



# ***Making Things Happen***

*An Exhibition of  
50 years of Foróige*

**1952 - 2002**



**50** Foróige 1952-2002  
Meeting youth needs in a changing world

by MARTIN JOHAN

# ROUNDABOUT

The demands of teenagers

CLUB IN AUSTRIA  
BASE AT THE CLUB

The history of Foróige was researched by Mark Duncan, a freelance researcher with a particular interest in twentieth century Irish history.



President Childers

"What young people do with their spare time, how they use their minds and how their hearts are enlightened will largely determine the future character of our society".

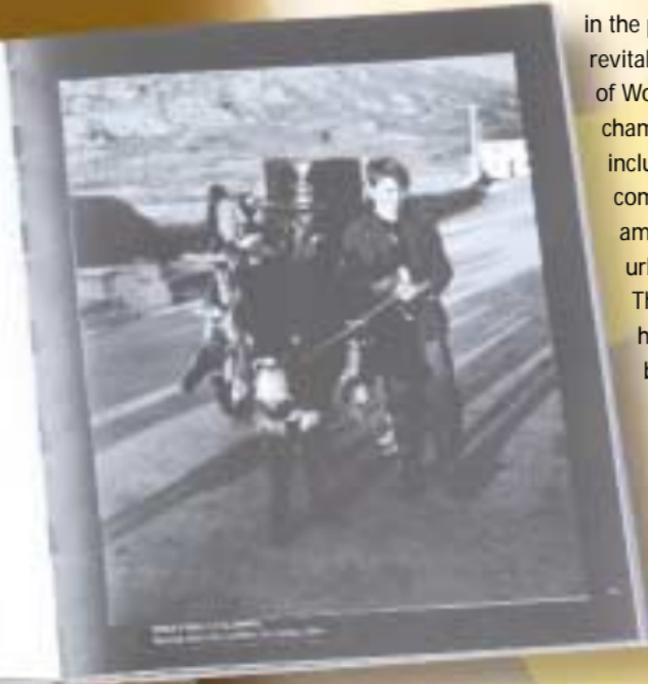
(Speaking at Crosserlough Foróige Club's Citizenship Symposium, Co Cavan, 1973)

## 'Making Things Happen': Fifty Years of Foróige, 1952 - 2002

Commissioned to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of Foróige - originally Macra na Tuaithe - this exhibition examines the development of the organisation in the context of the changing social and economic climate of late 20th century Ireland. Foróige's role has evolved in response to these shifting currents, and its commitment to the principle of social improvement through education and voluntary endeavour has

remained constant. With its origins in the popular movement to revitalise rural Ireland in the wake of World War II, Foróige today champions the cause of social inclusion through personal and community development among the young in both urban and rural contexts. Throughout its fifty-year history, the organisation has been a catalyst of social change, strengthening Irish democracy by building human potential and promoting its application in community life.

■ The drudgery of rural life: Drawing water, Corr na Móna, Co. Galway, 1955. (Courtesy of the Department of Irish Folklore, UCD).



### (I) The Lie of the Land: Whither Rural Ireland?

John Bruton, TD, then Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Education.

"There are groups who make very erudite criticisms of our present society, but who cannot or do not demonstrate their commitment by doing something about the matter themselves. This cannot be said of Macra na Tuaithe as their action projects so clearly demonstrate. Under this aspect of the programme, members go out, turn up their sleeves and tackle our social problems themselves".

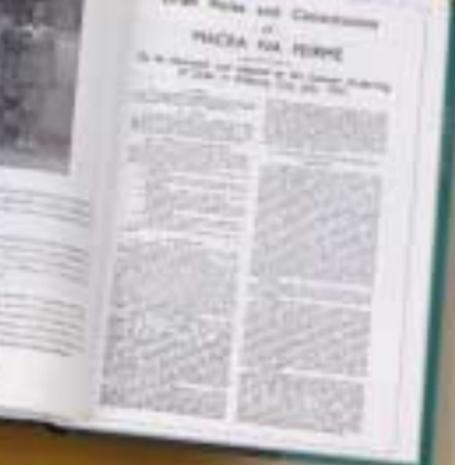
(Speaking at Foróige Citizenship Awards 1973)

Foróige was founded in 1952 when twelve Pilot Clubs were established in different areas on a trial basis. These clubs, conceived as a reaction to the particular problems that afflicted post-war rural Ireland, came together under the name Macra na Tuaithe a year later. The new organisation formed part of a sometimes uneasy coalition of voluntary interests, including Muintir na Tíre, the Irish Countrywoman's Association and Macra na Feirme, that aimed to reverse the trend of deteriorating living standards in rural Ireland. The Irish experience during the Second World War had confirmed the primacy of agriculture in economic affairs, but a number of factors - structural weaknesses in the agricultural sector, outmoded farm practices and incoherent government policy - combined to reduce many rural dwellers to a condition of miserable poverty. According to a Government-launched Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, which reported in 1954:



■ A hard-earned break from the harvest: A Kilkenny farming family, 1943.

*'Poor material standards of life (were) to be found in many parts of the country, but particularly in rural areas where the exacting demands of agricultural activities are aggravated, in many cases by the inadequacy of such amenities for houses and farms as power, light, water and sanitation. Much drudgery is caused by out-moded methods of day to day working and living.'*



Sustaining the fantasy of a rural idyll - an indulgence of many romantic nationalists and religious ideologues - became increasingly difficult in the face of such damning observation. The problems of rural Ireland demanded practical remedies, not escapes into rhetorical fancy. Above all, they required a modernisation of Irish farming. How else were rural living standards to be improved and the future of the Irish economy to be secured? Education was critical to this modernising project.

## Fr Pat Brady

"Macra na Tuaithe's educational programmes, eg. Culture, Young Homemakers, Future Farmers and Citizenship help members in self-confidence as they talk about them and see them through. They develop the ability to communicate and speak in public, to plan and do research, to co-operate, to enjoy leisure, to set up a home and live with others. Above all they develop a pride in the local area, become good members of the community and, with that, good citizens of the country".

Fr Pat Brady - Former Leader with Crosserlough Foróige Club, Co Cavan, speaking in 1974

While post-primary education remained the preserve of a privileged few until the late 1960s, the introduction of a system of Vocational Schools (known colloquially as 'Techs') in 1930 afforded broader access to agricultural instruction, already available through the Agricultural Advisory Service. Within a decade, over 200 Vocational Schools had been established throughout the country. Working through this system, rural science teachers exerted a profound influence: they helped awaken an interest in education beyond the classroom and in the early 1940s presided over informal rural discussion groups. A number of these groups evolved into Young Farmers Clubs, which in 1944 came under the umbrella of the national organisation later known as Macra na Feirme. Spearheaded by progressive young farmers, Macra na Feirme sought to empower local communities by instilling an appreciation of the importance of education.

■ Macra na Feirme members receive instruction in new technology at their summer gathering, 1947.

Members were encouraged to take charge of their own affairs, speak for themselves, plan their own programmes and run their own clubs. Macra na Feirme provided a lesson in self-determination and a model upon which a youth-oriented organisation with similar focus could be based.

## (II) Macra na Tuaithe & the Future of Rural Youth

Macra na Feirme's identification of the education needs of young farmers was significant. Selling self-improvement to generations that had known nothing but instability and a low level of material expectancy was unlikely to succeed: theirs was a conservatism borne of bitter experience. By directing its message at those between the ages of 18 and 35, Macra na Feirme hoped to inculcate a belief in the idea of a better future on the land. Macra na Tuaithe, which aimed at boys and girls in the 12-18 age-category, was set up in 1952 with a somewhat similar intent, the impetus coming from Macra na Feirme, rural science teachers and the Department of Education in the person of Morgan Sheehy. Linked inextricably with the Vocational Education system, Macra na Tuaithe initially functioned as a means of implementing the extra-curricular activities, in rural science and home economics, of the rural Vocational Schools. The association between the organisation and the state system was strengthened further by the abundance of Vocational School teachers in adult leadership roles. Macra na Tuaithe, however,

was a voluntary organisation built on principles pioneered by the 4 H (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) youth movement in the United States, those of individual empowerment and *'learning by doing'*.

■ Macra na Feirme at play: Sheaf-throwing in Swords in the late 1940s.



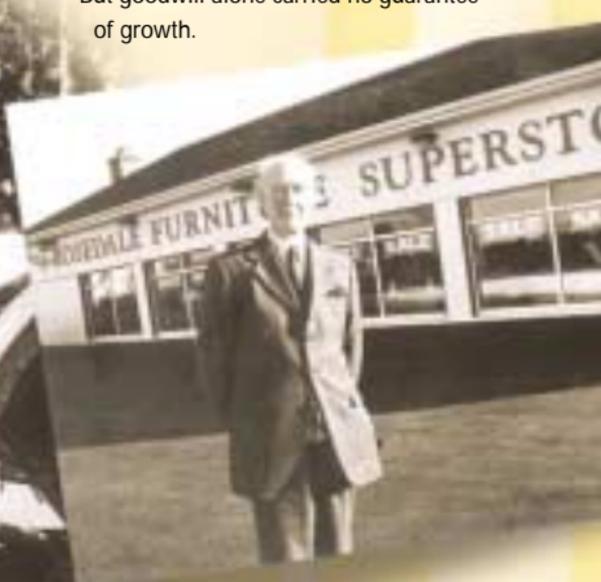
■ The opening of the first Macra na Tuaithe Club at Mooncoin Vocational School, 14th March 1952.

■ Seamus Doran, first Macra na Tuaithe Club leader in Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny. (Photographed on 13th March, 2002).

Speaking on 14 March 1952, at the establishment of the first Macra na Tuaithe Club in Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny, Sean Moylan, then Minister for Education, identified these as principles to underpin the task of national recovery: ***“There can be no remedy for our manifold national ills if we cannot create a spirit of courage and enterprise in our young people.”***

Political acclaim was to be expected: by fostering a self-help ethos, voluntary organisations like Macra na Tuaithe provided an ideological bulwark against the perceived advance of a culture of state-dependence.

But goodwill alone carried no guarantee of growth.



Macra na Tuaithe, which operated as an independent organisation governed by a twelve-member Council comprising representatives of the Vocational education system, Macra na Feirme, club leaders and members, found it difficult at first to raise funds and attract club leaders. Compounding these problems was the emergence in 1955 of the National Farmers Association to press the political and economic interests of farmers, the effect of which was to weaken Macra na Feirme and reduce its involvement with Macra na Tuaithe at local level. This splintering of rural energies threatened to check the steady progress of Macra na Tuaithe, imperilling both its future and that of Macra na Feirme.

### Matthew James Corr

“If I had not joined the Macra na Tuaithe Club and started my farming projects I would be working and living in England now”.

Matthew James Corr - Former member and leader with Castlewarren Macra na Tuaithe Club, Co Kilkenny speaking in 1974

Displaying an instinct for survival, both organisations agreed a marriage of convenience. Macra na Tuaithe’s Governing Council dissolved itself, passing control to a sub-committee of Macra na Feirme. Macra na Tuaithe became, in effect, the junior wing of Macra na Feirme, a constitutional arrangement that endured until 1967.





■ An Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, presents the Young farmer of the Year Award.

### (III) Consolidation & Crisis: 1957-1967

The decade 1957 to 1967 was, for the most part, a period of consolidation and modest growth for Macra na Tuaithe. It was also a time of revived national fortune, the blueprint for recovery being provided by the First Programme for Economic Expansion, published in 1958. Inspired by civil servant T.K. Whitaker, the First Programme shifted the emphasis of national economic policy away from protection towards free trade and the attraction of foreign investment. With this jettisoning of traditional pieties came a belated recognition of the need for increased investment in education. For Macra na Tuaithe, Government acceptance of the role of education in promoting social and economic development was of little immediate benefit. The organisation funded an expansion of its activities, not with public finance, but with a five-year development grant of £30,000, secured from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of America in 1958. A Director of Education, Maurice Kennedy, was employed, joining a small national staff; new education programmes were launched, imparting practical instruction on subjects as diverse as calf-rearing and knitting; and a system of awards was introduced for both members and club leaders.

■ Maurice Kennedy, Director of Education, 1963-1966.



The number of clubs affiliated to Macra na Tuaithe increased from 159 in 1958 to 253 in 1963, prompted by the availability of improved resources and the extension of the Vocational School system. Many club leaders were drawn from the teaching profession and Vocational schools served as the most popular location for club meetings. Indeed, the number and calibre of voluntary club leaders was identified by the organisation as the most salient factor in its continued growth. But publicity also played a role in raising awareness of Macra na Tuaithe, details of club activities and sponsored competitions finding regular expression on Radio Éireann's *Down the Country* programme, as well as in the national and local press. The most high profile event of all was the "**Young Farmer of the Year**" competition, which was open to both boys and girls of registered clubs who had undertaken a project in Agriculture, Horticulture or Forestry. The standard of entry was consistently high, with many of the submitted projects maturing into viable commercial enterprises, aided by a special bank loan scheme established for registered Macra na Tuaithe members. The primary aim of the loan scheme was to educate young people in the handling of money and the use of credit, but it also had the effect of nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit among rural youth.

Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, TD,

then Minister of State at the Dept of Education

"Foróige's YCE (Youth Co-operative Education) Programme not only assists young people to prepare for work and employment but also provides them with the skills and self-confidence to generate employment".

(Speaking at National Recognition function for the YCE Programme, 1982)

■ Banking on a better future: A Macra na Tuaithe member avails of the Junior Loan Scheme.





■ Donogh O'Malley, the Minister for Education responsible for the introduction of free post-primary education and transport in 1967.

In terms of the modernisation of rural Ireland, however, Macra na Tuaithe's support for the rural electrification scheme was perhaps of more far-reaching significance. The extension of electricity to rural parts, facilitated by Macra na Tuaithe clubs and other community-based groups, effected what the writer Michael Shiel described as a *"Quiet Revolution"* in the Irish countryside.

Improvements in rural living standards came too late for many. For all their efforts to revive communities and all their belief in self-determination, voluntary groups were powerless to arrest the decline of rural Ireland. As circumstance got the better of aspiration, the flight from the land gathered pace. The numbers employed in agriculture in Ireland declined by 272,000 between 1926 and 1961. In the 1950s alone, a remarkable 400,000 Irish people emigrated, many of them small farmers and unskilled labourers, the children of whom Macra na Tuaithe membership was predominantly drawn. Emigration thus contributed to an erosion of the organisation's base, a process compounded by changes sweeping the Secondary education sector.

In May 1963, the Minister for Education, Dr. Patrick Hillery, announced plans to establish, in areas with scattered populations, comprehensive schools which would include elements of both the Secondary and Vocational schools curriculum.

### John Sullivan

"We should take confidence in the belief of the people who started Foróige 50 years ago that they could change things. We should believe that we too can change things for the better. We're looking back and admiring those people for what they did - Will someone do the same for us in 50 years time?"

John Sullivan has been a leader with Danesfort-Cuffesgrange Foróige Club, Co Kilkenny for almost 40 years. He is a former Chairperson of Foróige and is currently Chairperson of Kilkenny District Council.

### Shane Cullen

"Foróige has achieved in providing an environment for the development of Irish teenagers. For 50 years it has created friendships, a community spirit and self-confidence for the youth of Ireland. It gives members the skills and qualities to deal with life's challenges. Long live Foróige. May it continue to benefit future generations in the way it has mine".

Shane Cullen has been a member of Killargue Foróige Club, Co Leitrim for five years. He is currently Club Chairperson and was a member of the Foróige Reference Panel in 2001.



■ Memorandum and Articles of 'Fundraising' Foundation being shown by Mr. F.B. Farelly to (from left) Mr. M.J. Noonan, Dr. G. Creech and Sean Lemass, 1963.

Accompanied by a move to introduce a Common Intermediate Certificate for Secondary and Vocational schools, Hillery's initiative signalled a shift towards academic disciplines at the expense of technical studies. It was also the first of a number of important measures designed to democratise access to post-primary education during the 1960s. Culminating with the introduction by Donogh O'Malley of schemes for free Post-Primary education and transport in 1967, these changes afforded an unprecedented opportunity to children from less-privileged backgrounds, but they also diminished further the appeal of the vocational education system that had contributed so much to the development of Macra na Tuaithe.

Pressures from without were mirrored within: finance posed a difficulty after the Kellogg development grant ended, while constitutional issues led to a fraying of relations with Macra na Feirme. The problem of finance was temporarily eased by the setting up of a fundraising 'Foundation', which solicited and received support from a large number of Irish industries and commercial concerns.





This income was supported by a meagre grant-in-aid from the Department of Education, endorsed by the Dáil to assist Macra na Tuaithe *"in their educational work among the young of the countryside"*. The response of the Sean Lemass-led Government accorded with their belief that the social ills of rural Ireland could only be seriously addressed

if the State supported rather than led local initiative. Resolving the question of Macra na Tuaithe's constitutional status was a more fractious matter. Frustrated at the organisation's subordinate position to Macra na Feirme under the Constitutional framework agreed in 1957, members of Macra na Tuaithe's National Executive Committee struggled to assert their independence. The tensions engendered by the issue wreaked 'havoc' on staff morale, leading eventually to mass resignations, including that of Macra na Tuaithe's Director of Education. Closure on this matter was only achieved when Macra na Feirme acceded to a referendum of Macra na Tuaithe leaders in April 1967, a 'large majority' of whom voted to declare the organisation autonomous.

## Imelda Kelly

"My involvement with Foróige has been one of the most influential factors shaping my life: who I am and what I do. Through the range of activities and groups that I have participated in I have made friends, had lots of fun, gotten to know about the community I live in and become involved in local affairs and issues. In a nutshell, Foróige has cushioned and supported me when times have been hard and celebrated and rejoiced when times have been good. It has provided me with a window of opportunities and that is what I am most grateful for".

Imelda Kelly is a volunteer with the Glen Young Adults Project in Cork City, having previously volunteered with the GAP (Glen Action Project). She has been involved with Foróige for six years.

■ (Opposite): Education programmes introduced in 1969 remain the basis of Foróige Club work.

## (IV) The Challenge of Change: 1968-1980

Autonomy brought with it pressure to adjust to the demands of a changing society. Continued rural depopulation and the increased academic emphasis of the Vocational School curriculum impressed upon a revitalised staff the necessity of both a reappraisal of policy and a search for a wider application of Macra na Tuaithe principles. Under the direction of a new Education Officer - later Director - Michael B. Cleary, seven new educational programmes were introduced in 1969. These programmes, covering such areas as Citizenship, Leadership, Agriculture / Horticulture, Family & Life Skills, Culture, Science and Health, marked a major advance in the provision of out-of-school education and they remain - with some adaptation - the basis for Macra na Tuaithe club work to the present day.



With curriculum reform, the emphasis of club projects shifted from the individual to the group, and Macra na Tuaithe was transformed into an organisation based around the community rather than the school. But a revision of programme content alone was insufficient to broaden the reach of the organisation. This depended on the employment of a network of Regional Youth Officers, six of whom were appointed under the terms of a second five year grant from the Kellogg Foundation, secured in 1969. Buoyed once more by Kellogg munificence - £62,650 on this occasion - the fortunes of the organisation improved and club numbers increased.

Growth was not confined to rural parts. It was imperative, given the drift towards urban living, that Macra na Tuaithe realise the potential for establishing clubs beyond areas of traditional concern. The proportion of the Irish population living in urban environments surpassed that of rural areas for first time in 1971. Although urban growth was most pronounced in Dublin, no town in the country with a population over 3,000 in 1956 failed to experience an increase in 'cumulative population' between then and 1971. This was a trend of profound importance to an

organisation whose initial raison d'être had been the promotion of rural life.



■ (Above): Parliamentary Secretary Bobby Molloy, TD., T.J. Maher, President of the NFA and Matt Ryan, Chairperson of Macra na Tuaithe at the announcement of the W.K. Kellogg grant.





And yet, despite earlier tentative moves towards urban development, the decision of Macra na Tuaithe in 1971 to ***'initiate a more systematic approach to expansion in urban areas on an experimental basis'*** was explained as a response to

community demand rather than an act of self-preservation.

Meeting this demand presented the organisation with a new set of opportunities and challenges: in certain places, urban Ireland

offered more readily available facilities and services, as well as a larger pool of youth from which to draw, yet it was here that competition for resources and from other attractions was greatest. The appeal of Macra na Tuaithe to urban audiences lay in its unique approach to youth work, in particular its concern with developing programmes that took greater account of the needs of the person than the facilities available. Who could deny the attraction of a philosophy that stressed the uniqueness, creativity, dignity and value of the individual person? It was the idealism of Macra na Tuaithe's guiding principles that enticed new leaders and members, and steady growth was achieved in urban areas throughout the 1970s. By that decade's end, however, over 70% of Macra na Tuaithe clubs remained rural-based.

The policy of expansion embarked upon in the late 1960s triggered other important developments. Aided by the Kellogg grant, a permanent headquarters was secured alongside other rural-based organisations in the new Irish Farm Centre in Dublin, while the task of implementing the new educational programmes precipitated a deeper engagement by leaders in the affairs of the organisation. It was with the purpose of training leaders in the delivery of these programmes that the first National Conference of leaders was held in Termonfeckin, County Louth, in 1971. Held annually since, Macra na Tuaithe Leaders' Conferences have differed from those of other voluntary organisations in their emphasis on education instead of policy-making. When in 1975, the Constitution of the organisation was again amended, vastly increased representation was afforded to leaders, who by this time were drawn from a wider range of occupational backgrounds. To assist leaders in the implementation of Macra na Tuaithe's complex new curriculum, greater consideration was given to their training requirements. This interest in adult education 'evolved' not just from Macra na Tuaithe's commitment to the principle of volunteerism, but also from an awareness of the link between the success of youth-oriented programmes and the quality of adult leadership provided. Contributing in a voluntary capacity, leaders were nonetheless ill-equipped to drive the expansion of the organisation into urban Ireland. This was a task for professional youth workers and Macra na Tuaithe looked towards Government to provide these professionals with the requisite in-service training.



## Gareth Donnelly

"It's important to have somewhere to go each week, something to look forward to. It's great to be a part of a club like Foróige. You get to do activities, have fun and do some good work for others like raising money for charity".

Gareth Donnelly (14) is a member of "Hellraisers" Foróige Club, Co Longford

## Joe Horan

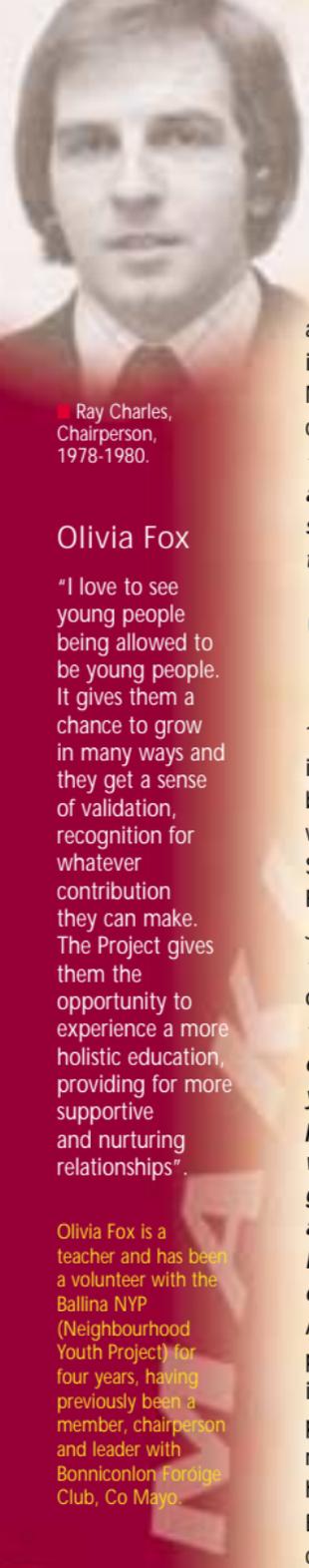
"Foróige helps to nurture our greatest asset: our youth, the future. I hope this continues for a long time to come".

Joe Horan has been a leader with Moate Foróige Club, Co. Westmeath, for three years.



## Towards the Edge of the Abyss

During the 1970s, successive Irish governments moved towards a National Youth Policy without ever reaching it. Failure to deliver on this policy objective was compounded by a refusal to adequately resource voluntary organisations working in the field. Lauding the social contribution of the voluntary sector while denying it proper financial support was like flirting without intent. Despite achieving both a 700% increase in the number trained by the organisation up to the mid-1970s and a ***"very substantial increase in membership"***, fiscal pressures, manifest after the ending of the second Kellogg grant in 1974, forced Macra na Tuaithe to reduce investment in staff and training.



Ray Charles, Chairperson, 1978-1980.

### Olivia Fox

"I love to see young people being allowed to be young people. It gives them a chance to grow in many ways and they get a sense of validation, recognition for whatever contribution they can make. The Project gives them the opportunity to experience a more holistic education, providing for more supportive and nurturing relationships".

Olivia Fox is a teacher and has been a volunteer with the Ballina NYP (Neighbourhood Youth Project) for four years, having previously been a member, chairperson and leader with Bonniconlon Foróige Club, Co Mayo.

As inflation rates soared in response to an international oil crisis, the value of State assistance to Macra na Tuaithe declined dramatically in real terms. With exhortations to Government for more adequate funding yielding little in return, plans for further expansion were thwarted, and existing activities jeopardised. Financial disaster was only averted by the decision of the Department of Education to increase its subvention at the end of 1979. The Chairman of Macra na Tuaithe at the time, Ray Charles, reflecting on how close to the abyss the organisation had come, remarked: **"Many of us doubted if the organisation could continue at all and even if it could, whether it could possibly play any significant educational and developmental role in relation to Irish young people."**

## (V) In a Time of Poverty & Plenty: Foróige 1981-2002

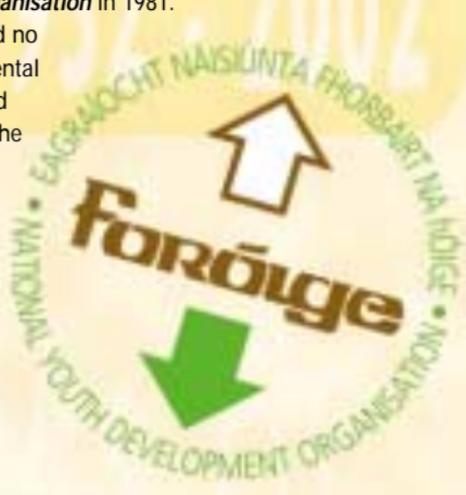
1979 marked a turning point for Macra na Tuaithe. Government intervened not alone to alleviate the organisation's financial burden, but also, for the first time, to confer recognition on youth work as an integral part of the national education system. Signalling a departure from the practice of official neglect, Fianna Fáil Minister for State at the Department of Youth Affairs, Jim Tunney, declared that the State had an **"obligation"** to support voluntary youth organisations for providing **"a vital form of education to young people in what is generally an informal and leisure environment"**. After a decade of procrastination, it appeared that political deeds and rhetoric were at last heading for closer alignment. But it was not until 1985, after the completion of a further period of consultation,



that a National Youth Policy was finally introduced. Containing much that had been recommended by the various voluntary youth organisations, the National Youth Policy aimed towards the development of a National Youth Service, to be administered at national level by the Department of Education and at local level by new Local Youth Service Boards. The idea for such a Service was borne of the belief - held by Macra na Tuaithe from its birth - that home and school were ill-equipped to meet all the educational needs of young people. The National Youth Service thus set about offering **"young people on the basis of their voluntary involvement, developmental and educational experiences which will equip them to play an active part in our democratic society as well as meeting their own development needs."**

Macra na Tuaithe did not await delivery of a legislative framework for youth development to set about reinventing itself. In a change more symbolic than real, Macra na Tuaithe was renamed **Foróige the National Youth Development Organisation** in 1981.

This rebranding involved no compromise of fundamental principle. It was intended merely to better reflect the broad appeal of the organisation's philosophy and to make identification with it easier for all, be they from city, town or country.





■ Aerial view of Tallaght.

■ Brian Lenihan, TD., presenting the Foróige Citizenship Awards at Blanchardstown Youth Service, 1990.

■ At the official launch of Tallaght Youth Service in 1987. (left to right): Jim Murphy, Chairperson, Dublin VEC; Caroline Hope, Manager, Tallaght Youth Service; Frank Fahey, TD., Minister of State for Youth Affairs.

The new name would, it was believed, facilitate further expansion into growing urban centres, Dublin in particular. Accounting for less than 15% of the State's population in 1926, Dublin absorbed almost 30% of it by 1986. City planners, in order to accommodate this population explosion, adopted an American rather than a European model of urban development, building new colonies on the outskirts of the city. The policy was a social disaster. As the centre of the city collapsed into decay, sprawling suburbs lacking in basic services or amenities were built along its western rim. Parts of these new settlements, starved of adequate resources, soon became oases of deprivation and in 1982, Foróige, with the assistance of the County Dublin VEC, moved to supplement local voluntary efforts by providing a comprehensive youth service to young people growing up in such conditions. What began on a pilot basis in the densely populated suburbs of Tallaght and Blanchardstown, which enclosed areas of acute deprivation, was developed further under the provisions of the National Youth Policy. Training, parenting and drug awareness were just some of the concerns addressed by Foróige-managed programmes, the aim of which was to help local youth help themselves.

With the development of the Tallaght and Blanchardstown Youth Services, Foróige courageously extended its reach beyond its own membership. The success of this initiative in securing a broader application of Foróige educational methods led to greater involvement in the provision of services throughout the 1980s, and it was in this area that staff and resources were increasingly deployed. Indeed, the late 1980s saw the introduction, first in Tallaght and later in Blanchardstown, of Foróige's first Youth Information Centres.



Diversification, however, did nothing to damage core, or 'Mainline', Foróige activity. Club numbers - no longer an exclusive measure of the organisation's social impact - mushroomed with the support of a growing number of committed voluntary leaders and professional Youth Officers. There were more than twice as many clubs at the end of the 1980s as there had been at the beginning - 508 as against 252 - and these proved remarkably successful in retaining the allegiance of members in the 15 to 18 years age category. These gains were achieved against a backdrop of national decline. Public finances in the 1980s deteriorated to a point



### Francis Wright

"I like Foróige because it's a lot of fun and we help people in the community. I'd like to do more fundraising because it's fun when you do it with a lot of your friends. The leaders are brilliant. They're very, very kind. I'd like to become Club Chairperson some day".

Francis Wright (12) is a member of Allenwood Foróige Club, Co Kildare.

such as to raise questions about the country's economic viability, while, in a dismal retreat to 1950s trends, unemployment and emigration increased to work their corrosive effects on family and community life, as well as to limit the opportunities of youth. The strength of 'Mainline' Foróige - over half of whose members came from what could be termed working class backgrounds - at this time speaks volumes for the response of ordinary people and their communities to these enervating pressures. Rather than succumb to a dispiriting fatalism, the organisation devised special programmes and projects to cushion the impact of the most striking symptoms of societal decay: unemployment, poverty and emigration. Addressing a Conference of Club Leaders in 1988, Foróige Chairperson, Brendan Coyne, reaffirmed the organisation's preference for action over aspiration. Foróige, he said, could not *"wait around for final solutions to be arrived at. We must deal for the practical effects (of poverty) now."*

## “The Dizzying Pace of Social Change”

It was not until the mid-1990s that Ireland broke decisively with its post-Independence record of economic underperformance. A number of factors - social partnership, EU structural funds, increased inward investment, the availability of an educated young workforce and a favourable international climate - contributed to the achievement of spectacular economic growth rates and the raising of Irish living standards to European norms. But as with the more muted 1960s experience of expansion, the rising economic tide of the last decade has failed to lift all boats. Sure there have been salutary developments: involuntary emigration and mass unemployment have been ended (for the present), but iniquities persist and the number living in relative poverty has increased. Global processes such as the revolution in communications technology have only added to the almost dizzying pace of social change. All these developments have impacted greatly on Irish youth. As received moral and cultural absolutes collapse under the collective weight of these forces, the journey through adolescence has become an even more testing one for many young people, especially those from broken homes and disadvantaged areas. In an attempt to ease their passage, Foróige has, over the last decade, sought not just to shape youth-related public policy, but also to become an instrument of its enforcement. Across a range of public policy areas - Education, Health, Social Welfare and Justice - Foróige has become a vehicle through which the State has pursued the goal of greater social inclusion. Through partnership with Health Boards, the Garda Síochána, Local Area Partnerships, the VECs and others, Foróige has been to the fore in helping youth in difficulty.



### Nicola Radford

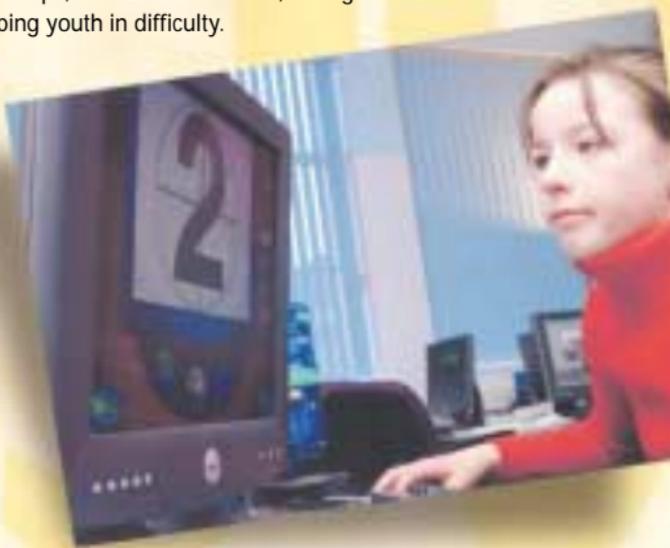
“I love going to the club because of the courses we do. We learn lots of new things and we're listened to. It's fun and there are lots of surprises. President McAleese came to see us last year. That was great”.

Nicola Radford (14) has been involved in the after-school club at the *dán* Project, Dublin for four years.

### Emma Roche

“My friends and I got involved with Foróige because there were no activities in Kilmallock for us. We wanted to make new friends and learn new things and to socialise. It's a way of getting out of the house and off the street and we love the craic in the group”.

Emma Roche (14) is involved in the after-school group at the Loobagh Area Youth Project in Kilmallock, Co Limerick.



To this end, improved State funding and corporate philanthropy have facilitated the employment of extra staff and the provision of a broadened range of services and projects in both urban and rural areas. However, 'Mainline' Foróige, reliant as it is on voluntary involvement, has fared less well. Club numbers have declined by 10% since the late-1990s, a consequence of changing lifestyle patterns and a general crisis in volunteerism. Ensuring the retention of an Irish tradition of volunteerism has become a key concern for Foróige at the outset of the new Millennium, for without this sort of social commitment, Michael Cleary warned in 2000, there would be a palpable diminution in 'the quality of life in communities and in society generally'.



Patty O'Brien

"When I reflect on my time as a leader, I see that there have been many changes over the years, but some things haven't changed. The value and importance of just being there and listening when members need to talk, allowing them to develop at a pace that suits them and giving recognition for small achievements is as vital as it ever was, perhaps even more so. It may be the only positive feedback they have received for some time.

Patty O'Brien has been a leader with Corofin Foróige Club, Co Galway for 13 years.

## (VI) Conclusion

No accurate measure can be made of the contribution of Foróige to Irish educational and community life over the last half-century. The work of the organisation has been such as to defy any easy 'cause and effect' analysis. Yet some sense of the transformative influence the organisation has had on the lives of members, leaders and staff alike can be gleaned from the many personal testimonies that survive. For anybody seeking evidence of the joy and fulfilment that can be derived from voluntary youth work, it is to these accounts that they should turn. But what of Foróige in the future? There is little doubt that the ideals of the organisation retain a seductive appeal: their stress on the value and creativity of the individual person, and on the capacity of each to participate fully in their own world, must be of interest to all concerned at the advance of the dehumanising forces of cultural homogenisation and social alienation. Should the organisation, however, continue to provide services directed at the symptoms rather than the root causes of social inequality? Or should it broaden its reach by extending further the range of services and projects it provides? Will it be possible to source sufficient funding to drive growth in the future? Questions like these are the substance of ongoing debate within Foróige and their resolution will have a large bearing on the long-term development of the organisation.

■ World record-breakers! Foróige Coin Challenge mural, consisting of 1,659,000 coins, 4th December 2001.



Gillian Walsh

"I think Foróige is good because you meet new people. I live in the country so it gives the young people of the parish a place to meet, supervised by adults. We also get to take part in activities with other Foróige groups so we get to know people from other places".

Gillian Walsh (14) is Chairperson of Kilcash Foróige Club, Co Tipperary.

Of more immediate concern, however, will be the implementation of the National Youth Work Development Plan 2002-2006, proposals for which are currently with the Minister of State for Youth Affairs. Envisaged under the Youth Work Act 2001, it is anticipated that this Plan will give official sanction to the huge advances made by groups like Foróige in raising the status of youth work in Ireland.



***It's been a long road travelled!***



■ Intel Computer Clubhouse at Blanchardstown Youth Service.



■ Intel Computer Clubhouse launch: An Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, TD., listens to David Morgan, Clubhouse member, keenly observed by Tom Coppinger, Chairperson of Foróige National Council and Peter Redale of Intel.

***“Foróige holds a special place in Irish life.***

***As Macra na Tuaithe, and later Foróige, the organisation has been a force for people of outstanding talent, creativity, and your hallmark has been commitment to youth development and to service in our community. I believe that these values are ever relevant to the challenges we now face as a country. We certainly are fortunate that we have a great organisation such as Foróige to promote and to stand up for these central civic values in these changing times. And I wish you every success as you chart a new way forward.***

***The Intel Computer Clubhouse, which is hosted by Foróige in the Blanchardstown Youth Service is a fantastic new facility and it’s a great and confident step forward to modernising your services. It certainly shows that your heritage as trailblazers for top class youth services is being applied with vigour to the challenges of youth work in a changing Ireland.***

***I assure you of my full admiration and support for your great work and wish you continued success going forward.***

An Taoiseach,  
Mr. Bertie Ahern, TD.



The fundamental purpose  
of Foróige is to enable  
young people to involve  
themselves consciously  
and actively in their own  
development and in the  
development of society.



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