

## **Community Development**

The Community theme arises from the recommendations of the Social Inclusion Working Group and the Cultural Working Group. A 1995 survey by the Volunteer Resource Centre estimated that the voluntary sector contribution (in-kind) was worth £470,700,000 in Ireland, equivalent to the contribution of 96,454 full time workers.

According to research carried out for the National Spatial Strategy, good community interaction is considered to be an important factor in the quality of life of Irish people. Community interaction is largely facilitated by the voluntary sector.

A major issue for South Tipperary and for the country generally is the profile of volunteers at a time of rapid life/work style changes and an acknowledged decline in social capital. A worrying feature of the consultations with volunteers is the age profile – more than 90% of volunteers consulted have at least 20 years voluntary experience.

During the consultations, the view of volunteers was that younger people will volunteer but for a specific job and for a limited period of time. There is a perception that these volunteers want more than just the good will of the community. Volunteers want ‘real support’ – structured, integrated transparent and agreed resourcing. Volunteers also want more recognition especially of the specific skills they bring to/develop in their voluntary roles and to have the opportunity to get formal qualifications through their voluntary work. Tipperary Institute will have much to offer in this regard and additional qualifications should help make volunteers more competitive from a career development perspective.

The economic, social and cultural development of the county cannot be met without continuing substantive voluntary effort. There is an imperative to ensure a continuous flow of volunteers and that volunteer time is productively spent. There is no doubt that this delivery is enhanced by a co-ordinated back up (such as that delivered with resources via the FAS Community Employment schemes).

The decline in volunteerism has been disguised to some extent by the delivery of community economic, social and cultural services with the support of FAS CE schemes (such as sports development officers; heritage centre officers; enterprise centre managers; etc). The FAS resources have been of major benefit to the delivery of community services in the county. There are drawbacks and voluntary groups are very concerned about sustainability issues. Volunteers are requesting ‘real support’ in that public resources are provided directly to support service delivery rather than being dependant on the good will of public bodies who have their own objectives to achieve (for example in the case of FAS – the upskilling of the participant so that he/she is competitive for available paid employment is the prime objective).

The volunteer enhancement aspect of the County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development also needs to focus on upskilling and qualifications so that structured pathways are available for new volunteers that will assist their general career

prospects. New legislation (geared to protecting children, Education Welfare Bill) will also create an impetus for volunteer qualifications. There may also be an impetus towards further public expenditure on the provision of cultural services in partnership with the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector is also concerned with the levels of bureaucracy involved in dealing with public service providers. A notable exception is the medical alarms scheme run in conjunction with the Department of Social, Community and family Affairs.