

1. YOUTH INFORMATION – DEFINITION & AIMS

This section

- (a) defines youth information;*
- (b) describes the information process;*
- (c) summarises the aims of youth information.*

What is Youth Information?

Youth information is an educational process which aims to empower young people to make informed decisions and positive life choices. It is carried out through the provision of a person-centred service, which is:

- *accessible;*
- *free;*
- *generalist;*
- *confidential;*
- *non-directive;*
- *non-judgmental;*
- *non-political;*
- *well publicised;*
- *offers information through a variety of media;*
- *engages in outreach work;*
- *promotes personal autonomy;*
- *works closely with other relevant agencies;*
- *offers an attractive and welcoming environment;*
- *provides access to resources;*
- *develops information skills;*
- *is staffed by specially trained workers;*
- *also services those who work with young people.*

Youth Information enables young people to:

- ◆ *develop their skills and abilities;*
- ◆ *avail of services, facilities and opportunities;*
- ◆ *solve problems;*
- ◆ *actively participate at local, national and international level.*

The important element of the youth information service is that it acts as a first point of contact for a young person; it will identify where help can be found and will support the young person in availing of that help.

The Information Process

The information process, which involves a sympathetic and supportive intermediary (an information worker), involves helping the young person:

- *to locate and interpret the relevant information;*
- *to understand the options available as well as the likely outcomes and risks involved in each considered alternative;*
- *to apply the information to her/his own circumstances so that s/he can decide on an appropriate course of action.*

Basically, youth information is about helping young people to identify their own resources, take their own actions and make their own decisions. It is provided in a warm, informal and welcoming atmosphere, and encourages the active participation of the young person at all stages in the process in a manner, which helps develop their autonomy.

Youth information is not merely about handing out information or facts but also, through dialogue and observation as well as through sensitive and sympathetic handling, involves uncovering the real needs of the enquirer and looking beyond the initial request for other related needs which may not be articulated. Often to deal with an enquiry at ‘face value’ is to leave the real need unsatisfied as many young people do not find it easy to put their feelings and thoughts into words and may not be used to talking about personal concerns. This is especially the case with the less articulate and other young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Aims of Youth Information

The main aims of youth information can be summarised, as follows:

- ◆ **To act, in a central location, as an information co-ordinating unit for the many sources of information available to young people;**
- ◆ **To assemble information for use by young people on matters relevant to their personal, social and vocational development and disseminate it in a format and style which they can understand, and in settings which they find comfortable and convenient to use, using all available forms of media and all forms of contact to reach the different groups of young people;**
- ◆ **Through adopting a personalised approach, to help them interpret and exploit this information so that they can apply it to their own particular needs and translate it into effective action;**

- ◆ **To alert young people to the existence of a wide range of services, facilities and opportunities available to them, providing an active rather than a reactive passive service which merely responds to expressed need and problems;**
- ◆ **To refer young people to other specialist organisations and services, as necessary, thereby acting as a link between a young person with a need or a problem and the agency which can meet their need or solve their problem;**
- ◆ **To actively encourage young people to use information sources, and develop information skills, as a basis for personal advancement, thereby helping them to develop personal autonomy and resourcefulness;**
- ◆ **To equip those to whom young people may turn for assistance e.g. parents, teachers, youth workers, social workers, guidance counsellors with the necessary information to enable them to respond effectively.**

(Youth Information – The Irish Response, NYCI, July 1989)