



# 50

Voices from the  
Last 50 Years

---

An Oral History of the  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
1967 - 2017

National Youth Council of Ireland  
3 Montague Street,  
Dublin 2, Co. Dublin  
[www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)  
T: +353 (01) 478 4122  
E: [info@nyci.ie](mailto:info@nyci.ie)

First published in January 2018 by  
© National Youth Council of Ireland 2018  
Author: Marie-Claire McAleer  
Design: Fuse  
Printed in Ireland by: Print Run  
ISBN 978-1-900210-47-8



The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. It uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people.

NYCI would like to acknowledge the Irish newspapers archives for permitting the reproduction of the newspapers clippings used in this report and Paul McCarthy, for permission to use the photograph of Olivia McEvoy.

This oral history is based on the 50 interviews conducted as part of the study. The accounts of events included in the study reflect the views and lived experience of the interviewees. All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that the stories told and included in this report are authentic and reliable and as far as possible, that the dates and titles of individuals named in the report are correct.

An Oral History of the  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
1967 - 2017

# **50 Voices from the Last 50 Years**

Researched, Written and Edited

By

Marie-Claire McAleer

# Contents

<b>Foreword by Professor Maurice Devlin</b> .....	1
<b>Author's acknowledgements</b> .....	3
<b>In the beginning</b> .....	7
<b>NYCI on the International Stage</b> .....	8
<b>The 1970s</b> .....	11
<b>Stories from:</b>	
Michael Adams .....	12
Geoffrey Corry .....	14
Seumas O'Brien .....	16
Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil .....	18
<b>Significant Policy Developments 1970 - 1980</b> .....	20
<b>The 1980s</b> .....	23
<b>The Haughey-FitzGerald Contests to Court the Youth Vote</b> .....	25
<b>Stories from:</b>	
Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall.....	26
Brian Merriman .....	30
Tom Costello .....	33
Peter Finnegan.....	36
Alan Graham .....	38
Richard Doherty .....	41
Mark Mortell.....	43
Dermot Rafter .....	46
Siobhán Corry.....	48
Mark Acheson .....	51
Dermot Lacey.....	52
Fidelma Joyce .....	54
Aoife Nic Lughadha .....	58

<b>The 1990s</b> .....	61
<b>The NYCI Assembly</b> .....	63
<b>Stories from:</b>	
Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl .....	66
Tom Curran .....	69
Anna Gunning .....	72
Simon Nugent .....	74
Peter Byrne .....	76
Elaine Lowry .....	78
Teresa Heeney .....	80
Kevin Kelly .....	81
Dan Boyle .....	83
Ciairín de Buis .....	84
Dr. Eammon Waters .....	86
Dónall Geoghegan .....	89
Jillian van Turnhout .....	91
James Doorley .....	93
<b>NYCI and Northern Ireland</b> .....	97
<b>The Millennium</b> .....	103
<b>The Celtic Tiger Period, 2000 – 2007</b> .....	104
<b>Stories from:</b>	
Lisa Hyland .....	104
Orlaith McBride .....	106
Duane Farrell .....	108
Colm Ó Mongáin .....	110
Mary Cunningham .....	112
Olivia McEvoy .....	115
James O’Leary .....	117
Eddie D’Arcy .....	119
Jennifer Dowling .....	122

<b>The Recession and Post-Recession Period, 2008 – 2017 .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Stories from:</b>	
Anna Cunniffe.....	126
Vicky Rattigan .....	128
Michael Barron.....	130
Teresa Walsh.....	132
Senator Fintan Warfield.....	133
Vanessa Mulhall .....	135
Eoin O’Liatháin.....	137
Sean Finan.....	138
Carmel O’Connor.....	139
Ian Power .....	141
<b>Glossary of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>149</b>



**Professor  
Maurice  
Devlin**

## Foreword

The establishment of the National Youth Council of Ireland and the 50 years of its history to date are closely bound up with the modernisation of Irish society. The year of NYCI's foundation was the same year in which 'free post-primary education' was introduced, following the publication of the landmark report *Investment in Education*. That report, which paved the way for a huge increase in the level of participation in second-level education, was itself a response to the key decision a few years earlier to open up the Irish economy to international investment, a development that brought with it profound social and cultural change and, in meeting the need for a more educated workforce through extending the years of schooling into the teenage years, fuelled the emergence of youth culture in Ireland. These developments coincided (and interacted) with demographic change. The census of 1966 had recorded the first increase since the famine of the 1840s, heralding among other things a burgeoning of the youth population that was to continue for decades.

But the NYCI has not just reflected and responded to social change; it has actively contributed to, and helped to shape, the processes that have transformed Irish society in recent decades. From the outset it had a strongly international outlook. The Committee of European National Youth Committees (CENYC) played a role in prompting its establishment. In its earliest years NYCI set up a Youth Travel Bureau and its work with partners at home and abroad helped to create the environment in which international and intercultural youth exchange would flourish. It has always been a very active member of the European Youth Forum and many of its members are affiliates of (and often protagonists within) European and global networks of youth work and youth movements. Nearer to home NYCI's close relations with counterparts in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales have been an important part of the civil society contribution to building and sustaining peace on this island.

Over the years NYCI has taken a pioneering approach to a whole range of issues and topics: work with girls and young women, outdoors education, youth arts, health promotion, development and global education, interculturalism, new technologies, and many more. Inevitably there have been moments of fracture and discord within the organisation during its history, at times reflecting differences of opinion and perspective on important social issues. This is to be expected in a representative body with a large number of individual organisations in membership, particularly given that they grew in diversity as well as number as time passed. However, it is NYCI's strength of collective voice that has been most

impressive over the years. It was particularly powerfully expressed during the marriage equality campaign two years ago, when NYCI unequivocally asserted its support for the principle that all young people have equal rights.

Above all NYCI has been a voice for young people and those who work with them. Over many years it has forcefully articulated and defended young people's rights and interests in relation to education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, creativity and personal development. It has promoted – and has itself been a vibrant expression of – the vital place of volunteers and volunteering in youth work and in society more broadly. It has also played an important role in the development of professional education and training for youth work, through membership of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee and in many other ways.

From the outset, NYCI called for a coherent and effective youth policy on the part of the state and in all the years since then it has consistently provided a critique of policy developments and initiatives affecting young people. But it has also been a willing and constructive partner to the state in the development and implementation of such policy. Indeed, there have been times when the state has been insufficiently interested or effectual in relation to youth work and youth policy and NYCI has provided much needed leadership. Its contribution was acknowledged by the state through the granting of 'social partnership' status from the 1980s and its designation as the national representative body for youth organisations under the Youth Work Act of 2001. A renewal and reinvigoration of that spirit of partnership with the voluntary sector would be welcome and timely as NYCI enters its second half-century. For NYCI itself, I hope that it will continue to respond in ways that are both relevant and imaginative to the changes and challenges facing young people in Irish society. Even more than when it was first established, we are living in times of uncertainty and unpredictability, and the need for collective effort in pursuit of positive social goals is greater than ever.

I am delighted that NYCI has taken the opportunity of its anniversary to prepare an oral history of its first fifty years, and I commend Marie-Claire McAleer for compiling such a fascinating and insightful collection of memories and reflections. All the staff and volunteers involved in the organisation over the last five decades deserve immense gratitude and respect.

**Maurice Devlin is Professor and Head of Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University, where he is also Jean Monnet Chair in European Youth Studies. He has worked closely with NYCI and several of its member organisations since the 1980s.**



**Marie-Claire  
McAleer**

## **Author's Acknowledgments**

2017 marks the golden anniversary of the existence of the National Youth Council of Ireland. As part of the commemoration of this significant milestone in the organisation's history, the board of NYCI commissioned this qualitative research study to be conducted on the history of the organisation. This publication is the compilation of 50 interviews conducted with people who have been involved in NYCI at some stage over its 50 year lifetime. The idea behind the oral history project was to capture 50 stories from the past 50 years of the organization, in a way that both reflects past achievements and celebrates the highs and lows of the organisation's history. The publication aims to document policy issues that dominated the organisation's agenda and map significant events throughout the five decades, through the voices of people who played an integral role in the organisation's history. To ensure that interviewees reflect the broad and diverse nature of NYCI's rich and colourful history, the participants were purposefully selected, taking into account their significant contribution to the organisation during a particular period and their role and involvement in the Council. In selecting interviewees to inform the study, I was mindful of the need to capture the diverse political orientations within the broader membership, the varied aspects of the work and the changing nature of the research, policy and advocacy agenda.

This oral history is based on the interviews conducted as part of the study. The stories told and events included were selected and highlighted by those interviewed. The accounts of events in the study reflect the views and lived experience of the interviewees. Narrative analysis of this nature always brings a number of challenges and this research is no exception. I am cognizant that the report relies on the memories of interviewees and as with all histories, there is always more than one interpretation of a life event or situation. Every effort has been made to ensure that the stories told and included in this report are authentic and reliable, as far as possible and the dates and titles of individuals named in the report are correct.

I would like to thank my colleagues – James Doorley, for reading through the draft manuscript and making editorial suggestions and Daniel Meister, for overseeing the design and publication of the report. I would also like to acknowledge the earlier work of Geoffrey Corry and Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall, whose historical documents on NYCI were of great assistance to me in conducting this research. Lastly, a special word of thanks to Professor Maurice Devlin for his reflective input and to the following people who allowed me to interview them, contributed their stories to this publication and reviewed excerpts of the draft publication at the editing stage:

Anna Gunning  
Aoife Nic Lughadha  
Ciairín de Buis  
Elaine Lowry  
Fidelma Joyce  
Carmel O’Connor  
Siobhán Corry  
Teresa Heeney  
Vicky Rattigan  
Anna Cunniffe  
Jennifer Dowling  
Lisa Hyland  
Olivia McEvoy  
Orlaith McBride  
Jillian van Turnhout  
Vanessa Mulhall  
Dónall Geoghegan  
Seán Finan  
Seumus O’Brien  
Alan Graham  
Ian Power  
Tom Curran  
Tom Costello  
Brian Merriman  
Colm Ó Mongáin  
Dan Boyle

Dermot Rafter  
Dermot Lacey  
Eddie D’Arcy  
Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall  
Senator Fintan Warfield  
Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl  
James Doorley  
James O’Leary  
Kevin Kelly  
Mark Acheson  
Mark Mortell  
Michael Barron  
Fr. Michaél Mac Gréil  
Peter Finnegan  
Peter Byrne  
Richard Doherty  
Simon Nugent  
Eoin O’Liatháin  
Geoffrey Corry  
Michael Adams  
Duane Farrell  
Mary Cunningham  
Teresa Walsh  
Dr. Eamonn Waters

It has been an honour to undertake this research and I greatly appreciate the time and contribution of each and every one of the research participants. I appreciate their honesty, openness and applaud their amazing memories for detail. The stories conveyed during the interviews, made me laugh, made me feel nostalgic and also made me reflect on how much Ireland has changed over the 50 year period and how much things have remained static. Progress in some youth issues has been significant, but on other policy agendas, things have remained the same. I was struck by the cyclical nature of particular policy issues. The profound impact of recession and the impact it has had on young people, generation after generation, is striking. Issues such as youth unemployment and youth emigration dominated NYCI's agenda in the 1980s and in the most recent recession, once again these issues re-emerge – like history repeating itself.

I hope this publication provides an engaging, lively and interesting record of the last 50 years of NYCI, but also serves as a timely reminder of the importance of the work of NYCI now and for the next 50 years! Long may it continue!

**Marie-Claire McAleer is Head of Research & Policy at the National Youth Council of Ireland.**

In the  
**beginning...**

## In the beginning...

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) was formally established on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1967, but the foundations were set much earlier. In the mid-1960s, during the Fianna Fáil government of Sean Lemass, the Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley, recognised the need for renewed state support for youth services. He supported the efforts of the Council of the European Youth Committees (CENYC) to establish a coordinating committee in Ireland, through which Irish youth work could be represented abroad.

On 12 May 1966, the Irish Press reported that discussions about the formation of a national youth council in Ireland were set in motion following a visit to Ireland by Mr. H. Binder, the President of the CENYC. The article reports that during his visit, Mr. Binder had separate talks with leaders of youth groups in Ireland and attended a joint conference, at which Mr. Jim Dukes of the Department of Education presided. Jim Dukes (father of former fine Gael Leader, Alan Dukes) was a liaison officer with the youth section of the Council of Europe. Corry (1990) refers to an important meeting, which was held in the Department of Education on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1966, to investigate the possibility of establishing a national youth committee similar to committees that existed in other European countries. Present at that meeting were representatives of 15 voluntary organisations. Within months, the task was completed by a committee of five people, supported by Paddy Walsh (a member of the Catholic Youth Council).

A characteristic of Irish youth work in the 1960s was its commitment to volunteerism, which was strongly rooted in voluntary youth organisations. From the start, the Council was committed to youth participation and was pluralist in character. The first chair of NYCI was Reverend Norman Styles from the Church of Ireland and Matt Ryan of Muintir na Tire was Vice Chair. On 18<sup>th</sup> January 1967, the first ever NYCI constitution was adopted and the National Youth Council of Ireland was formed. One week later, an inaugural meeting was held in the Shelbourne Hotel on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1967. The following year, the new Minister for Education, Brian Lenihan Senior TD is on record in Dáil Éireann as recognizing the Council as the coordinating body of the principal voluntary youth organisations. Prior to 1968, there was no state funding for youth organisations. Following extensive lobbying by the then President of the Limerick based Federation of Catholic Boys Clubs, the very first grant of IR£450 was allocated. The following year, a national scheme of grant in aid was introduced, which enabled youth organisations to begin to establish core administration and to employ staff. In 1969, the then Minister for Finance, Charles Haughey allocated IR£100,000 for youth, sport and community organisations and 12 youth organisations received their first grants, totalling IR£33,000, to extend their programmes and services. At around the same time, a small youth, sport and recreation section was established within the Department of Education.

In the first decade of the organisation's existence, NYCI was establishing itself and was being shaped by many young, impressive and very able individuals who were attracted to the organisation for a variety of reasons. In this period, representatives from uniform organisations and the faith-based organisations tended to dominate leadership positions within the organisation. There were four guiding and scouting organisations – two catholic and two protestant. There was quite a strong input from protestant faith-

based organisations in the early days of NYCI. Organisations such as the Church of Ireland youth body and the Methodist youth department were very influential. The Jewish Youth Council was also actively involved in NYCI during this period. The youth wings of the political parties started to become active in the late 1970s. The Connelly Youth Movement (CYM), which was very controversial at the time, was involved and is discussed in more detail later in the report. In the late 1970s, Ógra Fianna Fáil was established, followed swiftly by the establishment of Young Fine Gael. Other organisations such as the National Federation of Youth Clubs, An Óige (Irish Youth Hostel Association) and Foróige were also actively involved.

In 1972, NYCI was chaired by Michael Webb who represented the Scouting Association of Ireland (SAI). The first full-time Secretary General (Director) was Michael Adams (profiled on pages 12–13). Other members of the executive during this time included Derek Nally (National Federation of Youth Clubs), Jerry Kelly (Catholic Boys Scouts), Richard O’Toole (Union of Students in Ireland), Estelle Feldman (Irish Girl Guides) and Rev. Gordon Gray (Presbyterian Youth). In 1973, NYCI had 24 member organisations namely; The Boys’ Brigade, Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland, Catholic Girl Guides of the Diocese of Dublin, Catholic Young Men’s Society of Ireland, Catholic Youth Council, The Catholic Youth Crusade of Ireland, Church of Ireland Youth Council, Comhairle le Leas Óige, Comhchoiste Náisiúnta na Gcoláistí Samhraidh, The Girls’ Brigade of Ireland, Girls’ friendly Society in Ireland, The Irish Girl Guides, the Irish Methodist Youth Department, the Irish Union of School Students, Macra na Feirme, Macra na Tuaithe, Muintir na Tire, the National Federation of Youth Clubs, An Óige, Presbyterian Youth Committee, Scout Association of Ireland, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, Union of Students in Ireland, Young Men’s Christian Association and Young Women’s Christian Association for Ireland. It also had five associate member organisations, namely; Comhcairdeas/Irish Workcamp Movement, Ferns Diocesan Youth Service, Ógra – Cork Youth Associations, Student Christian Movement and Voluntary Service International (Irish Youth Directory, 1973).

### **NYCI on the International Stage**

From the 1960s, the CENYC and the European Coordination Bureau of International Youth Organisations (ECB) represented youth interests at a European level. The Youth Forum for the European Communities (YFEC) was established later in the 1970s, as a forum to provide the National Youth Councils of the Community and non-governmental international youth organisations of Europe, a platform to discuss amongst themselves the various aspects of Community politics and the problems they felt most strongly about. Twenty-one non-governmental youth organisations and eight National Youth Councils (including Ireland) were accepted for full membership of the YFEC, having fulfilled the criteria agreed and adopted by the temporary secretariat at a meeting in Copenhagen in April 1977. The other National Youth Councils that were accepted into membership were Belgium, Denmark, Italy, France, Holland, Germany and the United Kingdom. Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland did not qualify for full membership and were given observer status. The ECB and CENYC were given consultative status.

NYCI was actively involved in the CENYC, the ECB and the YFEC and also played a part in European and international initiatives through involvement in inter-governmental bodies in the youth field operating at the European level. These included those relating to the European Youth Centre and the

European Youth Foundation within the Framework of the Council of Europe. Similar initiatives within the European Communities existed through NYCI's membership of WAY (World Assembly of Youth), which ensured contacts with the International Labour Organisations (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). WAY was the worldwide organisation with members in all continents, excluding the former Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe. NYCI gained membership of WAY in Belgium in 1969. At its 8<sup>th</sup> assembly in Manchester in 1972, Ireland was one of 56 member national youth committees present and was elected to the 16 member WAY Executive Committee.

The General Assembly of CENYC met every two years to decide on general policy. Ireland could send delegates to both the General Assembly and Executive Committee meetings. In 1971, Richard O'Toole (Vice-President of NYCI) was elected Vice-President of CENYC. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1976, the Council of Ministers of European Economic Community decided to create a temporary Secretariat for the establishment of a Community Youth Forum. Three plenary meetings were held on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1976, 26 – 27<sup>th</sup> April 1977 and 12 – 13<sup>th</sup> December 1977 to discuss and approve the establishment of the Youth Forum for the European Communities (YFEC), which was established the following year in 1978, to work vis-à-vis the European Union (then called the European Community). In the 1990s, following a major process of rationalisation, a single structure replacing all youth organisations was established. As a result, the CENYC, the YFEC and the ECB merged into one body – the European Youth Forum or Youth Forum Jeunesse (YFJ). YFJ was established in 1996, as a European international organisation, representing national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations. NYCI continues to be actively involved in European youth politics via the European Youth Forum to this day.

The  
**1970s**

## The 1970s

In the 1970s, NYCI was a new organisation, still very much in its infancy. It reflected a commitment to Christianity and many of the people on the NYCI Executive were committed Christians. The main objective of youth work at the time, was to ensure people continue in their faith. In the period 1970 – 1974, NYCI established four committees; education and youth welfare, travel, youth community and the environment. There was a big UN youth conference on the environment in Toronto and four NYCI delegates attended on behalf of the organisation. As a result of the UN conference, Ireland hosted a conference on the environment in Killarney. In 1973, NYCI published a document entitled *The Development of Youth Services*. The policy issues that dominated NYCI's agenda in the early 1970s centred on the nature and scope of youth work. Hours were spent deliberating over such issues to try and reach a consensus amongst members.

From 1974 onwards, political youth movements started to emerge. Political parties were realizing that young people were a significant proportion of the population and they wanted to appeal to the youth electorate. Haughey formed Ógra Fianna Fáil (OFF) and then FitzGerald moved quickly after that to form Young Fine Gael (YFG). The notion of 'partnership' also began to evolve. There was a sense of youth empowerment and young people saw their future as part of Europe. Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1974. Membership of the European Union had a strong influence on Ireland and an ever closer union began to emerge.

By the mid-1970s, the membership of NYCI was a patchwork quilt of different youth organisations. There was a real mix of uniform organisations, faith-based organisations and a greater presence of a variety of youth political movements. Actively involved in the Council at this time were the Catholic youth movement, the Church of Ireland youth movement, the Presbyterian youth movement and the Methodist youth department. Political groupings like the Connolly Youth Movement (CYM) provided an extreme left perspective to youth affairs, while the young European federalists offered a strongly European perspective, which was right of centre. Interviewees from this period in NYCI, refer to the mix of agendas and the difficulty at times, finding a common ground, which made developing policy complicated.

The CYM was the first political youth organisation in Ireland. They were committed to the ideology of 'communism,' which, at the time, was a dirty word in Ireland. Their application for membership generated a lot of debate and discussion amongst in NYCI's membership. Michael Adams (profiled on pages 12–13) recalls that although the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) were supportive of CYM's membership of NYCI, their membership was not accepted initially, but it marked the start of a discussion about opening the membership of NYCI up to youth political groupings. The CYM later became members of NYCI, followed by Ógra Fianna Fáil and Young Fine Gael. The CYM held strong communist values and as such were controversial. Indeed, so controversial, that one interviewee recalls seeing a special branch car outside the NYCI's office every time the organisation had a meeting, because of the attendance of CYM representatives at NYCI meetings! NYCI also had fairly close contacts with the British Youth Council (BYC) in the 1970s. At the time, the BYC was a federation of political youth organisations. There were also the Standing Conferences of Youth Organisations (SCYO) for England and Wales and Northern Ireland.



### Michael Adams

First Secretary General of NYCI, 1970 – 74

Currently lives in Dublin and Berlin

(Ich bin ein DuBerliner!)

Current Position: Happily retired, after 35 years working for a EU agency

Prior to his appointment as the first Secretary General in NYCI in 1970, Michael Adams had very limited experience of youth work. Whilst studying History and Politics at Trinity College Dublin in the period 1963 – 1967, Michael was involved in the SRC (the students' representative council), which later became known as TCD students' union. He became involved in USI, holding the position of Vice President, responsible for culture and education. After he graduated, he moved to the UK. After that, he spent a year in the European Institute of the University of Amsterdam studying European integration. After his year in Amsterdam, Michael returned to Ireland and worked for C oras Tr acht ala (the Irish Trade Board), until he saw the position of Secretary General of NYCI, advertised in the newspaper. He applied for the position and was appointed to the post. At the time, Paddy Lyons (from Comhairle Le Leas  ige) was the chairperson (President) of NYCI. Comhairle Le Leas  ige was later to become CDYSB. Comhairle Le Leas  ige was not a voluntary body and at the time they had paid employees and around six youth officers. After Paddy Lyons' term, Michael Webb was elected the next Chair of NYCI. Michael Webb came from what was then the Scout Association of Ireland (SAI) and was a quantity surveyor by profession. Under Michael Webb's chairmanship, the profile of the Council grew and his term in office coincided with a number of significant moments in Irish politics for young people. One particularly significant moment, was the 1972 referendum to reduce the voting age to 18.

NYCI's home in the early days was at 39 Fenian Street, which is now the Gingerman Pub. The Council rented the upstairs room and this is where Michael Adams worked from and where executive meetings were held. Michael recalls the first council meeting he attended. There were 20 – 30 people in attendance and the youngest people in the room were himself and his friend Geoffrey Corry. He recalls with amusement, in those early days, the leadership of the organisation comprised of mainly men, who would have been in their 50s. The vice chairperson was a Jesuit priest from Galway, who was representing the National Federation of Youth Clubs, also referred to as 'The Fed' (now known as Youth Work Ireland). Another big player on the NYCI Executive (Board) at the time was a man named Derek Nally (a Garda Sergeant from Bunclody). Derek was involved in 'The Fed' and Ferns Youth Service. He later became General Secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors and was a candidate for President of Ireland in 1997.

NYCI did not have access to meetings with the Taoiseach in the early 1970s, but they did work closely with two Parliamentary Secretaries to the Department of Education. Michael O'Kennedy TD (FF) and John Bruton (FG) worked on the youth agenda, despite the fact that there was nothing about youth in

either of their titles! The big policy issue of the early 1970s, which dominated the agenda of the Council, was to persuade government to adopt a National Youth Policy and in doing so, to provide more money for youth work. There was a proposal from the Department of Education that NYCI would administer the budget to youth organisations. The Council refused. Michael Adams contends that this meant everybody could unite on the basis that they wanted more money for youth work, rather than NYCI being placed in the unenviable position of administrator of inadequate funding, while simultaneously being the representative body for youth organisations.

The training of youth leaders, both voluntary and professional, was also a major theme and the Council organized a number of seminars and conferences. On this and other issues, Michael considers international contacts were of major importance and study tours provided unique and valuable opportunities for personnel from NYCI member organisations to exchange views and learn from each other, as well as their hosts. These contacts and membership of the CENYC also contributed enormously to reducing the reluctance of member organisations to becoming involved on political issues, though not sufficiently for them to grant NYCI membership to the CYM, which was the first party political organisation to apply!

### **Referendum of Reducing the Voting Age from 21 to 18**

NYCI actively campaigned for the reduction of the voting age to 18. In 1972, a referendum was called on the issue. The referendum to reduce the voting age was passed, but Michael Adams says that while the campaign itself was interesting, the after play was much more of a story. When the 1973 election was held, the referendum had already been passed and the constitution had been changed. The election, however, was being held on the basis of the electoral roll, which was dated before the referendum, which in effect would exclude prospective voters under the age of 21 (unless they had taken the initiative individually to get themselves on the electoral registrar). Michael Adams remembers going to a meeting with Michael Webb in Sean McBride's house, to discuss the issue. Sean McBride was a barrister who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his involvement in setting up Amnesty International. Mary Robinson (later President of Ireland) was also present at the meeting. At the meeting, they discussed the possibility of challenging the government's decision to call an election, which excluded those aged 18 – 21 from voting. To legally challenge the government's decision, an individual had to make the case that their rights were being infringed by calling the election at that time. A willing volunteer from the scouts was found to take the case. The motion before the court was to call on the government to postpone the election until the results of the referendum were implemented. Michael recalls that it took a week or two for a final decision to be taken and for those two weeks it looked possible that the election date would have to be postponed, but in the end the government's decision was upheld and the election proceeded as planned. Reflecting on this event in NYCI's history, Michael Adams said NYCI played a very important role in the campaign to reduce the voting age to 18.



### Geoffrey Corry

Former Board Member, 1969 – 72

Information Officer, 1974 – 76

Secretary General, 1976 – 80

National Secretary (Director) of NYCI, 1976 – 80

Current Position: Independent facilitator and mediator

Geoffrey Corry first got involved in NYCI in 1969 and very soon after that, he became Honorary Secretary. He remained on the Executive until 1972 and then moved to London to take up a full-time post with the British Council of Churches. When he returned to Dublin in 1974, he was appointed to the position of Information Officer with NYCI. His role was to prepare and publish the NYCI newsletters and policy documents. In 1976, he was appointed Secretary General – a position he held for four years. He left NYCI staff in 1980 to become General Secretary of the National Federation of Youth Clubs.

Geoffrey was involved in youth work from a very early age and active in youth meetings and groupings in the 1960s. He says this period in Ireland was “*an incredible time for youth and students.*” The Second Vatican Council and the economic development of the Lemass era created a very different environment in Ireland and from that emerged a generation of young people engaged and participative, with a vision for change. Whilst a student at Trinity College Dublin, Geoffrey had heard about the formation of the National Youth Council and made further enquiries about it from the Methodist Dublin Youth Group. He was then approached by Rev. John Knox, the secretary of the Irish Methodist Church Youth Department in Belfast, to become involved in NYCI as its southern representative. Geoffrey recalls his first council meeting in 1969, which was held at 39 Fenian Street, Dublin 2.

*“You went up the stairs to the first floor and there was one large rectangular room at the front of the building taken up with the tables for the Council meeting – nothing else apart from a small room and a toilet on the return. When Michael Adams was appointed two years later, he had a desk at the end of the big room”* (Geoffrey Corry, 2017).

At that stage, there were 15 organisations involved in NYCI and many of the founding fathers of the Council Executive, like Rev. Norman Styles and Paddy Lyons, were more mature in age. Geoffrey was nominated by Richard O’Toole (USI President) to the Executive at the next AGM and recalls O’Toole saying:

*“This is a Youth Council, so we need to have youth represented on the Executive.”*

O’Toole also got elected to the executive at that Annual General Meeting (AGM). Corry soon became very involved in all the committees and was elected as Honorary Secretary of the Council.

One of the main attractions of being involved in NYCI in those days was the opportunity for international travel, to meet other national youth councils in Europe, through CENYC. There were



Pictured above NYCI's first office at 39 Fenian Street, Dublin 2

trips and study visits to Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Bonn, Paris, The Hague and even eastern European countries, like Yugoslavia and Romania, long before the fall of the Berlin Wall. These trips were much sought after. So much so, that Geoffrey and Richard (O'Toole) made sure that at least one young person would get nominated alongside the older volunteer heads of member organisations, in order to

have real youth representation. One memorable trip for Geoffrey was to attend an EEC Youth Colloque in Brussels in June 1971, because of Ireland's application to join the common market. Then continuing with his haversack on his back, he took the train up to The Hague to represent NYCI at the five day World Food Congress of the FAO. Young people from around the world were put up in a temporary youth village in an old military barracks outside the city. Geoffrey says it was probably the first time the UN took the voice of young people seriously. He recalls that the atmosphere was fantastic and proved to have a huge influence on him. The 'Third World' was a new concept at that time and it proved to be a great opportunity to learn about world development issues, as well as the poverty gap between northern and southern hemispheres. As a result, when he returned, he represented NYCI on the Gorta council.

*"It was a real kind of conversion type experience of going to EU and UN events and being part of it and seeing the big people up on stage and these concepts being talked about and worked through. So for us, as younger people, young adults, going to those events, it was a real sense of being part, of us playing our part in this big enterprise, so it was very exciting" (Geoffrey Corry, 2017).*

Those years also saw opportunities for youth leaders to go to youth conferences at the European Youth Centre (Council of Europe) in Strasbourg, on a range of topics. Youth exchange agreements with France and Germany, established between the governments, offered language training and youth exchange visits, which proved to be influential in opening up vistas and cultures beyond Britain. Geoffrey says that they also realized how poor the youth facilities in Ireland were compared to the amazing youth facilities abroad.

*"We came back rather amazed at the youth facilities on the continent compared to our dingy church or community halls" (Geoffrey Corry, 2017).*

From 1976 – 1980, Geoffrey held the position of Secretary General in NYCI. In this role, he enjoyed facilitating young leaders from the member organisations to get involved in the cut and thrust of policy formulation on youth work matters and social affairs. Some went on to become involved in party politics and senior leadership roles in civil society. He acknowledges it was often challenging to find consensus in NYCI, because of the diversity of organisations in membership, but the regular council meetings and working groups supported the building of relationships across uniformed organisations and beyond, to include the new arrival of issue-based groups. His role was to find consensus and to tease out issues. The fact that a common youth work policy document was produced, in 1978, was a big leap forward, bringing real cohesion to the work of NYCI.



### Seumas O'Brien

President of Macra, 1977 – 79  
Macra Representative on NYCI and International  
Affairs Committee of NYCI, 1975 – 77  
Member of European Youth Forum, 1978 – 80  
Current Position: National Chairman of IFAC,  
2006 – 2017

Seumas O'Brien became involved in NYCI through his association with Macra na Feirme in the 1970s. He was Macra's representative on NYCI and sat on NYCI's International Committee (IC) from 1975 – 1977. His first impression of NYCI was that there was a huge number of very diverse youth organisations in membership, from urban to rural and to a lesser extent, from regional backgrounds. The scouting and guiding movements and faith-based organisations had a strong presence. Coming from a non-political, non-sectarian organisation like Macra, Seumas says he was conscious of the 'intriguing mix of different denominations and political groupings.' While 'intriguing,' Seumas also acknowledges that such diversity presented challenges as well and could be frustrating, as the mix didn't lend itself easily to reaching a consensus position. NYCI at the time was also going through a transition from the established years, to a period of trying to consolidate its programme of work more effectively.

NYCI in the 1970s was a dynamic organisation but it was challenged in terms of cohesion. For example (as previously referred to on page 13), there was a strong proposition that the national youth council would be the distribution authority to youth institutions. This proposal was totally and utterly rejected by Macra na Feirme, Macra na Tuaithe (now Foróige) and Muintir na Tire, who were long established organisations with very different structures. There was a real concern that reallocation of funds would dilute their financial support from the state. Seumas also recalls NYCI refusing membership to the CYM. The CYM had gone public on NYCI's rejection of its membership application and were exploiting it to the full. They were commenting in the press about it, saying NYCI had the audacity to refuse them membership. Macra took the view that the CYM should be allowed membership and that it was better to have them in membership than outside of it. Macra believed the CYM was capitalising on the publicity and took the position that it would support CYM's membership of NYCI. The politics of NYCI ignited an interest in Seumas and it was at this point that he became very interested in getting more involved in the Youth Council. When the opportunity arose to represent Macra in the Council, he put himself forward. Macra had two representatives on the Council at the time, Seumas and Aidan Arnold. Aidan was on NYCI's Youth Affairs Committee and Seumas sat on the IC. At this time, Gordon Campbell was chairperson (President) of NYCI and Brian Beggan was chairperson of the IC.

During his period of involvement on the IC, the focus of the committee's work was; the establishment of a Youth Forum (YFEC), relationships with the CENYC and third world agencies, the Franco–Irish cultural exchange programme, the British–Irish exchange programme and the World Festival of Youth, in 1978. Of particular interest to Seumas, was safeguarding the two young European farmer organisations. Reflecting on his time on the IC, Seumas says it was *'a splendid year and a half'*. He attended CENYC meetings in Brussels on behalf of NYCI. In fact, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1977, Seumas along with Rory O'Ferrall and Stephen Haughey were present at the CENYC plenary session when the decision to formally establish the YFEC was approved.

Seumas' departed from NYCI to become President of Macra. He subsequently became a member of the Youth Forum representing the European Committee of Young Farmers and 4H clubs, in the period January 1979 – January 1980 and later held the Presidency of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) from 1980–83 and was President of World Congress of Young Farmers from 1982–83.

When Seumas thinks back on his involvement in NYCI, he remembers the meetings he attended on behalf of the Council in Brussels, the establishment of the YFEC and being amongst young people who had a political interest in being part of the European Community. The experience provided him with the foundations to later become European President of Young Farmers and eventually, World President of Young Farmers. He greatly enjoyed this period of his career and appreciated the opportunity to meet like-minded people from many different persuasions across Europe. Speaking of the benefits he derived from participating in NYCI in the 1970s, Seumas says the experience cemented in his mind, the incredible success of European integration that has taken place in the last 50 years. He says he is honoured to be part of this integration, in many different forms, but mainly in the world of agriculture. In terms of the role of NYCI, he believes it *"provides a great foundation to progress into politics, into business, into sport, leadership, or community leadership...It is part of the life process."*



### Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil SJ

NYCI Vice President/Honorary Secretary,  
1982 – 83

Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil has a strong association with NYCI, which started in the 1970s. At one stage he served as Honorary Secretary of NYCI and was also a Vice President of NYCI. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he held his membership of NYCI as a representative of three organisations, maintaining a close relationship with the organisation for thirty years. Micheál joined the Jesuits in 1959. As a very academic order, he says there was an expectation that most members would pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies in philosophy, in secular science or in theology. He studied philosophy and social science in Leuven, Belgium. From Belgium, he got a graduate assistantship in 1964 to Kent State University in the United States. He spent five terms there. It was while in Belgium that his research interest in prejudice began. He subsequently published three major works on the subject of prejudice in 1977, 1996 and 2011. Prejudice in Ireland was the subject of his doctoral research. As part of his research, Micheál measured the prejudices of Irish people.

In 1966, he came back to Dublin and got involved with the Irish language movement and with Conradh na Gaeilge. Conradh na Gaeilge established a special youth section, known as Ógras (Óg-Ghluaiseacht Chonradh na Gaeilge), which contributed significantly to enhancing Irish as a living language, among some young people. By the late 1970s, there was growing pressure among young people within Ógras for greater autonomy from its parent organisation, Conradh na Gaeilge. This desire for independence drew support from a number of Ógras branches.

*“Máiréad Ní Chinnéide (later Máiréad Bean Uí Dhomhnaill) was the first chairperson (of Ógras). I was the second chair. Then, at the end of the 1970s, some got restless...they wanted to be independent and didn't want to be a youth section of a senior organisation. There were some decisions made that they didn't agree with. We had a meeting then in Drogheda on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1980, at which it was decided by those interested in independence that a new youth organization would be set up. It was agreed to name it 'Feachtas' meaning 'campaign' (Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil, 2017).*

#### **Feachtas is born**

Feachtas was established in 1980. Micheál says that it was good to establish Feachtas to provide an independent, youth-focused Irish language organisation. He says of this time that there was an emancipation process in train and *'the young people didn't want to be controlled.'* In March 1980, Micheál

resigned from Ógras and switched his representative status on NYCI from Ógras to Macra na Feirme (of which he was a member). Macra nominated him as their NYCI delegate. At the inaugural meeting of Feachtas, it was decided they would apply for membership of NYCI and were duly accepted as a new member organisation.

Micheál describes his time in NYCI as ‘exciting.’ Coming to the organisation with an academic background in sociology, he applied this lens to the study of youth and saw NYCI as providing a structured peer environment for young people. He says he discovered on joining NYCI that it had two main sections – youth work and youth affairs. The youth work section naturally was very youth work oriented. The growth of ‘extended adolescence’ at the time resulted in the youth affairs section became vocal and political. Micheál says he felt that Foróige left NYCI as a result. He regarded the disaffiliation of Foróige from NYCI’s membership to be one of the saddest events to happen during his time of involvement in the Youth Council.

In the 1980s, Micheál says NYCI promoted young leaders in the farming community and elsewhere and it was ‘quite middle class.’ Meetings were held in hotels. He remembers one event in a ‘posh’ hotel near Lansdowne Road.

Micheál also remembers being part of an NYCI delegation that met Minister Garret FitzGerald TD, then leader of the opposition, in the early 1980s. Thinking back on the occasion, Micheál says:

*“I remember it well. It would be one of these Haughey FitzGerald contests. Well, Garret took up the youth issue very well. I’d be more left-wing than he would be. He’d be quite right, but at the same time I admired him. Then the youth issue seemed to lose its political relevance in the late ‘80s... in the ‘90s... it quietened it down... Social Partnership did a lot of good but it certainly undermined the Dáil and it certainly made us a little bit less prominent”*  
(Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil, 2017).

During the 1980s, he remembers representing NYCI at the International Socialist Youth Conference in Kumrovec in Yugoslavia, during the reign of Marshal Tito. Micheál addressed the conference and recalls a Russian delegate asking him what NYCI’s position was on Northern Ireland. He explained that each individual organisation had positions, but NYCI collectively did not take positions except on broad issues like humanitarian issues. It was a pluralist Council.

Speaking of his time in NYCI, Micheál says it was very enjoyable and inspiring. He was committed to the work:

*“I got more out of it than I gave. I was very committed....to get to know other leaders, which after all, is the purpose of life. You see, my outlook on life is, we are here to get to know and love each other and in so doing, get to know and love God! It doesn’t come the opposite way. I got to know some of the finest people in the country through the National Youth Council. The NYCI has contributed much to Irish society by serving the needs of young people, protecting their rights and giving them a voice in Irish society”* (Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil, 2017).

## Significant Policy Developments 1970 – 1980

In 1973, John Bruton was appointed Parliamentary Secretary and remained in this position for the lifetime of the Coalition, until 1977. As Parliamentary Secretary, he was very receptive to youth issues and appointed a panel of advisers to draft youth policy. NYCI were not represented on this panel, as Deputy Bruton preferred to consult with NYCI separately. The panel was assisted by a Departmental Inspector, Paddy Neary. Bruton visited other European countries during this period, to familiarize himself with youth services in other jurisdictions. NYCI engaged with Deputy Bruton for two years on four salient policy questions pertinent to the future of youth work:

- Was the purpose of youth services for recreation or education?
- Should the youth services be primarily a statutory or a voluntary service?
- Could voluntary organisations provide a comprehensive youth service at local level?
- Should professional training be provided through pre-service courses or by in-service methods?

In 1974, the draft youth policy developed by Deputy Bruton and his Inspector and Departmental advisers was circulated to cabinet and Government Departments for adoption. Unfortunately, no further progress was made in terms of advancing its progression. The expected publication of a white paper on youth policy did not emerge. According to Corry, those active in NYCI at the time believe that the oil crisis of 1974 thwarted Bruton's efforts to proceed any further and as a result, any further expenditure in this area was suspended. The final policy document was published a month prior to the May 1977 general election, with minor amendments to the draft document and the Government sanctioned the spending of £235,000 to implement the proposals. Corry contends that when the white paper, *"A Policy for Youth and Sport,"* was finally published in 1977, it was too late to have any real impact. *"A huge vacuum had been left and morale had taken a nosedive, when there was no response at all to the earlier policy deliberations"* (Corry, 1990: 16).

Bruton did, however, deliver on the introduction of four special schemes during his time in office:

- Three Youth Encounter Projects for school truants as an alternative to school or the more costly residential special schools – one in Dublin, Cork and Limerick.
- Temporary Youth Employment Scheme for unemployed people aged between 18 and 21.
- Youth exchange programmes with France and Germany operated under Cultural Agreements.
- Outdoor Education Centres and training in adventure sports mainly located in closed down national or vocational schools in areas of scenic beauty.

In 1978, the incoming Fianna Fáil government appointed Jim Tunney TD as Parliamentary Secretary for Youth and Sport. Deputy Tunney expressed concerns about youth organisations not having any clear vision of their role and hinted at the need for amalgamation of the many youth club agencies. In May 1978, he appointed 14 members to a committee chaired by District Justice James O’Sullivan. The committee’s remit was to report on *“the nature and effectiveness of the programmes being carried out by youth organisations (non-uniformed) in receipt of grants direct or indirect from the Department of Education and make recommendations deemed appropriate for the improvement and development of the Youth Services”* (O’Sullivan Report, 1980: 7). This committee was to produce an interim report within three months. In response, NYCI worked to get an agreed consensus amongst its members on outstanding policy issues and published its proposals as *“A Policy on Youth Work Services,”* in late 1978. Post publication of the interim report, Deputy Tunney used the committee’s report to secure additional funding from the Minister of Finance, George Colley TD and he also secured a supplementary estimate for IR£62,000 for the outstanding financial problems of youth organisations. During his period in office, Tunney established a separate Youth Affairs section in the Department of Education, which was headed up by Tony O’Dalaigh (rapporteur of the National Policy Committee). Minister Tunney also affirmed the principle of volunteerism as the basis for youth work in Ireland and committed to revising the annual grant aid scheme to give security of employment to full-time staff. In the late 1970s, the Employment Action Team established by the Minister for Labour had recommended a Development Officers Scheme to be created with 100 posts for voluntary organisations working on education, social services or community development projects. Although the 1979 Budget provided half million punts to roll out this scheme, it did not provide adequate funding to ensure the implementation from the O’Sullivan Report to employ 20 new youth work posts for the wider youth work sector. Shortly afterwards, government announced the introduction of four year contracts only, a grant ceiling of IR£5,000 and a sliding scale starting at 90% of expenses in the first year to 60% in the fourth year. Such stringent conditions exacerbated the financial challenges facing the youth work sector. The scheme was later integrated into the grand aid scheme in 1984 (Corry, 1990: 20 – 21).

The  
1980s

## The 1980s

The 1980s was a very politically unstable time in Ireland. Governments could not maintain majorities and kept collapsing. In very quick succession, there was a Haughey government (1979 – 1981), followed by a FitzGerald government (1981 – 1982), followed by a Haughey government, which lasted nine months (1982), followed by a FitzGerald government (1982 – 1987) and then another Haughey government (1987 – 1989). This landscape made it very difficult from a lobbying point of view. Against this politically unstable backdrop, the youth population was high – 50 per cent of the population in Ireland was under 25 years of age. In the 1980s, NYCI expanded the nature and scope of its work and started to think outside of the youth work domain. Under the presidency of Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall, NYCI started to develop policy positions on a broad range of youth issues such as employment, education and housing. The Council began to respond to the changing social agenda of the time.

In 1980, the O’Sullivan Report entitled “*Development of Youth Work Services in Ireland*” was published, which in many ways consolidated youth policy in Ireland. The government’s white paper, published in December 1980, reflected the main principles and issues contained in the O’Sullivan Report. In relation to funding of the sector during this period, the grant aid allocated to Vocational Education Committees (VECs) for youth work, increased from IR£100,000 to IR£480,000, which was fairly insubstantial considering it was divided amongst 36 committees. There was also additional money available through a new Capital Grants scheme established by Minister Tunney for recreational facilities to convert former rural schools into adventure sport centres (Corry, 1990).



Picture taken at the 1981 Assembly from Left to Right: Paul Beggan, Tom Costello, Siobhán Corry (née Doyle), Rory O’Ferrall, Taoiseach Charles Haughey and Fergus O’Ferrall

The 1980s was a decade, which saw a growing political consciousness of the youth agenda. Youth unemployment dominated NYCI's agenda. Geographically focused issues, like drugs were also on the agenda. There was a heroin epidemic in parts of Dublin. Issues like access to contraceptives, divorce and abortion led to heated debates in NYCI. In the early 1980s in Ireland, access to contraception was restricted and only available on prescription for bona fide family planning and health purposes and homosexuality was illegal.

NYCI had a very prominent position throughout this decade and produces some impressive youth work resources, which contributed significantly to shaping public policy on key youth issues. During this decade, the Council produced a publication entitled "*Our Future Can Work*," which was an analysis of youth unemployment. NYCI's approach was to include the importance of youth work alongside measures to address youth unemployment and to lobby for the introduction of a Youth Employment Levy to address youth unemployment, which was introduced by the government of the day. Youth information was also big issue at the time. A Working Group on Youth Information was established and a Youth Information handbook entitled '*Stepping Out*' was published. The handbook provided information about social welfare entitlements for young people and advice on how to apply for benefits or education grants. In the period 1983 – 85, the government sought to conduct a comprehensive National Youth Policy and to develop a National Youth Award Scheme, which later became known as Gaisce. Government also sought to ensure greater coordination of youth training and education opportunities vis-à-vis the offer of a Social Guarantee for those under 25. A new Minister of State for Youth Affairs was also appointed and the Youth Affairs section was moved from the Department of Education to the Department of Labour, to reflect the scale of the youth unemployment facing Ireland's youth. Other significant events during this decade were the establishment of the National Youth Policy Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of youth policy and another significant event to take place was the International Year of Youth in 1985.

The interviews reveal that this was also a decade characterised by a lot of discord in NYCI. There were different groupings in NYCI in the 1980s. One interviewee described the organisation as divided into two camps. One camp was described as comprising of '*naïve, idealistic young people*' and the other camp, as reflective of a '*microcosm of politics*,' in that it was a '*well-oiled political machine*' with people who had agendas.

A simmering tension existed between the youth work and youth affairs side of the NYCI house. The widening of the membership of NYCI to include more organisations and in particular, youth political organisations was also an important factor in sustaining the drive towards wider youth policy matters. As the youth affairs agenda grew and developed throughout the 1980s, some of the youth work organisations were uncomfortable and saw it as a threat to NYCI's core work, which they felt should be focused on youth work. The broadening of the agenda from the traditional youth work concerns of well-established voluntary youth organisations, to embracing a much wider youth affairs agenda, met with substantial opposition within the then membership of the National Youth Council. There were threats of and actual withdrawal from membership of organisations such as Macra na Tuaithe (now Foróige). Many of these organisations received ad hoc annual grants-in-aid from the Department of Education. Some commentators have suggested their withdrawal, or threats of withdrawal from NYCI membership may have been motivated by a desire to protect their access to such grants.

## The Haughey-FitzGerald Contests to Court the Youth Vote

Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil worked hard to court the youth vote in the early 1980s. In a paper included in an NYCI publication entitled ‘The Challenge for Young People,’ Dr. FitzGerald wrote that the institutions of the state must “...show that they can both mobilise the resources necessary to provide for the needs of the new generation and offer to this generation a vision of society that will command their allegiance and respond to their idealism” (NYCI, 1980: 13). He made a commitment that in government, Fine Gael would include NYCI in consultations on the shaping of public policy and allocating of resources, but said that it would depend on “the will and capacity of this council to play its role fully in such a consultation, by having a worthwhile input to make of a serious kind.”

On 21<sup>st</sup> January 1981, the first meeting between Taoiseach Charles Haughey and NYCI took place in Government Buildings. In May 1981, before the general election, he agreed to give NYCI ‘consultative status’ in the social partnership process, which effectively meant having regularly quarterly meetings with the Taoiseach to discuss relevant youth issues. It also gave NYCI access to individual Ministers and Government Departments on upcoming legislative proposals and discussion documents related to young people. Haughey agreed to consider the appointment of young people to relevant State and semi-State bodies such as NESC and RTÉ and to consider NYCI’s proposal for the establishment of an all-party Oireachtas Committee on Youth Affairs.

In a letter to NYCI, in November 1982, Dr. FitzGerald writes:

*“Fine Gael reiterates its commitment to bring representatives of young people into consultation on a whole range of national policies on a par with other social partners”*

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1983, NYCI met Garret FitzGerald’s coalition government to discuss the role of NYCI as social partners. At the meeting, it was agreed NYCI would have three meetings a year with government, to progress issues. NYCI also got two seats on NESC and the Youth Employment Agency and one seat on the Curriculum and Examination Board, however, no progress was achieved on the Council’s proposed Oireachtas Committee on Youth Affairs. By 1986, amidst a raging economic recession, the mood was more sombre and the power of the youth lobby had dissipated significantly. When Haughey’s government came back into power in 1987, they engaged in a process of cutting public expenditure. The increasing youth unemployment and youth emigration rates were back on the agenda and government was no longer interested in hearing the youth voice, to any large extent. In 1990, Taoiseach Haughey reduced NYCI’s representation on NESC from two seats to one seat. It was to be a decade later, when NYCI would gain full social partnership status.



### **Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall**

Chair of the Youth Affairs Committee,  
NYCI President, 1981 – 83,  
Special Advisor to Minister George Birmingham,  
1983 – 85

Fergus first became involved in NYCI in the mid-1970s, initially through the Methodist Youth organisation, but more substantially when he joined Macra na Feirme in 1977, as an Education Officer. From 1977 onwards, Fergus' participation in NYCI was effectively as a Macra na Feirme representative. He served as Vice President, Youth Affairs and later as President of the National Youth Council. In 1983, he was seconded from Macra na Feirme to serve as Special Advisor on Youth Policy to the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, George Birmingham, TD, who was attached to both the Department of Labour and the Department of Education. Responsibility for youth affairs was transferred to the Department of Labour and Fergus worked in the Minister's Office from that Department. At the end of 1985, he returned to Macra na Feirme and served as Chief Executive from 1985 until 1989, when his career ceased to have a direct link with youth services.

Fergus remembers NYCI at the time of his involvement to be always 'very stimulating' and 'great fun.'

*"We met regularly in Waterloo Road...We had many discussions and arguments. There was generally always a tension because I think the initial organisations from 1967 had been youth work organisations and they were more directly interested in youth work and particularly trying to get grants from the government"* (Fergus O'Ferrall, 2017).

At this stage in NYCI's history, there was no standard youth service grant scheme, so a campaign was initiated to establish what is now known as the Youth Service Grant scheme (YSG). Prior to the introduction of the YSG, some of the older organisations had been getting ad hoc grants for their work and began to get worried that the pie was going to be carved up in smaller pieces, so there was a lot of tension about funding. Their concerns proved to be ill-founded. The YSG scheme was introduced, the budget for youth work organisations was increased, a selection criteria was established and organisations were free to apply. Fergus O'Ferrall says it actually served to put youth work funding on a more professional footing in terms of the application and selection process. The other tension which existed in NYCI at the time was the raising of youth affairs issues. This tension was to prove much more controversial, long-standing and harder to resolve.

In 1981, the NYCI unanimously nominated Fergus as an Independent candidate in the Seanad Éireann election. The purpose was to create opportunities to bring before national and local politicians the policy priorities of young people. As part of his campaign, supported by Tom Costello, Fergus travelled the length and breadth of the country, canvassing support from TDs and local councillors in every party. He says he did not expect to be elected in a strictly party-controlled electoral system, but he did very well. Despite getting more first preferences than Mary O'Rourke, the party system and transfers saw her elected.

### **The Youth Employment Levy**

Youth unemployment was a very big concern in the 1980s. The Fianna Fáil government's response to the issue was to establish a Youth Employment Action team, but it really only acted as a consultative body. NYCI campaigned for a statutory Youth Employment Agency (YEA) and the introduction of



Picture taken on 22 December 1981 shows Minister for Finance, John Bruton, TD (4<sup>th</sup> from left) receiving an NYCI submission from Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall (NYCI President) with, from left to right: Brian Meyer, Paul Beggan, Alan Graham (NYCI Vice President), Siobhán Corry (née Doyle) (NYCI Secretary) and Tom Costello (NYCI Director of Youth Services).

a 1% youth employment levy on all incomes, which would fund the work of the agency. The agency was established and the levy was introduced in budget 1982, but Fergus says that unfortunately the government raided the fund.

*“It didn’t give the Youth Employment Agency the total amount that came from the 1%, because the Department of Finance...got greedy and it only gave a relatively small amount for development, on the basis that the agency hadn’t yet come up with how they would spend the money”* (Fergus O’Ferrall, 2017).

NYCI’s proposal was that this accumulated fund would give a social guarantee to every unemployed young person under 25 of either training, work experience or a job, which sounds somewhat familiar to NYCI’s current campaign for the implementation of a National Youth Guarantee Scheme! Instead, the Department of Finance instructed the agency to channel the bulk of the money to support the existing AnCo training projects for those under 25 years of age. The YEA was abolished in 1988 and the 1% Youth Employment Levy was integrated into a general levy fund, which was not designated for youth, per se. Another key area of work NYCI was engaged in, was lobbying to get the Government to agree to have a social dialogue or social partnership with the youth sector, which eventually came to fruition in the 1990s. Fergus recalls regular meetings with Government, which became known as ‘Quarterly Meetings between NYCI and Government’ under Taoiseach Charles Haughey TD and Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald TD.

During Fergus’ presidency, Minister George Birmingham asked him if he could act as his special advisor once he had completed his term as NYCI President. Fergus said the Minister had plans to establish the National Youth Committee to look at youth work and youth policy issues and to produce a white paper before the International Youth Year in 1985. At this time, Taoiseach FitzGerald had deliberately moved youth affairs from the Department of Education to the Department of Labour, because of the focus on employment, however, Minister Birmingham was attached to both Departments from 1983 – 85.

There was a high salience given to youth affairs at the time. Fergus remembers Taoiseach FitzGerald taking a big interest in youth affairs and in the Costello Report, to the extent that he was actually making comments on the draft discussion paper prepared in advance of the establishment of the National Youth Committee (or Costello Committee).

*“I remember, for example, the drafting of the discussion paper to prepare for the Costello Committee called ‘Shaping our future,’ and we drafted and it was circulated around government departments. The Taoiseach sent back his own annotated copy. He had actually taken time to read it and comment on it”* (Fergus O’Ferrall, 2017).

Fergus also recalls it being a fraught time culturally in NYCI in that there were cultural wars going on within the Council. In Ireland in the early 1980s there were the infamous ‘Ann Lovett’ and ‘Kerry Babies’ cases, which led to the issue of the right to abortion being raised for discussion at NYCI. The

establishment of the comprehensive Costello process in 1983 served to distract from these tensions. The Costello report and subsequent White Paper, *“In Partnership with Youth: The National Youth Policy,”* published in December 1985, helped to forge a link between youth work and youth issues, by focusing on a much wider agenda than just youth work.

Fergus says one of the highlights from this period was his involvement in the work of the National Youth Committee. He was very involved in supporting the work of the youth committee. He pays particular tribute to the chair of the committee, the late Justice Declan Costello:

*“Declan Costello was an outstanding Chair. We were very lucky to get him. He had a huge commitment to social justice and involving everybody. It was an honour to work with him. He was very keen to have it evidence-based, so he got people like Maurice Devlin to do a survey of the situation of young people, which is, I think a significant historical benchmark”* (Fergus O’Ferrall, 2017).

Another highlight for Fergus in his role as special advisor, was the establishment and implementation of the Gaisce Awards. As part of this process, Fergus remembers, he and Tony Ó Dalaigh (the Principal Officer in the youth affairs section) travelling to London to look at the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Gaisce was modelled very much on the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme.

Reflecting on low points from his period of involvement in NYCI, Fergus says he regrets and is sad that some member organisations left NYCI during this time. He says that it is unfortunate that they were not able to find a consensus and bring all the youth organisations with them, but there was no other way.

Fergus admires the fact that NYCI has survived for 50 years and is still functioning very well. In terms of the future role for NYCI, he says:

*“I think the whole experience of being in a youth organisation should be a sort of a democratic experience, that you learn how you make change through democratic means and that you see it as a means of change. It seems to me that’s even more important now in a world of dictators...I think there is a real challenge for youth organisations to have a critical pedagogy, to get people to think critically about issues and get informed”* (Fergus O’Ferrall, 2017).



### Brian Merriman

Vice President of NYCI  
Chair of the Standing Conference on Youth  
Affairs, 1980 – 84  
Current Position: Principal Officer, International  
Protection Policy Division, Irish Naturalisation  
and Immigration Service, Department of Justice

Brian Merriman's involvement in NYCI started in 1980 and he remained actively involved in NYCI until 1984. A journalism graduate, struggling to find work in a significantly shrunken jobs market, Brian applied for and was appointed to a position in the Catholic Youth Council (now Crosscare) in 1980. Although CYC were members of NYCI at this point, they were not actively involved in the Council. Brian said no one in CYC was particularly interested in NYCI, so as a new member of staff he decided to attend an event and was impressed. He said he met a lot of very interesting and engaged people.

In 1980 the youth affairs dimension of NYCI's work, was described by Brian as very much 'the poor relation,' taking a back seat to the youth work agenda until a period of political change happened in the early 1980s. This change, Brian attributed to Garret FitzGerald and his impassioned call for young people in Ireland to get involved in political life. In the 1980s NYCI had a lot of youth political parties emerging in membership. Brian also said he was the youngest person on the NYCI Executive and at the time struggled to be heard as a young person in NYCI. He said most people involved at this time were in their late 30s and that the age chasm was significant. There was also a very volatile electoral situation, which Brian felt helped his electoral ambitions and election to the esteemed position of Chair of Youth Affairs:

*"When a perceived to be Catholic Youth Worker says "I will go and do youth affairs," I was a shoo-in and I served three years on it; but what happened was the dynamic shifted hugely. First of all, the Youth Council became very political... The impetus for this, I think was that youth work was, in fact, losing its relevance..."*  
(Brian Merriman, 2016).

FitzGerald's government in particular, was extremely receptive to the youth agenda at the time and engaged with NYCI directly on a vast array of policy issues of relevance to young people. Brian recalls:

*"FitzGerald tasked us greatly. We would have summits with himself and the Ministers of Finance, Education, Labour and Justice. What was really, really shocking on the first summit was he came in and they more or less had all our grant stuff approved - they kind of just picked on my area and said: "Yeah, okay grand you're getting that grant. Now, what is your view on young people and housing? "... Suddenly the shift in the whole room turned over to youth affairs and not traditional youth work... and we must have debated with them for two and a half hours... I mean I was 19 or 20."*

Brian worked tirelessly with the National Director of Youth Work Services and the Standing Committee on Youth Affairs, to draft NYCI position papers. He said at this stage NYCI was a front page story and

had a very national media profile. NYCI assemblies, he remembers were dramatic and very political affairs, with a lot of game playing and intense debates. On one occasion, a lot of work had been done to advance policies in the Youth Affairs committee. When the policy came to assembly, the same organisations that were represented on the Youth Affairs Committee, who had worked on the policy, tried to vote against the policies. Grabbing a book from the table beside him, which he claimed was the committee's minute book, Brian says he threatened to expose their voting records, if they didn't respect the work of the volunteers and vote in favour of the policy before them. A vote was taken and the policy was passed.

### **The National Youth Congress**

On 3 – 5 April, 1981 the NYCI organised a major National Youth Congress in the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. This was formally opened by Taoiseach, Charles Haughey T.D. The National Youth Congress was very much the precursor to the National Youth Parliament in 1990, which later became Dáil na nÓg. The National Youth Congress was an initiative of the Youth Affairs Committee. It was held once a year in the Hotel Victor and proved to be incredibly valuable, but controversial. All TDs were invited to attend the National Youth Congress. Brian Merriman was to be the Ceann Comhairle at the first one, but the first congress attracted so many TDs that it was decided Brian would be better positioned as leader of the opposition, so Alan Graham (profiled on pages 38 – 40) became the Ceann Comhairle. The Congress set up 15 workshops, which would run simultaneously and focus on a broad range of key policy issues affecting young people's lives, such as young people and the law, young people in education, young people on drugs and young people on housing. It also marked the establishment of the first Women's Rights Committee in the Youth Council, which Brian Merriman chaired. There was also a workshop called 'sexual freedom.' Brian invited Anne Connolly of the Well Woman Centre and Senator David Norris to attend this particular workshop. The event attracted a lot of media interest. He says the following day the Hotel Victor was picketed and he was named in the front page editorial of a Catholic newspaper for being anti-catholic by letting any young person talk about sexuality. He recalls David Norris' input as 'brilliant.' He introduced himself as a representative from 'the North Great George's Street Preservation Association.' Brian permitted the press to attend the workshop on sexual freedom, as long as no young person who spoke at the session was named in the press. He recalls that a young man came out as gay during the workshop, which Brian felt was profoundly brave. He says the young man's intervention in front of the national media was 'very moving' and a very profound thing to happen at an NYCI event in the early 1980s.

Speaking of the National Youth Congress, Brian Merriman said *"it became bigger because it wasn't about delegates, it was about the youth organisations' members that came to engage and debate the views of young people."* This marked a very radical period in NYCI history, which was to cause a lot of division and discontent for some of the conservative member organisations later in this decade. Sexuality and women's rights continued to be contentious and controversial issues throughout the 1980s and ironically the same issues are back on the political agenda in 2017, in relation to repealing the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution (enshrined in 1983).

Brian later represented NYCI on the Youth Employment Agency (YEA). At the time, he was the youngest person ever to be appointed to a state board in Ireland at just 22 years of age. During his time on the YEA, an application was made by NYCI to fund a guide for young adults. Some of the NYCI Executive did not want information on contraception provided in the guide. Brian says he spoke against an attempt

# Youth book attacked for 'censoring' sex sections

BY JOHN WALSH

A CONTROVERSIAL decision to delete sections on contraception and homosexuality from a Government-backed handbook for young people was described last night as "a form of censorship."

"Youth Info '85" is being produced as a special International Youth Year effort by the National Youth Council, the umbrella body for various organisations including scouts, youth wings of the main political parties, Church linked groups and others.

The Council got £36,000 from the Youth Employment Agency to do research for the book and to build up a "bank" of information which could be used for other projects. Four young people were hired for six months under a temporary jobs scheme of the Department of Labour.

The book which will be published by Wolfhound Press, will cover a wide range of topics including young people and the law, political education, health, government and economy, work and training, environment and recreation. It will cost £3 through E.B.S. offices and £3.95 elsewhere; it is hoped to sell 45,000 copies.

Eight pages had been written about "relationships" but now the executive of the Council has decided to do part of this and incorporate other parts into different chapters.

It is understood that draft section on contraception does not go into detail about the various forms. It deals with the recent change in the law permitting the sale of contraceptives to those over 18 and says they are available from family planning clinics.

The section on homosexuality gives information and some details about the situation in Ireland. The recent introduction of a...

to prevent information for young people on contraception. Shortly afterwards, at an assembly in Waterford, the report from the YEA was due at lunchtime on the Saturday. Brian arrived on the Friday night and phoned to confirm the time of the YEA item on the agenda and to confirm he would attend to make his report. The next day, when he arrived to make his report as planned, Brian was informed that the agenda item had been moved to the morning session. He was not informed of the change to the agenda and missed the session. He believes the decision to change the time slot, preventing him making his report, was deliberate. Brian says this incident reflects the culture of the more conservative and controlling organisations that were part of the NYCI at the time, which was 'very political and cut-throat.' The General Assembly in Waterford, for Brian, was the lowest point in his four year period of involvement in NYCI. He later resigned from the YEA and ceased involvement in the Youth Council. Despite this low point in his NYCI engagement, Brian says there were many highlights, especially the many dynamic people he engaged with and specifically the work he did on raising the criminal age of responsibility and on the abolition of the concept of illegitimacy. He also regards his role in the establishment of the National Youth Congress, as important, in that it gave young people a voice and generated a lot of national media coverage for NYCI in 1982.

His hopes for NYCI, as it celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017, is that as an organisation, it acts as an enabler to empower young people to take control of their lives, to develop and express their own opinions and to encourage them to engage in the democratic process.

Irish Independent, 3 April 1985



### Tom Costello

Director of Youth Services in NYCI, 1980 – 83

Tom Costello joined the staff of NYCI in 1980 as Director of Youth Services. Prior to that, Tom was USI Education Officer and President of USI, in the years 1978 – 80. Tom came to the organisation with substantial policy experience and a background in campaigning. He completed his term as USI President in the summer of 1980 and was actively seeking work, when he saw the NYCI position advertised in the newspaper. He applied and was the successful applicant. During this period in NYCI's history, USI were not members of NYCI so Tom had no formal connection with the organisation prior to his appointment. His initial impression of NYCI in 1980 was that it was an organisation that held at its core a commitment to youth work. Unlike USI, which had a prominent public profile as effective lobbyists who were highly political, NYCI was less so on youth issues at the time and more focused on supporting youth work and securing funding for greater investment in youth work. This traditional focus of NYCI's agenda was about to change with the advent of the 1980s and the membership of the youth wings of political parties such as Ógra Fianna Fáil, Young Fine Gael and the re-joining of USI. The shift away from a sole focus on youth work towards youth issues caused some agitation amongst traditional youth work organisations in NYCI's membership, but the publication of the Costello Report in 1984 served to integrate youth work and youth affairs in a more synergised manner.

Tom recalls the recruitment process and the interview panel of 1980 when he was appointed to the staff of NYCI. On the panel was Fr. Micheál Mac Gréil, Siobhán Doyle (née Corry), Alan Graham and Rory O'Ferrall. The interview took place at 6 Waterloo Road, Dublin 4, where NYCI was located at the time. As Director of Youth Work Services, Tom had responsibility for three aspects of the work of the council; youth affairs, youth work and international. His role was to support the work of the Standing Conference on Youth Work and Standing Conference on Youth Affairs. At the time, Brian Myer from the Scouts was chairperson of the Standing Conference on Youth Work. Tom recalls that everyone attended this committee. It was very well established and the agenda at the time was focused on funding youth work and also ensuring youth work was recognized as educational. The main focus of the work of the Standing Conference on Youth Affairs was addressing the problem of youth unemployment.

#### **The Costello Report, 1984**

The Costello Youth Policy Committee was established by Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald in the 1983 and was chaired by Justice Declan Costello. It held its first meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1983. Initially Tom represented NYCI on the committee, but left NYCI in 1983 to take up a position at the newly established YEA. He continued on the committee after his departure from NYCI, but as a representative

of the Department of Labour. The Youth Policy Committee published the National Policy Committee Final Report otherwise known as the 'Costello Report' in September 1984. The remit of the committee was to make recommendations in respect of youth for consideration by the government. The committee members included representatives of relevant Government Departments, from youth organisations and the wider youth sector and from the world of sports, culture and the arts. Some committee members that are particularly noteworthy because they have become high profile public figures in Irish society are Joe Duffy (former President of USI and now RTÉ broadcaster) and Paul Heuson AKA 'Bono' (the singer from the band 'U2'), the former Minister of Education and Skills, Mary Hanafin, Mark Mortell (former advisor to Taoiseach Enda Kenny, former Newstalk broadcaster and public relations expert) and Elaine Bradshaw (former international cricketer, golfer and hockey player). Of course, all the committee members are worthy of special recognition and contributed significantly to a very comprehensive report on youth policy. At the time, the government dedicated a lot of resources and support to this committee and a valuable feature of its structure was the appointment of a distinguished and experienced Rapporteur, Tadhg O'Cearbhaill, to assist in the work. The committee also had the expert assistance of Maurice Devlin, who at the time was a Youth Officer for Comhairle Le Leas Óige. The committee met on 16 occasions and there were 42 meetings of the sub-committees established to support the work. Tom remembers the committee meetings and the tremendous contribution from all committee members. He recalls the presence of Bono at quite a few of the meetings. Bono, it seems, was personally recruited by Garret FitzGerald who held him in high regard. Government wanted to appoint high profile figures and this was around the time that 'U2' were becoming famous on the global stage. Bono volunteered for the subcommittee on youth unemployment and was very engaged on the issue. When he was not able to attend meetings, he submitted comments on drafts. The Rapporteur of the committee, Tadhg O'Cearbhaill had been the Secretary General of the Department of Labour. Tom worked closely with him on drafting versions of the report. He recalls weekend meetings working on the report in the home of Justice Costello.

### **Access to Power**

NYCI had tremendous access to different Taoisigh in the 1980s. Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil were trying to court the youth vote and this may have contributed to the close working relationship that emerged between NYCI and the Taoiseach of the day. In any event, NYCI had a lot of access to the serving Taoiseach. Several meetings took place with both Taoiseach Haughey and Taoiseach FitzGerald. At an NYCI Assembly in 1981, Taoiseach Charles Haughey addressed the NYCI delegates and during his speech committed to making youth a social partner. He also agreed to have quarterly meetings with the National Youth Council of Ireland. Tom Costello recalls being part of the NYCI delegation to meet Haughey. Tom's role at those meetings was as the 'chief note-taker' on the NYCI side. Haughey, he recalls only had one civil servant with him and had a 'prodigious memory.' At the end of the meeting, he was able to perfectly summarise the meeting, without having taken a note. NYCI's meetings with Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald were also notable and entailed hours of discussion on 'big-ticket policy issues' affecting young people. During one particular meeting with FitzGerald, after all the big agenda items had been discussed, NYCI raised its final item on the agenda, which was the need for a new premises. Once the issue was raised, FitzGerald took out his calculator and started calculating the square footage cost for NYCI and advised that he didn't think NYCI were getting the best value. This sort of conversation reflects the close and good relationship between NYCI and government at the time.



Pictured from left to right: Alan Graham, Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and Rory O'Ferrall on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1981, before a meeting with the NYCI delegation and FitzGerald TD, Liam Kavanagh TD (Minister of State at the Department of Education), Michael Keating TD (Minister of State at the Department of Justice) and Dick Spring TD

Reflecting on NYCI's future, Tom says he thinks one of the challenges for NYCI now and the future is the importance of continuing to promote the voice of young people:

*"I would love to see the Youth Council continuing to turn up the volume on the voice of youth....the other thing, is to get recognition for the value and role of youth work....I think that is still unfinished business" (Tom Costello, 2017).*



### Peter Finnegan

Director of Youth Work Services in NYCI,  
1983 – 85

Current Position: Director Housing Policy  
& Strategy, Dublin City Council

Peter Finnegan came to NYCI in 1981, with a background in student union politics. As a student in Maynooth, he was elected President of the Maynooth Student's Union. When he left Maynooth, he started working in Catholic Youth Care in the Dublin diocese. During this time, he became CYC's representative on NYCI's Youth Work Planning Committee and was Vice Chair.

When Tom Costello was seconded from NYCI to the YEA, Peter applied for his job. He was successful and recalls at the time there was a company car, an eight year old Mazda, which went with the position. Peter says that his predecessor, had enjoyed the benefit of the NYCI company car, but when Peter was appointed there was a discussion about putting the car into storage for safe keeping. Peter jokes that this was to ensure the car was kept in good condition, in case Tom decided to return to NYCI. In the end, after a little negotiation, Peter was given the use of the car. Ironically Tom never returned, but Peter left NYCI to join Tom in the YEA.

Peter recalls a major issue at the time was the withdrawal of the National Federation of Youth Clubs from NYCI and its attempt, encouraged by some officials in the relevant government department of the day, to seek negotiating rights with government on an equal status of that enjoyed by NYCI. The departure of the National Federation was justified by the claims that traditional youth work and church centred values were being compromised by the new issue based organisations within NYCI. Peter says the refusal of CYC, the largest Catholic Youth Organisation, to leave NYCI at the time, ensured the continuance of most Catholic youth organisations in membership.



The NYCI office was located on Waterloo Road and the Minister and his Department were on Mespil Road. Fergus O'Ferrall was advisor to Minister George Birmingham. Peter recalls that when he and Fergus needed to meet privately on issues, their preferred location was a ladies clothes shop on Upper Baggot Street. At the back of the shop was a small coffee shop, mainly frequented by shoppers. This provided an ideal venue for meetings that needed to remain unofficial.

*“We would be the only two men sitting in the coffee shop. So, the likelihood of us being spotted was pretty minimal and a lot of the deal making was being done in that context” (Peter Finnegan, 2017).*

Reflecting on his career in NYCI, Peter attributes the development of his political, research, policy and analytical skills, to his time in NYCI. He says that the best thing about NYCI was the circle of people he met, nationally and internationally. It taught him that the most important thing in any organisation is the ability to build relationships, create collaborative networks, and apply emotional intelligence as a key leadership trait. He also remembers a very committed staff team, who were dedicated to their work.

*“The staff team was small, but it was passionate about the work, felt committed to the office and volunteer community and was talented and creative. There were no demarcation lines and when needed, everyone was involved in whatever task needed doing” (Peter Finnegan, 2017).*

He remembers in particular staff such as Jane Richards, Catherine Breathnach, Nuala O’Donovan and David Meredith.

Speaking of NYCI’s future, Peter is convinced of the value of an umbrella and support organisation that can represent young people and their organisations. Peter says, *“life is different today and technology has changed the entire basis of communication and engagement, not always for the better. NYCI can play an important role in helping active participants build skills and learn through experience. It can help mould in a non-party political way, the political and activist leaders of the future.”* He believes NYCI needs to position itself as relevant and effective around the issues and challenges facing today’s young adults. He contends that in a future society, dominated by technology, which will radically change the nature of work, NYCI needs to engage young people in policy development that can critically challenge societal thinking about the type of society, economy and community we build for the future.

Reflecting on NYCI in the period of his involvement with the organisation, Peter says, *“we were a generation of passionate change makers.”* He believes *“that desire to make a difference needs to be re-ignited in today’s more affluent young people.”* He hopes that in addition to serving its member organisations, that NYCI can *“reach beyond their members to those who don’t formally join organisations, who may feel alienated or isolated and who are searching for solutions to the challenges they face, in a world that is light years of difference away from the remembered days of the 1980s” (Peter Finnegan, 2017).*



### Alan Graham

NYCI President, 1985

Current position: Solicitor at A G Graham & Co

Alan Graham's introduction to NYCI was through his membership of the SAI and straddles two decades. He volunteered with SAI and eventually became their national secretary. Alan's engagement with NYCI started in the mid to late 1970s. Initially he represented the SAI on NYCI's International Committee and then became more involved in other aspects of the organisation. He described the International Committee as a forum where there was 'a huge camaraderie' between the youth work organisations and non-youth work organisations. At this time in NYCI's history, youth unemployment and youth representation were key policy issues for the organisation. Alan was elected on to NYCI's Executive and in 1985 was elected President of NYCI. Alan also held the position of president of the YFEC, in Brussels.

At the time, NYCI was located on Waterloo Road in a lovely Georgian house, which NYCI was determined to buy. In fact, Alan attended an auction on behalf of NYCI to bid on the sale. Unfortunately, the property was sold for £19,500 and his budget was £19,000. NYCI narrowly missed out on the purchase by £500, but eventually moved to its current home at 3 Montague Street, Dublin 2. On page 49, Siobhán Doyle elaborates on the story of the purchase of and move to Montague Street.

One of the first external meetings Alan remembers attending on behalf of NYCI was during Brian Beggan's presidency and was a meeting with Taoiseach Charles Haughey. He says of the meeting that it was 'quite a big coup' at the time. Indeed, NYCI had a lot of access to powerful people in the corridors of power in Leinster House, during this period. Several meetings took place with both Haughey and FitzGerald respectively. These sorts of meetings developed into a social partnership with the trade unions, the employers and the farmers. At that stage, youth representation was quite low down on the agenda, but as NYCI developed and established itself, it later gained social partnership status.



NYCI's office at 6 Waterloo Road,  
Dublin 4



Pictured above NYCI representatives meeting with Government – from left to right Alan Graham, David Meredith, Michael Whitney, Minister of State, John Browne TD, Taoiseach Charles Haughey and Frank Fahey TD

Alan’s recollection of NYCI in his days of involvement was that it was quite political and there was rivalry between youth organisations. He attributes a lot of this to egos, but acknowledges that there were debates on lots of contentious social issues of the day, from contraception to divorce. These issues were challenging for NYCI and often caused rows. As a result, NYCI tended to avoid ‘high politics’ to ensure a consensus of sorts. There was a tendency to stick to the ‘bread and butter’ type issues. Another focus of the work was campaigning of greater state investment in youth work and the youth sector. Alan remembers the announcements of the block grant every year. Speaking of these annual budget announcements, he says *“that was a big day and it was never enough and we always moaned about it...”*

Interestingly the issue of ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality’ wasn’t addressed to a significant extent. This was a private matter, rarely if ever discussed in a public forum and never in NYCI:

*“I mean sex wasn’t a word you even talked about. You might’ve talked privately about it, or in rooms, but you weren’t going out, at least I don’t remember us going out on any big issues of that nature. It was more representation and the voice of youth, which frankly, in those days, probably bored most people to tears...”*  
(Alan Graham, 2017).

On Northern Ireland, Graham said that there wasn't an appetite to take a position on what was deemed a political hot potato. He recalls chairing a meeting of the NYCI Executive and putting forward a proposal, that as an all-Ireland organisation, with some of its members working throughout the island of Ireland, NYCI should have its annual general assembly somewhere in Northern Ireland. This proposal was rejected, with Ógra Fianna Fáil arguing that NYCI would be paying VAT on the bill, which would go to Her Majesty's government! This reflected the sort of idiosyncrasies that existed in NYCI at the time.

In 1985, Alan ran against Fr. Micheál MacGréil (representing Feachtas) and Mark Acheson (Church of Ireland Youth Department) for the presidency of NYCI. Graham was the successful candidate and was elected president of NYCI in 1985. The Secretary General/Director of NYCI at this time was David Meredith and later Tom Curran was appointed to replace Meredith as Director.

Alan greatly enjoyed his time in NYCI and made lifelong friends from this time in his life. Speaking of NYCI and its role in Irish society in 2017, he says he hopes that it continues to go from strength to strength.



## Richard Doherty

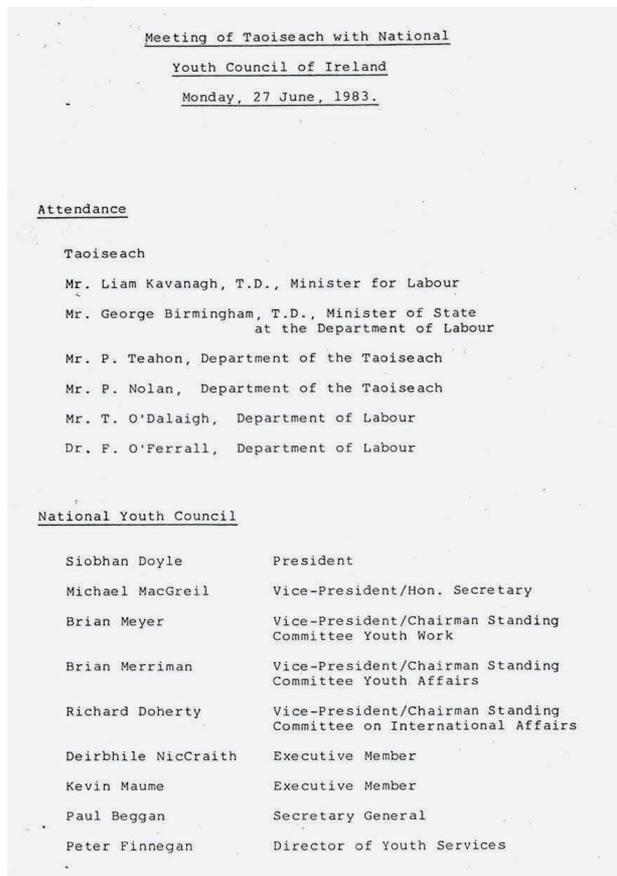
Chair of the NYCI's International Committee,  
1981 – 84

Current Position: Deloitte, Belgium

Richard Doherty represented the scouts in NYCI. He came from one of the suburban scout groups in Rathfarnham, Dublin 14, which produced ten people from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, who were all actively engaged in NYCI. He spent 3 years as chair of the International Committee in NYCI and later took up the position as Secretary General of YFEC (the Youth Forum of the European Communities) in Brussels. He said that being involved in NYCI at the time was ‘inspiring’ partly because of the voice the Council was acquiring in political debate. During Richard’s time in NYCI, the organisation had a lot of access to the Taoiseach of the day, Garret FitzGerald and Richard recalls a meeting in Government Buildings with Taoiseach FitzGerald that exemplified the access NYCI had to senior politicians during the period:

*“We were sitting in government buildings. It was 1982 ish and he (Dr. FitzGerald) did most of the talking. His civil servants were all sitting there dutifully, but he knew all the dossiers off by heart himself. We went about hour and a half overtime. It was incredible, the guy was just, you know, facts, focus, policy, enthusiasm and the Youth Council had never, ever had that kind of access to government or influence before...”* (Richard Doherty, 2017).

Doherty said that many of his contemporaries involved in NYCI at the time were not initially involved in formal politics but joined political parties around the same time. Garret FitzGerald’s



Cover page from the minutes of a meeting between the Taoiseach and NYCI on 27 June 1983

political style and approach, he contends, served as a ‘bit of a catalyst’ for enhancing formal youth political participation. The international dimension to the NYCI policy work generated much interest and excitement and plenty of travel opportunities as well!

*“These were fun times and I was always interested in foreign policy and international affairs, so I did the international thing at NYCI, then after doing it for three years, the Secretary General of the European Youth Forum, Ad Melkert, approached me and asked “would you like to run for” his job, because he was going back into Dutch politics”* (Richard Doherty, 2017).

According to Doherty, there were plenty of complex discussions on the wording of final documents, communiqués and policies and a lot of opportunities for the personal development of the people involved in NYCI. The issue of youth representation was key to these discussions. Internationally, the European Parliament, European Commission and national governments were open to the views of young people, partly because they did not want to be seen not to be interested in what the youth of the day were saying. The NYCI’s committees were the hub of discussion on many national and international, social, political and economic issues of the day. At the time, the apartheid system was in operation in South Africa. There was a discussion about this at the International Committee and Richard Doherty recalls one of the members of the committee saying *“well you have to differentiate between sport and trade. We should trade with South Africa but we shouldn’t play rugby with them.”* This line of argument, he recalls, caused uproar at the time and a fascinating debate ensued on the appropriateness of economic sanctions. It was also the cold war period, Reagan and Thatcher were in power and cruise missiles and disarmament were big issues. These issues were discussed and vigorously debated by the International Committee in NYCI. NYCI hosted a conference with the Anti-Apartheid movement in Trinity College Dublin in 1982. Taoiseach Charles Haughey attended and spoke at the event, which generated a lot of media interest. The conference was the number one item on the RTÉ Nine O’clock news that night, linking Haughey to the NYCI conference and what he had said.

At 24 years of age, Richard left NYCI and Ireland and moved to Brussels to take up a position in YFEC (which later became the European Youth Forum after merging with CENYC – the council of European national youth committees – another European youth platform). He attributed this career move to his involvement in NYCI. NYCI served as a learning curve, where Doherty developed skills in the basics of committees, policy formation, finding consensus, keeping people on board and securing broad representation of youth interests. He also learned a lot about the policy formation process in Irish politics via the social partnership process, which was beginning to take shape and involve youth.

His hope for NYCI now and in the future, is that it will relentlessly keep the spotlight on the need to invest in education, training and employment measures for young people.

*“The price you pay for failing to give people the best possible start in life is huge for generations thereafter and, in that sense, I think that is the most important role the Council can play...If you have young people consistently making the case that they deserve the support of society as they start in life, the political system will probably follow...and that is as it should be”* (Richard Doherty, 2017).



### Mark Mortell

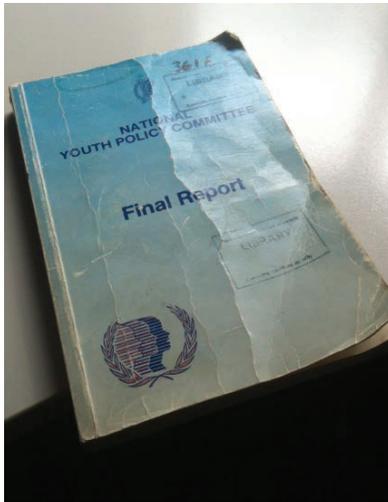
Vice Chair of the Standing Conference  
on Youth Affairs  
Member of the NYCI Membership  
Review Committee  
Youth Representative on the  
National Youth Policy Committee  
Current Position: Partner Fleishman Hillard  
International Communications

Mark Mortell's involvement with NYCI began in the early 1980s as the delegate from Young Fine Gael (YFG). He had been actively involved with YFG in County Wicklow from 1980 and was on the YFG National Executive as National Secretary. Mark became YFG's representative on NYCI in 1981, but knew of NYCI and its work, through his friend Brian Merriman (profiled on pages 30 – 32). Mark sat on NYCI's Standing Conference on Youth Affairs and remembers many in NYCI at the time who became high profile figures in Irish politics. People like Councillor Dermot Lacey (profiled on pages 52 – 53), former Fianna Fáil Minister Mary Hanafin, who later sat alongside Mark, on the National Youth Policy Committee and former Fianna Fáil TD Michael Mulcahy (who represented Church of Ireland Youth and was chair of the International Committee) were actively involved in NYCI during this period. In the 1980s, the political groups were very active in NYCI. Ógra Fianna Fáil, YFG and Labour Youth played key roles in the organisation along with more left wing groups such as the CYM. Mark recalls Ógra–Sinn Féin's youth movement repeatedly finding their attempts to gain NYCI membership being rejected. Interestingly, many of the most politically active people in NYCI at the time were there as representatives of other youth organisations, whether scouting, Irish language or from the faith-based organisations. Mark remarked that the political groups, despite their differences, became quite connected to each other. He says participating in a forum like NYCI was “*a great way of learning the game.*”

The first NYCI meeting Mark attended was held at the Clarence Hotel on Dublin's south quays. In the early 80's, 'The Clarence' was a far cry from the glitzy Temple Bar landmark people know today. Another NYCI favourite meeting venue at the time was Wynn's Hotel on Abbey Street. Reflecting on his first NYCI meeting, Mark remembers the energy, enthusiasm and passion of the people and the mission of the organisation, at a difficult time for young people in Ireland.

*“I can remember feeling the excitement of being with a bunch of people, many of a similar age group, others who were older, but together being part of a conversation where we actually thought that our voice, our point of view was going to be heard or we were going to make it heard. We weren't particularly radical, but the group felt some radical thinking could emerge because we were together and we were organised. For me, I learned an awful lot about political engagement, about networking, about building relationships about creating a powerful voice for a community that matters. NYCI was a diverse range of people from diverse backgrounds” (Mark Mortell, 2017).*

When Garret FitzGerald's government came to power, he appointed George Birmingham as the first Youth Affairs Minister. This was seen by NYCI as a big triumph, because it had been sought for over a long time. The Department of Labour was given responsibility for youth affairs and that too was a shift in thinking and reflected the importance of jobs and training, as well as education for young people.



A photograph of the Final Report of the National Youth Policy Committee

### **The National Youth Policy Committee**

In 1983, Mark was appointed to the newly established National Youth Policy Committee, chaired by Justice Declan Costello. The National Youth Policy Committee produced the 'Costello Report' and it was a significant document. It was the first comprehensive attempt to develop a youth policy that focused on more than youth work. Prior to 1983, the O'Sullivan Report had done that, but the Costello Report marked a significant change in direction. The government of the day was setting out an approach for young people living in Ireland and sought to enhance young people's ability to participate in wider democratic society. To reflect this, the committee included some young people. There were four youth representatives appointed to the committee; Mark Mortell and Mary Hanafin both with NYCI connections, Joe Duffy (USI and now RTÉ broadcaster) and Paul Hewson, otherwise known as Bono. USI were not members of NYCI at this point. They later re-affiliated to NYCI and then left again. Mark recalls there was a constant

battle with USI, who kept coming in and going out of NYCI membership in the 1980s. A long standing NYCI figure, Tom Costello, was also appointed to the committee, having taken up a role in the newly established Youth Employment Agency.

Speaking of Bono, Mark says he attended a few of the meetings, *"he was impressive, colourful and this was before U2 became a global phenomenon, but Justice Costello absolutely loved him. They established a rapport early on and I know when he couldn't come to meetings he would offer his perspective of things to the Judge, always insightful and always interesting."*

Mark recalls that the meetings of the National Youth Policy Committee were 'very formal.' They were held with all the seriousness you might expect of something that had a sense of importance. This was an extraordinary experience and a steep learning curve in how the apparatus of state conducts itself in dealing with complex challenges. He says Justice Costello was methodical, detailed and thorough in his approach to the work and was helped enormously by the very senior civil servant who ran the committee – Tadhg O'Cearbhaill – a former Secretary General of the Department of Labour. Some of the detailed work of the committee included getting out to see youth services on the ground. Mark recalls one such visit to Limerick and Cork. The visit involved experiencing the intense work and meeting the dedicated full-timers, volunteers and state agencies working in detainments centres, with traveller groups and with the poorest community groups. They also saw activities in more affluent environments, presenting a microcosm of the range of youth engagement to the committee members who travelled.

*“We did an enormous amount of data gathering and analysis...it was a very well run experience. From the NYCI’s point of view, we were there to represent a point of view from organised youth activity. It was a really interesting experience. I think the report was a very substantial piece of work. I know some of it got picked up and acted upon, other elements ended up gathering dust” (Mark Mortell, 2017).*

At the end of his time with NYCI, Mark sat on the Membership Review Committee, alongside David Meredith (former NYCI Secretary General) and Alan Graham (former NYCI President). This committee served as an appeals body for new organisations joining NYCI providing the final ‘rubber stamping,’ for membership applications. At this time in NYCI’s history, gaining membership of the organisation was very difficult. Some interviewees have described it as ‘an exclusive club.’ Such an analysis might be explained by a view at the time that joining NYCI meant contributing to NYCI’s agenda. It wasn’t about a place for people or organisations seeking membership to advance their own careers or their organisation’s agenda. There was a view amongst the broader membership at that time that NYCI’s strength came from being a collaborative federation based on following an agreed agenda. The NYCI was a very broad mix of views reflecting conservative and liberal views of the world and of Irish society. In the early 1980s, the Eighth Amendment to the constitution emerged as one such issue. YFG took a position that it was against inserting this amendment into the constitution, in contrast to the Fine Gael party, who were split on the issue. Mark says that this broad range of views existed in NYCI too, but successive NYCI presidents over that period went to great lengths to avoid alienating member organisations by taking too strong a stance on issues that would split the organisation.

Looking back on his days with NYCI, Mark remembers it as a very positive and enriching personal experience that he will always treasure:

*“You had this eclectic gathering of people, the full timers, the part-time elected officers and the volunteers all flung together, not agreeing on everything, but committed to the things we all felt were worth pursuing. Those of us in the political organisations were in a forum where you could flex your political muscles and hone some skills, engage in a little bit of jousting, and learn how to endure those few people that just wanted to hear their own voice...I have nothing but positive memories of NYCI ...it felt like it was valuable...it felt like something real, it felt meaningful” (Mark Mortell, 2017).*



### Dermot Rafter

NYCI Vice President  
Chairperson, Youth Affairs Standing Committee,  
1984 – 87

*“I can’t over emphasise the feel good factor of working with people from different organisations and meeting them and having a common sort of agenda and idealism I suppose...” (Dermot Rafter, 2017).*

Dermot Rafter represented the Catholic Boys Scouts of Ireland in NYCI. He first became involved in the work of the Council in the early 1980s, whilst a student at Trinity College Dublin. At the time, Brian Merriman was chairperson of the Youth Affairs Standing Committee and Brian Meyer was chairman of the Youth Work Standing Committee. Dermot joined the organisation at a time of change in NYCI. Within a relatively short period of time, he became chair of the Youth Affairs Standing Committee, Mark Acheson became the chair of the Youth Work Standing Committee and Michael Whitney became the chair of the International Committee.

The Youth Affairs Committee at the time became a forum for young people to discuss and address key social issues affecting youth. Under Dermot’s chairmanship, the standing committee developed policies on many issues, however, this often presented difficulties for Dermot, as the positions the committee was taking did not correspond with the ideology of the organisation he was representing in NYCI, namely CBSI. On the social front, he greatly enjoyed the many friends he made during this time in NYCI and recalls strolling up to Waterloo Road after college, doing some work in NYCI and then going for tea together. He also remembers some of the fantastic work they did at the time:

*“...We had these amazing conferences and gatherings in Youth Affairs...We did all types of mad things. One of the first ones I was involved in was out in the Hotel Victor in Stillorgan. We brought in Team Theatre, who were a theatre group and for the first few sessions with all the delegates, they simulated the classroom experience again. So the delegates were divided into three groups/classes and we went into the local community school where Catherine (Breathnach) had been a pupil. The teachers (actors) then came in and gave us a 45 minute class, just to remind us of the experience of sitting there being lectured at. It was all about the theme of ‘open education,’ so it was very exciting at that time and enormous fun” (Dermot Rafter, 2017).*

Dermot described NYCI at that time as being a breeding ground for young politicians, which at times could be ‘cut-throat.’ He felt that as a result, some young people with ideals, got lost in a politically charged environment, or says that perhaps they were too naive. He remembers the fun times he had in NYCI, but he also left the organisations feeling ‘broken’ after what he described as a politically toxic assembly in 1987, which resulted in the ending of his relationship with NYCI. He had been supportive of one of the candidates running for the NYCI Executive. Just before the election, the Director of NYCI read out a letter that he had received from CBSI (the organisation Dermot was representing). The letter stated that they were publicly withdrawing the nomination from the candidate Dermot was supporting. He said he felt humiliated and quietly left the event. This event was to mark the end of his involvement in NYCI and he left his role as a delegate from CBSI. Reflecting on his flirtation with NYCI in the 1980s, he says he learned an awful lot about politics. It was a fantastic experience and he also learned about ‘group dynamics’ and ‘youth loyalty,’ but the NYCI Assembly of 1987 left him feeling ‘bruised’ for many years after.



### Siobhán Corry

President of NYCI, 1983 – 85

Current Position: School Management Advisor,  
Secretariat of Secondary Schools

Siobhán Corry (née Doyle) was the first female elected as president of NYCI, in 1983. Her involvement with the Council, however, started much earlier. Siobhán's first engagement with NYCI was in 1974, when she was invited to attend an AGM to represent the Girl Guides of Ireland. She was to later hold the positions of NYCI Vice Chair and Secretary and was eventually elected to the position of NYCI President. Her predecessor, Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall, was appointed advisor to Minister George Birmingham midway through his presidency and Siobhán was elected at that point to succeed him. She held the NYCI presidency from 1983 – 85 and her presidency coincided with the International Year for Youth in 1985. She vividly remembers her first NYCI AGM. NYCI as an organisation was very much in its infancy, only seven years in existence. There were 15 organisations in membership and the membership was very diverse. Such varied and diverse membership made trying to achieve consensus and agreement within the Council challenging at times.

### The International Committee

Siobhán was involved in the work of the International Committee, which was very popular with delegates, as it had all the 'amazing' trips to various places. Young people involved in NYCI at the time, availed of wonderful opportunities to participate in lots of study visits to places like Denmark, Greece and Turkey. During this period, there were lots of study visits and reciprocal visits throughout Europe.

*"It was a big thing because there wasn't a lot of travel for young people in the 1970s and 1980s and it was an opportunity to go to Europe, to places that you would never have got to and also the cost was huge. I remember I was on the European Youth Forum, representing Ireland and the cost of the flights, you were talking about six hundred pounds sometimes, for flights from Dublin to Brussels" (Siobhán Corry, 2017).*

Siobhán remembers one particularly amusing trip she made to Moscow in the 1980s, as part of an NYCI delegation. It was a study visit to the Soviet Union during the Cold War and she was accompanied by Richard Doherty, Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl, Mary Hanafin and a few others.

*"When we came out of the airport... I was put in the back of this huge big black limousine, on my own, because I was the president and the others were put into a mini behind... You know everything was supposed to be egalitarian, but when we got to the hotel, I had a suite of rooms and they just had rooms... it was an amazing trip. We went by train overnight to St. Petersburg... It was winter and it was snowing and all these naval officers were on the train. Of course,*

*every step we took we were accompanied by, well supposedly an interpreter, but it was a bit more. It was a bit more than an interpreter and they didn't encourage you talking to anybody that you might meet...*" (Siobhán Corry, 2017).

### Moving to 3 Montague Street

The 1970s executive meetings were held in the NYCI Office, which was located at the salubrious address – 6 Waterloo Road, Dublin 4. Although it was a salubrious address, apparently it wasn't very salubrious inside and there was little space to accommodate a growing staff team. The rent on the building was also increasing and there was an attempt to buy the building. Alan Graham (former NYCI President) attended a public auction on behalf of NYCI, but unfortunately missed out on the sale by IR£500. Siobhán Corry recalls that everywhere was very expensive. A bank official called Mick Lagan in TSB gave NYCI a mortgage and they started to look in earnest for places to purchase. Then Siobhán spotted an advertisement in the newspaper for 3 Montague Street.



*"I saw this building, which belonged to 'Winston's.' It was originally called 'Gorevan's.' When I was starting school that's where everybody went in the city to get your school uniform. It was a big department store and then it turned into 'Winston's,' which was another department store. Anyway, they owned this building (3 Montague Street) and they used it for storage. We put in an offer, it was accepted and then of course, didn't Winston's go into liquidation or something. So there was a big hold up, you know, months and months before the sale went through..."* (Siobhán Corry, 2017).

Eventually the deal was sealed in October 1984 and apart from a short period of relocation in Dominick Street during renovation work on 3 Montague Street, NYCI remains at this address today!



The NYCI office at the 3 Montague Street, Dublin 2, taken on 3 October 1984

### International Year for Youth, 1985

Siobhán's presidency coincided with the 1985 International Year for Youth. She obtained a secondment from her teaching position to assume the role of presidency full-time. She said obtaining a secondment was great because it was a very demanding year. There were so many engagements during the International Year for Youth. It provided an opportunity both domestically and internationally to



Pictures of the NYCI Office as it was in February 1985, before it was converted into office space

profile the youth agenda. It was at this time that the idea of youth as a social partner became consolidated in the mind of then Minister for Youth, George Birmingham. It also marked the period in which Gaisce, The President's Award scheme was established and various other initiatives during the International Youth Year, put youth on the map. During this year, there were so many youth events and the Council also dedicated a lot of time to trying to get the grants increased, which was always very difficult. Soon after, a youth development officer scheme was introduced, which appointed about forty people to youth organisations, but on a temporary basis. Siobhán recalls having a lot of meetings with both Haughey and FitzGerald, during this period.

Speaking of her time involved in NYCI, Siobhán says:

*"It was very time intensive and demanding. There were lots of hectic meetings and lively AGMs... We got great opportunities and for me, in terms of, I suppose my professional development. You know, when you're going for a principal's job and you know, you've been able to say you've been in meetings with the Taoiseach, you've been lobbying the department, you've been meeting ministers, you know, things that you'd have to be doing maybe for your school or whatever and chairing meetings, all that kind of thing, you got great training. I think a lot of people went on and took the benefit of that with them into their careers and then, of course, I met my husband, so what can I say..."*

In terms of her hopes and wishes for NYCI now and into the future, Siobhán says she hopes that NYCI will *"become stronger and focused on what it can actually do on the ground for young people..."*



### Mark Acheson

Vice President of NYCI, 1985

Current Position: National Chaplain of the  
Boys' Brigade in the Republic of Ireland

Mark Acheson's involvement with NYCI began in 1980, through his membership of the Church of Ireland Youth Council (CIYC). He recalls hearing about NYCI and later became CIYC's representative in NYCI, chair of the Youth Work Services Standing Conference Committee and Vice President of NYCI. Coming from a pure youth work background, Mark says he was impressed by *"this amazing gathering of people from all sorts of organisations."* From the outset, Mark's motivation for getting involved in NYCI was to focus on the youth work agenda, but he says the emerging mix of agendas under the umbrella of the Youth Council, meant there was an *"element of going outside one's own comfort zone."* Looking back now, Mark says that the politicisation of the Youth Council was so strong at the time and that he wasn't prepared for this highly politicised environment. Initially, the politicisation of NYCI wasn't very apparent but as time progressed, the tensions between youth work and youth affairs grew stronger. He says he was slow to realise that many representatives of the uniformed or faith-based organisations in NYCI were also involved in politics and had a clear sense of where they wanted to go. Throughout the 1980s, a lot of power struggles took place.

In 1996, Mark remembers CIYC delegates were very keen to support Ógra Sinn Féin's admission to membership, but he says that the northern congregation tended to take a harder line regarding Sinn Féin joining the NYCI. Speaking of their position, Mark says the Church of Ireland tends to adopt a more moderate approach, but on this occasion he sought advice from Archbishop Robin Eames.

*"My sense was this had a wider implication and as Chairman of the Church of Ireland Youth Council I was able to ring Robin Eames, who was the Archbishop of Armagh. He'd answer the phone and he would work with me on these things... and I said to him I have an issue here. I'm just really looking for a steer as to how you feel about it"* (Mark Acheson, 2017).

In the end, the CIYC abstained from voting when Ógra Sinn Féin's application came before assembly in Cork in 1996.

Reflecting on NYCI in the 1980s, Mark describes it as a *"hot melting pot"* of different views and perspectives on many different aspects of life affecting young people. As NYCI marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he hopes that the organisation will carry on and continue to look for interventions in public life that will enable young people to be themselves and make positive contributions to society.



### **Dermot Lacey**

Labour Youth and Catholic Boy Scouts Ireland Representative

Period of Involvement: 1979 – 2005

Vice President of NYCI, 1991 – 92, 1993 – 94

Current Position: Labour Party Councillor on Dublin City Council

Dermot Lacey’s involvement with NYCI straddles three decades. He first became involved with the Youth Council in 1979, representing Labour Youth on the International Committee. At the time, NYCI was located at 6 Waterloo Road. Labour Youth pulled out of NYCI and Dermot later returned to the Council in 1985, representing CBSI. He was elected to the board of NYCI and in 1990 was appointed as the Labour Party Youth Officer. Between 1990 and 2005, Dermot says he combined representation of Labour Youth and CBSI, depending on whether or not Labour Youth was in membership of NYCI or not. During his time in NYCI, Dermot was chair of the Youth Affairs Committee and the International Committee, Vice President of NYCI and he also represented NYCI on the board of FÁS in the early 2000s.

The NYCI Executive in the 1980s, Dermot recalls as being ‘very divided’ and ‘very political.’ There were always tensions between the various different political factions and pre or post executive meetings were known to be held in different locations, depending on which camp an executive member belonged to.

*“It would depend on whose side you were on, whether you were having a pre-executive coup planning meeting or a post-executive coup planning meeting” (Dermot Lacey, 2016).*

### **The Compromise on Contraception**

The issue of contraception in the 1980s created a lot of difficulty for NYCI. It was a very divisive issue, which eventually led to member organisations leaving NYCI. It came to a head, when a motion came to an NYCI assembly to liberalise contraceptives. Dermot recalls CBSI delegates were under absolutely strict instructions not to vote for this motion of liberalisation of contraceptives. At some stage in the proceedings, a compromise motion was drafted and the CBSI delegates decided they would vote for it, much to the concern of the head of the CBSI delegation, who felt very compromised by this decision. In a conversation with the CBSI delegates, it seems they argued that they voted for the motion on the basis of the World Scouting motto “Be Prepared” and they felt availability of condoms was in keeping with this ethos! It didn’t go down well with the CBSI leadership, but Dermot and colleagues had got their way.

Reflecting on his involvement in NYCI, Dermot says:

*“I have a memory of really great times. Of absolutely terrific and totally pointless rows (laughing), of the exhilaration of when you won on some obscure position. Undoubtedly, I learnt about politics in NYCI and in Scouting Ireland, far more than I learnt in the Labour Party or in City Hall. I think I learnt how to use the official political stage much better, because of my time in NYCI and on the CBSI Board.”*

Dermot says he has retained absolute commitment to young people and hopes that someday the voting age will reduce to 16, at least for Local Elections. Such a step, he believes would be progressive and would encourage young people to vote:

*“I think one battle I’d like to see NYCI fighting and winning is votes for sixteen year olds in local elections... I believe that if 16 year olds got a vote in local elections it would encourage people to vote, it would get them into a habit of voting, they would be voting on things that have an immediacy to them and that I think in turn would encourage them to vote in general elections...”*

### **Where the Hell is Macedonia?**

One of the funnier moments in NYCI’s history, which has been told several times by other interviewees, is about a diplomatic incident at a European meeting, involving NYCI, the Greeks, the Germans and of course, the Macedonians. The Macedonian Youth Council was applying for membership and this was on the agenda for the meeting. An NYCI delegation of seven people were in attendance at the COE meeting, but before the official proceedings commenced, all directors and presidents had a pre-meeting the night before. They agreed the optics of it and agreed that Macedonia would not be admitted into membership this year, but their membership would be approved the following year. So, the meeting commenced and at one stage in the meeting, Peter Byrne (NYCI Director) noticed the light going on at the end of the row.

Peter recounts:

*“There were several hundred people in the room and Dermot Lacey is now about to speak, which has everybody surprised, especially as the agreement has been done. Dermot made a very impassioned speech about the Macedonians having their own language, their own culture, their own right to self-determination, that just because they were a little country like Ireland they get kicked around and nobody stands up to help them. He’s quite shocked that nobody is standing up to help them and everybody else is quite shocked why Dermot doesn’t know that all this was agreed last night. Then I realise that he hadn’t been there for the briefing at breakfast (laughter)... Dermot continues and I’m getting notes passed to me from the Germans wanting to know what the hell was going on and from the Greeks wanting to know what was going on. Then Dermot sat down and forgetting to turn off his microphone, he turns the guy beside him and says, “Do you know where the hell Macedonia is anyway?,” which got translated into five languages and is in the official record.”*

Dermot later became Mayor of Dublin and during his term, he invited the Mayor of Skopje (the capital of Macedonia), to visit the city.



### Fidelma Joyce

Women's Rights Officer, USI 1987 – 88  
Chair of the International Committee, 1990 – 91  
USI Representative on the NYCI Board  
Current Position: Senior Human Rights and  
Equality Officer, Irish Human Rights and  
Equality Commission

Fidelma Joyce represented the Union of Students in Ireland in NYCI and was very active on NYCI's International Committee (IC) in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As well as serving as chair of the IC, she was also involved in the NYCI's Standing Conference on Youth Affairs Committee, the Women's Participation Working Group and was a member of NYCI's Board. Tadhg Daly, Mick Clifford, and Nick Reilly also represented USI at this time. Fidelma's initial impression of NYCI in 1987, as a 21 year old, was that it was a body that had too many older people and not enough young people representing the interests of young people.

*"From a USI perspective as the national student organisation, it was hard for us to comprehend, attending a youth assembly, where most of the delegates were well over 30"* (Fidelma Joyce, 2017).

There was also very little time allocated for debating ideas and motions at national assemblies. In 1987, USI was participating in NYCI, but Fidelma says it was quite a challenge for a radical student organisation, one of the largest youth organisations in the country, to find its place within a body that was led by adults with more traditional perspectives on young people in society. Notwithstanding these cultural challenges, she says that USI was committed to engaging in a positive way and making change happen. Overtime she recognised the complexity of bringing such a diverse range of youth organisations together to develop youth policy and that the process of discussion in the committees, while slow, also yielded good results.

At this time, Michael Whitney was the chair of the IC. He later became the President of the CENYC. Following this period, Jim O'Connor was IC Chair and later became a Vice President of the YFEC. Fidelma then took on the role of chair and represented NYCI at CENYC meetings and later worked for CENYC. NYCI was and continues to be, very committed to promoting European values and shaping European youth policy and participation. The IC took great advantage of the youth leader training courses offered by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. Fidelma recalls being sent to the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg for such training with youth leaders from all over Europe.

*"The youth leader training course had a huge impact on me and equipped me with a range of skills and knowledge that helped me in my roles on the International Committee"* (Fidelma Joyce, 2017).

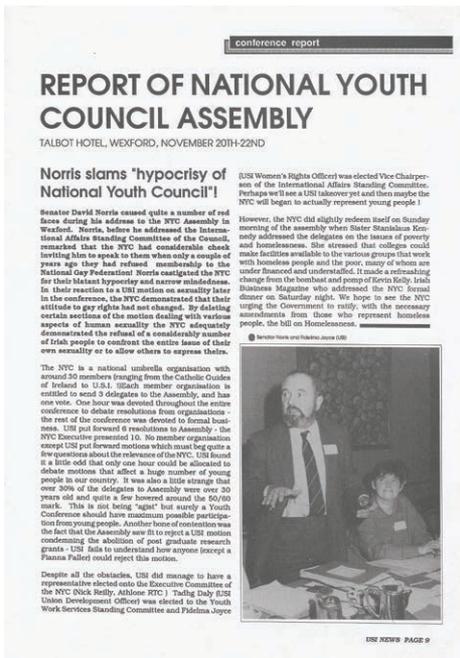
During Fidelma's time in NYCI, she recalls a lot of the work of the IC focused on NYCI's representation abroad, in terms of participation at the CENYC, YFEC and European Coordination Bureau of International Youth Organisation (ECB) meetings. The IC developed its own comprehensive international strategy to inform its approach and NYCI brought its perspective to a range of issues at European level, including youth unemployment, education, youth participation, gender equality, anti-racism, East-West relations and global solidarity. NYCI was also very interested in the youth exchange programmes emanating from the European Communities/EU and engaged actively with Léargas, the National Youth Agency for these programmes. Representing NYCI abroad offered opportunities to develop strong bi-lateral co-operation with a range of national youth councils including the British Youth Council, 31 (Dutch Youth Council), DUF (Danish Youth Council), and LNU (Norwegian Youth Council). Fidelma said that she really appreciated the tireless work of the NYCI staff who supported the work of the IC, people such as Eileen Punch and Elaine Lowry.

Two social issues of concern during this period, which USI was to the forefront on and proved to be controversial for NYCI, were the issues of sexuality and women's right to access to information on abortion services. Fidelma says while NYCI was very reluctant to embrace either issue, it couldn't ignore them. At the time, the provision of non-directive counselling was being 'shut down' in Ireland. In *AG (SPUC) v Open Door Counselling Ltd. and Dublin Well Woman Centre Ltd. (1988)*, the High Court granted an injunction restraining two counselling agencies from assisting women to travel abroad to obtain abortions or informing them of the methods of communication with such clinics. *SPUC v Grogan and SPUC v Coogan* targeted students' unions, seeking to prohibit them from distributing information on abortion available in the UK.

*"As the High Court had determined that there was no right to information on abortion services in other jurisdictions, women's magazines were on sale in Ireland with the addresses of such services in the UK blacked out, preventing women from accessing such information ...USI stood up and bravely provided the information..."* (Fidelma Joyce, 2017).

While this was a difficult issue for NYCI, a USI motion on the right to information was debated at its National Assembly. The debate on the right to information and the aftermath of the debate is discussed in more detail on page 67 of the report.

The other issue at the time centred on sexuality and recognition and support for lesbian and gay young people. Fidelma Joyce recalls the NYCI Assembly in the Talbot Hotel in Wexford on 20 – 22 November 1987. The IC invited Senator David Norris to speak at its meeting, at the assembly. He spoke very openly about the fact that he felt the National Youth Council hadn't supported gay rights and he even mentioned that the National Gay Federation hadn't been able to become a member of NYCI, for a period of time. One of the USI motions at the conference was on sexuality. Motions could be voted on section by section resulting in some sections being deleted. In his speech, Senator Norris criticised the



Article from the January 1988 edition of the USI News reporting on the NYCI Assembly that took place from 20 – 22 November 1987, criticizing NYCI’s refusal to accept the National Gay Federation into membership

fact that key parts of the USI motion were actually taken out before it was voted on and stated that by doing so, NYCI had demonstrated its refusal to accept a considerable number of Irish people who wished to be open about their sexuality and to express it. Reporting on Norris’ address at the 1987 NYCI Assembly, the January 1988 edition of USI News, states that “Norris castigated the NYC for their blatant hypocrisy and narrow mindedness” (USI News, 1988: 9).

Concern about the level of participation of women in public life and leadership positions also came to the fore during this period in NYCI’s history. A survey revealed that young women were underrepresented in leadership positions in youth organisations at European and national levels. Fidelma recalls she was one of only two young women appointed to the Board of NYCI during her time. NYCI took this challenge on board and set up a Women’s Participation Working Group, which Fidelma was a part of. She recalls the Women’s Participation programme as having a very positive impact in supporting young women to take on leadership positions in NYCI and its member organisations.



Picture of the Women’s Participation Working Group

In this period, huge changes were taking place in Europe with the collapse of the ‘Iron Curtain’ and the reunification of Eastern and Western Europe. National youth councils through CENYC and international non-governmental organisations through ECB played a key role. NYCI made a strong and positive contribution throughout this period. Prior to these changes, Fidelma recalls attending meetings of the All European Youth and Student Cooperation (AEYSC) Framework, which brought together youth representatives from Western and Eastern Europe to exchange views and find agreement on ways to cooperate. The contacts made were critically important when the collapse finally came. Developing democratic youth work and national youth councils in the former Eastern Bloc became a high priority for CENYC. Fidelma was appointed to CENYC, initially for a year, to support the establishment of National Youth Councils in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Her role as project officer was to develop contacts and a strategy to develop and deepen cooperation. CENYC sought to support fledgling national youth councils, facilitating bi-lateral contacts and stimulating co-operation between youth leaders from national youth organisations and national youth councils in Western and Eastern Europe.

As Europe unified and the youth of Europe came together, there seemed less need for three bodies to represent them. Discussions, at times tense and difficult, began to merge CENYC, ECB and the YFEC. The efforts were successful and the European Youth Forum (YFJ) was established in 1996. Its inaugural meeting was hosted by the National Youth Council of Ireland in Cork. The YFJ succeeded in having a stronger voice than ever at EU level, because the merger of the three organisations managed to unite (the merger is discussed in greater detail on page 75). As a result, the EYF had a lot of influence. Later, Fidelma worked for the YFJ and continued working there until 2001. She enjoyed meeting and working with a variety of NYCI representatives during her time there. Reflecting on her involvement with NYCI, she says:

*“NYCI supported me to become a confident and skilled youth leader and opened up the possibility for me to work on youth issues at the European level. It was life changing and I am very grateful for the opportunities the organisation gave me.*

*NYCI is now a strong and influential voice for the interests of young people led by them. My hope for NYCI in the future is that, as an organisation it will grow bigger and stronger and empower as many young people as possible to be active in changing society for the better” (Fidelma Joyce, 2017).*



### Aoife Nic Lughadha

Vice President of NYCI, 1992 – 1993, 1994 – 1996

Aoife Nic Lughadha's first engagement with NYCI began in 1984. The first committee she was involved in was a subcommittee on youth unemployment and after that she gradually became more involved in NYCI, representing Feachtas. She started engaging more with the work of the Development Education programme and the International Committee and eventually was elected on to the NYCI Board and as Vice President of NYCI.

*“It started out first of all as a working group and I would have had a passion for that. So I started out in the working group and then that became a project. Then I got involved with the European anti-racism campaign in 1993. That would have been the big draw that I would have had in NYCI, as well as being eventually on the executive and at one stage Vice President as well”* (Aoife Nic Lughadha, 2017).

Aoife recalls NYCI in the 1980s as an organisation, which tended to be dominated by the larger youth member organisations. Smaller organisations would not have been represented much at board level at that time. She says that with the exception of Siobhán Corry, there weren't many women involved in leadership positions in NYCI at this time, although the gender imbalance wasn't something she was particularly conscious of. Also representing Feachtas in NYCI at this time, were Fr. Micheál MacGréil (profiled on pages 18 – 19) and Sean O'Fearáil.

It was the mid-1980s before Aoife decided to run for the board of NYCI. By this time, she says the idea of the electoral colleges had been devised and introduced, which effectively levelled the playing field and made it much easier for small organisations to get elected on to the NYCI Board. The idea behind the electoral colleges was that the board would be broadly represented to include subgroups in all the different colleges. Aoife got elected through a subpanel that was introduced. She says that before this amendment to the electoral system, many people from smaller organisations would not have considered going for the NYCI Board, as only candidates running from larger member organisations got elected. Aoife recalls this amendment was introduced in the late 1980s, after the departure of CYC and Foróige. She believes Foróige left NYCI because smaller organisations began to be more organised and as a result had more influence at board level.

### Running for the NYCI Presidency

Aoife recalls standing against Jillian van Turnhout for the NYCI presidency, in 1996. What was particularly interesting in this electoral contest was that they were friends and that it was first time two women had run against each other for the position. Aoife recalls this election and the context of the contest, with amusement:

*“We came from two completely different types of background, but we were both involved in youth work and we both knew each other very well. So it was really funny, like every so often we would sit in the bar and have a chat and a cup of coffee and people were coming over and saying to each of us, you are not meant to be talking and we kept saying why not. Because you are meant to be almost like fighting and the two of us were looking at each other. It was actually the first time two women stood for the same position as well. I think that was the other dynamic, that okay, we had our issues and we had our canvassers and we spoke to people and we had actually done most of our canvassing, as in sent out our blurbs to the organisations. At the conference we were actually colleagues, you know. Obviously, Jillian won...but at the same time that didn’t make us arch enemies or rivals...We were both standing on a certain platform. I always remember the two of us being amused at that...” (Aoife Nic Lughadha, 2017).*

### The All Different All Equal Youth Campaign

In 1993, racism and intolerance were prioritised by political leaders of the then 32 member states of the COE at the Vienna Summit, in October 1993. The idea was to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II with a youth campaign called *“All Different – All Equal.”* The aim of this campaign was to unite against racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance. The campaign was supported fully by the two pan-European platforms for non-governmental youth organisations – the CENYC and the ECB. The aim of the campaign was to mobilise all sectors of society to ensure equality, dignity, human rights and democracy. As part of the European campaign, NYCI were involved in an initiative, which involved five trains starting at five different points across Europe. One of them was in Ireland. The train started in Dublin and went to Belfast and from Belfast went across to Britain and Mary Robinson launched it in Dublin. It was very high profile. Aoife was vice president of NYCI in 1993 and recalls the organisation being very involved in the campaign, which was broadly reflective of Irish society. The trains were picking up young people along the way for this big conference in the summer. She recalls the campaign as an *“amazing initiative for the Council to be involved in”* and one of the highlights of her period of involvement in NYCI. NYCI later published an anti-racism and intercultural education resource pack for youth workers entitled *“All Different – All Equal,”* which was first published in 1995 and updated and republished in 2006.

President Mary Robinson with Aoife Nic Lughadha (Vice President of NYCI) and young people, at the launch of the All Different – All Equal Youth Campaign



The  
1990s

## The 1990s

Youth unemployment continued unabated throughout the 1990s. Throughout this decade, the NYCI's staff team expanded to include programme staff in the areas of youth arts, youth health and youth development education. NYCI formally joined the Social Partnership process in 1996 and the Youth Work Act was enacted in 1997 and was later repealed in 2001. The Standing Conferences on Youth Work and Youth Affairs were still in existence, as was the International Committee. In addition to the Standing Conferences on Youth Affairs and Youth Work and the International Committee, there was another working group established colloquially known as the 'NESC' group or sometimes it would be referred to as the 'NESC FÁS' group. Its official title was 'Economic and Social Policy Group.' This group was comprised of the NYCI representative of NESC and of FÁS, respectively. Although this committee wasn't exclusively male, men were overrepresented on the committee. The meetings would take place downstairs in the NYCI office and then it was a common practice to adjourn to Ryan's Pub on Camden Street after the meeting and continue the discussions on the serious social and economic affairs of the day. NYCI's representative on FÁS at the time was considered to be very important, given the scale of youth unemployment in 1990s and representation on NESC was also a key position. The establishment of the NYCI health programme, the arts programme and development education programme within NYCI during this decade, in many ways helped to play a role in bringing youth work organisations who had left NYCI back into membership. At the same time, a lot of energy was expended trying to get organisations that were out of membership back into NYCI during this decade. Organisations that left NYCI's membership were often referred to as 'the absent friends' in the discussions centred on how to attract them back into membership.

In the early 1990s, the LGBT youth movement was beginning to gain momentum. An organisation called the Lesbian and Gay Youth Federation of Ireland (LGYFI) was established in June 1991 and made a concerted effort to join NYCI. LGYFI was a coordinating body for all lesbian, gay and bisexual youth groups and societies in the country. According to an article in the Gay Community News in December/January 1992/1993, gaining membership of NYCI was seen by the community as highly significant, in that it meant that they were given 'official' status. They also valued membership of NYCI, as a vehicle through which they could lobby the government of the day for 'recognition and funding' (GCN, Dec/Jan 1992/1993: 1). LGYFI worked on their campaign to join NYCI for a year and a half. They first applied for membership to NYCI's membership review committee in June 1991, however, they decided that their application wasn't strong enough and to defer applying until June 1992. In June

1992, the application submitted was 72 pages long and set out their case for membership of NYCI. According to an article in GCN, the Director of NYCI at the time, Tom Curran, praised the application and the tremendous work and effort they put into it. On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1992, at NYCI's AGM in Limerick, LGFYI gained membership of the Youth Council. They were accepted into the organisation with the required two thirds of the total votes. This was a significant marker in NYCI's history and the start of a change in youth politics. A shift in societal thinking was beginning to emerge in Irish society. The following year homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland and although a lot more work remained to be done to achieve equal recognition for LGBT young people, the foundations had been set.

---

## Gays join youth council

**THE National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) has been urged to tackle alleged prejudices in youth clubs against young gays and lesbians.**

Welcoming the NYCI decision to accept the Gay and Youth Federation into its organisation — by a two thirds majority vote — the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) urged the council to tackle the many disadvantages experienced by young homosexuals.

GLEN spokesman Kieran Rhodes said young gays

and lesbians experienced problems of isolation and found it difficult to talk about themselves to parents, teachers and friends.

He claimed they could also suffer harassment at school if it was known they were gay or lesbian.

"One of the things the NYCI should tackle is the prejudice that exists in a lot of youth clubs so that young gay and lesbians would feel secure and not excluded."

The Gay and Lesbian Youth Federation was

voted into NYCI at its annual conference in Limerick.

The conference also voted in the Community Games Organisation but an application from Ogra Sinn Fein was rejected.

NYCI president Gearoid O Maoilmhichil said the 50 member organisations in NYCI now worked in a more open society and came into contact with new and developing organisations who wished to join it.

In voting in the Gay and Lesbian Youth Federation

the delegates had given recognition to the work it was doing for its members.

Mr O Maoilmhichil said delegates had questioned what would be seen as the alleged close ties between Ogra Sinn Fein and organisations engaged in violence and the political wings of those organisations.

He said the conference was also critical of the Green Paper on Education and saw it as seriously flawed because it didn't recognise the value of youth work to young people.

Irish Independent, 23 November 1992

---

The 1990s was a really exciting time in Europe. The Council of Europe had its system of co-management, which was unique because youth representatives and officials from youth ministries were working in the same body to make decisions on youth issues. This working arrangement provided a lot of learning for civil servants and NGOs about the value of working together and sharing and exchanging information and best practice. Parallel to the COE, was the emergence of a growing interest from the EU in youth and youth issues. There was the Youth for Europe programme, which was really just an exchange programme. There were plans to expand and develop it and establish a youth directorate. At the time, it was said that the Council of Europe had all the principles, policies and ideas, but the EU had the money, so the EU would take the good ideas from the Council of Europe and finance them — very much like an incubator. It was an exciting time in the development of youth, because there was so much happening and young people were getting recognition. As previously mentioned, this decade also saw the merger of the CENYC, ECB and YFEC into one body, resulting in the establishment of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) in 1996.

## The NYCI Assembly

NYCI assemblies traditionally took place in a hotel over a weekend at the end of November. They combined a conference and elections for positions on the NYCI Executive/Board. Assemblies were remembered by some as ‘contentious’ but always providing a great dynamic that comes with contested elections. The NYCI assemblies were mostly attended by the Minister of Youth or Ministry dealing with the youth work and youth affairs agenda at the time. They were also attended by the opposition spokesperson from across the political spectrum and on occasion the Taoiseach would even make an appearance.

Other descriptions of the NYCI General Assembly, which perhaps more aptly describes the social aspect of the annual meeting, conjure a fun atmosphere where people from different member organisations met to debate the policy issues of the day and sometimes ran campaigns for election against each other in contested positions of power within NYCI.

The following quotations are just some of the ways NYCI assemblies of the past have been remembered by interviewees:

*“They were just smoke-filled rooms of politics really, as to who was running for what... where people bonded and the focus of the meeting was to get money out of government...”*

*“I remember, like packing up for annual assembly was such a big deal... Unfortunately I’m going to be sexist now and say that the women, all of us, would probably be saying, ‘what are you packing and what are you bringing?’ So there’d be this build up.”*

*“Oh assemblies were all night drinking affairs.”*

*“Assemblies were like all-nighter affairs...it was kind of a big social event... I wouldn’t have been a person to be staying up till 4 o’clock in the morning, but you’d hear stories about people putting lots of drinks on other people’s bar tabs (laugh), but you know, I never did that...”*

*“I remember one in particular, where it was contested for I think it was president. And you know, I remember actually thinking, God this is really, really serious. Because people were ringing you up and looking for your vote. And like, I mean that hasn’t happened in years.”*

*“They were tremendous. You arrived down on the Friday and you knew nobody but by the time Saturday evening came around, which was usually kind of in the early hours of Sunday morning and being up half the night, you knew everyone. Saturday night you’d have the assembly dinner and a disco or something like that...”*

*“There was always some contentious proposal in from the members or whatever. I mean it was very good attendance. People did stay over and yes, we had very late nights and did all that, but in fairness people mostly did the work as well.”*

*“Assemblies, they were fantastically political, because the cultural clash was just unimaginable. I mean you had member*

organisations that turned up Friday, Saturday and Sunday in their uniforms, because that's what they did. They were uniformed youth organisations and so you'd have these grown adults from uniformed youth organisations...who would sort of sit there sternly or primly in their uniforms and then you'd have the likes of USI, when they were a member and all sorts of organisations, like Sinn Féin Youth, when they were trying to be admitted to membership, for example...there were always contests and battles."

"Despite the fact that youth work culture of the organisation was dominant in terms of the membership and the history, the assemblies started mimicking USI congress or political party youth conferences and that was odd when you think about the culture of a lot of the organisations. You'd expect more sort of workshoppiness and clubbiness and happy-clappy stuff."

"When you'd hear one coming up now you would say that was your whole weekend gone because you would come back on a Sunday and you were only fit for the couch. So they involved a lot of drinking, a lot of craic but a lot of work and it was serious work. Like I can remember, you know, at one stage sitting there and thinking, oh my God, this is like the real deal, when you kind of hear about it but the votes, the people would apply for membership and they would come in and kind of set out their market stall and then they would be asked to leave the room while it was discussed and then whether they were successful or unsuccessful then they were called back into the room and told you were either successful or unsuccessful."

"Assemblies were good fun. Now think USI congress and pull it back about four or five on the volume."

### Controversial Assemblies

Two particularly controversial NYCI assemblies that interviewees remember as standing out from other years were when abortion was debated and the year Ógra Sinn Féin applied for membership and were refused membership.

### The right to information on abortion services

At the assembly in 1991, NYCI was asked to support a motion on the right to information on abortion services. One interviewee says she will always remember one of the proponents of the motion was a very pregnant woman, appealing on the issue. Some commentators contend that the outcome of the assembly

---

# Dispute over abortion hits Youth Council

Irish Press,  
18 November 1991

**By PAT HOLMES**  
Education Correspondent  
THE country's largest youth organisation is to "review its involvement" in the National Youth Council of Ireland, amid a major row over a pro-abortion information motion passed at the council's annual assembly in Wexford yesterday.  
Delegates, including those from the Catholic Boy Scouts and Girl Guide organisations, voted for a motion from the Union of Students in Ireland which stated

their own organisations which they purport to represent. I do not accept that the vast majority of young people in Ireland run with what is being said here", said Fr Clarke, after a session which also passed a motion from the Workers Party Youth for a campaign for greater availability and accessibility of condoms.  
"I think it is timely for us to review our involvement in the National Youth Council of Ireland", said Fr Clarke.  
Mr Gerry Glynn, Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland, said he did not agree that they had voted against the ethos of the organisation

## Harassment warning

SEXUAL harassment is more prevalent in the workplace and in training and education than many people realised, Ms Sylvia Meehan, chief executive of the Employment Equality Agency, told delegates at

was the departure from NYCI membership of CYC and the National Youth Federation, however, this is not a universally accepted view. Others believe these organisations left NYCI for other reasons. Regardless of the reason for their departure from NYCI, it took over a decade for them to re-affiliate.

### **Ógra Sinn Féin’s application for membership of NYCI**

Ógra Sinn Féin had sought membership of NYCI on numerous occasions throughout the 1990s. In 1996, their application for membership came before Assembly once again. Having been refused membership the year before, it was very likely that they would be successful this time. The assembly was in Cork and they were ready to join and met all the criteria. The person who had been guiding them through application process was not able to attend assembly and was replaced by a local Sinn Féin councillor. According to Peter Byrne (NYCI Director at the time), the Sinn Féin representative was asked did he believe in punishment beatings for young people that stole cars and his response did not win favour with NYCI delegates. He did not condemn it and so the Ógra Sinn Féin application was denied once again. Peter says that the event was carried on the six o’clock news and the media coverage continued the next day:

*“I spent the entire day on the radio and TV explaining...the Irish Government were saying we are going to embrace Sinn Féin, the British Government were saying you’ve got to embrace Sinn Féin, but here we were, as the youth organisation saying no” (Peter Byrne, 2016).*

The following year Ógra Sinn Féin returned to the NYCI Assembly, clarified their position, stating punishment beatings were unacceptable and became NYCI members.



## **Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl**

President 1989 – 92

NYCI Child Protection Manager, 2006 – 08

Current Position: Child Welfare and Safeguarding  
Manager for the GAA

Gearóid was President of NYCI in the period 1989 – 92. He returned to NYCI in the mid–2000s, but this time as a member of the staff team. In 2006, he was appointed NYCI’s first Child Protection Manager. During his period on the executive, he was very involved in the youth work standing conference, but also held the position of Vice Chair of Youth Affairs for a year, prior to becoming Vice President of the Council and later President of NYCI in 1989. His first involvement with NYCI was when he was working with Ógras (the Conradh na Gaeilge Youth Section) in the late 1980s. He remembers being asked by his boss at the time to deputise at a meeting in NYCI. The meeting, as he recalls was to do with bilingualism.

Gearóid was from a small Irish language organisation and at the time, there wasn’t much scope for small, specialised organisations, like Ógras, within NYCI. Ironically, a few years later, Gearóid was successfully elected to the position of NYCI President. This electoral success, he attributes to the fact that there was a large number of organisations that ‘went looking for change’ and as a result, he was the first recipient of a coordinated campaign by small organisations and some larger organisations, to become President of NYCI. Prior to Gearóid’s election to the position of NYCI President, he contends that the organisation was, by its very nature, youth work oriented and dominated to some extent, by uniform organisations. The growth and expansion of youth affairs and organisations with an interest in youth issues grew significantly within NYCI from this period onwards. This caused tensions within NYCI at times and around this period a review of NYCI was commissioned. The review resulted in the creation of electoral colleges – with youth work colleges and youth affairs colleges having a proportionate number of seats. The result of the creation of electoral colleges meant that the executive was more evenly balanced and less weighted in favour of larger organisations. As a result, it meant that for the first time ever, smaller organisations could elect representatives on to the NYCI Executive. Whilst this was significant for smaller youth work organisations, at the time it shook the foundations of the Council slightly. NYCI reviewed its constitution and a new constitution, fully supported by the large organisations, was seen at the time to be most radical, but also inclusive. It also meant that NYCI established itself as a representative body of voluntary youth organisations, which meant the day the constitution was adopted in May 1991, the City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) lost their membership, because they were a statutory body. This move also culminated in dialogue that resulted in the re–admission of Foróige to the NYCI.

NYCI in the 1990s was representing and advocating for youth organisations and on youth issues, in a rapidly changing Irish society. It was the ‘Mary Robinson’ era and the abortion referendum took place, which according to Gearóid got him into ‘a lot of trouble’ as President of NYCI, thanks to the misconstrued interpretation of a motion put to Congress by the Union of Students in Ireland. It was also a time of major economic recession in Ireland.

*“I can remember in the mid-80s, we were doing well society wise...I was a young person and there was no talk of, you know, better save up there and buy a house or anything like that. You just lived the life and regretted there were only seven nights in a week...and then you got to 1990. There is a downturn” (Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl, 2017).*

In December 1989, 290,000 people were unemployed in Ireland and Ireland’s youth unemployment rate was the highest in Europe. House prices escalated exponentially. At the same time, NYCI had incurred 10% cuts in the Youth Service Grant Scheme and the ‘Disadvantaged Grant Scheme,’ which was introduced to supplement existing work, was being abolished. There was a view that the department’s system of allocating funding was not very credible. In this context, Gearóid says he felt compelled to run for the presidency of NYCI. He contested the presidency and ran against the sitting NYCI president, Fr. Martin Clarke. Gearóid was supported by a number of large youth work organisations. The result was overwhelming and perhaps reflective of the need and mood for change. For the next few years the Council focused on the social issues that were impacting on young people at the time and continued to address the youth work agenda. Gearóid says holding the NYCI presidency during this period, was a ‘hugely rewarding experience,’ but was also very demanding. His presidency was dogged by contentious and divisive social policy issues affecting young people at the time. NYCI found itself taking difficult positions and also faced challenges with youth service funding and the threat of losing larger organisations from its ranks, such as CYC and the National Youth Federation.

### **The Debate on Abortion**

Similar to current debates, the early 1990s saw divisive discussions on abortion in Ireland. Two referenda, the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, failed to resolve matters to any degree of satisfaction. It was the time of the infamous X case and friends, families and households differed on the debate. It was probably inevitable that the NYCI, given its youth affairs agenda would discuss these issues. Against this backdrop, the USI president at the time submitted a motion to the NYCI AGM. It was worded in such a way that it could be open to different interpretations, but essentially the main premise of the motion was about the right to information. It was very divisive and was referred to the NYCI’s Board for consideration. The NYCI Board decided that it could not rule the motion out of order so a debate on the motion was organised for members. A number of organisations abstained from participating in the debate. Recalling the debate and impact it had on NYCI afterwards, Gearóid says:

*“Some delegates stayed outside the door because they didn’t support it and didn’t want to be in the room... It went to a vote and it was passed. Ironically the motion could have been lost had all stayed in the room. We were forced into explaining to the media why the motion was carried and the debate escalated. Divisions appeared very quickly, people panicked on all sides and we had the NYCI Board defending the decision of Congress in public and in the media against CYC and some uniformed groups. The Council was accused of being pro-abortion and some distasteful arguments ensued. I recall being verbally attacked one day in Heuston Station when collecting an elderly relative from a train and also getting a number of distasteful telephone calls to my home, from some so-called pro-life activists. Calls were made at the time to my employer, the National Youth Federation, to dismiss me, but to be fair they stood by my right to represent the NYCI, even if they didn’t always see eye to eye with the NYCI on other issues.”*

After this incident, Gearóid says that CYC abstained from much of the NYCI business and to a lesser extent, so did some individuals. The uniformed organisations who held much sway at the time in youth work circles held firm in their commitment to the NYCI. CYC remained in membership until NYCI

accepted the membership of LGYFI. In a letter to the NYCI President at the time, they stated that they were leaving NYCI membership because the Council had lost all function and purpose by accepting the membership of LGYFI. Reflecting on this period, Gearóid says *“in 1992, homosexuality was still a criminal offence, which we must remember was decriminalized the following year in 1993.”* Irish society at the time was very much divided on many social issues in relation to sexuality, access to information on contraceptives and abortion.

During the remainder of Gearóid’s tenure, there was a shift away from a focus on youth work towards embracing the pertinent youth affairs issues facing young people of the day. Soon there was a change of government with the Labour/Fianna Fáil coalition, which actually catapulted NYCI’s status. Gearóid recalls that the first organisation that the new Minister of Education, Niamh Breathnach met, following her appointment in January 1993, was the National Youth Council of Ireland. At this meeting, NYCI told Minister Breathnach that they wanted to be seen as a Youth Work Education Council and did not want to be seen at the fringes. After this meeting, further meetings followed with other Ministers, resulting in the appointment of an NYCI nominee to the newly established National Social Economic Forum. This new status and recognition was very significant. It was a marker in the growth and value placed on NYCI and its contribution to the shaping and formulation of social and economic policy. The Council also received additional funding to employ a researcher at the time and the role of Press Officer was enhanced to assist in publicising the work of the Council. Relations between NYCI and government were described by Gearóid as ‘very good.’

Reflecting on his engagement with NYCI, Gearóid believes that the experience was both fruitful and demanding. His hopes for NYCI now and in the future are that it will continue to focus on issues affecting young people, seek to engage and represent all young people and that the Council would receive ‘a more stable level of funding’ in recognition of its work.

*“I think somewhere along the line there’s a huge cohort of young people out there not represented...they are not represented by anybody...Someone has to be representing their interests and I think there has to be a role there for the NYCI”* (Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl, 2017).



### Tom Curran

Director of NYCI 1989 – 93

Current Position: Secretary General of Fine Gael

Tom Curran was Director of NYCI from 1986 – 93. He came to the organisation with a background in youth work. Prior to his appointment as NYCI Director, Tom worked for 6 years as a development officer for the Scouting Association of Ireland (SAI) in Sligo. Speaking of this time in his career, Tom says he recognized the value of outdoor activity, through the scouting movement, as a means to providing the opportunity to develop young people into better, more responsible citizens. In the last two years of his employment with SAI, his work started to concentrate more on youth work issues and at the same time he was asked to represent the organisation on NYCI's Youth Work Committee. A little later, Tom moved from Sligo to Dublin to work in NYCI, initially to support the work of the Standing Conference on Youth Work Committee. In this role, Tom became more involved in youth work political issues. His initial impression of NYCI as a member of staff, was that it was 'intriguing,' principally because as an organisation it provided *"a forum, effectively, for a myriad of political organisations or youth work organisations to come together."* In 1989, Tom was appointed Director of NYCI. By this point, the youth political organisations had become a lot more actively involved in the Youth Council. NYCI tried to navigate the organisations in such a way as to avoid any one youth political wing dominating the work of the Council and to ensure that all organisations were as involved as possible.

In terms of issues that dominated NYCI's agenda at the time, funding remained a constant issue throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. A lot of lobbying of members of the Oireachtas was done to ensure additional funding for the youth sector. Despite the huge investment in campaigns to highlight the need for youth work funding, Tom says that the uncertainty in security of funding made it very difficult to employ staff. He was also concerned that adequate funding for the youth organisations would be prioritized, to ensure youth work practice on the ground, but also to maintain funding of NYCI via membership contributions, to ensure its survival. Another key aspect of his role as Director was to try to keep the various sectors within the NYCI happy, which at times Tom confesses was hugely challenging. In addition to maintaining a centre ground and working to find consensus in NYCI, he also had to deal with national youth organisations that had disaffiliated from NYCI and were now outside the membership and effectively competitors.

In 1989, NYCI secured funding for two initiatives – the Drink Awareness for Youth Programme (DAYP), which was an alcohol education programme, developed for schools and the Development Education for Youth Programme (DEFY). DAYP was the precursor to the NYCI Health Programme. Sean Gallagher (an Irish Presidential candidate in 2011) was employed from September 1989 – March 1990 to coordinate the DAYP along with Anna Gunning. NYCI subsequently procured funding from the Department

of Health to develop this programme and roll it out to youth workers throughout the country. Sean Gallagher was succeeded by Pat Forde (the former chair of NYWAC) in this role. As part of the advocacy work NYCI did on the alcohol issue, Tom recalls appearing on a soapbox for *The Late Late Show*. At the time, *The Late Late Show* did about six soapbox features a year. Tom explained that contributors had to write to RTÉ and provide a script:

*“Myself and Clíodhna, the press officer at the time, worked on the script. It was a three minute script we had to do and I got up on the soapbox and spoke about alcohol, about alcohol abuse and young people and about the vintners and about all the hypocrisy and all that sort of stuff and then I engaged in a debate with a couple of people on a panel”* (Tom Curran, 2017).



The Launch of the Drink Awareness for Youth Programme, from left to right: Tom Curran (NYCI, Director), Dr. Rory O’Hanlon (Minister of Health), John Cantwell, Fr. Martin Tierney (Director of Veritas) and Barry Masterson

The DEFY (Development Education for Youth) programme was also born in 1989 and the first Development Education Officer employed to work on the DEFY programme was Mary Sweeney. Her post was funded by a grant from the Department of Foreign Affairs, EC, Trócaire, Concern and Christian Aid. In the 1990s, DEFY moved out of NYCI and worked independently and eventually the programme ceased to exist. In 2002, NYCI procured funding once again, to work on development education for young people. This project was to be called the National Development Education Programme and came under the auspices of NYCI.

Funding of NYCI and indeed of youth organisations, was always hugely dependent on the Youth Service Grant scheme. By the mid-1990s, however, NYCI had a varied funding stream. Another programme NYCI was funded to host was the Youth Exchange Bureau, which stemmed from a recommendation

contained in the Costello Report. Anne Connolly was the first employee of the Youth Exchange Bureau, which was initially a tiny office located in NYCI, which grew and grew and eventually became Léargas. The Youth Exchange Bureau became a big player in itself. It was one of the things that was recommended in the Costello Report, to enhance internationalisation, however, it became too big, too quickly and started to accumulate other pieces of work. Suddenly a whole lot of schemes came on board, which were funded by Europe, to try and promote intercultural learning for young people. Tom explains that the project became too big for NYCI:

*“As it grew, it was always going to be much bigger than the Youth Council, because of the youth work aspect of it and the intercultural exchange for youth organisations was only going to be a small part. The schools were the big focus of attention and so it moved from NYCI.”*

During Tom’s tenure as Director of NYCI, the organisation also procured funding for youth information centres and for a period of time was the coordinating body. A librarian from Dublin City Library was seconded to NYCI to help set up youth information points and to provide information on travel and young people’s rights. At the same, Foróige and the National Youth Federation were also providing a lot of the youth information around the country and did not like the provision of youth information coming under the auspices of NYCI, so the initiative was short-lived. There was always a lot of political pressure for this function to be separated from NYCI and eventually it was removed from the Youth Council.

Reflecting on his time in NYCI, Tom says he found it ‘very beneficial’ and he enjoyed working for the Youth Council. In terms of his hopes for the future of the organisation, he says he hopes that youth work continues to evolve and change to reflect the needs of all young people. He also hopes that NYCI *“continues to exist as it serves a very important role in bringing together diverse organisations and representing youth organisations.”*



### Anna Gunning

Former Assistant Director, Youth Work Services,  
1995 – 2002

Current Position: CEO of Children in Hospital  
Ireland

Anna Gunning's career in NYCI, although periodic, spanned three decades and was under various different guises. After graduating from UCD in 1985, Anna spent four years working in Comhairle Le Leas Óige (which is now known as City of Dublin Youth Service Board). It was during this period that she developed an understanding and appreciation of youth work. In 1989, Anna applied for a project officer position working for NYCI and was successful. The post was to work on two project areas – youth participation and young women's participation.

The Youth Participation Programme started in earnest in the Easter of 1990. NYCI booked a school in Castleknock for a consultation with young people and approximately 200 young people attended, from all over the country. Anna and two others organised the event, which entailed a two night residential:

*“It didn't knock a thing out of us. We just thought, yeah, let's get them all together and we'll do all these workshops... So we went into the office, late in the evening, put together 200 packs and folders for the delegates on the topics we were going to be talking about and got them all into workshops. We hired a mobile phone and went out to Castleknock for the weekend” (Anna Gunning, 2017).*

In 1993, Anna was asked if she would be interested in working on the Drink Awareness for Youth Programme (DAYP) as a trainer. The Drink Awareness for Youth pack had been developed and NYCI had procured funding to roll the training out to youth workers, throughout the country. Sean Gallagher was already in post and Anna worked alongside him, piloting the training to around 30 youth workers over a 6 – 9 month period. It was during one of the training sessions that Anna met her husband Joe. He was a participant on one of the training programmes she delivered. At a later stage, Anna also worked with Pat Forde, who succeeded Sean Gallagher in the role as DAYP officer.

DAYP was the first partnership between NYCI and the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health. The National Youth Health Programme, established in the mid-1990s, grew out of the DAYP. In 1992, Anna applied for funding under the EU funded NOW programme to develop a training course for women youth workers in the combined skills of outdoor education and youth work. NYCI received a grant £250,000 IR over a 2 year period. The programme encompassed 50% youth work skills and 50% outdoor education skills and was delivered to a group of women over 18 months. The aim was to encourage more young women into outdoor pursuits and for workers to use this as an educational tool with their groups. It was accredited by NUI, Maynooth. Under Anna's management, NYCI developed a modular programme including 12 modules and a residential, which included outdoor activities such as canoeing, rock climbing, hill walking and orienteering. Anna says working on the programme, “*was just*

*an amazing experience. We went to Scotland and hill walked in snow...it was absolutely fabulous.*” NYCI also recruited Susan Coughlan to work on the programme, as well.

### Remembering Dympna Meaney

Anna recalls one of the most poignant moments of her time in NYCI was the death of her colleague, Dympna Meaney, in December 1992. Dympna was employed in NYCI as the Coordinator of the Development Education Programme and was cycling home from work one evening, when she was tragically killed in a traffic accident. Remembering Dympna, Anna described her as an extremely conscientious colleague, who was deeply committed to her work.

*“Dympna was our kind of moral monitor in such a fabulous, fun way...She was just great fun, but she lived the cause. She was really inspirational to me in my work...She just embodied everything about the DevEd...”* (Anna Gunning, 2017).

Recalling the night Dympna died, Anna said they were both working late in the office. Dympna was completing a Development Education pack called *The Right Stuff*, which focused on 500 years since Columbus’ voyage.



Pictured above Dympna Meaney

*“We were working late one Tuesday evening and it was only the two of us in the building and she said: “I’m off to a meeting.” She was going down town to a meeting and I said: “See ya.” Anyway she said: “Look, I’m off. Will you lock up?” and I said: “Grand.” She went off on her bike and I got a phone call at six o’clock in the morning from Rita McNulty (Chair of the Development Education Working Group) to say she had died... She was only 33.”* (Anna Gunning, 2017).

Anna said Dympna’s death was very traumatic. The staff of NYCI were devastated by the untimely and sudden death of their colleague, who was highly regarded and much loved. The office was closed as a mark of respect.

Tom Curran was the Director at the time and there were two Programme Managers – Eileen Punch and Deirdre Farrell. When Deirdre Farrell left NYCI in 1995, Anna applied for the vacancy and her application was successful. The focus of her work in this new role was on youth work and lobbying for the Youth Work Bill, the enactment of the Youth Work Act and the development of a National Youth Work Development Plan. Anna left NYCI in 2002 and had sporadic contact with the organisation until 2015 when she returned to do consultancy work for the Arts, Development Education and International programmes of work.

Anna’s hopes for NYCI as it marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is that will *“maintain its cutting edge piece and not to be reactive...both on the advocacy side, but also on the programme side and kind of push the boundaries...”* (Anna Gunning, 2017).



## Simon Nugent

President 1994 – 96

Current Position: CEO of Private Hospitals Association

Simon Nugent was president of NYCI in the 1990s, but his engagement with the Youth Council began much earlier. His first memory of NYCI was in 1981. At the time, he was chairing an event for the scouts called the National Venture Scout Forum, in the Oak Room in the Mansion House. He was 17 years old. At the time, the scout movement was very interested in youth participation and youth engagement. Richard Doherty (the chair of NYCI's International Committee at the time) addressed the event. His input was about a European scouting event called EuropAdo in 1982, which was a preparatory event for the International Youth Year in 1985. Shortly after the Mansion House event, Simon was selected as an Irish participant in the European Scout Youth Parliament and at the same time he got involved in the National Youth Council of Ireland. From the very beginning, he gained a great interest in the international dimension of youth policy. Simon chaired the Youth Affairs Standing Committee from 1986 – 88. During his earliest days he remembers, after really long and interesting meetings in NYCI's office on Waterloo Road, people would go to 'Cora's,' which was a pizza place on Mary's Road behind Baggot Street.

From the start, Simon was impressed by the dynamism, fresh thinking and debate within the Youth Council in the 1980s:

*"It was big, it was new, there were lots of different voices, lots of different things going on. Lots of politics, micro politics, organisational politics. Back then, the scouts were very involved. We were one of the organisations that provided organisational glue because we had freedom to be more political than a lot of the other youth work organisations. We weren't one of the political organisations...so we often ended up taking leadership roles, because we were acceptable to both camps"* (Simon Nugent, 2017).

Simon very quickly became inculcated into the organisational politics, which included all of the issues about member rivalry, staff volunteer relations and the principle of volunteerism. These issues were huge issues in the Youth Council in the 1980s. The scout movement was more inclined than others to take the view that the leadership positions must be held by a volunteer and the staff should support the work of the organisation. At that stage, the NYCI Executive had 11 members, comprising of six officers and five ordinary members – the President, the Vice President, the Treasurer, the chair people of the three standing committees and then five ordinary members. All executive members were expected to be volunteers. Simon says if a staff member of a member organisation joined the NYCI Executive, then there were raised eyebrows. It was regarded in a negative way.

Simon was also part of NYCI delegations to meet Charlie Haughey, who was leader of the opposition at that stage. Having youth wings of political parties in membership was helpful to NYCI, in terms of trying to lobby for youth work resources or indeed, to pursue the wider agenda of youth affairs. It made it easier to get meetings with politicians from particular political parties, on a more secure basis. NYCI also had two seats on the National Economic and Social Council in the 1980s, before the formal recognition of NYCI as social partners in 1996. Indeed, Simon recalls being in a meeting in a small room at the top of Adelaide Road in the Department of Labour, in early 1987, when the new Taoiseach Charles Haughey turned to the employers and the trade unions at an NESC meeting and said, *'guys, we've just got to solve this problem.'* Simon says that although he didn't realise it at the time, this was the beginning of the negotiations of the "Programme for National Recovery" and decades of social partnership.

*"I mean there were 17 seats I think at the table...it was really fascinating. For me it had the added nuance that I was doing politics in Trinity, including having classes with Basil Chubb, who knew everything about social partnership and who was not impressed that one of his fourth year students thought they knew more about what was happening in social partnership than he did. So that was funny in its own right...but it was just a great opportunity to see what was going on and to learn"* (Simon Nugent, 2017).

### **The Merger**

Simon has great memories of fascinating and incredibly formative times as a youth affairs delegate going to different European Youth Forum meetings. One of his most abiding memories of his involvement in youth politics at an international level, was chairing the special meeting in 1996, which saw the consolidation of CENYC and the European Coordination Bureau (ECB) into the European Youth Forum. The meeting was hosted in Cork during the Irish European Presidency. The meeting Simon chaired, as host Council President, marked a very important milestone in European youth politics. The merging of these youth organisations was significant, because of the tension which had existed between the Association of National Youth Councils on the one hand and the international bodies on the other hand. This tension had always undermined the Youth Forum and its effectiveness as a partner in the process, at the EU level. Some might argue it was a creative tension, but it was something that needed to be wrapped up.

Simon says of this meeting, *"it was nice to be involved and because I had been around the European scene, I could sort of tell where people were coming from...This brought the whole thing together in a way that made sense once the Council of Europe became much more synergistic with the European Union."*

Highlights from Simon's time as NYCI president were the opportunities to meet the Prime Minister of Spain, Felipe González, as part of European delegation, when he was incoming President of the European Council and also to meet the President of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol. He also had the honour of receiving President Mary Robinson at an NYCI event in 1993, to launch the Irish part of the EU Youth Campaign, *'All Different, All Equal'* to unite against racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance.

Reflecting on the role of NYCI in 2017, Simon believes there will always be a need for the Youth Council to push the envelope in terms of youth rights. He is concerned, however, about the impact on Ireland from Brexit and says in an era of social media and the disintegration of traditional politics that young people need to be well able to organise and to have a voice, to influence the political system, more than ever before.



### Peter Byrne

Director of NYCI, 1993 – 2001

Current Position: CEO South Dublin Chamber

Peter Byrne was CEO of ECO–UNESCO, which was established in 1985. ECO–UNESCO applied for membership of NYCI and initially were associate members for a period, before eventually gaining full membership status. In 1993, Peter was appointed Director of NYCI – a position he held until 2001. Although rarely enforced, Peter recalls that when he first joined NYCI, there were very strict protocols in place to prevent associate members from voting or attending certain meetings. They were not allowed to talk during the decision– making process and were only allowed to speak after all the full members had spoken. He found most people to be incredibly friendly and generous and says that as an organisation, ECO–UNESCO benefited greatly from NYCI:

*“We learnt what youth work was, we learnt what training was...Everything that NYCI produced we devoured and everything they had, we participated in” (Peter Byrne, 2016).*

Thinking back to 1985, Peter remembers it as the period of the International Youth Year, Bob Geldof’s Live Aid, the Cold War was still ongoing, there was violence in Northern Ireland and there were no mobile phones or social media of any kind. Speaking of this period in NYCI’s history, Peter says:

*“Everything relied on contact with people...Therefore the debate and the discussion at the standing conferences was always very vibrant because people wanted to challenge.”*

Peter recalls a relatively good cross fertilisation of ideas between the Standing Conference Committee on Youth Affairs and the Standing Conference Committee on Youth Work in the early days, but tensions started to emerge at the end of the 1980s. There were three consecutive contested elections in NYCI in 1986, 1987 and 1988, which polarised people in the organisations. Different camps started to establish within the membership. There were huge rows on the board about why NYCI wasn’t being more vigorous around issues such as access to contraception, abortion and divorce. Fr. Martin Clarke was the president at the time and took the view that NYCI taking positions on these social issues would fracture the organisation, if they were dealt with incorrectly. It was a difficult time on the NYCI Board and Peter remembers the board meetings at this time were particularly ‘energised’ around these issues. The outcome was that NYCI never took a position on abortion, but did support the legalisation on divorce. The conversation at board level was very divisive and set the foundations for what was to come, further down the tracks. The issue of contention underlying all of the division came down to the role of NYCI and what the organisation should advocate on. Traditionally, NYCI had focused on issues such youth education, youth employment, youth welfare and what it deemed to be social justice issues, rather than the moral social issues.

*“Being on the executive was a real eye-opener, because I’d never been on that type of board before. It was quite interesting to watch and there was a change going on, there was an awful lot of personal interest starting to creep in at that stage...It was around that time that I started to see the seeds of a potential breakup for NYCI, so the bigger organisations were fighting and talking about setting up their own...” (Peter Byrne, 2016).*

Foróige left NYCI in 1982 and CYC left NYCI a decade later, the week before Peter became Director. As the incoming Director, Peter was determined to get these organisations back into membership of NYCI, but to achieve this, required a considerable amount of work. At the same time, he also faced other challenges within the organisation:

*“NYCI had financial problems, it had structural problems, falling numbers attending events. It didn’t seem to know whether it was going to stand for things or not stand for things...The department told me that if I took the job and I wasn’t able to bring others in, that they would cut down my grant in two, half would go to this new organisation...It never happened, but I was working on the basis that they distrusted each other more than they distrusted us” (Peter Byrne, 2016).*

Despite this challenging period, NYCI weathered this storm and the larger organisations that left in the 1980s and 90s, eventually returned to NYCI. During the period Peter was Director, there were many significant milestones and achievements in NYCI. He recalls as particular highlights, the publication of the Youth Work Bill and the recognition for NYCI, the establishment of NYWAC and the successful negotiation for an allocation of the lottery funding, coupled with an increase in the youth service grant. In addition to bringing the youth sector together, NYCI also navigated the children protection field, which was a relatively new policy area at the time. Child protection guidelines were introduced for the first time in Ireland. Peter also oversaw the renovation of the NYCI office.

Peter says he was very sad leaving NYCI. He has two lasting memories of this time. One is of his last staff meeting as Director. The other memory is of the last time he left the NYCI office, hearing the NYCI Press and Information Officer say, *“Fraser Crane has left the building,”* as Peter walked out the door. Reflecting on this time and his career in NYCI, Peter says:

*“The day I left NYCI was the hardest day I ever had in work in my life, saying goodbye to everyone that day, because I knew that for eight years of sitting with these people, who I thoroughly enjoyed, had great craic, we did things that I felt made a difference ...and they were some incredible times...”*

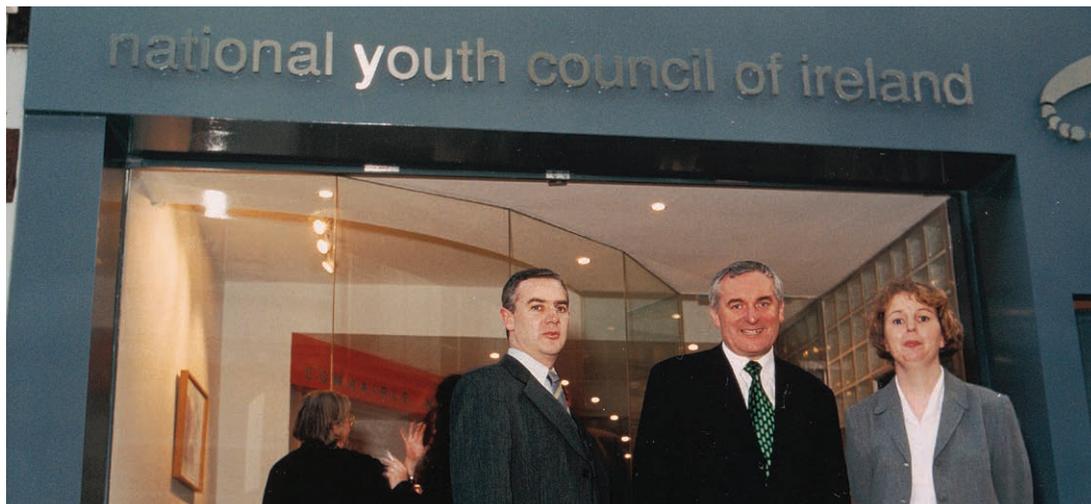


### Elaine Lowry

NYCI Staff 1989 – present

Elaine Lowry joined the staff of NYCI in March 1989. Prior to this, she had been working in Paris and had recently returned to Ireland. She noticed an advertisement for an international administrative position in NYCI. She was fluent in French and had the required skillset, so she applied for the position and was appointed. International Administrator was the first of many roles she assumed in NYCI. At the time, NYCI had specific administrators for specific roles and the international dimension of the work involved running an exchange programme called the Franco–Irish Exchange programme.

NYCI in 1989 was a very different and much smaller organisation to the NYCI of 2017. There were no programme staff and there were three administrators to support the youth affairs, international and youth work portfolios. The staff team comprised of the Director and an Executive Officer who supported the work of the Standing Conferences on Youth Affairs and Youth Work and the International Committee. At a later stage, several working groups were established to work on specific policy issues, such as the Development Education Working Group and the Health Working Group. These working groups were volunteer–led and chaired by a volunteer.



From Left to Right: NYCI Director Peter Byrne, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and NYCI President Jillian van Turnhout at the reopening of the NYCI office on 13th October 1998.

### **The reopening of the NYCI office**

In 1998, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern reopened the newly renovated offices at 3 Montague Street. This was during the period of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland and the Taoiseach had a lot of security. Elaine Lowry says that her abiding memory of this auspicious occasion was the sniffer dogs that were used to do a security check inside the NYCI premises before the Taoiseach arrived for the formal proceedings. Recalling the incident with great amusement, she said:

*“The main thing that I remember from it is not even him doing the official opening. It was that we were all there on the morning getting organised. We were bringing caterers in...and we had literally just got it sorted and the next thing sniffer dogs appeared. We all had to leave. Everybody had to leave while they went through the building. We laughed for about a week, honest, I kid you not - just when I think back to how different things are now. I have very, very vague recollections of us in the porch of NYCI with the bank manager. I have no idea where we even put food now that I think about it!”* (Elaine Lowry, 2016).

Elaine continues to work in NYCI but under a different guise. She co-manages the administration team and is responsible for membership engagement. Reflecting on the last 28 years working for the organisation, she says she has greatly enjoyed her career at the Youth Council and in particular, the international work she was involved in at one stage in her career in NYCI.

*“My favourite was always international... I probably enjoyed that period the most, because it was something I was very, very interested in and then we got funding for a full-time International Officer and I started just doing the Admin Manager type role...I am now working with the membership and I enjoy that because I like that interaction with our members. I think that’s important for us and it’s always been varied”* (Elaine Lowry, 2016).



### Teresa Heeney

Chair of the NYCI Women's Participation Working Group  
Current role: CEO of Early Childhood Ireland

Teresa recalls the National Youth Council of Ireland in the 1990s as a great place to meet a lot of impressive people, who had the ability to argue and debate issues. She says it was also a great place to forge working relationships. Prior to her involvement in NYCI, Teresa had been working with a youth service in Tipperary for a period and then moved to Dublin to work with Peace Corps (now called Localise) who were members of NYCI. Her predecessor in Peace Corps had been involved in the Youth Council, through its Development for Youth Education (DEFY) programme and so Teresa continued this engagement, but was also interested in other areas of work that NYCI were doing at the time. She soon became chair of the Women's Participation Working Group and recalls doing some really great work as part of the working group. During this time, the Women's Participation Working Group produced a resource called *Sugar and Spice*. Reflecting on this particular initiative, Teresa says:

*"It took a lot of time. It took a lot of money and it took a lot of work, getting consensus. It was new and it was a new kind of work as well, at the time. It was really rewarding and it was really good work"* (Teresa Heeney, 2017).

The work of the Women's Participation Working Group was really innovative and significant. In addition to the production of the *Sugar and Spice* resource, the working group also pioneered a women in management certificate programme, accredited by NUI, Maynooth. This programme was facilitated by Jane Clarke and Patricia Penderville and provided participants with a great source of support. It also enabled them to develop leadership and management skills.

One of the highlights, Teresa remembers from her time in NYCI, through her involvement in the DEFY programme, was an 'amazing' opportunity she had to travel to Brazil on an event sponsored by Tròcaire. Liam Wegimont was the coordinator of the DEFY programme at the time and Teresa recalls having the opportunity to travel inland and to live in really bereft communities in Brazil, sleeping in hammocks:

*"It was quite a unique opportunity and one which I'll always be very grateful for, because it really did provide an opportunity to figure out how to work together as a group of Irish people out there. It also provided a real appreciation for the work of Tròcaire and seeing the work that they do, which is about working with local organisations...we got to meet all kinds of activists. We got to visit favelas in Rio. It was quite an amazing opportunity that I certainly wouldn't have had if I wasn't involved with the council..."* (Teresa Heeney, 2017).



### Kevin Kelly

Development Education Officer with  
Development Education for Youth Programme  
(DEFY) 1996 – 98  
Current Position: Ambassador of Ireland to  
the Netherlands

Kevin worked in NYCI during the period 1996 – 98 but also did a short stint before that in 1994, before going on a two year programme to Botswana. He held the position of Development Education Officer with DEFY. Initially a project of NYCI that subsequently (during his time) spun off as an independent NGO under the guardianship of NYCI and development NGOs. He was responsible for co-ordination of programmes aimed at the integration of development and human rights education into the programmes and policies of Irish youth organisations. This role entailed staff supervision, networking, campaign research management, education resource production and training. He was also involved in policy development and representation of DEFY on national and international NGO fora. A major focus of the annual calendar was preparing for and delivering ‘One World Week,’ a week of training and awareness-raising on global issues. Kevin recalled the programme producing several colourful education resource packs for youth workers and youth leaders. He remembered NYCI as a very vibrant and energetic place to work.

*“We were mostly all young people in our early 20s and created a work environment that was productive, creative but also great fun. There was great scope for imagination and experimentation and the culture of the organisation at the time really fostered team work and collaboration across the silos of various programmes. Everybody pitched in at busy times to support each other’s initiatives. Particularly memorable were the annual congress meetings, which took place in different parts of the country”* (Kevin Kelly, 2016).

Kevin talked at length about how valuable working in NYCI was for him and how he took the skills he gained from his early career in NYCI with him throughout his professional life.

*“Working with NYCI at the start of my career provided many formative experiences that have shaped my perspective on the world as well as my capacity to work as a diplomat. It taught me about the power of social organisations to influence politics and shape public policy. It fostered in me an appreciation of teamwork and inclusive management and an awareness of the importance of fun in the workplace. At a personal skills level, I learned a huge amount about public speaking, group facilitation and training. These are skills that I have used most days of my career since, as an ambassador managing large teams and aid programmes in Africa, as a senior manager in the Department of Foreign Affairs HQ in Dublin and now as an ambassador in a European country”* (Kevin Kelly, 2016).

Kevin stated that the exposure to global development issues he received through DEFY/NYCI was a critical influence in him travelling to Rwanda in 1998 and subsequently securing employment in Irish Aid, the Irish Government Aid programme. He subsequently joined the diplomatic stream of the Department of Foreign Affairs and is now serving as Ambassador of Ireland to the Netherlands.

In response to the question of what he hopes for NYCI now and into the future, Kevin stated that he hoped NYCI would continue to represent the needs and interests of all Irish young people, including newly arrived young people who have migrated to the country either by choice or necessity.

*“I hope that the organisation will continue to take on difficult issues of racism, discrimination and inequality and that it will always remain committed to fostering an international perspective to promote global citizenship with Irish young people” (Kevin Kelly, 2016).*



## Dan Boyle

Vice President of NYCI, 1999 – 2000

Current Position: Public Affairs Consultant

Dan Boyle first became involved in NYCI in 1988, through his association with the National Youth Federation (now known as the Youth Work Ireland). Throughout the 1990s, Dan recalls *'there was a kind of a dance between the NYCI, the National Youth Federation (aka 'The Fed'), Foróige and the Catholic Youth Council.'* During this period, Dan says that The Fed, Foróige and CYC, valued their own direct access to the department and did not value the idea of an umbrella organisation. NYCI put a lot of energy into trying to persuade and convince these key organisations of the merits of becoming involved in NYCI and it was around 1988/89 that they reengaged in NYCI.

Dan became very involved in the work of the Youth Council through his membership of the board and the various NYCI sub-committees he participated on. He recalls attending the occasional meetings at the Department of Education and Youth Affairs. In particular, Dan fondly remembers the standing conference committees. He represented NYCI on the Public Transport Consultation Forum and was NYCI's representative on NESC for four years. He says he greatly enjoyed his period on NESC. Recalling his time on NESC as its youth representative, Dan says *"it was amazing...you were involved in the strategy document, which took about two years to do and you were involved in a lot of smaller reports as well. Just to have the input I think was good...It is the only element of social partnership that is still working, as far as I can see."*

In terms of personal memories of the close bond and working relationship he had with colleagues from his time of engagement with NYCI, Dan recalls that when his father passed away in 2000, a group from the NYCI staff travelled down to Cork for the funeral. This meant a lot to him and reinforces the strong sense of collegiality, which existed and continues to exist in NYCI to this day.

Dan acknowledges that NYCI is a state sponsored body and as such, has to reflect a balancing act, in terms of the extent to which it challenges the status quo, however, he would like to see the organisation take 'more radical positions' and be more 'visible.'

*"I know there is a lot of good work done behind the scenes, and so forth, and you want to maintain relationships, but I think it is also important to engage the public. In media terms, the only way you can engage the public is by being seen to have an open debate and you can't do that behind closed doors"* (Dan Boyle, 2016).



### Ciairín de Buis

NYCI Board

Research & Policy Officer, 1998 – 2000

Ciairín de Buis was involved in NYCI initially as a volunteer and board member and later as a member of staff. Her first introduction to the Youth Council was in 1994 as a Labour Youth representative. She was actively involved in Labour Youth in the 1990s and recalls leaving the room at a meeting of Labour Youth and when she returned, she had been nominated as their representative in NYCI. Ciairín says she didn't really know much about NYCI at the time. Her first impression of the Council was that it was a *'very welcoming and open'* place. It was also a very busy time, because the NYCI building was just about to be renovated so the board were looking at plans. Ciairín remembers a lot of discussion at board level about the need to ensure the building had wheelchair access.

Speaking of her first NYCI Assembly in County Clare, Ciairín says she travelled with Dermot Lacey. She remembers that Dermot's car lights weren't working, so every time he dipped his lights, his headlights went off. She says she remembers arriving to assembly *'terrified'*, due to the car lights, or lack thereof. At one particular assembly, she recalls a big row about gender quotas. She was still on the board and was speaking against gender quotas, as she felt at the time they were not the appropriate mechanism to address gender underrepresentation. A view she no longer holds and now favours the use of limited gender quotas. She also recalls that funding was a significant issue in NYCI, in the 1990s. While there was funding, money was always tight and adequate funding of the organisation was always a challenge. Funding was so limited that at a launch of a particularly important report, Ciairín remembers as a board member being asked not to eat the biscuits or drink a cup of tea, because there weren't enough biscuits and tea for everyone expected.

Ciairín later returned to NYCI in 1998, but this time as the organisation's Research & Policy Officer. The job was advertised and she applied for the position and was appointed to the role. At the time, youth unemployment, housing and young people's participation at a political level were key issues for NYCI. She recalls, in particular, a research report NYCI published at the time entitled *'Voting at the Crossroads.'*

Ciairín found NYCI to be ‘very collegiate’ place to work. There was a fun atmosphere in the office and one particularly funny memory she has, of her time working for the Council, is of a colleague climbing into one of the presses downstairs and getting stuck because the door closed on them.

*“There were lots of jokes about said person climbing into the closet when everyone else was getting out of the closet... At the time NYCI had been doing a lot of campaigning around sexuality and about young people feeling able to come out and this particular person, who was straight, climbed into the closet, which we all found hilarious at the time!”*  
(Ciairín de Buis, 2016).

### **Meeting Bill Clinton**

Another indelible memory Ciairín holds of her time in NYCI is of meeting President Bill Clinton when he visited in 1998. She says she got to meet Clinton by default as an NYCI colleague was sick that day. It happened to be on the day she was packing up for the office move from the temporary office on Dominick Street to move back to the refurbished Montague Street office. She recalls the event was in the College of Surgeons. Ciairín remembers the room was full of people waiting to meet President Clinton. She was delighted to get to meet him and shake his hand.



### Dr. Eamonn Waters

NYCI Press & Information Officer, 1995 – 2001

Current Position: Principal Officer in the Civil Service

Eamonn Waters came to NYCI from USI, where he had been an officer and was familiar with the work of the organisation prior to his appointment as NYCI's Press and Information Officer. In the summer of 1995, he started working in NYCI and worked for the organization for 6 years. His initial impression of NYCI when he started working there, was that it was *'highly professional'* and *'somewhere people wanted to work.'* The focus of his work at the time was to try and access more funding for youth work and the sector and to do it in imaginative ways. One of the things he tried to do as the press officer was to get more coverage of NYCI and to ensure NYCI was in the national newspapers on a weekly basis. By achieving this objective, NYCI were able to capitalise on the media coverage and convert that profile into access to key political figures and government ministers. During this period, NYCI was seen to be a highly credible commentator on all kinds of youth issues, including youth work, youth unemployment, education and issues around drugs. Any youth issues that were in the public domain, NYCI took a position on. The Council developed a really good media profile during this decade and used that to advance its own agenda, whether it was for political access or to achieve certain changes in the youth affairs section of the Department of Education or the grant scheme. One significant event, he remembers was during the 1997 Irish presidential election campaign. NYCI had an event to profile youth work in Buswell's Hotel. All presidential candidates were invited to attend and most of the candidates showed up.



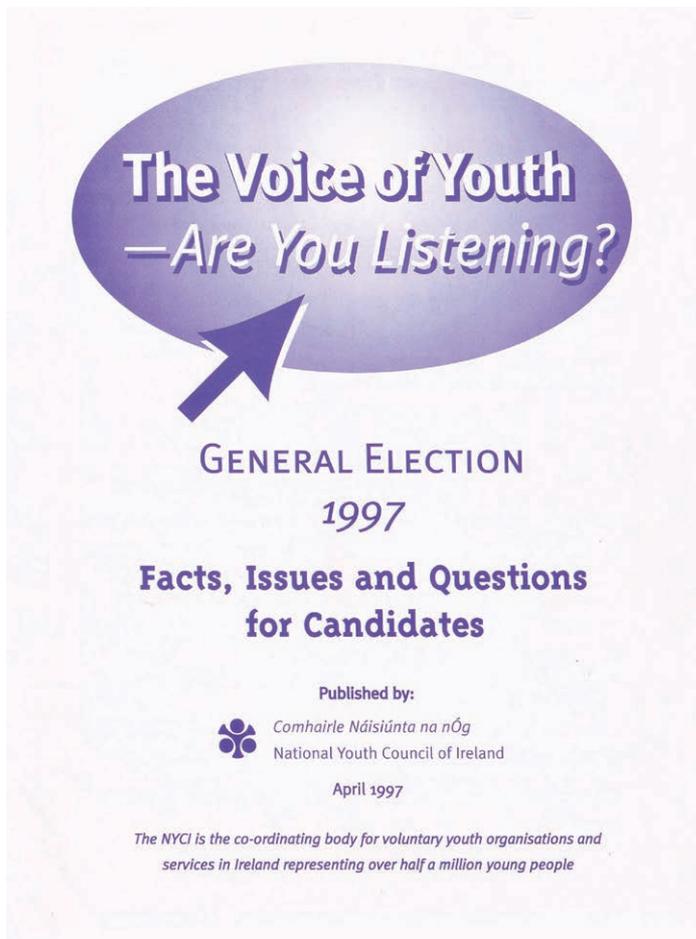
Pictured above  
Taoiseach John Bruton  
and NYCI President  
Jillian van Turnhout at  
the launch of The State  
of Youth Report on  
8<sup>th</sup> January 1997

Eamonn says there was “a forest of TV cameras and press photographers following the candidates around” and some great interaction at the event. NYCI also got great media coverage. There were many events like this during this period in NYCI and good political engagement.

During the rainbow coalition government, Taoiseach Bruton launched a major State of Youth Report for NYCI, in 1996. It got huge traction in the political world at the time. What was particularly interesting about Bruton’s involvement in this launch was the fact that, at that point in time, he was youngest TD ever elected to Dáil Éireann. John Bruton was very receptive to the youth agenda and NYCI found him to be accessible and could get meetings with him during his premiership.

### The 1997 General Election

In 1997, NYCI was actively campaigning to encourage young people to register to vote and to use their vote. As always, NYCI maintained its political impartiality and did not endorse any political candidate or party, however, six months prior to the general election, NYCI commissioned a poll of young people (aged 18 – 25) to ascertain their attitudes and behaviour to voting. The poll data indicated that Fianna



Published by NYCI  
in April 1997 in  
advance of the  
general election

Fáil was the most popular party for young voters. NYCI got huge traction from this and in the lead up to the election, was seen as a credible voice for young people. It also reinforced the importance political parties gave to youth issues in their manifestos and propelled NYCI as a key voice in the campaign.

Two years later, in the run up to the 1999 local and European elections, NYCI continued to campaign to encourage young people to register to vote and to use their vote to get issues on to the campaign as well. Danny Wallace TD, the Minister of State in the Department of the Environment at the time, launched NYCI's Youth Manifesto in Cork. This was an effective strategy to get significant youth issues on to the political agenda and into the media. NYCI's campaign message was that the solution to most problems was to provide resources to youth work, in keeping with its mandate.

### **The EC meeting in Turin**

In the late 1990s, there was a move to get recognition into one of the European treaties for young people and youth work. Eamonn remembers around this time, attending a meeting in Turin, Italy, on behalf of NYCI. The meeting he attended was one of the European Council meetings and the plan was that people from all the National Youth Councils would all meet in Turin and try to lobby their delegations and take part in public events. Prior to leaving Ireland, Eamonn contacted the Department of Foreign Affairs to see if he could arrange to meet with Gay Mitchell, who was then Minister for European affairs, representing Ireland at the meeting.

*“Gay Mitchell was involved in NYCI in the 1970s, so I got a phone call while we were there to say yes, the Minister will meet you. I think I was the only person who got into the European Council. This was the heads of state, Prime Ministers and Presidents, so the security was tight and I couldn't get registered as a delegate... The way it was dealt with was I was given a badge that belonged to one of the Irish officials, so I became sort of, for the purpose of the meeting, I was given accreditation that belonged to somebody else. Went into the building, met with the Minister and some of the senior officials. Very good meeting and very receptive...” (Eamonn Waters, 2017).*

Eamonn recalls Minister Mitchell was very receptive to the idea that there should be a provision in the treaty for young people and youth work and subsequently there was a negotiation in one of the treaties to include a youth clause. Reflecting on this event, he says it was wonderful to have the opportunity to be the only National Youth Council representative to have attended a meeting with their Minister at a European Council:

Speaking of the work of NYCI and its role in 2017, Eamonn says:

*“I'd see the material that they produce as generally good, credible and well researched, which makes it more impactful when you read it... Media coverage and the quality of the research, is of a high standard, which I think makes a stronger impression. Certainly, if you're trying to get a handle as a policy maker on what an organisation is up to, if you have well-argued and well-presented papers, they have an impact...I'd see it (NYCI) as still having a high degree of credibility as an NGO and as the main voice of youth organisations and youth voice in the country” (Eamonn Waters, 2017).*



## Dónall Geoghegan

Assistant Director of NYCI, 1996 – 2005  
 Current Position: Political Coordinator for  
 Independent Ministers

Dónall Geoghegan joined the staff of NYCI in 1996. Prior to that, Dónall worked as a youth officer in Foróige, which was not a member of NYCI at the time. Reflecting on his time working in NYCI, he is most proud of the policy work he did on the Youth Work Bill, the Youth Work Act, the National Youth Work Development Plan and his work on Social Partnership.

### NYCI and Social Partnership

As previously referred to, it was in the early 1980s, under Haughey’s government, that social partnership was initiated. Apart from NYCI’s membership of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), it was a decade later before the youth voice was fully involved. When the new Fine Gael led rainbow coalition government took over in the 1990s, they agreed to broaden the social partnership model and include other representative voices in the social partnership process. NYCI was actively seeking to formally join social partnership for a number of years. At the same, the Community Platform (CP) was established with the aim of being a representative body of community and voluntary organisations. NYCI was invited to join the CP at this time, but wanted to be a social partner in its own right and did not want their only route to social partnership to be via the Community Platform. NYCI was called into the negotiations for the PESP social partnership agreement in 1996. Reflecting on this moment in NYCI’s history, Dónall Geoghegan believes it was a very important and significant milestone for the organisation:

*“It was a political decision at the end of the day. Cabinet made that decision...there was a sense then that NYCI had been the first organisation to be recognised by government as a partner. There was even the policy document, the White Paper on Youth, called ‘In Partnership with Youth.’ NESF itself was a stepping stone and there was a demand for greater involvement of the social partnership, so government set up NESF as a limbo room, where you put all these other groups in to talk about social policy” (Dónall Geoghegan, 2016).*

In his capacity as Assistant Director for policy and research, Dónall Geoghegan was NYCI’s representative on the Community Pillar of Social Partnership throughout the 1990s and into early 2000s. He was the chief negotiator on behalf of the youth sector in the negotiations of the various social partnership agreements signed during this period and worked tirelessly to ensure NYCI’s agenda was included in the various agreements. Indeed, so synonymous was Dónall with social partnership in NYCI, that at an NYCI staff Christmas party one year, a colleague gave Dónall a pair of boxer shorts with ‘I love Social Partnership’ sewn on to them, as a secret Santa gift!

On a more serious note, NYCI invested considerable time in the social partnership process. Dónall and later James Doorley (current NYCI Deputy Director) and the various Research & Policy Officers during 1990s and 2000s (namely Ciairín de Buis, Marian Brattman and Marie–Claire McAleer) worked with member organisations on the development of NYCI position papers for the negotiations. During the actual negotiations, long hours were spent in Government Buildings, sometimes into the early hours of the morning, with colleagues from the Community and Voluntary (CV) sector and other pillars, responding to draft documents and working to ensure key policy items were included in the various agreements. The Director of NYCI, Mary Cunningham, co–chaired the CV pillar meetings during the negotiations for ‘*Sustaining Progress*’ and ‘*Towards 2016*.’ NYCI invested a lot of time and work on social partnership. It gained from social partnership, in terms of contributing to the development and formulation of social and economic policy affecting children and young people and access to important government bodies and departments, but it was not without its critics. The criticism often levelled at social partnership was that it focused on the economic agenda more than the social agenda and that the social policy issues and decisions affecting the constituents of the CV Pillar organisations, were often relegated to the margins of the discussions. Social Partnership in reality was a very policy heavy process, which at times could be frustrating and as with a lot of policy–making, took time to reap the rewards. It provided huge access to the political system and it helped to build relationships with the key stakeholders and policy–makers in the civil service, but some commentators would argue that it provided access without real influence. As a result, it was sometimes hard sell to those outside the process.

Dónall says he learned a lot about the worlds of policy and politics from working in NYCI and he loved this time in his career. In particular, he says he loved “*working with great people, who were a bit of craic and were prepared to have fun while they worked, as well.*” In terms of the future, he says that he hopes NYCI will continue to be ‘*nimble, energetic and able to change and evolve.*’ He also hopes that as an organisation, NYCI will continue to fight for things that matter to young people.



### Jillian van Turnhout

NYCI President, 1996 – 99

NYCI Nominee to the Economic and Social Committee

Jillian van Turnhout (née Hassett) got involved in NYCI in 1990. At the time, she was a very active member of the Irish Girl Guides and a member of the Scout Association of Ireland adventure scout group. She remembers meeting David Meredith and Richard Doherty (who were adventure scout leaders) and recalls them telling her about NYCI and encouraging her to get involved. Her first introduction to the work of the Youth Council was through NYCI's International Committee, where she represented the Irish Girl Guides. The International Committee was supported at the time by Eileen Punch (Programme Manager in NYCI).

Jillian's first impression of NYCI, was that she was very young within the organisation, compared to some of the other volunteers involved at the Council at the time. As a 20 year old, she felt very much like *'the young one coming on board'* and was conscious of the age profile in the organisation. Her abiding memory of NYCI from those early days was *'dark, long rooms, lots of people and a nice atmosphere.'* Standing Conference meetings would take place in the NYCI office and tended to attract 'the boys' as it was regarded as a forum where the 'important policy' was discussed and developed. At the time, the International Committee was dealing with the agenda of the Youth Forum of the EC and CENYC. It also started to oversee the setting up and rolling out of an English language course for overseas students. The Council of Europe ran language courses for youth workers in different countries and the International Committee brought the English language course to Ireland. The course was held for many years in Rockwell College in Tipperary, every summer.

### International Meetings on Youth

When Liam Aylward was Minister for Youth, there was a meeting on Youth at the Council of Europe level in Vienna. NYCI was asked to be part of the state delegation and Jillian van Turnhout travelled with the Minister and officials, as part of the Irish state delegation. In advance of his address to the meeting, the Minister asked the officials to give Jillian a copy of his draft, so she could provide feedback. It seems the officials were trying to dissuade the Minister of the necessity to do this, but Minister Aylward insisted that Jillian was the best person to review his speech as she would know how it would be received. Jillian said he made her feel really welcome and very much part of the state delegation. Another international meeting Jillian recalls from her time as NYCI president was a UN meeting for youth in Lisbon. There are two types of meetings at the UN conferences – the formal meeting and the informal meeting. The formal is attended and addressed by all Ministers and the latter is comprised of working groups who work on drafts documents on the various issues of interest. At the Lisbon meeting, there

was a lack of familiarity of the structure and format for the UN meetings and as a result the officials inadvertently sent Jillian to the formal meeting where the final document from the conference was being discussed. As a young representative, Jillian says the opportunity to be part of a state delegation at a UN Youth Conference was ‘*amazing*.’ It also demonstrated how progressive Ireland was in comparison to other countries, by including young people.

### **Becoming NYCI President**

In 1996, Jillian was working in Brussels when she decided to run for President of NYCI. This was before the era of online communications and she remembers making phone calls from Brussels to member organisations of NYCI, to ask them to support her candidacy and vote for her:

*“I phoned every single organisation and like you’d pretend it wasn’t costing you a fortune because I had to pay my organisation back for these phone calls. ‘And do you mind waiting, and you are going no problem!’ (laughing) and then they would say ‘oh I’ll get her to ring you back, you go no, no I’ll wait.’ Because you don’t want to give a Brussels number, that you are out of the country. So you are trying to pretend you are just ringing from home ”* (Jillian van Turnhout, 2016).

Jillian ran against Aoife Nic Lughadha (Feachtas) for the presidency that year and was delighted that she was the successful candidate. She greatly enjoyed her presidency, which was filled with so many fantastic moments. She recalls getting her first mobile phone, at the start of her presidency:

*“It was my first mobile phone...most people did not have a mobile phone and I got one, a motorola. I remember Peter (Byrne) bringing me to the shop to get it. I’ve still the same number today and I got it because I was becoming President and I needed to be contacted. I was like wow! I sat two days looking at it, waiting for it to ring”* (Jillian van Turnhout, 2016).

She says that a highlight from her presidency was her last AGM, which was held in St. Patrick’s Hall in Dublin Castle.

*“I managed to secure the support of the state that we could have a banquet and it was just fantastic. St. Patrick’s Hall was full and we had a brilliant dinner and really lovely night...That was just a lovely end to a time”* (Jillian van Turnhout, 2016).

Jillian’s hope for NYCI, as it celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is that the member organisations will see the value of coming together to demonstrate the value of youth work to the public. She also hopes that NYCI will become the voice of young people, that it will reflect the vibrancy and ambition of youth and ensure that young people have a place at the table.



## James Doorley

NYCI Honorary Treasurer, 1997 – 1999  
 NYCI President, 1999 – 2002  
 YFJ Vice President, 2003 – 2004  
 Current Position: NYCI Deputy Director,  
 2006 – present

James Doorley's involvement in NYCI started in 1995 and spans over 20 years. Phase one of his engagement in the Youth Council started in 1995, while he was studying at NUI, Maynooth and was very active in one of NYCI's member organisation, Macra na Feirme. Phase two started in January 2006 and continues to this day, in his role as Deputy Director of NYCI. His first engagement with NYCI was quite fortuitous. As he explains, it *"sort of happened by accident."*

*"I wasn't even active in Macra at a national level, I was just very active at local level. I was chair of the North Tipperary region of Macra, but at the time I was part of a campaign to kind of bring about a lot of changes. I had actually put forward a lot of amendments to the constitution of Macra at our AGM and created a bit of a storm at the time. I suppose, to be frank about it, I would say I was almost sent to NYCI (laugh) to kind of, almost keep me busy elsewhere and perhaps they were right..."* (James Doorley, 2016).

As someone training to be a Youth and Community Worker, James benefited greatly from this random introduction to NYCI. Prior to attending his first NYCI General Assembly in Galway, James confesses that he knew very little about NYCI and suddenly he had been nominated to its board. He joined the board of NYCI in 1995. Simon Nugent was the NYCI President and Peter Byrne was the Director, at the time. The first person James remembers meeting at the NYCI General Assembly was Peter Byrne. James' initial impression of the NYCI was that it was a very political organisation, with a lot of different youth organisations and countless acronyms to digest and remember. He also found it to be very friendly, welcoming and supportive.

During this period, some of bigger national youth organisations like Foróige, CYC and the National Youth Federation had left the NYCI membership. There was a lot of talk at the time of an alternative youth council being established amongst the bigger national youth organisations. There were rumours that attempts were being made to recruit the scouts and guides to join this new body. Fortunately, this did not come pass and it was to be during James Doorley's presidency that NYCI succeeded in getting the National Youth Federation, Foróige and CYC back into membership.

James remembers the NYCI Board meetings would last three or four hours, with very long agendas and lots of documents to review and discuss. The way the board operated at the time was very different from the way the current NYCI Board operates, in that there wasn't a great distinction between operational and strategic issues. A lot of decisions on operational issues that would now be taken by NYCI staff, would have come to board meetings for discussion and decision-making.

## Going for the NYCI Presidency

James was also nominated to the EU Commission of the European Youth Forum in 1997, so in many ways hadn't really considered running for the NYCI presidency, until he was approached by a few people from a number of the member organisations. Encouraged by the support, he put his name forward and actively campaigned to become President. He ran against Malcolm Byrne (from USI) in the election and was successfully elected to the position in 1999. He was delighted when he was elected and described it as a very 'exciting' time. Prior to becoming NYCI President, James had never done any media work. He remembers his first radio interview as NYCI President was with Vincent Brown! It was about young people and politics and it was the night time show he used to do on RTÉ Radio 1.

## NYCI Policy Priorities in 1990s – 2000s

The policy priorities during 1990 – 2000 focused on housing, the cost of motor insurance for young people, local government reform and youth work funding and legislation. NYCI launched policy documents on housing, on motor insurance and worked on a document on local government reform, which sought the establishment of an Electoral Commission! NYCI is still campaigning for an Electoral Commission to this day. An indelible memory James holds of this time in NYCI were the meetings of the NYCI Economic and Social Policy Group with people like Dan Boyle, Dermot Lacey and Malcolm Byrne. James recalls a lot of *'really intense kind of discussion and people disagreeing and people like Dermot Lacey coming in and kind of, throwing a spanner into the works and totally disagreeing with everything... playing devil's advocate. It was great fun and it led to the development of many excellent papers.'*

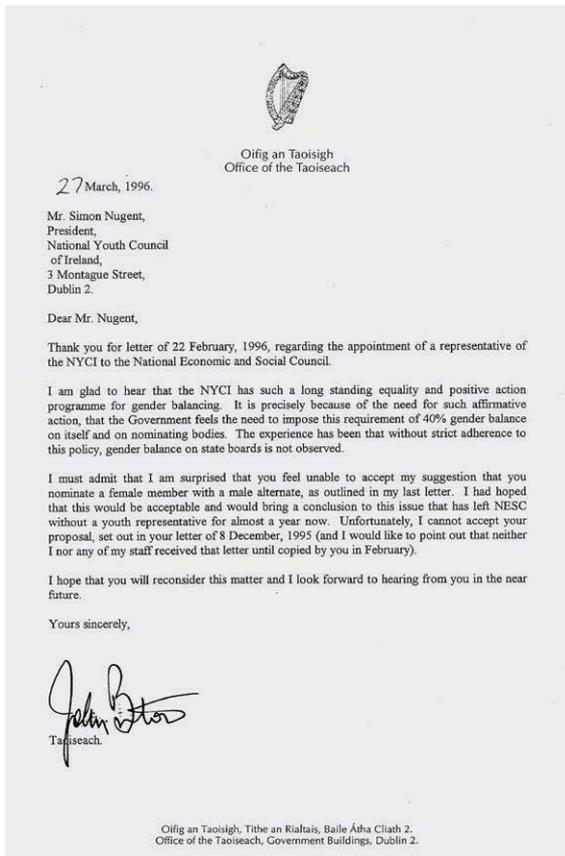
NYCI always had a very good reputation in Europe and a long track record of NYCI people holding influential positions in Brussels. James Doorley was very involved in the international work of NYCI. He was involved with the EU Affairs Commission of the YFJ and was also on the Council of Europe Advisory Council. NYCI also had several EU Presidency Officers throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Colm Keaveney, (former USI Education Officer, Labour and later Fianna Fáil TD) was appointed as EU Presidency Officer in 1996. In 2003, Olivia McEvoy (profiled on pages 115 – 116) held this position when Ireland once again hosted the presidency.

Another important forum established in the 2000s was the National Forum for Europe 2001 – 2008, which was chaired by Senator Maurice Hayes. It comprised of people from the various political parties on the island of Ireland. NYCI were part of the special observer pillar and it provided an opportunity to raise issues of a European nature at a national level. It ran out of steam after a couple of years, mainly because of the onset of the economic recession in Ireland.

## The Youth Work Act, 2001

There was a tremendous amount of work and energy invested in getting a Youth Work Bill. Later, the enactment of the Youth Work Act, 2001 and the National Youth Work Development Plan (NYWDP) marked significant milestones for NYCI. An SAI representative spoke at an NYCI meeting about the need for youth work to have a strategy or plan for development, in order to secure funding. This view

sparked an internal discussion in NYCI and Peter Byrne (Director of NYCI at the time) took the view that it was more strategic to get the department to write the National Youth Work Development Plan than for NYCI to do it themselves. This approach meant NYCI could input into the drafting and get the state on board. The end result was a NYWDP that was extremely important for youth work at the time. The enactment of the Youth Work Act (2001), gave recognition to youth work and the work happening in the youth sector. It was also of critical importance for NYCI, because it enshrined NYCI as the designated representative body for youth work organisations in Ireland. There were lots of conspiracy theories at the time within the sector that the Youth Work Act was an attempt by the state to ‘take over the youth work sector.’ In 1997, Willie O’Dea became minister and took the view that the act was inoperable and that the sector had to start all over again. People were exasperated. It took four years to get it back on the statute books!



Letter from Taoiseach John Bruton to President Simon Nugent regarding the appointment of a NYCI representative to the National Economic and Social Council

## NESC

James is currently the Community and Voluntary Pillar's nominee on NESC. NYCI have had a long track record of NYCI representation on NESC and at one time the organisation held two places. James recalls a row at the NYCI Board in the 1990s over gender representation on NESC. The argument centred on NYCI being dictated to by the department on the gender of its nominees to state boards, as opposed to NYCI being opposed to gender quotas, per se. Taoiseach John Bruton had written to NYCI requesting they nominate a female on to NESC to represent NYCI. On 22 February 1996, Simon Nugent (NYCI President) replied to Taoiseach John Bruton, to convey the board's unhappiness about the stipulation that their nominee to NESC should be female and reaffirming NYCI's commitment to equality and to a programme of 'positive action for balancing.' In response, the Taoiseach replied stating that it was *"precisely because of the need for such affirmative action, that the Government feels they need to impose the requirement of 40% gender balance on itself and on nominating bodies."* The letter also expressed surprise that NYCI felt unable to accept his suggestion that they nominate a female NESC representative and

a male alternate. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 1996, the Taoiseach continued to restate his position, in response to a parliamentary question regarding the appointment of the NYCI nominee to the NESC. He stated that he was not refusing to accept a nomination from the NYCI to the NESC. He asserted that NYCI had nominated a male to represent them on NESC for the past 12 years and as it was government policy to have at least 40% of both men and women in appointments to State Boards, Government were *requesting* all social partners to observe this gender balance in making nominations to the NESC. James says NYCI perceived the Taoiseach's intervention in relation to gender representation as a threat to their autonomy and in many ways, felt that it served to undermine the independence of their selection process. The NYCI Board also felt slightly aggrieved by the fact that Government itself had failed to meet the 40% target in its own nominations to NESC. In later years, gender quotas were put in place to redress the gender imbalance that existed in NYCI, in terms of equal representation of men and women on NYCI committees. Eventually, these gender quotas were removed as the pendulum had actually swung to the other extreme and men became underrepresented on the NYCI Board.

## NYCI and Northern Ireland

Despite having member organisations working on all-island basis, NYCI, for the most part, distanced itself from taking a position on the political conflict in Northern Ireland, throughout the period known as ‘The Troubles.’ It did, however, work towards paving the way towards peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, at significant moments during the conflict. Key moments, which are particularly noteworthy, are the Council’s involvement in the Peace and Reconciliation Forum in Dublin Castle chaired by Justice Catherine McGuinness in 1996, the campaign encouraging young people to vote in the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the period post the signing of the 1998 peace accord, when NYCI shared a staff member with YouthNet. The appointment of a North–South Officer in 2000 was a significant development. The role of this member of staff in the development of north–south relations and its contribution to youth work on an all-island basis, was of paramount importance. The work done during this period, 2000 – 2003, laid the foundations for future and ever closer cooperation between youth work organisations throughout the island of Ireland.

### Anglo-Irish Relations

Prior to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a lot of work was done by NYCI to facilitate dialogue, which would contribute to the peace process. NYCI was involved in the North/South Youth Managers’ Forum, which was established in 1989. The forum, facilitated by Co-operation Ireland, involved the major youth work providers, north and south of the border. NYCI was also involved in a cross-border project with YouthNet, Combat Poverty and the ADM. It ran from November 1998 to June 2000 and aimed to “*encourage an understanding of difference and the development of mutual respect and tolerance*” amongst young people on both sides of the border. The focus of the work was the organisation of a major youth event involving 70 young people aged 13–16, to explore the impact of the peace process on their lives and on their communities. The Corrymeela Community was contracted to work with a group of 12 young people (aged 18–21), who organised the event. YouthNet was the lead partner in the initiative. ‘Causeway’ was another mechanism for the distribution of funding. It was aimed at addressing the need for reconciliation between young people in Britain and Ireland. NYCI was represented on the board of Causeway, by Malcolm Byrne. The Departments of Education in Britain and Ireland, Co-operation North, Léargas, the British Youth Council and the Northern Ireland Youth Council were also represented on the board of ‘Causeway.’ The Four Nations Forum also existed to provide a representative forum for the representative structures of the youth organisations in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These jurisdictions were represented on the forum by the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, YouthLink Scotland, the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services and YouthNet respectively. The main function of the Four Nations Forum was to share the knowledge and experience of each organisation and to cooperate on key pieces of work. In 2000, the focus of its work was on child protection, training standards and accreditation, youth participation and political lobbying. NYCI ran a training course for the group on the topic of ‘*Influencing Decision Makers.*’

The UK Youth Alliance was established when Peter Byrne was Director of the Youth Council. NYCI had observer status on this alliance. The objective of the alliance was to promote and foster a common agenda for the promotion, recognition and development of youth work. He explained it was a very

vibrant group comprising of representatives from Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and NYCI. They never got into politics but worked on very practical items, where there was commonality and sharing and exchange of good practice. It continued to develop and strengthen and gained momentum in the 2000s. In 2001, the alliance changed its name from UK Youth Alliance to British/Irish Alliance. In 1996, the British Irish Youth Alliance received an invitation from the *Forum for Peace and Reconciliation* to make a presentation on its work. The focus of their presentation was to highlight issues affecting young people in the north and in the south of the island of Ireland.

*“We choreographed it so they couldn’t say any piece belonged to the Republic or the North. Issues affecting people were the same and we got on really, really well after that. The Department (of Education) was really interested. Then I got a call from Senator George Mitchell’s office asking would I be a facilitator in the Good Friday Agreement...to assist bringing the community and voluntary sector together” (Peter Byrne, 2016).*

Peter’s role in the Good Friday Agreement talks was to facilitate a dialogue between members of the community and voluntary sector from the nationalist and unionist traditions in Northern Ireland and to convince them that the process was worth investing in. Subsequent to the ratification of the agreement, NYCI were invited to meet President Bill Clinton when he came to Ireland in 1998, as part of its contribution to the peace process. A highlight from this period that Peter recalls was the invitation by Mo Mowlam MP (former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) to her garden party in 1998. Other memorable occasions were the invitations to speak at Stormont and address the Northern Ireland Assembly, Dáil Éireann and to present to a Select Committee in Westminster, on the importance of participatory democracy. He was accompanied at the time by Dr. Eamonn Waters (former NYCI Press and Information Officer). The Department of Education were very enthusiastic about the north–south work NYCI was engaged in at the time and according to Byrne, understood the importance of it. Department officials accompanied NYCI delegations to the north on numerous occasions as part of the north–south work.

One lighter and amusing anecdote on north–south diplomatic relations told by one interviewee as part of this oral history of NYCI is a story about an official who worked in the youth affairs section of the Department of Education in the 1990s. The official worked closely with NYCI and accompanied the NYCI delegation to Northern Ireland for north–south meetings with civil servants from Northern Ireland. On one occasion, it has been told, that he got off the train from Dublin to meet his northern counterparts and said *“we come as friends and not as conquerors,”* much to the amusement of both parties.

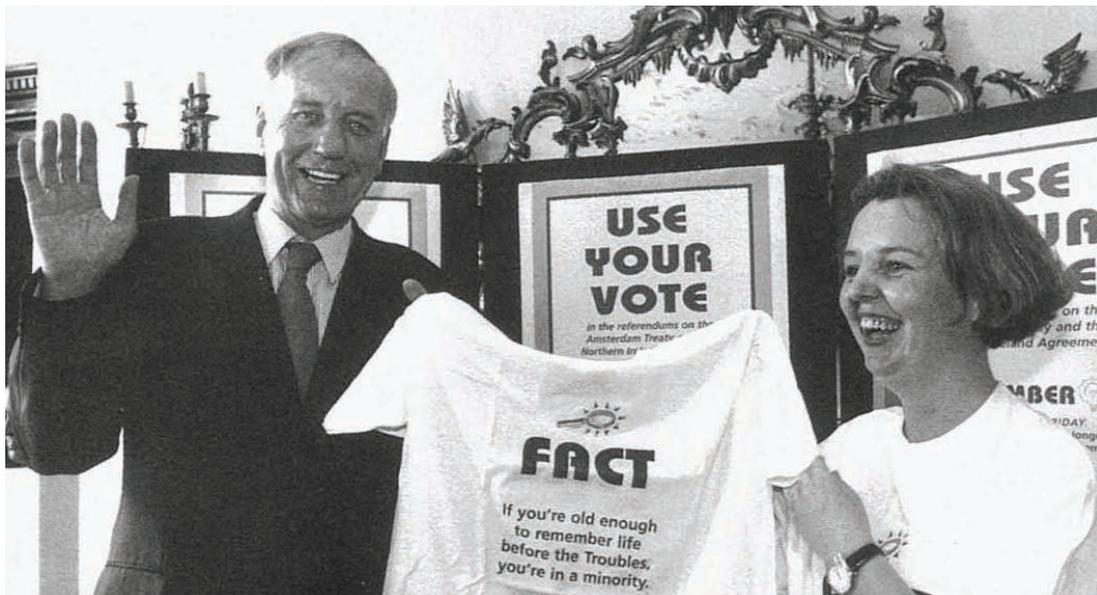
### **The Good Friday Agreement Referendum**

Former President Jillian van Turnhout recalls one of the challenges NYCI faced at the time of the Good Friday Agreement was around taking a position on the referendum. Jillian explained the dilemma the organisation faced at the time and the strategy they employed to be able to encourage young people to vote and to vote yes.

*“We had a policy as NYCI, which I very much supported, that we will never tell young people how to vote. We will only encourage them to use their vote. Dónall Geoghegan (former Assistant Director of NYCI) was our representative on social partnership. He was put into a very unenviable position as the mood was that social partnership was going to come out and say we are all encouraging everybody to vote yes to the Good Friday Agreement. So we had*

*to discuss it at NYCI - what could we do and how could we get around it. So we agreed that instead of Dónall going to that meeting, I would go to that meeting as President and I would say that I will vote yes...it wasn't a moment you could say, well it's not ethical for us to do it this way" (Jillian van Turnhout, 2016).*

So that is how NYCI got around the conundrum of how to endorse the Good Friday Agreement. The organisation played a very crucial and active role in ensuring that the agreement negotiated in 1998 was passed, by encouraging young people to vote. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1998, two referendums were ratified – the Good Friday Agreement and the Amsterdam Treaty. NYCI's focus was on running a campaign to encourage young people to vote. 450,000 young people were entitled to vote in the Republic of Ireland and 180,000 in Northern Ireland. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews officially launched the campaign in the presence of NYCI's member organisations and the national media, in Iveagh House. The message was communicated through leaflets, posters and t-shirts. The campaign contributed to one of the biggest turnouts of young people in a referendum vote.



Minister David Andrews and Jillian van Turnhout (née Hassett) pictured at NYCI's campaign encouraging young people to vote in the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998

At the NYCI Assembly in November 1998, it was agreed to strengthen ties with the representative structures in Northern Ireland, recognising the cross-over in membership between the two bodies. A practical realisation of this was reflected in the decision of the board of NYCI to co-opt a member of YouthNet (the representative structure in Northern Ireland for Voluntary organisations) on to the board of NYCI at the time, as a board member with 'observer status.' NYCI had a good relationship with YouthNet during this period and bilateral meetings between the Directors and the Presidents of both agencies took place. Following extensive discussions, the two organisations pursued and got funding for the employment of a joint North/South Project Officer. Duane Farrell began working on the project in September 2000. Indeed, NYCI records show that at this time there was great momentum

and an appetite for closer north–south cooperation. Quite elaborate proposals were in place for a North South Youth Work Alliance, with proposals for joint research projects and the sharing of expertise in the programme and training areas, which did not come to fruition.

### **The Appointment of a North-South Officer**

During 2000, north–south and east–west cooperation was greatly enhanced with the appointment of a shared post between NYCI and YouthNet. Duane Farrell was appointed to coordinate a north–south project and this lent a new dynamic to the work and allowed NYCI to work more closely with other organisations to create new structures and to grow new relationships across the island of Ireland. Duane’s role initially was to conduct an audit of the youth sector north and south. He was based in YouthNet in Belfast and one of the outcomes from his work was the deepening relationship between the Youth Council of Northern Ireland (YCNI) and the development of the North/South Youth Managers Forum. The North/South Officer position lasted from 2000 – 2003.

### **Current North-South-East-West Cooperation**

NYCI continues to work on a cross–border basis and up until 2016 engaged closely with both YouthNet and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, in 2016, as a result of the cutbacks in Northern Ireland, the YCNI was subsumed into the new Education Authority and YouthNet ceased to exist, leaving a big vacuum. Over the last five years, NYCI has been working on the whole issue of ICT in youth work on a cross border basis. An initial cross–border meeting on youth work and ICT was funded by ‘Youth in Action’ and initiated NYCI to do further work on this emerging issue. NYCI’s annual conference in December 2012 focused on ICT and youth work practice. Additional funding was secured from ‘Youth in Action’ for a further residential seminar, which included people from other countries in the EU, to share and exchange their practice in relation to ICT and youth work. The next step was to secure funding under Erasmus to conduct international research with four other research partners from Northern Ireland, Finland, Austria and Denmark. The International Screenagers research was conducted in 2015 and launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016. The research provided an evidence–base on which to secure funding from Science Foundation Ireland, to collaborate with Techspace, to roll out a training programme for youth workers to enhance their competence in the use of ICT in youth work practice.

### **The North/South Education and Training Standards Committee**

The North/South Education and Training Standards (NSETS) committee emerged through discussion at NYWAC. The NSETS committee was officially launched in Armagh by the then Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Síle de Valera and the Minister for Education for Northern Ireland, Angela Smith MP, in January 2006. The launch was the culmination of several years of discussion between the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) and the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC), in consultation with the Departments of Education north and south and with other relevant interests in the youth work sector. Previously professional youth work or youth and community work qualifications on the island of Ireland were professionally endorsed in Leicester, England. There was a very strong sense from the academic institutions and the field that Ireland should have an all-Ireland framework for the professional endorsement of youth work education and training, which would ensure and support best practice and facilitate professional mobility and exchange both on a north–south and east–west basis. Since 2006, the committee has continued to meet and there has been a rolling out of the programme of endorsement of professional programmes. The NSETS committee has also focused on ethical practice in work and produced a publication on ethics in youth work. The NSETS committee works to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and training of youth workers through an endorsement process based on a rigorous assessment of all aspects of programme context, content, delivery and practice placements. While in the first instance NSETS is concerned with professional programmes in higher education institutions, it is recognised that there is a need in the longer-term, for an integrated endorsement framework, which would encompass a range of levels and types of youth work training and education, to be developed, in consultation with the relevant interests and institutions. Currently the role of the NSETS committee is to assess all aspects of the quality of professional formation programmes in youth and community work offered by higher education institutions in Ireland and to professionally endorse (or not) the programmes submitted to it. Unfortunately, the budget allocated by both governments for the work of the NSETS is very small. Furthermore, the landscape in the youth sector in Northern Ireland has changed dramatically over the last two years, with the loss of YCNI and YouthNet. Currently there are ongoing negotiations as to how the North/South Education and Training Standards committee is going to be funded into the future.

The  
Millennium

## The Millennium

From 2000 onwards, NYCI is characterised by two periods – the pre–recession period and the recession and post–recession period. This section reflects the pre–recession period of the Celtic Tiger era between 2000 – 2007 and maps the events in the organisation during this period.

Significant youth policy developments took place from 2000 onwards. In 2000, the National Children’s Strategy was published and a year later the Youth Work Act, 2001 was enacted (replacing the 1997 Act). The National Youth Work Development Plan 2003 – 2007 was published in 2003 and in 2005, the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) was established. This office was later renamed the Office of the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) in 2008.

## The Celtic Tiger Period, 2000 – 2007



**Lisa Hyland**

Administration Manager in NYCI, 1999 – present

Lisa first started working for NYCI in 1999, on the Youthstart Programme. The aim of the programme was to develop professional skills for a certain target group of early school leavers, by working together to address the problems of exclusion of young people from the labour market. Youthstart funded a number of groups around Ireland. Lisa was responsible for managing one of the programmes called the ‘Technology Awareness Programme for Schools’ (TAPS). TAPS was aimed at promoting science as a subject in schools. On completion of the TAPS, Lisa was asked to work for Youthstart on a longer-term contract. Her initial impression of NYCI was that it was an *‘extremely friendly organisation’* and contrasted greatly with her previous employment in Leinster House, which she says was a *‘lot more serious.’* Going from Leinster House to NYCI, she described as a *‘360 degree move’* for her professionally.

### **The Youthstart Programme**

Lisa’s role while working for the Youthstart programme entailed coordinating all the projects in Ireland, ensuring reports were submitted on time, deadlines were met and doing onsite visits to see how the programme was being rolled out. She reported to the Director of the programme, Helen Campbell. At the time, there were around 20 projects receiving funding from Youthstart. Lisa says of the work, *‘it was very varied and very interesting.’* The EU investment was significant in terms of funding and a lot of excellent work was done through Youthstart.

### **The Impact of the Recession on NYCI**

Reflecting on the late 1990s and 2000s in NYCI, Lisa recalls the Celtic Tiger period as a great time to come into the organisation:

*“When I entered NYCI it was during the Celtic Tiger...its gas because at that time there were office building extensions, renovations, people going on exotic holidays and if you were doing Christmas shopping it had to be in New York...then the Troika came to town and everything changed. It was a much different place when I came here to work in NYCI...At the start of the recession, we were informed about all the dreadful things that could happen and still are to date. We did lose people along the way, which was really unfortunate and very upsetting at the time for the people we lost. Fortunately the people we lost went on to forge very successful careers because of the contacts that they made during their time in NYCI and because they were very good at what they did” (Lisa Hyland, 2017).*

Lisa also coordinated the English language course for NYCI together with Elaine Lowry. The English Language course was also funded by the European Union. They brought a group of students from all over Europe to Ireland for three weeks in the summer to learn English. She says it was a challenging, but rewarding piece of work.

In relation to funny stories, Lisa has so many but unfortunately most of them are off the record. Lisa spoke of the ‘brilliant’ staff days out that NYCI used to enjoy pre-recession. Staff salaries remained static so these staff days out were a way of thanking the staff for their patience and commitment to the work. Lisa says they were ‘great craic.’ One of her favourite staff days out was to Enniskerry, County Wicklow and was organised by Lisa and Elaine Lowry. The first part of the day was a shooting exercise, which some staff found quite challenging. Lisa recalls, *“everyone was kitted out in army attire and let’s just say some people took it much more seriously than others.”* On reflection, she and Elaine decided it wasn’t really something they wanted to engage in, so they let their colleagues play soldiers and got their hair done instead!

*“So anyway when we got up there a few staff were absolutely raging because we were going off to the hairdressers, but the laugh was on us, because when we got there it was like a granny’s hairdressers in the middle of Enniskerry and the hairdresser wheeled out a roller tray and proceeded to put a set of rollers in our hair... There are no words for the results and thankfully no pictures. Elaine had to visit the chemist to buy a frizz control spray”* (Lisa Hyland, 2017).

Reflecting on her 18 years working for NYCI, Lisa says *“for me it has always been a great organisation to work for and the people have always been fantastic and have given NYCI 110%.”* Lisa hopes as NYCI celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> year that *“it continues to go from strength to strength.”*



### Orlaith McBride

NYCI Arts Officer

NYCI President, 2011 – 2012

Current Position: Director of the Arts Council

Orlaith McBride had a dual role in NYCI, as both a member of staff and later as a CEO of a member organisation. Initially, she was employed as NYCI's Arts Officer and later returned to the organisation as Director of the National Association of Youth Drama (NAYD) (a member organisation of NYCI, now known as Youth Theatre Ireland). In her capacity as Director of NAYD, she joined NYCI's Board and eventually became NYCI's third female president.

Prior to joining the NYCI staff team, Orlaith worked for a number of years in youth theatre in Tallaght, with South Dublin County Council. This role entailed running community and youth theatre projects. Orlaith was particularly passionate about youth theatre and maintained a commitment to this genre after she left the position. In the late 1990s, Orlaith joined NYCI as the Arts Officer, working on the National Youth Arts Programme. She replaced Monica Corcoran in the role and Anna Gunning was her manager.

Speaking of the National Youth Arts Programme, Orlaith says at the time she worked in NYCI, the arts programme was very disconnected from the arts sector and exclusively focused on the youth sector. This disconnection from the wider arts sector was one of the reasons Orlaith chose to move to NAYD:

*"It was absolutely exclusively focused on the youth sector and then artists were brought in to that, but it didn't really connect that much with the arts sector...I could see, albeit, that I was very committed to working with young people, that if I continued in the narrow youth sector, that was NYCI, that I would be lost as somebody who was committed to the arts, as well as to the young people, so I left when the job as Director of NAYD came up"* (Orlaith McBride, 2016).

The NAYD focused on the art form that Orlaith is so passionate about, but it also involved working with young people. Although she was more comfortable working in the arts, Orlaith says she missed working in NYCI and in particular, the political and systemic elements that her former role entailed. She says in many ways that exposure to the politics of NYCI, equipped her with the skills she has brought with her, throughout her professional career.

Orlaith was to return to NYCI and to sit on the board of NYCI for two terms in the 2000s. At the end of her last term on the NYCI Board, she became NYCI President for a very short period from November 2011 to September 2012. In September 2012, Orlaith left her position as Director of NAYD to become the Director of the Arts Council, so stepped down in the role of NYCI President.

During Orlaith's time in the position of NYCI Arts Officer, she says that one of the most significant policy developments was the formulation of the first ever National Youth Arts Policy. In 1993, the *Making Youth Arts Work* committee was established by Kay Sheehy (former NYCI Arts Officer and now an RTÉ producer). This committee produced a report proposing ways to develop youth arts in Ireland. Ten years later, the first ever National Youth Arts Policy entitled '*Arts in Their Lives*' was published. This was the first policy on youth arts in Ireland and the first time youth arts had been inserted into a policy context. At the time, this was really important in terms of NYCI forging a stronger relationship with the Arts Council. This policy document led to the development of a strategic plan for the National Youth Arts Programme, which was launched by then Minister for the Arts, John O'Donoghue, in the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Shortly after the launch of the strategic plan, Orlaith was appointed to the Arts Council by the Minister. Orlaith contends these policy developments in the early 2000s were significant milestones in the development of youth arts in Ireland and set the foundations for future development and cooperation between NYCI and the Arts Council:

*"I would absolutely say that there wouldn't be a commitment to children and young people as obviously asserted in the Arts Council's current ten year strategy and our three year plan, if it wasn't for that policy document of NYCI's in 2003"*(Orlaith McBride, 2016).

Reflecting on her engagement with NYCI, Orlaith says:

*"They were 12 of the happiest years of my life, really, being involved in that organisation and being around that organisation. People that maybe I don't see so much anymore would always remain friends and people I would always count on as friends, because it was such a lovely time, it genuinely was such a lovely time."*

Orlaith believes that NYCI will always have an important role to play in Irish society, in terms of practice, representation and advocacy. She also holds the view that to continue to do the work it does, it will always have to demonstrate the value and importance of this work:

*"I think it will always have to assert its position and convince people of why it needs to continue. I think it does need to continue, if for no other reason than to bring the sector together, to hear what the issues are, to represent those issues, to articulate those issues and also to be that voice that talks about the concerns of young people in Ireland..."* (Orlaith McBride, 2016).



## Duane Farrell

NYCI/YouthNet North–South Officer, 2000 – 2003

Current Position: Charity Director at Age NI

Duane had been living in Belfast for a few years, working with young LGB people, when he saw the position of North–South Officer advertised by YouthNet and the National Youth Council of Ireland and applied for post. He recalls doing two interviews as part of the recruitment process. The post was created in the context of the Good Friday Agreement and initially was a one year fixed–term contract. Education had just been designated as one of the areas of cooperation on a north–south basis and YouthNet and NYCI were very keen that non–formal education and youth work provision would be seen as part of that and recognized as important. Both departments agreed to fund Duane’s position for one year, each allocating 50 per cent of the funding. Duane’s position was based in the YouthNet’s office in Belfast, but he spent time in Dublin as well. The post was a new role for both organisations and in that sense, initially there were no structured outcomes set out. Duane says that in many respects this gave him the freedom and the opportunity to make the job his own, to shape the direction of the work and to try and make an impact. Politics was a constant context for the work and this was something Duane was conscious of from the start. Speaking of the work, Duane says he was conscious of the need to apply language sensitively:

*“Politics is always in the ether and we had to be very careful and conscious of how we used language and the types of language that we used, but politics was never the main objective of this role. I suppose one of the first things that I did, was an audit of what provision was available. It threw up a couple of things. It was fascinating that there were young people in around the border and actually they could access provision either side of the border. That was based on convenience, sometimes what was easier to get to. So there was an issue there.”*

Prior to 2000, there was a long tradition of youth exchanges between the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, for over 20 years, but the vision for this post was that it needed to go beyond youth exchanges. The organisations engaging with both YouthNet and NYCI felt that the work needed to be brought more into the policy sphere. One example of an issue that was brought into the policy sphere was child protection and the arrangements in place for closer cooperation between the north and south, which prior to 2000 had been quite separate. Before 2000, the reality was that an individual could potentially have a conviction on one side of the border and there was no requirement to share this information between the two jurisdictions. There was an aspiration around deepening connections across the youth sector, throughout the island of Ireland. Duane recalls that this aspiration for closer cooperation was particularly acute in Northern Ireland:

*“I suppose particularly in Northern Ireland, where I was based at the time, there was a real focus on trying to make it different for generations coming through. Trying to give younger people a different experience. We were right after the Good Friday Agreement, probably a lot more optimism around at that point in time and it was seen as an important piece to do, to try and deepen those connections on a north-south basis” (Duane Farrell, 2017).*

One key piece of work Duane was involved in, as North–South Officer, was an audit of youth work provision on both sides of the border. Another aspect of the work he remembers with great pride was a conference YouthNet and NYCI organised during the European International Year of Volunteers in 2001, entitled *‘Blood, Sweat and Volunteers.’* Ruth Griffin (NYCI’s Youth Development Officer) helped Duane to set up a young people’s panel to advise on the conference. The young people set a vision for the conference, which was about recognising the important roles that younger people played as volunteers and trying to create an awareness of young people as volunteers. The conference title came from the young people’s panel.

After a year, the North–South Officer post had demonstrated benefit to the youth sector and additional money was secured to continue the work for a further two years. By January 2003, Duane moved jobs and in October 2003 the Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed. The political dynamic in Northern Ireland had changed entirely at that point in time and the post was not renewed. Duane recalls this particular period of his career as a ‘good and happy time.’ Reflecting on his years working in the youth sector in a north–south capacity, he says:

*“When I look back on those times and particularly in Montague Street, they were really fun times, but not, you know frivolous fun. It was people who were doing really good work...I’ve worked in a number of places since and there are places that take the work really seriously and that is not a bad thing, but NYCI did really good things, in an enjoyable way. I worked with people who enjoyed what they did and I think that was very apparent when you came into the office.”*

Speaking of north–south cooperation in the context of the forthcoming Brexit, Duane thinks it is probably one of the single biggest issues affecting the UK and it will have massive implications for Northern Ireland, right across the life cycle:

*“I think there are real and genuine concerns here in Northern Ireland. I don’t think anybody knows what impact Brexit will have, particularly at this stage of the negotiations, where there’s no clear vision around how border issues will be addressed, but I’m fairly clear that the absence of a border has allowed deeper connection...particularly between young people on these islands” (Duane Farrell, 2017).*

Duane’s hope for NYCI now and in the future is that it continues to do good work:

*“As the republic starts a new journey towards hopefully stability, prosperity, all of those things, that young people have a continued voice in that...and that diverse young people, if it is young travellers, if it is young LGBT people... I think that is probably part of the unique space of NYCI, gathering that up, creating spaces where young people can do that and then projecting that voice outwards. So, you know, I would say it is keep doing and keep doing it in that fun way” (Duane Farrell, 2017).*



## Colm Ó Mongáin

Information and Press Officer, NYCI 2001 – 2003

Current Position: Editor/Presenter of This Week,

RTÉ News and Current Affairs

Colm Ó Mongáin came to NYCI straight from college. A graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, he had just completed a Master's degree in multimedia studies when he saw an advertisement in *The Irish Times* for the position of Information and Press Officer. He said he was attracted to the post as he had previously worked in the Students' Union in Trinity College as a Press and Publications Officer and thought the job specification matched his skills and career ambitions. Colm recalls with fondness the camaraderie in the office. It was an interesting job requiring Colm to draft press releases, liaise with press, promote the work of the organisation and occasionally deputise as a spokesperson for the organisation. His Irish language skills were an asset to NYCI and he did a lot of interviews with Raidió na Gaeltachta and other local and regional radio stations.

At the time Colm was involved in NYCI, there was a lot of focus and energy expended on lobbying for the Youth Work Bill to be enacted. Key policy issues which dominated NYCI's agenda at the time were the cost of motor insurance for younger people and alcohol. There was concern about the political positioning of young people's affairs. The government of the day had a Minister for Youth Affairs within the Department of Education, but it had not been properly amalgamated. The relationship between NYCI and the department at the time was pretty fraught. During this period, Youth Affairs was a bit of a backwater within the Department of Education. It had moved from the Department of Sport and didn't really have a home. The Principal Officer with responsibility for Youth Affairs at the time was P.J. Breen. P.J. deputised a lot for the Minister at NYCI events. He represented the department at NYCI assemblies and other events and consequentially forged a close working relationship with the Council.

### **The Commission on Liquor Licensing**

Colm represented NYCI on the Commission on Liquor Licensing. He recalls with amusement, his experience and engagement with the Commission on Liquor Licensing, describing himself 'a bit of a troublesome sort' on the Commission. It was an interesting group, in that it comprised of industry representatives, young people's representation and representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise. From the very first meeting he attended, he tells how his attire and the fact that the previous NYCI representative had missed a few meetings, left him at a distinct disadvantage:

*“Between one thing and another, the previous representative hadn’t been at the meetings in a while, so there was a kind of a bad atmosphere towards the National Youth Council. I didn’t improve it, because I turned up the first day with about a day’s stubble on me. I wouldn’t have been known for my sartorial elegance. I turned up with a day’s stubble and a woolly jumper. I think all these old civil servants, took a dim view of me around the table” (Colm Ó Mongáin, 2016).*

In an attempt to redeem himself, Colm describes how he went to Coyle’s on Aungier Street and bought a trilby to go with the three piece suit that he wore to his NYCI interview. Now he was dressed to impress. According to Colm, NYCI’s position on the Commission was ‘pretty thorny,’ because NYCI was resolutely against deregulation of the liquor licensing laws, because greater availability would mean an increase in alcohol consumption levels and greater alcohol-related harm. The Commission on Liquor Licensing comprised of people who would take the same view of alcohol policy. The Department of Health and Department of Education commission members were supportive of NYCI’s position, but the drink industry representatives on the group ensured that progressing an agenda of greater regulation of alcohol, would be challenging.

*“Ultimately, there was a kind of a fudged compromise and the kind of cafe/bars thing came out of the mix... The benign view of it would be there would be a same kind of policy debate had around the table... I suppose a more sceptical view of it would be that it was populated by safe interests around the table...” (Colm Ó Mongáin, 2016).*

At a difficult point in the negotiations, the chairman of the Commission, Gordon Holmes, asked Colm to do some research with secondary school students on the impact of education on their attitudes and behaviour in relation to alcohol.

*“The message I came back with was that education has a very limited effect. Crowding the curriculum wasn’t going to have much of an effect either and that we really needed to look at things like advertising and availability and all that kind of thing. So they weren’t best pleased with it” (Colm Ó Mongáin, 2016).*

Colm called for a minority report and says this resulted in ‘absolute mayhem.’ He was accused of leaking to the media. In the final report of the Commission on Liquor Licensing, there were a few footnotes to reflect NYCI’s counterposition.

Colm greatly enjoyed working in NYCI and said that he gained ‘huge and valuable experience’ from this period in his early career. In terms of the role for NYCI now and in the future, Colm says that the pervasiveness of social media has meant that young people are far more vulnerable to intelligence-led marketing. He believes there is a place for a strong advocate on behalf of young people to ensure protections are put in place to protect children and young people from the retention of sensitive data on social media. How information is retained will be a big concern. How industry HR uses a person’s past on social and digital media when they were only 15 will become a big issue in the future.

*“I think all of those things are going to be big and I think young people’s rights within that very fast-moving unregulated environment is going to be something that needs a really credible voice on and I think NYCI, if it isn’t doing so already, would probably need to think seriously about moving into that space” (Colm Ó Mongáin, 2016).*



## Mary Cunningham

Director of NYCI, 2002 – present

Mary Cunningham has been Director of NYCI since March 2002. She is the first female Director of the Youth Council. She came to the organisation with a wealth of experience advocating on behalf of children, in a representative body for children's organisations in Northern Ireland. She had recently completed her MBA and decided she wanted to expand her horizons, which were limited in Northern Ireland at the time. She recalls being at an airport and seeing the advertisement for the post of Director of NYCI advertised in *The Irish Times* and deciding to apply. She vividly remembers her first day on the job. She arrived at the office on Montague Street. This was the first time she had set eyes on the NYCI office. In contrast to the beautiful building she had worked in, in Belfast, which had training rooms, meeting rooms and a boardroom, she admits to being 'underwhelmed' with the building itself, but in relation to the location, says it was 'absolutely excellent.' From the get-go, she was impressed by the quality of the staff and the diversity of work that the organisation did.

*"It had greater capacity than the organisation I had left, in terms of dedicated staff around advocacy, dedicated capacity around research, so you know, it was very exciting"* (Mary Cunningham, 2017).

In terms of the key policy, advocacy and campaign issues, the consistent one was always the focus on youth work funding. The Youth Work Act (2001) had recently been enacted and NYCI's focus was on the implementation of the various sections of the legislation. The National Youth Work Development Plan had just been signed off by the youth sector and the Department of Education and on the policy front, there was a big focus on the cost of motor insurance for young drivers. Another interesting dimension of NYCI's work when Mary arrived, was the fact that the practice development side of the house and the advocacy side of the house were completely separate. Despite the organisation having a significant number of staff and the evidence of very good work operationally, the organisation didn't have a strategic plan or a staff handbook. The work wasn't set within a strategic framework, in terms of everybody in NYCI being clear about the strategic direction of the organisation.

*"I kind of felt that it was almost as though NYCI was like an anchor tenant and then we had these different programmes that were kind of here by accident and didn't really see that they were completely knit into the organisation. Every single programme had their own identity, their own branding, their own logos, their own websites and NYCI, the organisation, had a different branding and website. So the very first paper I put to the board of NYCI was for the need for us to have a strategic plan"* (Mary Cunningham, 2017).

As incoming Director, Mary felt it was important to consult the members about the strategic direction it wanted for NYCI. She felt it was important to reinforce a very strong sense of NYCI's role as 'membership serving,' to be strategic about the issues that NYCI prioritised during the lifetime of the strategic plan and to ensure more informed evidenced-based position-taking with more of a focus and greater depth. Mary's preference was for NYCI to focus on a relatively small number of issues and to become experts in those issues so that NYCI would become 'a really credible go to organisation on a number fronts.' The NYCI Board accepted the need for a strategic plan and a very comprehensive consultation with the membership and stakeholders followed swiftly. Mary recalls not only talking to member organisations, but also scanning the external environment and talking to a broad range of key stakeholders, including the VECs, other statutory bodies, the health boards and the Garda Síochána. The first strategic plan ensured that the work of the Council was informed by the needs of its members and informed by the needs of young people, but also provided scope for NYCI to be proactive and monitor trends and emerging issues affecting both the sector and young people. An issue that the Council revisits periodically is whether NYCI is the voice of young people and/or the representative body of national youth organisations. In 2002, NYCI member organisations responded through the consultation process to say that NYCI was the representative body for national voluntary youth organisations in Ireland and that they worked directly with young people. Therefore, in terms of being informed about the issues that impact on young people, NYCI does this through its member organisations.

### **The National Youth Work Advisory Council (NYWAC)**

There had been an NYWAC under the previous legislation, until the 2001 Youth Work Act replaced it. The NYWAC under the 2001 legislation was just being appointed when Mary started working in NYCI. The Youth Council had a significant number of seats on NYWAC and whilst it produced a lot of excellent work, it was frustrating at times. Speaking of NYWAC, Mary regarded it as a really important structure that achieved a lot in terms of child protection guidelines, a position on young people and alcohol, the establishment of the North/South Education and Training Standards Committee, the National Quality Standards Framework and the Intercultural Strategy, which led to the establishment of NYCI's Equality and Intercultural Programme. Despite the progress made in a number of important policy areas, implementation of promised aspects of the NYWDP failed to materialise. The fact that everyone had signed off on the NYWDP and there no commitment or pathway to implementation was a cause of huge frustration within the youth sector. The voluntary sector had invested so much and there was a shared agenda with the department towards moving forward, but there was no progress in terms of implementation and the promised development unit was never established.

## **NYCI's Position on the Marriage Equality Referendum**

One of the things Mary is proudest of from her 15 years as Director of NYCI, is the role she played in supporting the board to make a recommendation in relation to NYCI taking a position on the marriage equality referendum. Speaking of the referendum and NYCI's involvement in endorsing a 'yes' vote, Mary says:

*“It's actually quite emotional...I mean it was a huge precedent because I mean a lot of NYCI's member organisations are either faith-based or have faith-based roots and my understanding is that previously there had been a lot of controversy over the programme of social change that was happening in Ireland in the nineties...I mean to the point where there was a motion at one of our annual assemblies, which was actually putting forward a change to NYCI's memorandums and articles of association, which prevented the organisation from taking a position in referendum unless that was supported by two thirds of the membership.”*

This made it extremely difficult for NYCI to take any position on the marriage equality referendum. The board were concerned about going out to the membership and getting a 'no' answer, which would obviously have been a worse position than being neutral. Some board members felt NYCI should avoid taking a position but after many long conversations about the organisation's commitment to equality, the board decided to consult widely with member organisations. After a process of consultation with the NYCI membership, NYCI got the green light to take a 'yes' position.

## **Recession and its impact on NYCI**

A low point for Mary in her time in NYCI was the period of the recession, which she says was a very difficult time for the organisation, its member organisations and the young people they worked with. Speaking of this period and the impact it had on NYCI, she says:

*“NYCI survived but I think we're a long way from thriving. I mean we survived because of the commitment of the Board to try and retain as much of the capacity of the organisation as possible. We survived because of the flexibility of staff, where people volunteered to reduce their working hours and I mean people accepted that salaries were frozen. We had gone through a process in terms of job evaluation, which was just implemented on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008 and almost 10 years later that's still where people are...so that requires a lot of support from staff...So they were very difficult times...We also had situations where people left and weren't replaced... and then the funding for our Development Education programme was cut at the end of November 2012 and three staff lost their jobs in the run up to Christmas. So that was very, very difficult, really very difficult.”*

In 2017, it is now legitimate to lobby for greater engagement with young people on policy issues, which affect them. This sea change is reflected in the current development of the LGBTI Youth Strategy, which copper-fastened youth engagement into the process from the outset, by establishing a young people's advisory group and ensuring young people from the advisory group are on the full committee. The full committee has also received training in relation to engaging with young people. Reflecting on the last 15 years in NYCI, Mary says there has been a lot of progress and development, particularly in relation to giving young people a voice, but she acknowledges that whilst progress has been made in terms of structures like Dáil na nÓg, 'Young Voices' and the UN Youth Delegate Programme, 'it is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination.'



### Olivia McEvoy

Ireland's EU Presidency Officer for Young People, 2003 – 2004  
 Project Manager of the Dáil na nÓg Programme, 2004 – 2006  
 Current Position: Director | Diversity & Inclusion Advisory services | EY

Photograph  
 taken by Paul  
 McCarthy

Olivia McEvoy had a varied involvement with NYCI throughout the 2000s. Her engagement with the Youth Council started in the autumn of 2013 when she was appointed Ireland's EU Presidency Officer for young people during Ireland's 2004 Presidency. Her period of employment in this post was for nine months. She returned to NYCI shortly after that contract ended to the position of Project Manager of the Dáil na nÓg programme, which NYCI was contracted to coordinate. Olivia managed the Dáil na nÓg programme from 2004 – 2006. From 2006 onwards, she established a consultancy practice, Cnag ar an Doras, continuing to work on children and young people's participation and remaining in close contact with NYCI and its members for the next 10 years.

During the Irish EU presidency, Olivia was responsible for the management of relevant stakeholders in this process and facilitating negotiations between the EU Commission, the Department of Education & Skills, the European Youth Forum and the NYCI, to ensure further advancement of European youth policy and the coordination and execution of key European Presidency events. This was a busy role, which entailed a lot of travel between Ireland and Brussels, but time was also spent in NYCI.

In 2004, the Irish Presidency's primary goal was to make progress on the European Commission's White Paper, *"A New Impetus for European Youth."* Its objective was to address the issues of social integration and social inclusion, as they related to young people. Social integration and inclusion were considered at the European Youth Ministers Conference in Ennis, County Clare, in March 2004 and by the Council in May 2004. The European Youth Ministers Conference was held in Dromoland Castle and was a very lavish affair. Olivia recalls how they took over Dromoland Castle and all of Dromoland village:

*"Every single hotel in Dromoland village was booked...The very important people stayed in Dromoland and there were buses that ferried the more normal of us to other hotels. It was a big bang event!"* (Olivia McEvoy, 2017).

Olivia established an EU presidency advisory committee of young people to advise on the work, in terms of the events and the programme of work. On this committee were some big names from the world of Irish politics, such as Minister Simon Harris TD and former Minister of State for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton. NYCI worked with Youth Ministers, officials, non-government organisations and young people from all 15 member states and the 10 accession states. In terms of policy achievements, two pieces of policy were adopted during the Irish presidency. One was a declaration on racism and one was on social integration. Reflecting on her period as Ireland EU Presidency Officer for young people,

Olivia says there were many special moments. In particular, she recalls the “Day of Welcomes” in Dublin, to mark the European Union’s largest ever enlargement, with the accession of 10 new member states. As part of the youth input, Olivia worked with a consultant and young people from all accession states and local young people on an Access – Arts project. The project resulted in a rap which eventually led to a visit of the young people involved to Áras an Uachtaráin to meet with President McAleese.

Olivia was to return to NYCI after the EU presidency but this time under the guise of Project Manager of the Dáil na nÓg programme. At the time, Olivia says that children and young people’s participation was an absolutely alien concept so Dáil na nÓg was regarded as quite cutting edge, because it was one of the few really big forums that gave young people a voice and included children and young people in decision-making on an ongoing basis. Olivia designed and coordinated a new format for Dáil na nÓg in 2004, which provided an imaginative and innovative approach to youth consultation and participation. It also involved ongoing advocacy by Dáil na nÓg delegates after the one day parliament event in Croke Park, with young people advocating on the issues that had been debated and voted upon by Dáil na nÓg.

In a separate participation project, Olivia collaborated with youth workers from Youth Work Ireland, Foróige and youth organisations from Northern Ireland to bring 10 young people from Northern Ireland and 10 young people from the Republic of Ireland to Canada. One of those young people was Senator Maura Hopkins. The initiative was a cross-border programme, intended to encourage youth participation and it was funded by Irish Canada Funds. She says it was an amazing trip and although she did not come from a youth work background, it ignited in her the importance of children and young people’s participation and how little interventions could make such a significant difference in the lives of young people. It also inspired her to investigate the idea of participation more and ultimately to form a consultancy. At this point in her engagement with NYCI, Minister Brian Lenihan had been appointed as the ‘Super Junior’ Minister for Children. She says the creation of this ministry was a significant and monumental contribution to the children and youth agenda and gave them more prominence at a political level.

Olivia has many great memories from her time working for and with NYCI. She says of this time that she remembers the *‘really good atmosphere and fun environment amongst colleagues deeply committed to and passionate about meaningful impactful change for young people.’* Her hope for NYCI, as it marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is that it manages to stay current in a disruptive world that is changing so rapidly. Her hope for young people is that they continue to have a voice and that their voice is given real legitimacy. She also believes that the voting age should be reduced to 16.



### James O'Leary

President of NYCI, 2005 – 2008, 2012 – 2015  
CEO of Involve

James O'Leary was president of NYCI for two terms. His first term as president was in the period 2005 – 2008 and he also held the presidency from 2012 – 2015. He first became involved in the Youth Council through his role as coordinator of the National Association of Traveller Centres (NATC), which later became known as *Involve*. NATC's role was to provide youth work services to young Travellers. From an early stage in this coordinator role, James recalls linking in with a Principal Officer in the department called Brian Power, who recommended that NATC apply to join NYCI. As someone relatively new to youth work, prior to joining NYCI, James' impression was that there was *"a little bit of an elitist nature to the Youth Council and to its members."* Furthermore, as an organisation based in Athlone, he felt NATC was more distant and removed from the work of NYCI. Post-membership, James acknowledges that he was mistaken and his initial impression was ill-founded.

James recalls the first NYCI assembly he attended. Speaking of the occasion, he remembers attending with a young Traveller lady called Theresa B. Ward and vividly remembers them making their pitch as to why they should become members and then being asked to leave the room, while the members discussed whether they met the eligibility criteria for NYCI membership. Describing the experience, he says the expression *'running the gauntlet'* comes to mind. Speaking of the process of applying for NYCI membership, James says, *"it was not a welcoming process ... it was more of a test."*

During his NYCI presidency, he was involved in changing this elitist and somewhat off-putting initiation process to become a member of NYCI. He says that NYCI today is very different to the organisation he joined in the early 2000s. In the early 2000s, there was a lot of internal politics with a big P. The actual process of joining NYCI was *'hugely political.'* While he acknowledges that NYCI is still a political organisation, he believes *'the P has become smaller and there is far more individuality involved in it and ... more solid processes, solid policies and solid systems in place, in the way the organisation does its business, so it's now more structurally led rather than individually led'* (James O'Leary, 2016).

James' rise in status from a representative of a new member organisation to his election as NYCI President, has been described by others as *'meteoric.'* *Involve* joined the organisation and James was elected on to the NYCI Board within a year and shortly afterwards was elected to the position of president. He was elected president at the NYCI Assembly in Wicklow. Running for the position of NYCI president, he says was *'incredibly daunting and difficult,'* particularly as he had never asked anybody to vote for him before,

so this was new territory. He ran against a representative from Scouting Ireland and remembers it was a very close contest with only two votes in the differences. James was the successful candidate and said he felt 'elated' and honoured to assume this role.

At the time James was elected president, NYCI were facing some difficult HR issues and funding was, as always, an issue. Recognition of youth work and youth work funding were key issues on NYCI's agenda during his presidency. Youth Affairs came under the remit of the Department of Education and at this time was often referred to as the '*Cinderella of the Department.*' Síle de Valera, the Minister of State for Youth Affairs at the time, James recalls, was very receptive to NYCI's agenda.

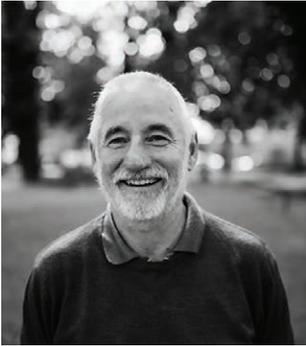
*"Síle was good to work with and certainly got around the country to the projects, you know. She'd a good way about her and she got youth work, she understood it. As a Minister, she understood the value of it...She had enough linkages herself into community work and she just understood the organisation. She was good to work with... While she was in the ministry, I think funding wise, we did okay"* (James O'Leary, 2016).

Reflecting on his term as NYCI President, James says he is proud of the work NYCI did on the economic assessment of youth work:

*"It was a hugely valuable piece of work that the organisation led out on...Obviously we had just begun to go into recessionary time and everything was about money and the economic value, so the document was very valuable and still is today"* (James O'Leary, 2016).

James is also proud of the establishment of the specialist youth work organisations network, which he regards as hugely valuable to specialist youth work organisations, in terms of sharing and exchange of information. He holds so many fond memories of his time in NYCI and says he looks back with smiles at many funny moments. In particular, he remembers his first term as president and the bond he established with the vice president, Eddie D'Arcy and the treasurer, David Owens and the lighter moments when the board got to know each other in between board meetings. Speaking of the close friendship that developed between the three officers and comradery of the board residential meetings, James says:

*"There was a little bit of 'The Three Amigos' going on, you know. We worked closely and we worked very well together. There was good fun while the work was being done...There was a bit of singing too, at the board residential...Eddie was by far the best singer, absolutely. I was by far the worst, in fact people have told me that I haven't a single note in my head but that's ok, it doesn't deter me right and I plough on...Vicky Rattigan, absolutely great singer, so there were these fun, light moments that were great and everybody did the work again the next day and that was all part of it."*



### Eddie D'Arcy

President of NYCI, 2008 – 2011

Current Position: CEO of the Solas Project

Eddie D'Arcy's involvement in NYCI started in the late 1970s when he was a student in UCD. He describes himself at the time *"as a rebellious arrogant brat of a youth leader running a small club in Whitehall."* NYCI was located on Waterloo Road and Eddie remembers attending meetings of the Youth Work Standing Conference in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. His affiliation was through Catholic Youth Care and later in his career he became Manager of Ronanstown Youth Service. As a young volunteer, Eddie was motivated to get involved in NYCI to secure funding for his youth club. CYC were mostly involved in the work of NYCI's International Committee at this stage and in developing links across Europe. There were a lot of opportunities to attend conferences across the Europe. There was one international grouping on youth clubs, which attracted Eddie's attention. He recalls, in particular, attending a conference in Germany on behalf of NYCI:

*"I remember one time going to this place in southern Germany and really only having a vague idea how I was going to get there and I was the only Irish delegate. I remember flying to Frankfurt, going to find my way to a bus station and this guy dropping me off somewhere in this remote village. I had no idea of the place...but it never bothered me...I was there half a day before I realised that the conference was actually going on, you know, but they looked after me really well"* (Eddie D'Arcy, 2017).

During the 1980s, Eddie remembers the 'fierce competition' to get elected on the board of NYCI – every single post was contested. NYCI assemblies were very well attended. In the 1980s, CYC held the presidency for years and then lost it at an infamous conference in West Cork. Shortly after this, Eddie recalls that there was a row about NYCI's position on access to information on abortion. A motion went to assembly. The issue was debated and NYCI was split down the middle on the issue. Afterwards CYC left NYCI. The view at the time was that they left because they felt NYCI was taking positions on issues that had nothing to do with youth work.

A decade later, CYC came back into NYCI membership and Eddie returned to NYCI and this time, to NYCI's Board. Eddie at this stage was Manager of Ronanstown Youth Centre (a CYC youth service). At the time, CYC were looking for someone to represent the organisation on NYCI's Board. There wasn't a huge interest, so he put himself forward. He says that coming back to NYCI was 'very weird,' but that he had never actually broken his own personal links with the organisation. He maintained a somewhat tenuous link with the Youth Council during CYC's period of disaffiliation, by continuing to stay involved in its work, via a disadvantaged youth work sub-committee and a number of research studies NYCI were working on. In the early 2000s, Eddie recalls being very involved in the review of both the NYCI constitution and the membership criteria.

During James O'Leary's presidency, Eddie remembers a particularly fraught NYWAC meeting, which led to NYCI taking a stance and walking out of the meeting in protest:

*"Relations between ourselves and Youth Affairs were very, very poor...People had travelled to the meeting and there would be 30 people there and every single item on the agenda, the response from the department was 'no progress,' 'no progress,' and they wouldn't discuss anything. So we took a decision that at the next meeting, if the report was 'no progress,' we would just all get up and walk out, which we did...We felt that the department wasn't taking NYWAC seriously, wasn't prepared to work with us and in fact, was, you know, despite what they said, were deciding or making their own decisions"* (Eddie D'Arcy, 2017).

After this stance, Eddie says the relationship gradually improved and a very positive relationship developed between NYCI and Minister de Valera. Despite the fact that they had to travel to Clare to meet her in her constituency, Eddie says the meetings were good and she took a *"genuine interest in youth work and was generally very receptive."* He also remembers her successor, Minister Sean Haughey, was also very receptive, supportive of the work and very accessible.

During this period, NYCI established a close working relationship with a civil servant called PJ Breen. PJ Breen was a Principal Officer in the department and attended a lot of NYCI events. When Youth Affairs was moved to the newly established Department of Children and Youth Affairs, it became more challenging. Eddie says that despite their expectations that this move would improve the position and status of the youth sector, the new department was a much bigger department and *'the youth sector was only a small fish.'*

*"We thought we were going to be the main guys in there, but in fact we weren't...Early Years were important, Tusla was important. We were very much on the fringes, you know..."* (Eddie D'Arcy, 2017).

Speaking of the period of recession and its impact on the youth sector, Eddie said it was a very difficult time to be on NYCI's Board. The department lost 40% of its funding during the recession and a significant proportion of those cuts were borne by the youth work sector. Eddie says it felt a bit like *"every dog for himself"* and regrets that the youth sector didn't mount a national campaign to oppose the cuts and engage in direct action. He feels had it done so it might have protected the interests of the sector more:

*"I think if we had played our cards right and if we had looked for much more... The fact is the senior citizens got out and marched in big numbers and there was fairly quick rollback... It was just organisations again being afraid of being seen to be political..."*(Eddie D'Arcy, 2017).

Eddie treasures his involvement with NYCI over the years. One of the highlights of this period was receiving an NYCI award during NYCI's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in recognition of his special contribution to youth work. The award was a bronze hand and to receive it at the formal dinner in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, he says was both a surprise and an honour and something he is very proud of. The award holds pride of place on his mantel piece at home. He also speaks highly of the close working relationship forged during his time on NYCI's Board, with James O'Leary and David Owens. Otherwise known as *'The Three Amigos,'* Eddie has maintained a close friendship with David and James and says:

*"We worked hard and we partied hard, the three of us...we sort of stayed close...because at the time there was a lot of conflict going on and we had to be seen as close. It was enjoyable being involved because of the two lads and we had a bit of a laugh together."*

Looking back on his early days of NYCI, Eddie remembers, in particular, the great NYCI assemblies. He says they were fascinating in comparison to the *'fairly sedate affairs now.'*

*'As a relatively young person, it (the NYCI Assembly) was an exciting place to be...It was a forum in which you could debate stuff that was interesting around young people and we were able to get relatively easy access to a whole range of Ministers and be in there and be listened to and be able to impact on policy. That was good'* (Eddie D'Arcy, 2017).



### Jennifer Dowling

Irish Girl Guides

NYCI Board Member, 2003 – 2006

Current Position: Organisational Psychologist  
with VITAE Consulting

Jennifer Dowling represented Irish Girl Guides (IGG) on the board of NYCI in the 2000s. She was a student in Dublin City University at the time and was invited by IGG to attend NYCI events as IGG's representative. Her first engagement with NYCI was on the International Committee. She says that Jillian van Turnhout encouraged her involvement and was so supportive and helpful.

*“Jillian was fantastic...she pushed for me to get involved in a few events...I went to a couple of conferences. I remember my first conference when I was 19...I remember just being in Dublin not that long and being sent to this conference in Sarajevo on my own. I think it was probably one of the first trips I'd ever done on my own and it was incredible...”* (Jennifer Dowling, 2017).

Jennifer says the conference in Sarajevo was a real 'eye-opener' and gave her a taste for youth politics and the youth movement. At this conference, she recalls getting into a conversation with Nelson Mandela's grandson at one stage. When she returned to Ireland, she joined NYCI's newly established committee, the Social Policy Network, which at the time was chaired by William Lavelle (YFG). She also joined an NYCI working group on participation, established to develop a resource on youth participation. At the end of her time in DCU, Jennifer did a placement in NYCI during the summer of 2006. She was also on the board of NYCI.

Reflecting on her first impressions of NYCI, she says one of the things she noticed was that there weren't many young people involved in the Council, at the time:

*“Like in the actual structures... the committees, on the board, it was predominantly older people and I think when I sat on the board I was one of the youngest people to ever sit on the board, you know. At the time for me I was like, this is the National Youth Council, how could I be one of the youngest at 19...”* (Jennifer Dowling, 2017).

When she first joined the NYCI Board, Jennifer says it was intimidating, but she and William Lavelle who was also on the board, raised the issue of the need for greater youth representation and participation at board level. This is one of the reasons Jennifer got involved in the Working Group on Participation, which was charged with the task of examining the structures of the National Youth Council and identifying measures to encourage and facilitate young people to get more involved in the structures of NYCI. Jennifer said that while initially she found the board a bit daunting and intimidating, it was great that she was surrounded by people on the board who had lots of experience from whom she could learn so much. She also valued the fact that her ideas were never discarded but were always taken on board.

Jennifer says of her time in NYCI, *“I made some great friends and had great contacts and loads of funny moments.”* One moment she recalls with particular fondness and regards as a highlight, was an invitation she received to address a conference in Croke Park, organised as part of The National Taskforce on Active Citizenship consultation. The Taskforce was established by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in April 2006 and Mary Cunningham (Director of NYCI) was on the Taskforce Committee. Jennifer recalls Mary inviting her to attend and to speak on the issue of active citizenship on behalf of young people. Speaking of this experience, Jennifer said:

*“So he (Bertie Ahern) spoke, alongside Sean Kelly (former president of the GAA and MEP), Mary Davis (former Irish presidential candidate) and me! I remember just being like incredibly nervous. I actually summarised all my experience in youth work and presented it to a room full of media... Jillian read my speech for me and Miriam O’Callaghan was presenting. She was lovely and she was like ‘you’ll be fine’ and it went really well.”*

Jennifer says that one of the wonderful things about being involved in NYCI is that they *“always kind of push you to a little bit more, to stretch yourself and I think I learned an awful lot through that. I think that’s what it’s all about.”* As an organisation, she thinks it has *“made a huge contribution to youth work in Ireland”* and hopes it will *“continue to grow and be recognised for what it does and the contribution it makes.”*

## The Recession and Post-Recession Period, 2008 – 2017

The last chapter of this NYCI oral history focuses on the period from 2007 to the present day. Part of this period includes the recession, which had a devastating impact on NYCI, its member organisations and the wider youth sector. In 2009, the recession hit Ireland and once again young people were amongst the biggest casualties of some of the policy decisions taken. At one stage during the recession, Ireland's youth unemployment rate was at 31% and as with previous recessions, there was large scale youth emigration from Ireland. In spite of this very challenging time, NYCI survived and continues to remain the representative body for the youth sector, providing a voice for youth work and children and young people in the development and shaping of public policy. Some of the issues that dominated this decade from a policy perspective were youth work funding, children's rights, child and youth poverty, youth unemployment, the 'youth guarantee' to quality education, training and employment, youth emigration and barriers to return migration, housing and homelessness, promoting volunteering and formal youth political participation, extending voting rights to 16 and 17 years, youth mental health, anti-racism, alcohol, precarious working conditions and Brexit. During this period, NYCI also undertook a number of ground-breaking research studies, which generated substantial media coverage. NYCI published research on youth unemployment (2011), youth volunteering (2011), the economic value of youth work (2012), youth emigration (2013), barriers to return migration (2014), health inequalities in Ireland (2014) internships (2015), use of ICT in youth work practice (2015) and the experiences and insights of minority ethnic young people growing up in Ireland (2017). The research on the use of ICT in the youth work practice was part of an international research project called 'Screenagers.' This research provided an evidence base, which helped to secure funding from Science Foundation Ireland in 2017, to design and deliver bespoke training on the use of ICT, social and digital media for youth workers. It was also a time of creativity and innovation and the NYCI staff team worked hard to maintain the quality of the work. NYCI made a number of gains in very important areas such as the introduction of the first ever Irish UN Youth Delegate Programme in September 2015 and the establishment of the 'Young Voices' consultation process. 'Young Voices' has helped to shape the development of public policy on a variety of issues affecting young people.

In terms of policy and legislative developments, the national policy framework for children and young people, 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures,' was published and set out Government's vision for children and young people from 2014 – 2020. It outlines 5 national outcomes and provides structures to oversee the implementation of the policy framework. In 2015, NYCI worked closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on the development of a National Youth Strategy, 2015 – 2020. The Council continues to work on intercultural and equality issues

and to influence the shaping of public policy to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm. NYCI contributed to the Substance Misuse Committee and lobbied for the publication of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, which is currently before the Houses of Oireachtas. The international work continues to go from strength to strength and NYCI continues to engage with the European Youth Forum, the UN and participate at various international events, to ensure the Irish youth voice is at the table. Other advances were made in the child protection, youth arts, youth health, development education and intercultural and equality work areas in NYCI, in relation to policy, advocacy and practice. There have been so many successes and achievements on the part of NYCI and its member organisation to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.

As part of the oral history, I interviewed ten people from this period, who have various forms of engagement with NYCI in recent years. Their contribution to the study provides a more contemporary insight into the organisation. These interviewees are either currently involved in NYCI or have engaged with NYCI recently. They told me about their very rich experience of engagement with the organisation and of their thoughts on the important issues facing NYCI in 2017 and into the future. Their stories reflect a young, dynamic and energised NYCI and to adopt one interviewee's expression, an organisation that *"has its finger on the pulse."*



Pictured at the NYCI Youth Guarantee Roundtable in June 2013, from left to right: James McCann (Chair of NYCI's Policy & Advocacy Committee), Marie-Claire McAleer (NYCI's Head of Research & Policy), Minister Damien English TD (then Chairman of the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Innovation & Enterprise) and Tim Hayes (Head of Communication/Information, European Commission Representation in Ireland).



### **Anna Cunniffe**

Research & Policy Officer, 2007 – 2009

Current Position: Assistant Principal,  
Department of Health

Prior to working in NYCI, Anna had been working in Mental Health Ireland where she was very involved in promoting positive mental health for young people. When the position came up in NYCI she noticed that NYCI were going to be getting more active in encouraging positive mental health for young people and felt it would be a good match for her skill set. She applied for the position and started working in NYCI in 2007. Her initial impressions of NYCI were that it was a very warm and very positive organisation to work.

*“There were lots of young people on the staff, which really struck me. I suppose I’d come from an organisation where there had been a number of people working there for a long number of years...so coming into NYCI was really vibrant, it was really energetic, there were lots of new roles starting up and lots of new projects. There was a lot of activity, a lot of different areas and really interesting areas. But yeah, overall I think I felt it was a really vibrant, energetic organisation” (Anna Cunniffe, 2017).*

Anna worked as part of the research & policy team. The big policy issues which dominated NYCI’s policy and advocacy agenda at the time related to youth mental health and alcohol-related harm. In the media, there was huge attention on suicide and self-harming. There was a focus on trying to increase positive messages in the media and to run positive campaigns targeting young people. Youth work funding continued to be a focus of NYCI’s work during this period, as was securing and maintaining the mental health budget. These were the policy priorities NYCI focused on at the time and there was a big push before and after the budgetary cycle every year, to emphasise the importance of investing in youth services to meet these needs and to improve youth mental health for young people.

Anna recalls in particular some of policy areas she worked on during her time in NYCI, such as the ‘Towards 2016’ advocacy work and the bilateral meetings she attended as part of the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership:

*“It was really interesting to see the interactions between the various government departments and high level civil servants and then to have various service providers around the table as well... You felt very important going along to those meetings, even if you were just sitting at a back chair in the corner of the room. It was great to get an insight to the goings on of such high level meetings” (Anna Cunniffe, 2017).*

In terms of international experiences during her time working for NYCI, she reflects on a very interesting trip she attended in Paris with her colleague, Marie–Claire McAleer.

*“I think we learned an awful lot at the conference and made some really good contacts...I suppose that sort of focus on the research side as well as the policy is so important because I do think, really strongly, when you’re working in areas of developing policy you need to continuously develop your research competencies to be able to analyse the evidence. If you don’t have good evidence, you can’t draft good policies, so it is really important to put resources into the research side, to develop those skills. At the time, I think it was wonderful that we had that chance to contribute to a high-level European research conference and to bring some of those skills back to the NYCI” (Anna Cunniffe, 2017).*

In response to the question of what she hopes for NYCI now and in the future, Anna says she hopes NYCI will *“continue to grow, develop and strengthen and continue to put out those positive messages to young people, particularly young disadvantaged people. It is important that disadvantaged young people have someone who is shouting out for them or is in their corner.”*



### Vicky Rattigan

Young Christian Workers  
Former NYCI Board Member  
Current Position: National Coordinator,  
Young Christian Workers

Vicky Rattigan has been involved in NYCI since the 1990s and continues to engage with the Council through her work with Young Christian Workers (YCW). She recalls YCW moving offices from one premise to another premise on Talbot Street and during the move coming across some NYCI documentation. It prompted her to find out more about the Youth Council and to get involved. Initially, her involvement was by way of attending the standing conference meetings and she admits that these meetings were somewhat ‘off putting’ at the start.

*“I remember having a chat with Peter (Byrne) and him encouraging me to go to the meetings...He was really encouraging to us in the early days...so much so, that he helped us when we changed from kind of our old structure to the newer structure. Peter helped us, in terms of setting up a company limited by guarantee” (Vicky Rattigan, 2017).*

Vicky remembers the NYCI of the 1990s as being very ‘middle class’ with young people who had third level education or who were third level students. She says one of her concerns about NYCI at the time was that there were no ‘ordinary young people’ involved. It was also a period in NYCI’s history, when members were highly politicised and there was a very strong influence from youth wings of political parties. Reflecting on the standing conferences that existed in NYCI at the time, Vicky says that while they had their faults, there was something great about them, in that they served to bring members together in between NYCI assembly events.

Vicky was later elected on to the board of NYCI on two occasions. Her first term spell on the board was during the presidencies of Jillian van Turnhout and James Doorley. Her second term on the board was under James O’Leary’s presidency. Reflecting on her time on the board of NYCI in the 1990s and in the 2000s, she recalls the tremendous volume of work done in NYCI and ‘of the craic’ they had doing it. Speaking in particular of the NYCI assemblies, Vicky says *“they were great fun, you know it was really, really great fun...one of my best pals would be Connie Larkin, who was on the board. I met her at an NYCI assembly... and some of the people that I met at assembly, I would still be quite friendly with now at this stage.”*

Vicky says there have been some really positive developments in NYCI during the period she has been involved in the Council, in terms of recognition of the youth sector and in terms of the relationships that have been built up between NYCI and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. As a smaller organisation, Vicky values the ‘*support and encouragement*’ YCW receive from NYCI and believes the establishment of the ‘Specialist Organisations Network’ in NYCI is a really positive development for youth organisations like YCW.

*“For YCW, I think the support and encouragement that we’ve gotten, particularly from Mary (Cunningham) I would say, over the last number of years, has been really, really supportive, really positive for us” (Vicky Rattigan, 2017).*

Vicky would like to see NYCI getting more recognition for the work that it does. While she acknowledges that NYCI is the umbrella organisation representing youth organisations, she would also like to see the voice of young people reflected more in the work and thinks it is important that young people can feel their voice is heard at a national level through their involvement in NYCI.



### Michael Barron

Former Executive Director of BeLonG To  
Current Position: Executive Director of EQUATE

Michael's first involvement with NYCI was with the DEFY programme when he worked in Focus Ireland, around 1999. At the time he worked in 'The Loft,' which was a day centre for homeless teenagers. In 2003, *BeLonG To* was established to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people in Ireland. The following year, Michael became reacquainted with NYCI when *BeLonG To* joined NYCI. In his role as Executive Director of *BeLonG To*, Michael worked closely with NYCI to represent and advocate on behalf of LGBT young people. He recalls the first campaign *BeLonG To* ran on homophobia, was the "So Gay" campaign. It was a poster and booklet campaign. It was funded by a Leargas grant and NYCI played an instrumental role in disseminating it throughout the youth sector. He acknowledged that this campaign was significant and in many ways stimulated a national conversation on the issue. It generated media interest at the time, with *The Sunday Times* running the story on their front page with the headline "church anger as gay campaign targets schools." He said the support from NYCI at the time was important and contributed to other organisations coming behind the campaign. Indeed, Michael is very complementary of the role NYCI played throughout this period, in terms of its contribution to issues of equality and human rights. Ireland was beginning to change and with it, a change was evolving within the youth sector. Traditionally, the youth sector was conservative in nature and a lot of youth work reflected a religious ethos, which was not as tolerant of issues of sexuality and gender. The youth sector and NYCI in particular, drove that changed agenda. Michael believes that this kind of work, before the marriage equality referendum was significant. This shift in attitude and behaviour was linked to the kind of growth in grassroots youth supports, for LGBT young people. Reflecting on the success of the marriage equality referendum in particular, Michael believes that NYCI's involvement was really significant.

*"Personally, I was very moved by it...because I know there were sensitivities around it...I think NYCI in particular and then also Foróige and Youth Work Ireland coming on board, kind of reframed the marriage equality issue from being about adults getting married to being about what kind of country do you want young people to grow up in"* (Michael Barron, 2017).

According to Barron, the current Director of NYCI, Mary Cunningham, played a pivotal leadership role during the marriage referendum and her work has been vital for the work for Equality and in particular, in bringing NYCI on board in relation to the marriage equality referendum.

*“Mary Cunningham’s leadership was so vital at key moments for equality and young people. I think particularly of her support for BeLonG To’s first campaigns against homophobia and transphobia in the early 2000s, when there was some risk in it for her and NYCI. Again in 2015, Mary skilfully brought the NYCI and its membership into the BeLonG To Yes Coalition for Marriage Equality. How she did this, was a master class in principled diplomacy, bringing the organisation and its membership with her. The NYCI taking this position was really important for the campaign overall and sent such an important message to LGBTI young people. I have such admiration for how Mary did this” (Michael Barron, 2017).*

Michael’s hope for NYCI now and in the future is that it will ‘*maintain a radical edge*’ and continue to be responsive to the needs of all young people.



### **Teresa Walsh**

ICTU Youth Committee  
NYCI Board member  
Chair of the International Advisory  
Committee 2016 – present  
Current Position: National Induction for  
Teachers Regional  
Development Officer

Teresa Walsh became involved in NYCI via her trade union involvement. As a primary school teacher, she is a member of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), which is affiliated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). The secretary of INTO nominated Teresa to be the INTO representative on the ICTU Youth Committee. She later became chair of that committee and during this period, there were various invitations, presentations and discussions around lots of youth topics. An opportunity to be a board member of the National Youth Council of Ireland arose so Teresa put herself forward and was successfully nominated and elected. She later became involved in NYCI's International Advisory Committee and eventually became its chair in 2016. Teresa has described the many opportunities she has had through the international work in NYCI as 'amazing.' In terms of the benefits to be derived from participation in international youth politics, Teresa says:

*"It has been a huge learning curve... Takes you out of your little pigeon hole in Ireland and it opens up possibilities and links with other people and cultures as well."*

During her involvement in NYCI, Teresa says that the areas of work that have impressed her most have been the work on youth homelessness, youth unemployment and precarious working conditions. Reflecting on her most memorable moment from her time in NYCI, Teresa says it was a lobbying meeting with James Reilly TD, former Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, that she attended as part of the NYCI delegation:

*"There were quite a few from the department there and quite a few NYCI... I remember speaking on behalf of young people and about youth work and what it meant on the ground. I felt quite passionate about what I was saying and I think they took that on board... subsequently the budget came out and youth work got more money. So I would see that as quite an achievement in a sense" (Teresa Walsh, 2017).*

In terms of challenges for young people in Ireland in next three to five years, Teresa says the issue of pay and conditions, the cost of living for young people and pensions will come to the fore. She is also concerned that Brexit will exacerbate the precarious working conditions so many young people experience and make things much more difficult for them. She hopes that NYCI will continue to advocate on behalf of young people and its work will reflect issues that are directly affecting their lives.



## Senator Fintan Warfield

NYCI Nominee to Seanad Éireann in 2016

Senator Fintan Warfield's first engagement with the NYCI was during his term as Mayor of South Dublin County Council. During that time, Fintan focused on three big agenda items – homelessness, youth unemployment and LGBT rights and as soon as he took office he started to work on a Mayor's youth conference. He was conscious of the Youth Council through the good work of member organisations such as SpunOut.ie, and his first impression of NYCI was that it was *'highly organised and highly professional.'*

It was during his period as Mayor that Fintan decided he would like to run for the Seanad. The Seanad offered a platform in which he could highlight the key issues he had worked on throughout his year as Major. He also felt that the Seanad freed him from working in any one geographical region and also enabled time for activism to be channelled into specific policy areas. In researching the route to the Seanad and exploring the process, he discovered that NYCI had nominating rights to the cultural and educational panel. As part of the process, a candidate must demonstrate they have knowledgeable experience and practical experience in the areas relevant to the cultural and educational panel. As a full-time musician, with an academic background in film and television production, Fintan met all the criteria so he proceeded to meet organisations with nominating rights, including NYCI. He was struck by the NYCI process and regarded it as very transparent and fair. He was impressed that NYCI chose to close submissions from interested candidates on the same day as nominations closed for the Dáil elections, which Fintan felt reflected the value NYCI placed on the Seanad. He applied and was chosen by the board of NYCI for nomination and was successfully elected as the first Senator of the 25<sup>th</sup> Seanad, topping the poll. He credits the NYCI Board for selecting a young candidate and says it was a great privilege to be chosen.

As a young Senator in Leinster House representing the youth agenda, he feels he has worked really well with NYCI on key issues affecting young people. A prime example is the work on extending voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds. NYCI have been campaigning for voting rights for those age 16 and 17 for many years. Senator Warfield says that when his campaign on 'Vote at 16' began in 2017, he was able to harness the experience of NYCI in lobbying for a reduction in the voting age and to draw on NYCI's substantial research and policy documentation. Acknowledging NYCI's campaigning work on the issue, he says NYCI's work was 'extremely valuable' to him.

Fintan is most proud of the work he has done on the Gender Recognition (Amendment) Bill, which was passed in the Seanad, in May 2017. Reflecting on this Bill, he says he thinks the draft legislation when enacted will be hugely empowering for trans young people. Another significant part of his work as a Senator is participation, voter registration and the promotion of formal youth political participation.

In terms of his hopes for NYCI now and in the future, Fintan says he hopes and anticipates that the NYCI will be *“a major vehicle for progressive change, that it would stay true to the needs and the expectations and the aspirations of young people...and continue to have a great ambition for Ireland, where young people are allowed to channel their aspirations...through their organisations and through NYCI.”*



### Vanessa Mulhall

Young Voices Steering Committee Group  
NYCI Representative on the  
European Youth Forum, 2013 – present

Vanessa Mulhall first got involved with NYCI through her association with Foróige, in 2013. She was part of the Foróige alumni group for the entrepreneurship programme and heard that there was a consultation for the social inclusion part of ‘Structured Dialogue.’ She recalls the meeting was in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and she attended as part of an NYCI delegation. This was first time she had heard of NYCI and the experience was very positive. A few months later, Vanessa was invited by NYCI’s International Officer, Jean–Marie Cullen, to attend a European Youth Forum event on youth entrepreneurship. This trip to Paris marked the start of Vanessa’s engagement with NYCI in an international capacity. She says the opportunity to represent NYCI during the French Presidency was an “unreal kind of experience.” At the time she had just celebrated her eighteen birthday and it was her first time travelling without her parents. The penultimate moment of the trip was the opportunity to meet President Hollande in the Élysée Palace:

*“He was lovely and I’d say there would have been less than twenty people in the room...I brought one of my products with me so I had like, they are pots, and I had like the Irish flag and the French flag on it and I presented that to him...After that meeting then we went to have a protest like ten minutes away from the Élysée Palace about quality jobs, so it was from one extreme to the other” (Vanessa Mulhall, 2016).*

Vanessa also had the opportunity to travel to conferences on ‘Empowerment of Young People in Political Participation’ in Riga and in Luxembourg. She said these conferences were great in terms of sharing and exchange of information and it was at one of the conferences, that she got the inspiration about ‘Youth Check,’ which existed in Germany and Austria. ‘Youth Check’ is an audit of policy, which is effectively a system of ‘youth proofing’ public policy decisions to ensure they are ‘youth–friendly.’ When she returned home, she discussed the possibility of introducing Youth Check in Ireland. Meetings took place between NYCI and the DCYA and following presentations to the Better Outcomes Brighter Future Policy Consortium, it got the green light and now NYCI and DCYA are working together to introduce it in Ireland.

Vanessa is very involved in NYCI’s work on the ‘Structured Dialogue’ consultation process, which is an EU process which takes place in all EU member states countries with young people. She was part of the first group involved in the process. Her group thought the name ‘Structured Dialogue’ did not aptly

reflect the youth dimension of the process and so they renamed it 'Young Voices.' Following on from her work on 'Young Voices,' she was invited to participate on the National Implementation Project (NIP). The role of the NIP was to examine three work reports arising from the consultation process and work on the implementation. One of the areas she worked on was how to improve 'career guidance' for young people. She and the others on the group met with various different stakeholders including the Department of Education and Skills on the issue. She said the meeting with the department was very significant and there was a lot of constructive engagement and discussion.

Vanessa's involvement with NYCI happened while she was a student at Maynooth University, studying to become a youth and community worker. She attributes her involvement with NYCI to her gaining greater awareness of youth work and youth policy at a national and international level and in helping her advance in her academic studies.

*"I was fortunate enough to find out about the Council when I was 17 or 18 and I've been telling my youth groups about NYCI and the stuff they do. So I hope that they (NYCI) reach more young people and keep the strong connection that they have with the European Youth Forum because I think that has endless possibilities"* (Vanessa Mulhall, 2016).



### Eoin O'Liatháin

Irish United Nations Youth Delegate 2015 – 16  
Current position: Director of Shout Out

Following a competitive selection process in 2015, Eoin O'Liatháin was selected by NYCI as the first ever UN youth delegate to represent Ireland's youth at the United Nations in the period 2015 – 16. Although he had experience of interacting with *BelonG To* and other youth mental health organisations whilst he was a student at Trinity College, this was his first formal connection with NYCI. One day he saw a tweet advertising the UN Youth Delegate Programme. It sparked an interest, as it was an area of policy he was interested in. He said when he received the telephone conversation informing him that his application had been successful, he was 'ecstatic.' Eoin described the experience of being a UN youth delegate for Ireland as 'wonderful.' He acknowledged that it was daunting initially, in that it is the biggest political stage in the world and with that comes responsibility to think about what representation means and how to effectively represent Ireland's youth at this forum. Eoin and the other UN youth delegate selected that year, Orla Murphy, approached their brief by drawing strongly on the academic research available to them to support their advocacy work, but also relying on their own knowledge and experience of issues affecting their peers and young people of their generation. Issues such as youth emigration, youth unemployment and education were key policy areas they focused on during their tenure as Ireland's UN youth delegates.

One of the honours of being a UN youth delegate, is the opportunity to address the United Nations Assembly. Reflecting on this experience, Eoin admitted he was very nervous.

*"I mean even if you're not nervous about public speaking, you're very, very aware of the setting so it's almost solemn. I remember first going into the General Assembly and there are just these characters, like Angela Merkel or Putin or the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. All these people that are on TV but suddenly they're in a room with you, so that was sort of very unforgettable and lends onto this nervousness and excitement."*

Eoin and Orla did a lot of media work during their year as UN youth delegates to communicate to a youth audience about the global goals and the launch of 'Coalition 2030 - The Sustainable Development Goals.' Their interviews were broadcast on 2Tube (the after-school RTÉ2 TV show) and RTÉ News reaching a broad and diverse audience. One of his abiding memories from the year which he recalls with great fondness was meeting President Michael D. Higgins whilst in New York.

During Eoin's year as UN youth delegate, he became very familiar with the work of NYCI and says he learned so much from the experience. He made friends for life and developed skills that he will bring with him throughout his professional career. His hopes for the future of the organisation as it marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, are that as an organisation it will "*continue to develop*" and respond to needs for all young people, recognising that they are not a homogenous group.



### Seán Finan

35<sup>th</sup> National President of Macra na Feirme,  
2015 – 17  
NYCI Honorary Treasurer and Board member  
2013 – present  
Vice President of the Council of European  
Young Farmers, 2017 – 19

Seán Finan joined the board of NYCI during his term as Vice President of Macra na Feirme, in November 2013. He later became National President of Macra in 2015. Prior to joining the NYCI Board, he says he had a general awareness of the work of the Council, but was very interested in understanding more about the purpose and function of NYCI. From the outset, he was really impressed with the level of depth and understanding of the many youth issues NYCI worked on.

During Seán's involvement in NYCI, he believes that the Council's work on encouraging participation of young people at all levels within youth work has been very important. The work on the pre-budget submissions and lobbying on various youth issues, he also regards as critically important.

*“There are a number of very significant developments in society since I became a member of the board, which I am impressed that the National Youth Council has pioneered and brought to the fore. It has been an advocate on behalf of its member organisations on a lot of very important societal issues” (Seán Finan, 2017).*

In his role as honorary treasurer of NYCI, Seán says one of the biggest challenges for youth organisations and NYCI, has been and continues to be funding. Furthermore, there has been a huge growth in the number of regulatory requirements in the youth space, which present additional challenges for the youth sector. Another challenge facing youth organisations and young people is Brexit and its implications, particularly for young farmers. He is particularly concerned about the effect Brexit may have on the livelihoods of the family farm, as a result of potential trade deals and loss of trade relationships with the UK. There is also concern about the potential impact in terms of freedom of movement of young people and the impact on some of NYCI member organisations that operate on an all-island basis.

Reflecting on the work of the NYCI Board, Seán is pleased to see budgetary increases in youth working funding over the last two years. In terms of his hope for NYCI in the future, Seán hopes as an organisation, NYCI will continue to grow and develop and be a strong advocate for young people.



### Carmel O'Connor

NYCI Board Member  
 Manager of Talk About Youth Project  
 St Andrews Resource Centre

Carmel's engagement with NYCI spans over 25 years. She speaks very highly of NYCI and describes her relationship with the organisation as *"like having a second family."* She said from the very beginning of her engagement with NYCI, she fell for the organisation *'hook, line and sinker.'* Her experience and engagement with NYCI has always been *'hugely positive.'* Reflecting on the early days of her involvement in NYCI as a participant, some of the key issues for young people were youth unemployment and supporting young people to deal with all sorts of adversity. Empowering young people with the skills to be resilient was very important.

She first became acquainted with NYCI when she worked for Catholic Youth Care as a Development and Education Officer. Her role in CYC at the time was to manage and to support volunteers in youth projects, youth clubs and summer projects, in Dublin city. She acknowledges that her involvement with NYCI has been under many different guises. Initially she was a participant with the *'Outdoors NOW'* project. This project was the first of its kind to be introduced into the country and received European funding. The idea behind the *'Outdoors NOW'* project was to run an outdoor education programme, to promote that type of work amongst young girls and young women within the youth sector.

#### **The DEFY International Exchange Programme to Africa**

Carmel was also involved in the DEFY (Development Education for Youth) programme. She recalls one of the most memorable moments of her time with NYCI was an international exchange programme to Mozambique and South Africa. Carmel recalls this international exchange programme as *'amazing.'* She also describes the experience as quite *'traumatising'* and *'mind-blowing'* because Mozambique was still coming to terms with the aftermath of a civil war and many of the people they met were experiencing huge poverty. Speaking of this international exchange programme, Carmel says it was *'a phenomenal experience'* that she will never forget.

*"I suppose the whole thing was very emotive from start to finish. In South Africa, we were involved in a three day seminar...I also stayed with a family in Soweto and that was just an incredible experience. I continued to have links for many years with the head of the household who was a local school teacher. Nancy was her name. We were also brought to an orphanage – that was horrendous. Horrendous is the only way to describe it because you just felt powerless and you were watching these beautiful children, full of life, knowing the huge poverty and isolation they were facing"* (Carmel O'Connor, 2017).

Carmel was also involved as a participant in the first national youth health promotion course. She recalls how she and Louise Monaghan did the course and then delivered it to CYC staff in the various regions. As time progressed and the CYC representative on the NYCI Board, Eddie D’Arcy, stepped down. Carmel was approached and asked if she would be interested in representing CYC on NYCI’s Board. She is currently a NYCI Board member and has been actively involved in the NYCI’s *Youth Work Changes Lives* campaign. Speaking of the importance and significance of the campaign, she believes it could prove to be one of the most important campaigns that the organisation has ever run. Speaking of her involvement in the planning of the campaign, she says:

*“I loved being part of the planning, because it’s something that I have a huge passion for...There is still huge confusion, outside of our sector as to what exactly is youth work...so it’s vital that we get the message out there, the value of it, the outcomes for young people, how it helps communities and society as a whole and why it is so important to fund”* (Carmel O’Connor, 2017).

Carmel was also on an advisory group, which helped to formulate the new strategic plan for the Youth Arts programme for 2018 – 2020. She believes that there have been so many achievements in NYCI and one of the key aspects of the work is that NYCI *‘has its finger on the pulse’* and is relevant and responsive to the needs of the youth sector. She specifically mentions recent work like the youth emigration and return migration research, the *‘Vote at 16’* campaign and the Public (Health) Alcohol Bill policy and advocacy work, as hugely important for the organisation. She regards recognition for the sector, recognition for NYCI, recognition for youth work and the need for more resources, as of paramount importance for NYCI now and in the future.

*“I suppose in terms of the future, what I want to see for the future of NYCI, is a growing membership and extra resourcing, so you can have more staff and run more programmes, more political support, more recognition of the lobbying and policy work pursued by the organisation and a consolidated agenda across the sector”* (Carmel O’Connor, 2017).



## Ian Power

Director of SpunOut.ie

President of NYCI, 2015 – present

Ian Power first became involved with NYCI as a board member in January 2013. At the time, he was a newly appointed Director of SpunOut.ie, which had recently joined NYCI as a specialist organisation in 2009. Initially, Ian was impressed by NYCI's broad and diverse membership. It represented so many different youth organisations and this, in many ways, motivated SpunOut.ie to get involved in NYCI. SpunOut.ie recognised the benefits of membership of NYCI and the opportunities it offered to network with the wider youth sector. When Ian joined the board of NYCI in January 2013, it was at the height of the recession. He recalls a lot of pessimism in the air. The key concern for NYCI at the time, was trying to minimise the impact of the cuts on the youth sector, which were becoming really difficult for youth organisations to withstand. Reflecting on this time in NYCI, Ian thinks that it is testimony to NYCI's important role and contribution to youth work and youth policy, that it survived the recession and did not fragment. The youth sector, he says responded in a resilient manner to the challenges it faced and kept working with and for young people. In spite of a very difficult time, Power believes that what emerged from the crisis was a *"kind of the joined up thinking"* and *"willingness to be part of a dialogue with the state about how we resource the sector."* Effectively, this placed the sector in the proactive position, where it was focused on what it was doing for future generations of young people. It also placed a spotlight on how the sector best positioned itself to ensure it is resourced to cope with the projected growth in the number of young people who will be reliant on youth services over the next 5 – 10 years.

One of the highlights for Ian during his involvement with NYCI was the opportunity to take part in the Forum on Human Rights and Democracy at the United Nations in Geneva, in his capacity as NYCI President. He found this experience to be 'fascinating' as it focused on increasing the political participation of young people all over the world in democracy. The arguments made for and against by member states of the United Nations resonated with some of the work NYCI had been pioneering on the promotion of formal political participation of young people. Ian felt that the forum provided an opportunity for member states of UN to learn from each other.

*"There are lots of things that we shouldn't take for granted here in Ireland, including free and fair elections. For some countries, they were fighting for such basic rights as that. The Forum was helpful to put into perspective the issues facing Ireland, for us to be able to share learning with member states, to learn about best practice elsewhere and to understand the power of young people running as parliamentary candidates in forcing change"* (Ian Power, 2017).

Reflecting on the work of NYCI on the issue of youth political participation, Ian says it is important that Ireland adopts a more youth-friendly system, which is welcoming to young political candidates. Acknowledging the presence of a NYCI nominated Seanad member, Senator Fintan Warfield, Ian says he is delighted that during his term on the board of NYCI, that NYCI played a role in the supporting a young and ‘very capable’ candidate to be elected to the Seanad. Ian also highlights the success of the UN Youth Delegate Programme, introduced in 2015, as another example of how important youth representation and a youth voice on a world stage, such as the UN, is for Ireland.

Reflecting on the period Ian has been involved in NYCI to date, he is extremely complementary of the breadth and quality of the work done in NYCI, on behalf of its members:

*“When I think back over my involvement with the council over the last five years, I think of the things like the UN Youth Delegate Programme, the equality and inclusion work, the work around youth emigration and unemployment, the work on improving quality standards across the sector and advocating for the increase in resources, which have been successful, in the last three budgets. I think about the work that has been done in relation to Young Voices and the development and support the council gave to the development of the national youth strategy. There’s been so much activity” (Ian Power, 2017).*

2017 is very exciting time for NYCI. Not only does it mark the organisation’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, NYCI is also in the process of formulating its new strategic plan. Of priority to Ian, as the current NYCI President, is the need to ensure that NYCI continues to represent its members and supports them to do the work they do with young people. He also hopes NYCI continues to dedicate the same level of commitment to ensuring the best interests of children and young people are met throughout Ireland.



NYCI staff photographed in the Round Room of the Mansion House on 27 September 2017 at the end of the National Youth Work Showcase.

## NYCI Presidents 1967 – 2017

The Revd. Norman Styles  
Paddy Lyons  
Michael Webb  
Dr. Gordon Campbell  
Brian Beggan  
Rory O'Ferrall  
Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall  
Siobhan Corry  
Alan Graham  
Fr. Martin Clarke  
Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl  
Simon Nugent  
Jillian Van Turnout  
James Doorley  
Kevin Hickey  
James O'Leary  
Eddie D'Arcy  
Orlaith McBride  
Ian Power

## NYCI Secretary Generals/Directors 1967 – 2017

Michael Adams  
Denis Murphy  
Geoffrey Corry  
Paul Beggan  
David Meredith  
Tom Curran  
Peter Byrne  
Mary Cunningham

## Glossary of Abbreviations

<b>ADM</b>	–	Area Development Management
<b>AEYSC</b>	–	All European Youth and Student Cooperation
<b>AGM</b>	–	Annual General Meeting
<b>AKA</b>	–	Also Known As
<b>AnCO</b>	–	A training council – An Chomhairle Oiliúna – commonly referred to as AnCO, which later became FAS
<b>BOBF</b>	–	Better Outcomes, Brighter Future
<b>Brexit</b>	–	‘Brexit’ is an abbreviation for “British exit,” referring to the UK’s decision in a June 23, 2016 referendum to leave the European Union
<b>BYC</b>	–	British Youth Council
<b>CAP</b>	–	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>CBSI</b>	–	Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland
<b>CDYSB</b>	–	City of Dublin Youth Service Board
<b>CEJA</b>	–	European Council of Young Farmers
<b>CENYC</b>	–	Council of European National Youth Committees.
<b>CEO</b>	–	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CES</b>	–	Centre for Effective Services
<b>CIYC</b>	–	Church of Ireland Youth Council
<b>COE</b>	–	Council of Europe
<b>CV</b>	–	Community and Voluntary
<b>CYC</b>	–	Catholic Youth Council, later known as Catholic Youth Care and now known as Crosscare
<b>CYM</b>	–	Connolly Youth Movement

<b>DAYP</b>	–	Drink Awareness Youth Programme
<b>DEFY</b>	–	Development Education for Youth
<b>DevEd</b>	–	Development Education
<b>DCYA</b>	–	Department of Child and Youth Affairs
<b>DUF</b>	–	Danish Youth Council
<b>ECB</b>	–	European Co-ordination Bureau of International Youth Organisations
<b>ECC</b>	–	European Economic Community
<b>EuropAdo</b>	–	Youth of Europe
<b>EU</b>	–	European Union
<b>FAS</b>	–	An Foras Áiseanna Saothair, referred to in English as the Training and Employment Authority and commonly known as FÁS was a state agency in Ireland with responsibility for assisting those seeking employment. It was established in January 1988 under the Labour Services Act, 1987. It was abolished in July 2011 and replaced by a new agency, named SOLAS. The training function of FÁS was absorbed into the restructured local Vocational Education Committees which were retitled Education and Training Boards in July 2013
<b>FAO</b>	–	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
<b>GAA</b>	–	Gaelic Athletic Association
<b>GCN</b>	–	Gay Community News
<b>HR</b>	–	Human Resources
<b>IC</b>	–	International Committee in NYCI, now International Advisory Committee – IAC
<b>ICT</b>	–	Information Communication Technology
<b>ICTU</b>	–	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
<b>IGG</b>	–	Irish Girl Guides
<b>ILO</b>	–	International Labour Organisation
<b>INTO</b>	–	Irish National Teachers' Organisation

<b>LGBTI</b>	–	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex
<b>LGBT</b>	–	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans
<b>LGYFI</b>	–	Lesbian and Gay Youth Federation of Ireland
<b>LNU</b>	–	Norwegian Youth Council
<b>LY</b>	–	Labour Youth
<b>MBA</b>	–	Masters in Business Administration
<b>NATC</b>	–	National Association of Traveller Centres
<b>NAYD</b>	–	National Association of Youth Drama
<b>NESC</b>	–	National Economic and Social Council
<b>NESF</b>	–	National Economic and Social Forum
<b>NIP</b>	–	National Implementation Project
<b>NYCI</b>	–	National Youth Council of Ireland
<b>NYF</b>	–	National Youth Federation, also referred to as ‘The Fed,’ now known as Youth Work Ireland
<b>NYWAC</b>	–	National Youth Work Advisory Council
<b>NYWDP</b>	–	National Youth Work Development Plan
<b>NSETS</b>	–	North/South Education and Training Standard
<b>OFF</b>	–	Ógras Fianna Fáil
<b>OSF</b>	–	Ógra Sinn Féin
<b>RTÉ</b>	–	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
<b>SAI</b>	–	Scout Association of Ireland
<b>SCYO</b>	–	Standing Conferences of Youth Organisations for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

<b>SOLAS</b>	–	a state agency responsible for all public funding of further education and training
<b>SPUC</b>	–	Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
<b>SRC</b>	–	Students' Representative Council, which later became known as the Students' Union.
<b>TAPS</b>	–	Technology Awareness Programme for Schools
<b>TCD</b>	–	Trinity College Dublin
<b>TD</b>	–	Teachta Dála – a member of Dáil Éireann – of the lower house of the Oireachtas.
<b>UCD</b>	–	University College Dublin
<b>UK</b>	–	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	–	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	–	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is a specialized agency of the United Nations based in Paris.
<b>USI</b>	–	Union of Students in Ireland
<b>VEC</b>	–	Vocational Education Committee
<b>WAY</b>	–	World Assembly of Youth – the international coordinating body of national youth councils and national youth organisations
<b>YCW</b>	–	Young Christian Workers
<b>YEA</b>	–	Youth Employment Agency
<b>YFEC</b>	–	the Youth Forum of the European Communities
<b>YFG</b>	–	Young Fine Gael
<b>YFJ</b>	–	Youth Forum Jeunesse also referred to as the European Youth Forum
<b>YSG</b>	–	Youth Service Grant
<b>YTI</b>	–	Youth Theatre Ireland
<b>YWI</b>	–	Youth Work Ireland

## References

Corry, G. (1990) *Milestones in Youth Services Policy Making in Ireland 1965 – 90. A short history written for NYCI in 1990* (unpublished).

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. The national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) *National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education (1977) *A Policy for Youth and Sports*, Dublin: Government Publication (Bruton Report).

Department of Education (1980) *White Paper on Educational Development*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education (1980) *Development of Youth Work Services in Ireland*, Dublin: Stationery Office (O’Sullivan Report).

Department of Education and Science (2003) *National Youth Work Development Plan, 2003–2007*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2009) *Quality Standards Framework (QSF) Initiative for Youth Work*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Department of Health and Children (2000) *The National Children’s Strategy, Our Children – Their Lives*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Labour (1983) *Shaping the Future: Towards a National Youth Policy – A Discussion Paper*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Labour (1985) *In Partnership with Youth: The National Youth Policy*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of the Taoiseach (2000) *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Social Partnership Agreement 2000 – 2003*, Dublin Stationery Office.

Department of the Taoiseach (2003) *Sustaining Progress. Social Partnership Agreement 2003 – 2005*, Dublin Stationery Office.

Department of the Taoiseach (2006) *Towards 2016. Social Partnership Agreement 2006 – 2015*, Dublin Stationery Office.

Doorley, J. (2015) *JobBridge: Stepping Stone or Dead End?*, Dublin: NYCI.

- European Commission (2001) European Commission White Paper: *A New Impetus for European Youth*, COM (2001) 681, Brussels: European Commission.
- Gay Community News (1992/1993) *A Taste of Success*, GCN Dec/Jan 1992/1993.
- Government of Ireland (2001) *The Youth Work Act*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Indecon (2012) *Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work*, Dublin: NYCI.
- Irish Independent (1992) 'Gays join Youth Council,' *Irish Independent*, 23 November 1992.
- Irish Press (1966) 'National youth movement plan,' *Irish Press*, 12 May 1966.
- Irish Press (1991) 'Dispute over abortion hits Youth Council,' *Irish Press*, 18 November 1991.
- Kiely, E., Leahy-Warren, P., and Weathers, E. (2014) *Health Inequalities and Young People in Ireland: A Review of Literature*, Dublin: NYCI.
- Mac Gréil, M. (2014) *The Ongoing Present*, Dublin: Messenger Publications.
- McAleer, M-C. and Doorley, J. (2011) *Creating a Future for Young Jobseekers*. NYCI Position on Youth Unemployment, Dublin: NYCI.
- McAleer, M-C. (2013) *Time to Go? A Qualitative Research Study Exploring the Experience & Impact of Emigration on Ireland's Youth*, Dublin: NYCI.
- McAleer, M-C. (2015) *Home is Where the Heart is*, Dublin: NYCI.
- McAleer, M-C. (2016) *Screenagers International Research Project. Using ICT, Digital and Social Media in Youth Work. National Report of the Republic of Ireland*, Dublin: NYCI.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (1973) *Irish Youth Directory*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (1973) *The Development of Youth Services*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (1975) *Irish Youth Directory*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (1978) *A Policy on Youth Work Services*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (1980) *Challenge for Young Ireland*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.

National Youth Council of Ireland (1982) *Our Future Can Work: NYCI Employment Policy*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.

National Youth Council of Ireland (1984) *Getting There: NYCI Submission to National Youth Policy Committee*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.

National Youth Council of Ireland (1986) *National Youth Policy Response. Junior Partners?*, Dublin: NYCI.

National Youth Council of Ireland (1995) *All Different – All Equal*, Dublin: NYCI.

National Youth Council of Ireland (1998) *Get your facts right*, Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland.

National Youth Policy Committee (1984) *Final Report*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

O'Connor, H. (2011) *Lending A Hand: A Report on Young People and Volunteering in Ireland*, Dublin: NYCI.

O'Connor, H. (2011) *Youth Unemployment in Ireland - The Forgotten Generation. The Experience of Young Jobseekers and their Interaction and Engagement with Key State Support Services*, Dublin: NYCI.

O'Ferrall, F. (1983) 'Irish Youth Work – Challenges and Issues,' *Social Studies*, Vol 7, No 2 (Spring 1983).

O'Ferrall, F. (2014) *The National Youth Policy – 30 years after the Costello Report. A Personal Reflection*, Paper given at the Youth Policy Conference, NUI Maynooth, 25–26 June 2014.

USI (1988) 'Report of National Youth Council Assembly,' *USI News*, January Edition, 1988.

Walsh, A. (2017) *Make Minority A Priority*, Dublin: NYCI.

Walsh, J. (1985) 'Youth book attacked for 'censoring' sex sections,' *Irish Independent*, 3 April, 1985.

