



National Volunteering Strategy

Submission to; Department of Rural and Community Development

Submission by; National Forum of Family Resource Centres

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FRC Programme

The Family Resource Centre (FRC) programme is Ireland's largest National Family and Community-based support programme, core funded by Tusla – The Child and Family Agency. Through the provision of universal and targeted services we work to tackle disadvantage, marginalisation and social exclusion and to improve the functioning of the family unit so that families & communities can achieve the 5 National Outcomes, under the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures policy framework. The programme involves local communities in addressing the issues they face, and creates meaningful partnerships for social change between voluntary and statutory agencies.

FRCs are located within a community-based model of family support and this model is at the heart of the Programme. The centrality of community development in informing the approaches, values and methods underpinning the work of FRCs is a defining feature of their contribution. The community development ethos is embedded into FRCs makeup; each FRC is a community managed, autonomous and not-for-profit independent organisation run by a Voluntary Management Committee comprised of members of the community.

We work inclusively and cooperatively with individuals, families and communities, as well as both statutory and non-statutory agencies. FRCs operate under a combined model of community development and family support, supporting families and communities through a

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prevention and early intervention approach. Through this model we strive to effectively bring about social inclusion, empowerment and to facilitate and support participation, community leadership and self-determination. FRCs are community led and locally informed; the projects, programmes and services provided are determined by the needs of the local communities which they operate in.

Volunteer Strategy

Family Resource Centre's as volunteer led organisations facilitate and contribute to community development, active citizenship, increased social networks, social capital and are a central component of the community and voluntary sector and volunteering nationally.

The very essence of Family Resource Centres is facilitating the participation and involvement of communities as part of our community development ethos. The International Association for Community development (IACD) states community development to be a process of *'harnessing the innate abilities and potential that exist in all human communities to become active agents in their own development and to organise themselves to address key issues and concerns they share.'* This activity is led by community activists who are volunteers, thus making volunteering and community development inextricably linked and the foundations of the FRC Programme. The National Forum of Family Resource Centre's is proud to have signed up to the 'Towards Standards for Community Work' document and this community work led by the principles and practices of community development puts our programme at the heart and soul of volunteering in Ireland.

Our projects are unique in that they are guided by volunteers in the community from the point of inception, through to management and our overall planning and development. Needs, responses and actions are identified by the community with professionalised support

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from project staff. Family Resource Centre's seek to bring about social change through empowerment and participation, our volunteers are activists in their communities with a strong sense of civic duty. The coming together of people and communities to work together, to support each other, and ultimately to achieve positive outcomes for the whole community, is the sentiment of meitheal that once guided the life and breath of Irish society.

The FRC Programme is one of the largest volunteer led programmes in the country. The team composition for Family Resource Centre's nationally is 62.2% volunteer workers, with the remaining 37.8% made up of staff, comprised of both core and other.

With a total of 1,309 full-time equivalent volunteer workers, our volunteers gave 45,815 hours of their time in 2018. This time translates into a saving for the state of €448,987 at the current minimum wage rate of €9.80. This does not take into account the actual outputs and outcomes achieved by this work or the impact these volunteering hours had in communities around the country.

As a volunteer led programme we see the importance of volunteers and volunteering each and every day. They are crucial to the sustainability and development of the programme and the communities they volunteer in.

As part of a National Volunteering Strategy, we feel this impact needs to be recognised in a meaningful way. FRCs as small, non-profit organisations seek to support our volunteers as best we can, but we are already stretched and sometimes they do not get the support they deserve. As part of a national strategy, adequate funding and resources needs to be allocated to support structures on the ground, ensuring that non-profit, voluntary organisations in the community and voluntary sector have the capacity to ensure proper volunteer management, in the best interest of volunteers and to ensure the strategic and sustainable development of local projects and organisations.

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Adequate funding for training is also required, to ensure that volunteers have the capacity and skills to do the tasks expected of them, opportunities for upskilling should be easily available. Proper skills and training ensure that volunteers are knowledgeable in their roles and are protected in having these necessary skills and knowledge.

We also recommend the roll out of a national volunteer charter that all organisations with volunteers should be expected to sign up to, fully recognising volunteers, their contribution, their role, and to ensure that there is a clear understanding and boundaries as to who and what volunteers and volunteering is and should be. Volunteers already go above and beyond, they need security, trust, encouragement and support in their roles; they should not be put in positions where they are carrying out roles or tasks that should be that of staff members. Volunteers are not protected by contracts, in the same way employees are, and there needs to be some mechanism under which they are protected, at no risk of exploitation and that their roles are recognised and validated. The charter should also seek to ensure good relations and clarity on roles between staff and volunteers.

Volunteers need tangible, workable, real supports on the ground, a volunteer focused strategy must carve out ways to work with our country's volunteers to celebrate, highlight and encourage more volunteering.

We need to recognise volunteering as a crucial element of community development and further encourage community activity as a means of strengthening civil society and bringing about collective change. Mechanisms should be put in place through solid local, regional and national initiatives to get hard to reach individuals in the community who would benefit most from volunteering and becoming active members of their community. FRCs, other local projects and groups need support in order to reach out to these individuals.

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The value and worth of volunteers and volunteering is often spoken about, but that value must receive real recognition in the shape of investment. Local groups and organisations must have the resources to enhance the volunteering experience, avoid volunteer fatigue, and ensure that they can meet their obligations with respect to good practice, volunteer management, support and retention.

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