

features

Youth Work in Wales has been given an important boost by a unique national conference at Cardiff International Arena in December, Wales Youth Agency staff believe.

The conference, on "Building the Future" of youth work, was attended by 150 people from all over Wales. Many of them policy-makers.

They heard a keynote speech by Sir Wyn Roberts, Minister of State for Wales, and saw a major exhibition illustrating the activities of a wide range of organisations concerned with young people.

The event, the first of its kind, was organised by Wales Youth Agency and other youth organisations in Wales, with three major issues in mind:-

- The need to raise awareness of youth work in public life.
- The threat to the youth service posed by diminishing resources.

What now?



Pictured with youth representatives are Sir Wyn Roberts, Minister of State for Wales, and Gerald Davies, Chairman of the Wales Youth Agency

- The need for action to ensure proper support for youth work from the new-look local authorities due to take over in 1995.

Sir Wyn himself emphasised the first point when he said the youth service had been traditionally "slow in seeking to promote the extent, quality and value of its work". The conference and its timing coincide with the first National Youth Work Week had already paid dividends in

The minister described the core purpose of youth work as "the personal and social development of young people through informal education" and he welcomed the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales as "an important milestone in understanding and value of its work".

He added: "Wales has risen to the challenge and produced a document which states

clearly what youth work does and how it will go about doing it".

Sir Wyn went on to emphasise the value for money which youth work offers.

The total annual youth work budget in Wales was estimated at £12.5 million, he said. This went towards individual projects and the employment of 300 full-time and 3,000 part-time workers.



Would the story of Romeo and Juliet still have become a tragedy if there had been a youth worker around? This question was posed by Eleanor Williams, of Newport, (pictured left), one of the speakers in the conference session on "what has the youth service done for me?"

Ms Williams, who is about to become a solicitor, moved delegates with her account of how her own experience of the youth service had helped her come to terms with disability.

The audience were equally fascinated by the personal stories of Welsh rugby international full-back Luc Evans, Debbie Page, a full-time worker in Mid Glamorgan, Carmarthen farmer Hywel Griffiths, and Patric Stephens, a teacher at Rhydfelen Welsh school and Urdd worker.

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a look at the December conference on Youth Work in Wales - and some of its outcomes

"These workers are helped by an army of 30,000 volunteers who, if they were paid for their time and effort, would cost the taxpayer some £80 million a year. The bottom line is that the cost of the Welsh youth service per young person is just £2.80 a year.

Sir Wyn emphasised that youth work was "an inherent part of overall education services" and that local authorities had a duty to provide adequate facilities for the youth service. He was sorry some local authorities had reduced their youth services and curtailed support for the voluntary sector, although others had maintained or even extended provision.

Sir Wyn maintained that the local government finance settlement provided enough money for local authorities to meet all their statutory duties "including those related to the youth service".

This statement angered at least one person in the audience, who walked out in protest.

Referring to plans to replace the present county and district authorities in Wales with 21 unitary authorities, the Minister said work should be put in hand to help the new authorities develop their thinking on youth work. "Good decisions will be made only if good information is available. Those involved in youth work are best placed to provide that information".

Sir Wyn went on to say that the concept of partnership between local authorities and the voluntary sector was at the heart of an effective youth

service. The Dyfed Youth Council, an association of 30 voluntary organisations working closely with the local authority, was a good example of such a partnership, he said.

"The bottom line is that the cost of the Welsh youth service per young person is just £2.80 a year."

Commenting on the conference later, Wales Youth Agency Assistant Director John Rose said: "We feel something positive has happened. For a start, the event brought together the biggest exhibition of youth work ever held in Wales and this showed the really wide range of people and activities involved.

"It wasn't just a case of preaching to the converted - a lot of people attending were from outside the youth work field, from district authorities police, and social services, for example.

"We intend to continue to publicise youth work and a

attention on what we need to do in regard to the new unitary authorities and the location of youth services. We believe, and this was stressed by the Minister, that youth work is part of education. We have to work to ensure that this is not forgotten when the work of the present eight local education authorities is taken over by the new unitary authorities".

Wales Youth Agency director Brian Williams will be bringing youth interests together to decide a strategy for ensuring the right location, structure and management of youth services when the unitary authorities are formed in 1995.

There are 450,000 people in Wales aged between 11 and 25. More than 90 per cent of them come into contact with youth work at some time.

This means there are enormous possibilities for communicating with young people on important issues, such as health, education, housing, crime prevention, the environment, culture and sport, Sir Wyn told the conference.



Some of the conference delegates

Youth Work in Wales Award announced

The launch of an annual award scheme to recognise the talents of organisations and individuals working with young people was announced at the conference by Sir Wyn Roberts.

The Welsh Office is sponsoring the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award and a Premier Excellence Award for outstanding work with young people.

A "Significant" cash prize will be offered and the first awards will be announced at the start of the 1994 National Youth Work Week.