

# Young people's involvement in the development of a Climate Justice Action Plan

## Foróige

### 1. How the topic was identified

- In October 2019, Foróige's Reference Panel identified climate justice as an issue affecting all of society and young people in particular. It called on the organisation to consider making this a key topic for 2020. The Foróige Reference Panel is a group of up to 64 young people who represent the views of all 50,000 members of Foróige, from clubs to projects, to youth services and programmes. The work of the Reference Panel directly affects and influences how Foróige operates and ensures that young people's voices are heard in the running of the youth organisation.
- Young people on the Reference Panel felt that more needed to be done to reverse the climate crisis, and that education for both young people and adults was needed to highlight the inequalities in terms of those affected by climate change.
- In January and February 2020, almost 1,000 young people engaged in Foróige's clubs, projects and services, and attended Foróige's Regional Conferences and Seminars (youth consultation events) across the country. These events enable young people in Foróige to identify key topics important to young people and make recommendations for the organisation on these topics. The need for more action on climate change and tackling the climate crisis was a key topic identified at these events; young people felt more needed to be done to support them to take action on climate justice.
- At the first meeting of the newly elected 2020 Reference Panel in April 2020 (held online due to Covid-19), a report summarising the Regional Conferences and Seminars was presented. Each individual Reference Panel member was also given a report on the Regional Conference or Seminar that elected them. This ensured that Reference Panel members were fully aware of the recommendations made by young people in Foróige on the topic of climate justice.
- The Reference Panel highlighted a number of key areas for the organisation to consider in the development of an action plan on climate justice. This included:
  - » young people to be the key drivers of a national climate justice initiative in Foróige;
  - » the establishment of a youth advocacy panel to ensure that young people had a direct say in all aspects of the initiative and could promote the topic to other young people, the public and policy-makers;
  - » the development of trainings and workshops for staff and volunteers on the topic of climate justice and ways to support young people in taking action;
  - » the development of a climate justice programme for young people;
  - » the establishment of Climate Justice Ambassadors in Foróige clubs, groups and projects;
  - » national and local social media campaigns to highlight the issue and things people can do to take action;
  - » a Climate Justice Digital Youth Conference.

### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The audience for this initiative was organisation-wide and included young people from the Foróige Reference Panel, almost 1,000 young Foróige members who attended Regional Conferences and Seminars, young people on the Foróige Ecollective, the National Chairperson of Foróige and the Board of Foróige, the CEO of Foróige, members of the Senior Management Team and staff and volunteers with expertise in child and youth participation and other key areas (such as training and programmes, marketing, communications and event management).
- All these stakeholders played a role in final decisions on the Climate Justice Action Plan, which was initiated and led by young people.

### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

#### SPACE

- The first step, and key to the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative, was the establishment of a national youth advocacy panel. Members of the panel were young people interested in making a positive difference to climate justice, being ambassadors for climate justice and ensuring young people's voices were at the centre of all decision-making.
- The role of the youth advocacy panel was: to frame the direction of the organisation on climate justice; to make recommendations on policy, guidelines, educational programme developments, trainings, research, and key strategic partnerships; to advocate at a local, national and international level; and to lead on a number initiatives.
- Following a meeting of members of Foróige's Senior Management Team, a strategy was put in place to ensure the youth advocacy panel had diverse membership from across Foróige clubs, projects and services (and in terms of age, gender and location).
- Furthermore, a member of the Senior Management Team with significant experience in child and youth participation in decision-making was assigned to support the work of the group.
- Due to the impact of Covid-19, all meetings were held online through Zoom. This presented an initial challenge to group formation as members of the group had not met each other or the staff and volunteers in place to support them. To develop group cohesion, a group dynamic and a feeling of safety from the outset, staff and volunteers facilitated fun and interactive ice breakers and group activities, and used small break-out discussion groups.
- Initial meetings with the youth advocacy panel also included a clear explanation of their role, the roles of staff, volunteers and expert advisors, and other key staff who joined the group at various stages. Following this, the group expressed the need to decide their own name. They are now known as the Foróige Ecollective. The group also developed a contract outlining behaviour and expectations.
- Child safeguarding procedures were put in place, including parental consent, a child safeguarding statement, the appropriate ratio of staff to young people, guidelines for group work online, attendance monitoring and records of all meetings.

#### VOICE

- Meeting logistics for the Foróige Ecollective were decided in consultation with the group to ensure they happened at a time and day suitable to them. Group meetings were initially held every two weeks, then every week as their work programme developed.
- The staff and volunteers who facilitated the group provided ongoing support and ensured the use of youth friendly methodologies during meetings.
- At the first meeting of the group, the Director of Programmes and Research presented a youth friendly version of the application to the DCYA Youth Climate Justice Fund and clearly outlined both the role of the Foróige Ecollective and where the views of the group would influence the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative across the coming months.
- A youth friendly presentation 'What is Climate Justice' was presented to the group by an external expert in the subject, and followed by a Q&A session. This information session was a great success and the external expert remained with the group in a volunteer capacity throughout the initiative.

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- The Foróige staff responsible for the initiative's key actions attended the relevant meetings of the Ecollective. Members of the group were told which staff member was attending in advance and which action of the Climate Justice Initiative they would be consulting with the group on. Staff members who attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective met with the facilitator of the collective in advance to prepare for the meeting and ensure their presentation, facilitation methodologies and consultation questions were suitable to the needs of the group and appropriate for influencing the direction of the Climate Justice Initiative.
- A variety of methodologies were used to ensure that group members had different options for expressing their views, ideas and opinions during each meeting. These included large and small group discussions, interactive whiteboards, videos, chat functions and asking each member in turn to share their views. The use of a variety of methodologies helped to ensure all young people had the opportunity to have their voice heard.

## AUDIENCE

- The Director of Programmes and Research presented at the initial meeting of the Foróige Ecollective and clearly outlined where the group's views would influence the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative, and how in turn this would influence the whole organisation.
- An internal Climate Justice Initiative steering group was also formed as part of the Climate Justice Initiative and was made up of Foróige staff, management and the Senior Management Team with responsibility for actions under the Climate Justice Initiative. The Foróige Ecollective was informed about this group and that a report of their meetings would be presented by their staff-support person at each meeting of the Climate Justice Initiative steering group.
- The staff-support person who facilitated the group was in a position to ensure that appropriate decision-makers engaged with the young people throughout the process.
- The staff responsible for the Climate Justice Initiative attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective and engaged in consultations and discussions with them on areas such as programme development, a Climate Justice Checklist and Awards, training for adults and young people, a social media campaign, a podcast series and a Digital Youth Conference. At all meetings, young people were made aware of how their views, ideas and opinions would influence each step of the process.
- At the online meeting of the Foróige Reference Panel in October, members of the Foróige Ecollective presented their role, explained climate justice, and talked about how young people can make a positive difference to climate justice and the various actions and activities under the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative. The group also asked for feedback and ideas on the Digital Youth Conference, and on how best to engage young people in Foróige on climate justice.
- The Foróige Ecollective worked together with staff from Foróige Marketing and Communications to research, script and present their own 10-episode climate justice podcast series 'Future-Proof Living'. This has been made available on all podcast platforms.
- A member of the Foróige Ecollective provided input about and an update on the group's activities and the actions of the Climate Justice Initiative at a meeting of the Board of Foróige.

## INFLUENCE

- The Foróige Ecollective made recommendations on all aspects of the Climate Justice Initiative. This included the:
  - » look and design of all branding;
  - » content of the Foróige Future-Proof Programme;
  - » content and methodologies used in the training for staff and volunteers to facilitate the Foróige Future-Proof Programme;
  - » content and methodologies used for the Climate Justice Workshop for staff and volunteers;
  - » content and process of the Foróige Future-Proof Climate Justice Checklist;
  - » outline, content and guest list of the Foróige Future-Proof Digital Youth Conference;
  - » guests, research, scripting and presenting of the Foróige Future-Proof Living podcast series.
- Notes from all the meetings were compiled and a report was presented at each meeting of the internal climate justice steering group. Staff support for the group checked that the notes were accurate and their views and opinions were recorded correctly.
- All staff, volunteers and external experts who attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective provided feedback to the group on how their views, ideas and opinions were used or not, through written reports and/or attendance at follow-up meetings.
- Each meeting of the Foróige Ecollective included 'updates' as part of the agenda. This ensured that the group was informed of finalised decisions at all stages of the development of the various actions under the initiative.

## 4. Lessons learned

- While reflecting on and evaluating this initiative, one of the key areas highlighted by everyone was the importance of time; ensuring and planning for enough time for 'space, voice, audience and influence' to happen meaningfully.
- This initiative involved multiple stakeholders and multiple projects happening simultaneously, each one working towards a deadline. It inevitably took longer to carry out a number of the tasks than originally planned. As with most funding models, criteria under the Youth Climate Justice Fund of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs included the need for grant funding to be spent within a timeframe and by a deadline. At times, this put pressure on the Foróige Ecollective group and the group facilitators to ensure all four areas of the framework were happening while also 'getting the job done'.
- It is clear that participation takes time and, as is often the case, more time than is anticipated. Going forward, it will be important to plan for the unexpected and build this into the project timeline. This will help to ensure young people have the appropriate time and space to participate in all aspects of decision-making.