



**NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND**  
**COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA NA NÓG**  
**YOUTH COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**



**SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION TO FORUM FOR  
PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

The sector of society for whom the discussions of this Forum will have greatest significance are children and young people. They will inherit the outcomes of political decisions being made now. They will be responsible for implementing and maintaining peace and reconciliation on this island. Indeed, our only hope of a future free from prejudice, alienation and violence depends on young people.

**NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND ...**

- Young people both sides of the border are most severely affected by the social problems and inequalities which often find negative expression in prejudice and violence. Unemployment is currently running at 28% in the Republic and is clearly linked with low levels of educational qualification, which in turn is linked with socio-economic background. Other problems such as drugs, crime and teenage parenting are also facing young people in an increasingly complex society. Because of these problems young people tend themselves to be viewed negatively as a problem rather than as 'our greatest resource'.
- While young people care deeply about the world around them and all over the world have been to the forefront of movements for change and development, nevertheless they often lack the skills and knowledge to take action on their concerns and feel alienated from political processes. This alienation has implications for the future of democracy and for peace and reconciliation.
- Youth work or non-formal education is a unique intervention in young people's lives which is based on a voluntary and mutually empowering and enabling relationship between young people and adults. Youth work is a powerful force for social challenge and has a political role in enabling young people develop their vision of society and to become involved in effecting change. The youth service is especially committed to empowering and resourcing young people experiencing different forms of disadvantage.
- Youth work in terms of its value system and its political role is based on principles of empowerment, participation and equality and is therefore inherently about building peace and reconciliation. Youth work is also innately about developing an understanding of our own and other cultures and making positive connections with other traditions.
- Youth organisations have a strong tradition of working across national frontiers and the work of NYCI member organisations, many of whom work on an all-Ireland basis, consciously reflect the aim of replacing divisions with a sense of common purpose.

- Youth Exchanges are an important and valuable method of youth work which contribute to building peace and reconciliation and are most effective as part of an ongoing youth work process. Other initiatives such as development education work, anti-racism and intolerance campaigns, peace and conflict studies, inter-cultural workshops also play an important role.

## **YOUTH COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND ...**

- Young people have been significantly impacted upon by the last 25 years of the conflict. In fact no person under 25 has experienced a 'normal life'.
- The last 6 months have given young people a taste of change and they appear receptive to the potentials.
- The role of the youth service in the midst of this was to provide support and hope to young people, in work done at a multiplicity of levels and complexities.

Through the youth work principles of participation, partnership and voluntarism the youth service has sought to give young people a voice, to create space for reconciliation and dialogue and to break down barriers and isolation. It has done this without fanfares, with few resources and the amazing commitment of over 14,000 volunteers.

- The ceasefire allows us the opportunity to take stock. We face enormous problems ahead - the problems of unemployment, low educational attainment, teenage parenting, drugs, crime and emigration. Yet despite this we acknowledge also the courage and hope of this generation of young people who are ready to face the challenges.
- The role of the youth service is to assist this development. Specifically the service has developed expertise in the process of inclusion. Encouraging young people to participate, to come in from the outside is extremely important. In its advocacy work, its work with the disadvantaged, with young women and in political education the service seeks to develop skills of leadership and responsibility.

The Youth Service has led the way in reconciliation creating space for sensitive but challenging dialogue. Through fostering cross-border, European and International links it seeks to further break down barriers and widen horizons.

- It is imperative that the Youth Service plays an effective part in the peace process and its work needs to be recognised and resourced. Parity of esteem between youth work with other professions is essential.

## INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we have outlined some ideas for moving forward in the directions indicated in the summary. The initial list will be elaborated on and expanded during our presentation.

- To recognise the significance of the future role of young people in implementing and maintaining peace and reconciliation and to make a strong commitment to their education and development for the future.
- To empower and skill young people to develop their vision of society and to increase their opportunities for participation and their access to decision-makers at all levels
- To build on existing youth work responses and demand the funding and recognition needed to broaden and deepen non-formal education approaches.
- To invest in social and economic opportunities for young people and to develop effective responses to the issue of youth unemployment.
- To strengthen youth work co-operation on a North/South basis and to increase resources for exchanges and joint initiatives on all levels.
- To develop north/south youth work co-operation within an EU framework and to look to specific programmes for increasing young people's opportunities for mobility, training, education and information.