

# Recording Information

## Introduction

It has become so much a part of your professional life. You love it or hate it. The session is over but you still have to write it up. The programme is finished but it needs to be evaluated. A particular young person has very sensitive issues that have to be carefully recorded. Professional reflective practice requires us to record our work. But also, in order to meet the growing demands to evidence the impact and the value of youth work, recording information has become a necessary and key activity.

The Youth Work Act 2001 describes youth work as 'planned and systematic' and this places more demands on youth workers than ever before to record information and to keep it in a confidential, sensitive and legally correct way. That's why it is essential to develop a sensitive, professional, understandable and user-friendly policy on recording information.

A comprehensive policy on recording information is the means by which the privacy rights of individuals are safeguarded in relation to the processing of their personal records and data. You have certain key responsibilities in relation to the information that you process and the eight principles governing this are briefly laid out below.

# Recording Information

## 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.

### *Creating a policy*

- Who should be involved in the process of writing this policy?
- What help might you need in writing it e.g. do you need legal advice?
- What time is allocated for recording information as part of the working week?
- What training do workers need in relation to information recording, sharing and storage?
- What are the responsibilities of the youth workers /management committee?
- What will happen if someone does not follow this policy?
- When will you review the policy?

### *Information Recording*

- What information do you need to record, in what form and format?
- What information do you not record?
- What other ways can information be recorded that provides true access, e.g. those with reading difficulties or with impaired vision?
- Why do you need the information you keep?
- What information do you need to keep to meet funding requirements?
- How will you record information that can help to shape the development of your service?
- What kind of information should you keep under child protection and welfare guidelines?
- What will you do with work diaries when they are finished or a staff member leaves?
- How might reports be written e.g. separate fact from opinion and be aware of using jargon/ acronyms?

### *Information Sharing*

- How will you share information with other agencies/parents/guardians/young people?
- What kind of information will you need someone's permission to share?
- How will you deal with 'soft' information that you hear informally or from a third party?
- Consider the rights of different age groups and their entitlement to access recorded information in relation to them?
- How and when will you tell people about the type of information you keep about them and their right to see it e.g. during the engagement phase?

### *Information Storage*

- Where will you store it? How long will you store it for?
- How will you keep it safe and secure?
- How and when will information be destroyed?
- What are the procedures for taking information out of the premises?

## Key things to ensure

- Involvement in the design of the policy of all people you expect to follow it
- All legal requirements are met within the policy
- Written records are kept using dark pens as this makes it possible to photocopy
- Sensitive data is treated with respect

## 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:

The relevant Acts are the Freedom of Information Act 1997 (amended 2003) and the Data Protection Acts 1988 (amended 2003). Some of the specific legal demands on youth projects/services need clarification but the legislation promotes best practice.

Generally there is an obligation to make sure that proper steps are taken to collect and store personal information about young people using your service. There are 8 principles of Data Protection laid out in these acts that apply to manual (handwritten or typed records held in filing cabinets) and computerised information:

1. Get and deal with information fairly
2. Keep it only for specific, clear and lawful purposes
3. Use and disclose it only in ways fitting with these purposes
4. Keep it safe and secure
5. Keep it accurate, complete and up to date
6. Make sure that it is relevant, adequate and not too much
7. Keep it for no longer than is needed
8. Give a copy of his/her personal information to someone who asks for it
- 9.

Other relevant legislation and guidelines include:

- 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
- U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- Youth Work Act 2001
- Child Care Act 1991
- “Our Duty to Care”, Department of Health and Children, 2002

## Where else to get 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.

Look in the publications section of the CDYSB website under the ‘Forms for Publication for Voluntary Clubs and Groups’ at [www.cdysb.ie](http://www.cdysb.ie).

[www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie) is the website of the Data Protection Commissioner and gives more detail about your rights and responsibilities under the acts.

# Recording Information

## A policy on Recording Information 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 recording information 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. You might also be clear about your expectations of external agencies with who you share information.
- 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 are the responsibilities of the management committee or who will have access to information. 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 recording information policy. The recording of information is such a key part of professional practice that there will be links to all elements of your work. Links to other policy areas, should be identified in this section. All your policies must inter-connect; otherwise the vision for your youth project/service may become confused and pull people in different directions