

## **The Get Ahead Club's Afterschool Support Groups, Clondalkin, Dublin 22**

The Get Ahead Club is a community-based education project that aims to support the participation and progression in school of children at risk of marginalisation. It achieves its aims using a community development model that provides a range of services that target children and their families. These services include afterschool groups, breakfast clubs, summer programmes, developmental work with parents and participation in integrated responses to educational needs.

### **Background**

The North Clondalkin Homework Project was established in 1994 by Dóchas, together with local schools and parents, due to concern about children not succeeding in the education system because of limited social and communication skills, poor self-esteem and difficulty completing homework. Volunteers were recruited and trained to operate afterschool support groups on a pilot basis. After an evaluation of the project showed the pilot phase had been successful, the project was set up on a permanent basis. A management committee was formed and FÁS, through South Dublin County Council, came on board to sponsor a CE scheme. The workers on this scheme carry out the direct work with children on the project.

The project continues to develop as resources become available. It was renamed The Get Ahead Club in 1999.

### **Aims and Objectives of The Get Ahead Club:**

1. To support the development among targeted children of:
  - good homework patterns
  - good school attendance
  - positive relationships with their peers and with adults
  - inter-personal qualities such as self-esteem, self-confidence and the ability to deal appropriately with conflict
2. To enhance the capacity of parents to support their children's education
3. To increase the capacity of the local community to be an active partner in the provision of educational services in the area.

### **Target Groups**

The Get Ahead Club operates in north Clondalkin, an area which is classified as being severely disadvantaged. Within this area it caters for children who:

Need extra individual attention, e.g. due to family circumstances

Need to develop social skills, e.g. to make friends, to deal appropriately with conflict

Have poor homework patterns

Have poor school attendance patterns

Have poor self-esteem or self-confidence and are withdrawn in class.

Services are provided to children from all seven primary schools in north Clondalkin.

### **Services Provided**

Afterschool support groups are based in four local community centres.

Eight groups operate, catering for 120 children in total from second and third class. Each child attends twice every week from 2.45pm to 4.30pm and individual attention is guaranteed with a staff to child ratio of 1:2.

Each session includes:

Healthy snack  
Homework support  
Developmental activities – e.g. self-esteem building, games, arts and crafts, sports etc.

### **Work with Parents**

The aim of working with parents is to address their educational and developmental needs so that they, in turn, can support their children's education.

### **Work with Other Agencies**

The project participates in a range of initiatives to work towards an integrated response to educational needs in Clondalkin.

### **Easter Programmes**

In order to provide positive alternatives for children during school holidays, activities include trips to Funtasia, the cinema, the zoo, activity centres etc.

### **Management and Staffing**

The Get Ahead Club is incorporated as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. The project is managed by an independent committee representing a range of local interests. This includes representatives of parents, community groups, schools, South Dublin County Council, Ronanstown Youth Service (CYC), and An Garda Síochána. 22 Community Employment (CE) staff work on the project and there is one CE supervisor. There are also 4 part-time key workers, (one for each of the four centres where the project operates), whose role is to ensure the project operates effectively at a local level. The Get Ahead Club is also served by one full-time project coordinator.

### **Funding**

Funding for the operation of The Get Ahead Club has been provided through a range of different agencies and bodies, including:

FÁS

South Dublin County Council

Department of Education and Science

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Clondalkin Partnership

Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

One-off grants from a range of sources.

### **Outcomes**

Independent external evaluations have noted that the project has major benefits for the children who are involved. Feedback from school staff and parents suggests that The Get Ahead Club provides a whole range of positive supports – social, nutritional and educational – to the participating children.

Some of the tangible outcomes for children attending the project are:

- Much improved homework patterns
- Improvement in self-esteem
- Improvement in social skills
- Progression of parents onto courses to meet their own needs.

### **Want More Information?**

Rita Sweeney, Project Coordinator, The Get Ahead Club.

Tel: +353 (0)1 6450281