



Youth Work Ireland

**Report for Youth Work Ireland on the  
status of Voluntary Youth Clubs and  
level of support they receive from the  
Regional Youth Services.**

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## **Report for Youth Work Ireland on the status of Voluntary Youth Clubs and level of support they receive from the Regional Youth Services.**

Following on from a discussion document prepared and circulated by Patrick Burke, CEO, Youth Work Ireland titled *“Strategy for the Promotion and Support of Club based Volunteer Led Youth Work in the Context of the National Quality Standards Framework for Clubs”* in February 2013 and subsequently considered by the Board and Regional Directors Network. It was agreed that a brief baseline study was needed to gain a national picture of Youth Work Ireland Club Work. A questionnaire was circulated to all Member Youth Services in January 2013.

### **May 2014**

The Report is based upon information provided by a brief questionnaire completed by 17 of the 22 Regional Youth Services<sup>1</sup>. The Report is intended as a discussion document which will assist Youth Work Ireland in their development of an Integrated Youth Service Model. 2014 has been designated as the “Year of the Club” so it is particularly appropriate that the position and status of the Voluntary Youth Club within an integrated map of Youth Work provision is identified and reviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> 18 responses from Member Youth Services received, one of which does not have voluntary clubs. The research is based on 17 Member Youth Services.

Members	Questionnaire received?
Canal Communities Regional Youth Service	Yes
Carlow Regional Youth Service	Yes
Clare Youth Service	Yes
CDYS Youth Work Ireland	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Cork	No (no clubs)
Donegal Youth Service	Yes
Ferns Diocesan Youth Service	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Galway	Yes
Kildare Youth Services	Yes
Kerry Diocesan Youth Service	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Laois	No
Limerick Youth Service	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Longford	No
Youth Work Ireland Louth	Yes
Meath Youth Federation	Yes
Midlands Regional Youth Service	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Monaghan	No
North Connaught Youth and Community Services	Yes
Ossory Youth	Yes
Youth Work Ireland Roscommon	Yes
Tipperary Regional Youth Service	Yes
Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service	Yes

***Review of data compiled from the Youth Work Ireland Questionnaire.***

The question that evokes the most interest and interesting responses was Q11. ***What is your vision for the place of club work in your Region?*** The response to this question appears to demonstrate genuine interest and at the same time considerable concern for the work of developing and supporting voluntary youth clubs throughout the country. I believe the responses to this question highlight the position of club work within the Regions at the present. For this reason, I have decided to highlight this particular question and place it at the beginning of the report.

### **Q11. What is your vision for the place of club work in your Region?**

This question produced a number of interesting responses out of which some key themes emerged.

These included:

- A.** Voluntary Clubs and the Service's role in supporting them need a much higher profile and status, both within the Organisation and outside it.
- B.** The role that Voluntary Clubs play in contributing to youth work provision within a Region needs to be recognised and integrated into a wider model of provision, which should include other service provided by the Youth Service (e.g. Youth Projects, Garda Diversionary Projects and Youth Information Services)
- C.** The role our staff play in developing and supporting Voluntary Youth Clubs should be integrated into our Strategic Planning and the work plan of the Service.
- D.** The importance of the Voluntary Club to local communities, especially in rural areas.
- E.** Recognition of the role that volunteers play and the important contribution they make in the lives of young people.
- F.** Remember our roots—that the Organisation grew out of a Federation of Youth Clubs.

I have included a number of quotes to better capture the sentiment expressed by the responses.

#### **Our vision:**

“To increase the number of volunteers to better enhances the quality of youth work for our young people”

“To set up a County club network”

“Increase involvement of the clubs with our youth service”

“Increase the number of clubs significantly – give club work a higher profile, more resources.....ensure it is part of our strategic plan”

“Ensure club work remains central to the work of our service....equal status with other work.....secure extra resources to provide the required level of support for clubs.”

“It’s at the heart of what we do.....we need to develop a more integrated service.....to prioritise grassroots development....the promotion of club work in every village/town.”

“forms the basis of our work”

“.....essential part of an integrated service.....need to offer a better quality service to sustain clubs

“.....core to the delivery of youth work.....back to our roots i.e. supporting voluntary clubs.....need to integrated our service (universal and targeted ) .....youth clubs are central to our work” .

“need to integrate the clubs more with the ‘Organisation’ .....share good practice, discuss challenges.....make the clubs feel part of an overall strategy.”

“...club work ....life blood of youth work in Limerick....access for most young people to youth work.....important part of community life especially in rural areas.”

“need to develop more clubs in rural areas....provide better support for volunteers.”

“club work is universal youth work....need to focus on themes not just fun/social activities” .

“....need to support volunteers to provide better quality youth work in local communities, not just traditional youth clubs.....perhaps issue based work...., youth clubs are a gateway to other activities.....need for clubs to see themselves as an integral part of the youth service.”

“better integration between clubs and projects.....”

.”.....clubs should be central aspect of what we do.....provide all communities with an opportunity to develop vibrant clubs so young people have access across the county”

It appears obvious that there is a sense that the status and importance of supporting voluntary clubs has slipped over the years.

It is critical that the role of developing and supporting voluntary youth clubs be integrated with the other roles carried out by the services. The youth work provided by voluntary clubs needs to be part of an integrated youth work provision for the Region.

The aspirations expressed by many of the Services in their Vision statements is not reflected in their present provision, nearly all the Regions expressed the need to develop more clubs and provide better support.

**Q1 Does your Service have plans to grow the number of voluntary clubs in their Region?**

75% of Services responded positively to this question however when asked to elaborate, were vague on specific plans and had set no targets for the Service or staff. Those Services that did state targets set 2 as the average number of new clubs they planned to develop (targets ranged from 2 to 5). A number of services set targets over a 2 year period. The data did not include information on the estimated number of clubs that are expected to (or may) close over the year so it is difficult to estimate real growth figures.

While it is evident that most Services want to grow the number of Voluntary Clubs in their Region it is also evident that most have not formally planned to ensure the development happens, have not set specific targets for their Service or for staff involved in supporting Voluntary Clubs. It is important that a designated person, either staff or volunteer takes responsibility for this area of work.

The 25% of Services that indicated that they had no plans to develop new Voluntary Clubs stated a number of reasons (no designated club worker, lack of capacity amongst existing staff being the most common). Youth services with limited resources need to consider alternative and creative responses to developing their club support work, for example working collaboratively with other services, use of community employment staff and/or volunteers and additional support from the national office.

**Q2. Services were asked to identify the cost of supporting a Voluntary Club in their Region.**

Over 60% of services either did not or could not respond to this Question. Of those that did respond the figure ranged from e500 to e9, 800. Two Services gave an overall cost of their club support work (e45, 300 and e100, 841 respectfully)

In terms of resource allocation it would appear that many of the Services have not quantified the level of resources that they are allocating to supporting and developing Voluntary Clubs. Nationally it is important that at a minimum level of support for the development and sustainability of voluntary youth clubs is agreed by the Regional services. It is important that the National Office in making representation for increased resources for this work have accurate figures on the cost of developing and sustaining Voluntary Youth Clubs. In the context of the roll out of the NQSF for voluntary groups the role of Youth Services and National Youth Organisations in supporting Clubs to meet agreed standards will be a very real issue. Agreeing a cost per unit and what that cost includes is an immediate priority for Youth Work Ireland.

**Q3. Describe the kinds/quantity of support provided by your Service to Voluntary Youth Clubs?**

The most popular responses to the question were as follows.

1. Child Protection Training
2. Training for leaders (Inc. intro. To youth work, roles and responsibilities, committee work, junior leadership etc.)
3. Regular contact by phone and email.

90% of the Services indicated they provided the above services to their clubs.

4. Club visits
5. Interclub/ Regional events
6. Garda vetting/ volunteer checks.

60% of Services indicated they provided the above services to their clubs.

7. Insurance
8. Information flow
9. General Admin support
10. Regional forum/networks.

25% of Services indicated they provided the above services.

Other kinds of supports identified included Crisis intervention (3 Services), Volunteer recruitment (3 Services) and one Service indicated they had a staff member present at every Voluntary Club.

It is noted that few of the Services mentioned support in rolling out the NQSF for Voluntary Clubs, and only one Service mentioned the Starting Out Programme. The question of information flow on National Developments in Youth Work within Youth Work Ireland may have to be reviewed.

**Q4. How many staff visits to clubs per year on average?**

Responses ranged from none (2), to being present at every club (1). Generally clubs were visited between 1 and 3 times per year, with the average number of visits being 2 (50%).

The issue of minimum standards should be considered and whether a Service is required to visit every Club a minimum number of times per year.

**Q5. Does your Service network your Voluntary Clubs?**

Approximately 60% of the Services (11) responded positively to this question, networking their clubs in a variety of ways e.g. Events, Forums, and Training. Four Services did not network their clubs (primarily because poor responses to networking attempts in the past). Two other Services planned to introduce networking in the future (2014 or 2015). It is important that the Organisation identifies and reviews successful models of networking at clubs and looks to duplicate these models in other areas.

**Q6. Would your Service like to see a national structure for club networking?**

60% (10 Services) were in favour,

30% were not in favour,

10% were unsure.

Options for national networking included, networking of club development staff, organising national Volunteer events (perhaps alongside existing national events) and the use of online structures.

Issues and concerns expressed included, “pulling volunteers away from their role in the community”, the cost for volunteers participating at Regional or National level, and “asking too much of the volunteer”. Overall while most of the Services were in favour of national networking of clubs they expressed concerns over challenges and barriers they anticipated in moving this forward. A key question Youth Work Ireland should consider if the organisation had remained focused solely on the support of voluntary youth clubs, what would the role and function of the National Office be? It may be worth while researching National Office roles within other large youth organisations focusing solely on supporting voluntary youth work.

**Q7. Would your Service like additional supports from National Office to better develop your club work?**

The response to this question was overwhelming positive (15 Services in favour, 1 unsure and 1 not in favour).

The roles and services for National Office most commonly identified included:

- Advocating/lobbying nationally on behalf of local Voluntary Youth Clubs (especially those in rural areas)
- National club co-ordinator.
- The development of a national resource pack that could be used locally,
- Standardise club training and club supports.
- Training for and networking for club development staff.
- Identify and facilitate national and international opportunities for club volunteers.

- Network with other National Organisations involved in developing and supporting voluntary youth clubs/groups.

### **Q8. Do your clubs participate in the following National Programmes?**

Irish Youth Music Awards:

75% of the Services reported that their clubs did not participate in the Music Awards. Of the 25% of Services that responded positively the number of clubs involved per Service was very small (average of 1 club).

Issues raised included “awards not promoted enough” “seen as a programme for projects with full time staff”, cost of participation, standard too high and clubs do not know about them.

#### **Nollaig**

Just less than 50% of services reported that clubs in their Region participated. In the Regions with no participation reasons given included “no interest” and “too childish”.

#### **Youth Factor**

50% of Services reported that clubs from their Region participated with some reporting good numbers of clubs involved. It appears to be the most popular of the National Programmes with an average of 6 clubs per region participating.

#### **Youth Games**

Just less than 50% of Services reported that clubs from their region participate with 5 Services reporting high levels of clubs taking part. The Services that reported no clubs participating mentioned cost, over competitiveness and lack of promotion as some of the barriers.

### **Q9. Mini Grant Schemes.**

7 Services reported that clubs from their region had applied.

6 Services reported that none of their clubs had applied citing a range of reasons (e.g. associated clubs excluded, clubs unaware of the scheme, 2<sup>nd</sup> round not advertised and level of paperwork involved)

4 Services were unaware if clubs from their region had applied.

**Q10. What support do you offer your Voluntary Club Leaders?**

Many of the Services referred back to Q3. Or repeated the answers given to Q3. The majority of responses related to Child Protection Training and Leadership/ Youth Work training. Interestingly, as with Q3 only one service mentioned the recruitment of new volunteers and the development of new clubs.

**Q12 what is the vision for the place of Voluntary youth Club work nationally?**

40% of the Regional Services did not respond to this question, however an opportunity should be provided for reflection and discussion on the role of the National Office in relation to voluntary youth clubs.

For the 60% of clubs that did respond the common themes that emerged included the following:

- A. Representing the voluntary clubs at a national level including advocating on their behalf for better resources, promoting the value of their work and the significant role that volunteers play, and highlighting the importance of the role that voluntary clubs play in the life of rural communities.
- B. Reviewing the existing vision of voluntary clubs, explicitly demonstrating their value, and exploring additional models of youth work provision.
- C. Create a National Body that voluntary clubs/groups can identify with and be proud of their association with.
- D. Provide access routes for young people and volunteers to participate in National and international experiences.
- E. It is recommended that the National Strategic Planning Process gives this area of work due consideration.

**Q13. What do you consider to be the outcomes of your club work for young people?**

The most commonly identified outcomes were that Voluntary Clubs:

- A. Provided a safe space for young people, locally accessible.

- B. Provided a sense of community, helped young people identify with their community, developed a sense of civic pride/responsibility in young people.
- C. Provided opportunities for young people to develop increased self-esteem, new skills (including life skills)
- D. The experience of good role models and to value volunteers.

Some individual responses identified outcomes in relation to:

- A. Inclusion, equality and racism.
- B. Youth participation, opportunities for leadership roles.
- C. Opportunities for new experiences.
- D. Positive relationships with adult
- E. A place where volunteers can gain experiences

Many of these outcomes reflect recent research by Dr. Maurice Devlin and Anna Cunning (The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work) and both documents should be used as the basis of highlighting the value of voluntary youth work to young people and their communities.

## **Conclusion**

As one of the largest youth work organisations in the country Youth Work Ireland understands:

- That youth work is an informal educational and developmental process,
- That the involvement of a caring adult in a young person's life has significant positive outcomes for the young person
- That there is ample evidence of very positive outcomes for the young people who get the opportunity to participate in quality youth work.

***Youth work Ireland also accepts that access to quality youth work, for the vast majority of Irish young people will be through a voluntary youth club,***

***And that young people who chose to participate in youth work have a right to access good quality youth work.***

At NYWAC and other forums where Youth Organisations and the various Funders meet there is constant reference to the enormous contribution that Voluntary Youth Work makes to the lives of Irish young people and to Irish Society. Many National Youth Organisations were founded to support Voluntary Youth Groups on the ground. However that status and Significance some Organisations give to the work of supporting and Developing voluntary clubs seems to be diminished. Time, energy and resources have become concentrated on the development of youth projects targeted at a relatively small number of very disadvantaged young people. Much of the focus of youth work has been centred on this area of Intervention.

**The Member Services of Youth Work Ireland should consider a number of actions:**

Commit to ensuring an appropriate status and resources are allocated to developing and supporting Voluntary Youth Work. Identify and adhere to an agreed minimum level of support for voluntary youth work in their Region.

Commit to ensuring that the Voluntary Youth Work provision in their Region is part of an integrated Youth Work Plan. Consider the possibility of collaborating with other Regions to ensure the best possible outcomes for this work.

Ensure that the support of Voluntary Youth Groups is properly planned, that targets are set and reviewed and that this area of their work is included in their strategic planning processes.

Review the existing Voluntary Youth Club provision in their Region with particular reference to the age groups being catered (a brief review of clubs in one Region indicated that 80% of

their clubs catered for children under 13 only, with some of these catering for very young children i.e. 5 to 8 years, in fact only 2 clubs in the Region appeared to have members over 14yrs)

Review the type and quality of the Voluntary Youth Club provision in their Region e.g. what percentage of groups are youth activity groups and what percentage would be considered youth development groups.

Consider developing and launching a number of alternative models of voluntary youth groups (other than the traditional youth club).

Consider the issues relating to providing support(as a local youth service) to Voluntary Youth Groups affiliated to other National Youth Organisations or operating as independent community youth groups.

Review models of volunteer recruitment, training and retention, research models used by other Youth Organisations both here and abroad.

Review the relationship between the individual Voluntary Club and the National Office/Organisation. Youth Work Ireland should consider reviewing its national brand in relation to their voluntary youth clubs. The promotion of the value of a voluntary youth group in communities should become a priority for National Office.

That the National Office should create and make use of every opportunity to promote Voluntary Youth Work and to lobby for adequate resources

That the National Office should work with its member Services to agree minimum levels of support for their Voluntary Clubs and Volunteers, particularly in the context of the rollout of the NQSF at a local unit level.

**Time Frame:**

In reviewing David Mann's Confidential Report to Youth Work Ireland on Member Clubs, one of the key facts will seem to indicate a degree of urgency in revamping and revitalising the support of voluntary youth groups. David's report would seem to indicate a dramatic drop of

almost 25% in the number of volunteer leaders (from 4131 to 3192) in a two year period.

**The potential for Voluntary Youth Groups to support significant numbers of young people exists however potential in terms of capacity and quality is dependent on adequate support from the Youth Services. The existing level of support in many Regions needs reviewing and appears to be inadequate.**

*Eddie D'Arcy (May 2014)*