



Youth Work Ireland

## **Introduction**

Youth Work Ireland is a Federation of 20 Member Youth Services and a National Office who work together to support, empower, inspire and educate young people through the delivery of best practice youth work services. Our Vision is an Ireland of equality, access and participation for all young people. We are an inclusive and member-centred organisation. Our work is in service to our membership as they in turn work to develop the potential of young people and strengthen communities in Ireland.

Youth work in Ireland is a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations. (Youth Work Act 2001)

Our Youth Work for All model seeks full and adequate funding for youth services in every part of the country, a right to youth friendly dedicated spaces, paid and voluntary youth workers in every community, youth work as an enabler of rights. Youth work is delivered by voluntary organisations, welcomes all young people without exception and is youth led.

## **Community Safety**

We believe the issue of community safety is very relevant to the lives of young people and those who work with them in local Youth Services.

The long title of the Act provides for

- Improving the safety of, and the perception of safety in, communities through collaboration between relevant Departments of State and public service bodies at national and local level and to provide for community engagement in the prevention of crime and harm
- Provides for the establishment of a National Office for Community Safety and for local community safety partnerships;
- Provides for the establishment of the Policing and Community Safety Authority and to provide for its functions

## **Defining Community Safety**

There is a wealth of material in this particularly in the explanatory memorandum to the original bill. An accessible and robust definition can be developed from this. There are multiple factors contributing to people not feeling safe and this is particularly the case for vulnerable people. For young people in particular examples these would be anti-social behaviour, aspects of bullying, issues for vulnerable groups and relationships with the Gardai.

There are clearly differential experiences of safety, some will be geographic specific (certain communities) and others more specific to groups (eg LGBTI+). Changing demographics and diversity need to feature in definitions.

Technology can play a role in innovative approaches as long as proper safeguards are respected. We need to go beyond neighbourhood watch and integrate this concept in to other community strongholds and leverage the trusted relationships that local groups and networks have like local Youth Services.

We do need to recognise a continuum of issues impacted in safety and trust in communities such as anti-social behaviour to public order, low level crime, an a feeling of lack of consequences for these activities.

## **Community-Grounded Knowledge – Youth Work and Young People**

We would focus on the role of communities and particularly community based youth organisations led by local people who engage young people in their work as key partners. Youth work delivers pro social outcomes for all participants. There is significant targeted work in disadvantaged communities and often youth organisations are the only support for certain groups, or certain areas where the state is not present or trusted. The community basis and youth centred approach makes it successful.

Young people would like a better relationship with Gardai and more opportunities to interface with them in school, in youth centres and in the Community in positive ways. Safe, indoor spaces are required, specifically Youth Centres where a dedicated strategy is needed. Outdoor teen spaces in green spaces cannot be ignored with a dedicated national strategy for this.

Anti-social behaviour on public transport impacts on young people greatly and they report feeling unsafe with adults under the influence specifically mentioned in local research. Male black Irish young people in particular feel the relationship with the Gardai needs work. They feel they are perceived as a threat just by being together in groups in public spaces.

Better lighting in areas that young people walk after dark (like 5pm in winter) in villages and towns e.g. home from school, sports, youth club has been highlighted to us, this requires local assessment. More frequent reliable and affordable public transport with

shelters with later buses at weekends so people can safely get home after socialising have been flagged by young people in local research.

Truly valuing and involving community actors helps them take a more active role in their own safety. Police presence and visibility is an issue and this should prioritise Community Gardai and JLOs and principles like restorative justice. In general where there are Community Gardai in post and they link with youth organisations and schools then relationships are reported as more positive. There will clearly be a need for area based approaches to allow for spatial differences.

### **Collaboration**

Community groups are increasingly called upon for legitimacy and gatekeeping but rarely get a proper seat at the table. A genuine commitment to a real say in decision making would enable strong collaboration.

Multi-agency structures are welcome, but they can also be slow, bureaucratic, and hard to coordinate. Youth services (often under-resourced) may struggle with the demands of partnership working, especially with statutory bodies.

Youth services might find themselves designing community-safety interventions, but their interventions may overlap or misalign with other state actors, unless there is strong coordination.

Agencies similarly often work to their own agenda, plans and funding aims to enable communities work together more effectively to improve safety they need to change this posture. The involvement of youth services and young people in aspects of policy has been encouraging in examining best practice but it can still involve tokenism and box ticking. Innovative and novel methods are needed to ensure good quality involvement and collaboration.

There needs to be a dedicated youth engagement pillar to a community safety strategy and a focus on young people's relationship with the police and other state actors.

### **Measurement**

There will be a need for qualitative and quantitative indicators of community safety based on interaction with community actors. Issues like safety and security can of course be very personal and qualitative while issues like reported crime statistics can be more quantitative.

Community safety strategies/ initiatives often prioritize "safety" in terms of crime statistics, feelings of safety, anti-social behaviour. But youth services measure success differently (e.g., engagement, wellbeing, development). There may be a misalignment in how success is defined and evaluated. The strategy will need robust evaluation frameworks that include youth-specific metrics, not just crime reduction.

## **Policy and Governance**

There are numerous national government policies with local delivery methods which can support community safety, but they are often not fully implemented and siloed thinking and delivery often hampers delivery.

In the makeup of the LCSP schools often appear to be unrepresented. There is also no mandated link with for example PPNs where Community Reps are elected and accountable back through the PPN. Under the LCSP process people could submit a EOI as an individual and be chosen by Local Authority CEO and the LCSP Coordinator. They didn't have to be nominated by anyone and there is no identified mechanism for engaging with or reporting back to the people or area they are deemed to represent.

## **Recommendations**

1. Young people's safety should feature in any definition of Community Safety
2. There should be a dedicated Youth pillar in the Community Safety Partnership
3. Closely aligned with the above should be and overarching focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
4. Institutional links should be forged with local Youth Services and national organisations
5. A greater role for community Gardaí and JLO's should feature in the strategy
6. The strategy should once more have measures to break down the silos in the approach of agencies and Departments and ensure accessibility of the voluntary and community sector to decision making and funding
7. A programme of practical measures related to transport, lighting, planning, and community facilities should be central to the strategy with funding attached
8. The Strategy should endorse the need for a dedicated Youth Spaces strategy from the Government.
9. The strategy will need robust evaluation frameworks that include youth-specific metrics, not just crime reduction.
10. Governance structures must facilitate the involvement of frontline community participants