

Detached Work

Introduction

Most youth workers will readily testify that their job doesn't begin and end at the front door. In fact, they realise that some of the most important breakthroughs occur when you're on the young person's own ground; on the street corner, public park, local shops or chipper. The normal centre environment and atmosphere for the youth worker is replaced by new opportunities and possibilities for a different kind of engagement with young people. You may feel out of your comfort zone and away from the support systems of the youth project/service. It would be helpful and really practical to know where you stand in terms of policy, practice and supports.

"Detached work is non-centre-based and seeks to make contact with young people in places where they choose to meet, with a view to building relationships of trust, delivering programmes and responding to needs".¹

Detached work is a planned youth work programme that happens in places that are not controlled or managed by the youth worker. This kind of work has some similarities to 'outreach work' and is often thought to be the same thing but actually has a different focus.

Things to think about

If you are thinking of creating a policy in this area, the following questions are designed to get you thinking. They do not cover everything but should help to get you started. The 'Statement of Good Practice' on detached work also gives a good summary of some of the practical aspects to consider.

Planning

- Why should you use detached work as a way of working with young people? What do you hope to achieve? What is its purpose?
- What particular qualities, skills and knowledge are needed for this type of work?
- What training is required?
- Which people in the community and other services need to be informed about the work and its purpose?
- Who should be involved in creating and writing this policy?
- If the work is to be developed on an interagency basis, have the expectations of the different agencies been worked out and agreed?
- How will you measure the value of the detached work?
- How will the youth workers be supported and supervised?

Risk Assessment

- How will you assess the risks involved for the youth workers and the young people? Who will do this?
- How will the health and safety of the youth workers and the young people be protected?
- How might the child protection and welfare policy affect how you do this work?

Doing the Detached Work

- How will young people be involved in the development of a detached work programme?
- How many youth workers will work together at any one time?
- How will the youth workers be identified by others when they are working e.g. the Gardai or local residents?
- Who can the youth workers contact while carrying out this piece of work?
- What equipment and clothing do the youth workers need?
- How will requests for money from young people be dealt with by the youth project/service?
- How will the youth workers deal with illegal activity, which they might come across while undertaking this work?

Recording and Evaluation

- How should the detached work be recorded?
- How will information from the detached work be shared with the rest of the team?
- How will you measure the impact of the detached work programme?
- How will you ensure that the learning and experience from the detached work programme is made available to other youth projects/services?
- When will you review the policy?

Key things to ensure

- Spending sufficient time preparing and planning the work
- Involving people in the creation of the policy
- Acknowledging the demands of detached work on the individual youth worker and the youth project/service

Relevant legislation/guidelines

In designing any policy, it is important to be aware of the wider context in which your youth project/service exists. In many cases, how you have to act is dictated or influenced by the law:

- Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005
- Code of Good Practice, Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector Department of Education and Science 2003
- Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999
- Youth Work Act 2001
- 'Our Duty to Care', Department of Health and Children 2002

Other sources of information and resources

A good policy keeps up to date with current practice, trends and legislation. Your policy should be a living document which directs and underpins the work you do and how it is done. Policy development takes time and effort but the return is worth the investment. There are a range of information sources and resources available to help you. Here are a few to get you started.

Some Irish and UK services have developed detached work programmes and policies.

See, for example:

www.thebase.ie

www.fyrc.ie

www.youthlink.co.uk

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk

Other information can be found at:

www.youthworkireland.ie

www.youth.ie

Alan Rogers of Youth Clubs UK has written the following books on this subject:

- Management of Detached Work
- Starting out in Detached Work
- Policy and Action for Detached Work
- Recording and Reporting

A policy on Detached Work might use the following structure

- 1. A COVER PAGE.** This should include: the name of your youth project/service; the title of the policy; when it comes into force; the person(s) responsible for signing it off; and a date for reviewing it.
- 2. A POLICY STATEMENT.** This should state clearly, but in broad terms, what you want the detached work policy to cover. It is a statement of intent and vision, saying what your youth project/service believes. It can be quite short and need not go into all the practical details; these are covered by the sections below.
- 3. REASONS FOR THE POLICY.** This section should give, in clear bullet points, your reasons for creating this policy. Ask yourself questions such as: “Why is such a policy helpful?” and “What concerns would arise if we did not have a policy?” There are some practical reasons for having a policy like this, while other reasons may reflect values that are important to the youth project/service. All these reasons should be listed: they will help all those who are required to comply with the policy to understand its importance and accept it.
- 4. THOSE WHO MUST COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY.** This section could again be bullet-pointed, listing all those who you expect to follow the policy. They might include, for example, the project leader, youth workers, volunteers, students. If the work is run on an interagency basis, the expectations of each agency should be identified and agreed before the work starts.
- 5. IMPLEMENTATION.** This will be the largest section of the document, setting out the practical details of how you intend to put the policy into practice. It states who is responsible for what, and how, in practical terms, you intend the policy to be carried out. It might name the tasks for which various people are responsible e.g. what level of responsibility the project leader will have for networking with other agencies, or how good communications within the team will be encouraged. See the section on ‘Things to think about’ above for some more prompts.
- 6. LINKS TO OTHER POLICY AREAS.** This section should list the other policies of your youth project/service that link into your detached work policy. Links to other policy areas, such as your health and safety policy, should be identified in this section. All your policies must interconnect; otherwise the vision for your youth project/service may become confused and pull people in different directions.