acting:

> *…while we were doing the…drama training at the time, they told us to depict sadness…And for me then, my mum used to watch a lot of African movies [laughter]. And the way I depicted sadness, I was told it was too forced, and it wasn't really authentic, and I really took that and tried to work with it, and it was only years later that I [realised that]… even down to the depiction of emotions…that was even white-centred.*

This young adult professional's other experience of youth work was in a volunteer-led group affiliated to Foróige, in which the vast majority of the leaders and members were Black. Her participation in both groups at the same time was not approved of by her Black friends:

> *So this is why I was called a traitor. So Foróige was in a predominantly black area, so everyone who attended Foróige was black. And [the other youth group] was in a predominantly white area in [the town] and everybody who attended was white, and I was maybe….other than one of my friends who used to go with me sometimes, I was the only one. The only Black person in that youth club.*

The young woman gave a vivid description of how it felt different to be in the two different groups. In the overwhelmingly white group, she consistently felt misunderstood, to the point that '…sometimes I felt like I had to translate my soul… I don't know if that makes sense?'

Being in the other group was an infinitely more positive experience, even though it was less well resourced:

> *Whereas actually in the other youth club more times than not, it wasn't that we did that much, it wasn't that…like, you know, because I remember at that time the Youth Club wasn't that heavily funded…..but it had regular attendance, it was always packed…and I remember then the main thing I got was, I feel understood here. I feel safe here. And it was maybe one of those spaces where I could bring my whole self, in comparison to say anywhere else at the time in Ireland.*

This young women's experience makes it clear that in addition to issues of racism and prejudice on the part of staff or volunteers another key factor that has shaped Black communities' perceptions of youth work is the – in

most cases – lack of diversity among the youth workers themselves. The fact that the Foróige Club had a Black leadership made a decisive difference:

> *…like there was a time when I was playing [various sports]… I'd have different friends, different Black friends [and] their parents wouldn't let them attend like a match…or whatever, especially if it was an overnight trip. But, with Foróige any time we even had an overnight trip…every black parent would let their child go…and it was just that sense of Ok, we trust that this is safe. And maybe that also had to do with the fact that there was a Black youth leader there who also was a parent. But yes, it received that stamp of approval.*

A young Black male respondent who lived in Balbriggan but did not participate in youth work services while growing up confirmed that both the nature of the programmes and the composition of the leadership and membership had made such services unattractive to him and his friends:

> *I didn't feel they were welcoming. There were groups but I didn't engage in any of them and most of my friends didn't. We didn't feel very welcome and we also weren't interested in the activities ….they didn't seem very inclusive. Or there weren't people from minority backgrounds engaging in those services, there really weren't a lot…*

He made it clear that the lack of Black youth workers was a key factor:

> *I suppose when we say not welcoming it really came down to the representation. We didn't see anyone like us…..They definitely didn't look like us!*

He also identified a further important factor, which is the lack of a concerted effort on the part of youth work organisations and services to

reach out to Black communities and to take the time to build relationships with them.

> *Most youth workers and youth work services aren't in community with ethnic minorities, [physically] in that community. There is a general community. Yes we all live in Balbriggan but like actually being in community with a group is different from just being [located] in a community geographically.... It is not about sending out flyers or hosting town hall [meetings and] just giving information. [The response is] 'like why should I receive this.....why should I trust you?' because a lot of youth work is about trust. It is about these relationships. So you need to take the time to build these relationships.*

The same respondent observed that there had been some improvement in this respect in recent years:

> *I think young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are definitely engaging more in youth services... that is mainly because that relationship has been built over time. Mainly either from young people who are engaged in services [becoming] young leaders in the service and they have spoken to people in their community and they built that [up]....because of the trust they have in their community. People have entrusted them.....they have been able to trust them with their own children.*

Discussions between the researchers and local white youth workers indicated both that the workers were conscious of the obstacles and disincentives to young Black participation that have been outlined above and that they believe they have made some progress in recent years in addressing them. Part of the challenge has been to reassure parents about the positive and developmental nature of youth work, given the levels of

fear and apprehension about unsympathetic or intrusive state services as discussed in an earlier section:

> *Yes, and parents are getting to know about us more and the community are getting to know about us more. And I will ring a parent around a consent form…Like for example, [at] Halloween, I had to contact all the parents to get individual consent to take the young people to Farmaphobia. A trip where we bring young people on the buses, a scare house, you know. And we had a huge amount of Black Irish that came on that trip. We have not seen that before…We're a social outlet for their young people. So, I'm a pro-social activity practitioner. You know, I'm not a social worker. I'm a youth worker and that's, I think they're getting to know that themselves as well within the community.*

Other aspects of the current youth response include a focus on outreach and on staff training:

> *…we would do outreach and when we were doing outreach, a lot of the people that we were meeting on the street were Black Irish and so they knew about the cafés as well. You know it's like the young person who's on the street is finding out about it as well. I think, our own practice as well over the last couple of years we did diversity training ourselves.*

An important part of the outreach is to address misconceptions among the young people:

> *Basically, we have found working particularly with the really hard to reach young lads… if you can get them to even not think that you're a Guard, then you're ok like. So that's what that means.*

The diversity training has supported the youth workers in deliberately building intercultural awareness into their practice. Food provides one way of celebrating diversity and acknowledging the richness and variety of the young people's cultural backgrounds:

> *…we had like a food share where we came in and some of the lads were from the Congo and we had some of their food and I brought in some, so at least then when I have young people that come in, I'm like oh, I ate their food or my young lad's friend is from Ghana. So it's like that you're kind of like acknowledging that there's difference or you talk about food that comes from [different countries in Africa]. At least then it shows that you're making an effort. I think to make an effort to genuinely get to know people.*

> *But look, even having Halal food in the fridge really lets a young people know they're valued and their culture is respected. And you know, because you're cooking for people or you're making food and there is an option for them and they're having the same, but different…And also like takeaway containers, I always have that around fasting times as well or if young people can't eat till after sundown.*

As a result of a combination of initiatives, the youth workers reported an increase in the ethnic diversity of the young people participating in their services in recent times, particularly in 'youth café' settings as opposed to the more 'targeted' projects. They have experienced some cultural tensions on occasion, such as when a group of Roma young people attended a group having recently experienced a bereavement and some young Black participants wanted to play their drill music, and they are conscious of the need for further intercultural skills training. In general music is found to be a unifying force in the youth groups.

> *You know [in the time of Covid we only had small groups], five, maximum six, and now you're seeing the bigger swell,*

so we're having an increase and we're having more cultures come together. So you can see little kind of pockets and they do sit together and they naturally segregate and separate, you know. So we'd see the lads like hanging out with their own colour, their own culture and we try to break that down and do as many group activities [as possible] and like the music room has been a great leveller for that because they're all in the music booth together. They're all at the sound deck together. So it's kind of it's brilliant. It's great. You stop seeing that segregation and you find that there's a common denominator, the love of music…

The introduction of a recording studio has been found to be a great success in a number of respects, among other things in attracting young people who otherwise would be unlikely to attend, including some young men who are very interested in drill music:

We would have really, really hard to reach, high risk Black lads that come in and use that recording studio. And a lot of it would be on Thursday evenings with myself and [colleague's name], who's not here right now. And like these lads would come in, they use the studio, but then of course we would have conversations with them around lyrics and this and that and the other. And they're also then, it's kind of it's built trust with us with them where there possibly isn't trust with other agencies…So we can support them with like the likes of court cases and do you know, and that type of thing and probation…

There appears to be a gender pattern to the participation in different groups:

And we'd have more Black females in our UBU and universal programmes than we do in the hard to reach and the

justice programmes…There's no Black females on the justice programme.

A key area in which the need for further improvement was acknowledged is in relation to the ethnic diversity of youth workers themselves, a point highlighted above by Black interviewees. There has been some recent success in recruiting volunteers:

I'm more with volunteers…what's been great is I've actually got five volunteers that are Black Irish and I'm learning a huge amount about home and culture and life from their perspective.

However, there is no Black youth worker among the paid staff at present (there was one who left to take up a job elsewhere). Workers hoped that this would change:

We now presently have two students that are people of colour, but we've no staff members who are people of colour. And I find that as an organisation, I kind of feel that we're doing the best by our young people when we have people of colour in the staff as well.

4.3.2 Community development

Apart from youth work, the other major type of professional practice and social intervention addressed in this research was community development. Cairde is a local organisation and centre that adopts a community development approach to challenging health inequalities among ethnic minorities. It was instrumental in the setting up of the Balbriggan Integration Forum in 2012.

Balbriggan Integration Forum…was something that came out of the community. It was due to lack of integration

because you had the divide between the, you know the new Irish and the indigenous…and that need came back from both communities, that if we could set up something like a forum for them to address issues, you know common issues together, to get them to know [each other] better culturally.

One of the people most centrally involved in Cairde and the Forum is a professionally qualified Black community worker who explained that – as in the case of youth work outlined in the previous section – community work as practiced in Ireland is not necessarily something that would be familiar to people from African backgrounds or from some parts of Europe:

Community work is fairly new to us, you know, to Africans, and I know [also to] Eastern Europeans, we have different…we have, in Africa in general [such work is] led by the Church. It's pastoral work. It is not community work. It is not community development, it's pastoral development. I know that things are changing, but that's the way it goes.

Respondents noted that sometimes there can be tensions between a community development approach and a pastoral approach, because of different perceptions and assumptions regarding such matters as gender roles, authority and young people's behaviour. The following was an exchange in a focus group:

R1: [T]he kids are reacting to external forces [such as racism]. Some of them [pastoral workers] don't see that…You know, and sometimes to be honest with you, religion, like, you can't mix it sometimes with the issues that have been, you know, they cover them up, 'go pray over them'…you need to address those issues.

R2: There are some issues you cannot pray over.

R1: Exactly. You know so…that would be my concern.

Women's leadership has been vital in community development initiatives in Balbriggan, a point that was made by interviewees from diverse ethnic and gender backgrounds. One of the women leaders herself said:

> *…unless you create it, do you understand, create sisterhood, you create…you know, a support network…It complements or it substitutes the need to have relatives and all that at home, and without that definitely, without that support we would have so many people with mental health issues…Do you know that nearly 80% of members that went through the Women's Group here have gotten either a job, they have gone to college…we are touching everybody that comes to our doors, and it's beautiful and that's community development.*

Apart from work relating to health inequalities and the situation of women, relationships between the Gardaí and Balbriggan's Black communities was another area in which progress had been made that according to research participants could be attributed to the success of a community development approach, as well as to proactive and positive action and what was described as 'open-mindedness and supportiveness' on behalf of the local Garda leadership. While there had been severe tensions a few years ago:

> *We've done a lot of work within the community…working with parents [who] share with us their concerns and some of the concerns are definitely social profiling, Garda stopping [young people] and we took that on board last year and the year before, we've been working with that. And things have changed, things have quietened. And I think it's to do with, as well, the openness and the relationships that the establishment had with the community, or have not had, because it's still current…things are changing and didn't change [just] because it had to change, but because we…worked hard to step up and say we need to make this happen. It's the children, it's our children that will suffer if we*

don't step up..... [Community development] is the approach we used.

A member of the research team spoke from both a personal and professional perspective in acknowledging the importance of the leadership shown by local Black community development workers not just in addressing important issues today but in acting as role models for young people who might in turn be inspired to take up the lead:

We have created spaces for our children to look up and say, if our parents take it up to there, we can take it on further. So, we have done, you have done, a lot...it is something that is powerful to watch the space that you are creating for the women, listening to [you] saying that the women that never used to come out of their house but they are now coming to this space and you can't even keep them quiet!... And that is creating, sowing a seed and that seed is growing and you can see by what you're saying there, that our young people we are raising are going to take this on further...So, fair play to the work you're doing and well done, it's great, it's great to create those spaces for the communities.

4.4 Future responses?

As mentioned in the first section of these findings, when young people were asked what facilities or services would improve their experience of living in Balbriggan they consistently referred to the need for a place to 'hang' and 'chill', especially for older young people who do not see themselves as 'kids'. One referred to the predominance of church-led groups for young Black people and thought it would be good to have similar spaces for more diverse groups:

Probably a church, but not just your regular church, like so basically, it would be a 'church' where like Asians, Blacks,

whites, every single denomination, every single person like you didn't expect would be in there. That's the type of church, that's the type of facility or organisation that I would like to have because I feel like you go to places, you see the same things over and over again…I think it will teach you a lot about other people and other cultures.

Another young person emphasised the importance of opportunities for creativity:

It's just like I would like a big centre and if that's not even possible, like multiple centres where you can just have both sport activities and different like crafts, like whether it be music, literature, art, whatever it is that someone does, so that you can meet people like-minded, like with the same craft as you. So like rather than having to do it in your school because school doesn't really teach you like certain things as well as it could. Or like it doesn't really bring out that creative side. Like you weren't rewarded for creativity as much as you ought to be.

Adults from the Black communities agreed that it was very important to have spaces for young people be able to 'hang out' but stressed that it was important to temper this aspiration with the need to ensure safety:

But the thing is, again, if the space is provided for them to hang out, how are they going to do this hang out. Who is overseeing that hang out? Not as if you are micro-managing them in any way, but how is that hang out safe? But the thing is what have you put into their heads? What kind of head space, where are they at this moment? What provision are you making for them to be able to say, ok this is my culture, this is where I am now, and this is who I want to be.

In a focus group with Black community workers and parents, the point was made that the funding requirements for 'targeted' youth work schemes made it very difficult for youth services to reach out to all young people, including those who might benefit greatly from participation but who would not fit into any of the target categories:

> *And then Foróige have the music in it.... If you go in there is [space] for them to hang and we understand that they have their UBU project, but how many children are they catering for? Really? Because they have specific, structured specifications for all those fundings and that 80% of the funding is for children, troubled children. And then [only] the 20% is for general purposes.*

This related to a theme that emerged consistently in the research when respondents were asked what should be done differently: the need for funding schemes for youth work to be less prescriptive in ways that might have negative (and possibly unintended) consequences in terms of social integration and interculturalism. One professional in education and training expressed forceful views about this, but these views were supported in every other interview and discussion in which the researchers participated.

> *So the universal youth work, which is the piece that I keep banging on to the Department about...is very important in a place like Balbriggan, because that's where the young people from all the different groups get to mix....And it's a more neutral place...where young people just come together and have fun and ...learn with each other and support each other and have a significant adult maybe as a leader or whatever in the group, is missing. And that is, that's resource based.*

Youth workers with Foróige referred positively to a new project funded by the Health Services Executive which would allow for a less constrained approach to group membership:

> *…we also have a new project just starting, it's a Youth Health Initiative which is universal provision as well…it came through HSE funding. So we have a new team of four youth workers…they'll be providing more universal kind of provision as well, but we would see, like where all projects would sort of link in very regular with each other, and so that there would be cross over and step down and step up opportunities…*

The same respondent, like many others, made the point that local Black young people, like other young people, simply needed places to get together and enjoy themselves:

> *[T]he one thing that always comes up for young people all over Balbriggan from every community is the fact that there's just not enough amenities for them…. that's a constant, ok. And then they feel, I know, because you hear it all the time, so they hang around in groups, the same as I did back in the 70's you know, I met my friends and we hung around, we weren't doing anything, getting into any trouble - but we were just hanging around - and that's what they're doing but they don't have those kind of spaces in Balbriggan and that's one of the things that keeps coming [up].*

Within the context of the youth service, the spaces that are most like this are youth café spaces, and this research strongly suggests that there is a need for much more such provision:

> *But it's great to see the Black Irish feeling comfortable coming to those youth café spaces and this is a chill space for them to come to and engage with. And also, our*

recording studio has been another plus. They can come to the youth café and they can use those spaces and they can get up there and record themselves and put down some tunes and that's brilliant. And it's just, again so creative and a great way of bringing young people into use the space.

Another point that emerged consistently in the research was the need for young Black people to have spaces and opportunities where they could express their own voices and have them heard in a way that felt authentic to them. A member of the research team spoke both as a parent and as a professional in congratulating and encouraging the youth participation efforts of Cairde and the Balbriggan Integration Forum in establishing a youth forum for Black young people:

And we must continue to empower [young people] to participate and to speak up, you know. So, we, you as parents…know some of the issues there, the difficulties and challenges they face, but they know this themselves; you know. And they may actually…name it better than we do, you know. [So it's important that] that the youth always participate and speak out for themselves [and] we can be there as parents [and workers] scaffolding them to [support them to] use their voices…

Related to this emphasis on participation and empowerment, respondents stressed that a greater focus on universal youth work provision should be accompanied by a recognition of the continuing need for dedicated spaces and places for young people with specific cultural (or other) identities. 'Universal' does not mean 'generic', and it is essential that Black young people have spaces where they feel comfortable and are free to express themselves:

…we need to focus on what we mean by integration… what does that integration look like?… Because to me integration is really more about accessibility…[W]e focus too much on

'Oh we need to just get them into [mixed] spaces'…But when they come into the spaces, like what is the space like, is it welcoming? So it is all around not just…getting more young people [into mixed spaces].

Returning to the fact that Black communities sometimes, for good reason, are wary or apprehensive about the nature of youth work and its role in their young people's lives, a young Black adult who has a professional career and is also a volunteer in youth work stressed the importance of communicating the value and benefits of youth work, in a way that will make sense to parents for whom the education of their children is a key priority, not least as a way of overcoming inequality and disadvantage:

So I would say for most people from African backgrounds….so this is a generalisation but …academic achievements are very, very important. Let's say if my parents came to live with me and you came to them and said 'Oh come engage in this youth service', 'What are we doing?', 'Oh we are playing games, we are doing these fun activities'….it is like…. 'They can do that on their own time….like they need to study…this is just them goofing off…How does this play into their development?'

The same respondent addressed an issue that came up in a number of interviews and focus group discussions, namely the need for adequate and appropriate education and training of youth workers (who are currently overwhelmingly white) so as to be able to attract and sustain the engagement of Black young people, but also deal with all the complex issues that arise in multi-ethnic youth work settings. It is also vital that both training and reflection are ongoing, through continuing professional development:

I think youth workers need to be open to a lot of personal reflection because it is not just 'I do this, I have done my intercultural training so I understand everything. I know how

to do it' Like 'the book said this'…There has to be more meaningful engagement…So I feel there needs to be sustained training not just be one off [because] things are constantly changing and evolving…even child protection, intercultural training…anti-racism training…all of these need to be continuous, ongoing… We need more reflective spaces in youth work.

A white youth worker in a management role agreed with this need for ongoing training and reflection among youth workers:

Yes, I think we need to have it on our agenda all the time, like other things as well, like youth participation. We need to have it on our agenda and be discussing it on an ongoing basis and when you're busy and you're running around, it's not always your priority. Your priority is getting things done and making sure staff know what they're doing when you've new staff and things like that.

Not surprisingly the issue of diversity of youth workers themselves emerged as something that must be addressed as a priority if the situation regarding the participation of Black (and other minority ethnic) young people in youth work is to change for the better.

Q: So if we had youth workers who were black and approaching [young people] - would the message be any different? Or would it be received differently?

R: It would be received differently. I am confident it would be received differently because quite often when……white people in general go into our spaces it is in this benevolent, evangelical manner, it's like, 'I am here to save you, I am here to save you from yourselves' or 'here is a gift I am offering you'. Whereas if it was someone from our community [people will not be] as defensive because

there is …the matter of trust, like historically…There is already mistrust in our communities. is like 'what do you actually want….what is the angle?'…So if we had more youth workers from [minority] ethnic backgrounds, I think it would go a long way into actually getting…young people from [diverse] ethnic backgrounds engaging with the services. And of course there has to be funding for that.

In a separate group discussion, a white youth worker made a similar observation and used the group itself as an example:

And, [I'm] looking around [this] room and just saying, it's all white faces [of] the youth workers as well. I mean these are young Black Irish coming in [and] where's the representation, for the young people coming in?… So, you know like that's something that I'm very conscious of as well…especially for the girls, I think it's important for them to see women of colour in the role as well.

Of course this is an issue that goes far beyond youth work. A policing professional commented on the irony that Black young people born and brought up in Ireland might have a limited sense of direct contact with their African culture and heritage…

…and yet in the country they are born and reared in and have a passport for and go to school in will tell you they are not represented, they don't see themselves in power. They don't see role models, you know other than the odd footballer who says you can do something, be something.

A Black respondent called for a drive to ensure a large increase in *'professionals in diversity'*:

…you know what I mean, there needs to be a front line…the care workers….the everyday [roles]… teachers, or the Garda,

the police force, the social workers, people who are interacting everyday in the banks and wherever that you go in…[young people] need to see people who look like them. RTÉ needs to recruit someone…I am sure there is plenty of people who could read the 6 o'clock news who are Black, who could be trained… you know, recruitment in these spaces. So it's about seeing people who look like you, people you can identify with, you can aspire to be like them. You know, it is not only to be hidden somewhere in a children's show…playing [and making] cartoons or something…

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section relates the main themes and patterns emerging from the analysis of the findings of this research to the key theories and concepts in the literature discussed earlier.

5.1 Young people's lives and experiences

The experiences of Black young people in Balbriggan, and their responses to those experiences, show aspects of several of the categories identified in the classification developed by Phinney and colleagues (Phinney 1992; Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997: Phinney & Ong 2007), often in complex and overlapping ways. The first of these categories is 'separation'. We have seen that when young people and adults were asked about which groups 'hung out' with which other groups in Balbriggan, the answers were varied and sometimes apparently contradictory, ranging from 'Black and white young people rarely ever mix' to 'you see mixed groups all the time as well [as separate groups]'. On balance, the preponderance of views among both Black and white respondents tended to suggest that while 'mixing' and 'integration' are very common among young children in primary school ('they don't care who you are, what you are'), the situation changes as they get older, both in post-primary schools and elsewhere in public places ('you see the cliques building, the Blacks on their own, the whites on their own'). Among the common explanations were the fact that there is very little routine, everyday 'mixing' among older people and that young people are just following suit ('if we stopped instilling our biases in them at home the kids would be fine'); and, in particular, that issues related to identity and difference tend to become more important for young people as they approach and enter the teenage years ('then I want to know who I am, so I start learning about my own culture'). Taken together these factors highlight the importance of a range of responses and opportunities in policy and practice, including community development and youth work, for

whole areas and neighbourhoods and where appropriate for specific groups within such areas.

The point about 'knowing who I am' raises another one of Phinney's categories, namely 'bi-culturalism', which was a frequently occurring theme in the interviews and focus groups for this research, particularly in the context of an acknowledgement that a large proportion of the Black young people in Balbriggan are 'second generation', that is they are the Irish-born children of parents born and brought up elsewhere. The circumstances of their parents' migration, and experiences since coming to Ireland, often involved upheaval and trauma, instilling chronic stress, anxiety and frequently fear. These 'trickle down to young people as well', creating a strong sense of *protectiveness* among Black young people, with 'the teenagers looking after each other and also [aware of] minding their parents'. This is part of a complex set of factors shaping young people's responses to diverse cultural influences, including those of their parents and families, of the broader community and society around them, and of an increasingly globalised world.

Such a multifaceted or hybrid cultural context brings many opportunities for creativity and fulfilment, and this research has provided striking examples of these including music and other forms of artistic and linguistic expression, but it can also lead to difficulties and tensions for young people. Examples include the difficulty of 'pleasing everybody' when there are different and possibly conflicting expectations between home and the outside world regarding such matters as parent-child roles and responsibilities, authority, religion, gender and sexuality. This is in keeping with previous research including that of McCrea and Mahon (2015) whose title, drawing on the words of one of their research participants, captures the tension: 'How do I get the balance in my head?'. In the present research, the experience was described as a kind of 'disconnect' for young Black people ('always feeling that they can't bring their home self into certain environments') and a need to 'switch codes' as they move from one 'world' to another, in terms of behaviour, demeanour, dress and even speech

('these kids have two accents, the one that they use with the [white] Irish kids and the one they use at home'). Humour was identified as a common way in which young people deal with the challenge of constant code-switching, but despite the fact that it might prompt laughter and enjoyment, such humour was not seen as simply or necessarily a positive thing ('they can joke about it and make fun of it but at the very core of it is this fear of being othered').

The 'fear of being othered' is one example of the way in which the lives and experiences of Black young people and communities are pervaded by racism in its many forms. The literature review introduced a framework that draws attention to four 'overlapping dimensions' of racism: historical, structural, institutional and individual (INAR 2020). Ireland has moved from being a society with relatively little cultural diversity (apart from the longstanding presence of its indigenous minority Traveller community and the different traditions associated with the colonial relationship with Britain) to one with a great deal of cultural diversity (with connections spanning the globe and a strong element of that diversity arising from oppression, adversity, and forced migration). The specific sequencing and chronology of this process of change are an example of the historical dynamics of racism. The findings of this research provide many examples of the structural and institutional dimensions at play at a national and local level, including inadequate and unjust immigration policies and practices and the persistence of patterns whereby some groups of people experience differential and unfavourable treatment and outcomes based on ethnicity, culture and colour, within specific social institutions and across all aspects of their lives.

Individual racism (sometimes called interpersonal racism) refers to the forms of racism which 'most people commonly understand as racism because they are the most visible forms' (INAR 2020: 9). Respondents in this research gave numerous examples of experiencing and observing this type of racism (in public places, in interactions with the police and security staff, in schools, in youth groups and community settings). But the

consistency and commonality of such accounts make it clear that even 'individual' racism has institutional and structural (or 'systemic') underpinnings.

The literature review suggested that the concept of intersectionality is helpful for understanding the dynamics of inequality (Crenshaw 1989; 2016). It certainly helps to explain the different experiences of young Black men and women in this research. The young people regularly drew attention to a pattern whereby they were treated differently in public places based on gender. Consistent with other research, young men were much more likely to report regular experiences of being 'profiled', 'hassled' and 'moved on'. Young women were much less likely to spend significant amounts of time in public places at all. When they did, they didn't have the common experience of young men being perceived as threatening or 'trouble', but they could be subject to other types of oppressive behaviour such as harassment or name-calling, often relating to their colour or their dress.

The findings also highlight the need to be alert to forms of racism and oppression that might not seem to fit neatly into any of the four categories just referred to and might therefore 'fall between the cracks' of conventional understandings and responses. An example is the deployment of humour as a strategy (at an individual level and in terms of peer interaction and support) for dealing with unequal or oppressive experiences and environments. Such humour can be a form of expression involving initiative and creativity, and one with pleasurable aspects; but it is prompted by a negative experience nonetheless, and it could be deployed to other and perhaps more positive purposes in the absence of the inequality that prompted it. Another example is the fact that many Black and other minority ethnic young people may disregard or understate the prevalence of racism in their lives. This pattern – identified by Tizard and Phoenix (1998) and reiterated in the research of Gilligan et al. (2010) – also became evident in the present research, in which there were sometimes striking contrasts between the accounts of some Black young

people and those of Black parents, community workers and other professionals (a contrast similar to that noted in the research by Dhala et al. 2019). Like other forms of oppression and inequality, racism can have 'chilling' and silencing effects to which everyone seeking to counter it needs to be particularly attentive.

Both the above examples also reinforce the relevance of the concepts of agency and structure, and the dialogic interplay between them - 'one of the central questions in sociology' (Deacon 2002: 135) – when it comes to interpreting and understanding the findings of this research. Individual actions and interventions always take place in the context of – and are always strongly, sometimes decisively, influenced by - social structures and systems; but such actions and interventions can themselves influence, or act upon, the structures and systems in turn. The chances of such action influencing or effecting systemic change are greater if multiple individuals become conscious of having something in common and of sharing a purpose or objective. This type of consciousness-raising and taking action within groups is at the heart of both youth work and community development, which is why they are given prominence in this study.

5.2 Discourse and stereotyping

As stated in the Findings section, even before being asked explicitly respondents in this research frequently drew attention to the fact that young Black people and their families and communities, in Balbriggan and elsewhere, are constantly faced with inaccurate and distorted representations of their lives in the media and elsewhere in public discourse. They usually described this in terms of stereotyping, and indeed the examples they gave of stories and depictions in the media (both mainstream and social/digital) amply bear out and confirm the insights of the wide research literature on stereotyping with regard to both youth and ethnicity (Hall 1997; Ferguson 1998; Devlin 2006; Cushion et al. 2011; Mastro et al. 2015).

The fact that young Black people are most likely to appear in the media in one of two starkly contrasting ways – as great successes in sport or music or as being associated with crime and public disorder – is a very good example of Stuart Hall's analysis:

> *People who are in any way different from the majority – 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to [a] binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling because strange and exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!* (Hall 1997: 17)

Hall's point about 'them' and 'us' highlights the relationship between stereotyping and processes of 'othering', that is of identifying and magnifying aspects of an individual or group that are considered to set them apart in some way as being 'different'. But there can be an arbitrariness about the aspect that is selected, and from the point of view of the person or group being othered it may not even be something that has ever struck them as significant or worth paying attention to. One research participant in this study expressed this extremely succinctly when she said:

> *'…until I moved to Ireland I wasn't even considered Black. And then there is this label of 'Blackness' placed on me now that I have to wrestle with and make sense of…'*

This makes it clear that matters of representation, stereotyping and discourse more broadly are closely bound up with the distribution of power. The more powerful groups in society are typically not othered or routinely represented in crudely dichotomous ways: their members are recognised as having complex, multi-faceted and indeed unique characteristics and personalities that set them apart as individuals, not as entire groups that are 'different'. It is minority groups that have to contend

with being labelled as 'different' in this way – not different from each other, as unique individuals, but different *en masse* from the rest of society.

It is important to recognise and challenge such simplistic othering and what might be called 'differenting' processes. In doing so, however, it is also important not to disregard the fact that the people on the receiving end of such processes are not just viewed or depicted or talked about in unequal and oppressive ways; they are *treated* in unequal and oppressive ways, including (in the case of this research) the range of racist ways outlined above. It was in an attempt to identify these separate but interrelated processes that a framework for addressing inequality was developed that distinguished between issues of (and the need for equality in relation to) redistribution (in the economic sphere), representation (in the political sphere) respect (in the 'affective' sphere, to do with caring) and recognition (in the cultural sphere) (Equality Authority 2004). Socially and critically informed approaches to working with people attempt to take account of all of these aspects and the relationship between them, even if they do not always use precisely the same terminology. This brings us back to the role and contribution of youth work and community development.

5.3 Current responses

The findings identified a number of factors why youth work has, at least until recently, had limited success in attracting, involving and responding to young Black people. These include:

- The absence of youth work, as practiced in Ireland, in the countries and cultures in which the parents of many of the young people grew up.
- The association of youth work in the minds of many parents with 'troubled (or troublesome) kids'.
- The wariness of youth work among many parents and communities based on the perception that it might be associated with what they have experienced as unsympathetic or intrusive state services.

- Previous negative experiences of youth work on the part of young people and/or their families, ranging from 'thoughtlessness' or cultural insensitivity to outright racism.
- The lack of visible cultural diversity among the young people attending youth work groups and services and – in particular – the fact that the youth workers and leaders who might be attempting to get them involved were virtually always white ('they definitely didn't look like us!').
- The lack in the past of concerted and sustained efforts to reach out to Black young people, families and communities and to take the time to build relationships with them.

The findings suggest that considerable progress has been made in addressing many of the above factors, at least in Balbriggan. Not surprisingly, it is possible to attribute such progress to purposeful interventions and developments that can be seen to correspond to some of the recommendations set out in previous relevant studies such as McCrea and Mahon (2015) and Walsh and Yacef (2020). These include an increased focus on outreach and street work, the progression of some young Black participants in youth work into leadership positions and the gradual increase in involvement of members' parents (which in itself helps to attract other parents), as well as efforts to provide activities and resources that are attractive to young people from diverse cultural backgrounds, notably music and recording facilities. An explicit emphasis on intercultural and diversity training – leading to greater awareness and attention to cultural practices relating to food and diet, for example – also appear to have made a positive difference. However, challenges and difficulties remain, relating to restraints and prescriptions of youth work funding schemes and the absence of people of colour among professional youth work staff.

In contrast to youth work, the respondents and contributors to this research from a community development background were themselves Black. They were also predominantly women, and the importance and effectiveness of

'sisterhood' was an important theme in discussions. Some tensions were identified between the community development approach and the pastoral approach of church groups which may be more in keeping with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of African migrants to Ireland. Two notable areas of success and progress arising from a community development approach were identified in the research. One was the very high proportion of women who, as a result of involvement in community development programmes and activities, gained employment or were able to avail of educational opportunities. The other was the improvement in relationships between the Gardaí and Balbriggan's Black communities, which was also attributable to positive action and what was described as 'open-mindedness and supportiveness' on behalf of the local Garda leadership.

5.4 Future responses?

When it came to recommendations for interventions that would help to counter the negative experiences of young Black people in Balbriggan and also build on positive developments to date, there was a very strong correspondence between the ideas and suggestions that emerged most commonly among both young people and adults. Put simply, the key idea was for 'spaces and places' for young people to be together and to be themselves. One young woman whose primary experience was in a church-led youth group not surprisingly used 'church' imagery to invoke the kind of ideal facility she would like to have. Her words are worth repeating here:

> *Probably a church, but not just your regular church…so basically, it would be a 'church' where like Asians, Blacks, whites, every single denomination, every single person like you didn't expect would be in there. That's the type of church, that's the type of facility or organisation that I would like to have because I feel like you go to places, you see the same things over and over again…I think it will teach you a lot about other people and other cultures.*

This type of 'church, but not just your regular church' clearly corresponds to what many people with a close involvement in youth work would call 'universal provision', and that is precisely what several adult professional participants in this research called for ('…universal youth work, the piece I keep banging on [about]'). The point was made consistently that existing requirements under the UBU scheme militate against a more diverse, equitable and inclusive youth work service, and specifically militate against the involvement of more Black young people living in communities but not identified as at risk of isolation (a key focus of UBU). This research throws new light on what 'isolation' might mean for different minority groups. Ironically, the naming of the scheme is intended to suggest that youth work provides somewhere for young people to be themselves ('You be You'), but in the opinion of respondents to this research it currently does nothing of the sort for some groups of young people.

The research also suggests that – again in the spirit of enabling people to *'be themselves'* – universal provision is not the same as generic or invariably 'integrated' provision, and that as well as mixed youth groups there should be appropriate allowance for dedicated spaces for young people with specific identities, including young people from minority ethnic groups (*'to me integration is really more about accessibility for different groups'*).

Also highlighted was the need for youth workers themselves to have time and space to reflect on their practice on an ongoing basis as well as a systematic programme of continuing professional development to build on initial programmes of professional education and training (…'sustained training, not just one off…because things are constantly changing and evolving…'). The theories, values and principles of professional youth work and community development practice – and indeed their ethical frameworks (Sercombe 2010) - all point to the need for such reflective time and space, and for personal and professional development on an ongoing basis (Devlin 2012; Tierney et al. 2019). While these are not matters that tend to feature in policy contexts, ironically attention to them is also likely to

improve effectiveness, efficiency, quality standards and value for money, the kinds of things on which policy does usually place the emphasis (McMahon 2021) . A related suggestion is that at a time of severe workforce shortages and a crisis of recruitment and retention of paid staff, providing inclusive and equitable access routes into youth work and community development would be a worthwhile response to the issues raised in this research and to many others.

This brings us to the final point: the research findings forcefully communicate the need for a more diverse youth work workforce at local level and indeed in Irish youth work more generally (and this should happen in the context of a concerted attempt to make the 'public realm' in Ireland, including the media, more visibly diverse and reflective of the make-up of the population): *'If we had more youth workers from [minority] ethnic backgrounds…it would go a long way to getting [the] young people…engaging with the services. And of course there has to be funding for that'*.[2]

We conclude with the words of Johny Pitts, a Black writer, photographer and broadcast journalist who grew up in a working class community in Sheffield in the north of England. Towards the end of a recent book in which he reports and reflects on his travels across a number of countries and cities in continental Europe, focusing in particular on the experience of Black communities, he has this to say:

> *'The youth workers and community leaders working with disadvantaged kids working in communities like the one I grew up in are unsung heroes. Their work to provide amenities and initiatives in the midst of increasing cuts to vital funding is perhaps the single most important type of*

[2] A 2023 research report on Ethnic Diversity Amongst Staff and Volunteers in the Irish Youth Work Sector is available from NYCI. It notes the lack of demographic data collected on ethnicity of youth work students and staff. It also reveals challenges in attracting minority ethnic youth and community students into mainstream youth work.

work being carried out in black communities across Europe' (Pitts 2019: 390).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has explored a range of aspects of the lives of Black young people in Balbriggan, as perceived and described by themselves and those who work with them or in organisations with whom they come into contact. It has described many positive features of their lives, ways in which they enjoy themselves and find fulfilment, take the initiative in response to their own needs and interests and find sources of support from their friends and from adults. But it has also described considerable burdens and obstacles, ways in which they and their lives are – in the words of one respondent – unjustly diminished and in many cases in which they encounter outright racism, or sometimes 'subtle' but no less insidious forms of oppression and discrimination. An adequate response to ensure that the positive features can be enhanced and the negative countered, and that includes youth work, community development and a range of appropriate interagency initiatives, requires action at both local and national levels. We therefore present the following recommendations:

6.1 Local

1. Opportunities should be proactively sought out and created (including through a dissemination event for this research) to acknowledge and share the positive aspects of Black young people's lives and experiences and to discuss and identify responses to the negative and challenging aspects.

2. Building on existing partnerships and collaborations, including the Balbriggan Integration Forum, we recommend that all relevant stakeholders are invited to participate in the development of a local intercultural strategy with a specific focus on youth (including youth work)

and with actions relating to recruitment, education and training of professionals and volunteers.

3. This research should be built on further through the implementation of an action research project with a focus on intercultural youth work and community development, to include a strand on accredited leadership education and training for minority ethnic young people and adults.

6.2 National

1. Noting that an intercultural youth strategy for Ireland, despite one having been funded and prepared, has never been adopted (much less implemented)[3] and so as to ensure the implementation of Action 2.11 of *the National Action Plan Against Racism* and its sustainability into the future far beyond the 'target completion date' of 2025[4], the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should collaborate with the National Youth Council of Ireland to develop and implement

(a) a national youth work response to the lives and needs of minority ethnic young people and

(b) an anti-racism awareness and action plan for all young people.

[3] The National Youth Council of Ireland proposed and received funding for the development of an Intercultural Youth Strategy. It was completed and submitted to the then Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science in 2008 but was never officially published or acted on.

[4] Action 2.11 of the *National Action Plan Against Racism* is: 'Take measures to ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic young people in mainstream youth work and other state funded youth initiatives, reinforce support for targeted minority ethnic group youth initiatives, and resource initiatives aimed at empowering young people to understand and challenge racism' (Government of Ireland 2023: 22). The named implementing bodies are the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

2. Funding schemes for youth work, community development and related services should be revised so as to facilitate and support more universal provision in the form of ‘spaces and places’ for minority ethnic young people to gather, both identity-specific and mixed groups.

3. There is an urgent need for a national workforce development strategy for youth work, to include incentivisation initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of minority ethnic professionals and volunteers (publicly funded and drawing on examples in other sectors such as formal education) and with actions relating to both initial and continuing professional education and training.

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