

WORKING NOTES

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FACTS AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING: DOES THE GOVERNMENT NEED AN OUTREACH FACILITY?

A few months ago applications for support from the Global Grant for Local Development, were invited through the national Press. The advertisements were intended for local community bodies.

In at least one local community we know of, it was by mere chance that somebody associated with the area saw one of the advertisements and alerted community activists in time to make an application. In another area the advertisement was not seen at all and no application was made.

While on the face of it it seems fair to solicit applications for this kind of funding through public advertisement, does this procedure actually succeed in informing the people who need to be informed? Many people in poorer areas do not read Irish newspapers. Many people do not scan newspapers for advertisements of this type. Many community activists would not understand that this advertisement might be relevant to them, or what the reference in the advertisement to 'capacity-building' might mean. In the community mentioned above, when a meeting of the local residents' association was told about the advertisement by the person who had seen it, nobody else in the hall knew anything about it. Is it possible that knowledge of schemes of this kind gets distributed through the population in inverse proportion to the need for it?

In its most recent bulletin the European Anti-Poverty Network has highlighted the problems of marginalised groups in accessing funding. It makes the point that marginalised groups often lack the skills and resources needed to prepare applications and that there should be some assistance available to them for this. It notes that inevitably large amounts of funding are 'commandeered' by large well-supported voluntary and semi-state organisations.

The government is clearly out of touch with the realities on the ground. The EAPN bulletin quotes a civil servant as saying that while one application form was pretty daunting, "it served the function of enabling the Department to ... eliminate those who did not really know what they wanted from the programme". In the most marginalised areas the problem is precisely that the local people are not in any position to know what they want from these programmes or what they are about. We are talking here of ghettoised communities of up to 5,000 people with 70% unemployment, with 53% of the population out of school by fifteen, with nobody in the community with third level education. These people can be easily "eliminated".

Would it not be possible to put in place some system of outreach whereby the most disadvantaged communities could be identified, communicated with and offered advice on the application process? EAPN suggests an independent non-governmental organisation to circulate information and provide help. The present procedures leave too much to chance and risk leaving the poorest even further behind.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE

Eoin O'Sullivan

Testimony to the official neglect of children and young people in Ireland is that the primary legislation governing young offenders remains the 1908 Children Act. This is despite numerous reports highlighting that the Act is unsuitable to the modern era and is in urgent need of replacement, **not modification**. It is understood that a new Juvenile Justice Bill will be brought before the Oireachtas later this year. It is expected that this Bill will repeat a number of archaic practices such as allowing for the whipping of young people deemed guilty of minor offences and the abolition of the option of sending children to adult prisons. However, the new Bill must not simply repeat some outdated sections of the 1908 Act, and leave much of the 1908 Act incorporated into a new Bill, but **must be a manifesto for change in the manner in which we conceptualise and address young offenders**.

Despite ongoing concern regarding juvenile offenders in Irish society, little research has been conducted on the process by which children are labelled as delinquent and committed to secure units or prisons. Little empirical data has been collected on the social characteristics of young offenders in Ireland and no research has been conducted on what happens to young people after they leave reformatory/special school system. The conclusion to be drawn from the limited information we have available to us highlights emphatically, that the majority of young offenders are from backgrounds of deprivation and poverty, and as a recent report on Juvenile Offenders in Britain concluded "It is clear that economic and social disadvantage, whether in family background, employment or housing, is intertwined with the roots of criminal behaviour by young people."

Thus, responses to crime amongst juveniles must be located in the socio-economic environment which they inhabit. Building more prison's, custodial units, increases in the number of Gardai on the Streets etc. cannot prevent crime from occurring, although it may control it at an exceedingly high cost to the state. The recent First Report of the Select Committee on Crime - *Juvenile Justice - Its Causes and Remedies*, highlighted that homelessness, personal and family problems of certain young people. Truancy, educational failure, unemployment, child abuse and drug problems all contribute to offending by young people. If society is serious about preventing crime, its first step must be to prevent the conditions for crime from existing in the first place. On a practical policy level, it is clear that policies that aim to eliminate poverty, homelessness, inadequate health care services, the provision of equitable educational opportunities etc. reap a more benefi-

cial response in terms of ending juvenile crime than the building of additional prison cells and detention units. It would appear that the state has no problem providing funding for the building of an additional 200 prison cells in Wheatfield prison, yet cannot find funding to alleviate youth homelessness.

It is strongly recommended that as a starting point, the blueprint for crime prevention outlined in the recent Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder be applied to all areas in Dublin. In particular, the principles of this blueprint must be built into the policy framework and inform all decision making in this area. The following observations of the Interdepartmental Group must be viewed as integral to developing a new conceptualisation of juvenile justice.

*It will not be possible to make progress in this area unless some additional resources are provided.

*Special care and attention must be directed towards children at risk.

*Employment opportunities must be created.

*The causes of crime and disorder are multifactorial and it is necessary, therefore, in looking for solutions to the problem to address a range of socio-economic issues as well as what would be generally be seen as 'law and order' matters.

In conclusion, only through a sustained commitment to producing a more egalitarian Irish society can the destructive impact of youthful crime on the perpetrator and the victim be alleviated. Micro-level interventions in this area, such as the provision of more Neighbourhood Youth Projects may control youthful crime, but cannot produce a society in which the fatalism and alienation that currently is pervasive amongst the working class young is eliminated.

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DOES YOUR COMMUNITY ORGANISATION NEED HELP?

Many organisations have difficulties with management, organisation and planning. With the advent of County Enterprise Boards and the proliferation of schemes directed at the voluntary sector, these problems are becoming more pressing. Although a lot of expertise is available at community level, it is sometimes a good idea to bring in an outsider to take a fresh look at the situation. The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice offers an affordable consultancy service in the areas mentioned. Staff from the Centre, who have experience in community work, planning and management, can visit your area, meet representatives and advise on strategy and implementation.

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URBAN CRIME - CAN WE LEARN FROM THE DANES?

The Report on Urban Crime and Disorder* has not received the level of attention it should have, possibly because it is based on just one suburban area, Ronanstown in West Dublin. However it must be considered required reading for anyone concerned about crime and disorder in any local authority area.

One of the more interesting snippets in the Report is an account of Crime Prevention policy in Denmark. Over the past four years there has been a 33% decline in crime there involving young offenders. The driving force behind this achievement is the national Crime Prevention Council established in the early 1970s. It has 52 different bodies represented on it. Its executive committee includes three police chiefs, leading figures from the business world, and a leading criminologist. The Council receives annually £400,000 per annum from the state, and £100,000 from the business community. More significant support is provided through staff being seconded from the private and public sectors.

The cutting edge of the Crime Prevention Council is provided by local SSP committees. SSP stands for School, Social Workers, Police Co-Ordination. The SSPs initially concentrated on drawing up action plans for problem areas. Their main work now is to create projects for young people to divert them from anti-social activity. Where there is a problem in an area the police call in the local SSP to help them.

The police play a central role in crime

prevention programmes. They visit teenage classrooms. They organise projects to provide teenagers with some alternative excitement, including summer camps and even work experience stints for teenagers in police headquarters. They concentrate particularly on "problem families".

Not all is sweetness and light. The authorities target gang leaders, the "hard cases", and send them on long stay ship cruises where they have to work their passage. Less extreme are motor bike repair projects run by young offenders. There are closed institutions, but very few are sent there.

Two aspects of the Danish programme stand out. One is the scale and complexity of the crime prevention infrastructure, carefully built-up over twenty years. Although the cost is considerable, it is obviously only a fraction of the savings brought about by a 33% reduction in teenage crime.

The other interesting aspect of the programme is the heavy police involvement. Given that hostility towards the police provides a focal point for much urban disorder, the building of more normal relations between police and young people must be a priority area, and it is good to see this highlighted in our own Interdepartmental Group Report. In this context it is a great pity that in recent years, due to public spending constraints, there has actually been a cutback in community policing in some urban areas in Ireland. This is one cost-saving measure that could turn out to be very expensive indeed.

*Urban Crime and Disorder: Report of the Interdepartmental Group. Dublin. Stationery Office. November 1992. £6.50.

HOMELESS

YOUNG PEOPLE

The problem of homelessness amongst young people is one that has been growing not only in extent but also in the level of public awareness of the problem, in contrast to the denial - certainly inaction - of the statutory bodies and their political masters.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'HOMELESS'?

Homelessness is not just 'rooflessness', although there is sometimes a tendency to try to reduce it to that. Most homeless young people sleep rough only occasionally; most nights they get a friend who will put them up on the sofa, or a relative who will put them up for a few nights or they find an empty building or shed where they will be dry, warm and above all, safe. The characteristic of homelessness amongst young people is that they are constantly on the move, with no stable place in which they can put down roots and grow and develop. Such an unstable situation is clearly destructive to the healthy development of a young person and in particular places the young person in a situation in which it is difficult to form and maintain close personal relationships with others, a limitation which may affect the rest of their lives.

HOW MANY HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THERE?

In short we do not know. In 1987, in two surveys that were undertaken, almost 400 young people under 18 were homeless in Dublin and almost 300 in other cities and towns in Ireland. All the voluntary bodies would say that the numbers have increased since then. In the first three months of 1993, 191 new homeless young people came to the attention of the statutory or voluntary bodies, which if continued throughout the year would suggest about 800 young people becoming homeless in Dublin in one year.

However, homelessness is not just a Dublin issue - every single town in Ireland has this problem, although many do not want to acknowledge it. Few towns have any services available for young homeless people and many, after a short time, will drift off to Dublin or London where their plight only gets worse.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS?

Almost always, homelessness is caused by a breakdown in relationship between one or both parents and the child. This may result from parental violence, sexual abuse or alcoholism; it may be that the parents have separated and the parent with whom the child is living has taken in a new partner and either the new partner rejects the child or the child rejects the new partner or both. However, frequently it can be difficult to identify why the young person has left home; it often results from a breakdown in communication between the parent and the child which leads to both parent and child reacting in a destructive way to each other. If they are not helped to overcome this barrier, the relationship between them can become so tense that the atmosphere in the house becomes unbearable, particularly if there are younger children also living there.

In many cases, the breakdown in relationship is nobody's fault, neither the parents' nor the child's. The parents and child can be upset, worried and confused and may be desperately seeking help - help which may not be available. Social workers may be so overstretched, particularly in more deprived areas, that one has the time to give to families in trouble until the crisis finally arrives - and then it may be too late. Services for children or families in difficulty may simply not exist in the area. In many cases the stigma which is attached to being a homeless child, ("they are robbers, or take drugs or are out of control") or the parent of a homeless child, ("What was going on in that house?") is totally undeserved and only adds to the problems of the family.

RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

The primary response must be preventative - providing the social workers and family support services which can intervene and support families in difficulty before the crisis erupts. As most homeless children come from well-defined deprived areas, these services must be located in those areas. In time, such support services would ensure that the numbers of young people leaving home would be reduced to a minimum.

However, preventative services are too late for those children who are now on the streets. A priority for them must be the provision of emergency accommodation so as to ensure that no child is left on the streets or unsupported. Even a few weeks or days on the streets may introduce a child to crime, drugs, prostitution and make their problem immensely more difficult to solve. Above all, the illusion of freedom which life on the street provides may make it difficult to reintroduce a young person to the dependency on others which is appropriate to their age.

There also exist a small number of young people who are well-known to all the voluntary agencies and who are too damaged to fit into the highly structured life of most hostels. They may have been in many of the hostels and been expelled because they were too difficult to manage or may not have been admitted to many hostels for the same reason. They require a special regime, characterised by flexibility, small numbers and high staff-child ratio. Such a service is expensive, but less expensive than prison, which is where most of these young people will otherwise end up.

CHILD CARE ACT 1991

The most important step in dealing with the problems of children and their families was the introduction of the Child-Care Act 1991. The history of this Act, both before it was introduced and afterwards, is highly significant in highlighting the political indifference to the whole problem of youth homelessness. For the previous twenty years numerous reports highlighted the

inadequacy of the 1908 Children's Act as the major legislative provision for children and recommended that it be replaced. Eventually in 1985, a new Children's Bill was introduced into the Dail but had still not passed two years later when the Dail was dissolved. In 1988, the new government introduced another Children's Bill which took a further three years to pass into law. Even today, two years after the Act was passed by the Dail, only one significant section of the Act has been signed into law by the Minister. This is the section which obliges the Health Boards to provide "suitable" accommodation for homeless children up to 18 years of age. However, no resources have been made available to implement this section. An increasing number of homeless children are being placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation or in adult homeless hostels because no "suitable" accommodation exists. Indeed, social workers in the Dublin area are now refusing to deal with homeless children over the age of 16 in protest at the lack of accommodation available to them. The reality is that today the main legislative provision for children is still the Children's Act 1908 because the Minister has not signed into law the new Act of 1991 and the services for homeless children are just as inadequate as ever.

CONCLUSION

The provision of accommodation, food and care for children is an issue of fundamental rights. In a civilised society, fundamental rights should be guaranteed by law and provided by the structures of society. Hence the provision of services for homeless children must remain the responsibility of the Government, although they can legitimately fulfil this responsibility by delegating services to voluntary bodies. However, even then, ultimate responsibility for the funding, continuity of service, and standard of service must remain with the Government through the Health Boards. At present, services to homeless children are dependent on the goodwill of individuals who compensate for inadequate funding and support with their time, energy and compassion.

Peter McVerry, SJ

NO SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS FOR LONG-TERM UNEMPLOMENT

Since the mid 1970's most western economies have been faced with the growing problem of unemployment. In the early to mid 1970s the average rates of registered unemployment in the European Community was 2/3%. In the 80's, despite an increase in economic growth which helped generate an additional nine million jobs, the rate of unemployment never fell below 8%. Since 1990 unemployment has increased and the rate of average unemployment in the European Community now stands at 10.6%

Relative to other European countries Ireland has fared badly in providing unemployment opportunities for its citizens. For example over the period 1969-73 when most European Countries has an average unemployment rate of 1%/3%, the rate of unemployment in Ireland was 5%/7%. This trend has continued and the difference between Ireland's average and that of the other European Community Countries, with the exception of Spain, has widened. Between 1986-90 Ireland's average unemployment rate was 16%/18% compared to a Community average of between 7%/9%. Currently Ireland had an unemployment rate of 18%.

Countries with the highest levels of unemployment also tend to have the highest incidence of long-term unemployment. Almost half of all the unemployed in the European Community have been out of work for a year or over. This represents 4% of the labour force. In Ireland around two thirds of the unemployed have been out of work for over a year. This is equal to 9% of the labour force.

Unemployment has impacted unevenly on the labour force with certain categories harder hit than others. Particularly affected are individuals with low levels of skills and education or who have skills which are no longer in demand, early school leavers and older workers. Individuals with these

characteristics tend to remain unemployed longer mainly because they have to compete with people who have higher level of skills and education, and also because of the reluctance of employers to recruit the long-term unemployed.

Stronger economic growth and direct actions aimed at increasing employment opportunities, are necessary to address long-term unemployment, but are unlikely in themselves to be sufficient. Special measures aimed at reintegration are both justified and essential.

Given the negative social and personal effects that long periods of unemployment has on individuals, families and communities it is not sufficient to put in place programmes that enable the long-term unemployed to compete more equitably on the labour market in isolation from other measures. Programmes must therefore address the totality of social, personal and labour market factors which combine to prevent the long-term unemployed accessing the employment opportunities which are or become available.

Programmes for the long term unemployed should include the following: actions to motivate and encourage, skills and educational development, counselling for individual and social problems, assistance in accessing information on employment or self-employment and employment and self-employment preparation activity.

Because of the relationship between poverty and long-term unemployment the income for programme participants would have to be at a level which eases the financial burden on themselves and their families. Importantly it must also be acknowledged that people who are unemployed for long periods will require long term individual support and development if they are to be able, once again, to compete successfully on the labour market. It is questionable whether the current range of short-term measures and action, however extensive in scale and scope, have the capacity to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed. It is clear therefore that long-term integrated programmes (3 - 4 years) need to be developed as an important part of the measures to address long-term unemployment.

At present labour market programmes for the long-term unemployed are the responsibility of two main agencies, FAS and the VEC. A variety of other Departments and Agencies deal with elements of the problem, for example the Departments of Social Welfare, Health and Environment. In order to ensure a more coherent delivery of actions the various Departments and Agencies must integrate their programmes and services. This could best be achieved by the establishment of one body with the resources and power to develop and implement programmes for the long-term unemployed.

The Area Based Partnerships established under Chapter Seven of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress have the potential to fulfil this function at a local level. At present their capacity to do so is limited primarily because their role is unclear particularly in terms of their relationship to the Government Departments and Agencies and the limited budgets of the Partnerships.

Long-term unemployment remains a feature of the unemployment problem which requires special measures. These should be integrated into other actions aimed at stimulating economic growth and additional employment opportunities. If more effective actions are to be developed then the nature of the policy objectives, which shape the measures intended to address long term unemployment, needs to be examined. The policies should acknowledge that the long-term unemployment problem is an issue of poverty and social exclusion as much as it has to do with the operation of labour markets.

Given the social and personal importance that employment plays in how our society values the contribution of its citizens it is necessary that programmes for the long-term unemployed are judged on their ability to keep the maximum number of people in touch with the labour market rather than consisting of short-term actions to reduce the number on the Live Register.

GRASSROOTS

(A column for priests and religious working in disadvantaged areas)

In their recent study of voluntary organisations, The Voluntary Sector and the State, Pauline Faughnan and Patricia Kelleher highlighted the significant involvement of members of religious orders and diocesan priests in voluntary organisations. Of the organisations surveyed, 43 per cent were founded or initiated by a priest or religious. In spite of their declining numbers, it is clear that religious still play an important role in voluntary and local community activity.

Religious orders in Ireland are often connected through their schools and other activities with a wide social mix, and therefore are potentially a powerful lobby. The Council for Major Religious Superiors is a body that the government of the day may not be particularly fond of, but they cannot ignore it.

However, in the case of religious working in disadvantaged communities, while they are often effective in their own areas, they are not very well networked, and this probably diminishes the impact they might have on establishment attitudes and state policy, whether through the CMRS or in other ways.

In May 1993 a small number of religious working in disadvantaged areas met in the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice to discuss their role in the local community. One theme that emerged was that while these religious maybe quite effective locally in helping out with problems, they do not, with some significant exceptions, challenge the defects in the wider systems which give rise to these problems. For instance there has been little or no coordinated protest by these religious about the process through which the vast local authority housing 'ghettos' in which they live have been created. There was also a concern expressed that through their work religious could even be bolstering up systems, of both Church and State, that none of them really believe in.

The hope is that by meeting in this way religious living in disadvantaged areas will clarify their own role, and support one another in speaking out on issues of common concern.

A further meeting of this group is scheduled for Saturday, 16 October, 10.30-1.00. For further information ring Bill Toner S.J. at 874-0814, or Peter McVerry S.J. at 874-0002.

“WORK IS THE KEY” - WHAT NEXT?

The Bishops' Pastoral, Work is the Key, has been well received by the media. Its broad-ranging analysis has found few dissenters. It emphasises the devastating effect of unemployment on a large section of the population, and the serious responsibility of a large sector of the community to tackle the problem. The Pastoral was particularly critical of the growing apathy and fatalism which is one of the biggest obstacles to finding solutions.

However, the Pastoral has steered away from the difficult area of specific solutions, the Bishops considering that because these were in the sphere of economics they were outside their competence. The conclusion seems to be that someone else must come up with solutions. But in fact, is anyone coming up with the sort of radical solutions necessary to have any significant impact on the problem? Is there an opportunity for us to come up with and lobby for solutions?

The difficulty with solutions - or even small steps to improve the situation - is that many of them require difficult decisions and a willingness on the part of those who have wealth or work to share it out a little more equitably with those who have not. Archbishop Connell emphasised this in his recent talk on the subject.

If we agree that the problem is so serious that it cannot continue for the long term, then difficult decisions become easier.

A broad division of the problem into two areas helps to focus the mind -

- (a) the creation of additional jobs;
- (b) the need to sustain those who remain unemployed in terms of their physical wellbeing and with some degree of hope and dignity.

The first area (a) requires few policy decisions - everyone is in favour of more jobs; (b) however is the area where difficult decisions are needed and where consensus will be hard to achieve.

Can we persuade our organisations to support even one initiative which could impact on the long term problem of unemployment? To help the thinking process we set down a few random suggestions and ask you to select, debate, and, if in agreement, to lobby.

- (a) Support the introduction throughout Europe as quickly as possible of a maximum 48 hour working week.
- (b) Allow people on the dole to earn part time wages - without affecting their dole entitlements, as long as their total earnings were subject to tax - and within specified limits. The Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme is not the answer to this problem.
- (c) Commence a programme aimed at reducing the retiring age throughout Europe, and reducing the qualifying age for Old Age Pension.
- (d) Increase the Tax Free Allowance to ensure that those on low earnings do not pay tax. The cost of this measure to be paid by a surtax on earnings over £50,000.
- (e) Encourage more job sharing in areas of the economy not directly open to competitive pressures, e.g. teaching.
- (f) As we go to press, the CMRS model is receiving a lot of airing. This model has a lot of potential - is there anyone in a position of influence prepared to champion it?
- (g) Other suggestions? - we would be glad to hear them.

If we agree with the analysis of Work is the Key, that we cannot allow the present situation to continue, we need to do more than tinker around the edges of the problem. Difficult decisions need to be made soon.

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