



Local Champions: Your Voice, Your Power

An advocacy masterclass for NYCI Local Champions

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Provide consultancy services to Boards and management teams on governance, board evaluation, strategy and recruitment.

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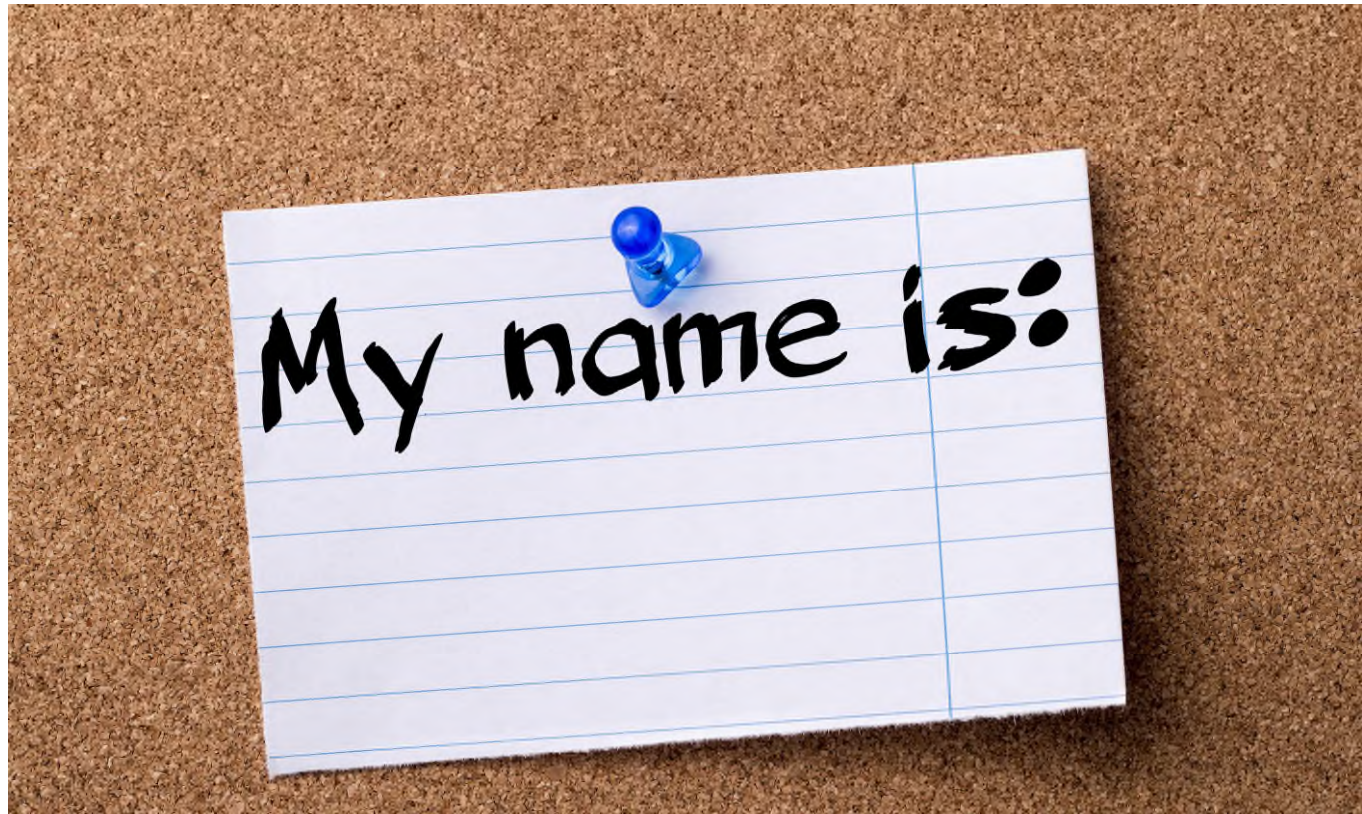
Over the past twenty years, I have served on over fifteen Boards across the private, not-for-profit sectors and Charity sector both in Ireland and at EU level. In four of these, I served as Chair and as Vice-Chair on a further three.

I am a former Senator, and have worked with legislatures in Scotland, Wales, Canada and US.

Today, I am presenting on behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland

*Slides will be sent to you after the Training

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**INTRODUCE YOURSELF &
TELL US WHAT IS YOUR SUPERPOWER?**

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Agenda

What We'll Cover Today

PART 1: The Foundation

- What is youth work — and why does it matter?
- The landscape: who decides and how
- NYCI's current campaigns and priorities

PART 2: Making Contact and Making It Count

- How to reach TDs, Senators and Councillors
- Getting a reply — and what to do next
- Tips, tricks and getting to the top of the queue

PART 3: Your Vote, Your Power

- Why voter registration matters more than you think
- Using your vote strategically

PART 4: Workshop — Breakout Rooms

- Map your issue, plan your first move
- Share back: what does a win look like?

Q&A and Wrap-up

You are the Local Champions

This session is for you — NYCI's Local Champions across Ireland

- You are aged 18–25, from youth organisations across the country
- Some of you have been advocating for years. Some of you are starting out recently or today may be your first day.
- All of you have something in common: you know what young people need — and you're willing to say it out loud
- NYCI has brought you together because your voice, your experience and your location matter
- Today is about giving you the practical tools to turn that into real influence

This is a peer session as much as a training. The most experienced among you will contribute — because the best advocacy lessons come from people who've actually done it.



1. The Foundation

*What you need to know
before you take your first step*

Youth Work

What is youth work — and why does it matter?



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What is youth work and why does it matter?

Before you can advocate for youth work, you need to be able to explain it in 30 seconds.

Youth work is

- Voluntary, educational work with young people outside of formal schooling
- Delivered in clubs, centres, projects and communities across Ireland
- Proven to build confidence, resilience, civic participation and life skills
- Often the only consistent, trusted adult relationship some young people have outside the family

The spaces and places argument

- Young people need somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to
- Youth clubs, youth cafés, youth projects — these are not optional extras
- When they close or lose funding, there is nothing to replace them
- You see this in your community. That's your evidence.

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Why Your Voice Matters

Youth work is under-represented in political debate

Oireachtas mentions (2002 – 21 January 2026)

Phrase	Mentions
"Youth Work"	1597
"Youth Organisation"	201
"Sport"	57,953



Sport is mentioned 36 times for every 1 mention of Youth Work

If we don't raise youth work, who will?

Every Parliamentary Question, every Commencement Matter, every Committee appearance, every briefing to a TD — it all adds up.

NYCI's current campaigns and priorities

You're not advocating alone. You're part of a movement.

NYCI is currently campaigning on

- **Youth work funding** — calling for a significant increase to properly resource the sector
- **Vote at 16** — extending voting rights to 16 and 17-year-olds
- **Youth employment and social protection**
- **Youth homelessness**
- **Active citizenship and youth participation**

As a Local Champion, you are NYCI's presence on the ground

- Your local knowledge strengthens NYCI's national case
- Your relationships with local politicians amplify NYCI's asks
- When you speak, you speak as part of a network — and that carries weight

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Who makes decisions?

TDs

Teachta Dála — elected to the Dáil. Your local TD represents your constituency. They need constituent voices to justify action.

Senators

Elected/nominated to the Seanad. Can raise issues, ask questions, propose amendments. Often more accessible than Ministers.

Councillors

Local government — county and city councils. Most local issues (planning, services, funding) flow through them. Your most direct line.

Ministers

Set policy direction for their department. Hard to access directly — but briefings to their officials and through your champions work.

Civil Servants

The people drafting the actual legislation and policy. They brief Ministers on what's 'workable'. Often more accessible than you'd think — and they stay in post when Ministers change.

And also...

Committee chairs and members, party spokespersons, Mayor/Cathaoirleach, public bodies, regulators, and the media (which shapes what politicians think matters).

The Oireachtas



The Constitution

Article 15.1 The national parliament known as the Oireachtas

Article 15.1.2 Oireachtas consists of President and two Houses

Article 15.2 Sole and exclusive power of making laws vested in the Oireachtas (This means only the Oireachtas can make laws - not the Government, courts, or local authorities)

Article 15.10 Each House shall make its own rules and standing orders

Experience of Local Champions



What was your first contact with a politician like?



What worked that you didn't expect?



What would you tell your younger self about advocacy?

2. Making Contact — and Making It Count

*How to reach them, how to get a reply,
and what to do once you have one*

How to actually contact a TD or Senator



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas

It's simpler than you think

- Email: firstname.lastname@oireachtas.ie
- Find your TD or Senator: oireachtas.ie/en/members — search by constituency
- Track what they've said: kildarestreet.com — search their name, read their speeches and votes
- Is there a Minister in your constituency? Note their portfolio — it's your entry point.

Before you write, do your homework

- Have they spoken on youth issues before? Reference it: *"I noticed you raised youth homelessness at Committee in October — I wanted to share something relevant from our work in [area]."*
- What is their party's position on NYCI's priorities?
- What is happening locally that connects to your issue?

Subject lines that get opened

- ✓ "[Your organisation] — 2 minutes on youth work in [constituency]"
- ✓ "Invitation — visit [youth club name], [town], [month]"
- ✓ "[Constituency] young people — something I think you should know"
- ✗ "Youth work funding — please help"
- ✗ "FW: NYCI campaign — template letter"



Getting a reply (1 of 2)



Most people give up after one email. Don't. But also — don't chase blindly.

What works:

- Three short paragraphs maximum — who you are, what you want them to know, one clear ask
- Make it local and specific — their constituency, their patch, their voters
- End with an easy next step: *"Would you be free for a 10-minute call in the next few weeks?"*
- Follow up once, two weeks later, with new information — not just a nudge

Getting a reply (2 of 2)



Know the gatekeeper

- Most TDs and Senators have a Parliamentary Assistant (PA) and/or Secretarial Assistant
- They manage the inbox. They decide what gets flagged.
- Be warm, be reliable, remember their name. A good relationship with the PA is often worth more than a direct email to the TD.

Getting to the top of the queue

- Timing matters — avoid budget week, election campaigns, and major Dáil business
- Post-recess (September and January) are good moments — they're back and looking for issues
- Connect your ask to something currently happening: a Bill, a report, a news story
- Ministers in your constituency have more power to act locally — and more reason to be seen to deliver

DÁIL ÉIREANN SITTINGS 2025/2026

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Sep	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
Oct			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Nov	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30							
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May					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Jun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
Jul			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		

Dáil Sittings =



Public Holidays =



Weekends =



Dáil is in recess =



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Once you have contact — what next?

The reply is not the destination. It's the beginning.

Stage	What to do
After first contact	Say thank you. Deliver anything you promised. Immediately.
Two weeks later	Brief update — new information, not just a chase
Ongoing	Short updates. Relevant news. Keep them informed.
When something happens locally	Drop a note. "Thought you'd want to know..."
When they act	Thank them. Publicly where appropriate. Tag them.
Deepen the relationship	Invite them to visit. Offer a briefing. Introduce them to young people.

Enough about me,
let's talk about you.

What do YOU
think about me?

What if they engage but on their own issue?

*A TD gets in touch but wants your opinion on something they're working on.
How do you make it work both ways?*

Use it as a bridge, not a diversion:

- Give them what they want first — be genuinely helpful, share your experience and evidence
- Then pivot: *"This actually connects directly to something we've been seeing in our work — can I share it with you?"*
- Or: *"We'd be very happy to help with that. While we have you — there's something I'd value your view on."*

Useful bridging phrases:

- *"That connects directly to what we see every day — let me give you an example..."*
- *"The two issues are more linked than they might seem — here's how..."*
- *"We're very happy to support you on this. In return, could we share something we've been trying to raise?"*

Tips and Tricks (1 of 2)



A few things that experienced advocates know that aren't in any guidebook.

- **Personalise everything** Template letters are spotted immediately. A short, personal, specific email from a constituent always beats a campaign template. NYCI can give you the key messages — your job is to make them local.
- **The Minister in your constituency** If a Government Minister represents your area, their portfolio is your direct line to power. Find out what they're responsible for. Connect your issue to it. Their PA is your first call.
- **Use kildarestreet.com like a research tool** Search your TD's name. See what they've raised, what they care about, where youth issues have come up. Reference it in your email. They notice.

Tips and Tricks (2 of 2)



- **Create the moment** Politicians respond to visibility. A well-organised visit, a local newspaper story, a social media post tagging them — these cut through. Always have a clear ask ready when the moment comes.
- **Bring the evidence and the story** Data tells them the scale. A real story from a real young person tells them why it matters. You need both. The story is what they remember.
- **Follow the legislative calendar** Pre-legislative scrutiny, committee hearings, pre-budget submissions — these are the windows where your voice has the most impact. NYCI will flag these — watch for them.

Creating effective communications

7 Cs of Communication

- ✓ Clarity
- ✓ Coherence
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Correctness
- ✓ Conciseness
- ✓ Concreteness
- ✓ Courtesy

Example:

Email subject lines that work: '[Your Organisation] - Brief update on [specific issue]' or '[Constituency name] impact - [issue] – 2 min read'



Courtesy

- Acknowledge
- Thank you
- Follow up appropriately –
 - Immediately if you promised information/action
 - 2 weeks after initial contact, send brief reminder with new information or development
- Deliver on any actions you promised



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Managing Criticism and Knockbacks



What you show

- "Thank you for your response — I appreciate you taking the time."
- "I understand you have competing priorities right now."
- "We'd welcome the chance to share more evidence when the time is right."
- "We'll keep you informed of developments."
- Calm. Professional. Undeterred

What you're may actual feel — and that's understandable

- Frustrated that they didn't engage seriously
- Annoyed that a form reply took three weeks
- Deflated after you spent hours preparing a briefing nobody read
- Angry that young people's issues keep slipping down the list
- Wondering if any of this is worth it

Questions?
Comments?

3. Your Vote, Your Power

Why voter registration matters more than you think

TDs (and Senators)

checktheregister.ie

What TDs and their teams actually do

- They check who is on the register in their constituency
- Canvassers report back on which areas engage and which don't
- Organised groups of registered young voters in a specific area get taken seriously
- Unregistered people, however passionate, are invisible to them at election time

What this means for you:

- If you are not registered, you are not on their radar in the same way
- If you *are* registered, organised, vocal and turning up — you are exactly who they want to talk to
- A group of 20 registered young voters from one town, carrying the same message, is genuinely powerful

***Voting is the most basic act of advocacy
and one of the most effective***

- **Research candidates' positions** on youth issues before you vote
- **Tell candidates** — in person, at the door, by email — that you are voting based on their stance on specific issues. They remember this.
- **After an election**, write to your newly elected TD. Welcome them. Remind them what you care about. It sets the tone early.
- **Attend constituency clinics** — they are often poorly attended. Three organised young people showing up together is noticed.
- Use **social media** during campaigns to ask candidates direct questions publicly — they respond when there's an audience

4. Workshop — Breakout Rooms

From knowing to doing



Breakout Rooms – Brief

One person takes notes to share back – Choose one scenario



The community centre — Your local youth project met every Friday night in the community centre. The centre is now closing for three years for renovations. The young people have nowhere to go.



The staffing crisis — Your local youth project used to have four youth workers. Now there are two full-time and one part-time. They've had to start a waiting list. Young people are being turned away.



The missing service — The town next to yours has no youth work service at all — despite having a large secondary school and several new housing estates being built.

Pick one. Then work through these questions as a group:

- What is the problem? One sentence.
- What is your ask? Who is your first target? Name them.
- Draft your subject line. One sentence. Write it down.
- What does a win look like? Specific and measurable.

Reporting back

For the group reporting back:

- Which scenario did you choose — and why did it resonate?
- What is your ask in one sentence?
- Who is your first target and why them?
- Read out your subject line

For everyone listening:

- Is the ask specific enough to act on?
- Is this the right target?
- Would you open that email?



What does a win look like?

Wins come in different sizes

- A **Parliamentary Question** asked — your issue is now on the public record
- A **Commencement Matter** (Seanad) / **Topical Issue** (Dail) raised
 - a Minister has to respond
- A **Committee appearance** — you gave evidence, it's in the official record
- A **site visit** — a TD has seen your work with their own eyes
- A **budget line** — specific funding secured
- A **policy commitment** — on the record, in writing
- A **legislative change** — the longest game, and the most lasting

None of these happen from one email. They happen from consistent, evidence-based, relationship-driven advocacy — over time.

Five things to do this week



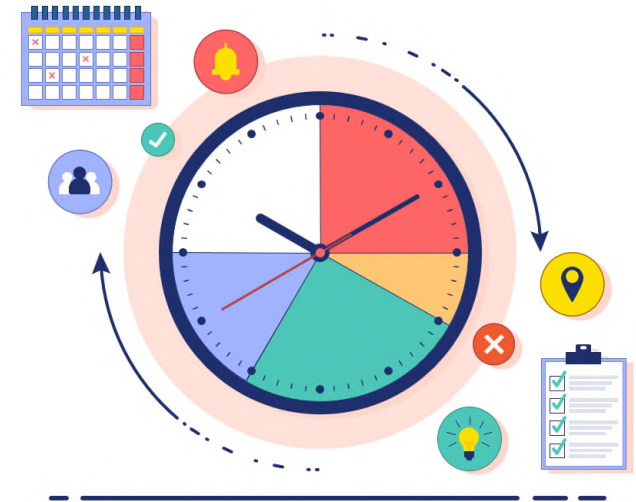
Not someday. This week.

- **Check you're on the electoral register** — checktheregister.ie — right now, today
- **Identify your local TDs and Senators** — firstname.lastname@oireachtas.ie — Make a list read to us
- **Look them up on kildarestreet.com** — what have they said about youth issues? Do you have any issues of connection
- **Draft your subject line** — you started it in the breakout room. Finish it.
- **Draft the email** — one specific, local, personal email ready to send at appropriate time.

NYCI will follow up with resources and support. You are not doing this alone

Key takeaways

1. **You can do this** your frontline experience is expertise that decision-makers don't have
2. **Get in early** — engage before decisions are made, not after
3. **Stay compliant, stay confident** — you can absolutely do this within the rules
4. **Be persistent and be personal** — one targeted, local, specific contact beats ten template emails
5. **You are NYCI's presence locally** — when you speak, you speak as part of something bigger



Resources

Understanding the Oireachtas

- Oireachtas website: www.oireachtas.ie
- Dáil schedule: www.oireachtas.ie/en/dail-schedule
- Seanad schedule: www.oireachtas.ie/en/seanad-schedule
- Find your TD/Senator: www.oireachtas.ie/en/members
- KildareStreet.com (track voting & speeches): www.kildarestreet.com

Voting Register

Check the Register: checktheregister.ie/en-IE/

Electoral Commission: www.electoralcommission.ie/

Legislation & Policy

- Government Legislation Programme: www.gov.ie (search "legislation programme")
- Programme for Government: www.gov.ie/en/publication/078a1-programme-for-government-2025-securing-irelands-future

Compliance

- Lobbying Register: www.lobbying.ie
- Charities Regulator: www.charitiesregulator.ie (includes Guidance on Charities & Political Causes)

NYCI

- NYCI Advocacy: www.youth.ie/advocacy-and-representation
- NYCI campaigns: www.youth.ie/get-involved/campaigns

Sector Support

- Carmichael: www.carmichaelireland.ie
- The Wheel: www.wheel.ie

**The real risk? Staying silent while decisions
are made about you without you.**



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WHEN YOU ARE READY TO GO PUBLIC

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Before you speak — know your message

The most effective advocates prepare before they open their mouths

- What is your **one key message**? (Just one — everything else supports it)
- Who is your audience? What do they already think? What do they need to hear?
- What challenging questions might come up — and how will you handle them?
- Have your key facts ready. Know your numbers.
- Talk your points out loud before you go in — it sounds different in your head

Do's and Don'ts — in the room or on air

- ✓ Be brief and to the point — but not so brief you say nothing
- ✓ Use plain language. No jargon. Assume nothing.
- ✓ Remember: you understand this issue better than the person interviewing you
- ✓ Stay focused on your audience, not your nerves
- ✓ Correct yourself if you make a mistake — it's fine
- ✗ Don't get drawn into "what if?" questions or speculation
- ✗ Don't let someone put words in your mouth — correct them politely
- ✗ Don't wait for the perfect question. It may never come. Find a way to make your point anyway
- ✗ Don't attack the person — challenge the argument

Useful bridging phrases — buy yourself time to think

These move you from a difficult question back to your key message

"Yes, but what's really important here is..."

"That may be your view, but what we hear consistently is..."

"Let me give you a concrete example of what this actually looks like..."

"I can't speak to that specifically, but what I can tell you is..."

"The real issue here is..."

"You've raised a lot there — let me start with..."

"And that's exactly why we're here today..."

"So the ask is simple — and it's this..."

After — reflect and build

- Well done. Seriously. Most people never do this at all.
- What worked? What would you do differently?
- What challenging questions came up — and how did you handle them?
- Share the experience with your team. Everyone learns from it.
- Start small (a local radio interview, a council deputation) and build from there. Experience is the only thing that makes this easier.



Scenario: You step into an elevator at RTÉ and find yourself standing next to Patrick Kielty. You have just 30 seconds to spark his interest in your role as a Local Champion

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Take 5 minutes to prepare your pitch

- Remember - he's looking for engaging stories for the Late Late Show
- Think about what would interest his audience
- Consider an impactful opening line
- Include a memorable fact or story
- End with a clear purpose