



# Youth Work Ireland

## **Youth Work Ireland Final Declaration 2011**

The Annual General Meeting of Youth Work Ireland held on 21 May 2011 attended by its 22 Member Youth Services unanimously agreed the following Final Declaration:

### **Putting Young People First**

Youth Work Ireland will continue to speak out about the key issues impacting on young people. Young people have told us that jobs and emigration continue to be their biggest concerns. Ireland's recession is becoming a lengthy one and it disproportionately affects our young people. There can be no recovery on the backs of people who have the least. Jobs strategies and initiatives need to have specific and dedicated measures that help young people.

Work experience and internships can play a part but young people need real skills and real work. There are numerous restrictions and blockages in the education and training system, real public reform can address these and free up capacity to accommodate the huge demand for education and training amongst our young people. However we welcome overdue reforms in the formal education system.

Young people need to be heard in our political and economic system. The Government plans a Children's Rights Referendum which may at last give some voice and presence to young people in relation to decisions that affect them. However young people tell us they know nothing about this referendum and the issues involved and crucially nobody has asked them. This is several years after Taoiseach Ahern announced the Government's intention to have such a vote. Clearly the people who should benefit from such constitutional change should be involved and aware in relation to it. We intend to carry out such awareness raising work in the run up to the referendum.

### **Sustainability of Youth Service Provision**

Similarly a new Children's Strategy and Youth Policy Framework are being developed by Government. These must be active and living documents and involve real integration across policy areas and Government Departments. Youth Services already work in this way in local communities and Government should examine and learn from the efficiencies and economy of such an approach.

In this year the European Year of the Volunteer we will continue to support, train and develop our network of over 7,000 Volunteers. Youth Services are particularly dependent on volunteers to run a quality service. In the current climate Government needs to recognize and value the contributions of this important group in society through tax and welfare policies.

One of the pillars of the EU Youth Policy Strategy 2009 is to improve young people's access and full participation in society. We will make our learning and documented good practice available to policy makers, service providers and practitioners to achieve this.

We call on the new Government to

- Preserve and maintain the funding base of youth work services which have suffered from massive cutbacks
- See young people as a resource and as strengths, as key assets in our economic recovery
- Support integrated, community based youth services which work with all young people across the range of policy areas.