



Community Work Ireland working collectively to support and promote community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and advancing human rights

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Community Work Ireland

Community Services Programme Review – CWI Submission

June 2019

Introduction

Established in 1981¹ Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes and supports community work/community development as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 800 individuals and organisations that support community work/community development and work in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. For over 35 years, Community Work Ireland has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland seeking to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

As the leading community development organisation in the country whose members work in and with the most marginalised and socially excluded communities in Ireland Community Work Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the review of the Community Services Programme.

¹ As the Community Worker's Co-operative

Underpinning Values

Rather than responding to all the items on the terms of reference, CWI makes a number of general points that touch on these below;

CWI suggests that any new or revised iteration of the Community Services Programme be based on the set of values and operating principles included in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A 10-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors In Ireland*. These are:

- **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION** - A commitment to active participation of all stakeholders, including citizens and non-citizens. Participation is rooted in the belief that communities have the right to identify their own needs and interests and outcomes required to meet them. Building active participation involves a recognition that policies and programmes targeted at communities and groups will not and cannot be effective without the meaningful participation of those communities in their design, implementation and monitoring.
- **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES** - A commitment to empowering communities, increasing their knowledge, skills, consciousness and confidence to become critical, creative and active participants. It leads people and communities to be resilient, organised, included and influential.
- **COLLECTIVITY** - A commitment to collectivity. A collective approach requires a focus on the potential benefits for communities rather than focusing only on benefits for individuals. It recognises the rights of communities and groups, including funded organisations, to work autonomously and maintain a critical voice. It involves seeking collective outcomes in pursuit of a just and equal society.
- **SOCIAL JUSTICE** - A commitment to social justice, including promoting policies and practices that challenge injustice and value diversity.
- **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** - A commitment to sustainable development, including promoting cultural, environmental, economic and social sustainable policies and practices.
- **HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION** - A commitment to human rights, equality and anti-discrimination, involving promoting human rights and equality in society and committing to addressing the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by many groups. Specifically, recognising the particular experiences of people in relation to gender based issues and in particular the impact of gender inequality on women (including women from marginalised communities and minority groups) and on society as a whole. In accordance with the *Public Sector Duty*, we are committed to eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and protecting human rights.
- **SOCIAL INCLUSION** - A commitment to social inclusion. Prioritising the needs of communities experiencing social or economic exclusion, including rural isolation, and recognising that promoting social and economic inclusion requires us to recognise and seek to address the root causes of exclusion as well as developing strategies and mechanisms to promote and ensure inclusion.

Contribution of the CSP

Benefits to the Community

In CWI's experience, many of the CSP host organisations are motivated by an awareness of the needs in their communities and a commitment to equality and tackling disadvantage by ensuring the delivery of services and supports. This is an important element of the CSP and one that needs to be given due recognition.

The Community Services Programme is a critical programme for the delivery of essential services to the community that could not be viably delivered by the private sector, in an affordable way. The CSP allows for the identification of local needs and the development of a bespoke response to those needs. In this context, the nature, range, diversity and scale of CSP funded initiatives should be viewed as one of the programme's strengths.

In the experience of CWI members, the CSP is used to support the delivery of services to often vulnerable members of the community that would not otherwise be able to access the service being delivered. These range from services to older people, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, etc. **We suggest that the review highlight this valuable contribution that the CSP makes to the delivery of services to vulnerable communities that could not otherwise be delivered.** In CWI's experience these are significant.

The review must endeavour to measure the direct and indirect impact of the work. While it is critical to measure and highlight the direct impact of the CSP programme, it is equally critical to attempt to measure the indirect impact of the CSP supports. While these are often invisible or difficult to measure – for example, how many older people decide to remain in their own home in the knowledge that a service, including the social element, is available to them.

CWI also suggests that there is an examination of *affordability* versus *profitability*. CWI members would suggest that the focus has become unbalanced in favour of profitability to the detriment of affordability. The review should examine the expectations of profitability in the context of an examination of the different types of services being delivered. In some instances, a charge for the service may be realistic and viable. In other instances, where services are focused on vulnerable communities, a charge for services is unrealistic and, in the context of a current emphasis on profitability, may endanger the service.

Benefits to the Workers

The benefit of job opportunities and career advancement to people from marginalised communities that the CSP facilitates cannot be overestimated. In the experience of CWI, the programme is used to create and develop opportunities for people from marginalised communities such as Travellers, people in rural areas where employment opportunities are few, ex-prisoners, long term unemployed people, etc. This is a critical aspect of the programme. It contributes to the development of community role models and helps to challenge stigma and discrimination within the labour market. For some, it provides critical experience in the workplace that allows them to build a career history required for main-stream job opportunities.

The jobs created by the Community Services Programme must be viewed as ‘real’ jobs. In that context, the CSP must provide adequate funding to ensure that all workers receive the minimum wage with a view to moving towards the provision of a living wage. This is critical in order to attract people to CSP funded jobs in an increasingly competitive labour market.

As outlined above, not all CSP funded initiatives are in a position to charge for services or supports and this should be acknowledged. Where this is the case, the contribution to social benefit should be acknowledged and a full contribution to wages should be made.

Career enhancement and progression must be retained as elements of the programme. However, there must be an acknowledgement that many people employed by CSP will never progress either because of a lack of employment opportunities or because they have reached their own employment potential. The programme should allow for cases to be made by organisations where this is a reality for them.

In-work training must become a key element of the programme and a training budget should be provided to enable this. Where appropriate, the provision of collective training opportunities at a local and national level should be encouraged.

The Future

Community Work Ireland believes that the Community Services Programme has enormous potential. There is significant demand for the expansion of the types of services and supports that can be supported by the CSP that would complement the work of many community development organisations all over the country.

It is critical to acknowledge that one-size does not fit all. For some CSP supported initiatives trading income is part of the model and in that instance the initiative may be in a position to charge for services/supports and use that to contribute to the wages of the CSP supported employees. For others, this is not the case and allowances must be made where this is a reality.