# 'Coffee Houses' and 'Crime Prevention'

## Some thoughts on Youth Cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects in the Context of Youth Work in Ireland

*Micheál O'hAodain*

### Abstract

There has been a significant increase in the number of youth cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Ireland. It could be argued that they represent two differing approaches to youth work; that youth cafés generally represent the 'universal' approach, while Garda Youth Diversion Projects are more representative of the 'targeted' approach. This paper will consider both initiatives in the context of youth work in Ireland, setting their emergence and development against the backdrop of youth work's traditions and values, while also acknowledging the changing nature of the field and questioning the current direction of youth work. It will question the extent to which these developments reflect the core traditions and values of youth work and will go on to suggest that youth cafés, if properly funded and truly grounded in the traditions and values of youth work, have great potential to engage young people as critical and active participants in their communities and society.

### Keywords

Youth work; youth cafés; Garda Youth Diversion Projects; universal and targeted approaches

## Introduction

Among the many changes that have occurred in youth work in Ireland in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of both youth cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects. Both have also been the focus of policy development with youth cafés featuring prominently in *Teenspace, the National Recreation Policy for Young People* (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007a) while Garda Youth Diversion Projects form a significant element of the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008–2010* (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008a). It could be argued that these initiatives represent differing approaches to work with young people, with youth cafés generally representing the more 'universal' or 'mainstream' approach offering open access to all young people, and Garda Youth Diversion Projects representing the 'targeted' approach. Perhaps one could go further with regard to youth cafés and see in them the potential for a more radical approach to youth work through the creation of a public space for young people along the lines of the 'coffee houses' of the past, the 'penny universities', which were seen as influential in the development of democracy.

Youth work is something that is difficult to define clearly. This difficulty in 'pinning down' the meaning of youth work is referred to by Smith (1999; 2002), while in the Irish context it can also be seen as a 'contested concept' with blurred boundaries often existing between youth work and other work with young people (Powell *et al.*, 2010:15). This lack of clarity prompts Treacy (2009) to comment that in Ireland almost anyone can say they are a youth worker. This may be partly perhaps because youth work operates in a wide range of different, at times even separate, spheres; sometimes closely linked with the State system, at others partially linked, and sometimes operating exclusively in the voluntary or 'third' sector.

Notwithstanding this range and diversity, efforts have been made to define youth work. The legislative basis for youth work in Ireland is the Youth Work Act 2001, which provides a definition incorporating a number of key principles. These include the educational nature of youth work; the fact that it is complementary to the formal systems of education and training; the voluntary participation of young people; and the primary role of voluntary organisations as providers. Various Irish commentators have also attempted to identify the key defining features or characteristics of youth work including Jenkinson (2000), Kiely (2009) and Devlin and Gunning (2009) Among the key features identified are relationship-building, voluntary participation, informal education and the collective or associational nature of the work. However, in a changing political, ideological and financial climate, where there is a much greater emphasis on accountability and value-for-money, youth work finds itself increasingly challenged by the State and other funders to achieve 'hard' outcomes, based on clearly identifiable aims and programmes. It could be argued that this has entailed a move away from a 'universal' approach towards a more 'targeted' approach which is more amenable to measurement and accountability. It is also possible to question whether some of what is now being done in the name of youth work is in fact youth work as traditionally defined. This paper sets out to explore that question with reference to youth cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

## What is Youth Work?

The full definition of youth work in the Youth Work Act 2001 (section 3) is:

> … a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is:
>
> (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
> (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations

Notwithstanding the fact that there is a legislative definition for youth work in Ireland, there are ongoing debates on its meaning and purpose. A recent research project, commissioned by the Youth Services Interagency Group (comprising a number of Ireland's largest and longest established youth work organisations) resulted in the publication of the report *The Purposes and Outcomes of Youth Work* in 2009. One of the key objectives of the research was to develop 'a definition of youth work which can reflect the common ground held by the organisations commissioning the research

while accommodating difference' (Devlin and Gunning, 2009: 8). Another recently published piece of research, *Working with Young People: A National Study of Youth Work Provision and Policy in Contemporary Ireland*, included in its remit a concern to explore how youth work was currently conceptualised by various actors involved in the sector (Powell *et al.,* 2010).

The difficulty in 'pinning down' the term youth work has been taken up by Smith (2002) who points out that when people use it they can mean 'very different things'. He refers to the 'contrasting traditions of youth work' that have developed and gives the examples of the variety of work with young people that could be regarded as 'youth work':

> For example, they might be describing work with a group of Guides; running a youth club; making contact with different groups of young people on an estate; mentoring a young person; or facilitating a church fellowship; or tutoring on a mountain walking course. (Smith, 2002: 1)

This diversity is also reflected by Bradford (2005:58) who describes youth work as 'an ambiguous set of practices, pushed in different directions at different times by different interests', while Coussée (2009: 8), in a comment on youth work in the wider European context, talks of it suffering from 'a perpetual identity crisis' in which it seems hard for youth workers 'to put their work into words'. Treacy (2009:187) contends that the lack of clarity about the purpose of youth work is particularly an issue in Ireland where 'anybody can call themselves a youth worker, regardless of qualifications and experience'.

The wide-ranging nature of youth work in Ireland and elsewhere has prompted various commentators to try and identify its key elements and values in order to develop a better understanding both for those directly involved, be they young people, youth workers or youth work providers, and those not directly involved but crucial to youth work's success and development, such as funders, policy makers and the media. In posing the key question 'What is youth work?', Jeffs and Smith, while on the one hand pointing out that the term can be used to describe a wide range of activities and services, nonetheless argue that there are five elements, all of which are required to be present in order to distinguish 'what we now know as youth work' from 'other welfare activities'. The five elements are: voluntary participation; education and welfare; focus on young people; association, relationship and community; and being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity. They also point to the origins of youth work as a product of civil society, overwhelmingly undertaken by volunteers and 'wrapped up with associational life, community groups and voluntary organisations' (Jeffs and Smith, 2008: 277–279). Other commentators, including Davies (2005), Davies and Merton (2009), and, in the Irish context, the National Youth Council of Ireland (2009), for the most part remain close to Jeffs and Smith in their definitions of youth work. Kiely (2009) lists the values espoused by youth work as 'empowerment, equality and inclusiveness, respect, involvement of young people in decision making, partnership and voluntary participation', and proceeds to look at each value in turn. She questions the extent to which these values actually inform practice and argues that 'a lack of clarity underpins many of the terms frequently used to communicate the value base of youth work' (Kiely, 2009:12). Tucker (2004), in recognising the strains and tensions arising from the very broad range of approaches to defining youth work, writes of 'youth working' in terms of 'the game', where the rules change and the

demands on young people and those who work with them also change. These demands can be '… potentially empowering: to promote rights and responsibilities, to engage young people in decision making; or to assist them voice their opinions'. However, they can also be '… constraining: concerned with control, regulation and conformity' (Tucker, 2004:81). This theme, concerning the potential of youth work to be either a force for domestication and control; or to be liberating and empowering, is one taken up by many other authors including Banks (1999), Bradford (2005), Hurley and Treacy (1993), Gilchrist *et al.* (2003), Lorenz (2009), O'hAodain (2009) and Treacy (2009).

Youth work's definitional complexity is related to the increasingly complex pattern of policy and provision. In fact Devlin (2008:52) suggests that youth work is increasingly being seen as 'just one of a proliferation of types of policy and provision aimed at young people'. Along similar lines Kiely and Kennedy (2005: 202) describe the voluntary youth sector as being 'only one part of an increasingly complicated landscape of services directly or indirectly experienced by children and young people in Irish society'. Youth work risks becoming lost in this landscape and Devlin (2008:52) expresses concern about the way in which youth organisations have become involved in competing for funding that is available to support 'work with young people', which may not qualify as youth work in the strict sense, and which poses dilemmas for youth work organisations in their struggle 'to maintain key principles'.

## Irish Youth Work Policy – 'Universal' or 'Targeted'?

As well as being differentiated in terms of its underpinning values, work is also often defined in terms of the type of young people it seeks to engage with. In this context it is often described as being either 'universal/mainstream' or 'targeted', with the former approach associated with young people in general and the latter with particular individuals or groups of young people who can be categorised as being – for example – 'disadvantaged' or 'at risk' (Smith, 2003; Bradford, 2005; Davies and Merton, 2009; Kiely, 2009; Treacy, 2009 and Powell *et al.*, 2010). There has been a significant shift towards a greater emphasis on 'targeted' youth work and away from the concept of 'universal' provision both in Ireland and Britain. This has raised concerns among some commentators that youth work is changing beyond recognition and in danger of losing some of its defining characteristics.

The terms in question, while open to interpretation in the youth work context, are explained by Davies and Merton (2009:8) who define 'targeted' as comprising of 'specific programmes and/or facilities which young people – particularly those identified as 'at risk' and/or with 'special needs' – may be required to attend and which are meant to offer them dedicated and often intensive support', while 'universal provision' is that which is 'available to all potential users as a citizen's right, without financial or other qualifying tests'.

Davies and Merton contend that from its origins much of youth work had been 'targeted' in a deliberate way: 'in the past on 'the poor' and 'the lower orders', today on 'the disadvantaged' and 'the socially excluded'' (Davies and Merton, 2009:8). This concern of early youth work initiatives with 'working class youth' is echoed by other authors such as Hurley (1992), Jenkinson (1996), Jeffs and Smith (2002), Kiely and

Kennedy (2005), Lalor *et al.* (2007) and O'hAodain (2010). All of these, in varying degrees, identify what Bradford (2005: 58) describes as the 'bourgeois desire to mould the character and conduct of working class youth'. Notwithstanding the 'targeted' nature of many early youth work initiatives, Jeffs and Smith contend that by the 1860s a distinct practice, identifiable as youth work, had developed, which included certain characteristics which set 'youth work' apart from other work with young people. These include that it was 'based upon a voluntary relationship', 'did not operate according to a pre-ordained externally imposed and inviolate curriculum or structure'; young people were often able 'to use the centre or club on their own terms'; it was 'not employment led', and it focused on the 'group or collective experience rather than that of the individual' (Jeffs and Smith, 2002: 43–45). This focus on the group or collective experience was to become a defining feature of youth work. In the Irish context Kiely (2009:17) regards the 'principle of collective association' as being central to 'the philosophy of youth work'.

However, the recent renewed emphasis on 'targeted' and 'individualised' youth work is seen as presenting a challenge to this focus on the group or collective experience, to the extent that some commentators question whether this developing practice is youth work. Among those expressing such concerns in the English context are Smith (2003), while Bradford (2005) links this move towards 'targeted' youth work with the increasing 'managerialism' which demands that youth work 'should demonstrate its value and outcomes in relation to specific groups of young people'. He sees this as part of 'a growing political demand' for the targeting of specific young people, in which youth work has found itself increasingly drawn into 'targeted' work with groups comprising the so called 'underclass' (Bradford, 2005:57–62). As part of this process of targeting, youth work has become 'fundamentally managerialised' so that youth work and youth workers can be made 'accountable'. The result is that youth workers, instead of engaging with young people in an open way which is partially determined by young people themselves, now work in a much more rigid and bureaucratised setting, operating to 'a range of pre-set targets, standards and performance indicators' (Bradford, 2005: 65).

A number of commentators have identified similar issues in the Irish context. McMahon (2009) argues that the State has taken control of youth work and she refers to 'the discourse of new managerialism' with all that it entails, which she maintains 'pervades voluntary sector-State relationships'. She cites the Youth Work Act 2001 as an example of this. Addressing the issue of 'targeting' in Irish youth work, both Treacy (2009) and Kiely (2009) identify the ways in which statutory funding is very influential with regard to the focus of youth work as the various government departments which provide funding – such as Education and Science (now Education and Skills); Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and Health and Children – tend to require youth organisations to address society's concerns about 'problem young people' or young people with 'problems', and become increasingly involved in setting the parameters for work with young people. It is suggested by Treacy (2009) that the youth work sector should resist such pressure to produce 'learning outcomes' or to move towards a 'defined curriculum' and should instead 'restate its commitment' to the importance of relationships as the focus of youth work. He particularly identifies the Irish Youth

Justice Service as being likely to make demands for 'definable outcomes' in return for its 'investment' in Garda Youth Diversion Projects (Treacy, 2009:190).

The under-resourcing of mainstream/universal youth work is an issue raised by both Kiely (2009) and McMahon (2009). McMahon concludes that 'State intervention presents a challenge to universal provision by underfunding mainline work and emphasising targeted provision' (McMahon, 2009:123). The question of the youth work sector's own role in facilitating recent developments, including the increased focus on targeting, is raised by Kiely (2009:15), who suggests that the sector has in fact 'enabled' the State to focus its policy interventions on 'problem' constituencies of young people, while McMahon (2009:122) sees the sector as being 'complicit' with the state in 'positioning young people as passive consumers of youth services'. In a comment on the rapid growth of Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Kiely notes the 'remarkable pace' of the development of this type of youth provision which she claims indicates that the Government 'expects youth work to make a major contribution to the maintenance of law and order' (Kiely, 2009:14). She sees risks for youth organisations of finding their policies and practices being conceived 'along very narrow crime prevention lines' (Kiely, 2009.:24).

There appears to be a strong case to be made that the emphasis on targeting 'problem' groups of young people poses difficulties for 'universal' youth work, which becomes the poor relation, underappreciated and under-funded. In the British context, Jeffs and Smith (2002) challenge the very notion and value of targeted initiatives and put forward a case for the development of universal services, while in a strong plea for a change of direction in Irish youth work, Kiely (2009:29) advises youth work agencies to steer away from targeted youth provision and to campaign for a universal youth work which would 're-engage with young people whose lives are not defined as "problematic" and where the scope of the intervention is open and organic rather than policy driven'.

## Policy Context for Youth Cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects

Apart from developments specifically related to youth work, there have been a number of significant policy initiatives in the area of work with children and young people in Ireland in the relatively recent past. Particularly important were the publication of the *National Children's Strategy: Our Children, Their Lives* (Department of Health and Children, 2000) and the subsequent establishment of the National Children's Office in 2001 'to lead and oversee implementation of the National Children's Strategy' (NCO, 2006). In 2005 the National Children's Office was absorbed into the newly created Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). The Office of the Minister for Children was established as a unit within the Department of Health and Children with links also to the Departments of Education and Science; and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The OMC brought together the National Children's Office, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), the Early Years Education functions of the Department of Education and Science, and the newly established Irish Youth Justice Service (Lalor et al, 2007). In a further development, described by Devlin (2008) as being 'entirely unanticipated within the sector', the

Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science was, in May 2008, transferred to the Department of Health and Children, specifically to the Office of the Minister for Children whose name changed to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA).

The establishment of the Irish Youth Justice Service in 2005 was followed by the publication of the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008–2010* (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008a). Meanwhile, September 2007 saw the publication of *Teenspace, the National Recreation Policy for Young People* (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007a) which set out to provide 'a strategic framework for the promotion of positive recreational opportunities aimed principally at young people aged 12 to 18 years' (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009). These two documents contained provisions of direct relevance to youth work and youth work organisations. These were, respectively, the further development and expansion of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the establishment of youth cafés. These developments could be seen as representing two contrasting approaches to youth provision, that is the 'mainstream' approach in the case of youth cafés contained in the *Teenspace* policy and the more 'targeted' approach in the case of Garda Youth Diversion Projects. Both developments will be considered further in the following sections.

## Youth Cafés

A key proposal in *Teenspace, The National Recreation Policy for Young People* concerned the development of youth cafés as a response to the need for somewhere for young people to go with their friends to 'hang out'. This was a need which had been identified by young people during the research and consultation process for the policy and also in the annual sessions of Dáil na nÓg (the young people's parliament, also developed as part of *the National Children's Strategy*). In September 2007, the then Minister for Children, Mr. Brendan Smith, TD, speaking at the launch of the policy, spoke of 'hanging out' as 'a valid and important aspect of teenage life', recognising that young people need 'a safe warm, dry place to do so'. He noted how young people had identified the need for 'casual recreational opportunities' such as drop-in centres and youth cafés. He went on to speak of the Government's commitment, in the 2007 programme for Government, to the 'structured development' of youth cafés (OMC, 2007b). As part of the development of youth cafés, the OMCYA, together with the National Children's Advisory Council, commissioned the Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, to undertake research into youth café provision in Ireland and also to produce a toolkit and guide to setting up youth cafés. These were published in April 2010 as *Youth Cafés in Ireland: a Best Practice Guide* (Forkan *et al.*, 2010a) and *Youth Café Toolkit: How to set up and run a Youth Café in Ireland* (Forkan *et al.*, 2010b).

The term youth café is widely used to describe a broad range of facilities and services provided in an equally broad range of settings and premises in many cities, towns and parishes across the country. These range from services that operate one evening a week in the corner of the local community hall, staffed entirely by volunteers, to services that are open seven days a week with professional paid staff, supported by volunteers, providing a wide vaeriety of services, activities and opportunities. So what is a youth café? As already mentioned there have been two recently published reports

relating to youth cafés in Ireland (Forkan *et al.*, 2010a; 2010b). In the second of these documents, the *Youth Café Toolkit: How to set up and run a Youth Café in Ireland*, a youth café is described as:

> … a safe, dedicated, quality meeting space for young people ranging in age from 10 to 25 years. It is determined *by* young people *for* young people, in partnership with adults in the locality. In more general terms, a youth café offers the following to young people:
>
> - A relaxed meeting space, which is safe, friendly, inclusive and tolerant;
> - A place for both sexes and for young people from all social and cultural backgrounds to engage in social interaction with their peers in a safe and supportive drug- and alcohol-free environment;
> - A location for relaxation, recreation and entertainment, and, where appropriate, as a site for information, advice or even direct care/service provision;
> - A place where young people can develop good quality relationships with their peers and with adults.
> (Forkan et al, 2010b: 2)

Forkan *et al.* go on to point out that there is 'no set model' for a youth café in Ireland, with each café being unique in its own way. They do however contend that, in general, youth cafés can be categorised into three different types:

- Type 1: … simply a safe meeting place where young people can hang out with their friends, chat, drink coffee or soft drinks, watch TV or movies, or surf the Internet …
- Type 2: … includes all of the things offered above *plus* a variety of recreational and educational activities, chosen by the young people themselves, *plus* information on State and local services of interest to young people. The activities or programmes in this kind of café are usually developmental and/or community-focused …
- Type 3: … the most developed and usually takes a few years to reach this stage. In this kind of café, all the things on offer above in Types 1 and 2 are available, *plus* a range of specific services, directly designed for young people. These might include, for example, education and training, healthcare information (both physical and emotional) and direct targeted assistance. When functioning effectively, this kind of café allows young people to identify their needs, establish their desired outcomes and, therefore, determine the most appropriate level of service provision for themselves.
  (Forkan et al, 2010b:3)

At present most of the established youth cafés are provided by, or operate under the umbrella of, youth work organisations. However they fall into a 'grey area' when it comes to identifying them as youth work. Both Kiely (2009) and McMahon (2009) express some reservations with regard to youth cafés, in particular due to the links that many have to Health Service Executive (HSE) funding and their health promotion remit. However, in the *Teenspace* policy, according to Minister Smith, youth cafés are seen as offering great potential to provide a 'wide range of developmental, educational

and information programmes to young people' (OMC, 2007b). In the policy document itself it is advised that such facilities should offer 'a range of activities and developmental programmes' for young people as well as 'just a safe place to sit and talk to friends', while being capable of operating at 'different levels of service provision' designed to meet the needs of particular areas and also providing 'health and other information/education' relevant to the needs of the young people (OMC, 2007a: 62–63).

It is not clear how the Government intends to proceed with youth cafés on a long term basis, particularly with regard to their funding, notwithstanding the provision of €1.5 million in a youth café funding scheme in April 2010 (the amount allocated corresponds almost exactly to the number of under 25s in Ireland, equating to an allocation of €1 per young person). Despite the extensive nature of the *Teenspace* policy document, the provision of 'dedicated youth cafés' is predicated upon the availability of resources, as Action 22 of the Implementation Action Plan states: 'Resources permitting and following a local needs assessment, dedicated youth cafés should be provided on a phased basis …' (OMC, 2007a: 129). In a further indication of this uncertainty regarding funding, a report in the *Irish Examiner* (12/11/2007) stated that the Government were to look to 'rich donors' and 'philanthropists' to help fund the development of youth cafés.

## Garda Youth Diversion Projects

As already indicated the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008–2010* (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008a) included among its objectives the expansion and development of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects. Specifically included in the objectives were the development of new guidelines for the projects (objective 2.1.4), and the increase in the number of projects from 100 in 2008 to 'about 130' by the end of 2010 and 168 by 2012 (objective 2.1.8). The Strategy defined Garda Youth Diversion Projects as:

> community-based initiatives intended to help divert young people away from crime and towards positive and socially responsible behaviour. The projects challenge offending behaviour and develop children's skills so they are in a better position to avail of opportunities for education, employment, training, sport, art, music and other activities, as well as providing a structured environment to add stability to a young person's life (IYJS, 2008a: 43).

The first two of these projects, initially known as Garda Special Projects, were set up in 1991 'following disturbances involving young people and the Gardai in Ronanstown in November of that year' (Kilkelly, 2006:91). Subsequently the projects were seen as working well and their continuance and expansion was recommended so that by 2001 a total of sixty four projects had been established (Centre for Social and Educational Research, 2003). By 2008 this had grown to one hundred projects (see Appendix 2, *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008–2010* for a complete list of Garda Youth Diversion Projects). Although 'youth justice work' is identified in the Garda Youth Diversion Project Guidelines (CSER, 2003: 4) as being 'different to youth work in general' because of the focus on helping young people 'to deal with the issues surrounding their offending and the need for behavioural change', the projects are, nevertheless, significant in the context of youth work for a number of reasons.. Firstly, the service

engages with young people (mainly those in the 12–17 age group, although on occasions young people aged 10–11 and over 17 years can also be accommodated). Secondly, the projects, in the main, employ youth work skills and methods in their work with young people. Thirdly, all participation by young people in Garda Youth Diversion Projects is on a voluntary basis. Fourthly, many of those employed as staff in these projects are 'professional youth workers or community workers' (Lalor et al, 2007: 256). In a development connected to staffing, it was decided in 2008 that all 100 Garda Youth Diversion Projects should be staffed by two workers and funding to support this development came from the European Social Fund. According to the *Garda Youth Diversion Project Procedures Manual ESF 2007–2013* (IYJS, 2008b), 24 projects had received sanction to employ the additional worker in 2007, while the remaining 76 projects were approved for an additional worker 'in 2008 and beyond'.

In the context of the 'targeted' approach to work with young people, these projects can be seen to target two groups in particular, while also allowing for the participation of other young people from the 'mainstream'. The GYDP Guidelines (CSER, 2003) identify the 'primary project target group', which should form the majority of participants, as 'young people who have entered the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme and are considered at risk of remaining within the justice system' (Guideline 5). The secondary target group consists of young people who are not in the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme but are considered 'at risk of entering the justice system at a future date' (Guideline 6). The third group comprises young people from the mainstream who are not considered at risk, who may be friends of some of those in the other groups, or may act as positive peer influences, or may also act to support and encourage the others. Young people who enter the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme may be referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Projects if deemed suitable but the majority do not as they are not thought likely to reoffend. Although these two services are linked they are in fact separate. The Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, which originally commenced in Dublin in 1963 as the Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) scheme and was launched nationwide in 1981, was put on a statutory basis by Part 4 of the Children Act 2001. The Garda Youth Diversion Projects, described by Kilkelly (2006: 66) as 'locally based youth crime prevention schemes' operate in a more informal way.

## Assessment

It is arguable that both youth cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects represent the emerging face of work with young people in Ireland, if not exactly traditional 'youth work'. At a practical level many of those involved as workers in both youth cafés and Garda projects, whether paid or volunteer, are from the field of youth and community work. In theory all of the young people who attend or participate in both settings do so on a voluntary basis, although there is some debate regarding the degree to which attendance in the Garda projects is in practice 'voluntary'. It could be argued that this presents a problem in defining the projects as youth work. However Ord (2009) has recently questioned the necessity to have voluntary participation as a defining requirement for youth work.

There is little doubt about the 'crime prevention' intent and the associated 'targeted' nature of Garda Youth Diversion Projects. This may be more of an issue than voluntary

participation, although much of the public funding that is available for work with young people in Ireland is in fact 'targeted' in one way or another and as previously mentioned much youth work since the earliest days has also been clearly targeted. It is possible to see the work of the Garda projects fitting in with the more 'conservative' approaches to youth work represented in the 'character building' and 'personal development' models as outlined by Hurley and Treacy (1993), which they contrast with the 'critical social education' and 'radical social change' models. It can be argued however that it is preferable to see the Gardaí engage with 'problematic' young people or 'young people with problems' in the context of these projects rather than in a more confrontational way as was more often the case in the past, and still is often the case.

In many ways the youth café concept would seem to be an ideal fit with youth work. Notwithstanding this, there are some doubts and Powell *et al.* (2010:6), while acknowledging the importance of youth cafés in the youth work sector, refer to 'mixed views' as to whether this model 'actually constitutes youth work, and the degree to which it differs from previous youth work interventions'. While Forkan et al.(2010a) present youth cafés as 'having the potential to act as an innovative response to the changing needs of young people in modern Ireland', there is no doubt that the youth café concept that is presented here is rather a conservative one, which like the Garda projects is quite in keeping with the character building and personal development models outlined by Hurley and Treacy (1993). Youth cafés are framed within the broad context of youth development theory, including social support theory, attachment theory, the development of resilience, and the civic engagement of young people. Mention is also made of the potential to engage positively with 'troubled or troublesome' youth within 'civic society'. The use of the word 'civic' rather than the 'civil' in this context may be telling. The difference may appear subtle but there are very real differences between 'civic society', with overtones of duty and loyalty, and 'civil society', which conveys a greater sense of politicisation and critical participation. There does not seem to be a sense that the 'civic engagement' envisaged here could include the politicisation of young people or their engagement as critical citizens who might form an opinion that there are shortcomings in the social, political or economic structures of the society which could be changed (there is no 'revolutionary potential' in Skott-Myhre's (2005) terms).

There was a time when much youth work in Ireland was seen as adopting a more critical approach. The *Final Report of the National Youth Policy Committee* ('Costello Report') (Department of Labour, 1984), was seen by many as groundbreaking at the time and is still the most progressive statement on youth work in Ireland to date. It emphasised the empowerment of young people, advocating their social and political education, with the aim that they become critical participants in the society:

> In summary, then, we believe that youth work must be addressed to the developmental needs of the individual: through social education, it must be concerned with enabling the individual to develop his/her own vision of the future and the social skills needed to play an active role in society. If youth work is to have any impact on the problems facing young people today then it must concern itself with social change. This implies that youth work must have a key role both in enabling young people to analyse society and in motivating and helping them to develop the skills and capacities to become involved in effecting change.
> (Dept. of Labour, 1984:116)

Many people in youth work today still believe in that type of critical, empowering engagement with young people, with 'critical social education' (Hurley and Treacy, 1993) as the model of practice. The case study research by Devlin and Gunning (2009) found strong levels of support among youth workers (both paid and volunteer) for the view that youth work should be about both social education and social change. However, there was also strong support for some traditional 'character building' aims and, in particular, for personal development ones. In fact, the authors suggest that 'personal development within a community context' might be defined as the 'dominant discourse' of the youth workers in their study (Devlin and Gunning, 2009: 15).

The current author would suggest that personal development, with its predominantly conservative, individualised approach, fits well with the agenda of our neo-liberal, individualised society. This perhaps reflects wider changes in the world. The apparent demise of socialism, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, has led to the reappearance of what Powell (2007:5) refers to as 'the old preoccupations and concerns of conservative thought'. This implies a rather pessimistic view of human nature and an associated view that the essential role of governance is 'the imposition of order'.

Where do concepts such as social justice, equality and inclusion fit within the neo-liberal model? These are among the key espoused values of youth work, explicitly set out as such in the *National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007* (Department of Education and Science, 2003) although commentators such as Kiely (2009) suggests that such values are often more rhetoric than reality. However youth cafés, if seen in terms broader than those in which they have been thought and written about to date, may present an opportunity for both an expansion of 'universal/mainstream' youth work, and a more critical engagement with young people. Although some funding has been provided for youth cafés, they require a lot more in order to be put on a solid footing and enabled to provide proper 'open access' youth work services available for all young people. Youth cafés have a lot of potential to provide a 'public space' for young people, providing them with an opportunity to engage in civil society, not as mere acquiescent consumers, but as active critical participants with opinions and voices. In this context it is vitally important that the values and ethos that underpin youth cafés are carefully thought out so as to provide that liberating, empowering space associated with Critical Social Education (Hurley and Treacy, 1993; Hurley, 2002), rather than a space concerned with 'control, regulation and conformity' (Tucker, 2004:81). Perhaps the 'Coffee Houses' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could provide an insight into the possibilities. These were places where, according to Powell (2007:56) 'a conversational democracy took shape that sparkled with new ideas'. Suter (2005: 108) describes how, in the English context, such coffee houses were sometimes called 'penny universities', where for the price of a cup of coffee people could 'participate in discussions on a variety of topics', mix with 'all sorts of people', in a convivial atmosphere where there was 'no limit on the topics that could be discussed', helping to create 'greater political freedom'.

## Conclusion

The ongoing development of youth cafés and Garda Youth Diversion Projects present both opportunities and challenges for youth work in Ireland. Whether or not they can

be regarded as youth work may depend on how youth work itself is defined and conceptualised. The diverse and contested nature of youth work becomes evident when trying to establish a clear definition. In general terms youth cafés could be regarded as 'universal' in nature (although it is acknowledged that there are exceptions to this), while Garda Youth Diversion Projects are clearly 'targeted' in orientation. The increasing emphasis and investment in 'targeted' youth work at the expense of 'universal' provision is a cause for concern, with 'universal' approaches suffering a lack of funding and support.

Perhaps youth work in general needs to reflect on the direction it is taking. The emphasis on personal development in much of current youth work practice can be contrasted with a more critical, liberative tradition which was represented by the *Costello Report* (1984), and embodied in the model of critical social education presented by Hurley and Treacy (1993). Does youth work need to regain that tradition, reclaiming those values related to empowerment, social justice and equality?

It requires courage and a willingness to contemplate alternatives to see in both youth work in general and in youth cafés in particular the potential for a greater, more critical engagement with and for young people. Youth cafés do not have to be conservative spaces; they can be critical spaces that foster debate and questioning – maybe they could even provide space where young people could participate in and contribute to the development of what Wilkinson and Pickett (2010: 4) refer to as 'a shared vision for a better society'.

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**Biographical Note**

Micheal O'hAodain is a college lecturer at the School of Applied Social Studies at the National University of Ireland, University College Cork, where he is a member of the B.Soc.Sc. (youth & community work) course team. Before joining UCC, Micheal worked as a Garda, including fifteen years spent in community policing.

**Contact Details**

Micheal O'hAodain,
School of Applied Social Studies,
University College Cork,
William Thompson House,
Donovan's Road,
Cork, Ireland.
Tel: + 353-21-4903753
Email: m.ohaodain@ucc.ie