

Residentials/Trips Away

Introduction

You're on the side of a mountain – hailstones have arrived and the group are not too happy. You're in the canoe but two young people are refusing to wear the life jacket because the colour doesn't suit them. It's 3am in the hostel, you're exhausted but 23 young people have no interest in sleeping. You're thinking why do you do it? The training never prepared you for this.

And then you remember the little breakthroughs of earlier years. The quiet one who became a leader. The crucial snippet of information shared over a hot chocolate. The new talents that had the opportunity to emerge. The good memories and stories the young people tell over and over again when they come home.

Working with young people away from the immediate environment of the youth project/service's premises has so many potential benefits, not least the opportunity to build a deeper and more meaningful working relationship. However, working in this way presents challenges both to a youth project/service and to youth workers. The statement of good practice for activities outside of the youth project/service premises emphasises that they should be systematically planned and organised with young people.¹ It is therefore desirable to develop a clear and effective policy in this area.

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 activities outside of the youth project/service premises also gives a good summary of some of the practical aspects to consider.

Planning

- What are the needs of the young people and how will the residential programme/trip away meet those needs?
- Are the activities relevant to the age group?
- Will youth workers undertake a pre visit to a centre to carry out a risk assessment prior to the residential programme/trip away?
- How will issues of diversity and equality be managed?
- How will the young people be involved in the planning of the residential programme/trip away?
- How will parents/guardians be involved in the planning process?
- How will information be given and shared with parents/guardians?
- Is there an allocated budget for the residential programme/trip away and is there provision within this for emergencies?
- Do you require additional insurance cover for the residential programmes/trip away?
- What transport might be used and what documentation and insurance requirements will your youth project/service need?
- Does your youth project/service have a transport check list developed for the use of your own transport and commercial hire?
- How many youth workers are necessary and appropriate to ensure a proper ratio of youth workers to young people?
- Will the youth workers working on the residential programme/trip away know the young people? What issues might occur if they do not?
- How will the youth workers be supported to deal with any issues that might arise during the residential programme/trip away?
- Will there be a nominated 'Contact Person' for youth workers and parents/guardians during the residential programme/trip away?
- Will youth workers have an up to date contact list with details of parents/guardians and other emergency contacts with them while on residential programme/trip away?
- What are the ground rules and how might they be agreed with the young people prior to the residential programme/trip away?
- How will the youth project/service's child protection and welfare policy be observed?

Emergencies and medical issues

- What consent forms are necessary e.g. medical information and permission to be attended by a doctor for under 18 year olds?
- Are youth workers aware of the youth project/service's critical incident management policy?
- Is there a youth worker with first aid training on the residential programme/trip away?
- What are the youth project/service's arrangements in relation to the storage and holding of young people's prescribed medication by youth workers?

During the residential programme/trip away

- Is there an agreed drug and alcohol policy that applies to youth workers and young people while on a residential programme/trip away?
- What are the rules and health and safety procedures of the centre you are visiting and are youth workers and young people aware of them?
- What are the agreed sleeping arrangements for males and females, youth workers and young people e.g. separate sleeping arrangements, supervision?
- How will child protection and welfare be observed and the privacy of young people respected?
- How will young people's money be dealt with and recorded on the residential programme/trip away?

Recording and evaluation

- How will the residential programme/trip away be recorded?
- How and when will the residential programme/trip away be reviewed? Who has responsibility for making this happen and in what time frame?
- How and when will this policy be reviewed?

Key things to ensure

- An appropriate balance between centre-based programmes/activities and residential programmes/trips away
- Appropriate resources are committed
- Clarity around the purpose and expected outcomes for young people of the residential programme/trip away

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:

- 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
- Our Duty to Care, Department of Health and Children 2002
- Youth Work Act 2001

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.

The Child Protection Unit was set up in 2004 and works primarily with youth work organisations in addressing the needs of the youth work sector in relation to child protection. It is available at www.childprotection.ie

Residentials/Trips Away

Léargas is Ireland's National Agency for the management of National, European and International co-operation programmes. They have extensive experience in supporting groups to organise exchanges and international programmes. This work is documented and available at www.leargas.ie in the youth section.

The youth work links and ideas website will give you connections to many different youth work resources on the Internet. It is found at www.youthwork.com

A policy on Residentials/Trips Away 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 residentials/trips away 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. WHO MUST FOLLOW THIS POLICY** This section could again be bullet pointed with who you expect to follow this policy. This might include for example the youth workers and project leader. If the residential/trip away is undertaken on an interagency basis the expectations of each agency are best worked out and agreed upon in advance.
- 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 'contact person'. 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 residentials/trips away policy. Links to other policy areas, such as your health and safety policy and child protection and welfare 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

¹ *Statement of Good Practice: Activities Outside of the Youth Project/Service Premises*