

Submission to Department of Rural and Community Development on the working draft of the National Volunteering Strategy 2020 – 2025

Barnardos mission is to help transform children’s lives through our services; support parents; and challenge society where it fails our children. In 2019, we had 367 (2018: 320) volunteers involved across the organisation. These volunteers were involved in Barnardos in such roles as manning helplines, providing administration support, assisting in parent and toddler groups, breakfast clubs, after school groups and playgrounds, facilitating the Roots of Empathy programme and the Wizards of Words reading programme in numerous primary schools and sorting and selling both new and preloved goods which are donated to our seven shops and as members of our Board. Without the dedication, enthusiasm and generosity of these committed volunteers Barnardos could not do the work it does.

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to comment on the working draft of the National Volunteering Strategy 2020 - 2025 which has been developed by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

We request that a **definition of the Strategic Objectives timescales** of short-term, medium-term and long-term be included in the published strategy.

The following are our comments which regard to the 5 Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: To increase the participation and diversity in volunteering including embracing new trends and innovation

This objective needs to do more to address the challenges to volunteering in order to increase the participation and diversity in volunteering in Ireland.

Such challenges for organisations include:

- Insurance costs
- Funding / budgets for volunteer programmes
- Involving under 18s in volunteer roles
- Lack of flexible short term volunteer opportunities to suit the diverse needs, interests and circumstances of potential volunteer

Such challenges for volunteers include:

- Due to budget constraints in some organisations volunteers are unable to claim for pay out of pocket expenses (e.g. transport, parking etc.)
- Social barriers (language, literacy, urban isolation)
- Poor infrastructure / public transport in rural areas

- Lack of flexibility in terms of how and when they can volunteer
- Fear of over-commitment in term of time

Strategic Objective 2: To facilitate, develop and support the Volunteering Environment so that it contributes to vibrant and sustainable communities

We agree with the development of a code of conduct for both volunteers and volunteer involving organisation but this must be voluntary. The code of conduct must be simple and aligned to existing codes such as the Charities Regulator Governance code. However it must not add to the already significant regulatory and legislative burdens being experienced by VIOs.

We welcome that actions under this objective identify and address the need for resourcing to enhance the capacity of volunteer involving organisations and the volunteering environment as a whole, such as the provision of a bursary fund, investing in capacity building of VIOs to manage their volunteers and investment in the national volunteering database (I-VOL). However the government needs to address the ever increasing and often overburdening insurance costs for organisations.

Strategic Objective 3: To recognise, celebrate and communicate the value and impact of volunteers and volunteering in all its forms

We welcome a national communications strategy which values and celebrates the impact of volunteering. This needs to be resourced at both local and national level.

We would like to see recognition of volunteering at local level through creative approaches to thank and recognise that all contributions are equally valued rather than nominating and honouring volunteers at formal award ceremonies. For example, ensuring that all VIOs have sufficient budget to hold their own volunteer recognition events or the introduction of local volunteer rewards scheme, organised through the Volunteer Centres, which offers volunteers "thank you" gifts such as a free coffee in a local coffee shop, discounts in local shops, discounted tickets to recreation amenities such as the cinema, theatre, swimming pool, etc.

Strategic Objective 4: To promote ethical and skills-based overseas volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland

We recognise that this strategy should also have an international component. We would like to see actions relating to the harnessing of the experience and expertise of those who have returned from volunteering abroad at local level.

Strategic Objective 5: To improve policy coherence on Volunteering across Government both nationally and locally

We welcome any action which would improve policy coherence in relation to volunteering as this is a significant issue which we encounter. As an example, in relation to Garda Vetting, we are receiving mixed messages from a variety of government departments and agencies. We totally agree that regulatory compliance is good for the sector however we must point out

that ongoing, hands on support at local level is essential to achieve and maintain compliance.

Implementation and Monitoring:

Once the Strategic Objectives are agreed, the Implementation Plan needs to contain very clear Key Performance Indicators plus Timescales (which as mentioned previously need a definition of what is meant by the short-term, medium-term and long-term) and the agreement of the Responsible Bodies to these. The Department with the National Advisory Group will need to be tasked to perform the interim and annual reviews of the Implementation Plan.

Evaluation:

The outcomes, as listed under the Evaluation section, are important indicators in measuring the success and impact of the strategy however these outcomes must be tied to goals. As the draft is currently structured there is no explicit tie back to the goal so how do we know the goals will deliver these outcomes?

Submitted by:

Suzanne Connolly, Volunteer & Supporter Engagement Service,
Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

Tel: 01 7080431 / Email: connolly.suzanne@barnardos.ie