



**Clare Youth
Service**

Clare Youth Service
Carmody Street,
Ennis, Co. Clare



Clare Youth Service



..inspiring young people to create the future

Clare Youth Service -

Clare Youth Service had its beginnings in 1969 when it was established as the Clare Regional Youth Council. Over the years it has changed and developed to become a leader in the field of Youth Services. It is affiliated to Youth Work Ireland (t/a NYF)

Clare Youth Service is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It operates under the guidance of a board of directors who are responsible for overall policy formulation and implementation. Day to day operations are carried out by the professional staff and volunteers of the Service

The aim of Clare Youth Service is to assist the holistic development of young people and those who work with them, so that they are enabled to participate fully in society, in a way, which respects the equal worth of all.

Clare Youth Service is a young person centred organisation believing that all young people are of equal value and citizens in their own right. Our core values of Trust, Listening, Respect, Voluntary Participation and Representation are reflected in our work.

Through the work of volunteers and staff Clare Youth Service engages with over 3000 young people annually.

The Service has offices in Ennis, Shannon and Kilrush and provides outreach services throughout the county. There are currently twenty volunteer led youth clubs operating in rural areas in Clare supported by Clare Youth Service.

The Service receives funding from a number of government departments to deliver targeted projects in specific areas in Clare. All other work of the Service is funded by local community and business interests through our funding raising efforts.

The current government funded projects are as follows:

Project name		Geographic area
Community Training Centre	Providing formal certified education and training courses in QQI Level 3 and 4. This includes the Leaving Certificate Applied and a work based learning programme.	Open to all early school leavers aged 16 to 21 years.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects	These projects work in partnership with the Gardaí in Clare. The projects work with young people to support and enable them to make positive choices. The project seeks to support young people to engage positively with the wider society.	Kilrush Garda District Ennis Garda District (incl. SNN)
Clare UBU	This project works with young people in need of additional supports from specific designated locations.	Ennis and Shannon and in the coming months will extend into SMB, NMOF and Clareabbey.
Drugs Education and Prevention Project	This projects work with young people in Ennis and operates from the Carmody Street and Junction premises.	Ennis
Kilrush Youth Project	The project works with young people from Kilrush .	Kilrush
Ennis Youth Projects	This is funded for 7 hours each week to provide individual support to young people who are referred.	Ennis and surrounding areas – referrals from Tusla
Youth Information Service	Providing accurate information and support for young people and those who work with them.	Countywide include links with schools and online nationwide chat service.
Comhairle na nÓg	Supporting Youth Participation and actions which are directly related to young peoples lives.	Countywide

While COVID19 has had a significant impact on the delivery of independently funded projects and programmes the Service is continuing to deliver the following programmes:

- Youth Identity Project a programme for young women.
- Five a day for your mental health.
- Adult groups in the Junction Youth & Community Facility.
- Peer mentoring training (Schools based programme).
- Support and training for volunteer led programmes.
- Social and Personal Development Groupwork Programme (Funded by Ei Shannon).

The Youth Service welcomes the opportunity to make a submission for consideration as part of the consultative process in the development of the Clare County Development Plan 2022 – 2028.

At the outset the Service would like to acknowledge the significant and welcome changes that have taken place in the past decade and would highlight the following:

- The level of consultation with young people with respect to programmes and projects operated by Clare County Council has been of real value. In recent years young people have engaged with the council with respect to issues of rural transport, access to facilities and concerns about personal safety in laneways in Ennis. It is gratifying to note that significant programmes have been instigated by the Council including:
 - The piloting of Rural Uber in West Clare
 - Improvements to laneways in Ennis including cleaning, painting and improved lighting
 - The support for the Junction Youth and Community Facility in Ennis – this was one of the first Youth led facilities developed in the country and has had an important impact on intergenerational contact and relationships.
 - The support for Clare Comhairle na nÓg – with real and effective listening to the issues and concerns raised by young people in Clare.
- Most recently the concerns of young people with respect to internet access during lockdown have been met with the opening of the Digital hubs to students. This has been a most welcome development, of value to both second and third level students.
- Support from the Clare Local Development Committee
 - The funding provided to support youth clubs and youth projects in Clare while technically small has had a huge impact. Funding for the purchase of PPE and small scale infrastructure projects has meant that facilities and IT are available to young people at this most difficult of times.
- Investment and proposed investment in social spaces for all is particularly welcome. The seamless inclusion, as a natural part of such development, of provision for teenagers and young adults is particularly welcome. Developments such as the Cycle Paths throughout the county offer not only opportunities for safe physical activity but also potential for employment and small business development.

As an overarching theme the Service would respectfully suggest that a balance between economic and social and cultural development is essential. While at times this can prove a challenge the importance of such balance is essential. Additionally

the Service would like to ensure that the Council continues its excellent record of consultation with young people, not only providing space for their voice but clearly hearing and acting on their concerns and ideas.

With respect to the Issues document published as part of the consultation the Service would offer the following observations:

Key challenges we face:

The list of challenges as presented are reasonable however we can suggest 'harnessing the vision, lived experience, energy, enthusiasm and drive of young adults to support development'.

Many young adults are drawn to the wonders that Clare has to offer. Areas along the coast have attracted younger people seeking a more authentic space to live and work. DigiClare will certainly assist supporting people to work however many of these people are unlikely to engage with local government or the wider community. Consequently the potential to learn from them is lost. These *Digital Natives* have a life experience that many are unfamiliar with. Often policy makers and community activists are older, more settled members of community and these young adults can live in a bubble or micro community. Perhaps innovative means could be sought to target this particular group to hear their voices and seek opportunities for their input to various developments.

Similarly there is a real dearth of younger people represented in the Council. There are many reasons for this – including the reality that young people, particular those in the 16 to 21 age group, tend to be a real mobile grouping often leaving the county for employment and education.

Voters typically and understandably want familiar faces, people they can trust and people with experience, settled in the community and often with a record of community achievements. All of this is completely understandable however it contributes to the idea that the Council and politics more generally are not a place for young people.

Perhaps consideration might be given to something to challenge this. At the next election could candidates be asked to seek running mates age 16 to 18 – while a great deal of planning, thought and training would be needed to develop such a process it would be an incredible experience for young people. Candidates could benefit from hearing youth views and incorporate specific actions into their manifestos. Young people would gain first-hand experience of campaigning and the highs, lows and reality of political life.

The Vision for Clare

A worthy and aspirational statement that could benefit from punchy tag lines. Given all that Clare has to offer it seems unfair that the County is often overlooked – by tourists, investors and residents. Shannon Airport, the Clare Campus at UL, the

Burren, the coast, the network of towns and villages all make this an ideal place to holiday, work, invest and live. There is a real need to get the word out.

It would appear that Social Media is the place to be and short soundbites and viral videos are what people now respond to. There is a need for a special ongoing campaign that spreads the message. A campaign that speaks specifically to those under 35.

While there is an audience for beautiful tourist videos – the short clips that go viral and plant seeds in minds are needed to influence younger generations. Much of what is out there on social media is not particularly palatable to the older generation however there are some professional short viral clips that give insights into life in other areas making them seem attractive and exciting. Perhaps thought could be given to getting a group of young bloggers and vloggers to work on this. It would certainly offer young adult volunteers a tangible opportunity to engage in a practical manner in promoting their county.

Population and housing

Housing is an area of real concern for young people with lack of affordable, safe and suitable accommodation a real issue. Many young people are well aware that we are facing a serious financial crises post COVID19 and the potential for young adults to get on the housing ladder is becoming less and less likely.

There are assumptions made about young people – assumptions that they always have a space at home to live. This is not always the case and some young people are forced into unsafe and unsuitable accommodation. For others there is simply no suitable rental accommodation available to support their moving out of home and continuing the progression to adulthood.

There is a real lack of rental stock and landlords would always favour older tenants. In addition to ensuring the provision of emergency housing for under 18's thought could be given to supporting the development of apartments. Young people are often happy to live in towns and there are many old shops in places like Ennis, Shannon, Ennistymon, Scarriff and Killaloe where the upstairs (former family homes) has been relegated to store rooms or empty underused spaces. If support was to be provided to owners to develop these as affordable one bed apartments this would assist with availability. It would be essential that the spaces be of a high standard.

Of equal value to the availability would be people living in town centres. With much development now moving to the outskirts, the town centres are often empty and small shops struggle for business. If there was a significant number of young adults resident in the centre of towns this would help create a thriving atmosphere, in addition to consumers supporting small business.

As young people get older and begin to settle many would be happy to live in more rural areas however the real issue is lack of transport. Efforts need to be made to provide affordable, dependable and regular transport at times it is needed. It is simply inconceivable that a person living in Kilrush cannot access public transport to

get to Ennis or Shannon to access a job at 8 or 9 in the morning. Similarly areas in Clare that are served by a bi weekly bus service have no hope of retaining people in the area if they can't access their jobs.

Connectivity

Accessible, affordable and dependable internet access is, in this century, a basic requirement for development. Across all sectors and services including education, tourism, social and economic development it is a key ingredient. The pandemic has certainly highlighted the needs and opportunities associated with connectivity and also the manner in which people living in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged.

In our discussions with young people it is clear that the absence of access impacts all areas of their lives, compounding issues of disadvantage in education, rural isolation, lack of access to services and mental health issues. It is clear that it impacts significantly on economic development and consequently opportunities for employment in local areas.

Addressing this problem must be a foundation stone in the plan if development is to be possible in all areas in the county.

Investment in communities

There are many communities within Clare – communities formed by geographic location, socio economic situation, culture, religion, age and sense of identity to name but a few. In supporting communities, thought and time could be given to exploring the range of appropriate supports necessary for the different types of communities.

If the plan is to assist in supporting all communities to achieve then perhaps thought needs to be given to creating communities of commonality – a focus on what unites rather than divides us. It is unfortunate that much of the funding opportunities which exist are dependent on the existence of a particular label. Often the label describes only one aspect of a community or person, or assumes or projects a commonality that simply does not exist. Assumptions are made that people of a particular background all think, believe or act the same. Such generalisations only serve to divide.

Consideration could be given in the plan to looking at ways to bring people together, celebrating our humanity. There would be much to gain in this.

As a Charity working to support young people and volunteers who work with young people, the state funding available for this work has taken an increasingly narrow focus. Funding is available for targeted work with the intention of supporting 'social inclusion'. While in many ways an understandable basis for setting priorities as it is applied it is short sighted and will ultimately fail to achieve real social change for young people. The exclusion of young people who do not fit the label creates confusion, further stigma, impact identity and ultimately limits opportunities. The funding to support volunteers has all but disappeared.

As an organisation in existence for over 50 years it is clear to us that while at times there is an absolute need for targeted work, ultimately bringing young people together from different life experiences builds understanding, empathy and knowledge. It also creates opportunities for learning and personal goal setting which is transformative throughout a person's life, irrespective of their starting point.

The real value in the development plan must be about people and the opportunities it creates to improve their lives. Ideally it needs to support the active involvement of all people in this process. There are a myriad of actions and levels which can be taken to support such an objective.

Consideration should be given to supporting investment in the work by the voluntary and community organisations working in this way throughout Clare. Their achievements are only limited by the investment in their work. There are many organisations in Clare supporting such growth and development whose achievements go unrecognised. Many of these local worthy organisations face a common challenge i.e. the growing bureaucracy disguised as compliance. For example trustees must now be registered with three national organisations – the CRO, the CRA and the RBO. Increasingly scarce resources are being diverted to meet the ever increasing compliance requirements to the detriment of their time to actually serve their groups. If this sector fails then much of what makes Clare such a wonderful county will be lost and greater and more difficult issues and challenges will emerge.

Consequently consideration should be given to using the influence and power of the Council to ensure that compliance requirements are necessary and uncomplicated. Similarly consideration should be given to long-term investment in the sector to support the work of such groups in Clare.

In acknowledging the commitment of the Council to actively listen, hear and respond to the views of young people we would summarise our submission as respectfully suggesting that the Development Plan:

- actively works to achieve a balance between social, cultural and economic development
- is grounded in celebration of difference and values the unique contribution of all perspectives
- is committed to bringing people together in ways that build understanding, respect and cooperation
- seeks to address issues which impact on quality of life including housing, transport and access to services, education and employment, connectivity and rural depopulation
- actively supports the contribution of community groups, charities and voluntary organisations to the development and wellbeing of the County