



Youth Participation and Rights:

Implementing the Youth Participation Policy and the 2009-2013 Strategic Plan



Youth Work Ireland

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by Youth Work Ireland

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September 2010



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Youth Work Ireland is a federation of local youth services throughout the country who work in the interest of young people through the provision of a range of services and who share a common ethos and approach.

Our Vision

Youth Work Ireland has a clear and unambiguous view of the kind of society we want to contribute to developing.

Our vision states this clearly as:

'A more equal and sustainable world where all young people are valued and involved.'

Our Mission

Our mission is:

'to contribute to changing society for the benefit of young people.'

We will achieve this by deploying the resources of the Federation, both nationally and at a regional level through the engagement of Boards, staff and countless volunteers in order to:

- Promote quality youth work
- Build our capacity
- Work to realise the rights of young people
- Influence decision making and policy

Our Beliefs

We have a positive view of young people, their dignity and worth

All young people have rights and should be supported to realise these

Young People have the potential to effect change



Framework of Actions for Youth Participation and Rights:

Implementing the Youth Participation Policy and the 2009-2013 Strategic Plan

This document sets out a framework of actions, intentionally developed over the past year that will bring about the realisation of our vision, mission, beliefs and objectives in relation to the rights and participation of young people in Youth Work Ireland, in their communities, in the Irish Youth Work Sector and in Irish society.

These actions are informed by our Strategic Plan 2009-2013, by our work in partnership with young people, by practice within our 22 member services and practice concerns as identified through a peer-reviewed desk study published in *Youth Studies Ireland*, 4 (1) 2009.

The Youth Work Ireland Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013 sets out an ambitious agenda for realising young people's rights and participation in our organisation, in the Irish Youth Work Sector and in society as a whole. Most relevantly, the Strategic Plan sets out strategic objectives and a set of shared beliefs which determine the way that we work with and for young people. These beliefs also inform our objectives and the partnerships that we develop to progress our work.

Our Beliefs

- We have a positive view of young people, their dignity and worth.
- All young people have rights and should be supported to realise these.
- Young people have the potential to effect change.

Our Strategic Objectives

In order to realise our Vision and Mission, four core strategic objectives will guide our work over the next 5 years. The actions under these objectives are largely oriented towards engaging the development of Youth Work Ireland, the Irish Youth Work Sector and Irish Society in an emancipatory movement. This movement is envisioned to encourage sector-wide support for young people's rights, support young people to have their voice heard, and advocate for tangible changes in the current policy framework. This paper is a focused discussion on this set of actions.

Strategic Objective One:

We will work to promote quality youth work Practice as a developmental process with and for young people

Actions to progress this goal in a manner that is consistent with our beliefs will involve not only developing innovative evidence-based programmes and professional development, but also directly ensuring that programmes develop practice and organisational policies that support young people to become active in their communities and have their voice heard. Key to this is engaging with approaches consistent with our beliefs; including strengths based approaches to working with young people.

Key Actions to achieve Strategic Objective One:

- Provide a programme of training to the Irish Youth Work Sector through the Irish Youth Work Centre that introduces youth participation in a community context through an understanding of strengths based approaches. Not only will this programme develop practice in the sector and promote rights-based and strengths based approaches to Youth Work, it will also document and capture current practice to be shared within the sector and help to encourage consideration of within the youth work sector of what is common to all of us in our Youth Work.
- The provision of a series of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) workshops for Youth Work Ireland youth workers on a regional basis. These workshops will employ appreciative inquiry to identify and document effective practice which is currently taking place within Youth Work Ireland services to engage young people as active citizens in their communities. This practice will be underpinned by learning from ABCD practice internationally in order to support the continued development of Youth Work practice which supports young people to have their voice heard, to activate their rights and to become active participants in their communities. These workshops will be tied into an ongoing plan of professional development to ensure continual development and sharing of effective practice including supportive discussion and sharing of practice through a Virtual Community of Practice (VCOP).
- Redevelopment of the "Youth Work in Ireland" VCOP to support the sharing and development of practice which supports young people to have their voice heard, to activate their rights and to become active participants in their communities. The "Youth Work in Ireland" VCOP will continue to focus on supporting the learning and

development of practitioners from across the Youth Work sector. Redevelopment will include tying content and discussion on the VCOP into discussions and learning which takes place in the training programme in the Irish Youth Work Centre. This will involve supporting the continued networking of training participants through the forum, re-purposing documentation of practice gathered in workshops and trainings as detailed above as well as video footage of these events re-developed into Webinar material.

- Implement and document a pilot scheme to put in practice an asset-based approach through a youth-led matching fund programme for young people's community projects. The long-term plan for this project is to evaluate and if successful manualise and provide training and support for other Youth Work Services interested in this approach. Initial funding is in place, a core-group of young people has been recruited and planning workshops are now scheduled for this initiative.

Strategic Objective Two:

We will work to create a climate where the right of young people to participate equally in decisions affecting them is realised

This objective specifically prioritises and focuses on advocacy work which will realise a change in perceptions of young people and in opportunities to exercise their rights, particularly their right to be heard. In the process of developing our Strategic Plan, consultations and focus groups identified a concern that currently policy, Youth Work practice and the position of young people in society is influenced negatively by a deficit view of young people. Such a view is opposed to the beliefs of Youth Work Ireland and the view of young people put forward in the National Youth Work Development Plan (DES, 2003). This view, along with a historic lack of regard for the rights and best interests of young people limits the scope and opportunities for young people to participate equally in decisions affecting them.

Work to address this strategic objective will involve advocacy efforts which take place in partnership with young people to alter the frame of reference within which young people are viewed and in which decision-making which affects young people takes place.

Key Actions to achieve Strategic Objective Two:

- Support the ongoing development and also initiate the dissemination of the 'Voices of Youth' programme which provides a platform for young people to actively engage with the media and concerns of youth voice and perceptions of young people in Irish society. Dissemination will be through documentation and manualisation of the programme and provision of training to Youth Workers in the sector.
- Through a Youth-led, partnership with 'Voices of Youth,' seek funding to support the research, analysis and dissemination of a 'Strategic Frame Analysis' in order to identify the dominant beliefs and understandings about young people in Ireland. The results of the analysis will serve to identify potential reframing messages that will inform advocacy efforts by young people and by the sector.
- Documentation and development of practice that engages young people as self-advocates in their communities and in society. This will take place through a youth-

led international workshop in which young people present, share and document barriers and opportunities for young people to positively engage in their communities and to have their voices heard.

- Identify gaps and failures to involve young people in policy and legislative development and work to directly involve young people in these. This builds on previous work in this year to develop a National Youth Poll around the effects of the Current Economic Crisis.

Strategic Objective Three:

To create an environment for the benefit of young people through influencing legislation, policy and public opinion

Achieving this objective involves advocacy and engagement with the broader policy and service development agenda to ensure that these are informed by the voice of young people and best practices as they have been identified within Youth Work Ireland and in international research. Our beliefs are critical in informing this advocacy work and bring a consistent emphasis on the need for the youth sector, government and Irish society to respect and act to implement the rights of young people.

Key Actions to Achieve Strategic Objective Three:

- Developing a peer-reviewed, evidence-based paper which sets out Youth Work Ireland's beliefs and values in relation to current Youth and Community Work models. The discussion within this document will examine current trends in policy and theoretical approaches and make a case for the relevance of Youth Work Ireland's beliefs and practices in the emerging policy context. In particular, the discussion will interrogate deficit versus strength based approaches to working to young people and the importance of young people's citizenship and rights. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a evidence base for engagement with the policy process in the medium and long-term.

Strategic Objective Four:

To strengthen and develop an effective, innovative and cohesive organisation that can achieve its mission

Our strategies for developing an organisation which can effectively support participatory processes include proven organisational change mechanisms such as Quality Standards, policy integration, leadership and strategic communication.

Key Actions to Achieve Strategic Objective Four:

- A new National Office Youth Participation Policy provides for the organisational change required to embrace and support the involvement of young people in the organisation, in their communities and in society. This policy articulates the principles and commitments of Youth Work Ireland in relation to youth participation and rights as they are identified within the current strategic plan and through a Survey of member services conducted in 2008. Several of the key actions that appear in this paper are mandated by the policy. Most saliently, this paper is itself part of the policy commitment. That is, the policy mandates the development of a clear framework of actions to enact Youth Work Ireland's beliefs and commitment. This paper serves to provide that very framework and is part of our efforts to communicate our commitment and provide leadership within Youth Work Ireland and within the Irish Youth Work Sector.
- A Participation Proofing Mechanism has been developed, piloted and is now being implemented to ensure that all of our in the National Office is measured and referenced against our commitment to youth participation and rights. This mechanism ensures policy integration as it is embedded in the central decision-making processes within the National Office and serves to challenge all staff to involve young people in a principled way in our decisions.
- A Youth Reference Panel is currently being developed to provide a structure that ensures that young people's voices are directly heard in the decision-making and policy development processes within Youth Work Ireland. This structure will seek to bring young people not only into a greater range of decision-making processes, but to map out and develop the ongoing changes that will need to take place in order to bring about increasing levels of young people's involvement that are required in the organisation. In this way, the panel will develop and enlarge its role on an ongoing basis.
- Quality Standards are an important tool in ensuring the ongoing improvement and harmonisation of practice, as well as higher levels of organisational efficiency and

impact. However, Quality Standards are also a means of creating change in organisational culture and ethos and as such must be informed by our core belief in youth participation and rights. The current re-development of the Youth Work Ireland Quality Standards Framework seeks to involve young people in a number of ways in order to insure that these beliefs, as well as the experience and perspective of young people is included. Firstly, it has been agreed that young people will be involved in the current process of revising the standard framework. Secondly, the new version of the standards will provide for young people to be involved in the Assessment Preparation Teams for the Assessment process. Thirdly, young people are to be involved in providing evidence during the assessment process. Lastly, a pathway to the involvement of young people in the assessment process as Assessors has been built into the current iteration of the QSF and the involvement of Young Assessors on the Assessment Team is envisioned as long-term outcome of the Assessment Process.

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