

### ***“Where do we stand?”***

All community and social services need certainty to deliver most effectively on their vision and mission. Youth work is a core community service all around Ireland yet it still is waiting for leadership and direction from those in authority. Some 12 years ago a Youth Work Act was passed, in many respects it heralded many welcome changes such as a ministerial advisory committee and an admired definition of youth work. However years later those who deliver youth services on the ground are faced with a confused and fragmented picture which coupled with successive cutbacks in funding for youth services makes our work even harder on a daily basis.

There have been significant changes in the funding and support for youth work in local communities. This is not a major issue if we are talking about administration and financial matters. However all too often administration and finance becomes a policy matter or is the beginning of the assumption of policy responsibility by a public body. The 2001 Youth Work Act is clear that youth work is primarily delivered by voluntary organisations. Large amounts of the Act laying out a system of local administration and planning have not been commenced in 12 years.

VECs (now ETBs) are given a central role in the administration of youth work locally in the 2001 Act. Many ETBs have established committees for this function but not under the Youth Work Act. The DCYA has also provided for a central role for the City of Dublin Youth Services Board in the process but again without any policy role. A funding disbursement role for Pobail completes the “simplification” of the arrangements! In terms of policy a Framework is being progressed slowly in connection with the overarching Children’s Strategy. It is now six years since there was any policy document on how youth work is delivered in Ireland.

Locally many youth services have linked with local development companies such as partnership and LEADER in terms of funding and joint work. There has been a long term cohesion process in place here. Similarly another field of support from the HSE has been subjected to considerable change management and re-organisation and will be again with the advent of the Child and Family Agency. Alongside this we have had the development of Children and Youth Services Committees in many areas. More recently the reform of local government and Local Authorities will create new social and economic committees. This is of course before we consider RAPID, school completion, FAS, Dormant Accounts, Drugs Task Forces and many many more.

There is now a veritable plethora of body’s agencies, Quangos and committees that are relevant to youth work locally. Indeed the cost of these bodies could go a long way to addressing the funding crisis in the sector. These further complicate what is a relatively simple process often relying on voluntary work with limited resources. Clearly clarity is needed. Increasingly pressure on finances means many agencies see their role as dictating or imposing models of practice and organisation. We see the real value of local voluntary youth services and a proper system of working with young people as being a proper professional partnership between voluntary and statutory organisations.

Delivering joined up services to children and young people will be the theme of our National Conference in November. We hope that finally we will see some leadership on some of the key questions as to where local youth services stand

We call on the government to as a matter of urgency to work with the Youth Sector and the other key stakeholder organisation to establish clear protocols on roles and responsibilities and to ensure that it fully supports the Voluntary Sector to fulfil its role as envisaged in the Youth Work Act.