



Community Work Ireland working collectively to support and promote community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and advancing human rights

# Strategic Plan 2017-2019

# Introduction

Established in 1981 Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes, advocates for and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, inequality and discrimination and promoting human rights in Ireland and globally.

CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 800 individuals and organisations that support community work approaches in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. CWI derives its mandate from its members who play a central role in all aspects of the organisation.

Since its establishment, Community Work Ireland has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of disadvantaged communities to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. We have promoted community work as an effective and professional approach to addressing the issues facing disadvantaged communities and have worked to create the conditions for community work to develop and thrive, advocating for resources, supports, policies and programmes to enable the growth and sustainability of a strong autonomous community development sector in Ireland.

## Community Work Is

*‘A developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way’.*

We work with our members to build or mutual capacity and mandate to effect change, working collectively and collaboratively to develop our analysis, our research and our policy submissions and representing the organisation in key fora and platforms.

We provide information and regular updates to members and other stakeholders on core relevant policies and developments and provided opportunities for networking, shared learning, discussion and debate.

We play an active role in the community sector in Ireland and actively supported initiatives and strategies to advance the position of particular groups including for example, Travellers, migrants and women.

We support the All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training to produce All Ireland Standards for Community work which aim to provide a reference point and guide for key stakeholders that seek to support community work for the promotion of social inclusion, social justice and equality and as an intervention for social change.

We engage internationally with the International Association for Community Development and the European Community Development Network building international solidarity, support and engagement.

**Community Work Ireland is the leading organisation in Ireland promoting and advancing community work.**

## The Context

Community work is a critical intervention in addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promoting human rights. Community work and the community development infrastructure has been subject to significant resource cuts and policy changes over the past number of years and remains under-recognised, under-resourced and under-valued. There is an ongoing challenge to assert the importance of independent, autonomous community work.

Notwithstanding this, the emphasis on community work in the new Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 is welcome. We trust that there will be increased opportunities for community work in and with marginalised communities around the country.

The establishment of a new Department of Rural and Community Development present a number of opportunities to embed quality community work and standards in policy and practice including as they pertain to rural development.

In a similar fashion, the ongoing work of the cross sectoral Working Group established to develop an implementation plan for *Our Communities: The Framework Policy on Local and Community Development* provides an opportunity to ensure that community work and the values that underpin it as a profession and an approach is embedded in the policy implementation plan.

Independent representation remains a challenge at local and national level. At local level, local authorities continue to play a co-ordinating role in all community and local development and community sector representation in local decision-making bodies is negotiated through the state established Public Participation Networks.

Nationally, representation of the “community and voluntary sector” in decision-making structures such as the National Economic and Social Council and other important policy arenas continues comes through the state established Community and Voluntary Pillar, a structure with narrow representation that Community Work Ireland members increasingly question.

Current political rhetoric emphasises economic recovery. However, the gap between rich and poor continues to rise, and many marginalised communities including asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, Travellers, older people, women, people with disability continue to face poverty, inequality, discrimination, homelessness and social exclusion.

Globally, the rise of right-wing politics in Europe, the United States and throughout the world, as well as the ever-present threats of climate change, environmental destruction and unsustainable global economic growth, present serious and worrying challenges. They also present potential opportunities for greater community mobilisation and greater demands for civil participation, transparency, and the promotion of human rights.

Community Work Ireland is challenged to respond to the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by this context.

*“Community development has been diluted and abused by governments, damaging communities and limiting the potential for community organisations to effect change and bring about long-term development socially and economically” (CWI member).*

## CWI Mission

The CWI mission is to promote and support community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality, promoting, protecting and advancing human rights and ultimately, achieving social change that will contribute to the creation of a just, sustainable and equal society.

## CWI Values

CWI's values reflect the values of community development and it is these that underpin the work of the organisation. Community Work Ireland believes in and is committed to the values outlined below and as set out in the All Ireland Standards for Community Work:

- Collectivity – Working in a collective way that emphasises the right of members to collectively influence the work of the organisation. A collective approach requires practitioners to focus on the potential benefits for communities rather than focusing only on benefits to individuals. CWI believes in and is committed to collaboration and partnership approaches to achieving common goals;
- Community Empowerment – Community empowerment involves an approach which leads people and communities to be resilient, organised, included and influential;
- Social Justice and Sustainable Development – Promoting a just society involves promoting policies and practices that challenge injustice, poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion, and valuing diversity of identities and approaches. Promoting a sustainable society involves promoting environmentally, economically and socially sustainable policies and practices;
- Human Rights – In seeking a society where human rights and equality are realised and discrimination is addressed, community development is reinforced by human rights mechanisms and frameworks, processes and standards for the protection and promotion of human rights for all;
- Equality – Promoting equality and challenging inequality and oppression
- Anti-discrimination – CWI is opposed to discrimination in all its forms and is committed to working to eliminate discrimination;
- Participation – Participation is rooted in the self-identification of needs and interests, the formulation of responses by the community or group concerned and is central to their ability to continue to influence outcomes.

CWI is committed to putting these values into practice underpinned as they are by those of professional commitment, integrity, transparency in governance and team approaches to decision-making. The voice of CWI members is central to all CWI work.

# Strategic Planning Process

The development of this Strategic Plan was informed by consultation with, and engagement of, CWI members throughout the process, including a workshop at the CWI AGM in December 2016, a survey to all members focussing on key priorities, a joint CWI Central and Community Sector meeting, discussion at two CWI Central Group meetings and editing and refining of the document by CWI staff.

CWI members stressed the importance of continuing to work on core areas and approaches while emphasising the need for membership engagement, communication and mobilisation. Members expressed a very positive response to CWI's allocation of core funding until mid-2019 and saw this as a validation of the work of CWI and a significant opportunity to develop strategically and grow the organisation.

More specifically, when asked in our survey and in consultation meetings what they **value most** about the work of CWI and what areas they consider important to be **continued and expanded**, our members highlighted the following priorities;

- **Information Provision and Analysis** – Including newsletters, updates, research on core issues for communities and for community work and ongoing continued analysis of new developments, policies and programmes.
- **Policy Work** – Including submissions on key policy areas, support for members in developing their own submissions, bringing a community work analysis to a wide range of policies and programmes, building public sector capacity and awareness of community work approaches and value, influencing programme and policy design.
- **Providing Opportunities for Networking and Learning** – Including ongoing organisation of national and international conferences, workshops and seminars.
- **Representation of key issues at policy level** – Including continued engagement and meetings with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, other Government departments, political representatives and Pobal.
- **Advocating for Community Work, Autonomy, Standards, Professionalism and Development of the Community Work Discipline** – Including reasserting the independent / interdependent role of civil society and of community work in Ireland, continuing and enhancing the work to embed the All Ireland Standards for Community Work in all appropriate areas including in programme design and working to ensure that community work is recognised as a legitimate profession.
- **Building membership engagement, capacity and mobilization** – Including training, creating opportunities for networking, learning, reflection and collaboration, fostering a sense of the collective amongst members and building their capacity to engage in national policy arenas, recruitment of new members and building new leadership.
- **Enhancing communication and media profile** – Including better use of social media and profiling community work concerns in print and broadcast media

*“Looking forward to CWI developing strategically now with the new resources” (CWI member).*

*“CWI will continue to develop now there is some security of funding” (CWI member)*

*“I would like to commend CWI on maintaining a strong national profile & influence during times of limited resources. A voice for community work existing beyond policy or programme constraints is essential & CWI are an excellent resource for those of us who seek to encourage that” (CWI member).*

*“Well done for all the great work! and good luck with the next 3 years... delighted your funding is secure for 3 years.... Keep up the good work!” (CWI member)*

*“CWI with its strong analysis and positions on policy, is the only organisation concerned with promoting and representing community work issues in Ireland” (CWI member)*

# CWI Goals and Strategic Priorities

## Goal 1 Supporting and Promoting Community Work

CWI's goal is recognition and validation by all stakeholders of autonomous community work as a value-based professional discipline that is appropriately resourced to achieve its objectives.

**Strategic Priority 1** To embed community work in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of relevant programmes, policies, structures and practices

**Community Work Ireland will:**

- Promote the understanding and use of the *All Ireland Standards for Community Work*;
- Advocate for independent, autonomous community work and appropriate structures and programmes to facilitate this;
- Play a co-ordinating role in the All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work;
- Contribute to the design of policies and programmes that facilitate community work.

**Strategic Priority 2** To resource community work and CWI members through the collaborative development of information and analysis and representation of core issues on existing, new and emerging structures.

**Community Work Ireland will:**

- Provide critical policy analysis to CWI members and other stakeholders;
- Provide opportunities for CWI members to engage in policy at local, national and international levels
- Provide opportunities for information sharing and networking to CWI members and other stakeholders;
- Undertake research and projects where appropriate;
- Continue to represent issues of importance to CWI members at national and international forums;
- Engage in appropriate forums on emerging issues and trends;
- Collaborate with other organisations to achieve common objectives;
- Contribute to policy development and implementation in relation to new, emerging and developing issues.

### Strategic Priority 3 To provide networking and learning opportunities for community workers and other stakeholders

#### Community Work Ireland will:

- Provide regular opportunities for members to meet nationally and locally through regional member's meetings and meetings of the Community Sector Subgroup;
- Organise conferences and seminars on current relevant themes;
- Provide training opportunities for CWI members as appropriate
- Provide opportunities for CWI members to represent the organisation in various fora
- Organise joint events at local and national levels with local and national organisations who support community work.

## Goal 2 Organisational Sustainability and Development

CWI's goal is a sustainable organisation, recognised, acknowledged and resourced as the national organisation promoting and supporting community work with an active and engaged membership base.

### Strategic Priority 4 To consolidate and develop the CWI membership

#### Community Work Ireland will:

- Engage with the CWI membership by organising regional and national meetings;
- Ensure ongoing two-way communication with members ensuring that members have a clear say and can participate and contribute meaningfully to the development and work of the organisation;
- Develop a strong communications strategy including social media, print and broadcast media;
- Mobilise members to act on key issues and concerns;
- Build and expand our membership base through a CWI membership drive which promotes the benefits of CWI membership to individual community workers and organisations;
- Develop a category of student membership and promote community work student engagement with CWI;
- Develop a strategy to identify members to represent CWI on relevant policy structures and support them in their representative roles including by developing a reporting/supporting procedure which includes identifying capacity building needs.

### Strategic Priority 5 To ensure the sustainability and further development of CWI

#### Community Work Ireland will:

- Continue to ensure that Community Work Ireland is sustainably funded;
- Ensure that CWI adheres to excellent governance practice meeting all legal obligations;
- Establish sub-groups and ad hoc project teams as needed and appropriate, recognising that these spaces provide opportunities for new leadership to grow and develop;
- Seek to diversify the CWI funding base.

# Notes

Community Work Ireland is supported by the Support Scheme for National Organisations



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,  
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil  
Department of Housing, Planning,  
Community and Local Government

