

YOUTH IN THE SERVICE OF COMMUNITIES

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It is a paradox that the term "youth" in the minds of a large section of the adult population is associated with an immature, irresponsible, anti-social, troublesome minority. This is unfortunately fostered by the influence of the mass media, which often for the purpose of commercial exploitation emphasise the "youth culture" and on a more derogatory note the "teen-age culture" and give prominence to the negative aspects of youth life and activities. However, the evidence and the experience of Cyprus and indeed of many other countries presents the opposite picture.

In the first place, youth is not a minority. In Cyprus 31% of the total population are between 12-25 years of age, while 54% of the world's population is below 25 years of age. On the other hand, juvenile delinquents in our country comprise only 0.3% of the criminally responsible juvenile population i.e. ages 7-15 years. The needs and attitudes of our youth have certain aspects which are common to the youth of developed or developing countries: their quest for education, interest in the arts, and aspirations for the achievement of human rights and social justice. They are affected by the conflict between generations; they are imbued with the urge to make a mark on the world. They are idealists and they thrive on change.

Our youth, while influenced to some extent by the western youth culture, have also discovered the potential power of their own force through the part they played in the national struggle and in obtaining national independence for their country. As a result, some of them secured strategic political, administrative and social positions of prestige and importance, and they no longer wish to be served or to be used. This social status was won for youth in general and as a result the youth of today have a different outlook and feel more confident and more independent in their relations with each other and towards the others. They no longer tolerate being seen as objects and treated as pawns by adults. They want to become agents and beneficiaries of development rather than its victims. They want to plan their future and make decisions which affect their lives. They increasingly feel the need for participation in public affairs and in the economic

and social development of their country. Their demonstrations and school strikes are a manifestation of this urge.

The development objectives of our country, as with many other countries, are better conditions for a population which is mainly youthful, so that the linking of youth to development is inevitable. As has been said, "No development can take place if the youth people in the population are not involved. No development plans can be implemented without large numbers of young people working for them. No major benefits can accrue to the population at large without accruing mainly to the young." That is why the keynotes of modern youth policies are "participation" and "greater responsibility".

It is within this context that the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, through its Department of Social Welfare Services, launched in 1968 for the first time its Community and Youth Work Programme, as part of the Second Five-Year Development Plan 1967-71. It is significant of the thinking behind the Plan that youth work was perceived as an integral part of community work.

The Plan was drawn up in order to combat the threat of disruption to the traditional family bonds and close-knit community life by social changes, such as increased mobility and urbanisation brought about by rapid economic growth. It also responded to the existence of unplanned, unguided, unco-ordinated and often wasteful activities by voluntary associations in the community service field, and the belief that youth could, if facilitated, improve their culture and involve themselves in developmental action.

The broad objectives of the Community and Youth Work Programme are:

- (a) the motivation of communities to take appropriate action for the solution of social problems, where necessary through financial assistance in the form of grants-in-aid; and
- (b) the provision of services for the welfare of youth and the mobilization of youth to establish their own institutions through which they could promote activities for self-development, as well as for the development of society.

With a view to securing the welfare of youth and the promotion of their participation in community action, the Department of Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance on the one hand rendered direct service to youth through the establishment of Youth Centres in the three major towns, namely Nicosia, Limassol and Famagusta, and on the other hand promoted the establishment of clubs and youth centres by community welfare associations and youth organisations in other areas, including town neighbourhoods and large rural centres.

Two of the three Youth Centres, in the towns of Nicosia and Limassol, were established and are operated by the Department of Social Welfare Services. A social worker has been allocated to supervise their activities, as well as to promote youth work in the District and supervise the community and voluntary youth clubs and youth centres which have been established. The third Youth Centre in Famagusta was established by a voluntary organisation on the encouragement of the Department. This organisation assumed responsibility for the payment of rent and the purchase of most of its furniture and equipment.

The broad objectives of the youth service and the youth centres in particular are:

- (a) to promote the progress and welfare of youth through opportunities for satisfying their basic needs;
- (b) to train youth in citizenship and the assumption of responsibility; and
- (c) to help develop youth culturally and socially and enhance their ability to participate effectively in the development of their country.

The Youth Centres operated by the Department are staffed and equipped in order to provide facilities for cheap meals, rest, recreation and for the physical, cultural and social development and vocational guidance, mainly for working youth. The youth centres are run on a large measure of self-government and their members, with the guidance of the social worker, organise lectures, debates, artistic and other cultural activities, participate in regional and national sports tournaments, organise educational excursions and camping, and participate in voluntary community work projects. Increasing importance is given to the latter

activity and a fuller account of same is given later in this paper.

In pursuance of its youth policies, the Department of Social Welfare Services provides technical and/or financial assistance to voluntary organisations, youth groups and community welfare councils for setting up new youth centres, youth clubs or other youth services, or for developing existing ones, where on the basis of a proper social study it is established that there is a need for such services. At the end of last month there were 26 community youth centres in operation all over the country (8 for girls) with a total membership of 1350.

Under the Grants-in-aid Scheme the Department of Social Welfare Services during the last three years assisted financially and provided technical advice to 24 voluntary organisations and community welfare associations for promoting youth services in their communities with a sum of £5,500.

As stated earlier in the report, the Department of Social Welfare Services, through its Community and Youth Work Programme and in realisation of its youth policies, increasingly provided scope and opportunities for the realisation of the needs of youth to participate in community service projects, especially in the rural areas where the need was more felt. The community youth services in two of the major Districts, namely Nicosia and Famagusta, were organised on a District level with the establishment of Federations of Youth Centres and District Youth Committees. The Famagusta Federation of Youth Centres also organised District conferences and seminars for the promotion of youth work in their District.

The list of community service projects in which members of the above youth centres participated during the last two years is quite an impressive one. The activities described below give an indication of the type and range of the projects;

(a) A good number of the youth centres are housed in purpose-built premises of their own, which their members helped to build through voluntary labour and with materials donated by the community.

(b) Members of the youth centres offered voluntary labour work for the building in various communities of:

- (i) day care centres
- (ii) children's parks

- (iii) play-grounds
- (iv) sports grounds

(c) Youth centres initiated and participated actively in regular campaigns for:

- (i) the improvement of church-yards, village squares and cemeteries;
- (ii) village cleanliness, tree-planting and conservation of the environment, especially during the peak tourist season;
- (iii) village sanitation and mass inoculation during epidemics.

(d) Youth centres organised:

- (i) groups of volunteer blood-donors;
- (ii) visits to hospitals, social welfare institutions and army camps during Christmas and Easter for giving presents and for entertaining patients, national guardsmen and inmates of institutions;
- (iii) work-parties for repairing the houses and rendering service to needy old people;
- (iv) fund-raising activities for community welfare purposes, such as scholarships for poor students;
- (v) sports and athletic tournaments;
- (iv) community celebrations on religious or national holidays;
- (vii) handicraft courses.

(e) Members of youth centres participated in the apprenticeship scheme of the Ministry of Labour.

The youth participated with great enthusiasm in these projects and derived immense satisfaction and benefits from them through acquiring a sense of responsibility, training in

citizenship and feeling that they had made useful contribution to society. The communities also benefited through the fostering of community spirit, as well as the improvement and the enrichment of community life.

Youth service, however, is not limited to the activities of Government and community youth centres alone. Apart from the young farmers' clubs run by the Ministry of Education, there is a wide range of voluntary organisations carrying out youth work, some of which are affiliated to international organisations. Some overseas organisations, such as the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom, organised a couple of years ago work-camps in co-operation with Cyprus youth organisations. Moreover, students of secondary schools are organised in societies, the activities of which include voluntary community service.

In spite of the progress made in youth work during the last few years, there is full realisation that conditions affecting youth change at an ever-rapid pace and fresh needs arise and problems crop up which need to be faced and met. To this end, the Department of Social Welfare Services, in planning for youth for the years to come, will endeavour to make provision for the expansion and development of its youth services to meet emerging and anticipated needs. Some of the basic problems identified in the field of youth work are:

- (a) further co-ordination of Governmental and voluntary activity. The latter is considered of paramount importance for the attainment of the overall objectives;
- (b) further and deeper study of the needs and problems of youth.