

**REVIEW OF BALLYFERMOT YOUTH SERVICE'S EXPERIENCE OF
YOUTH EXCHANGES**

REPORT

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a review of Ballyfermot Youth Service's Youth Exchange Programme conducted on behalf of the City of Dublin Youth Service Board. The main aim of the report is to document, describe and review the Ballyfermot Youth Service's experience of youth exchanges. Furthermore, it is hoped that by identifying how the youth exchange process operates in practice, this would better inform other youth projects what is entailed in undertaking a youth exchange.

More specifically, the review focused on the following areas:

- To give a brief review of the evolution and development of youth exchanges within Ballyfermot Youth Service (BYS).
- To document the range, type and destination of exchanges undertaken.
- To describe the organisation of the exchanges and outline the key stages/elements in their successful completion.
- To liaise with and interview youth exchange sponsors (e.g. Léargas).
- To outline the planning, content and delivery of the programmes undertaken during exchanges organised by BYB.
- To outline and comment on the range of exchange partners engaged with by BYB.
- To quantify the age and gender of young people who participated in youth exchanges organised by BYB.
- To receive direct feedback from young people and youth work staff (both paid and voluntary) on their experience of and involvement in youth exchanges.
- To detail the learning and development outcomes for young people engaging in youth exchanges organised by BYB.
- To comment on the funding available and required to undertake youth exchanges.

- To comment on the staffing required to undertake youth exchanges and the implications this may have for “normal” youth work programmes and timetabling.
- To outline the possible challenges, benefits and outcomes for a youth project/service who may wish to undertake youth exchanges.

1.2 Methodology

A multi-dimensional methodological approach was adopted for the review. In the first instance, the information relating to the evolution and development of the BYS youth exchanges, together with details of these exchanges, was compiled from reports and other documentation provided by Ballyfermot Youth Service (BYS). This information was augmented by personal interviews and focus groups held with BYS staff (paid and volunteers) and with young people from BYS who had been on a youth exchange. Two representatives of Léargas and the City of Dublin Youth Service Board who were familiar with BYS youth exchanges were also interviewed. From the outset, it was agreed that the scope of the review would be less wide-ranging than a standard evaluation.

1.3 Ballyfermot Youth Service (BYS)

Ballyfermot Youth Service is a limited company with a board of voluntary directors. It has an advisory committee of young people drawn from the various projects involved in planning programmes. Established in 1985, BYS currently employs a total of nine full-time and five part-time staff. The staff team consists of a Youth Service Manager, a Project Leader, four full-time and one part-time Youth Worker, an Outwards Bound Senior Instructor and Instructor, activities Co-ordinator, two part-time Youth Information Officers and two part-time Administrators. Ballyfermot is a working class suburban area located to the west of Dublin city and has a population of approximately 21,000 and over 40% of the population are under 18 years of age.

BYS provides planned educational and recreational activities for young people in Ballyfermot between the ages of 12 and 21 years. BYS receives funding from four different funds, namely YPFSF 1 and 2, LDTF Mainstreamed and SPY. These funds are underwritten by the Office of

the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and administered by the City Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB). Funding for the youth exchanges is derived from a variety of sources including, the European Union through Léargas in Ireland and their national counterparts in other European countries, BYS core funding, fund-raising activities by the young people, and a nominal fee paid by the youth participants.

The main objectives of BYS are to work with young people in the Ballyfermot area who are early school leavers and/or suffering from disadvantage to meet their needs by providing appropriate social, personal and development social programmes, including:

- Essential skills.
- Stay in School Programmes.
- After School Programmes.
- Sports Programmes.
- Young Men and Women Groups.
- Music Lessons.
- Youth Exchanges.
- Outdoor Education programme
- Youth Information centres

The focus of this report is on Youth Exchanges. BYS also provides a range of services and facilities to young people, including: two youth club centres (Decies and Gurteen), two information offices with IT suites (Drumfinn and Decies), two mini buses, a residential house, an Outdoor Education centre (Blessington) and an Amenity centre (Park West). BYS is committed to the provision of quality youth services in a manner that ensures the safety and welfare of young people. It has a designated Child Protection Officer (CPO) on staff who is available to advise and support any youth worker, group or project working with young people that has a child protection concern, be it around policy, procedures or a specific issue.

BYS has participated in the European Youth Exchange Programme for the past number of years and in 2009, BYS became an accredited centre for the European Volunteer Services (EVS), reflecting its ongoing commitment to the place of young people and volunteers within the European Union. BYS have successfully placed their first young person in Greece as an

EVS volunteer and currently they have three EVS volunteers working with them. In 2008/09, 182 young people successfully achieved the *Youthpass* certificate – the new European recognition tool for non-formal learning – and exchanges were carried out to a variety of countries, including Italy, Spain, Malta, Norway, Sweden, France, Poland and Martinique. Further details of the Youth Exchange programme are presented in Chapter Two.

1.4 The City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB)

The CDYSB is the Youth Work development agency for the city of Dublin, whose aim is to promote, support and co-ordinate the development of voluntary youth groups, community based youth projects and youth services in Dublin. It is a statutory sub-committee of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) and it is appointed by the CDVEC to make recommendations on youth work policy, programme development, grant aid and support services required to assist in the development of youth work at community level in Dublin. The CDYSB is the administering agency for three funds provided by the government: Special Projects for Youth Fund (since 1988), Local Drugs Task Force Funds (since 1998), and Young Peoples Facilities and Services Funds (since 1999). CDYSB administers the core programme funding to Ballyfermot Youth Service and it has assigned a liaison officer to work with the BYS management committee. The current review has been commissioned by the CDYSB.

1.5 Léargas and the Youth in Action Programme

Léargas is the National Agency in Ireland for the management of national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training. It is a not-for-profit organisation that operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science. Léargas works on behalf of the Department to manage European, national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, training and youth and community work. Through European, bilateral and international programmes, Léargas enables the development of intercultural awareness, facilitates change management, and helps develop new responses to the need for

innovation in education and the workplace. The Youth Work Service (YWS) is responsible for the delivery of programmes and service to the non-formal education sector.

Léargas is the national agency that administers the *Youth in Action Programme* (YAP) of the European Union (EU). In so doing, they are appointed and supported by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Youth in Action Programme offers funding for a variety of opportunities for young people aged between 13 and 30 years who are resident in the 27 Member States and 26 other countries within the programme¹. A Youth Exchange is described in the Youth in Action Programme Handbook as a project which brings together groups of young people from two or more countries, providing them with an opportunity to discuss and confront various themes, whilst learning about each other's countries and cultures². A Youth Exchange is based on a trans-national partnership between two or more promoters from different countries. A Youth Exchange has three phases: (a) planning and preparation; (b) implementation of the activity; and (c) evaluation, including reflection on a possible follow-up.

The general objectives of the Youth in Action Programme are to:

- promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular.
- develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union.
- foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries.
- contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field.
- promote European cooperation in the youth field.

A main priority of the Youth in Action Programme is the active participation of young people in their daily life. The overall aim is to encourage young people to be active citizens through (a) increased participation by young people in the civic life of their community, (b) increased

¹ Details of the Youth in Action Programme were taken directly from the EU 'Youth in Action Programme' Guide (2008). Further details of the Youth in Action Programme and Léargas may be found at www.leargas.ie.

² The Handbook is also very clear what a Youth Exchange is not. It is not an academic study trip, an exchange activity which aims to make financial profit or one which can be classed as tourism, a holiday, a language course or other type of tour, a school class exchange, a sports competition, statutory meetings of organisations, or a work camp.

participation by young people in the system of representative democracy, and (c) providing greater forms of learning to participate. The Youth in Action Programme Guide states that the projects funded under this programme should reflect these three dimensions by using participatory approaches as a pedagogical principle for project implementation. The Guide identifies a number of important features of the Youth in Action Programme, as follows:

- (i) **Non-formal learning:** The programme provides important opportunities for young people to acquire skills and competencies through non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal learning refers to the learning which takes place outside formal educational curriculum, while informal learning refers to the learning in daily life activities, in work, family, leisure etc. Projects funded by the programme must adhere to the following non-formal learning principles:
 - i. Learning in non-formal learning is intended and voluntary.
 - ii. Education takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which training and learning are not necessarily the sole activity.
 - iii. The activities may be staffed by professional learning facilitators, such as youth trainers/workers, or volunteers, such as youth leaders or youth trainers.
 - iv. The activities are planned but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects.
 - v. The activities usually address specific target groups and document learning in a specific, field oriented way.

- (ii) **The Youthpass:** Youthpass is part of the European Commission's strategy to raise the profile and recognition of non-formal learning. It is intended that the document will be of benefit for the future educational or professional progress of participants. All Youthpass certificates have a common structure, and contain the following information: personal details about the participant; general description of the relevant action of the programme; key information concerning the project and the activities realised by the participant; and a description and assessment of the participant's learning outcome during the project. The Youthpass is completed by the young person.

- (iii) **Visibility of the Youth in Action Programme:** Each project should enhance the visibility of the programme, clearly mentioning the European Union's support and raising awareness of the opportunities offered by the programme.
- (iv) **Dissemination and exploitation of results:** The outcomes of the project should be sustainable and be designed to have a positive effect on the largest number of young people once the project has come to an end.
- (v) **Anti-discrimination:** Anti-discrimination is a core element of the Youth in Action Programme. The programme should be accessible to all young people without any form of discrimination on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, or sexual orientation.
- (vi) **Equality between men and women:** This is one of the priorities for developing employment in the European Union.
- (vii) **Protection and safety of participants:** A safe environment, which respects and protects the rights of young people and safeguards and promotes their welfare, is promoted to give young people the opportunity to achieve their full potential in terms of social, emotional and spiritual development.
- (viii) **Multilingualism:** The programme aims to promote multilingualism, whilst also helping to create a society that makes the most of linguistic diversity and encouraging citizens to learn foreign languages.

The Youth in Action Programme supports five operational areas including **Youth Exchanges**. People are eligible for participation in a youth exchange if they are aged between 13 and 30 years of age or active in youth work or a youth organisation within a member state. Youth organisations can apply to Léargas for a grant on a project-by-project basis. If the exchange is a bi-lateral exchange, where the organisation intends working with one or two partners, each organisation would apply to their relevant national agency for funding, which in the case of Ireland is Léargas. From January 2010, this will now only involve one partner in the exchange applying for the full amount of the grant, which should make it easier to do bi-lateral projects. The grant from the Youth in Action Programme funds 70% of travel costs and there is also an allowance for food, accommodation and activities. Other costs are made up by the individual

youth organisation. Conversely, if it is a multilateral exchange, with four or more partners, the host country applies for total programme funding. Finally, if a youth exchange involves an organisation from outside the member states of the EU, an application for funding is made on their behalf by the member state host organisation.

Funding for projects is decided by Léargas on a project-by-project basis upon receipt of a completed application form³. The criteria used by Léargas to assess a youth exchange are clearly set out in the Youth in Action Programme Handbook, with each applicant organisation requested to provide the following information:

- the type of activity envisaged.
- the duration of the project.
- the relevance of the project to the general objectives of the Youth in Action Programme.
- the main themes of the activities.
- details of the applicant and partners.
- details of project participants and group leaders.
- the objectives and priorities of the project, protection and safety procedures.
- project content and methodology.
- the intercultural dimension.
- the European dimension.
- details of the expected impact on participants and their communities.
- Visibility.
- dissemination and exploitation of results.
- the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.
- the budget for the project.

³ The application form is quite detailed and Leargas acknowledge that some organisations might find the task daunting at first. However, they have a number of strategies in place to assist organisations including, information days and the development of a 'Jargon Buster' booklet (in progress).

1.6 Structure of the Report

Following this introduction, chapter two provides an overview of the youth exchanges undertaken by Ballyfermot Youth Services since 2004. In addition to documenting the range, type and destination of exchanges undertaken by BYS, chapter two will also give a brief review of the development of youth exchanges within BYS, and describe the key stages entailed in the successful completion of a youth exchange by means of a case study. Following this, the experiences of the staff and young people in the planning and implementation of the youth exchanges are reviewed in chapters three and four, respectively. In chapter five, the views of Léargas and CDYSB on youth exchanges are presented. The final chapter contains some brief concluding comments on the review. Finally, a short list of useful resources are detailed in the appendix.

CHAPTER TWO

BALLYFERMOT YOUTH SERVICE'S YOUTH EXCHANGES

'The Youth Programme has been a tremendous boost to our organisation; it has enabled us to encourage young people to participate in a broader range of programmes and it has acted as a recruitment tool for us. We now have a waiting list of young people who want to take part in programmes. As an organisation we gained a tremendous amount of new learning. It opened our eyes to how other youth workers and organisations work with young people and it gave our staff new confidence in their own practice. We have also seen the positives for young people from disadvantaged areas; it has opened their eyes to new communities and has taken some of them out of the mindset that the world is only where they live.'

Gerry McCarthy (Youth Service Manager BYS)

2.1 Introduction

Ballyfermot Youth Services (BYS) have participated in the European Youth Exchange Programme since 2004 when 25 young people went on a Drugs Awareness Programme to Amsterdam. Since then, 336 young people from BYS have been involved in 29 projects across 16 countries – Ireland, Italy, Malta, Belgium, Norway, Martinique, Sweden, Spain, Poland, Austria, France, Germany, Turkey, Lithuania, Brazil, Luxemburg and Netherlands. The themes of the youth exchanges have ranged from arts to peer education, drugs awareness, environmental issues and media production, sport and health.

Each youth exchange is relatively unique in terms of location, programme and participants, although each exchange shares the underlying priority of the Youth in Action Programme to ensure informal learning takes place during the exchange experience. The duration of the exchange can vary from seven to ten days, while the idea for an exchange can come from a variety of sources, including personal contacts by BYS staff, attendance at contact-making training seminars funded by Léargas and through the Léargas 'Partner Finding' database on its website. For example, the idea for the first exchange to Poland arose following contacts made at a training seminar organised by Léargas in Manchester, while the Brazil exchange came from a BYS management committee member who had taught for five years in Brazil.

The European dimension of each project is reflected in the large number of young people who achieved the *Youthpass* in BYs. In 2008, 100 young people successfully achieved the Youthpass, which is effectively the new European recognition tool for non-formal learning. As already stated in Chapter One, through the Youthpass, the European Commission seeks to ensure that participation in the Youth in Action Programme is recognised as an educational experience and a period of non-formal and informal learning. BYs use the Youthpass as an aid to selecting young people who wish to participate in an exchange and to record the learning that has occurred during the exchange.

2.2 The Range, Type and Destination of BYs Youth Exchanges

With one exception, each of the BYs Youth Exchanges involved mixed gender groups of teenagers from different countries. The youth exchanges are usually multilateral, involving projects from four different countries. BYs have found from their experience in organising and participating in youth exchanges that this type of arrangement tends to adopt 'a life of its own' as each country takes turns in hosting an exchange and projects naturally multiply when partners request the participation of young people in their exchange programmes. Over time, partners become familiar with each other and ways of working together are established. Since their first visit to Poland in 2004, BYs have established solid partnerships with a number of countries, including Poland, Lithuania, and Belgium. The management and youth workers in BYs stressed the importance of having a partner(s) you can trust to follow through on planning agreements and who will provide a structured programme if the youth exchange is to be successful (see chapter three).

An overview of the different BYs exchange projects is presented in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1 Ballyfermot Youth Service's Youth Exchanges

Year	Youth Exchange	Theme of Exchange	Young People on Exchange (Irish)*
2004 (February)	Amsterdam, Holland Young people from Ireland and Holland. Age: 15-17	Drug Awareness Programme	34 (24)
2004 (April)	Poland Young people from Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Ireland Age: 15-17	Arts	40 (10)
2004 (June)	Ireland Young people from Poland, Luxembourg, Holland and Ireland. Age: 15-17	Sport and Health	40 (10)
2004 (August)	Athens, Greece Young people from all European countries Age: 15-18	Athens Schools Network Olympics	100 (20)
2005 (Dec Jan June)	Brussels, Belgium Young people from Ireland Age: 14-17	Cultural Diversity	40 (40)
2005 (April)	Ankara, Turkey Young people from Turkey, France, Italy, Spain Age: 16-18	Citizenship	40 (6)
2005 (July)	Ireland Young people from Lithuania, Austria, Italy and Ireland. Age: 15-18	Learning through Peer Education Drugs Awareness	40 (10)

* Number of Irish young people on the Youth Exchange.

Table 1 Ballyfermot Youth Service's Youth Exchanges (Continued)

Year	Youth Exchange	Theme of Exchange	Young People on Exchange (Irish)
2005 (July)	Luxembourg Young people from Luxemburg, Ireland, Holland , Poland Age: 15-18	Media & Culture	40 (10)
2005 (October)	Lithuania Young people from Italy, Poland, Lithuania and Ireland. Age: 15 -19	.Health & Sport	40 (10)
2006 (July)	Brazil Young people from Brazil, Argentina, Northern Ireland and Ireland Age: 15-19	Youth together Environment & Arts	50 (15)
2006 (August)	Lithuania Young people from Poland, Lithuania. Ireland, Austria Age: 18-22	Outdoor Education Training	24 (6)
2007 (June)	Ireland Young people from Poland, Lithuania, and Northern Ireland. Age: 15-18	Youth and Health	50 (10)
2007 (August)	Ireland Young people from Brazil, Argentina, and Northern Ireland. Age: 16-21	Development education culture & Arts	50 (12)
2008 (July)	Salzburg, Austria Young people from Italy, Greece, Austria and Ireland. Age: 16-20 years	'Dialogue Unlimited' which encouraged young people to explore one another's cultures.	40 (10)
2008 (July)	Spa, Belgium Young people from Martinique, Romania, and Dublin. Age: 16-18	Racism and Sport/ Racism in Sport - exploration of how sport can be used as a tool for integration, personal development and growth, and challenging personal prejudices.	30 (6)

Table 1 Ballyfermot Youth Service's Youth Exchanges (Continued)

Year	Youth Exchange	Theme of Exchange	Young People on Exchange (Irish)
2008 (May)	Berlin, Germany Young people from Poland, Germany, Finland and Ireland. Age: 15-21	Intercultural Dialogue and skills training.	40 (10)
2008 (July)	Ariege, France Young people from France, Portugal, Latvia, Spain and Ireland. Age: 15-18	Appreciation of the natural environment	32 (8)
2008 (July)	Tortona, Italy Young people from Denmark, Belgium, France, Italy and Ireland. Age: 14-16	Intercultural Dialogue using art.	40 (10)
2008 (June)	Ireland Young people from Norway, Italy, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. Age: 15-17	'Warriors against Racism'	52 (12)
2008 (November)	Poland Young people from Malta, Ireland, Poland, Lithuania Age: 15-18	Art	40 (10)
2009 (August)	Oygarden, Norway Young people from Norway, France, Estonia and Ireland. Age: 15-18	'Dance Camp Unique' – a dance show where young people learnt and performed dances from different countries.	40 (10)
2009 (August)	Ireland (Dublin and Kilarity Adventure Centre) Young people from Italy, Poland, France and Ireland. Age: 16-18 years.	Fashion, media and sport – exploring how fashion and sport are interlinked, and how the media can influence our decisions to purchase certain styles and labels.	42 (12)

Table 1 Ballyfermot Youth Service's Youth Exchanges (Continued)

Year	Youth Exchange	Theme of Exchange	Number of Young People on Exchange (Irish)
2009 (August)	Stockholm, Sweden Young people from BYS Age: 16-18 years	Personal development through teamwork.	(8)
2009 (August)	Zakopane, Poland Young people from Poland, Latvia, Italy, Slovakia and Ireland. Age: 14-16	Communication for Tolerance	40 (10)
2009 (August)	Valencia, Spain Young people from Ireland and Spain. Age: 15-17	Around the world in 80 days.	20 (10)
2009 (August)	Malta Young people from Ireland and Malta. Age: 15-19	Sharing of different cultures through adventure sports and expedition.	16 (8)
2009 (June)	Italy Young people from Italy and Ireland. Age: 14-16	Sharing of different cultures through sport.	20 (10)
2009 (August)	Belgium Young people from Belgium, France, Finland and Ireland. Age: 16-20	Exploring the values of rugby and sport	40 (10)
2009 (October)	Riviere Pilote, Martinique Young people from Italy, Belgium, Martinique and Ireland. Age: 18-23 year	Citizenship and Sport – exploration of what it means to be a citizen and the place that sport plays in citizenship.	40 (9)

2.3 The Process of Organising a Youth Exchange

Each exchange entails a number of different stages which have been put in place to ensure their successful completion. The main stages of a typical exchange are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2 The Process of Organising a Youth Exchange

Stages	How Organised
Finding a Partner	This can be either by attending meetings, through the Internet or through existing contacts. Also, attending seminars making new contacts.
Agreeing dates & Theme and number of young people on exchange and number of leaders	Through personal meetings or use of Internet/ email.
Selection of Exchange Location	Each partner has to check out possible locations and see if they can facilitate the numbers.
Writing Application form	This can be done by different partners agreeing to write various sections.
Selection of Young People	Sometimes this is the first step and the young people can be involved in looking for a partner It is up to each organisation what process they use but sometimes the group is already formed and they want to do a youth exchange.
Advanced Planning meeting	This usually takes place approximately two or three months before the exchange. It allows for checking of all logistics. This meeting is also used to finalise the content of the programme and agree all rules. Insurances - take out appropriate policy
Preparation with young people.	Weekly meetings for up to 10 week, preparing for the exchange. This can include cultural work, and language skills. Fundraising and preparing budget. Agreeing group contract. All of the above are done by Youth Leaders
Parental consent plus passports	Organisation supplies parents with consent forms and medical report and passport forms
Booking flights and accommodation	This is done by staff.
GO GO GO	Supervision and working with young people.
Evaluation Youthpass	Leaders and young people. Young people and leaders.
Final report	Only done if hosting the Youth Exchange.

Source: BYS

More detailed information on the different stages involved in planning and running a youth exchange is presented in the following case study of a youth exchange which was hosted by BYS. The information was requested from BYS to illustrate the details of an exchange and the responsibilities of the host country. The more general 'learnings' and issues that have arisen across the 29 Youth Exchanges undertaken by BYS are detailed in Chapter Three.

Case Study: Youth Exchange held in Ireland August 2009

Theme: Fashion Media & Adventure

Number of countries involved: 4 (Italy, Poland, France, and Ireland)

Number of young people: 42

Number of Leaders: 8

Finding Partners and Agreeing a Theme (December 2008 to end of January 2009)

The idea for the exchange came from discussions with our young people after they took part in a youth exchange to Poland in November 2008. When they were in Poland, they looked at the role art plays in our lives, and they were so blown away with the idea of making clothes from scrap materials that they wanted to organise a follow-up exchange where we could build on the work done previously. Their previous experience on youth exchanges gave them an understanding of how we are connected as Europeans, with some of our traditions being very similar. The non-formal learning that our young people experienced has given them an understanding of these various traditions and cultures. Using Art and sport in this exchange has helped the learning to continue for our young people and fulfils one of the priorities of the Youth in Action Programme. In terms of the four youth work organisations that participated on the exchange, it strengthened the links within the four countries for future participation in the youth work programme. We had worked with two partners on previous exchanges in 2008 - one in Poland (November) and one in France (July). However, this was the first time for two of our partners to work together. It was also new for some of our young people as they were not all involved in previous exchanges.

The theme of this exchange was Fashion Media and Adventure and enabled young people to develop individual social and leadership skills by taking part in outdoor education activities and looking at how we are influenced by fashion. The idea was to use sport and fashion as a tool for integration and getting young people to work as teams and encouraging non-formal ways of

learning from one another. The emphasis of the programme was to build self-esteem, acceptance of other people, to open their minds, learn about other cultures and value one another. The project aimed to involve young people in exploring each others culture by participating in practical workshops and discussions.

Our objectives for the project were to:

- *Involve the young people in various activities which will provide them with practical ways of working with different cultures.*
- *Increase their confidence as young people in their own community and demonstrate ways to strengthen the relationships between the 4 groups of young people.*
- *Broaden their understanding of cultural & societal issues for young people in the 4 countries.*
- *Strengthen the links between Europeans.*

We have previously used sport as a tool for integration, given that you do not need to have language skills to take part in outdoor activities. It is a great way of getting young people working together. It allows for teamwork development and also for pushing out personal boundaries. It is also important for us to provide young people with healthy lifestyle opportunities. By using Outdoor education methods we were able to experience Wind surfing , Kayaking, and rock climbing, together with a mixture of indoor and outdoor activities focusing on daily themes e.g. creativity, communication, decision making, problem solving and action planning.

In terms of youth work policy, the implementation of the youth work act states that youth work is “an informal educational experience for young people designed to enhance their personal and social development” complementary to their vocational education. The experience the young people were given by participating in this exchange provided them with an invaluable learning experience, broadening their horizons in terms of life experiences, societal issues for young people locally and globally. They established lifelong friendships ensuring sustainability in terms of the youth programme for the next generation of young people.

Working methods

The working methods were all non-formal education tools, such as workshops, building up the personal development of the young person, discussions, giving them the opportunities to express themselves, outdoor education activities providing them with teambuilding exercise, use of IT, computers, web cams, and interacting with other communities.

Designing the programme

As the exchange was being held in Ireland, it was up to us as hosts to provide a daily programme of activities. We had discussions with our young people and some of them came up with the ideas of making T-shirts, shoes and designing a poster. We sent this information to our partners by email and also asked them to work on their ideas. We started this process in December 2008 and it was the end of January 2009 when we had the full programme agreed.

We checked out various locations in Ireland to accommodate 50 people for 7 days. We involved the young people in this process by getting them to use the Internet to search for education centres and find out the cost and availability. As we met every week it was possible to follow up on the progress. We had agreed that each partner would take on a number of workshops and be responsible for planning, implementing and delivering this aspect of the programme during our project. We agreed this by e mail. Each group liaised with their young people and made sure that they were also involved in the delivery of the workshops. Given that two of the countries involved, Italy and France, have a strong tradition of producing Fashion icons, it was their task to present their interpretations. The very fact that the ideas for this exchange have come from the young people meant that the project reflected their needs. Fashion plays a huge role in young peoples lives - what to wear, what to buy, what to eat, what phone should I have, am I fat or skinny etc. These issues are important for young people and it was an opportunity to discuss these issues on this project.

Application form

We started writing the application form in December and it was ready by the end of January for submission to Léargas. For the application form each country had to find out the cost of travel to Ireland for their group and send us the information. They also had to send us a Part 111 form

stamped by their organisation showing their willingness to take part in the exchange. (You need this to go with the application form). We also included the information on the workshops and discussion groups etc along with a daily programme of activities.

Advanced Planning Visit (June)

As you also submit the date for the Advanced Planning Visit with the application form we also had to get agreement for this date to take place in Ireland. We did this by e mail with our partners, the advanced planning visit was held in June. One Leader from each country was involved in an Advance planning visit prior to the exchange.

Agenda of the Advance Planning Visit (APV)

This is necessary to:

- *Ensure the suitability of venues.*
- *Give each country an input in the planning process for the exchange in terms of workshops and activities.*
- *Delegate pre planning roles and responsibilities in terms of carrying out activities during the exchange.*
- *Implement agreed child protection guidelines for this project.*

What was involved in the APV?

Meeting Ballyfermot Youth Service 1pm to 3pm
Planning, outlining of programme
Child protection guidelines
Workshop delivery/content
Practical Materials Lists.
Travel to Achill for evening
Visit Achill Education Centre stay overnight
Travel back to Dublin following morning
Visit Dublin venue
Final Meeting
Leave Sunday night

Following the APV visit to the Achill centre, it was agreed by all the leaders that the centre would not be suitable for various reasons for holding the youth exchange. This left BYS trying to get an alternative centre which we were able to do, we decided to use the Killary centre in Galway. During the APV each group was also requested to bring any details of flights and invoices for the

group travel. The amounts were then sent by bank transfer to the various partners. Following the APV, each group met with their young people each week and planned their presentations and workshops. This also included preparing icebreakers and games etc, consent forms and booking all flights and other transport. For the Ballyfermot group this period was spent sourcing all the logistics for the exchange and the various visits.

Groups arrive (August)

Implementation of Programme

Youth pass (September – October)

We registered each participant for the Youth Pass and used this period to record the learning that had occurred during the exchange. This was followed by an awards presentation night at which we celebrated the exchange.

Final Report

A final report was written and submitted to Léargas outlining the various aspects of the Youth exchange. All receipts for travel and a copy of boarding passes were sent to Léargas.

2.4 Funding

Funding arrangements vary by the type and destination of exchange to be undertaken. If BYS is hosting an exchange, Léargas provides total funding, with 75% given up-front and the remaining amount upon completion and presentation of relevant invoices, receipts and report. When BYS are travelling to another country, 70% of the travel costs are provided by the host country, with the remainder raised through fundraising by the young people, each of whom is also expected to contribute a nominal fee, between €100 and €150 each for European visits and up to €300 for South America. In 2008, BYS also contributed approximately €5,000 from its core funding towards expenses incurred by the youth exchanges.

Cashflow is an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration by any organisation undertaking a youth exchange, especially if they are hosting a relatively large multilateral exchange. When hosting an event, it can take up to three months before the final 25% of the funding is provided by Léargas, as it is not paid until all the paperwork is done e.g., invoices, evaluation and report. In the meantime, the hosting organisation has to manage their finances to take account of what can be a relatively substantial amount of money. Travelling abroad is less expensive and funds are often provided at the planning stage if the funding agency is the national equivalent of Léargas. However, when the funds are paid by a voluntary organisation, who in turn are dependent on funds from their equivalent of Léargas, a long delay of some months can occur. For example, flights to Norway are relatively expensive and while BYS had to purchase their air tickets to Norway in August, they were only refunded by their partner in October. This was due to the fact that their partner in Norway was a voluntary organisation who had to wait until they received funds from their national agency before refunding BYS.

2.5 Rules and Risk Assessments

Over the years, BYS have compiled a document⁴ covering policies and procedures relating to educational visits, which they use as a template for planning all trips. The aim of the policy document is 'to set in place, practice and procedures which would provide guidance for all those involved in planning and carrying out educational visits, in line with current best practice and in accordance with relevant Health and Safety and Child Protection requirements'. However, nothing is 'written in stone' and changes do take place following negotiation to accommodate the requirements of their partners and the specific nature of exchanges.

It is a detailed document covering many practical issues including, the roles and responsibilities of employers, group leaders, accompanying staff, and young people; a planning checklist; medical provisions; and recommended contact arrangements. For example, the section dealing with the responsibilities of the visit co-ordinator has the following recommendations:

The educational visits co-ordinator should be satisfied that:

- There is an acceptable code of conduct for leaders and participants.
- The visit complies with the requirements of the Educational Visits, Policy Practice and Procedures document.
- A competent Group Leader is selected.
- Child protection procedures are adhered to in the planning process, including the vetting of volunteer supervisors.
- All necessary arrangements and preparations have been completed including risk assessment, before the visit begins.
- All relevant checks have been undertaken if an external provider is to be used.
- The Group Leader has experience in supervising young people of similar age and ability to those participating and will organise and manage the group effectively.
- Where relevant, the Group Leader or one of the leaders is suitably qualified and competent to supervise and/or instruct the young people during activities.
- The Group Leader has taken reasonable steps to familiarise him/herself with the location/centre where the activity will take place.
- Voluntary supervisors on the visit are appropriate people to supervise children.
- The ratio of leaders to young people is appropriate.
- The employer has approved the visit, as appropriate.
- Proper procedures have been followed in planning the visit.

⁴ The document is largely based on a similar document given to them by the Western Education and Library Board (NI). They are happy to share their document with other youth organisations considering a youth exchange.

- There is adequate and relevant insurance cover.
- The Group Leader has the address and phone number of the venue to be visited and has a contact name.
- The Group Leader, accompanying staff, volunteer supervisors and nominated youth organisation contact are aware of the agreed emergency contingency arrangements.
- The Group Leader, leaders and nominated contacts have all relevant details of the group members.
- Establish any arrangements which may be required for the early return of individual participants.
- The Youth leader-in-charge should be clear concerning his/her role if taking part in the visit as an accompanying staff member. The Group Leader should remain in overall charge of the visit.

From this, it is clear that BYS believe that it is very important to have clear policies and procedures in place, a point also made by management and staff in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VIEWS OF BYS MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

3.1 Introduction

Since their first experience of a youth exchange in 2004, the staff and management of BYS have acquired considerable experience in planning and undertaking youth exchanges (see chapter two). The aim of this chapter is to record some of their general views of these exchanges and to highlight a number of factors they believe are important considerations for any youth organisation when planning or participating in a youth exchange. The information presented in this chapter is based on personal interviews and a focus group with the BYS manager, and BYS staff.

3.2 Overall Staff Views of Youth Exchanges

The BYS staff expressed very favourable views of the benefits of youth exchanges for the young people and others involved in the youth project, including themselves. Some of the main points made by management and staff were:

- 3.2.1 **Youth Exchanges Benefit Young People and Youth Organisations:** Allowing for some relatively minor issues, BYS staff and management were unanimous in their views that the exchanges have all worked very well and that young people have benefited from the total exchange process. Some of the perceived benefits for young people noted by the management and staff are illustrated by the following verbatim comments:

'You can definitely see a difference in the young people, in the way they see culture. It is really beneficial for them to get out of their own environment, mixing with other people from different countries. It makes them more confident. They have to make a presentation of Irish culture and they are proud to do it abroad. The relationship between the young people and the leaders changes when they come home, and for the better.'

'It is fun. It has to be for young people. But it is also learning. It gives young people new experiences and takes them out of their comfort zone; it challenges them and even when problems occur, most problems can be solved'.

'Youth exchange is a very good tool for getting young people to work towards goals'.

'The exchanges have shown us how professional youth work is in Ireland compared to some voluntary organisations. Sometimes problems arise around lifestyle standards, such as alcohol age limits or sharing of bedrooms. You can see that those groups who give too much freedom to their young people find it most difficult to establish boundaries. We need to maintain our standards of working with young people and sometimes young people from other countries will acknowledge this and ask us for permission'.

'There are definitely more positives than negatives. It gives young people an opportunity to explore other cultures. Ballyfermot is a disadvantaged area and this could be the first time young people travel outside their community, never mind to a new country. It helps to broaden their horizons and to develop friendships. They can progress to become youth leaders and some have, or to volunteer with EVS'.

'In one adventure sports exchange, it helped clarify the future for one girl who was considering dropping out of school and another who was unsure what to do in college. One has decided to do adventure sports in college and the other girl is going back to school to finish her leaving cert and follow the first girl to college'.

'There can be problems but most things are ok. Problems that have occurred include, difficulties communicating with people who do not speak English, the lower alcohol age in some European countries, the stricter boundaries set by Irish youth work standards, staying in accommodation

shared with other groups that are not on the exchange, different people attending the APV than attend the exchange etc'.

3.2.2 Youth Exchanges are a Normal Part of Youth Work: BYS believe that a youth exchange should be treated as a normal part of youth work, which enhances communication skills, team-building, self-confidence and enables young people to learn important skills. Over the years, BYS have incorporated aspects of the youth exchanges into their other work, such as including a planning phase and ice-breakers in every project. They also use the exchanges to motivate and reward young people to achieve goals in other projects. BYS believe that it is important that the youth exchanges are not removed from the normal youth work programme. Their view is that youth exchanges just happen to have an international element that broadens the scope of the youth work programme.

BYS also believe that when a youth organisation is experienced in residential work with young people, the young exchanges are easier than for other groups which operate a 9am to 5pm service: *'We have always done residential work with young people and we see this as an extension of that.'* Funds are available for exchanges until 2013, so they believe that it makes sense to avail of the funding through Léargas, especially during a time of financial retrenchment in many other areas of youth work.

3.2.3 Prepare, Prepare and Prepare! BYS operate a 10 week preparatory programme for youth exchanges, which focuses on the cultures of the host country and Ireland, and what is expected from young people during the exchange. A key aspect of the preparatory phase focuses on establishing relationships between the young people and also between the young people and their leaders. Getting to know the young people before the exchange helps both with a sense of teamwork and discipline on the exchange. As one staff member observed: *'You can see sometimes with other countries when young people don't know the leaders very well, that it is more difficult to establish boundaries and rules around drinking, smoking and bedtimes'*. When this happens, an established relationship between young people and leaders helps to maintain group discipline.

3.2.4 The **Advance Planning Visit** (APV) is regarded as the most important part of the planning process and it is perceived to be critical to the success of an exchange. This is where the logistics of the exchange are discussed and arrangements put in place for the visit. Approximately two to three months before the exchange is due to take place, one representative from each partner organisation meets in the host country and discusses the details of the exchange. The range of topics discussed need to be quite extensive including, the location of the visit, the agenda and structure of the programme, child protection guidelines, food, transport and the quality of sleeping arrangements. For the most part, BYS have had positive experiences of APVs.

Problems have occurred when the people attending the APV were different to those who subsequently end up on the exchange. This may be due to personal issues or possibly the 'greater appeal' of the APV for leaders where there is greater freedom and less responsibility without the need to look after groups of young people. The negative impact of this on the exchange was expressed by one youth leader as follows: *'You go to another country, meet two people, build relationships over two to three days, agree rules and ways of working together, organise workshops and then you go to the exchange and find two different people who haven't a clue what is going on! It happens sometimes and you have to start building relationships over again. The APV is the fun part, without the responsibility of looking after young people and no pressure of workshops'*.

BYS staff believe that a project should be very wary going on an exchange where they are not happy with the APV or any aspect of the exchange, such as health and safety or the capacity of the venue to cope with the group. In one situation where BYS was hosting an exchange, they changed the venue for the exchange following a visit to the centre they had originally booked (see chapter two). It can also happen that arrangements agreed at an APV are not adhered to by the host country, due possibly to a change in personnel from the time of the APV or the temptation for some groups to promise more than they can deliver when looking for funding. When this happens, it is important that the other partners are sufficiently prepared, flexible and capable of ensuring the programme operates as close as possible to the original programme.

3.2.5 **Be Practical and Organised:** BYs have learnt from experience the value of taking care of practical details including:

- Informing parents of the details of the visit through an open-evening and of getting signed consent forms from parents with provision for medical emergencies. During the parent evenings, the parents are shown photographs of the location, the accommodation, the food, and the activities so that there is no confusion. The young people also find the photographs very informative. BYs also believe that it is also important to be totally honest with parents and not over-promise. When asked by one parent if they could guarantee the exchange was 100% safe, the leader replied that no one could provide such a guarantee but he could guarantee that everything was in place to minimise danger.
- Getting passports well in advance and to anticipate problems e.g., getting permission for a passport if one parent is unwilling or unavailable to give permission, or the name on the passport may be different to the name known and used by the young person.
- Having a designated person in Ireland who keeps copies of all documents in case they are lost when on the exchange. One youth leader emails copies of these documents to himself so that they are available if he needs them.
- The establishment of one point of contact is best for parents and the young people, so as to minimise the circulation of rumours and misinformation.
- Exchanges should be spread out during the year to minimise disruption to other activities in the youth organisation. August is regarded as the best month to undertake exchanges for all European groups as it allows a full and comprehensive summer programme to take place in June and July.

- 3.2.6 **Build Trust and Relationships:** Trust is a vital part of the exchange process and where partners are not familiar with each other, the APV is important in establishing this sense of trust. As one staff member said, *'You need to know that if something happens, they can look after a young person'*. While BYS have been fortunate in not experiencing many serious problems during their exchanges, in one situation, a young person had to be hospitalised, her parents informed and arrangements put in place to bring her parents over. They were more than happy with the response by the host country. BYS regard the first two days as critical for a good exchange. This is a time when relationships are established and the more ice-breakers there are the better. On one occasion, the host partner left the ice-breakers until the final day, resulting in a poorer exchange experience for the young people. The issue arose when the people organising the exchange were different to the people who attended the APV and they were apparently unaware of what had been agreed at the APV.
- 3.2.7 **Known but Flexible Boundaries:** Boundaries are important for young people and BYS have found that it is better to go with agreed rules and boundaries but to be prepared to be flexible depending on the circumstances. They recommend that the partners share their rules and procedures in advance of the exchange and agree a common set of rules that respects cultural differences. It is important for partners to be flexible and to be aware of differences that can exist in different parts of Europe. These differences can relate to the standards of youth work, the quality of the accommodation and food, or more fundamental cultural differences. These are usually *'things you can work around once you are aware of them and you can prepare your groups for them'*. Some of the differences are to be expected, such as variations in food and the quality of accommodation. Others are possibly less expected, such as different 'rules' relating to alcohol, smoking and bed-times. Ideally, common arrangements are put in place at the planning stage but this does not always happen in practice. It can be very difficult maintaining boundaries relating to alcohol use, for example, where one of the partners allows their young people to drink and others don't. BYS don't allow their young people to drink alcohol and this is agreed in advance of the exchange. Ideally, they believe that access to alcohol should be restricted for all the young people on the exchange and that dealing with problem situations is best achieved through talking, reminding the young people of what they agreed before travelling, and ensuring they act responsibly.

3.2.8 **The Youthpass:** The Youthpass is highly regarded by BYS staff, with everyone believing it represents a significant addition to the youth exchange experience. While some countries do the Youthpass during the exchange, BYS prefer to wait a few months after they return from the exchange to re-engage young people about what they learnt on the exchange. They believe that the Youthpass makes young people more confident, with the added advantage of increasing their employment prospects. Since the young people decide what they have learnt, it *'gives them a great sense of achievement and develops their skills of self-reflection and personal development'*.

3.2.9 **Food and Accommodation:** Food is possibly the most contentious issue for the young people. BYS regard it as part of the learning process and young people generally adjust for the duration of the exchange, even if they complain a lot! One youth leader felt that the food represented the biggest challenge for most exchanges in *'getting young people to try pasta or try a different type of meat'*. However, eventually everyone eats something with no fatalities from starvation! There have also been complaints about the quantity of food and issues with the time of meals that have to accommodate the requirements of different cultures. Mediterranean cultures tend to eat much later than Ireland and Northern European countries.

The basic nature of some hostel accommodation is also an issue on occasion but this is usually resolved by telling the young people in advance what they can expect at the different venues. BYS have also found that exchanges where the group is accommodated together work better than where the young people are split up to stay in family homes. Most importantly, the group interacts and gets along better when they are accommodated together. Furthermore, if and when things go wrong in family accommodation, the response of the hosts tends to be more emotive when compared with the more impersonal hostel accommodation. It is the policy of BYS not to stay with host families.

3.2.10 **Exchanges are Time Consuming and Exhausting:** Participating in an exchange can be quite time consuming and exhausting, especially if you are the host partner. When travelling to a host country, a youth organisation will need to engage in an APV which usually takes up to three days, including travel. They will also need to prepare the young people for the exchange, complete the necessary paperwork, organise staff and scheduling, spend 7 to 10 days on the exchange, and evaluate the process

following the exchange. Most of the APVs take place at weekends as many of the partners are voluntary organisations. European partners will often encourage BYs to bring a young person to the APV but, to date this has not happened due to child protection issues (adults do not travel alone with young persons under 18 years of age).

The time and resources required in hosting an exchange is considerably longer, with most exchanges taking up to three weeks. The tasks involved in hosting an exchange include: provision agreement with partners, completing application form, booking venues, organising APV with partners, and ensuring programme arrangements are adhered to. Given the amount of work involved in hosting an exchange, BYs only do multilateral exchanges with relatively large groups of young people. While exchanges become less stressful and onerous over time, as partners become familiar with each other, BYs believe it is important to maintain a minimum commitment and *'to know what is happening with the young people at all times'*.

Involvement by BYs staff in the exchanges is entirely voluntary and there is no shortage of volunteers. To minimise the impact of exchanges on staff availability and the core work of the youth service, BYs have started using volunteers, by sending one volunteer with a qualified member of staff, and implementing an agreed time-in-lieu arrangement for staff that is less than a day for a day. The youth service manager of BYs made the following comment in relation to staff time and resources: *'We started using volunteers and this has made a big difference. Now we can send one volunteer and one staff member and this is not as costly to BYs in terms of time or resources. It is not possible for us to give an hour for an hour to staff and we usually give five days for a 7/10 day exchange and an overnight allowance after the first seven days. It is voluntary on the part of staff and arrangements are in writing. There is no shortage of staff volunteers. They have seen the benefits for young people and how enthused they are. It reinforces their own youth work practice and they see that their standards are way ahead of other countries'*.

BYs have also learnt to delegate some of the tasks to their partners when they are hosting an exchange by asking their partners to undertake tasks they are proficient and experienced in. For example, a partner that is proficient in art may be asked to take responsibility for any art-related tasks.

3.2.11 **Selection of Young People:** In selecting young people, BYS believe that is important to have an age and gender balance. Their one experience of a single gender group was less successful than gender balanced groups. They also recommend that the groups who go on exchanges should be established groups who have experience working together prior to the exchange and, ideally, on a similar topic to the exchange. BYS also believe that groups should be mixed in terms of targeted young people and others as they believe that mixed groups work better. It can happen, however, that when BYS bring gender and age balanced groups, other partners may not have done the same, resulting in difficulties for the exchange. On one occasion, a partner brought 12 year olds to an exchange where most of the young people were older, resulting in the younger group being separated for some of the activities. Others have brought mainly or exclusively girl groups, making interaction a little difficult for some boys.

3.2.12 **Application Form:** Completing a detailed application form for each project is very time-consuming but BYS have found the exercise very worthwhile. It helps the youth organisation to clarify their learning outcomes and it can force a youth organisation to face issues it might otherwise neglect.

In conclusion, the staff and management of BYS wholeheartedly recommend the youth exchange as an effective model of youth work. They believe that youth exchanges offer something tangible and worthwhile to young people and youth workers/leaders, which is different to the experience they receive in Ireland. Some of their main recommendations to any group thinking of undertaking an exchange are summarised below:

- Try it! Take the opportunity to go on an exchange and encourage young people to try everything while on the exchange. It is very different to their experience of youth work in Ireland and *'it would be a shame if young people were not given the opportunity'*.
- Be prepared for cultural differences and changes to the programme. However, it is important to maintain high standards in youth work.
- Know your group before you bring them on the exchange by organising workshops and possibly working on the same theme planned for the exchange.

- Use the exchange to motivate young people to set and achieve goals.
- Plan, plan, and plan again. Use the APV to ask all the questions you can and get to know the place and people hosting the exchange. Assume nothing and if you are not satisfied with the APV or any other aspect of the exchange logistics, change it or don't go.
- Agree rules and guidelines with the young people and partner projects at the planning stage.
- Be clear about the funding arrangements and be aware of cashflow implications.
- Link up with projects you can trust.
- Youth leaders should use the exchange to challenge themselves and step outside their comfort zone. Be clear and upfront with staff as to what is required from them if they decide to volunteer for the exchanges. Put everything in writing.
- Keep the group together when they return home and continue to work on other projects.
- The process gets somewhat easier as you learn to work with and trust different partners. However, it remains a demanding exercise for any youth group.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

4.1 Introduction

The views expressed in this chapter are based on the results of a focus group with 20 young people from BYS who had participated on a youth exchange in one of six different countries: Norway, Malta, Poland, Martinique, Belgium and Ireland.

4.2 Overall Views of Young People

First and foremost, every young person enthusiastically endorsed their youth exchange experience. Many described their experience as *'brilliant'* or *'really great'*. It was a fun experience where *'they met new people, saw new places, experienced different cultures and languages, and left their parents at home!'* Some young people mentioned how lucky they were to have had the opportunity to visit exotic faraway places as they would not have been able to afford it themselves. In addition to the fun element of the exchange, it is also clear that these young people learnt different skills and acquired knowledge about foreign cultures and Irish culture. Some learnt sporting skills, while others learnt how to dance, cook, understand different aspects of citizenship, and how to communicate non-verbally with sign language. An important aspect of their exchanges comprised a *'lot of preparation'* where they learnt how to play sport, do ice-breakers and get to know each other. Apart from ongoing difficulties with language, most of them felt that *'everything was set up before they went on the exchange'*. However, it is not so serious that they are constantly thinking about their learning objectives. These are built into their activities and they *'just do things without thinking too much about them'*. For most of them, *'it is all about learning and having fun'*. Most of the young people are still in contact with the young people they met on the exchange, often through Facebook, and all would like to go on another exchange.

Some verbatim comments illustrate their positive experiences on exchanges (overleaf):

'I had never done anything before like this. I know that being in a show is a bit gay but it was a great achievement to be in a show at the end in front of everyone. It was new and different – really great'.

'I had never played rugby before – it was brilliant'.

'I learnt how to swim in the Caribbean. It was lovely and sunny. We were on the TV religion channel. It was a very different culture at the far end of the world and it was great telling people where you were going. It was a great experience overall'.

'We really enjoyed dancing, mixing with other people and learning how they did it. We taught them Irish dancing. It was a choreographed show and we performed in front of the total group'.

'We made Irish stew'.

'It brings you out of yourself'.

'It was a bit awkward in the beginning but most of us got on well after a few days'.

'Nothing major goes wrong. A lot of time and preparation goes into it by BYS'.

'We had plenty to do – grand prix races, tree climbing, new food... '.

'You are not afraid to mix. No-one asks about your background or how much money you have'.

'It was a life-changing experience'.

'At least you can say you were there'.

'I will never forget it'.

'It broadens how you think about how other people live. People are poorer in Martinique and you appreciate what you have at home'.

'Ireland is not the only place we can call home. We wanted to go back again to work'.

'We couldn't stop talking about it when we got home for a month. We were talking real slow in the beginning, just like we were talking to foreigners who couldn't speak English'.

'It moves you outside your comfort zone. You don't stick with people you know'.

They also experienced some problems on the exchanges, mainly to do with food, communication difficulties with young people who didn't speak English, and being with groups which had different rules to them e.g., drinking alcohol, bedtimes and sleeping arrangements. Some of the older young people felt the supervision from leaders was too much and that it stopped them doing things they would have otherwise have done, such as drinking. However, they seemed to accept that this was *'part of the deal'* with exchanges and that it could have been much worse if the leaders were not as flexible in the way they operated.

'We were expecting to stay in a hostel but we didn't'.

'We had to sleep on old metal canvas beds'.

'We had to cut up and cook the fish we caught – it was horrible!'

'Some of the groups did not speak English and it was hard to understand them but we learnt to do sign language'.

'They kept to themselves until near the end of the trip'.

'I hurt my foot'.

'You miss your friends at home and your mobile phone but you make new friends and you have lots to tell your friends when you get home'.

'It was boring when you were sent to bed so early with nothing to do in your room'

'It was just so different and the food was !!!!!'

'Some of the centre staff came into our rooms without knocking because they thought something was going on but there wasn't'.

For the most part, these problems were handled to the satisfaction of the participants and they were regarded as very much secondary to the positive experiences of the exchange. The young people understood that these were things that happened on exchanges. The role of the Irish youth workers/leaders was perceived to be important in setting the right tone for the exchange. The young people generally felt they knew what was expected of them but that they could also negotiate changes to the agreed rules provided they did not go too far. For example, if they were with partner groups who had later bedtimes than those agreed with the Irish group, a degree of flexibility was exercised and later bedtimes were usually agreed, provided they did not disturb other people. Conversely, they knew that no negotiation was possible regarding drinking alcohol or other serious issues.

'We brought our own rules but we were allowed to stretch them sometimes around bedtimes'.

The exchanges enthused the young people and *'they told their friends everything about the trips'* when they returned home. Every one of them would like to go on another exchange, with some expressing a desire to volunteer for longer periods when they are older. They see the exchanges as a reward for their commitment to and involvement in BYS and they are willing to continue their commitment into the future in order to enhance their chances of going on another exchange.

'You have to earn the right to go. You write a paragraph why you would like to go and why you think you should go, something like that, and the youth workers pick you or not.... Young people who are known to have certain skills are sometimes asked to go.... It is for people involved in the youth services... It is for people who they can trust not to be bold if they are brought on a trip abroad'.

All in all, the exchanges would appear to have been a very enjoyable and learning experience for these young people. A summary of some of the activities participated in by the young people on different exchanges is outlined below to illustrate the diversity of the projects (Table 3).

Table 3 Summary of Activities in Selected Youth Exchanges

Location of Youth Exchange	Activities
Malta	Meeting and greeting team games, cliff jumping and sun bathing. Sea Kayaking, navigation, coastal walking and camping. Experiencing Maltese culture.
Poland	Each day started with energisers, followed by outdoor ice-breakers, games and various workshops including, tolerance debate, photography, GAA tournament, dance, media project, and recording a song with costumes and presenting live to the other groups.
Norway	Dance workshops and creating a Unique show in the Cultural Centre, using language, light, sound and cultural games. Presentation of each national culture through dance, media and arts.
Kilary	Mixing with each other in Dublin experiencing Irish food and culture before going to Kilary where the events included, workshops about fashion and art skills, and a range of outdoor activities.

In conclusion, the young people that participated in the review all agreed that the youth exchanges were highly enjoyable for the most part and that the trips represented something important in their lives. The exchanges were ‘learning and fun’ and very memorable. When asked what they say to other youth projects that may be considering going on a youth exchange, the young people made the following recommendations (overleaf):

- Prepare well before you go – build teamwork.
- Plan carefully – find out everything you can about the host venue e.g., the type of accommodation, what you have to do.
- The youth workers/leaders should meet and agree common ground rules.
- Make sure the group you are visiting is interested in the same things and themes as your group.
- Have a good mix of young people in the accommodation e.g., two Irish girls and two other girls sharing a room.
- Small groups are better than larger groups.
- Bring some food e.g., noodles.
- Try to minimise the amount of travel between venues.
- Have a good mix of genders but keep the ages tight.
- Be careful of going to places where the culture is very different and no-one speaks English.
- Above all, just go and experience everything you can!

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VIEWS OF CDYSB AND LÉARGAS

5.1 Introduction

The relatively brief comments presented in this chapter are based on two interviews with representatives from the CDYSB and Léargas, both of whom were familiar with BYS and their youth exchanges. The views of the two respondents do not necessarily reflect the official position of their respective organisations. However, there is no reason to believe that their views are different from others in their organisations.

5.2 CDYSB

The CDYSB Liaison Officer was quite complimentary of the way BYS had engaged in youth exchanges. Her impression, based on observing young people interacting at different events, was that the youth exchanges 'worked' and that the participation of young people in these exchanges had helped to build their confidence. Furthermore, the fact that 100 young people had achieved the Youthpass indicated that a certain amount of learning had taken place. While the participation of BYS in youth exchanges may initially have developed as another way of working with young people and possibly getting additional funding, she accepts that BYS were astute in realising the potential of the Youth in Action Programme for young people in the Ballyfermot area.

While BYS benefit from the youth exchanges, she also believes that BYS have expertise and facilities that other youth organisations may not have, such as a wide range of staff expertise (e.g., Youth Information Officers, Outward Bounds Instructors), facilities (e.g., dedicated outdoor education centre) and a very committed manager. However, it is their commitment and enthusiasm with which they approach youth exchanges that distinguishes all aspects of their participation in the Youth in Action Programme. A lot of work is required from an organisation that participates in a youth exchange, particularly when they are hosts to the

event. Young people have to be adequately prepared and everything put in place to ensure the exchange is successful. BYs do this very well on a regular basis.

She believes that the young people and BYs get a 'huge learning' from the youth exchanges, as otherwise they would not continue to participate and certainly not to the same extent they do now. There is always a waiting list of young people who want to go on the exchanges, indicating the value and success of the programme. The fact that young people are selected in a strategic way also appears to help the process.

She also believes that the young exchange model has a wider application to youth work, if only for the freedom it allows young people to behave when outside their own environment. A youth exchange may appear to be almost like a holiday to some people but it is much more. It is a professional youth work service that is organised in the same way as any youth work session, but with more challenges. The youth workers are professional and they are there to educate the young people. They go with clear aims and objectives, knowing what they want to get out of the session.

'All young people change when out of their own environment. Youth workers and young people have a very different relationship when they are away from their usual surroundings and particularly when out of the country. It brings a lot of challenges and sometimes they have bad experiences, such as home sickness and difficulties with the group, but these are things you have to work through.'

She is also confident that BYs evaluate their projects in accordance with CDYSB review and reporting systems and the Youth in Action Programme. From her knowledge of the programme, everything would appear to be in order:

- Detailed planning is incorporated into each exchange, with learning and development outcomes discussed and agreed in advance.
- There is generally a good gender and age balance in the different exchanges.
- BYs have engaged with a variety of partners in different locations.
- Feedback from the young people and youth leaders suggests that there is real value in the exchanges.

Overall, she believes that youth exchanges can be a huge addition to any youth service/project, but only if they are run properly. Finally, she feels that the experiences of BYS should assist other organisations in understanding the steps involved in an exchange and what issues can arise for a youth organisation.

5.3 Léargas

The views expressed by a representative from Léargas were broadly similar to those of the CDYSB liaison officer. When asked her overall opinion of youth exchanges, the Léargas representative felt there were many benefits associated with the Youth in Action Programme including, the benefits for young people in meeting young people from different countries and cultures, their enhanced awareness of different cultures, communication skills, tolerance, and anti-racism work. Also, there are significant educational benefits for young people with fewer opportunities in life. Léargas know from their evaluations and monitoring of Youth in Action programmes that young people who get involved in the Youth in Action programme grow in confidence and personal development. Other perceived benefits of the Youth in Action programme are: young people learn more about their culture and it instils a sense of pride in Ireland and their local community; the young people benefit from the preparation they put into the exchange; it engages young people in a youth work structure; it challenges young people's perceptions of other cultures; and young people have to deal with language barriers and learn to communicate with their peers, often in non-verbal ways. The views of youth workers also support this view.

The international dimension of the programme is perceived to be particularly important to youth work as it enables youth organisations like BYS see how other youth organisations around Europe work and they are exposed to different activities that can be used to work with young people in Ireland. The Youth in Action programme also reassures Irish youth workers and volunteers that the quality of their work is of a high standard and on par with their peers in other European countries.

Participation in a youth exchange requires that a youth organisation have sufficient resources and commitment to undertake the task. An exchange usually involves considerable planning, time given by young people and staff, supervision of young people in a foreign country, the development of appropriate objectives, and access to funds. Time has also to be set aside for completing a detailed application form and for the evaluation report. Accordingly, it is very

important that a youth organisation should plan their exchanges strategically to fit in with the other parts of their annual plan.

BYS are perceived by Léargas to be very strong in the area of youth exchanges. Further, they believe it is possible to see the benefits of youth exchanges within their organisation. YYS are seen as '*one of the leaders*' in the Youth in Action programme. The quality of their work is '*always exceptional*' and while they appear to do a lot of exchanges, they have the resources to do this in the way it should be done.

From their review and formal monitoring of exchanges, it is the opinion of the Léargas representative that:

- YYS exchanges are in line with the main objectives of the Youth in Action programme.
- YYS really engage their young people.
- Their activities use non-formal learning, opening young people's eyes to what it means to be a European in terms of culture and diversity.
- Their activities are at the level of young people.
- YYS are a learning organisation. They learn from their experiences and build from one exchange to the next. They learn what works and what doesn't, and they take this knowledge on board for subsequent exchanges.
- YYS usually achieve what they set out in their learning objectives for an exchange.
- They are also very good at disseminating the results of the exchange with parents, teachers and the wider Ballyfermot community.
- The success of the Youthpass programme shows that YYS are committed to the non-formal learning sector.

The two main problems that a youth organisation may encounter in an exchange are difficulties associated with finding partners and the paperwork associated with the programme. As already indicated, Léargas have a number of strategies in place to deal with these two issues including: the Partner Finding database on their website, contact-making services, an E-bulletin of organisations around Europe looking for partners, and information days to help people complete the application form.

Funding can also be a problem for some organisations. The grant from Léargas is not intended to cover all of the costs involved in an exchange. Accordingly, additional funds will have to be raised to cover the short-fall.

Finally, they suggest that any organisation interested in doing an exchange should give themselves sufficient time to attend a training course organised by Léargas to meet potential partners, to plan their exchange carefully and to prepare their young people for the exchange. Léargas believe that strong communication between partners is a vital component of a successful exchange. Each partner should articulate what their needs are and what their young people are interested in doing on the exchange. Léargas also believe that the active participation of young people in the process is key to its success. Finally, they advise that an organisation should not try to take on too much, especially in the beginning. It is always advisable to be well focused and to operate within the resources available to the organisation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

6.1 Conclusions

The main aim of the report was to document, describe and review the Ballyfermot Youth Service's experience of youth exchanges. The views and experiences described in this report require little additional comment. It is clear from the review that the Ballyfermot Youth Services (BYS) youth exchange experience has been of benefit to all concerned. BYS have participated in the European Youth Exchange Programme since 2004 when 25 young people went on a Drugs Awareness Programme in Amsterdam. Since then, 336 young people from BYS have been involved in 29 projects across 16 countries – Ireland, Italy, Malta, Belgium, Norway, Martinique, Sweden, Spain, Poland, Austria, France, Germany, Turkey, Lithuania, Brazil, Luxemburg and Netherlands. The views expressed by the young people and their leaders suggest that significant learning and personal development took place on these exchanges. This conclusion is also supported by the large number of young people who received the Youthpass in 2008 and the views expressed by the CDYSB and Léargas representatives interviewed in the course of the review.

A second aim of the review was to highlight issues that may arise in the course of an exchange for any youth organisation. The considerable experience of BYS in youth exchanges, together with their advice and recommendations, has been documented in this report and do not need to be repeated at this stage. However, perhaps the main point made by many people is that a successful exchange requires careful and comprehensive planning by each partner, particularly in the form of the Advance Planning Visit (APV). Young people should also to be prepared for the exchange by teamwork exercises and knowing what is expected from them on the exchange. If this is done properly, solid relationships are formed within which structures can be put in place to deal with most eventualities.

Finally, the successful experience of BYS in undertaking youth exchanges indicates that this model can be a valuable tool for youth work, particularly but not exclusively at a time when

core funding is becoming more difficult to access. It is not an easy process, entailing considerable commitment from the youth organisation. However, the evidence from this review suggests that the process can be worthwhile for everyone concerned.

Appendix

Useful Resources

Ballyfermot Youth Services (2009) *European Youth in Action. A Review of 2009 Projects.*

Ballyfermot Youth Services (undated) *Outdoor Pursuits Policy Document.*

European Commission (2008) *Youth in Action Programme Guide*, www.ec.europa.eu/youth

Léargas Resource material on youth exchanges may be found on www.leargas.ie/youth. They also provide a range of support services to organisations considering participating in a youth exchange.