Notes on Practice

Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice

Extracts from the City of Dublin Youth Service Board’s Toolkit

Introduction

The provision of quality services for young people is high on the public policy agenda in Ireland as the development of the Quality Standards Framework by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs indicates. With increased investment has come increased accountability and the need for youth service organisations to be able to document and illustrate quality of service in working with young people.

In 2009 the City of Dublin Youth Service Board published and launched Toolkit: Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice as a resource to assist in the ongoing professional development of youth workers in working with young people.

The Toolkit has been designed to provide a set of simple, user friendly, good practice guidelines which will assist youth workers and management committees to plan, deliver and evaluate good quality youth work practice with young people.

The Toolkit contains the following components:

- Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice covering three areas:
  - (1) Youth Worker and Young Person;
  - (2) Programme Provision and Development;
  - (3) Policy and Service Development.

- A series of Guides to Developing Policy on 18 different aspects of working with young people.

- 16 sample forms and templates covering Direct Work with Young People; Staff Support and Development and Health & Safety.

- A series of other resources to support good youth work practice namely: Potential and Needs Assessment; Complaints Procedure; Charter of Rights and Framework for Writing a Report on a Young Person.

This Notes on Practice section contains the following content from the Toolkit:

- Two Statements of Good Practice extracted from the main body of the Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice:
  - 1.1 Building Relationships;
  - 2.5 Outreach Work.

- One of the guides to developing policy: the one on Child Protection and Welfare

- One of the additional resources; namely the Charter of Rights.
1.1 Building Relationships

Statement of Good Practice
The relationship between the youth worker and young person is central to the youth work process and should be honest, respectful, developmental and have clear and appropriate boundaries.

In practice this means that:
- youth workers are welcoming and open towards young people
- youth workers ensure that young people are aware of relationship boundaries and the youth worker’s role and responsibilities in relation to young people’s care, safety and well-being
- youth workers are non-judgmental in their dealings with young people
- youth workers engage with young people in a non-discriminatory manner, with particular reference to gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, race, disability or membership of the Traveller community
- youth workers are inclusive and consistent in their engagement and interaction with young people and do not engage in favouritism
- youth workers engage in active listening with young people both on an individual and group basis
- youth workers communicate information and decisions to young people in a clear and easily understood manner
- youth workers use humour in an appropriate manner and ensure that young people are not offended by its use
- the relationship between a youth worker and a young person should be purposeful, developmental and focussed on responding to the potential and identified needs of the young person
- when dealing with matters of a sensitive, personal or emotional nature with a young person or group, youth workers need to be aware of and not exceed their own level of skill and expertise
- youth workers use the unplanned opportunities that frequently arise in youth work to engage with and develop their relationship with young people
- youth workers observe the youth project/service’s child protection policy and procedures when engaging in relationship building with young people
- youth workers observe the youth project/service’s health and safety and fire safety policies and procedures
- youth workers use team processes and supervision sessions to discuss, explore and develop their practice in relation to relationship building
- youth workers avail of opportunities to participate in relationship building skills training
2.5 Outreach Work

Statement of Good Practice
Outreach work is undertaken to encourage young people to avail of the programmes and activities on offer in the youth project/service.

In practice this means that:

- youth workers ensure that outreach work is based on stated objectives, clear methods, is systematically planned
- youth workers ensure that planning involves young people as appropriate
- youth workers plan and account for the budget in relation to areas of work for which they are responsible
- youth workers inform young people, parents/guardians and other relevant agencies of the range of services provided by the youth project/service
- youth workers observe the youth project/service’s child protection policy and procedures when engaging in outreach work with young people
- youth workers undertake and record ongoing risk assessment for any piece of outreach work for which they are responsible
- outreach work can be undertaken by one youth worker, however in particular circumstances a second worker may be required
- youth workers engaging in outreach work carry the youth project/service’s identity card and a mobile phone
- youth workers make contact with young people in places where they meet and socialise
- youth workers visit the homes of young people in order to build relationships with parents/guardians, inform them of available programmes and activities, and discuss the young person’s participation in the youth project/service
- youth workers network via local community structures, agencies and schools with a view to securing the referral of appropriate young people to the youth project/service
- youth workers keep records of outreach work in line with the youth project/service’s policy
- outreach work is reviewed and evaluated on an ongoing basis by youth workers and young people
- youth workers undertake outreach work in line with the youth project/service’s policy and procedures
- youth workers use team processes and supervision sessions to discuss, explore and develop their practice in relation to outreach work
- youth workers observe the youth project/service’s health and safety and fire safety policies and procedures
- youth workers avail of opportunities to participate in training in outreach work
A Guide to Developing Policy on Child Protection and Welfare

Introduction

It is essential to have a policy on Child Protection and Welfare. A child is defined under the Child Care Act 1991 as a person under the age of 18 years. Child abuse is categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse and a child may be subjected to more than one form of abuse an any given time (Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children). In order to promote the welfare of young people youth workers need to develop practice that is both holistic and young person-centred. The safety and welfare of young people is a core principle of youth work practice. A youth project/service has a responsibility to respond and take appropriate action when there is suspected abuse of a child.

Child protection and welfare is complicated and demanding however there is support, information and clear advice available for youth project/services who want to develop and improve their practices and procedures.

Things to think about

When creating a policy in this area, the following questions are designed to get you thinking. They do not cover everything but should help to get you started.

Planning

- Are you clear about what ‘abuse’ is, do you know what constitutes neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse or sexual abuse?
- Are you clear about the legal requirements in relation to child protection and welfare?
- Are you clear about the guidelines and codes that support youth workers in their work with young people at risk?
- What help might you need in writing this policy, e.g. other agencies similar to your own, the HSE?
- Who should be involved in the process of writing this policy?
- What particular skills, qualities and knowledge are needed for this type of work?
- What training is required and do you ensure that youth workers are kept up to date with developments in this area?
- What systems of support and supervision will be offered to youth workers involved in child protection and welfare concerns?
- Who must observe this policy?
- Who will be appointed the Designated Persons to deal with child protection and welfare concerns?
- Are you developing a Code of Behaviour and Good Practice for youth workers as part of your Child Protection and Welfare Policy?
- Does your recruitment and selection policy including garda vetting requirements?
- How will parents/guardians be involved in dealing with child protection and welfare concerns?
- What will happen if someone does not follow this policy?
How can you ensure that there is interagency co-operation, partnership and sharing of information between the youth project/service and other appropriate services?

Have you considered how this policy links with a range of policies for example, IT/Technology, Residentials?

What is your procedure for handling a disclosure of abuse from a young person in your youth project/service?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these procedures for the youth worker, other staff, young person and their family?

**Promoting a culture of awareness of child protection and welfare**

- How will you create a culture where young people can speak freely to youth workers about any concerns they might have?
- How will ensure that the youth workers and other staff use active listening to respond to young peoples concerns and issues?
- When will you review the policy?
- How will you work with other agencies and services in relation to child protection and welfare concerns?
- Have you created a youth-friendly version of your child protection and welfare procedures for young people, their parents/guardians and the wider community?

**Roles and Responsibilities**

- What are the responsibilities of youth workers and other staff to make this policy work?
- What specific responsibilities does a Designated Person have?
- Have you considered having a different person who is responsible for managing an allegation against a staff member in the youth project/service?
- How will the youth project/service support young people and their families to participate in family welfare conferences/case conferences?

**Reporting, Recording and Evaluation**

- When should a report be made to the HSE/Gardaí?
- What is the procedure for reporting a concern?
- How can you ensure appropriate follow up after a report has been made by the youth project/service?
- How will you consult with the family of a young person you have concerns about?
- What counts as ‘reasonable grounds for concern’?
- What might your approach be to underage sexual activity e.g. involving two young people?
- When will the youth project/service refer young people to other appropriate services, e.g. mental health services?
- How will the youth project/service monitor and record ongoing concerns about young people?
- How will confidentiality be maintained, is information shared on a need to know basis only?
- Recording information is really important, how might you do that?
- If a young person that you have concerns about leaves the youth project/service, what might the follow up be?
Key things to ensure

- Involvement in the design of the policy of all people you expect to follow it.
- The policy recognises the principle that children and young people are of paramount importance.
- That the youth project/service has a safe place where documents relating to child protection and welfare are stored and that access to such information is limited.
- Clear boundaries so that youth workers and other staff are not left carrying responsibilities beyond the scope of the youth project/service.
- Responses to concerns in are conducted in a non-judgemental manner.

Relevant Legislation/Guidelines

In designing any policy, it is important to be aware of the wider context in which your youth project/service exists. In many cases, how you have to act is dictated or influenced by the law:

- Code of Good Practice, Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector, 2nd Edition
  May 2003 Department of Education and Science
- Our Duty to Care (2002)
- Child Care Act (1991)
- Non-fatal Offences against the Person Act (1997)
- Protection for Person Reporting Child Abuse Act (1998)
- Domestic Violence Act (1996)
- Children Act (2001)
- Sexual Offences Act (2006)
- Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998
- Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Act 2000

Where else to get information and resources

A good policy keeps up to date with current practice, trends and legislation. Your policy should be a living document which directs and underpins the work you do and how it is done. Policy development takes time and effort but the return is worth the investment. There are a range of information sources and resources available to help you. Here are a few to get you started.

The Child Protection Unit was set up in 2004 and works primarily with youth work organisations in addressing the needs of the youth work sector in relation to child protection. It is available at www.childprotection.ie

To access the Duty to care document online go the department of health and children website and look under publications or follow this website address www.dohc.ie/publications/our_duty_to_care

Health Services Executive local health offices will have a list of social work teams and Child Care Manager. www.hse.ie
Barnardos’ website is very useful and this also includes the National Children’s Resources Center in Christchurch Square Dublin 8. www.barnardos.ie

The ISPCC provide a range of services including a helpline for children. www.ispcc.ie

A policy on Child Protection and Welfare might use the following structure

1. **A Cover Page** with the following; the name of your youth project/service, the title of the policy, the date it comes into action, person/people responsible for signing it off and a date for its’ review.

2. **A policy statement.** This should state clearly, but in broad terms, what you want the child protection and welfare policy to cover. It is a statement of intent and vision, saying what your youth project/service believes. It can be quite short and need not go into all the practical details; these are covered by the sections below.

3. **Reasons for the policy.** This section should give, in clear bullet points, your reasons for creating this policy. Ask yourself questions such as: “Why is such a policy helpful?” and “What concerns would arise if we did not have a policy?” There are some practical reasons for having a policy like this, while other reasons may reflect values that are important to the youth project/service. All these reasons should be listed: they will help all those who are required to comply with the policy to understand its importance and accept it.

4. **Those who must comply with this policy.** This section could again be bullet-pointed, listing all those whom you expect to follow the policy. For a policy as important as this that really means everyone engaging in any way with the youth project/service.

5. **Implementation.** This will be the largest section of the document, setting out the practical details of how you intend to put the policy into practice. It states who is responsible for what, and how, in practical terms, you intend the policy to be carried out. It might name the tasks for which various people are responsible, e.g. what are the responsibilities of the ‘designated person’, what training will be provided or how concerns should be recorded. See the section on ‘Things to Think about’ above for some more prompts.

6. **Links to other policy areas.** This section should list the other policies of your youth project/service that link into your child protection and welfare policy. Links to other policy areas, such as your health and safety policy, recruitment policy should be identified in this section. All your policies must inter-connect; otherwise the vision for your youth project/service may become confused and pull people in different directions.
Charter of Rights

Introduction

A ‘Charter of Rights’ is a formal statement that names clearly the rights that young people have within the youth project/service. It is desirable that a youth project/service draw up a ‘charter of rights’ in consultation with young people.

Working to raise awareness of young people’s rights is part of the youth work process. Young people in particular may feel disempowered and unaware of their rights.

Drawing up a Charter of Rights

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) recognises and promotes the link between young people’s rights and their responsibilities. Youth work as a non formal education process has a key role to play in developing the connection between rights and responsibilities.
- It is vital to involve young people in the preparation, creation and development of the charter of rights.
- A charter of rights does not have to be written as a formal document, the more creative it is the more engaged and interested the young people will be.
- A charter of rights cannot cover every experience a young person will have but should foster a climate of inclusion and entitlement.
- The youth project/service should set dates for reviewing, amending and updating the charter of rights.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) groups the rights of children under four headings. They are as follows:

- **Survival rights**, naming the things that all children and young people need to stay alive. These things include food, clean water, sleep, a place to live, and proper health care.
- **Development rights**, saying what all children and young people need to help make the most of their talents. These rights include: the right to education, the right to play, the right to get information, and the right to get involved in leisure and creative activities.
- **Protection rights**, children and young people must be protected from every kind of neglect and abuse. Protection rights cover lots of different issues such as the right of young people who get into trouble with the law to be treated fairly and with respect.
- **Participation rights** are a group of rights in the Convention that recognise young people as citizens and as people who have a lot to offer to the communities and countries in which they live. These rights include the right to have a say and to be heard when decisions are being made that affect them.

These headings might be a useful framework to use when designing the youth project/service ‘charter of rights’. Some youth projects/services may decide to create an all encompassing, customer or service charter. If this is the direction you choose to take it is necessary that the rights and entitlements of young people are clearly stated and are of paramount importance.
Relevant Legislation and Guidelines
The Irish Government published the *National Children’s Strategy* in 2000. It is a ten-year plan to improve life for all children and young people under 18 years of age in Ireland and will be reviewed shortly. The Strategy’s goal is to improve the experiences that are available to children and young people through listening, thinking and acting, for example, in health, education, protection and play/leisure. See the Department of Health and Children website [www.dohc.ie/publications/](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/).

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* is an international agreement on the rights of children that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989. It came into force as international law on 2 September 1990. It is the most complete statement of children's rights ever published and provides an internationally agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well-being of the child to which every child and young person under 18 years is entitled. For more information see the UNICEF website at [www.unicef.org/crc/](http://www.unicef.org/crc/).

In April 2002, a law was passed to set up the *Office of Ombudsman for Children* that has as its mission the protection and promotion of children’s rights. For more information see the website at [www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

Where else to get information and resources
There are a range of information sources and resources available to help you. Here are a few to get you started.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 80 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for children's rights and welfare in Ireland. The Alliance aims to secure the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland and their website is at [www.childrensright.ie](http://www.childrensright.ie)

For examples of charters that have been designed in consultation with young people see the following websites:
- [www.childrens-charterofrights.com](http://www.childrens-charterofrights.com)
- [www.whocaresscotland.org](http://www.whocaresscotland.org)
- [www.lgbtyouth.org.uk](http://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk)

Acknowledgements
This Notes on Practice has provided only an introductory sample of the Toolkit, which is designed as an integrated resource to support good youth work practice.
The Toolkit was developed by CDYSB with inputs from youth projects and services in Dublin City under the guidance of a Working Group comprising Bill Blake, Anne Cheevers, Gwen Doyle, Celene Dunne, John Farrelly, Anne Meehan and Mary Robb. The Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice were written by John Farrelly, Celene Dunne and Gwen Doyle, City of Dublin Youth Service Board.
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