

## **VOLUNTARY YOUTH WORK IN WALES.**

Voluntary Youth Work in Wales has a long and significant history. It has been part and parcel of Welsh social, educational and cultural life for well over a century. Its influence has been far reaching. Its ethos and values, adopted by generations of young people, have been woven into the social fabric of the Wales we know today.

The first youth-orientated organisations were established in Wales at the end of the 19th century and were primarily of a Christian and philanthropic nature. In the main their interests lay both in addressing the pressing social needs and the moral agendas of the period. Generally, as with the uniformed organisations who developed a presence in Wales at the turn of the century, these organisations were developed from seeds sown by parent organisations in England and Scotland.

These organisations mainly operated within the denser areas of population in Wales or along denominational networks. In due course, between the two World Wars, a new enthusiasm for the expansion of educational opportunities saw the establishment of new youth organisations that served to address the specific needs of particular social groups within Wales—primarily Welsh-speaking young people and the expanding agricultural industry—and a wide-ranging and ever organised sector of voluntary youth organisations was seen to be emerging.

Voluntary youth organisations flourished after the implementation of the 1944 Education Act as a meaningful partnership developed between statutory and voluntary services. Voluntary youth organisations were always an active partner in expanding educational opportunities and offering a range of constructive experiences within social domains that focused on the specific needs and aspirations of young people. As a result, voluntary youth clubs were imbedded into the profile of Welsh social life as almost every community from city to hamlet was served by a particular organisation or other.

As we approach the 21st century it is still the case that the voluntary youth sector is the seed-bed of much innovative practice. Health promotion organisations, homelessness and unemployment projects along with local environmental and arts groups are seen to be the cutting edge of today's voluntary youth services. As ever the voluntary sector is responding proactively to the current needs of today's young people. In so doing the voluntary youth sector is still addressing social need, still setting a moral agenda and still moulding the social fabric of tomorrow's Wales.