

The History of Youth Work: An Irish Perspective

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Youth Work Act 2001

- Youth Work is:
 - A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary involvement...which is -
 - (a) complementary to their formal, academic and vocational education and training; and
 - (b) provided primarily by voluntary organisations.
- [s. 3]

Youth Work Act 1997

- In this Act "youth work" means a programme of activity that is designed for the purpose of providing developmental and educational training so as to assist the personal and social development of young persons which—
- (*a*) requires the voluntary participation of young persons, and
- (*b*) is complementary to academic or vocational training. [s. 2]

Why two Acts in four years?

- General election and change of Government – part of a pattern
- Different (political) views of education system & how it should be run
- Not necessarily different views of youth work
- Voluntary youth organisations took the opportunity to improve their position

Key elements of 2001 definition

- Voluntary participation of young people
- Voluntary organisations as primary providers
- ...but with statutory oversight & coordination...
- ...by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) (“Partnership”)
- Educational purpose and focus

Voluntarism in Irish youth work

- Complex – at least three meanings relating to
 - Young People
 - Adults
 - Organisations
- Linked to principle of “subsidiarity” in Catholic Social Teaching

Subsidiarity

- The State exists for the common good, and that common good is best achieved when families and individuals are enabled to fulfil their proper destinies...The State does not exist to do for individuals and families and other associations what they can do reasonably well themselves...
- (James Kavanagh, *Manual of Social Ethics*, 1955)

‘Subsidiarity’

- Institutionalised in Ireland after independence (1922)
- But pervasive in effect since early nineteenth century
- Denominational education systems, church ownership of schools and hospitals (and institutions of care/custody)
- Separate youth work provision on political/religious grounds

Early youth work – voluntary organisations

- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) (1844)
- Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) (1849)
- Boy Scouts (1908)
- Na Fianna Éireann (1911)
- Catholic Scouts of Ireland (1927)
- Girl Guides (1911)
- Catholic Guides of Ireland (1928)
- Numerous other church-related clubs and groups

YMCA/CYMS

- ‘The so-called Catholic Young Men’s Associations...[aim] to make the members of them disloyal to the Government, and to send them out to as volunteers to Italy; to support the temporal authority of the Pope’ (1860)

Na Fianna Éireann

- National Recruiting Campaign, 1913. - Boys, will you enlist? Not in the English Army, but in the Irish one. Join Na Fianna Éireann (Irish National Boy Scouts).
- The course of instruction includes: - Squad and company drill, Morse and semaphore signaling, first aid and ambulance work, pioneering and camp life, Irish language and Irish history, hysical culture etc. etc.

Catholic Guides of Ireland

- ‘The Catholic Girl Guides [are] a National organisation, and every guide worthy of the name [should] work for her country and help towards the revival of its Gaelic culture. One of the biggest things the Guides have to do in that respect is to study the language of their country, to play their native games, and learn the native dances and songs.’ (1933)

What is a youth club...?

- ‘A club is what happens when a group of young men actuated by Christian charity, and more or less of middle class, and a group of boys of the slums form individual and collective friendships. A club is not a building or anything else on the material plane. It is like a bridge across the great gulf of class, environment, age, that exists between the two groups’ (1948)

Statutory Intervention

- *Comhairle le Leas Óige*, 1942
- Sub-committee of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)
- VEC system seems contrary to principle of subsidiarity (state run schools)...
- But churches not as concerned with controlling “mere” vocational education
- And in any case, RC Church/State very close after independence.....

Consensualism

- “[CLLO] is singularly privileged to have on its opening night this concord of Church, State and Municipality - cooperating to do honour to our purpose, and to do justice to the cause for which we stand. We...are sent on our mission of youth welfare with the Blessings of the Church, with the sanction of the State, and with the assurance of Municipal cooperation.”
(1942)

Youth Week 1944

- ‘The cinema, dancehall, the toss school, the billiard saloon and the private gambling dens [are] baneful distractions and influences [while] the predominantly unsavoury fare provided by the foreign film producers tends to deaden the sensibilities of decency and honour in young minds and hearts...[Counteracting such influences] is the negative aspect of the Youth Apostolate. Its more positive side is the building up in Youth of strong and virile Christian character.’

Youth Week 1944

- ‘It is in many respects more difficult to be a youth leader than a schoolmaster. Both are educationalists. To the one the pupils come compulsorily, to the other voluntarily. This is a vital difference. In the one education is direct, in the other indirect. For the one there is a definite programme fixed by outside authority, for the other the programme conforms to the needs and the desires of the members, who have to be inspired by the leaders themselves’.

Youth Week 1944

- ‘The leader has much to give, but what he gives must be the spontaneous offering of a heart fired with a great love of youth, and a will to understand and sympathise with its problems. He must strive ceaselessly to awaken in those young hearts committed to his care a love and trust from which will arise naturally a confidence in his guidance and leadership culminating in the establishment of a bond of friendship which will endure beyond the years of youth’.

Youth Week 1944

- ‘In the main, the leadership of Youth is now carried out by people who have performed a full day’s work. The whole responsibility cannot be theirs. In many cases the leaders are completely unsuited for the work...The establishment of a Training Centre for Youth Leaders should provide the opportunity for [leaders] to come under the influence of corrective training’

Modernisation

1950s....

- 1950s-1980s Urbanisation, industrialisation, globalisation
- Statutory youth service largely limited to Dublin
- Formalisation of voluntary structures (NYCI)
- State funding through “Youth Affairs Section” – still subsidiary role
- 1970s/1980s – complexity of “youth problems”
- Calls from the voluntary sector for a national youth [work] policy

Youth policy developments 1970s-1990s

- 1977 A Policy for Youth and Sport
- 1980 Development of Youth Work Services in Ireland (“O’Sullivan Report”)
- 1984 Final Report of the National Youth Policy Committee (“Costello Report”)
- 1985 In Partnership with Youth: the National Youth Policy
- 1995 Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education [Chapter 7 on Youth Work]
- 1997 Youth Work Act 1997 (later repealed)

Youth policy developments – 2000s

- 2000 National Children's Strategy
- 2001 Youth Work Act 2001
[Act of 1997 repealed]
- 2003 *National Youth Work
Development Plan 2003-2007*
- 2005 Office of the Minister for Children
(OMC)
- 2008 Office of the Minister for Children
& Youth Affairs (OMCYA)

National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007

- **Goal 1** *To facilitate young people and adults to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services.*
- **Goal 2** *To enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context.*

National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007

- **Goal 3** *To put in place an expanded and enhanced infrastructure for development, support and coordination at national local level.*
- **Goal 4** *To put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work.*

Youth work developments under NYWDP

- Quality Standards Framework (QSF)
- North-South (Ireland) and East-West (Ireland-Britain) links – professional endorsement
- Intercultural strategy and equality initiatives
- Renewed focus on educational/developmental nature & purpose of youth work

Integration of Youth Affairs within OMCYA

- Challenge or opportunity?
- More resources, more senior Govt minister
- Opportunities for integration/coordination
- But...blurring of boundaries between youth work and other “work with children and young people”?
- Challenge to retain collective/associative/change orientation of youth work?

Youth work – a profession?

- The doing of youth work, in the sense understood in this Development Plan, requires a particular combination of knowledge, skills and personal qualities. This is the case whether the person in question is a volunteer or a paid worker, and is more important than ever in the light of the current concern with child protection and related matters.

Youth work – a profession?

- Youth work is not just a **vocation**, although almost inevitably the people who do it have a particularly strong sense of personal commitment to the work and to the wellbeing of young people. It is a **profession**, in the sense that all those who do it, both volunteer and paid, are required and obliged, in the interests of young people and of society as a whole, to carry out their work to the highest possible standards and to be accountable for their actions.