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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH PROJECTS

NORTH INNER CITY
DUBLIN

1979 - 1994

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INTRODUCTION

The Task Force on Child Care Services was established in October 1974 by the Minister for Health. The terms of reference were:-

- (i) to make recommendations on the extension and improvement of services for deprived children and children at risk;
- (ii) to prepare a new Children's Bill, up-dating and modernising the law in relation to children;
- (iii) to make recommendations on the administrative reforms which may be necessary to give effect to proposals at (i) and (ii) above.

An interim report was issued in September 1975, which highlighted a number of issues for children which the Committee believed should be addressed immediately. One of the recommendations was the establishment of three pilot Neighbourhood Youth Projects in Dublin, Cork and Limerick by the relevant health boards.

In 1992, the Eastern Health Board commissioned a review of the Neighbourhood Youth Projects. This was completed by Patricia Kelleher, Community Action Network. The review traced the history and development of the projects. The work of the projects and their impact was also examined and recommendations were made in relation to the future management and development of the projects.

This report incorporates many of the issues discussed in the review. The report provides an opportunity to reflect and to look forward. But, in

particular, the report is an acknowledgement of the commitment of all the people involved and a celebration of fifteen years experience.

SECTION 1

THE PROJECTS - BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN

Traditionally in Ireland, services for vulnerable children were predominantly specialist and institutional in character. In the 1970's, there was a growing demand for alternative models of intervention. The importance of involving families and communities in services was highlighted. The Interim Report of the Task Force on Child Care Services supported a community based approach, thus ensuring a high level of family and community involvement in the lives of children.

At the same time as many were questioning the existing child care provisions and proposing alternative methods of intervention, there was considerable public concern about the illegal activities of a group of north inner city young people. Local community workers proposed the establishment of community based projects for these children, as recommended by the Interim Report on Child Care Services.

It was proposed that three inter-linked community based projects for young people would be established, with an overall director/co-ordinator. These were:

- A Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP) for over 16s. This was referred to as NYP(1);
- A Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP) for 12 to 16 year olds. This was referred to as NYP(2);

- A small residential unit within the community for boys involved in the Neighbourhood Youth Projects or other local projects who were in need of residential care in the community. This project became known as Tabor House.

The NYP's were established in 1979 by Eastern Health Board. Tabor House was established by a separate voluntary organisation. Originally, it was planned that the NYP's would be established as three year pilot projects (1979-1982). However the projects continued and are now an integral element of the family support services in the area.

SECTION 2

OBJECTIVES OF NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH PROJECTS

The Neighbourhood Youth Projects have three objectives:-

- To enable the young people involved with the project to remain in the community while receiving skilled help directed towards resolving or ameliorating severe personal/family problems which are putting them at risk or inhibiting their innate potential for development;
- To provide a resource to mobilise the potential of the neighbourhood to define and to meet the evolving needs of its younger people;
- To develop an approach to working with young people at risk which would provide guidelines to social workers and others throughout the country to help them in their work with groups and children in care.

At the time of their establishment in 1979, these objectives were viewed as progressive and innovative. Fifteen years later, the objectives are still as relevant and pertinent. The objectives emphasise the importance of

- (i) an integrated approach to youth work and family support and
- (ii) mobilising community groups and organisations on broader issues facing the wider community.

The Neighbourhood Youth Project's cater for the physical, personal development/emotional and educational needs of the young people. More specifically, the projects' aims are:-

A. Physical Needs:

- To ensure that young people have sufficient food and nutrition;
- To educate the young people on nutrition;
- To refer young people whose basic physical needs are not being met in the home to appropriate services.

B. Personal Development/Emotional Needs:

- To provide a safe therapeutic environment to allow young people discuss their worries, anxieties, anger and other emotions in a safe way and to try and help them to resolve the issues;
- To provide a safe, structured non threatening environment where young people can be helped to articulate and express their concerns and alter destructive behavioural patterns;
- To build the self esteem and confidence of young people;
- To develop trusting relationships with the young people and provide them with alternative adult role models where appropriate;
- To reflect on the personal choices and options open to the young people and to encourage them to take responsibility for the choices they make in life.

C. Educational Needs:

- To provide programmes of a recreational nature which will both stimulate and challenge the young people and provide for their social development;
- To offer recreational programmes which are an alternative to petty crime and life on the streets;
- To support the children in mainstream education where possible;
- To provide training in literacy and numeracy where mainstream education is an option and in the long-term, where appropriate to refer them to specialist schools;
- To encourage a regular and routine lifestyle which will make the transition to work, training and employment more effective;
- To refer young people where appropriate to training schemes and work.
- To provide basic education in literacy and numeracy.

SECTION 3

THE PROJECTS - STRATEGY AND APPROACH

The Neighbourhood Youth Projects' strategy intervenes at the level of the individual young person, at a family level and in the broader community context. The main focus of project staff is on building relationships with young people. Workers offer young people the possibility of positive, active, purposeful relationships. Projects are centred around recreational and educational activities. Families are also a major focus of the work and teams attempt to involve families in the solutions to the difficulties experienced by young people. In order to maximise the resources of state agencies invested in the inner city area, the teams have developed networks and supportive relationships with other local projects which are addressing the needs of inner city young people and their families. The emphasis in this context is on an integrated co-ordinated approach to problem solving. The projects are also attempting to influence mainstream government agencies and services in their responses to the needs of young people at risk, e.g. education, labour market policy, juvenile justice system, social welfare.

Although both projects cater for different age groups and have developed their own unique styles and programmes, both teams share a common philosophy and approach. The key elements of this are:-

1. Partnership

The workers, young people and their families work together, in partnership. This approach seeks to encourage the young person to participate in the solution to his/her own problems; it is flexible and informal; and it seeks to empower the young person to take responsibility for his/her own behaviour.

2. Inclusion

The Neighbourhood Youth Project's aim to involve young people who feel alienated from mainstream services. The projects aim to assist the young people to form new links and relationships in the community. While working with a core group, the projects also work with a wider fringe group.

3. Community Involvement

The projects are locally based and accessible. Acceptance by and involvement in the local community is essential to the effectiveness of the projects. Project staff are well known and trusted in the area.

4. Environmental Factors

The North Inner City experiences extreme levels of disadvantage and suffers from disproportionate problems of unemployment, educational disadvantage and physical decay. The projects recognise that these factors contribute

significantly to the difficulties and stress experienced by the young people and their families. The project staff also believe that change at individual, family and community levels should also be supported by political and institutional change aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and a fairer distribution of resources.

5. Use of Contracts

Each young person is required to sign a contract. This is based on her/his personal needs and agreed tasks. In some cases, it is a three way contract between the young person, the parents and the projects. The contract is a statement of the projects' commitment to the young person and also encourages the young people to take responsibility for their lives.

SECTION 4

NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH PROJECT (1)

This section will outline a brief history of the programmes, as well as illustrating how project staff respond to specific personal issues and presents the assessment of staff of the impact of the project. The project caters for over fifty children male and female currently between the ages of six and fourteen and many more are indirectly involved. It is open between 9.30 a.m. - 8.00 p.m. Monday and Tuesday and 9.30 a.m. - 6.00 p.m. Wednesday to Friday. Since the project started, it is estimated that more than two hundred children have availed of the programmes offered by the project.

Project Team and Resources

Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) has evolved and developed over the fifteen years of its existence. The commitment and dedication of past staff helped to shape the project as it is today. In all, nine full-time staff have passed through the project since it was established. Since 1983, Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) has operated from the second storey of the "school on stilts" located in Rutland Street. Prior to 1983 acquiring secure premises was a major difficulty for the project. Between 1979 and 1983 the project moved premises twice and was for six months without premises. The Youth Encounter Project (YEP) and the Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LY&CS) are also located in the "school on stilts". The fact that a number of community projects are located in close proximity to one another provides a supportive environment for the work of Neighbourhood Youth Project (1). All projects are working with young people and young adults at risk and there is a significant number of referrals made between these projects. The "school on stilts" is centrally located and has high visibility in the area.

The Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) team is comprised of three members, a project leader and two project workers. Work in the Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) requires a high staff/user ratio. It is policy to have at least two workers attending all project group sessions and outings. In addition to the three staff members employed, a cleaner is employed who along with her formal duties as cleaner has important informal contact with young people. She creates a homely atmosphere and is highly regarded by the young people and the staff.

The Neighbourhood Youth Project (1), having the use of premises over the years, has developed a more centre based approach and as a result has catered for the younger age group, particularly focusing on the six to fourteen age group.

Being centre based the Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) has developed a structured approach to its work. Given that there are extremely low levels of literacy, numeracy and basic life skills among project members, the project seeks to address these needs by providing a varied structured programme. This is accomplished by providing a range of opportunities to develop skills in literacy, cooking, arts and crafts, drama, specific educational games, play, as well as social and interpersonal skills. Special programmes are organised for the older age groups, on issues such as drugs, sex and health education. Day trips both recreational and educational are now offered more regularly with the recent purchase of a minibus for the project. Trips away are also a fundamental aspect to the work of Neighbourhood Youth Project (1).

Central to the work of projects such as the Neighbourhood Youth Projects, is understanding the survival role which crime plays in communities such as

the north inner city. As a community it is marginalised and dislocated from mainstream society.

Many families have been driven into semi-legal activities and crime. This is a direct result of chronic unemployment. The only options open are either low paid insecure jobs or long periods of unemployment. In many cases semi legal activities are a means of income support, supplementing state benefits. In reality in order to survive, petty crime has thus become an accepted part of the fabric of inner city communities. (Farrelly 1989). Unfortunately for those involved in more organised crime, life can be very precarious and often violent.

In this context it is very difficult for young people to stay out of crime. Community based projects can only contain crime for short periods or support people from becoming involved in serious crime. The long term solution requires the development of legitimate paid employment.

The Programme of Neighbourhood Youth Project (1)

Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) works with a core group of over fifty young people. Many more young people are involved indirectly in the project. The model of work adopted is a group work model, and each young person is involved in a specific group. Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) provides a safe, therapeutic environment which facilitates the building of relationships of trust between staff and young people and between young people themselves. The majority of the fifty members attend school during school hours and participate in after school activities in Neighbourhood Youth Project (1). However, some attend Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) each morning as an alternative to school. The remaining forty four are divided into seven groups and attend afternoon and evening sessions. Membership of the afternoon and

evening groups is determined by age and gender. The younger members participate in a mixed gender group, while the older members meet in all male or all female groups. There is one mixed gender group, three all male groups and three groups comprising females only.

Morning Group

The morning programme has taken many shapes over the years. The programme has evolved from full day care five days a week, to children attending the project full time in the mornings, or being released from the schools for different periods of time.

Currently the programme is as follows:-

- (i) A four day a week full morning programme from 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. for children who are out of school and therefore dislocated from mainstream education.
- (ii) Children who are released from school for different periods of time as a means of supporting them in mainstream education. The main participants over the years have been children aged between five and ten years.

Due to the nature of the community unfortunately many of the children come from difficult situations and have been exposed to and effected by crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and other street life from an early age. Therefore many children have behavioural problems and need constant supervision. The children need a lot of support as their experience in the school system has been difficult. Generally a three way contract is made between the children, their parents and the project staff. As the children on a full-time programme attend the project daily, close contact is maintained with their parents which is very positive and key to the success of the programme.

Programmes are planned around the individual needs of the children but in general there would be a basic structure involved, starting with breakfast if required, some school work emphasising basic reading, writing and numeracy. This is followed by varied, structured recreational activities.

For some of the children the aim would be to return them successfully to mainstream education. Many of the children would be referred on to specific schools outside of the area. For some of the children, in partnership with their parents, the project has facilitated the child to secure a place in Amiens Street residential project.

Afternoon Group Sessions

The forty four other participants are distributed throughout the seven groups which meet after school hours and in the evenings. Each group session is planned and recorded. This helps staff to reflect on the needs of children.

Each participant:

- Participates in a group for approximately two hours a week;
- Attends periodic individual "profiling" sessions with members of staff;
- Partakes in regular day trips a year;
- Goes away on holidays once a year for two nights.

Emphasis is placed on the building of long term relationships between staff and young people and between young people themselves. Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) members also need to be supported and helped in a variety of ways. These include help with coping with various issues in life e.g. encouragement to remain in mainstream education; and support in staying out of crime.

The format for the afternoon group sessions is generally as follows:

Free Play

The purpose of "free play" is to give young people time to settle before participating in more structured activities. Young people are given an opportunity to make informal contact with one another and with staff. Staff often take this opportunity to make contact with particular individuals and to assess if they have any particular difficulties.

News Time

At news time the group sits together and each member gives her/his news. News may include any experience during the past week which the young person feels like sharing with the group. Each member gets a chance to talk and all others are expected to stay quiet, listen and perhaps offer advice if appropriate.

Structured Activities

After news time, there is a time for structured games and activities. Emphasis is placed on fun in these activities. This helps the children to develop trust, concentration, self confidence and to learn social skills, how to co-operate, and how to deal with conflict situations. Some games include an educational element. Other programmes on sports, arts and crafts, drama, sex education and drug awareness are also organised.

Snack

Before going home young people share food together. The young people are given an opportunity to eat together as a group and to exchange ideas and conversation with each other. It can also be educational in that young people learn the nutritional value of different foods.

One to One Sessions

In addition to the weekly group sessions, all members of the group get an opportunity to have one to one sessions with a staff member. In these sessions staff are available to listen to the young person and to hear how she/he is progressing. If she/he wishes, she/he can express difficulties and ask for help. Staff give feed-back to the young person on his/her progress in the programme. As much as possible staff focus on the positive aspects of the young person's participation in the project. However, if the contract is not being adhered to, this is brought to the attention of the young person. Staff try to get the young person to reflect on the reasons why they are not keeping their agreement with the project.

Day Trips and Overnight Stays Away

All members get regular trips away. Since the purchase of a minibus day trips and overnight stays away are particularly important in the work of the project. They provide an opportunity for staff to get to know the young people and build up trusting relationships. During overnight trips away, young people can experience positive adult role models, a daily routine free from the pressures of poverty and disruption and time away for themselves.

A Drop-In

A drop-in has been started recently by Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) once a week for one and half hours. This is in response to the lack of mainstream youth services in the area. The project staff, also very importantly, get an opportunity to identify children who have further needs and so prioritise them for places in the smaller structured groups, when places occur.

Teenage Girls Group

An evening group for teenage girls has also been recently started. The necessity for this group occurred as places in Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) and A.S.P. were full and the project had made commitments to the teenage girls themselves, to offer them support through this difficult period of their lives. A programme addressing their needs is planned and will be evaluated regularly.

Teenage Boys Group

Similarly to the teenage girls the boys attending this session are in need of support and have no other services available to them. A programme with a strong emphasis on physical activities has been arranged for them, with structured time to address attitudes to crime, girls, health and sex education.

Ideally workers would opt to work in groups comprised of between four and six members. However due to the high demand for places in projects, numbers in groups can be as high as twelve.

Difficulties of Members and Issues Addressed

It is not surprising given the high level of poverty, large families, crime, violence and other difficulties that some families find it hard to cope. Given that the Neighbourhood Youth Projects are for children who are at risk. The following are some of the issues dealt with in the project.

Behavioural Difficulties

In the project staff's experience the children who exhibit behaviour problems tend to present in one of two different forms. This can either be overt aggressive behaviour, or withdrawn behaviour. Building a trusting relationship with the child opens up a safer avenue for a child to express their

feelings. Their confidence can be built through this relationship, resulting in a positive change for the child who may then regain control over their behaviour and relate more positively to others.

Social Skills

Some children have poor social skills. This can be evident when the young people are required to interact with people who live outside the inner city. In these situations young people feel insecure and often engage in what might be regarded as antisocial behaviour.

Inability to Cope

Due to the high level of unemployment resulting in poverty for many families, the pressures of parenting can become enormous. Therefore some children may suffer from some forms of neglect. This can be expressed in a number of ways;

- when a parent is absent through death, separation prison;
- where a parent has an addiction which results in them spending a lot of time outside the home.
- where a parent has not developed parenting skills for a number of reasons and is unable to meet their children's needs.

Within these circumstances, children, particularly girls, may find themselves turning into substitute parents looking after their younger siblings and often their parents. Boys may turn to crime to support the family.

When parents are unable to protect, nurture and nourish, their children are left open to exploitation. They may find it difficult to cope with structures, are unable to concentrate in school, wandering up town late at night. This can obviously be very damaging both emotionally and physically. With support

and structure for both the child and their parents, some if not all of these difficulties can be improved and resolved in some way.

Stress

Due to high unemployment and the resulting poverty nearly all the families suffer from stress. This may be exhibited through ill-health, or inability to cope. For some parents the use of physical discipline is a direct result of stress reflecting the frustration that many parents feel. Where project staff are aware of this, they try as much as possible to address the issue with parents and work with them in finding alternative methods of disciplining their children.

Crime

A large proportion of young people are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in crime. At risk in this context means that their peer group or siblings engage in criminal activities and that they themselves are vulnerable to becoming involved unless some significant intervention can be made. Some project members are/have been involved in crime. Crimes are mainly confined to shoplifting and other forms of petty theft. This is worrying given the young age of the group involved.

School Attendance

Some of the young people attending the project have difficulty attending school regularly and consistently. Reasons for inconsistent attendance include: difficulty coping with the school structure; difficulty following school curriculum because of intellectual ability; and not waking up or being called to attend school. Parents have also ambiguous attitudes towards school. Many parents had bad experiences and benefited little from the school system. In time of family crises, many of the older girls are often kept

home from school to look after their younger siblings. In addition, many young people engage in intermittent street trading to supplement family income.

An important aspect of the work of the project is giving support and encouragement to the young person to remain in school. If the young person leaves school because of particular difficulties, project staff act as intermediaries between the young person and the school. In situations where the relationship between the young person and school breaks down totally, the project provides a temporary alternative education facility and negotiates alternative provision.

Work with Families

The main aim of the work with parents is to establish a relationship with the parents in order to get their support for the work of the project. The active co-operation of parents is seen as one of the key variables which leads to success in working with a young person. Developing trust and establishing co-operation of parents is therefore central to the work of the project.

Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) have also been instrumental in bringing the parents together informally. This has taken the form of an informal social occasion with light food entertainment. These occasions give an opportunity to parents to discuss their own needs as well as the needs of their children.

In undertaking work with parents staff have to balance time allocated to young people with time allocated to parents. Staff are of the opinion that work with parents is central to resolving the difficulties of young people. This is particularly important in the case of the young age group catered for by Neighbourhood Youth Project (1). Staff have the flexibility to respond to

family difficulties, particularly in times of crisis. Many of the parents need long-term support,. Along with the provision of individual support for parents, staff feel that it is desirable that the project would offer parents an opportunity to meet each other in groups and to go on day trips and weekend holidays.

Assessment by Staff of Impact

Considering the limited resources which the project has and the difficulties which it attempts to cope with, the immediate impact of the project is impressive. The attendance rate is high. Staff estimate that it is approximately 90 per cent. The negative effects of family disruption and childhood distress on members lives is minimised. The majority of young people have:

- Higher levels of self esteem;
- Acquired minimal social skills;
- Experienced an increase in self confidence;
- Been given an opportunity to heal their hurts;
- Developed the ability to concentrate and cope with a minimal level of routine and structure.

In addition, members who have difficulty with school attendance have been helped to stay on in mainstream education and the risk for many young people of getting involved in crime has been minimised. The majority of the young people who attend Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) need continued supportive services through their transition into adulthood.

An important finding of the programme is that staff have identified older members who, although they are still young, have the potential ability to become "volunteers" in Neighbourhood Youth Projects. The importance of

young people who are at risk being recruited into the role of helper/volunteer should not be underestimated. They provide important role models for other young people in the community. In this context it is important that adequate resources, time and training are made available for them.

Work with Other Groups by Sharing Skills & Resources

The Neighbourhood Youth Project has very close working relationship with the Amien Street Residential Project and Tabor House. Other groups the project maintains close contact include the Talbot Centre, The Youth Encounter Project, The Adventure Sports Project, St. Vincents Family Resource Centre, North Centre Community Action Project, I.C.O.N. and particularly The Lourdes Youth and Community Services without whose support, the Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) would have had difficulties developing its programme.

The Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) also has invaluable support from local statutory agencies. These include the Eastern Health Board Social Work and Child Care Team, local schools, Juvenile Liaison Officers and Child Guidance Sections in the Mater Hospital and Temple Street Children's Hospital. Both Neighbourhood Youth Projects work closely together and a "fireside group" has been established to act as a support/training group with Amien Street and Tabor.

Conclusion

Community based preventative programmes can compensate for the social/psychological damage incurred in poverty situations. They can also in the short term contain young people from getting involved in crime. For short-term gains to be translated into longer-term benefits, extra resources and facilities are required by Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) and additional

services are needed for both young people and families in distress. More intensive work is required with members. Consideration also needs to be given as to how people on the waiting list can be catered for. The present two hours allocated to members would need to be increased significantly. Consideration needs to be given as to whether Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) should be involved in full-time education, for example, as it is with the Morning Group.

There is little doubt that Neighbourhood Youth Project (1) is making a significant intervention. With extra resources and greater co-ordination of services at an inner city wide level, this contribution could be significantly increased.

SECTION 5

NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH PROJECT (2)

Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) works with a core group of 52 young people between the ages of 10 to 18. A much larger number of young people use the resources of the project. Members range in age from 10 to 22. Members of NYP(2) come from families who have difficult social and economic circumstances.

One of the main tasks of the project is to help members to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. The low level of educational attainment and the lack of work opportunities for members exacerbate what is in normal circumstances a difficult transition. The extent to which young people in the city are at risk is reflected in the high levels of crime, drug abuse, joy riding and urban unrest in the area.

Young people are encouraged to increase their level of skills and education. Young people are also assisted to reflect on whether there are options open to them other than crime, joy riding and drug related activities.

Building relationships of trust with these young people is difficult and demanding. It demands skill, time and consistency from staff. Each young person is given intensive individual attention. A key concept used by staff to describe the core of their work is "diversion". The project aims to divert young people from becoming involved in activities which are likely to bring them into contact with the gardai, the courts and as a consequence end up in custodial care. For members who are in mainstream education or training staff support them in staying in school or in continuing their training.

Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) uses a contract based system. Each member signs a contract which specified his/her obligations to the programme. For example, the contract may specify that a person should not spend time around a particular area of the city or it may require that the young person give a commitment to attend a particular course. The young person is also challenged to take responsibility for his/her behaviour. Heroin dealing and abuse, and crimes against the person, such as mugging can result in the suspension of a young person from the project. Less serious crimes are sanctioned through the withholding of incentives which the project offers, such as trips away. Suspensions of young people are not undertaken lightly. The project is aware that it may be the only link which the young person has to mainstream institutions. If this link is broken the young person may become further marginalised and alienated. In the case of suspension, the project is open to the young person renewing his/her contract and being reinstated in the project.

Project Team and Resources

Since its inception in 1979, Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) has been associated with 20 Summerhill Parade. The premises however was the base of the North Centre City Community Action Project (NCCCAP) who generously gave the Neighbourhood Youth Project the use of an office base and other resources. It was not until 1989 that Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) had sole usage of Summerhill Parade.

For ten years Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) had no permanent premises. This meant that the project team developed a more street work approach than a centre based approach.

The project team is comprised of three male workers. The project leader is seconded from a social work position in the Eastern Health Board. The two project workers live in the area. This give the team unique advantages. Staff are in a position to identify at an early stage social problems and trends emerging in the area, such as outbreaks of theft, joy riding and drug abuse. They are also aware of young people who need help. Staff are in the area at night time and weekends.

The project's mini bus is a major asset. As well as being a resource to the young people, it is also used in situations where there is no transport available to families of members, for example, for occasions such as funerals, trips to prisons, hospitals, etc.

The Programme of the Neighbourhood Youth Project (2)

The 52 young people who form the core of Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) are divided into eight groups. Seven of the groups comprise between three and seven members. There is 19 in the eighth group. It is comprised of eleven volunteers and eight young people who have not yet been assigned to a group. Some of these young people are not ready for a structured group situation. Others are waiting for places in the other seven groups to become vacant.

Groups are divided according to age and interest. A minimum of four hours a week of programme activities is available to all members. If members choose to avail of optional or special sessions, they can receive up to eight hours a week of programme activities. Given that Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) is closely integrated with the Adventure Sports Project, members can also avail of programme activities of up to four hours a week with the Adventure Sports Project. This means that Neighbourhood Youth Project (2)

members can avail of up to 12 hours a week of programme activities. Along with the work undertaken in small groups, individual work and work with families is also undertaken.

Work in Small Groups

A wide ranging programme is available which includes recreational activities, educational activities and life skills. Work in small groups is undertaken in the following ways: recreational activities, club sessions, open sessions, day trips and overnight stays.

Recreational Activities

Recreational activities are deliberately designed to compete for the attention of the young people with the excitement of street life and joy riding. The project is also open in the evenings when few other facilities are available to the young people.

Popular recreational activities include bowling, swimming, pitch and putt, cinema, theatre, boating, go-karts, horse-riding and snooker. These sessions are held off the premises and the mini bus is used to drive members to these activities. Each group has a session for two to three hours a week. Recreational activities give workers an opportunity to establish personal relationships with individual members. This type of contact with members allows staff to be aware of the personal troubles which members may be experiencing. Through informal discussion staff can help young people to reflect on their difficulties and consider options open to them. One or two volunteers help organise these activities with a staff member.

Club Sessions

There are three club sessions each week. Older members attend a club night between 8.30 p.m. and 10.30p.m. Younger members attend between 6.00p.m. and 8.30p.m. Preparing and cooking a meal is central to club night activity. Staff members play cards, chess and draughts with members. Sometimes quizzes are organised as are talks and discussions.

Open Sessions

Special open sessions are held on soccer, reading/writing/numeracy, drama, guitar and cooking/arts/crafts. There are also specific training programmes in community youth work and health and social education.

Soccer

By involving young people in soccer, young people become aware of physical fitness and other health issues. The discipline of training and playing matches also helps to develop routine and concentration. Soccer sessions are organised according to age. There is a core group of ten who regularly play in the younger age group. The older age group is comprised of ex members, brothers of members, and friends of members. There are approximately 20 to 25 involved in the older age group.

Reading, Writing and Numeracy

When requested by parents, teachers or members, the project organises one to one sessions on reading, writing and numeracy for members.

Health Education Programme

A special health education programme involving information on sex education, drugs and other issues was introduced in 1991 and has since become part of the annual programme for older project members. The aim

was to increase knowledge, confidence and assertiveness of participants around these issues. The sessions were conducted in a non threatening manner around the themes of: talking to the opposite sex, going to discos, condoms, sexuality, dress and image, drugs, alcohol, HIV/AIDS, work, money. Four two hour afternoon sessions and a residential weekend were held. The health education programme has been extremely well attended and both staff and members feel it has been of real benefit to all.

Day Trips

Each member is entitled to one day trip a week during the summer period. These trips usually commence at 10.30a.m. and end at 4.30p.m. They involve such activities as climbing the Wicklow mountains, visiting historic sites in County Meath or going on a day trip to the Wexford Centre. On these trips away members generally opt to play children's games such as relivio or hide and seek. Many of them, forced into an adult world at an early age, were not given the opportunity to experience real childhood.

Trips Away

Each member gets on average three trips away each year. Overnight trips away are generally to The Wexford and/or Mullingar Centres, Glebe House and Killnacrott Abbey. The ratio of staff to member is high. There are generally four member to two staff workers. This gives the young people an opportunity to build up relationships with workers and to receive personal attention in a relaxed environment. In this context problems which the young person may be experiencing can be talked about. It also gives young people an opportunity to experience routine life without the pressures and demands of their life in the city. Young people can learn to prepare and cook food. Staff are also conscious not to reinforce stereotyped sex role images and models. For older members staff attempt to get them to reflect on drinking

patterns and how they use drink and other substances. Staff work long intensive hours during weekend trips away.

Drop in Centre

The drop-in centre is opened to all members and other young people known to the project three afternoons a week between 12.30p.m. and 2.00p.m. Food is generally available and staff use this time to share information on a broad range of topics. The number of young people who attend ranges from 10 to 30. The average number per afternoon for the first six months of 1992 was just under 20. The drop-in facility is unstructured and young people who attend are given options to engage in a range of activities such as playing cards, watching television and preparing food. Young people who show an interest in the project and who are at risk are considered by staff for inclusion in small groups as vacancies arise.

Individual Work with Young People

Although Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) does not provide therapeutic counselling, it provides support for individuals in coping with the challenges which confront them daily. For example, this involves supporting young people to stay at school, getting young people onto training programmes, or supporting them to get and stay in a job. Supporting young people to stay off drugs and out of crime is a major focus of the project.

Work with Families

Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) have significant contact with families. Parents are informed of the contract and the support of the parents is enlisted to support the conditions of the contract. When the young people are taken on trips outside Dublin, the consent of the parents is also sought. This gives project staff an opportunity to reflect with the parents on how the young

person is progressing. If the person is in trouble i.e. with drugs or the law, project staff will again have contact with parents. Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) staff have also been instrumental in bringing parents together informally in a Parents Group. The first organised activity of the parents group was a weekend in Killnacrott House. The group of women on that trip felt it would be a good idea to meet on a regular basis with other parents so they set out organising a parents group. This group now meet weekly in Summerhill Parade on a Wednesday morning.

The Law

Many of the young people attending Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) come into regular contact with the law. Mediating and advocating on behalf of members absorbs a lot of the time of staff. This involves contacting and supporting the family and young person to reflect on the problem to make decisions about what is the best course of action; mediating with the defending solicitor; giving verbal and/or written evidence in court. For members who are sentenced to terms of imprisonment or other forms of custodial care, the project continues to support them and staff visit them in prison. The project, if appropriate, will apply for Temporary Release Orders and take on the task of supervising the young people while out of prison. Members who are on Community Service Orders are also supported and there has been much positive involvement with the Probation of Welfare Section of the Department of Justice in relation to Community Service Orders. During the first six months of 1991, staff attended on average two court hearings a week. Any one hearing can take up to two or three hours to be called.

Training of Older Members as Voluntary Workers

The project has a deliberate policy of encouraging members who have participated in the programme to become volunteers. Some of the volunteers have difficulties themselves and workers are available as supports for the volunteers. The role of the volunteer is important. It has an important personal development impact for the volunteer. They act as an important role model for younger members in the programme. In order to support the valuable work of project volunteers - most of whom incidentally have participated in Neighbourhood Youth Project Health Education programmes, - a basic community youth work training course has now been included as part of the annual programme. The Community Youth Training programme which has been developed with the support of Comhairle Le Leas Oige consists of sessions on youth work skills delivered through workshops in Dublin and a residential seminar in Killnacrott House. A number of follow-up practice workshop weekends in which the trainee volunteers get supervised experience of organising activities for younger people are also included in the overall programme. This programme has been of great benefit to the volunteers and to the project itself. It is important to note too that a number of our project volunteers have gone on via temporary employment schemes to become full-time youth workers.

Drug Misuse

Poverty and unemployment have been greatly exacerbated by drug abuse in the inner city. Having identified drug abuse as a growing problem, Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) played an important role in getting the Medical Social Research Board to undertake research into heroin abuse in the inner city. Project staff played key roles during the research phase. The inner city branch of the Concerned Parents Against Drugs, which was made up of a coalition of local organisations and individuals including Neighbourhood

Youth Project (2) staff, played an important role in mobilising local people in the inner city against drug dealers in the 1980s. Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) staff also played a role in rehabilitating members of the Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) who had become addicted. Rehabilitative residential sessions were organised for these young people in the Mullingar Centre. Staff of Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) were also involved in the setting up of two drug related projects in inner city, Ana Liffey Project and The Talbot Centre. In the 1990's with the widespread availability of the drugs "ecstasy" and Heroin, drug abuse has re-emerged as a major problem. Again Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) staff through the ICON network have been prominent in trying to bring about the necessary inter-agency response so urgently required.

Student Training

Training students while on placement from various institutions has been an important aspect of the work of the Neighbourhood Youth Projects over the years. Students from a range of colleges which include Trinity College, University College Cork, University College Dublin, Waterford Regional Technical College, Sligo Regional Technical College, Cathal Brugha Street and Maynooth College have been on placements. There have been students on placement from colleges in Northern Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, France, Germany, Portugal, U.S.A. and Ghana. Placements have been successful both in terms of giving students "training" in basic community youth work practice and in communicating the models of youth work the NYPs work with. Students in turn have made important contributions to the work of the projects. All student placements are organised with the consent of the project members and staff.

Work in the Community

The Neighbourhood Youth Projects were developed by workers working in the inner city community. They are community based and have strong roots in the local community. Both projects are committed to local involvement at volunteer and staff levels. Neighbourhood Youth Project (2) now has local involvement both at staff and volunteer levels. The project has established consultative mechanisms which facilitate young people and local organisations in making an input into the policy of the Neighbourhood Youth Project.

Neighbourhood Youth Project staff participate on management boards of other local organisations and have developed effective relationships with other workers and volunteers. They are also committed to resourcing existing community groups, developing local leadership and promoting the establishment of new groups.

Understanding the structural conditions which give rise to poverty is central to the work of the Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYPs). It is in this context that the Neighbourhood Youth Projects have participated in inner city movements which seek broad based institutional change. They have played important roles in the NCCCAP, Alliance for Work Forum, the V & S group, the ICRG and the more recently established Inner City Organisations Network (ICON).

SECTION 6

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYP's) was a reflection of an innovative approach to child care, youth work and poverty. Neighbourhood Youth Projects adopt an integrated approach to the well being of young people at risk. Central to this approach is the recognition that family deprivation and the alienation of young people from societal institutions are associated with juvenile crime. The approach of the Neighbourhood Youth Projects is concerned with prevention and the building of positive relationships with the young person. They also emphasise the need to engage young people in active, purposeful activities. The community based dimension to the projects allows for a flexible and effective response to the difficulties experienced by young people in the inner city.

Recent Government reports and legislation support the approach adopted by the NYP's. The "Select Committee on Juvenile Crime" report advocates a similar approach to youth at risk. The Child Care Act 1991 places an obligation on health boards to provide child and family support services. The NYP's fulfil a significant role in supporting children within their families and within their own community.

The review commissioned by the Eastern Health board made a number of recommendations in relation to the management, and development of the projects. The recommendations included:

- (a) the recruitment of additional staff for both projects which would include a street-worker and sessional workers with specific skills,
- (b) the introduction of a decentralised financial system for the projects,

(c) the enhancement of existing consultation mechanisms to ensure that the young people and local organisations have an input into policy-making. Some of these recommendations have been implemented since the review, and it is hoped that the resources will become available to meet the outstanding recommendations.

The review also highlighted, yet again, the absence of an integrated Government policy for youth at risk. The Departments of Employment and Enterprise, Health, Education, and Justice all deal with services which are relevant to youth at risk. For the most part, the policies of the individual departments have evolved independently of each other. The result of this is that the services on the ground are not adequately co-ordinated. This lack of planning tends to dissipate the effects of special projects.

The establishment of the Inner-City Organisation Network (I.C.O.N.) in February 1993 has addressed some of the issues at local level. The Youth/Childcare/Family Support Subcommittee of I.C.O.N. is reviewing current service provision and needs and examining ways of co-ordinating services at a local level, as part of an overall area action plan.

Brid Clarke.
John Lahert.
Fergus McCabe.

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