



Aim

to explore how limited access to education affects choices later on in life and the importance of youth work in young peoples' lives.

Age

13 years and over

Time

45 minutes

Materials

section of Shane's story per group, copies of fact box on access to education in Ireland

Action

Find out about organisations in your area that support people to access education. A good place to start is the local library or community/youth information centre. Invite a speaker from a local organisation to speak to your group about the work they do and the impact it has locally.

What to do

Break into three groups and give each group a section of Shane's story. Explain that Shane is 16 years old and comes from Cork. Ask for a volunteer in each group to read the story. The groups should think about what is happening in the story. What opportunities does Shane have? What barriers does he face? How does he feel about his situation? Explain that they should present Shane's story as a short drama. Allow the groups 15 minutes to prepare.

Each group presents their drama. At a key moment, call freeze and the characters have to remain in position. The audience have to ask the characters questions in order to determine what is being represented and their feelings at that moment. Ask if anyone can suggest what's going to happen. After 5 minutes, move on to the next group.

Discuss the following:

- What barriers does Shane face to getting an education?
- Who has the power to remove these barriers?
- What opportunities has Shane had to access quality education?
- How do the barriers and opportunities presented to Shane by formal education (school and third level) differ from those offered by youth work?
- Hand out copies of the fact sheet on access to education in Ireland.
- Is Shane's experience similar or different to other young people in Ireland? Why?
- Do young people in developing countries face similar barriers and opportunities? Why?



Access to Education in Ireland

- 1 in 10 children leaving primary education have difficulty reading and writing and by 15 years old, 11% are able to complete only the most basic reading tasks.*
- Children in disadvantaged areas are three times more likely to have reading and writing problems.*
- Each year an estimated 1000 children drop out after primary school.*
- Nearly two thirds of Travellers leave school by 15 years of age having only completed primary education.**
- For people with a disability, almost half leave school with only primary education completed.**
- Almost two thirds of people with a disability left full time education at 18 years or under.**
- Asylum seekers in Ireland are not entitled to enrol in Third level education.

*Combat Poverty Agency (2003). Educational Disadvantage in Ireland.

**CSO. Census 2002.

Youth Work

- An estimated 200,000 young people are regularly involved in youth work in Ireland.
- They are involved in youth work because they want to be, not because they have to be.
- They are supported by 40,000 volunteers and 1,000 staff in youth organisations.
- There are a number of reasons why youth work is beneficial to young people:

young people enjoy themselves, while learning and developing themselves in the process;

young people have a wide range of programmes and activities to choose from depending on their interests;

youth work tackles real social issues locally and globally;

disadvantaged young people are provided with opportunities to learn and develop that specifically address their needs.



Shane's Story

One

Shane has two younger brothers who live with his father while Shane lives with his mother. Shane has been expelled twice from different schools, first when he was 12 years old and then when he was 15. In school, he would "lose the plot" in classes he didn't like. As a result of his behaviour he was referred to a counsellor. He was expelled before his Junior Certificate, but studied alone and "aced" his exams.

Shane did not want to leave school but he was having problems at home which affected the way

he thought and behaved. If a teacher, or somebody on the street, said something near him he presumed they were talking about him and he would react. The first school did have a counsellor whom he found helpful but in the other school, he thought it was a waste of time. A youth worker arranged for him to have a psychiatric assessment and he got the opportunity to see a counsellor. This helped him to deal with the paranoia which he often felt. His experiences have led him to believe that survival at school means keeping your head down and biting your tongue.

Two

Shane has been involved with Ógra Chorcaí youth clubs for about the last 8 years. In his youth club he is now a junior leader. He runs two groups and is part of the young leaders' forum. He has also achieved two Gaisce awards, which honour young people for contributing to their community and developing their skills. Shane helped to produce an anti-drugs video and took part in rowing and sailing activities, acted in a play with young people from two youth clubs, organised a soccer tournament and helped to run a summer scheme with other youth leaders.

Shane's involvement in youth work also led to his participation in a project entitled "New Young Europeans" to mark Cork's role as European

Capital of Culture in 2005. Six young people from Cork and 10 refugees and asylum-seekers took part and had their photographs and stories displayed on a large poster in the city centre.

Shane loves working in the youth club and says "if I didn't have the youth club I'd probably have run the streets doing something stupid". He says he would rather go to the youth club after work than go out. He is popular with the young people at the club because he is not too strict and can have a laugh with them. He only intervenes if things get out of hand. Although being a youth worker is considered unusual or different where he comes from, his friends respect him for what he does. They even came along to see him in a play in which he had to wear a pink power rangers suit and wear an afro!

Three

Shane was expelled from school twice for behaviour problems. After the second time he was expelled, Shane got sick with meningitis and spent a number of months in hospital. While in hospital he decided he would like to go back to complete his Leaving Certificate, but has been unable so far to find a school that will accept him.

Youth workers from Ógra Chorcaí arranged for tutors to help him and others in similar situations. However, these classes had to be stopped because not enough people were attending them.

Shane could not keep up the studying by himself so he had to pull out of the exams.

At the moment Shane is working as a plasterer. He doesn't like the work, but he needs the money. He wants to study youth work at college but needs the Leaving Certificate for this. Ógra Chorcaí is helping to find a school that will accept him but his previous record in school means he keeps getting refused. If he can't get a place in a school, he will have to do a preparatory course and then wait until he is 23 to study youth work as a mature student. One way or the other he is determined to get his qualification.