

TOWARDS STANDARDS FOR QUALITY COMMUNITY WORK

**AN ALL-IRELAND STATEMENT OF VALUES,
PRINCIPLES AND WORK STANDARDS**





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Foreword

The development of this document, *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work*, was overseen by an *ad hoc* group of community workers, educators and other stakeholders from a variety of agencies and institutions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is presented as a tool to support those involved in community work. It is also presented as a work in progress, open to development in the light of changing circumstances and comments and feedback from users.

Towards Standards seeks to recognise and underpin community work and its ethos in promoting change. Its purpose is to provide a framework for community work in the context of economic, social and cultural developments in Irish society. The hope is that it will capture the richness and multidimensionality of community work in an increasingly diverse Ireland.

The *ad hoc* group acknowledges the particular contribution of the Community Workers' Co-operative and of the funding from the Combat Poverty Agency that supported this work. We are also particularly grateful for the participation and contribution at various stages in the process of people from a wide variety of diverse backgrounds, both from the North of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including universities, community projects, partnership companies, and minority organisations, including Traveller groups. Their continued support for this work in progress will be crucial for its success. Participation from the North of Ireland was also supported by the Community Work Education and Training Network in which the Northern Ireland *ad hoc* group members are involved.

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It should be noted when reading this document that the terms community work and community development are used interchangeably in recognition of their interchangeable use in practice in both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

Introduction

Community work is concerned with working collectively with communities and groups for positive social change, inclusion and equality. Over the past fifty years and more, voluntary and professional community work has supported communities in seeking such change. If effective community work practice is to be ensured in a rapidly changing Ireland of increasingly diverse communities, it is vital that standards are set to guide and focus practice.

The aim of this publication, *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work*, is to provide a reference framework for all community work stakeholders – employers, communities, funders, and education and training providers, as well as paid and unpaid practitioners. *Towards Standards* is concerned with setting the criteria - knowledge, skills, qualities, values and practice principles - for good community work practice, and for education and training for that practice. *Towards Standards* therefore outlines what should be expected of community workers and others using community work methods and approaches.

The framework has been developed by practitioners, educators and funders from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to be relevant in both jurisdictions and to reflect the distinct ethos of Irish community work. This was done acknowledging the differences associated with different sets of legislation and policies but recognising the key similarities in values and principles, as well as the continued importance of cross-border initiatives and worker mobility. It is intended that the framework will provide the basis for the development of community work education and training endorsement criteria, linking all levels of such education from short local courses to full professional programmes.

This document has been prepared with social work education and youth work standards in mind and with reference to the work of Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)¹ and the Training Agencies Group (TAG)².

Key to ensuring the value of the standards will be their use by all stakeholders. In order to evaluate them and contribute to their continuous development, an initial review is proposed in three years, followed by five yearly revisions to ensure continued relevance.

Setting Standards

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on quality and standards in a range of occupations including the social professions such as social work, social care and youth work. *Towards Standards* is concerned with setting out the key principles, expectations and ethical boundaries relevant to practice, and to education and training for that practice.

While the setting of standards is relatively new for some occupations in the Republic of Ireland, the process of setting standards across the UK, including in the North of Ireland, is well established. Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) is the Sector Skills Council with responsibility for ensuring the setting and maintenance of standards developed by the occupations included within the 'community learning and development' constituency. This comprises youth work, community development, community education, development education, family learning, working with parents, and community-based adult learning. A review of the LLUK National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work is now underway. It is intended that this document will inform that process.

In the Republic of Ireland the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework³, and of the joint North-South Education and Training Standards Committee for endorsement of Professional Youth Work Education and Training, highlights the emphasis on standards. In addition, the consultations for this document indicate clearly that community work practitioners, trainers and funders increasingly recognise the need for a set of standards to govern and safeguard community work as a profession, and to inform and guide the training and education of community workers.

Background and Process

In 2002, community workers in the Republic of Ireland met in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) under the auspices of the Department of Applied Social Studies to discuss the development of the discipline, and of community work training and education. The objective was set of developing standards and training and education endorsement processes that would not contradict the community work tradition of ensuring access to the profession for those initially involved as participants in community initiatives.

In 2004, the Community Work Education and Training Network (CWETN)⁴ in Northern Ireland and the Combat Poverty Agency⁵ funded research to explore the potential links between addressing poverty and community work education and training on an all-Ireland basis. The research findings highlighted practitioner concerns about practice standards and the need to develop an all-Ireland approach to professional endorsement of education and training at a range of levels.

In 2005, a small *ad hoc* group incorporating the priorities of both initiatives was formed. In support of its work the Combat Poverty Agency funded the Community Workers' Co-operative (CWC)⁶ to consult with community work practitioners. Subsequently, a seminar, '*Standards and Professional Endorsement of Community Work Education and Training*', was held in the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM) in October 2005. The seminar participants, which included community work practitioners, educators, funders and officials from relevant government departments North and South, considered an outline report on the standards consultation undertaken by the CWC. This report highlighted the importance placed by practitioners on developing standards, including the importance of the inter-relationship between standards and endorsement.

The seminar participants supported continued work by the *ad hoc* group towards conclusion of the work on the development of standards and a comprehensive endorsement framework. Additional consultation processes with practitioners were undertaken leading to this publication.

In developing the document, standards in other associated or similar professions such as social work and youth work, as well as community development standards elsewhere, were reviewed. In addition emphasis was placed throughout the process on developing a set of standards for community work that, while acknowledging the differences, North and South, would have a relevance and applicability across and between both jurisdictions.

A summary of the consultation process is outlined in Appendix B.

Defining Community Work/Community Development

Community work or community development involves an analysis of social and economic situations and collective action for change based on that analysis. It is centred on a series of principles that seek to go beyond consultation to participation and beyond capacity building to consciousness raising and empowerment. It recognises the changing and often hidden nature of the structural inequalities based on 'race', class, gender and disability to name but a few. It seeks to be transformative rather than conforming and empowering rather than controlling.

Community work is not a process that takes place in a short timeframe as it seeks to address deeply rooted inequalities and forms of disadvantage. It is recognised that it takes varying lengths of time to achieve tangible results depending on the community involved. Although various definitions of community development/community work are used by different organisations and groups, definitions generally have a number of common elements.

Definitions

In the Republic, the Community Development Programme of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs defines community development as being *“about promoting positive social change in society in favour of those who benefit least from national and global social and economic developments...(it) seeks to challenge the causes of poverty and disadvantage and to offer new opportunities for those lacking choice, power and resources”*⁷.

The CWC identifies the essential, distinguishing elements of community work as work that:

- Involves and enables people to work together to influence, change and exert control over the social, political and economic issues that affect their lives.
- Is about a collective focus rather than a response to individual crisis.
- Challenges inequitable power relationships within society and promotes the redistribution of wealth and resources in a more just and equitable fashion.
- Is based on participative processes and structures which include and empower marginalised and excluded groups within society.

- Is based on solidarity with the interests of those experiencing social exclusion.
- Is understood as including both geographic communities and communities of interest.
- Presents alternative ways of working, seeks to be dynamic, innovative and creative in approach.
- Challenges the nature of the relationship between the users and providers of services.
- Is open and responsive to innovation from other countries and seeks to build alliances with other organisations challenging marginalisation in their own countries and globally.
- Involves strategies which confront prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, socioeconomic status, age, sexuality, skin colour or disability⁸.

Pobal is an intermediary organisation that manages social inclusion and equality programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. It takes a community development approach to its work and in particular supports community development through measures such as the Local Development Social Inclusion and RAPID programmes. Pobal describes community development as:

“.. a developmental activity composed of both a task and a process. The task is the achievement of social change linked to equality and social justice, and the process is the application of the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and coordinated way”⁹.

The Combat Poverty Agency defines Community Development Work as:

“The long term process whereby people who are marginalised or living in poverty work together to identify their needs, create change, exert more influence in the decisions which affect their lives and work to improve the quality of their lives, the communities in which they live, and the societies of which they are a part”¹⁰.

In the North of Ireland, the Community Development Review Group¹¹ 1991 defined community development as:

“a process which embraces ... community work and other community endeavour – whether geographical or issue-based – with an emphasis towards the disadvantaged impoverished and powerless within society. Its values include participation, empowerment and self-help. And while it is essentially about collective action, it helps to realise the potential of both individuals and groups within communities. In the interest of developing this potential, community development challenges prejudice, sectarianism and the unequal distribution of resources – both in terms of financial resources and access to skills and knowledge.

Community development is the process which underpins collectivist approaches to education, economic development and the delivery of services in a situation in Northern Ireland where, for various reasons, there have been few opportunities for communities to participate in the democratic process”¹².

The LLUK National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work¹³ state that:

“the key purpose of community development work is collectively to bring about social change and justice by working with communities to:

- Identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities.
- Plan, organise and take action.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action in ways that challenge oppression and tackle inequalities”¹⁴.

The Budapest Declaration, which was agreed by the one hundred and thirty community workers, researchers, funders, policy makers and representatives from governments, civil society organisations and community groups from thirty three countries across the European Union and beyond, who attended the ‘Building Civil Society in Europe through Community Development’ conference in Budapest in 2004, defined community development in the following way:

“community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity, and a specific skills and knowledge base”¹⁵.

Community Development in Ireland

The tradition of community work in the Republic of Ireland and in the North of Ireland is vocational and professional, paid and unpaid. A distinct discipline and ethos has evolved, committed to working professionally and collectively with communities for social change, inclusion and equality. This discipline is strong in

its dedication to networking, solidarity and engagement with all of the stakeholders, including central government and local authorities.

Currently people are employed as community workers in a variety of work contexts. In both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, community workers are engaged *inter alia* in community development projects, family resource centres, local development and partnership companies and a range of other community or development organisations at local, regional and national level. They work with urban and rural communities to overcome disadvantage, discrimination and marginalisation, and/or with a range of groups experiencing discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities including: Travellers; women; people with disabilities; minority ethnic groups; refugees, asylum seekers and new communities; migrant workers and their families; lone parents; older people and other people experiencing poverty. In the statutory sector community workers are employed in local authorities, district councils, health trusts and bodies.

Community development may be the sole focus for some organisations. Other organisations may be involved in service provision, with some community workers employed to involve communities in this work. Still others may include community work as a dimension of their main task. These variations of focus and approach can lead to different interpretations of the role of a community worker and thus different expectations of the work that a person will engage in. Community workers are employed at all levels as project workers and as managers, organising, initiating, leading, facilitating and developing new and innovative ways of working with, and advocating on behalf of, marginalised communities.

Towards Standards sets down what is expected of a community worker and seeks to provide clarity to the task in all contexts. While these criteria reflect the uniqueness of community work, they are also consistent with other social professions. It is intended that they will be useful in naming and recognising the knowledge, skills and prior experience which community workers need to bring to their work in the variety of arenas outlined above. They are designed, as already indicated, to be useful for all community workers, regardless of their professional functions; the settings in which they work; the communities or groups with which they work; and the capacity, paid or unpaid, in which they work.

Community Work and Community Development in the North of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

In Ireland as elsewhere, persistent problems of poverty, discrimination, inequality and social division have accompanied economic growth and development. Responses based on community work and community development approaches seek to bring about social change that will result in enduring improvements for those communities experiencing high levels of social exclusion and discrimination. Over the past three decades or so responses to these needs have evolved from an almost exclusively charity/beneficence and self-help approach towards actions focused more on structural, institutional and programmatic adjustments, more likely to achieve sustainable change. This evolution is also visible in national and European policy relating to social inclusion, equality, integration and reconciliation. In this context, community work has developed as an effective means of articulating the needs, identifying the root causes of, and addressing inequalities and social exclusion experienced by communities marginalized within modern industrial societies. Over the same period a professionally robust and inclusive community work tradition has developed in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland committed to these aims. The current economic downturn may lead to some retrenchment in progress. It will also, however, inevitably lead to new challenges, and community development methods will continue to be relevant in responding to needs arising from this new economic situation.

DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In the North of Ireland, community work approaches have been used to address inequalities and issues of local concern over an extended period. Community development emerged as part of the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s and took root in local communities. From the '60s onwards, groups and communities lobbied for change and resisted unwelcome developments in services, rights and political processes. Community development in the 1980s evolved as the core channel for the administration of the proliferation of government-led unemployment schemes. Many grass-roots community initiatives thrived and were better placed to deliver much needed resources and services to local communities as a result of the boost to their staff complement.

In 1991, the Community Development Review Group recognised the vital role played by community work and outlined a statutory response in support of this work. On foot of this, community work became a central element of the Department of Health and Social Services Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector¹⁶.

Since then strategic support for community development has been provided by the Voluntary Community Unit within the Department of Social Development, with additional support provided by the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development and by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

The Good Friday / Belfast Agreement (1998) framed many of the policy initiatives that aim to advance and guarantee equality and human rights, and promote social inclusion and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Subsequent agreements and policy documents played an important role in helping to highlight the role of community development in the promotion of social inclusion. For example, The Compact¹⁷ (1998), promoted partnership between government and the community and voluntary sectors. It highlighted government's commitment to 'building real relationships' and provided a framework for the working context of community development in the North of Ireland. Partners for Change (2001-2004)¹⁸, the interdepartmental strategy for supporting and resourcing the community and voluntary sectors, recommended the establishment of a taskforce on resourcing and supporting the sectors. Investing Together (2004)¹⁹, the outcome of the taskforce's work, identified the establishment of quality standards, and the training and development of community workers as key to the overall support and resourcing process. Positive Steps (2005)²⁰ provided further endorsement for the need for kite-marking (bench-marking) and quality standards to encourage and support organisations to embrace a quality approach to their work.

In recent years the government's Review of Public Administration and the development of Community Support Plans earmark an increased role for community development within revised local government structures.

The peace process brought a marked increase in both the number of community development organisations and the number of community workers

employed to address a wide range of social needs in both rural and urban settings. A strong focus of this community work approach has been on developing inter-agency partnerships and cross-sector working. The peace process has enabled deeply rooted inequalities to be given greater visibility and priority. Promoting social and economic regeneration and addressing the legacy of the conflict has been central to the aims of successive rounds of EU Structural Funds and the Peace Programme funds in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties since the mid 1990s. Community development approaches have been a core part of this process.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Community work in the Republic of Ireland was visible in the 1930s, '40s and '50s in the Muintir na Tíre²¹ movement, and in the local social service councils of the 1960s and early '70s. The renewed focus on poverty highlighted through the Catholic Bishops Kilkenny Poverty Conferences and the first (European) Anti-Poverty Programme in the 1970s brought a shift from the parish as the focus of organisation to the issues and needs of specific social categories and communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Unemployment, lone parenting, the needs of Travellers and women were among the dominant themes in this new community development work.

Since the mid 1980s and the move to needs-based strategic responses to poverty, unemployment and disadvantage in the Republic of Ireland, community development has been a core mechanism in actions and initiatives to create the conditions to allow progress towards more integrated and socially cohesive societies. The rationale for community work as a response to poverty and disadvantage in successive poverty and community development programmes lay in the notion of empowerment. This refers to the capacity of excluded groups and individuals to be enhanced to the extent where they are enabled to become actively involved in addressing both the causes and consequences of their marginalisation. Community work was seen as the best way of ensuring the empowerment of those living in poverty and disadvantage.

Under the EU Structural Funds, community development became an integral part of local development strategies for the creation of community capacity upon which other social and economic initiatives could be built. During this period there were significant gains from the use of community work actions as direct

interventions to empower and progress target groups and as an accompaniment to broader integrated local development strategies to tackle social inclusion.

Published in 2000, the White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector aimed to provide a more cohesive framework of support and encouragement for the community and voluntary sector. It gave formal recognition to the partnership ethos that informs much of the working relationship between the two sectors, while recognising the differences between them. The White Paper recognises the importance of the values and principles associated with community work.

Most recently community work and community work methods in the Republic of Ireland are acknowledged as being central to achieving the aspirations contained in Towards 2016²², the National Social Partnership Agreement, the social inclusion priorities of the National Development Plan (NDP)²³, the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR)²⁴, the National Women's Strategy²⁵, the National Primary Care Strategy²⁶ and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion²⁷, and for Programme responses such as the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP)²⁸, the PEACE Programme²⁹, the Community Development Programme (CDP)³⁰, the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme³¹, the RAPID Programme³² and the developing social inclusion role of local authorities. Community work is also important in realising the objectives of the cohesion process³³, designed to bring about a more strategic application of social inclusion and local development.

Community development and community work methods are also key to the success of emerging strategies to promote the integration of new communities and for initiatives to promote equality and address discrimination by working in ways that involve and empower groups directly affected.

The Purpose of Towards Standards

The purpose of Towards Standards is to set out the knowledge, skills, qualities, values, and practice principles that combine to form standards relating to community work practice, and to education and training for that practice. Ethically and professionally community workers have obligations to their employers, to funders, to the communities with which they work, to the profession and to society. In this context Towards Standards provides a framework that outlines and promotes quality community development work. It outlines the expectations of community work practice and expresses the values and principles that are integral to community work. They apply in the following contexts:

- Where community work is undertaken on an unpaid/voluntary basis.
- Where a person is employed as a community worker.
- Where community work methods are being used in specific areas of work - for example community health and adult education initiatives.

They are designed to be useful to the following stakeholders:

For **community workers**, the standards can be used in developing strategies and work plans, monitoring and reflecting on practice and managing performance.

For **training agencies and the proposed future endorsement body** the standards can be used as the basis for the development of curricula for community work courses and the assessment and endorsement frameworks for such programmes.

For **employers** they provide a central reference point for overseeing the development and implementation of projects and strategies of community work employees and the recruitment, support and supervision of staff.

Finally, for **funders and policy makers** they provide benchmarks against which funding can be administered, work assessed and related policy proposals appraised.

Towards Standards also serves as an ethical basis for community work and clarifies its role as a way of engaging with communities. If utilised, the standards will help ensure that community development is understood by all engaging in it to maximise impact for the communities worked with. Towards Standards will also facilitate a better understanding of the role and function of community work by all involved and all who come in contact with it.

Knowledge, Skills and Qualities

In order to meet criteria for good community work practice there are essential knowledge, skills and qualities that practitioners must be able to demonstrate. The following outlines some of the knowledge, skills and qualities necessary for effective community work practice. The list is not exhaustive but does contain the core elements pertaining to the study and practice of community work.

KNOWLEDGE -

The following areas of knowledge are core requirements for community work

- The principles and processes of community work
- Governance and management
- Change management and organisational analysis
- Group work theory, purpose and processes
- Social policies and social theories, particularly those focused on:
 - ✦ poverty and social inclusion
 - ✦ gender, equality and integration
 - ✦ racism and sectarianism
- Social and environmental sustainability
- Public administration – including the social, political, legal and economic systems, background and context for community work
- An understanding and analysis of modern society – at local, national and global level
- Social sciences and research methodologies

SKILLS -

The following skill areas are core to the practice of community work

- Research and observation
- Communication, writing and presentation
- Working with people, empowerment and activation
- Reflective practice
- Negotiation
- Social analysis, policy analysis and development
- Group work, facilitation and committee skills
- Administration, including fundraising, financial and people management
- Strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation
- Conflict management and resolution
- Leadership, collaborative and partnership working
- Problem solving
- Innovation

QUALITIES -

Acquiring or developing the following core qualities or personal attributes are essential to good community work

- Integrity
- Competence
- Personal awareness
- Empathy
- Dependability
- Sensitivity and respect
- Discretion
- Openness
- Flexibility
- Commitment to change, equality and inclusion
- Political consciousness and environmental awareness

Taken together this set of knowledge, skills and qualities enable community workers to:

- Build relationships with and between communities;
- Facilitate the personal, social and political development and education of communities;
- Promote and facilitate collective action and the active participation and empowerment of people and communities;
- Uphold the core values of community work;
- Plan, manage and develop community work opportunities;
- Contribute to the development of policy and practice relevant to community work and to the issues faced by communities.

These will be essential prerequisites for professionally endorsed community work education and training at all levels and will be further elaborated in the endorsement framework that will follow. They are reflected in the core values and practice principle of community work.



Values and Practice Principles

Community work is rooted in a set of core values and principles. Values are generally understood as moral principles, priorities or accepted standards of a person or a social group. Likewise, principles are rules of personal conduct, fundamental or general truths or guiding theories or beliefs. The following core values and principles are the foundation of the unique purpose and perspective of community work. They identify and summarise the broad practice principles that suggest how community workers should apply these values. While each value is outlined separately below, in practice they all work together as a unit.

VALUE 1. COLLECTIVE ACTION

Community work is based on working with and supporting groups of people. It enables them to develop knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can develop an analysis, identify priority needs and issues and address these through collective action.

Practice Principles

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Inform themselves about the reality experienced by the communities with which they work and build relationships with communities framed by these realities.
- Involve communities in a collective analysis of issues, identify common needs and regularly reflect, review, evaluate and reset priorities and objectives.
- Work towards collective outcomes for the community as a whole rather than the advancement of individuals.
- Collaborate and build alliances with other groups, organisations and agencies in order to advance key community objectives.
- Create and enhance conditions for collective action through building solidarity, recognising achievements, learning from success and failure and sharing information on models of good practice.
- Develop innovative and creative approaches to working with communities and learn from other models of work nationally and globally.
- Create opportunities for progression in situations of conflict in communities and in the overall society of which they are part.

VALUE 2. EMPOWERMENT

Community work is about the empowerment of individuals and communities, and addressing the unequal distribution of power. It is about working with people to enable them to become critical, creative, liberated, and active participants, allowing and enabling them to take more control of the direction of their lives, their communities and their environment. It aims to effect a sharing of power to create structures that provide genuine participation and involvement. It is a process based on mutual respect and equal and genuine partnership between all those involved to enable a sharing of talents, experiences and expertise.

Practice Principles

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Acknowledge, value and build on people's lives, situations, skills, knowledge and experience.
- Work with people to build an understanding and analysis of their reality through consciousness raising that creates the conditions for collective analysis of the issues affecting them and results in the identification of ways to overcome these issues.
- Work with people to build confidence and self-esteem as pre-requisites to supporting them to undertake action.
- Have an analysis of power and how it is acquired, sustained and applied.
- Recognise power inequalities and seek to address them. This may involve work towards change in existing structures to ensure they embrace the empowerment of individuals and communities.
- Work with communities to develop informal and formal networks, and create alliances that support the achievement of collective goals.
- Be reflective and conscious of personal power and perceptions of it, and strive to use it appropriately.
- Work in partnership with communities to achieve outcomes in line with the issues they have identified.
- Identify and deal appropriately with conflict when it arises and support individuals, groups and communities to deal with conflict.
- Be prepared to challenge power imbalances in order to promote greater minority participation at all levels.

VALUE 3. SOCIAL JUSTICE

The active pursuit of social justice is an essential element of community work and makes an important contribution towards a socially cohesive society. Community work is based on a belief that every person and every community can play an active role in creating conditions for a just and equal society where human rights are promoted and all forms of oppression or discrimination are challenged. The pursuit of social justice involves identifying and seeking to alleviate structural disadvantage and advocating strategies for overcoming disadvantage, discrimination and inequality. It entails the promotion of policies and practices that are just and equitable. In effect it means working to promote human rights for all.

Practice Principles

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Develop a clear social analysis, making connections between local, national and global issues.
- Develop an understanding of the ways in which the policies and activities of government, organisations and society create or contribute to disadvantage or work towards inclusion and equality, and use this analysis to inform and support the attainment of social justice.
- Use knowledge and experience to appropriately contribute to the development of social policy at local, regional, national and international levels.
- Build the capacity of communities to appropriately contribute to policy development.
- Promote the equitable distribution of resources at all levels.
- Work in solidarity with marginalised communities towards gaining concrete improvements in their quality of life.
- Promote human rights for all in line with UN Conventions and other human rights instruments.

VALUE 4. EQUALITY AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

In working for equality community workers must work from the starting point that while people are not the same, they are all of equal worth and importance and are therefore equally worthy of respect and acknowledgement. Community workers have a responsibility to challenge the oppression and exclusion of individuals and groups by institutions and society that leads to discrimination against people based on ability, age, culture, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, nationality, skin colour, racial or ethnic group, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs. It is particularly important that community workers acknowledge the particular and historical inequalities experienced by women in all cultures.

Practice Principles

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Acknowledge the diverse nature of Irish society and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to disadvantaged communities and minorities.
- Respect, value, support and promote difference and diversity.
- Reject and challenge any form of discrimination and oppression.
- Support and develop anti-oppressive policies and practices.
- Keep up to date with, and reflect on, their own practice in relation to equality and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Challenge inequality at all levels.
- Find appropriate means to constructively support equality for women in all work.
- Promote understanding and analysis of equality issues and strategies to address them within communities

VALUE 5. PARTICIPATION

Participation is about the involvement of groups who experience social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in decision-making, planning and action at different levels, from the local to the global. It can be viewed as a continuum of activity that can start from information sharing through capacity building and empowerment to active engagement and meaningful participation in democratic processes. It recognises that people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives. In working to promote participation it is vital that inherent power imbalances are acknowledged and addressed. Ultimately the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged communities should contribute towards bringing about social change through appropriately informed policies and processes, to the benefit of all.

Practice Principles

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Work towards the development and achievement of meaningful participation and power sharing.
- Support communities to gain the skills necessary for full participation.
- Ensure work is based on the needs of the community.
- Support and promote the development of decision-making structures that are open, accessible and inclusive of those groups who experience social exclusion, discrimination and other inequalities and ensure that work to build effective participation is at the core of community work practice.
- Recognise and address barriers, including structural barriers, to meaningful and effective participation at all levels.
- Seek to ensure that strategies for participation are inclusive of diversity in society, particularly in terms of gender and minority group participation.
- Formulate strategies that go beyond consultation and create a policy context for full participation in governance.

Core Qualities

Alongside and reflected in the values and practice principles outlined above, there are a number of qualities that contribute to the effective practice of community work. The following two core qualities are essential because they are fundamental to a professional approach to community work.

QUALITY 1. INTEGRITY

Integrity is a generic quality for all professions. Community workers should act with integrity in accordance with their responsibilities and duties. Community workers should also work towards the maintenance and promotion of high standards of practice, and uphold and advance the values, ethics and mission of community work.

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Acknowledge, understand and balance their accountability to the community, to their employers, their colleagues, their funders and the legal system.
- Abide by best practice in relation to the values and principles that underpin community work.
- Abide by best employment and work practice.
- Promote proper financial accountability and good financial practice within their organisation.
- Maintain the highest levels of honesty and integrity.
- Recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life and be aware of the need to balance a supportive relationship with the community with appropriate professional distance.
- Ensure that their professional relationships with others are based solely on furthering the interests of the communities with which they work and are not distorted by their religious, political or business interests.
- Ensure that they do not allow personal differences with individuals to impact on the work they are doing with, or on behalf of, a community.

QUALITY 2. COMPETENCE

Competence is about being competent to fulfil the obligations and tasks of the work. Community workers should continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills through further professional development and through formal and informal learning networks. Community workers should also contribute to the knowledge, experience and skills base of their profession.

Community workers have a responsibility to:

- Develop and maintain the required skills and competence to do their work by undertaking further training and education, and attending seminars, conferences and networking opportunities.
- Be self-aware and regularly reflect on practice and approach.
- Think and work strategically and develop a plan of work reflecting community needs and community work methods and values. This should be evaluated regularly.
- Seek to develop and maintain support systems through contact with other community workers, community groups and community work organisations.
- Encourage employers to create the conditions for reflective practice to take place in team settings in order to promote a critical and developmental workplace.
- Record and promote lessons from their work
- Support development opportunities for those with whom they work

Conclusion and Review

If professionally robust and effective community work practice is to be ensured in a changing Ireland, it is vital that standards are set to guide and focus practice. This document, *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work*, outlines standards for professional community work. The question of how these are applied and ensured is challenging. Community workers and other stakeholders have a collective responsibility to create the circumstances where they are discussed, evaluated and upheld, and to determine how they are maintained into the future.

In order for these standards to be fully applied, it is vital that they are supported by community work practitioners themselves, funders, state and local bodies, employers (including voluntary management committees), community work organisations, and the academic institutions and others delivering education for community work. They will provide the benchmark by which the effectiveness and quality of community work in Ireland is measured.

Though designed to be a standalone document, *Towards Standards* is also the first part of the process of developing a framework for the endorsement of community work education and training. The process of developing the framework will require further ongoing consultation with all of the relevant stakeholders.

In order for this document to be of continued use it is essential that it is reviewed and updated. It is proposed that it be reviewed initially after a period of three years and every five years thereafter. It is further proposed that an independent body would also oversee the profiling and implementation of *Towards Standards*. This independent body should be comprised of relevant educators, community workers, participants from the communities, professional community work organisations and funders. The review process should be supported by an independent stakeholder with direct experience of community work.

Appendix A Glossary of Terms

A range of terms arise throughout this document which are widely used by community workers. The following glossary seeks to highlight what is meant by these terms when they are used in this document. This allows all users of this document to have a clear image of what is laid out.

Accountability – explain your actions and why you have performed them to those to whom you are responsible. In the case of community workers those to whom you are responsible include the community, employers, funders and work colleagues.

Capacity building – work that strengthens the ability of communities to organise around the issues that affect them.

Community – is the array of personal relationships, groups and networks that exist among people who share geographical areas, interests or socioeconomic conditions.

Community development or community work – is a developmental activity composed of both a task and a process. The task is the achievement of social change linked to equality and social justice, and the process is the application of the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision-making in a structured and coordinated way.

Consciousness-raising – to work with people or communities to raise awareness and understanding of issues that impact on their lives.

Empowerment – to work with people or communities in a way that builds confidence and supports people to take greater control over their own lives.

Participation – one or more processes in which an individual or group takes part in specific decision-making and action, and over which s/he may exercise specific controls. It is often used to refer specifically to:

- involvement in planning and decision-making participation.
- a role in implementation participation.
- involvement in learning and evaluation.

Principles – are fundamental truths or personal codes of conduct.

Social Analysis – explores social issues with a view to understanding their root causes and the causal chains which have led to these issues arising.

Social Justice – the fair treatment of all people and groups.

Values – are the moral principles, priorities or accepted standards of a person or a social group.



Appendix B

Outline of Consultation Process

Background

During 2005 and 2006, the Community Workers' Co-operative, with funding from the Combat Poverty Agency, held focus groups with community work practitioners and activists in Galway, Mallow, Belfast, Sligo and Dublin. The purpose of these focus groups was to identify standards of community work practice on the ground as part of a longer and larger process looking at establishing a form of standardisation for professional endorsement of community work training and education.

Synopsis

In all focus groups the discussion and interest among participants was animated, with much consensus. Participants overwhelmingly welcomed the development of standards for community development work and felt that it was important that practising community workers were involved in, and informed of the process.

Concern was expressed that there are a wide range of courses and jobs in the general community work field, sometimes resulting in core elements of community work becoming diluted or lost. This, participants believed, emphasises the need for standards.

Participants felt that other benefits of standards for community work related to practical issues such as setting salary scales for professional work, improving work conditions, clarifying the role of community workers working for state agencies, as well as being useful for community groups to refer to when employing workers and funders regarding overall conditions. It was also expressed that standards might contribute to community work being respected as a profession, as well as raising the profile of community work at many levels.

Participants felt that standards for community work needed to reflect and name community work as being about collective action for social change with clear principles and processes and non-negotiable core values.

In relation to developing standards, participants felt it was important to recognise unpaid community work experience and good interpersonal skills while not undermining the specific skills needed to do community work. They felt that professional training gives community workers an analysis, theory and knowledge to enable them to do their work and explores ways of increasing participation, consultation and using power in a positive way.



Appendix C

Endnotes and References

¹ Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the independent employer-led sector skills council responsible for the professional development of staff working in the UK Lifelong Learning sector.

² Training Agencies Group (TAG) is composed of universities and colleges in the UK and Northern Ireland who provide professionally endorsed youth and community work education.

³ National Qualifications Framework was proposed through the Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 1999 and launched in 2003. It is a system of 10 levels that incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained. www.nfq.ie

⁴ Community Work Education & Training Network (CWETN) was established in 1995 to network organisations that promote community development learning. Its core aims are to promote good practice in community development through education and training and to take a lead on establishing coherent provision in community development education and training.

⁵ Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) is a statutory organisation responsible for advising the Irish government on policies to reduce poverty. Established in 1986 it has played a key role in influencing anti-poverty policies and raising public awareness of the experience of poverty in Ireland.

⁶ Community Workers' Co-operative (CWC) was established in 1981 as a national network of community activists both paid and unpaid, working collectively for social change and social justice at local and national level. It seeks to be an independent voice and to campaign on issues that affect the lives of those experiencing social exclusion, discrimination and inequality.

⁷ Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2007). *National Development Plan 2007 - 2013, Consultation Process for the New Programme Period - Background Paper*. Community Development Unit, Dublin.

⁸ CWC (2004). *Strategic Plan 2004-2007*. Community Workers' Co-operative, Galway.

⁹ POBAL (1999). *Community Development Strategies and Actions within the Integrated Local Development Programme, Insights No. 11*. POBAL, Dublin.

¹⁰ Combat Poverty Agency (2000). *The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty*. Combat Poverty, Dublin.

¹¹ Community Development Review Group - was established in 1989 in the North of Ireland by a number of practitioners who were concerned that community development had become fragmented and had lost its previous focus from the '70s and '80s. The review was undertaken through an action based research process carried out over 2 - 3 years. A series of theme based seminars were held with widespread participation. The objective of the Review included assessing definitions of community development and ensuring that the agreed definition reflected the underpinning values. The results of the Review were published in 1991.

¹² Community Development Review Group (1991). *Community Development in Northern Ireland: Perspectives for the Future*. Community Development Review Group, Belfast.

¹³ LLUK National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work (UK 2003) detail the skills and practice principles required to engage in Community Development work.

¹⁴ Lifelong Learning UK (2003). *National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work*. www.fcdl.org.uk

¹⁵ www.iacdglobal.org/documents/general/BudapestDeclaration4683.pdf

¹⁶ Voluntary Community Unit: Department of Health and Social Services (1993). *Strategy for the support of the Voluntary Sector and Community Development in Northern Ireland, 1993*. Department of Health and Social Services, Belfast.

¹⁷ The Compact (1998) is entitled 'Building Real Partnership- Compact between Government and the Community and Voluntary Sector in Northern Ireland'. It is a jointly prepared agreed statement of the general principles and the shared values which govern the relationship between government and the community and voluntary sector. The Compact applies to the relationship between Government

(both central and local), including departments and Non-Departmental Government Bodies, statutory agencies, and district councils and the voluntary and community sector (which includes voluntary and community organisations and those who volunteer in those organisations and other settings).

¹⁸ Department for Social Development (2001). *Partners for Change, Government Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector, 2001 - 2004*. Department for Social Development, UK.

¹⁹ Taskforce Northern Ireland, UK Government (2004). *Investing Together, Report of the Taskforce on Resourcing Voluntary and Community Sector, 2004*. Taskforce Northern Ireland, UK. www.taskforceni.org.uk

²⁰ Department of Social Development, Northern Ireland (2005). *Positive Steps, Government's Response to Investing Together, March 2005*. Voluntary and Community Unit, Belfast.

²¹ Muintir na Tire was founded in 1937. It aims to enhance the capacities of people in communities, rural and urban, to become involved in local, social, economic, cultural and environmental development.

²² Department of the Taoiseach (2006). *Towards 2016: Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006 - 2015*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

²³ Government of Ireland (2007). *National Development Plan 2007 - 2013: Transforming Ireland - a Better Quality of Life for All*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

²⁴ Government of Ireland (2005). *Planning for Diversity: The National Action Plan Against Racism*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

The NPAR originates from commitments given by the Governments at the World Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001 and in Sustaining Progress, the Social Partnership Agreement in 2003 - 2005. Launched in 2005 the NPAR reaffirmed the Government's commitment that racism has no place in Irish society.

²⁵ Government of Ireland (2007). *National Women's Strategy (NWS)*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

The NWS is the government statement of priorities in relation to the advancement of women in Irish society for the period 2007 - 2016. It covers three key themes; Equalising socioeconomic opportunity for women; Ensuring the wellbeing of women; Engaging as active and equal citizens.

²⁶ Government of Ireland (2001). *Primary Care - A New Direction*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

²⁷ Government of Ireland (2007). *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007 - 2016*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

The NAPinclusion sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. The overall goal of the Plan is to reduce the number of those experiencing poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

²⁸ The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) is made up of a series of measures designed to tackle disadvantage in a variety of designated areas. It is funded under the National Development Plan and aims to tackle social exclusion; deliver a more sustainable economy; improve employment prospects; balance regional development. It is administered by POBAL on behalf of DCRAGA. Locally it is delivered through 38 partnerships, 33 community groups and 4 employment pacts.

²⁹ The PEACE Programme was established in 1995 to promote cross-border peace and reconciliation and is targeted at the Border Counties and Northern Ireland. A second programme was established to run from 2000-2004 and was further extended to 2006.

³⁰ The Community Development Programme provides financial assistance to projects towards the staffing and equipping of local resource centres which provide a focal point for community development activities and to other specialised community development projects and initiatives having a strategic importance. The Programme is aimed at addressing all areas of poverty and disadvantage. Projects are concerned with the needs of women and children, those with disabilities, the homeless, lone parent families, the elderly, the unemployed, young people at risk, Travellers and other disadvantaged groups.

³¹ The aim of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme is to combat disadvantage and improve the function of the family unit. The emphasis in the projects is on the involvement of local communities in developing approaches to tackle the problems they face and on creating successful agencies in the area concerned. Family Resource Centres involve people from marginalised groups and areas of disadvantage at all levels in the project.

³² The RAPID programme is an Irish Government initiative, which targets 45 of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. The programme aims to ensure that priority attention is given to the 45 designated areas by focusing State resources available under the National Development Plan. The Programme also requires the Government Departments and State Agencies to bring about better co-ordination and closer integration in the delivery of services.

³³ Cohesion refers to a process of streamlining local development structures initiated by the Irish Government in order to ensure the co-ordination of service delivery at a local level. It is informed by the following guiding principles:

- Improving on the ground services;
- Streamlining structures so as to avoid overlaps, duplication and undue administrative overheads;
- Bringing transparency, co-ordination and improved control to the funding and operation of local and community development measures;
- Strengthening the democratic accountability of agencies and service providers in the area.

