

Opening Statement

The Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth: “Youth Work”.

Tuesday, 18th of April 2023 from 15:00 in Committee Room 4, LH2000, Leinster House.

“Good afternoon, my name is Celene Dunne Director of City of Dublin Youth Services. In accordance with the Education and Training Board’s Act 2013, the role of City of Dublin ETB is to support the provision, coordination, administration, and assessment of youth work in its functional area. As part of the youth work function City of Dublin Youth Services is the conduit for grant aid supporting locally managed projects, groups, and clubs to deliver youth work in response to the needs of young people. This funding is provided by the Youth Affairs Unit within the DCEIDY & I acknowledge the Department’s commitment to supporting young people who are disadvantaged, marginalized or vulnerable.

I thank the committee for this opportunity and hope that our participation positively adds to the collective discourse around policy direction as it relates to the development of the youth work sector. We are happy to add to previous discussions on the topic and acknowledge the joint committees role in this stakeholder engagement process which has huge potential in terms of amplifying the value of youth work as a vehicle for social change.

In the City of Dublin, with a grant aid investment of €16,232,798 under a targeted scheme 47 local youth work providers deliver services, programmes and support to some 69,000 young people annually. In addition, under a variety of small grant schemes €683,000 is provided to support 105 volunteer led clubs engaging almost 7,500 young people delivered by 1,694 adult volunteers.

There are a variety of historical reasons why at a policy level youth work has lacked progression including lack of understanding of what youth work is, how it works, and consequently why it should receive investment.

I have been in post less than four months and have spent much of that time engaging with youth work providers on the ground to get an overview of the current, issues, and challenges. The most frequently raised challenges are funding, staffing and premises.

According to the providers year on year management boards await an allocation to continue their services leading to uncertainty for not only the management, staff and volunteers but also for the young people, their families and the communities. This leads to instability in the sector which could be addressed by a policy decision to place youth work funding on a statutory basis. A simplified formula that facilitates sanctioned posts, adequate programme costs and appropriate overheads would bring much needed stability. It has been clearly articulated to me that without mainstreamed, stable investment the sector struggles to convince policy makers of its value. This leads to a breakdown in trust and relationships and to a situation whereby so much time and effort is

expended seeking resources that little or no time can be given to the articulation of the long to medium term contribution of youth work to the individual young people engaged or society.

Retention and recruitment of qualified staff is difficult because offering terms and conditions commensurate with professionals delivering services is not possible without mainstream funding. Currently in the City of Dublin it is estimated that 9% of youth work posts are vacant resulting in cover issues which can ultimately lead to a reduction in services.

In relation to premises -for volunteer led clubs in many Dublin Communities the situation is - there are adults willing to volunteer, training and grants available to support them, however finding an appropriate space is proving difficult. This results in a frustrating situation where young people miss out on programmes and activities, and volunteer hours are lost to the community.

It is almost 18 years since the last round of facilities investment. Youth & Community facilities built during this period benefited from a sound policy which attached packages of funding to the facility to support the overheads and running of the premises and to provide additional youth work staff. This ensured that access for targeted young people was guaranteed and value for money was achieved. Key to the success of this policy was the partnership approach employed combining the expertise of the Department, the local authority, community sector and the ETB. As a roadmap this previous multi stakeholder approach would be most useful in designing a much needed new round of investment addressing the deficit in facilities and upgrading existing dedicated youth spaces.

From my engagements with boards of management, youth workers and volunteers on the ground it is clear that a youth work policy approach which includes all stakeholders and builds on learning from previous iterations could lead to much needed sustainable developments in the youth work sector in Dublin.”

Ends

Celene Dunne

Director City of Dublin Youth Services