

# Chapter 2: Youth Theatre Models and Structures

## Introduction

NAYD and the youth theatre community have witnessed increased levels of diversity develop within youth theatre models and structures since the last *Centre Stage*. This chapter explores youth theatre models and structures under the following headings:

- 2.1 Youth theatre models
- 2.2 Youth theatre foundations, structures and locations
- 2.3 Youth theatre governance and policies
- 2.4 Local, national and international relationships
- 2.5 Landmarks in the development of youth theatres
- 2.6 Sustainability

*Centre Stage +10* provides a snapshot of youth theatre between November 2007 and May 2008. As youth theatre is constantly evolving, the circumstances of many individual youth theatres have already changed since this research was carried out. Some youth theatres will have seen increases or decreases in their membership numbers while others such as Co. Carlow Youth Theatre have added another group to their youth theatre. Like all arts organisations and youth work services, youth theatres have experienced reductions in available funding in 2008/9.

Youth theatre in Ireland has witnessed significant developments since the research was conducted:

- Local Youth Services have founded two new youth theatres, Boolabus Youth Theatre was created by Dun Laoghaire Youth Service and Adrenaline Youth Theatre was founded by Sphere 17 Youth Service in Darndale, Dublin;
- The Local Authority Arts Office in North Tipperary has founded two youth theatres, Nenagh Youth Theatre and Fracture Youth Theatre;
- The Local Authority Arts Office in Laois has founded a fifth youth theatre, Portarlinton Youth Theatre;
- New youth theatres have been founded in Meath and Kerry. Trim Youth Theatre in Meath was an initiative of the Local Authority Arts Office and Free Range Youth Theatre has been established in Tralee as a result of the collaboration between Siamsa Tíre and other individuals who work locally in theatre;
- Buí Bolg, a professional street theatre company in Wexford, has founded a youth theatre;
- Trap Door Youth Theatre has been founded in Fermoy as a result of a community initiative supported by the Avondhu Development Group.

Some youth theatres have experienced very significant disruptions:

- Cavan Youth Drama has suspended all activities as of 1 Jan 2009. Research is being carried out into the best future structure for Cavan Youth Drama and it is hoped that activities will resume as quickly as possible thereafter;
- Co. Mayo Youth Theatre – Castlebar ceased activities in Autumn 2008. The Ballina branch is still working strongly with young people from that area;
- Na Crosáin Youth Theatre has suspended activities in its Galway city branch while they are experiencing staff changes and venue refurbishment but continues to work with the Connemara group;
- The residency of Kildare Youth Theatre’s parent organisation, Crooked House Theatre Company, has come to an end at the Riverbank Arts Centre in Newbridge. The youth theatre is now renting space for its activities within the town.

### 2.1 Youth Theatre Models

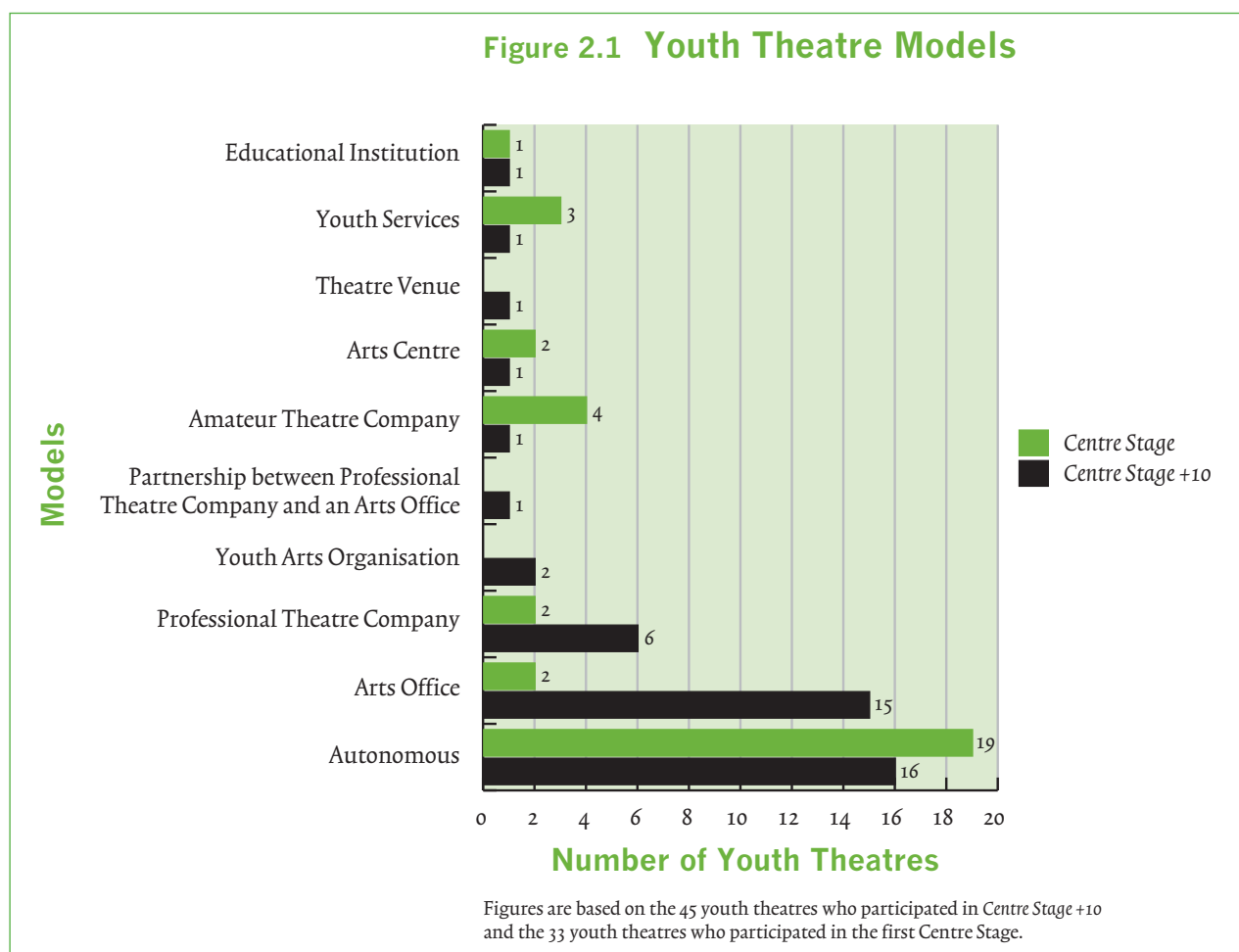
What types of youth theatre exist in Ireland? Since the last *Centre Stage*, NAYD and the youth theatre community have witnessed greater diversity within youth theatre structures, policies and activities. How can this diversity be examined and explained? NAYD developed a classification of different ‘models’ to facilitate an exploration of the differences that were emerging between youth theatres..

Of course, every youth theatre is different. Each group develops at its own pace, according to its particular environment and the needs of young people in its area. Youth theatres have very diverse foundations: they can be created by local volunteers; they can evolve as part of an arts centre or an arts organisation; they can develop in partnership with support agencies in their communities such as local youth services or as initiatives of Local

Authority Arts Offices. A youth theatre can operate on a small scale with one group of committed young people or might run a number of groups in a number of different centres across a city or county.

This classification of youth theatre models is not an attempt to pigeonhole youth theatres or create uniformity across the country. Within every model there is still huge variety. Models do assist, however, in highlighting some of the strengths and weaknesses in each of the different structures and revealing possibilities for development. Youth theatres can be categorised according to many different factors: for example, their founders, their structures, their purpose or their size. In *Centre Stage +10*, youth theatres are categorised according to the key decision maker, that is, the group of individuals or the organisation that is actually running the youth theatre. Therefore, youth theatres are categorised according to the ‘parent’ organisation that runs it (such as a professional theatre company, local youth services or a Local Authority Arts Office) or are classified as ‘autonomous’. Autonomous youth theatres are self-governing and have a voluntary board or committee.

In the first *Centre Stage* report, youth theatres were organised according to their principal founder but no data is provided to allow a comparison with current models. The youth theatres that took part in the first *Centre Stage* have been categorised in this research, for the purposes of comparison, according to information from the NAYD youth theatre archive. Figure 2.1 compares the models of the youth theatres that were involved in *Centre Stage* with those who were involved in *Centre Stage +10*.



The different types of youth theatre models are explored under the following headings:

- 2.1.1 Autonomous youth theatres
- 2.1.2 Local Authority Arts Office youth theatres and partnerships
- 2.1.3 Professional and Amateur Theatre Company youth theatres
- 2.1.4 Youth Services and Youth Arts Organisation youth theatres
- 2.1.5 Other youth theatre Models

Table 2.1 Provides information on the models of the youth theatres that participated in Centre Stage +10.

| YOUTH THEATRE                       | MODEL                         | COUNTY    |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Dry Rain Youth Theatre              | Autonomous                    | Wicklow   |
| Tallaght Youth Theatre              | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Youthopia Youth Theatre             | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Cabinteely Youth Theatre            | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Celbridge Youth Drama               | Autonomous                    | Kildare   |
| Clondalkin Youth Theatre            | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Droichead Youth Theatre             | Autonomous                    | Louth     |
| Independent Youth Theatre           | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Lightbulb Youth Theatre             | Autonomous                    | Cork      |
| Portumna Youth Theatre              | Autonomous                    | Galway    |
| Stage Craft Youth Theatre           | Autonomous                    | Tipperary |
| Griese Youth Theatre                | Autonomous                    | Kildare   |
| Limerick Youth Theatre              | Autonomous                    | Limerick  |
| Co. Sligo Youth Theatre             | Autonomous                    | Sligo     |
| Dublin Youth Theatre                | Autonomous                    | Dublin    |
| Galway Youth Theatre                | Autonomous                    | Galway    |
| Cavan Youth Drama                   | Arts Office                   | Cavan     |
| Co. Carlow Youth Theatre            | Arts Office                   | Carlow    |
| Co. Limerick YT - Lough Gur         | Arts Office                   | Limerick  |
| Co. Limerick YT - Abbeyfeale        | Arts Office                   | Limerick  |
| LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon             | Arts Office                   | Leitrim   |
| LYTC Carrigallen                    | Arts Office                   | Leitrim   |
| Manorhamilton Youth Theatre (MYTh)  | Arts Office                   | Leitrim   |
| Mayo Youth Theatre - Ballina        | Arts Office                   | Mayo      |
| Mayo Youth Theatre - Castlebar      | Arts Office                   | Mayo      |
| Roscommon Co. Youth Theatre         | Arts Office                   | Roscommon |
| Clare Youth Theatre                 | Arts Office                   | Clare     |
| Mountrath Youth Theatre             | Arts Office                   | Laois     |
| Portlaoise Youth Theatre            | Arts Office                   | Laois     |
| Rathdowney Youth Theatre            | Arts Office                   | Laois     |
| Stradbally Youth Theatre            | Arts Office                   | Laois     |
| Co. Wexford Youth Theatre           | Prof Theatre Co / Arts Office | Wexford   |
| Activate Youth Theatre              | Professional Theatre Co.      | Cork      |
| Boomerang Youth Theatre             | Professional Theatre Co.      | Cork      |
| Kilkenny Youth Theatre              | Professional Theatre Co.      | Kilkenny  |
| Physically Phishy Youth Theatre     | Professional Theatre Co.      | Cork      |
| Kildare Youth Theatre               | Professional Theatre Co.      | Kildare   |
| Na Crosáin                          | Professional Theatre Co.      | Galway    |
| Backstage Youth Theatre             | Amateur Theatre               | Longford  |
| Dreamstuff Youth Theatre            | Youth Arts Organisation       | Kilkenny  |
| Waterford Youth Arts                | Youth Arts Organisation       | Waterford |
| West Cork Arts Centre Youth Theatre | Arts Centre                   | Cork      |
| Roundabout Youth Theatre            | Youth Services                | Dublin    |
| Letterkenny Youth Theatre           | Theatre Venue                 | Donegal   |
| Cork School of Music Youth Theatre  | Educational Institution       | Cork      |

### 2.1.1 Autonomous Youth Theatres

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There are 16 autonomous youth theatres:

- 5 autonomous youth theatres are run on a completely voluntary basis;
- 7 autonomous youth theatres have a voluntary board or committee and pay facilitators to some extent (four of these are community initiatives employing professional facilitators);
- 4 youth theatres are established organisations with voluntary boards/committees and paid staff with full-time/part-time positions.

The autonomous youth theatre was the most common model during the original *Centre Stage* research period and is still the most common model in Ireland today. Many of the oldest youth theatres belong in this category.

The youth theatres of the 1970s and 1980s were generally initiated by one or a group of individuals who may or may not have had the support of local organisations and services. They existed as independent organisations who made decisions for themselves. The last decade has seen a rise in youth theatres created within local organisations and services, but there is still a thriving cluster of youth theatres that remain independent and self-governing.

The autonomous youth theatre model used to be termed a ‘voluntary’ youth theatre because of the voluntary board structure. These youth theatres were generally run on a voluntary basis by both youth theatre leaders and facilitators as well as board/committee members. The last 10 years have seen changes in the levels of voluntary adult involvement in youth theatre and have also witnessed the professionalisation of the facilitator and youth theatre leader. These, as well as other factors, have created a complex yet rich mesh of paid and voluntary involvement within the autonomous youth theatre model.

Five of the autonomous youth theatres included in this research are run on a completely voluntary basis by youth theatre leaders and board/committee members. Interestingly, only one of these youth theatres, Celbridge Youth Drama, was founded since the last *Centre Stage* report. The other autonomous youth theatres that have been created since 1997/1998 have all founded voluntary boards or committees and pay their youth theatre leaders/facilitators (although the payment given can range from a token to a standard wage).

Six autonomous youth theatres have been founded in this manner in the past 10 years and this model is particularly popular with community initiatives where local people are keen to set up a youth theatre but don’t have the necessary skills to run the drama activities themselves. One autonomous youth theatre was set up by a theatre school in central Dublin since the last *Centre Stage* and is now run by a voluntary board and facilitated largely by senior members, some of whom receive token payments.

There are also four large, established autonomous youth theatres where either permanent part-time or full-time staff report to a voluntary board/committee. These youth theatres are among some of the oldest youth theatres in Ireland and include Dublin Youth Theatre, Galway Youth Theatre, Limerick Youth Theatre and Co. Sligo Youth Theatre. Of these four youth theatres, Co. Sligo Youth Theatre is the youngest and has developed from an Arts Office initiative to a fully-fledged autonomous youth theatre with a voluntary board.

It is important to note that local youth services have been a significant support for autonomous youth theatres and many of the youth theatres are affiliated as youth clubs to local youth services such as Kildare Youth Service or local services run by Catholic Youth Care or the City of Dublin Youth Services Board.

#### **CASE STUDY: Co. Sligo Youth Theatre – an autonomous youth theatre**

County Sligo Youth Theatre was a joint initiative of the Local Authority Arts Office in Sligo and the Hawk’s Well Theatre. It was established in 1998 as a two-year Pilot Project and the Blue Raincoat Theatre Company joined the initiative as a partner in 1999. Over the past 10 years these partners have worked with drama facilitators to run youth theatre activities, with the Local Authority Arts Office as the lead agency providing funding and administration support.

As envisaged from the start, the youth theatre has developed into an autonomous model. By 2008, the youth theatre was run directly by a voluntary board including two members of staff from the Local Authority Arts Office, a member of HSE staff, the Artistic Director of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company, the Director of the Hawk’s Well Theatre, a parent and two member representatives. The youth theatre is managed by a full-time Artistic Director and employs freelance facilitators and directors to suit their programme.

### 2.1.2 Local Authority Arts Office Youth Theatres and Partnerships

- 15 youth theatres are run by Local Authority Arts Offices;
- 1 youth theatre is run by a professional theatre company in partnership with a Local Authority Arts Office.

The increase in the number of youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices represents the largest growth of a specific model since 1997/1998 and the Arts Office youth theatre has become the second most common model in Ireland today. Of the 33 youth theatres created since the last *Centre Stage* report, 15 were Local Authority Arts Office initiatives. Only two youth theatres were run by Local Authority Arts Offices during the original *Centre Stage* research. The term ‘Arts Office youth theatre’ has become an umbrella for a broad range of youth theatres all ultimately managed by Arts Offices but differing in staffing and organisational structures. This is often due to levels of funding, the tradition of drama and theatre within the county, the interests and experiences of Arts Office staff and policies as well as the geographical profile of the county.

Arts Officers have a remit to serve their entire county and have a responsibility to provide access to youth arts projects for all young people in the county. This challenge has often led Arts Officers to create multiple youth theatres within their county. For example, Co. Mayo Arts Office runs two youth theatres in Castlebar and Ballina, Co. Laois Arts Office runs four youth theatres in Portlaoise, Rathdowney, Stradbally and Mountrath and Co. Leitrim Arts Office runs three youth theatres, in Carrick-on-Shannon, Carrigallen and Manorhamilton. This is particularly common in counties where the geographical profile means that young people can’t easily access one central town and one central youth theatre. Sometimes Arts Officers create an umbrella structure for all youth theatres in the county, making individual youth theatres branches of a much larger organisation. An example of this is Co. Limerick Youth Theatre which has two branches in Abbeyfeale and Lough Gur.

There are, however, some interesting variations on these structures. The three youth theatres in Leitrim are all different from each other, even though they are co-ordinated by one Local Authority Arts Office. LYTC Carrigallen is supported by a small committee of volunteers, Manorhamilton Youth Theatre works in partnership with the Glens Centre where it is based and LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon is run by two drama facilitators and has a space rental relationship with The Dock Arts Centre. Co. Carlow Arts Office has created a part-time Youth Drama Officer position which runs a single-centre, single-group youth theatre but includes other responsibilities such as building local relationships and developing youth drama and youth theatre across the county. Co. Cavan Youth Drama has developed this model into a very large multi-centre, multi-group youth theatre that is run by a youth theatre Co-ordinator, a part-time member of the Arts Office staff. This post co-ordinates the activities of all branches of the youth theatre but also has responsibility to explore the development and sustainability of the youth theatre at a county level.

A partnership model has been created in Co. Wexford, where Bare Cheek Theatre Company (a professional theatre company) runs Co. Wexford Youth Theatre with the Local Authority Arts Office. This youth theatre operates within the structures of the theatre company and is supported in many ways by the Arts Office including funding, strategic planning, advice and marketing.

#### **CASE STUDY: Clare Youth Theatre – a Local Authority Arts Office model**

Clare Youth Theatre is an initiative of the Local Authority Arts Office and was founded in 2005 following a youth drama project. The youth theatre works with two groups of young people aged between 12 and 18 and rents workshop and production space at Glór, arts and entertainment venue. The group is based in Ennis and draws a county-wide membership.

Two freelance drama facilitators run workshops and direct productions. Staff from the Local Authority Arts Office are very involved in running the youth theatre, providing co-ordination and administration support as well as funding.

‘Clare Youth Theatre aims to draw young people together from all over the county in a spirit of creativity, fun and personal development through the medium of theatre.’ – *Mission Statement of Clare Youth Theatre*

### 2.1.3 Professional and Amateur Theatre Company Youth Theatres

- 6 of the youth theatres are run by five professional theatre companies;
- 1 youth theatre is run by an amateur theatre company.

The professional and amateur theatre communities have been key initiators and significant supporters of youth theatre since it began in Ireland. There has been a substantial exchange in terms of theatre practice, personnel, support and advice but some theatre companies have also become integral to the structures of youth theatre by founding and running groups themselves.

There is a very strong relationship between youth theatre and professional theatre companies that create theatre for young audiences. Graffiti Theatre Company runs two youth theatres in Cork, Barnstorm Theatre Company runs Kilkenny Youth Theatre and in 2008, the Artistic Director of Branar Theatre Company, co-ordinated Na Crosáin Youth Theatre for An Taibhdhearc in Galway.

Staff, freelance facilitators and actors who work for these theatre companies have worked for youth theatres around the country and also contributed to the development of youth theatre at a national level through participation in regional networks and the board of NAYD.

One youth theatre is run by a professional theatre company that began as a professional community theatre collective: Crooked House Theatre Company in Newbridge runs Kildare Youth Theatre. One professional theatre company, Boomerang Theatre Company, actually began life as Boomerang Youth Theatre. The youth theatre has developed into a theatre company that focuses on multi-media, international and visual arts productions while still running the youth theatre as part of its core programme.

The amateur theatre community has played a large role in the development of Irish youth theatre over the years and four youth theatres that participated in the original *Centre Stage* were run by amateur theatre companies. Though this community is still very involved in youth theatre through venue rental and partnerships, only one youth theatre that is run by an amateur theatre company is included in the research: Backstage Youth Theatre is run on a completely voluntary basis by members of the Backstage Theatre Group in Longford. The theatre group is governed by a voluntary board and youth theatre leaders report to this board.

#### **CASE STUDY: Kilkenny Youth Theatre – a professional theatre company model**

Kilkenny Youth Theatre is run by Barnstorm Theatre Company, a professional theatre company.

‘While the company develops professional theatre for specific audiences it also offers a resource to others in the community to use theatre as a means of education, self-development, exploration and celebration.’

<sup>1</sup> – Barnstorm Theatre Company website.

The youth theatre forms part of the theatre company’s outreach programme and is part of a series of activities (including the Junior youth theatre and the Adult Drama Club) where the local community can become actively involved in creating drama and theatre. The youth theatre was set up in 1991 and took a break from activities between 2003 and 2006. The youth theatre is staffed by the Barnstorm Outreach Officer, other facilitators and artists sourced from within the company and volunteers from the Adult Drama Group. All workshops and rehearsals take place at the Barnstorm building and the group use a local theatre for performances. The youth theatre works within the governance structures of the theatre company.

#### **2.1.4 Youth Services and Youth Arts Organisation Youth Theatres**

- 1 youth theatre run by a local youth service;
- 2 youth theatres run by youth arts organisations.

A natural affinity has always existed between youth theatre and youth work in Ireland. The youth services are an important partner for youth theatre through national and local funding, training, venue hire and support. Many youth theatres are affiliated to their local youth service and youth service staff sit on boards and committees of youth theatres or act as welfare advisors. Despite this close connection, only one youth theatre that is run directly by a local youth service is included in the research. The youth service model was strong during the first *Centre Stage* with three youth theatres being run directly by local youth services.

Many factors have contributed to this slight decline: among them the departure of key staff from the specific youth services involved, a trend towards film making and new technologies within youth work programmes as

<sup>1</sup> Barnstorm Theatre Company website, <http://www.barnstorm.ie>

well as a trend towards drama projects as part of an overall youth arts experience. Interestingly, NAYD saw a significant rise in affiliations from youth theatres run directly by local youth services throughout 2008.

The youth service model has largely been limited to the Dublin area and Roundabout Youth Theatre, run by the BRYR Youth Service, is based in Ballymun. A characteristic of this model is their location within areas of urban disadvantage.

Youth arts has been a developing field within the world of youth work over the past 10 years and the youth arts organisation model has become a new category. Two youth theatres are run by youth arts organisations in Kilkenny and Waterford and both have a large membership. Waterford Youth Arts developed from youth drama activities and was formerly known as Waterford Youth Drama during the first *Centre Stage*. The Young Irish Filmmakers developed Dreamstuff Youth Theatre from its initial film making activities.

#### **CASE STUDY: Roundabout Youth Theatre – a youth services model**

Roundabout Youth Theatre is run directly by a local youth service, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource. BRYR is a youth work organisation working for the welfare and development of 10-21 year-olds in Ballymun and views youth arts as an integral part of its services:

‘Arts are excellent vehicles for mobilising young people. In BRYR, we approach arts activities with the same ultimate welfare and developmental objectives as all our work. We recognise the particular communications and creative dimensions of art-based youth work... Theatre has been an important part of BRYR’s work since our formation in 1999.’<sup>2</sup> – Ballymun Regional Youth Resource website.

The youth theatre runs a programme of workshops and production work for three separate age groups: a junior group for the 10-12 age group, a middle group for the 13-16 age group and a senior group for young people aged over 16. The youth theatre is run by a part-time Artistic Director and supported by freelance facilitators and artists as well as a small team of volunteers. The youth theatre and its staff work within the governance and management systems of BRYR and are based at The Reco, Ballymun’s Central Youth Facility.

#### **2.1.5 Other Youth Theatre Models**

- 1 youth theatre run by an Arts Centre;
- 1 youth theatre run by an Education Institution;
- 1 youth theatre run by a Theatre Venue.

The remaining youth theatres represent an interesting mix of models. Arts Centres around the country are involved in youth theatre in terms of space and theatre rental but only one youth theatre (West Cork Arts Centre Youth Theatre) is actually run by a local arts centre. The original *Centre Stage* research included two youth theatres that were run by Arts Centres: First Call Youth Theatre which is still run by the Derry Playhouse and Stack youth theatre which was run by the South Tipperary Arts Centre. Equally, youth theatres have local relationships with theatre venues but only one youth theatre run directly by a theatre venue (An Grianán Theatre, Letterkenny) is included in the research. This youth theatre is the first of its kind in Ireland.

The school model of youth theatre was popular in the early 1990s but has been in decline since the end of that decade. This was a model where teachers ran youth theatres after school on a voluntary basis. The original *Centre Stage* report included only one such school or educational institution model based in Wexford town so it would seem that this model was already in decline at that stage.

This research again includes only one youth theatre run by an educational institution: the Speech and Drama department of the Cork School of Music (part of the Cork Institute of Technology) runs the Cork School of Music Youth Theatre. Though secondary schools are involved in drama projects and some schools offer rich drama opportunities to Transition year students, the youth theatres where a teacher worked after school with a consistent group of young people over a long period of time seems to have disappeared.

<sup>2</sup> Ballymun Regional Resource Website, <http://www.bryr.ie>

## CASE STUDY: Letterkenny Youth Theatre – a theatre venue model

Letterkenny Youth Theatre was founded in 2004 by staff from An Grianán Theatre. The Director of An Grianán had always been interested in establishing a youth theatre and had run once-off youth drama projects and workshop weekends for the young people of Letterkenny. In 2004, An Grianán entered discussions with staff from the Letterkenny Arts Centre about setting up a joint initiative. Although the Arts Centre have stepped away from the youth theatre in terms of an organisational role, their involvement gave momentum to the youth theatre and resulted in the formation of weekly youth theatre workshops.

The youth theatre is part of An Grianán's 'Workshop and Courses' programme for children, young people and teachers from the local area. The venue offers drama classes to 7-13 year olds and then offers young people the opportunity to progress onto youth theatre when they turn 14. The youth theatre work together as one group and meet once a week.

'Letterkenny youth theatre Company aims to be an ensemble company which offers opportunities for play and creative and personal development through drama and performance techniques. It offers an insight into aspects of professional theatre through a series of workshops and showcase performances.'

– Letterkenny Youth Theatre, Mission Statement

The youth theatre is co-ordinated by the director of An Grianán and works within the governance and management structures of the venue. The artistic programme is facilitated by a pool of three freelance, youth drama facilitators and artists. Workshops are held in a local hall and productions take place at the venue itself.

## 2.2 Youth Theatre Foundations, Structures and Locations

Youth theatre foundations, structures and locations are explored under the following headings:

- 2.2.1 Youth theatre foundations
- 2.2.2 Youth theatre size and structure
- 2.2.3 Location of youth theatres

### 2.2.1 Youth Theatre Foundations

The original *Centre Stage* report stated that all youth theatres that participated in the research evolved from small-scale drama projects or from sporadic local youth theatre projects. In general, youth theatres founded since the last *Centre Stage* have moved very quickly from any initial drama activities to recognisable youth theatre structures and practice. As the idea of 'youth theatre' becomes more widely known, founders state at the outset that they wish to set up a 'youth theatre' and drama activities are often only initiated once structures have been put in place. Founders may be aware of the work of other youth theatres or may have made contact with the youth theatre Officer (formerly Development Officer) at NAYD. This seems to have supported youth theatres to develop solid structures and an annual programme more quickly than before. The development of membership criteria for youth theatres wishing to affiliate to NAYD has also encouraged youth theatres to plan strategically during the early days of the youth theatre and this may also have shortened the journey from ad hoc projects to an operational youth theatre.

There is still a notable diversity in the range of initial youth theatre foundations. In the first *Centre Stage*, youth theatre founders were listed as individuals, local agencies, youth services, Local Authority Arts Officers, arts centres and theatre companies. Youth theatres founded since the last report have, by and large, been initiated by the same combination of individuals and organisations, although Local Authority Arts Offices have been the most active. The last 10 years have also witnessed the involvement of theatre venues, youth arts organisations, and a third level educational institution as well as local agencies such as community arts groups and community development organisations. Historically, individuals have been the primary driving force behind youth theatre in Ireland but the last 10 years have seen organisations playing an increasingly prominent role within the creation of youth theatres. However, this involvement is generally driven by the individuals within these organisations rather than a strategic plan for the development of youth theatre.

Of the 45 youth theatres included in *Centre Stage +10*, 29 have been founded since the last report in 1998<sup>3</sup>. Eight of these youth theatres developed into autonomous youth theatres. Looking more closely at the foundations of

<sup>3</sup> Thirteen of the *Centre Stage +10* youth theatres were also included in *Centre Stage*: Activate Youth Theatre, Cabinteely Youth Theatre, Cavan Youth Drama (as Cavan Youth Theatre), Droichead Youth Theatre, Dry Rain Youth Theatre, Dublin Youth Theatre, Galway Youth Theatre, Kilkenny Youth Theatre, Limerick Youth Theatre, Portlaoise Youth Theatre (as Laois Youth Theatre), Tallaght Youth Theatre, Waterford Youth Arts (as Waterford Youth Drama) and Youthopia Youth Theatre. Boomerang Youth Theatre, Kildare Youth Theatre and Backstage Youth Theatre were founded prior to *Centre Stage* but were not included in the research. For a full list of the founding dates of all *Centre Stage +10* youth theatres, see Figure 2.1 in Section 2.6 on 'Sustainability'.

these youth theatres we find that:

- Two youth theatres (Lightbulb Youth Theatre and Portumna Youth Theatre) were founded as community initiatives by a combination of local individuals and organisations such as local arts groups, community development organisations and Local Authority Arts Officers;
- Two youth theatres were set up as other models by a combination of founding partners but developed into autonomous youth theatres. Independent Youth Theatre was founded by the Independent Theatre Workshop, theatre school based in Dublin, and developed into an autonomous model and Co. Sligo Youth Theatre was set up by the Local Authority Arts Office with local partners the Hawk's Well Theatre and The Blue Raincoat Theatre Company, before developing into an autonomous youth theatre during the period of the research;
- Four youth theatres (Stage Craft Youth Theatre, Clondalkin Youth Theatre, Griese Youth Theatre and Celbridge Youth Drama) were set up by individuals from the local community. Although they may have received some support from particular organisations during the set-up phase, the individuals were the driving force behind the creation of these youth theatres. This would have been a very traditional way to found an autonomous youth theatre during the original Centre Stage research period.

#### **CASE STUDY: Lightbulb Youth Theatre –foundations**

Lightbulb Youth Theatre was founded as a community initiative by a combination of local individuals and organisations. A local community development organisation, Avondhu Development Group and the Local Authority Arts Officer for County Cork, in association with NAYD, held a meeting in Mallow for members of the public who were interested in youth theatre. The meeting attracted a number of people from the local arts community, including the Arts Alliance Mallow and the Pilgrim Players (amateur drama group), as well as parents who were interested in creating new activities for their children.

'I remember at the first meeting a number of people were parents of kids who were just interested in drama and they were obviously doing other things, like stage school or formal exams and I'd say they thought this was just going to be another outlet for that. Then there were others who thought this would be great as a feeder into the adult amateur drama group. At the meeting, the NAYD representative talked about 'youth theatre' and then from very early on we knew that it was different and that was important I think.' Lightbulb Youth Theatre leader

A core group of volunteers emerged from the public meeting and worked alongside key staff from the Local Authority Arts Office, Avondhu Development Group and staff from NAYD to decide how to set up the youth theatre and create a voluntary committee structure. The newly founded committee employed a youth theatre facilitator and developed a partnership with Graffiti Theatre Company that provided training and support for their new member of staff. The youth theatre ran taster workshops in the summer of 2003 to build an interest in drama and attract members for their first, full youth theatre year which started the following September. Avondhu Development Group and the Local Authority stepped back from the youth theatre once structures were in place and the committee was successfully running activities. The Local Authority continues to provide an annual grant of €6,000.

The remaining 25 youth theatres are all run by a combination of parent organisations.

Thirteen of the youth theatres were founded by Local Authority Arts Officers and include a variety of top-down and grass roots initiatives: Clare Youth Theatre, Co. Carlow Youth Theatre, Co. Limerick Youth Theatre – Abbeyfeale and Lough Gur, LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon, LYTC Carrigallen, Manorhamilton Youth Theatre, Mayo Youth Theatre – Ballina and Castlebar, Mountrath Youth Theatre, Rathdowney Youth Theatre, Roscommon County Youth Theatre, Stradbally Youth Theatre. Some Arts Officers developed youth theatres in accordance with a youth arts policy or because a gap in youth arts provision was identified. This can create a situation where local interest is only fostered after the youth theatre has been established. Other top-down initiatives allocated time to assess local interest in youth drama and run short-term projects before decisions were made about the establishment of a youth theatre. In other circumstances, Arts Officers were approached by youth drama facilitators or members of the public who proposed drama projects that were developed into Local Authority Arts Office youth theatres. This proved particularly common in counties with a strong amateur theatre tradition.

Though Arts Offices are the primary founding partner for most of their youth theatres, members of local communities have been involved and in some cases organisations such as local arts centres have also played a key part. In the case of Co. Wexford Youth Theatre, Bare Cheek Theatre Company approached the Local Authority Arts Office to explore the idea of setting up a youth theatre and a working partnership was established.

<sup>4</sup> Clondalkin Youth Theatre developed from a local group that ran youth drama activities since the 1980s. It began to build youth theatre structures and programmes in the late 1990s.

Professional and amateur theatre organisations, educational institutions, youth arts organisations, theatre venues and arts centres have also acted as the major founding partners in the foundation of youth theatres: Cork School of Music Youth Theatre, Dreamstuff Youth Theatre, Letterkenny Youth Theatre, Na Crosáin Youth Theatre, Physically Phishy Youth Theatre, Roundabout Youth Theatre and West Cork Arts Centre Youth Theatre<sup>5</sup>. These organisations are most likely to found youth theatres based on their own policies, core values and the close relationship between the work of a youth theatre and the principal activities of their organisation. Other than these factors, the critical component that enables these organisations to set up youth a theatre is additional funding. These types of organisations generally found youth theatres by themselves and focus on building strategic partnerships with their local community and local agencies after the initial set-up phase.

### 2.2.2 Youth Theatre Size and Structure

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There has been a large rise in the number of youth theatres with membership levels of 20 young people or less. The rise in small-sized youth theatres is a significant reflection of the difficulties that some youth theatres are experiencing in recruiting new members.

The *Centre Stage +10* research categorised youth theatres as ‘small’, ‘medium’ or ‘large’ depending on their membership levels:

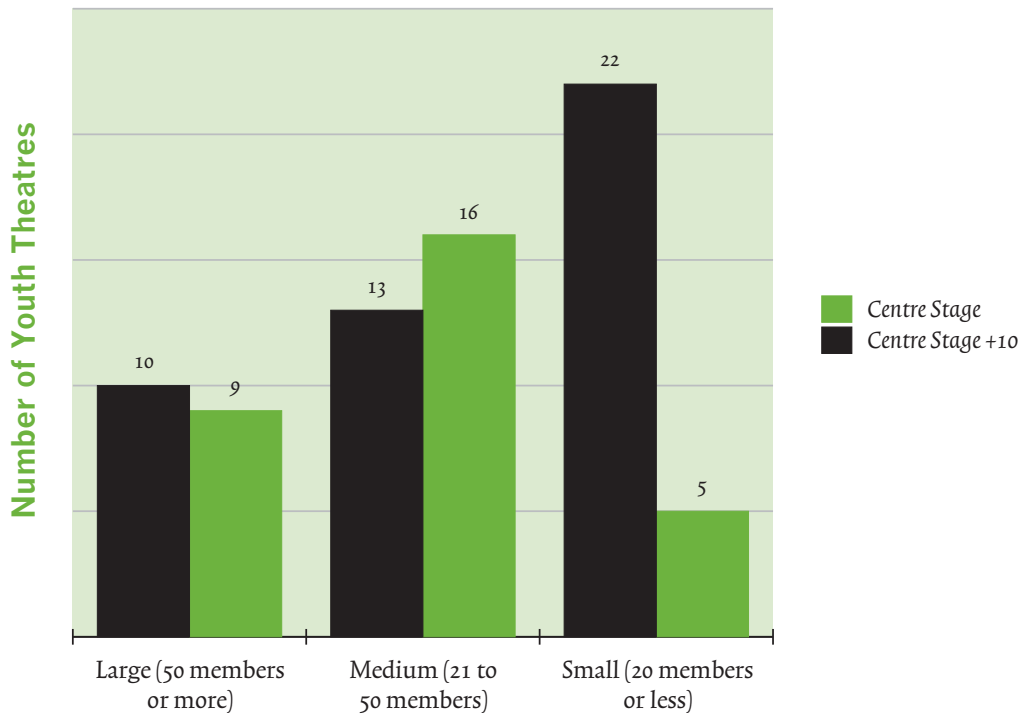
- Youth theatres with 20 members or less were termed ‘small’;
- Youth theatres with 21 to 50 members were termed ‘medium’;
- Youth theatres with 50 members or more were termed ‘large’.

Figure 2.2 outlines the membership size of youth theatres that participated in *Centre Stage* and those that participated in *Centre Stage +10*. Half of all ‘small’ youth theatres are run by Local Authority Arts Offices. Autonomous youth theatres account for 31.82% of all ‘small’ youth theatres. Youth theatres run by professional theatre companies are also likely to have low membership levels as two-thirds of these youth theatres had 20 members or less. These ‘smaller’ youth theatres are very evenly spread between cities, towns and rural locations. It is important to recognise that membership levels of 20 young people or less does not always signal a recruitment problem. In some cases these numbers are indicative of the working capacity of the youth theatre.

The increase in youth theatres with low membership levels has been balanced by the development of some large, multi-group youth theatres with high membership levels. This balance means that the average number of members per youth theatre has not changed significantly in the past 10 years. In the first *Centre Stage*, 33 youth theatres reported a membership of 1,530 young people, an average of 46 each. In *Centre Stage +10*, 38 youth theatres reported a membership of 1,803, an average of 47 each.

<sup>5</sup> West Cork Arts Centre has also previously run Skibbereen Youth Theatre.

**Figure 2.2 Membership Size of Youth Theatres**



Figures are based on 45 youth theatres who participated in Centre Stage +10 and 30 youth theatres who participated in Centre Stage.

### • Multiple Groups and Age Range

As youth theatres grow and develop, many create different working groups within their youth theatre. The key reason for the development of sub-groups has been the extension of the age range that the youth theatre serves. Of course, youth theatres may run sub-groups for different reasons. Some youth theatres like to separate out new members for a special programme of introductory workshops and experiences, some youth theatres like to run separate groups to challenge older members and some youth theatres find they have so many interested young people that they split their usual workshop group in two rather than turn people away.

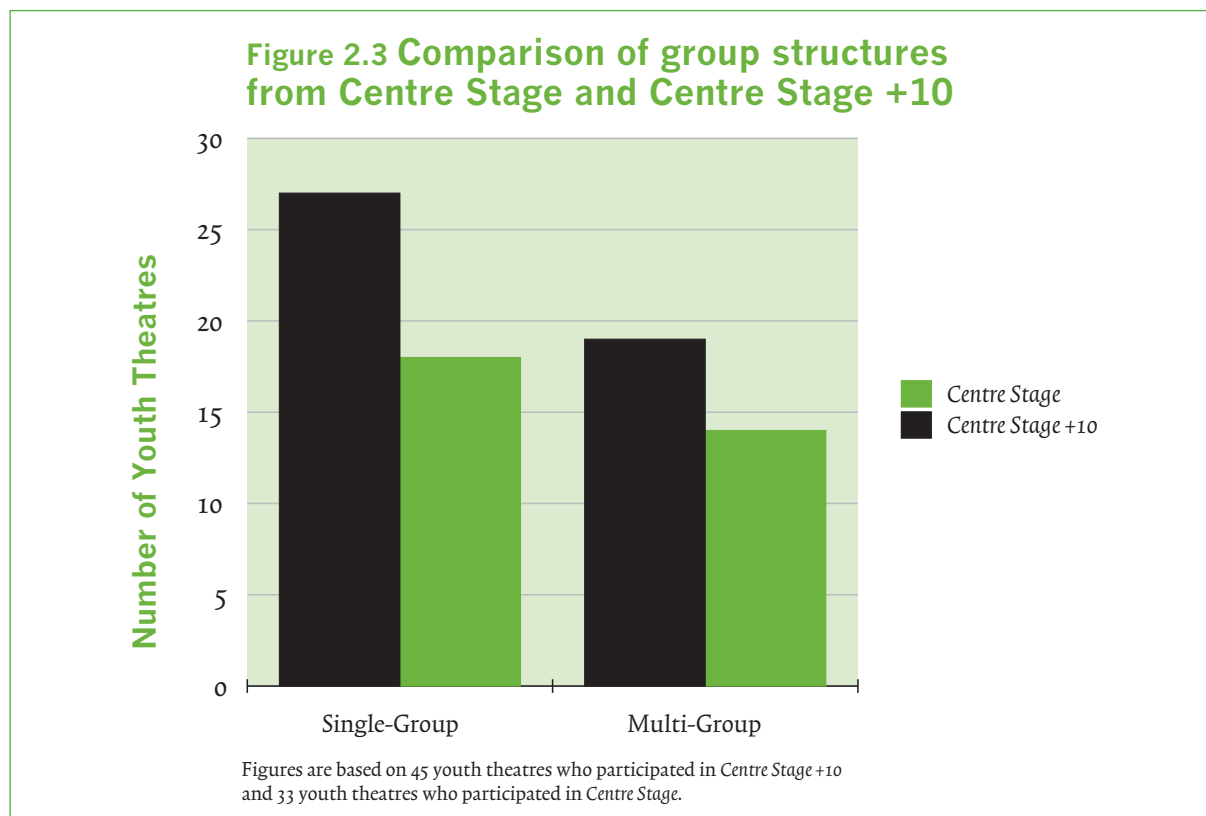
In the last 10 years, youth theatres have continued to extend beyond what was seen as the traditional youth theatre age range of 14 to 18. This trend had already been established by the first Centre Stage where 60.61% of the 33 participating youth theatres worked with young people under the age of 14 and 30.30% worked with children under the age of 12. In Centre Stage +10, 55.56% of the 45 participating youth theatres worked with young people aged under 14 and 31.11% worked with children under the age of 12.

At the other end of the age range spectrum, Centre Stage +10 youth theatres are also continuing the trend of working with young people aged 18 and over. 54.55% of Centre Stage youth theatres worked with young people aged 18 and over compared with 51.11% of Centre Stage +10 youth theatres. Youth theatres have significantly increased the number of young people they are working with from this age range. The 38 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres, that took part in Census Week, reported a combined membership of 196 young people aged 18 or over in comparison with the 71 young people reported by the 33 Centre Stage youth theatres.

During the Centre Stage +10 research period, 40% of youth theatres were running multiple groups. Large youth theatres run by youth arts organisations, arts centres or youth services are likely to run multiple groups that serve a wide age range. Medium and large autonomous youth theatres as well as a few Local Authority Arts Office youth theatres also reported work with multiple groups.

This number of multiple groups is not a new trend. In the first Centre Stage, 57.58% of the 33 youth theatres worked with multiple groups. Centre Stage youth theatres reported between two and eight sub-groups.

Figure 2.3 compares the group structures of youth theatres in Centre Stage with those that participated in Centre Stage +10.



• **Multiple Centres**

In the last 10 years, youth theatres have developed their structures to incorporate multiple activity centres. At the beginning of 2008, Cavan Youth Drama was an example of a large multi-centre youth theatre with activities in eight different locations around the county. The organisation was co-ordinated by an Artistic Director, a part-time employee of the Local Authority Arts Office. This role supervised the youth drama facilitators who ran activities in the eight centres and oversaw the development of the county programme.

Multi-centre youth theatres typically develop within a parent organisation such as an Arts Office, a professional theatre company or a youth arts organisation. At the beginning of 2008, Na Crosáin, a youth theatre run by a professional theatre company operated a multi-centre youth theatre in Galway city and Connemara. Waterford Youth Arts, a youth arts organisation, runs many different types of youth theatre activities in different communities around Waterford.

**CASE STUDY: Cavan Youth Drama –a multi-centre, multi-group youth theatre**

At the beginning of 2008, Cavan Youth Drama was working with 15 different groups in eight different centres around Co. Cavan:

|               |          |                               |
|---------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| Mullahoran    | 1 group  | under-12 age group            |
| Killeshandra  | 4 groups | under-12 and 12-18 age groups |
| Bailieborough | 1 group  | 12-18 age group               |
| Drung         | 2 groups | under-12 age group            |
| Kingscourt    | 1 group  | under-12 age group            |
| Cavan         | 3 groups | under-12 and 12-18 age groups |
| Belturbet     | 2 groups | under-12 and 12-18 age groups |
| Ramor         | 1 group  | 12-18 age group               |

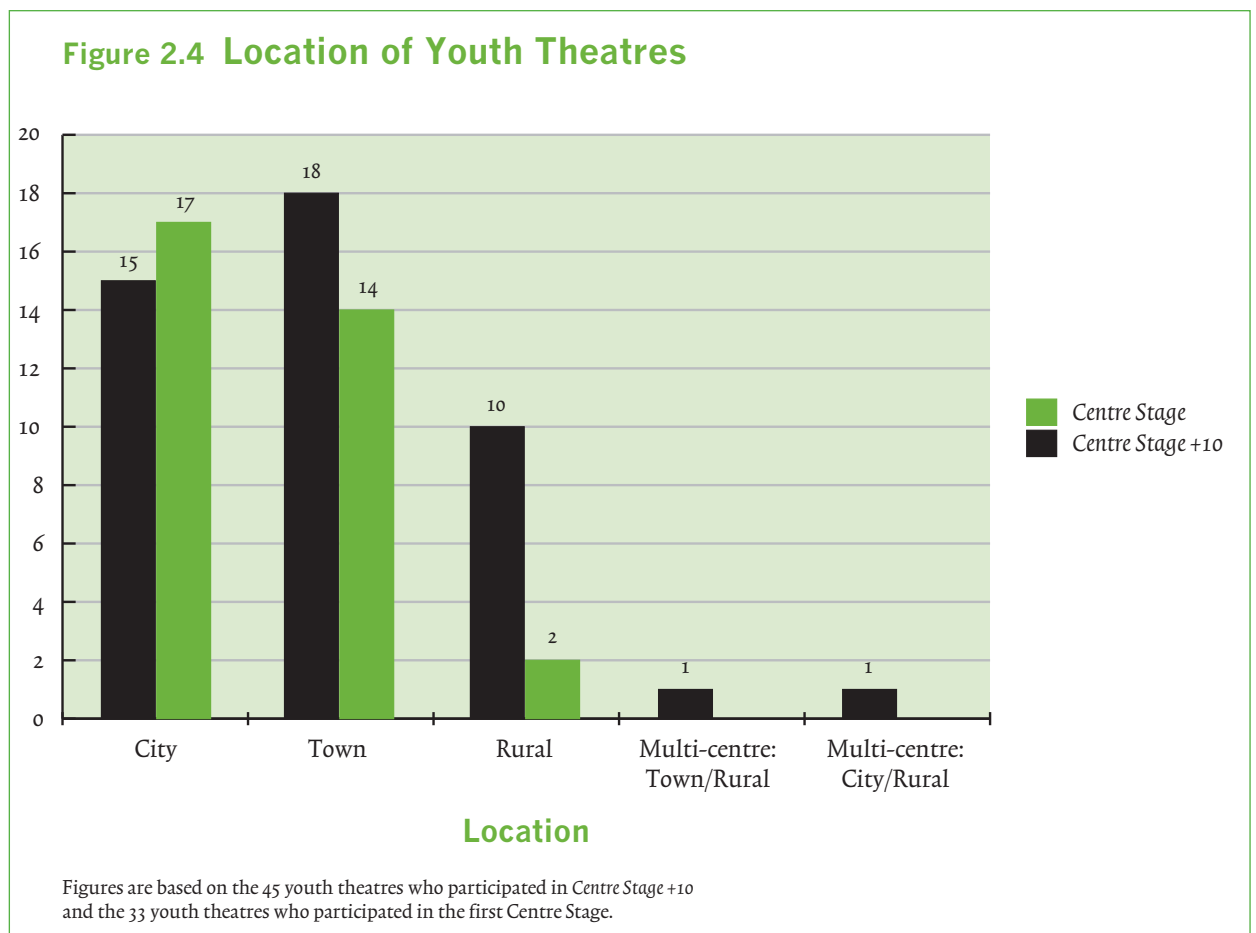
Cavan Youth Drama began in 1996 with one youth drama group based in Cavan town. The late 1990s saw the development of a new group based in Virginia (later to become the Ramor group with the opening

of the Ramor Theatre) and the Woodview group (later to become the Bailieborough group), which was established with the Cavan Partnership to serve the young people of a disadvantaged estate in Bailieborough. Peace and Reconciliation funding allowed Cavan Youth Drama to expand their programme and create further groups around the county. Taster workshops were carried out as part of 4-week projects around the county to gauge interest levels and identify potential locations for new youth drama activities. Cavan Youth Drama grew from three to 10 groups and then expanded to 14 groups over the following years. In 2008, Cavan Youth Drama was running 15 youth drama groups for children and young people around the county.

Autonomous youth theatres tend to serve the specific area in which they were created and would not typically develop a multi-centre structure. The larger, more established autonomous youth theatres have all engaged to some extent with the idea of outreach projects. Galway Youth Theatre, Dublin Youth Theatre and Co. Sligo Youth Theatre have all been involved in varying levels of outreach activity and Limerick Youth Theatre has a part-time Outreach Officer.

### 2.2.3 Location of Youth Theatres

In the 1980s and 1990s, youth theatres developed in cities and towns across the country and two of the oldest youth theatres (Dublin and Cabinteely) were formed in Dublin. The past 10 years have seen a more even distribution of youth theatres around the country and as a consequence increased access to youth theatre in rural areas. Figure 2.4 compares the location of youth theatres that participated in *Centre Stage* and *Centre Stage +10*. Youth theatres are categorised based on their location but it should be recognised that a youth theatre based in a town or a city may serve a county-wide remit and include members from rural areas.

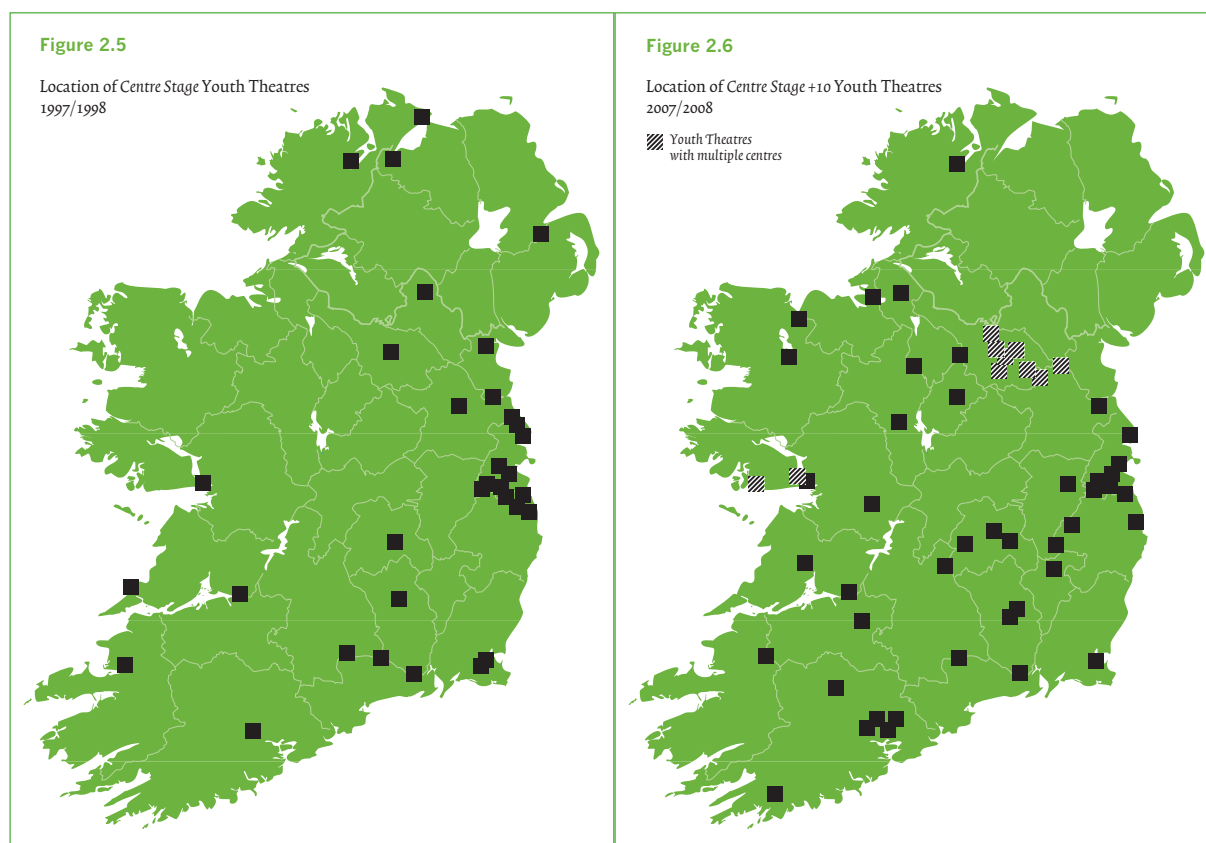


Two autonomous youth theatres are based in a rural setting and are community led initiatives. The remaining autonomous youth theatres are evenly spread between cities and towns and the four established, autonomous youth theatres are all in well populated areas. All youth theatres run by theatre companies, youth services, youth arts organisations, educational institutions, theatre venues and arts centres are based in towns or cities

except for Na Crosáin Youth Theatre which has a branch in Connemara. In these categories, eight are based in cities and four in towns. Youth theatres have evolved wherever the resources and expertise have existed to support them and traditionally this has meant that youth theatres clustered around the key arts and youth services in towns and cities.

The majority of rural youth theatres are run by Local Authority Arts Offices (seven rural youth theatres and one town/rural youth theatre). It should be noted that this model makes a significant contribution to the inclusion of young people from rural backgrounds and that strategic planning and support from county or regional organisations (i.e. youth and arts services) may be necessary to initiate rural youth theatres where local expertise or resources don't exist.

Figures 2.5 and 2.6 show the locations of youth theatres from Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10. The figures highlight the current geographic spread of youth theatres, showing the decrease in urban youth theatres and the increase in rural youth theatres.



## 2.3 Youth Theatre Governance and Policies

Youth theatre governance and policies are explored under the following headings:

- 2.3.1 Governance structures
- 2.3.2 Youth Participation
- 2.3.3 Youth theatre policies

### 2.3.1 Governance Structures

The range of governance structures in youth theatre reflects the variety of models that currently exists. Though governance remains essentially the same as it would have been during 1997/1998, boards, committees and parent organisations face increased responsibility as employers of youth theatre leaders and facilitators, as fundraisers and in terms of welfare and child protection policy.

The 16 autonomous youth theatres follow traditional governance structures that would have been common during the first *Centre Stage*. Their governance structures involved paid/voluntary leaders/facilitators reporting to a voluntary board or committee structure. Leaders in youth theatres that are run on a completely voluntary basis are also likely to sit on the youth theatre board or committee. Autonomous youth theatres that employ facilitators are more likely to have a separate group of adults who are only involved in board/committee activities. The four large autonomous youth theatres have more developed, formal board and committee structures and there is likely to be little cross-over between staff who work practically with the young people and board/committee members. The smaller, autonomous youth theatres often have more informal governance structures and some would not have the appropriate constitution or legal standing to act as employers of facilitators, directors or other youth theatre staff.

Youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices do not generally have board or committee structures. Usually, a facilitator or assistant facilitator reports directly to their employer, the Arts Officer or another member of Arts Office staff with responsibility for Youth Arts or Education. There are, of course, exceptions. In LYTC Carrigallen, a facilitator and an assistant facilitator are employed directly by the Arts Office but a team of local volunteers support the youth theatre and work as a youth theatre committee. In Co. Carlow, the Youth Drama Officer is line-managed by the Arts Office but is formally employed by Carlow Town Amenities Trust. The youth theatre is exploring the development of a more formal advisory committee and already has the Director of local youth work services in place as Welfare Advisor. Co. Wexford Youth Theatre is run by Bare Cheek Theatre Company in partnership with the Arts Office but the theatre company has its own voluntary board.

All other youth theatre models work within the governance and management systems of their parent organisation or the lead agency involved in the youth theatre. It's worth noting that Backstage Youth Theatre, a youth theatre run by an amateur theatre company, operates on a completely voluntary level and leaders report to the voluntary board of the amateur theatre company.

Aside from formal governance structures, youth theatres often have an informal network of advisors who can be called on for assistance. An example of this is Mayo Youth Theatre – Ballina, where the Artistic Director of Yew Tree Theatre Company acts as an artistic advisor.

#### **CASE STUDY: Dublin Youth Theatre – governance structures**

Dublin Youth Theatre is one of the oldest youth theatres in the country and has a highly developed governance system. It is a self-governing, autonomous youth theatre with:

- One full-time, paid member of staff and a live-in house manager;
- A part-time artistic director who is paid a small honorarium for the role;
- A voluntary board of directors, which is elected by the company membership at Annual General Meetings. The maximum number of board members is 14 and the minimum is eight. The chair of the board acts as the manager of the full-time staff member on behalf of the board;
- A company membership consisting of people who have previously served on DYT sub-committees or on the board of directors and also people who have been co-opted into the company because of relevant skills and expertise;
- Artistic and welfare sub-committees to support staff and particular areas of work. Other sub-committees or working groups are formed when necessary, for example DYT has recently formed a fundraising committee;
- Two member representatives who sit on the board. They are elected by the membership and hold monthly forums for members.

*‘The forum is a leader-free zone. Members have the opportunity to speak candidly about things that are happening in the organisation and their ideas and their vision and that goes back to the board. It’s discussed at board level and then fed back to the membership by the members representatives.’ - Dublin Youth Theatre Leader*

#### **2.3.2 Youth Participation**

Young people are the heart of a youth theatre. Youth theatre members have traditionally been included in the decision-making processes of a youth theatre. It has always been part of the ethos of Irish youth theatre to value the voice of young people, to encourage young people to express their opinions and to feel ownership of their

work and their youth theatre. In general, youth participation structures within *Centre Stage +10* youth theatres are quite informal. Young people can contribute to the running of their youth theatre by chatting with leaders and giving feedback on workshops, productions or general issues. These discussions would typically happen at the beginning or end of a weekly workshop or term of activities and would inform the annual programme of the youth theatre.

**Figure 2.7 Youth theatre members should help to make all the decisions in youth theatres?**



Figures are based on the responses of 56 youth theatre members attending *Centre Stage +10* member workshops.

During the *Centre Stage +10* Member Workshops, youth theatre members expressed a desire to contribute to decision-making within their youth theatre, particularly artistic decisions such as choosing a play for the next production, choosing skills workshops, or choosing facilitators and directors. Youth theatre members expressed a strong sense of ownership of their youth theatre and this drove their desire to be involved in running it. Members were keen to have their opinions heard. However, they felt unsure or reluctant about being involved in all decision making. They felt that areas such as finance, safety and child protection, as well as personal issues regarding youth theatre members, were more appropriately dealt with by youth theatre leaders. Some youth theatre members felt they did not have the skills or the knowledge to deal with these issues while other members believed that being involved in running the youth theatre might detract from their practical drama and theatre experiences. Youth theatre members who participated in *Centre Stage +10* Member Workshops were asked whether they would like to help make all the decisions in their youth theatre. They responded:

*“I think we should have an opinion on everything... just to know what’s going on, not to have everything going on over your head.” – Letterkenny Youth Theatre Member*

*“We’re part of the youth theatre. We’re like the foundation of the youth theatre, so why shouldn’t we be able to make decisions for the youth theatre. Without us there wouldn’t be any youth theatre.”*

*– Roscommon County Youth Theatre Member*

*“It’s important to have your opinion but running the youth theatre and making decisions is a lot of responsibility. And like, you don’t know what the repercussions are going to be.”*

*– Co. Sligo Youth Theatre Member*

*“Like we couldn’t make a decision on some things because it’s not our job and it’s not what we’re here for. We’re here for the theatre and we can make decisions on what our productions are and on our workshops but some decisions aren’t ours to make.” – Roscommon County Youth Theatre Member*

In the first *Centre Stage*, one third of the youth theatres had members’ committees and a total of 111 young people were involved in these committees. Although there has been a decline in formal youth participation structures, they still exist and are most common within the autonomous youth theatre model. In the larger autonomous youth theatres such as Dublin youth theatre and Co. Sligo Youth Theatre, member representatives still report to youth theatre staff or board. Smaller autonomous youth theatres such as Celbridge Youth Drama or Independent

Youth Theatre still have a high proportion of members involved at board level.

Formal youth participation structures are least common within the Arts Office model where the decision-making processes are generally layered between contract / freelance facilitators and Arts Office staff. One Arts Office youth theatre, Cavan Youth Drama, had piloted a formal youth participation structure during the *Centre Stage +10* research year. The youth theatre created a central youth theatre forum for older members that suited its multi-centre, multi-group structure.

Youth participation is not common practice within some specific models where leaders work within a restricted annual programme, in youth theatres where the leadership style is less democratic or in youth theatres with a large contingent of younger members. In general, youth theatre leaders reported that they had experimented with a broad range of formal youth participation structures but had decided that informal discussions with youth theatre members was the most suitable method for their youth theatre.

### 2.3.3 Youth theatre policies

Modern youth theatres have to engage with policies in a way that would have been unfamiliar to the youth theatre sector during the first *Centre Stage*. The first *Centre Stage* discusses NAYD policies, guidelines and ideas of good practice but does not mention the policies of individual youth theatres. A policy is a programme of actions adopted by a youth theatre or the set of principles on which the youth theatre and its actions are based. It is a new language that youth theatre leaders have to engage with.

Policy development has been led primarily by external influences such as changes in child protection and vetting, the professionalisation of youth theatres and their parent organisations, the involvement of Local Authority Arts Offices, the need to communicate the ethos and value of youth theatre to funders as well as the development of NAYD's criteria for affiliation. Youth theatres operate a range of different policies and may hold these policies in a variety of different formats such as policy documents, constitutions, aims and objectives documents, mission statements or simply as strongly held personal opinions.

All youth theatres that participated in *Centre Stage +10* had formalised child protection policies. Some youth theatres had separate, written welfare policies that included broader welfare procedures (such as responses to bullying or procedures for overnight trips) as well as group rules that had been developed by members. The majority of youth theatres stated that they had a written artistic policy. Although child protection / welfare policies exist as separate documents others such as artistic policies, inclusion policies, youth participation policies, recruitment policies or non-competitive policies were often brought together in documents such as constitutions, mission statements or aims and objectives documents or were sometimes agreed informally without being written down. Many youth theatres do not have an official, written policy on inclusion, youth participation, recruitment or non-competitive approaches. Some leaders have strong opinions on these issues which inform their work within the youth theatre, while other leaders simply had not given these issues much thought.

#### CASE STUDY: County Carlow Youth Theatre – policy development

County Carlow Youth Theatre has recently updated its child protection policy within a document called: Child Protection Policies, Procedures and Practices for the protection of children and young people involved with County Carlow Youth Theatre

The policy document includes:

**Section 1:** County Carlow Youth Theatre, Description and Roles

**Section 2:** Child Protection Policy Statement

**Section 3:** Policies and Procedures

1. Code of Behaviour
  - A) Child Centred Approach
  - B) Good Practice
  - C) Inappropriate Behaviour
  - D) Physical Contact
  - E) Health and Safety

2. Reporting Procedures
3. Confidentiality Statement
4. Recruiting Staff
5. Managing and Supervising Staff
6. Involvement of Primary Carers
7. Procedures on how to Deal with General Complaints and Comments
8. Complaints Procedure
9. Procedures for Dealing with Allegations against Staff
10. Procedures Covering Informing Primary Carers and Children of Action Taken in the Event of an Abuse Allegation
11. Accident Procedures

**Sample Forms:**

- Sample Volunteer Reference Form
- Declaration Form
- CCYT Registration Form
- CCYT Travel Mandate RE: International
- CCYT Travel Mandate RE: National
- Young Persons Travel Code of Conduct
- Key Actions Checklist

Appendix 1. Definitions of Abuse

Autonomous youth theatres develop policies with their board or steering committee. They often seek advice from a range of partners (including local agencies or services that they may be affiliated to) on the creation of these policies, especially child protection policies. All other models of youth theatre have parent organisations which may have policies in place already in the areas of child protection, welfare, artistic practice, health and safety or inclusion. Some youth theatres will simply adopt the policies of their parent organisation while others will adapt them or create new ones to suit their own specific purpose.

For some youth theatre leaders, policy development was a sign that youth theatre was becoming overly bureaucratic and they expressed concerns about the extra workload and the pressure they felt to put down on paper what they had been practising for years. Policy titles and language were very off-putting for some leaders who enjoyed the practical side of youth theatre work. At the other extreme, youth theatre leaders felt policies were necessary and important, not only to make procedures clear and transparent but also to ratify the rules and values of the youth theatre, so that a future generation of leaders could follow in the same spirit.

## 2.4 Local, National and International Relationships

Many youth theatres have strong local relationships, particularly those that grew organically from the community or those that invested in local relationships from the time of their initial set-up. Some youth theatres find the creation and maintenance of local relationships difficult because their key youth theatre leaders do not live in the local area and only visit for regular youth theatre activities. While some youth theatres overcome this challenge through the activities of local board members or parent organisations, others struggle to connect with their local community. Relationship building takes time and energy. Youth theatres mention a lack of time as the major barrier to relationship building.

Youth theatres have built up a varied range of national relationships. Some youth theatres have established connections with national arts or youth work funding organisations while others have made contact with theatre companies or venues outside their local area. The majority of youth theatres described a national network of relationships which included NAYD and other youth theatres. Youth theatre leaders described a mixture of long-term and short-term relationships with other youth theatres they met through training activities, festivals and exchanges.

A small number of youth theatres have international relationships with other organisations. Some youth theatres were still actively building international links but the majority described relationships that had been established through festivals or exchanges that had taken place many years ago. Boomerang Youth Theatre is a notable exception. Their programme and ethos centres on intercultural exchange and they are constantly building partnerships abroad.

### CASE STUDY: **Kildare Youth Theatre – local, national and international relationships**

On a local level, Kildare Youth Theatre has built relationships with Kildare Youth Services, the Bridge Community Development Project in Newbridge, the Riverbank Arts Centre and local schools and youthreach centres through outreach work. The youth theatre has also developed a relationship with NUI Maynooth by offering placements for students and encouraging students to conduct research into the outcomes of participation in KYT. The youth theatre has good relationships with the two other youth theatres in the county, Griese Youth Theatre and Celbridge Youth Drama, as well as another youth drama group based in Prosperous. KYT organises an annual youth drama festival for all Kildare groups every summer that includes performance and workshop experiences.

On a national level, Kildare Youth Theatre listed other youth theatres, NAYD and national funders such as the Ireland Funds and the Irish Youth Foundation. KYT has also been involved in national festivals such as the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival and has been involved in running the Irish ‘Connections’ festival for many years, building strong connections with other youth theatres around the country.

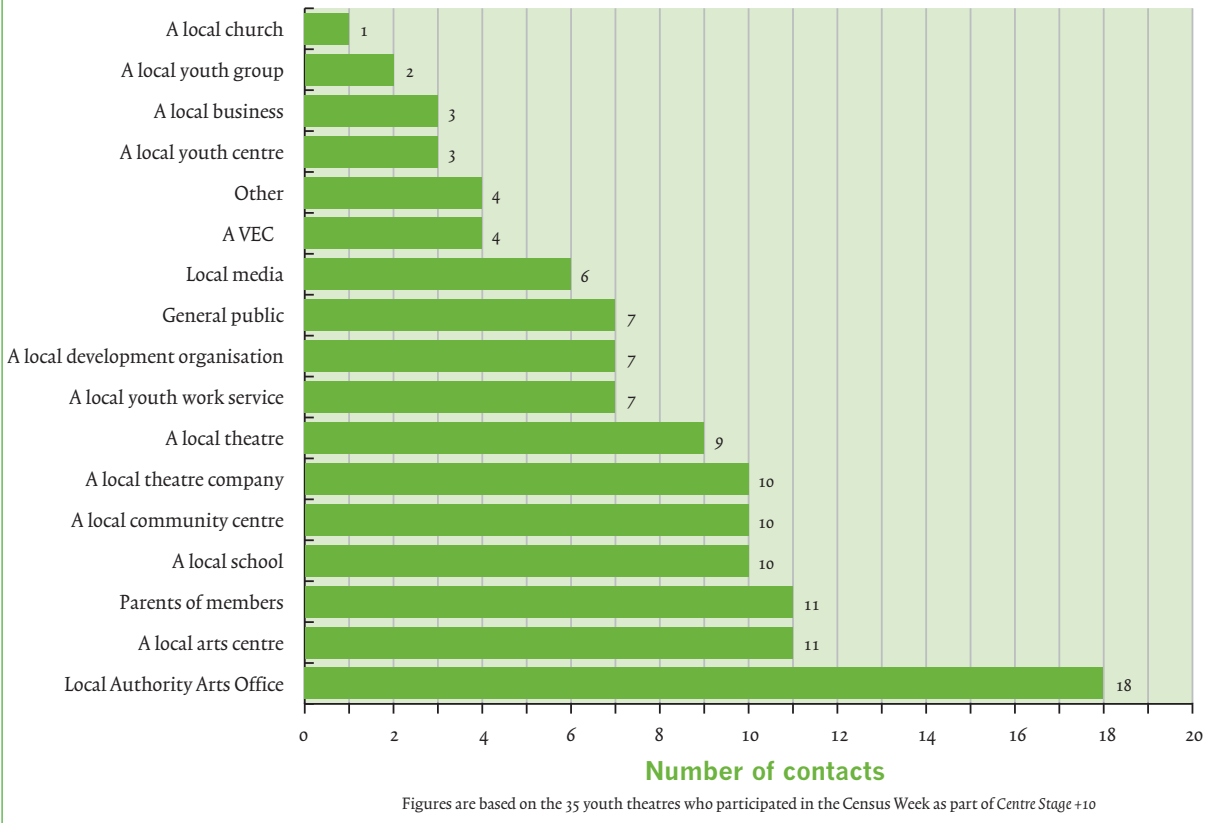
KYT has developed a strong relationship with the National Theatre in England through its ‘Connections’ work and performed at the RNT Cottesloe Theatre in London in 2003. KYT aims, funding permitting, to travel once a year to a venue outside Ireland. KYT members have travelled to Florence to work with Teatro della Limonaia as part of an ongoing exchange programme. They have also engaged with the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, the Prague Theatre Festival, the West Lothian Youth Theatre, the Ulster Association for Youth Drama and a theatre festival in Berlin.

“Oh they [connections with other groups] definitely enrich the youth theatre. That comes across in their evaluations, about the international aspect for certain... that there’s a wider connected web of people out there and it’s not just about this town. In fact, they’re much more focused on the national and international than they are on the local.” – *Kildare Youth Theatre Leader*

During Census Week, 38 youth theatres logged the type and level of contact with local organisations and individuals. All youth theatres made contact with at least one type of local organisation or individual. Contact with Local Authority Arts Offices was the most common, mainly because of the number of youth theatre leaders contacting their employers. Although, one of the Arts Office contacts was a meeting between a small autonomous youth theatre and their local Arts Officer.

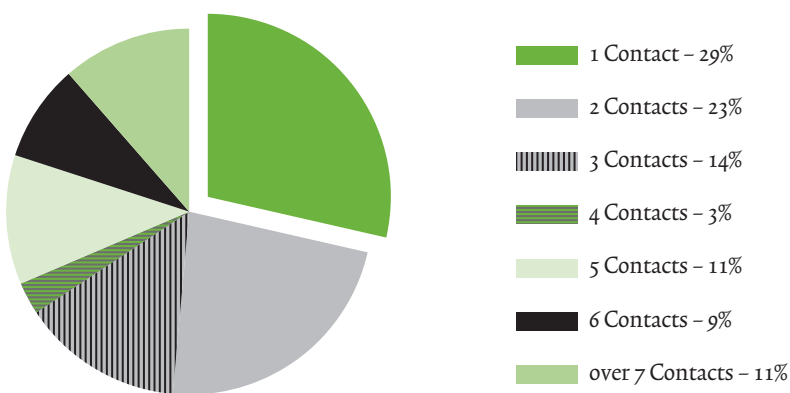
During Census Week, 60% of youth theatres felt their level of contact with local organisations and people was typical. 32% of youth theatres felt it was more than usual because of irregular activities such as recruitment drives or Open Days, monthly meetings, extra fundraising activities, attending performances and extra preparations for productions. 8% of youth theatres felt it was less than usual because production and administration levels were less than at other times of the year.

**Figure 2.8 Local Contacts made by Youth Theatres during Census Week**



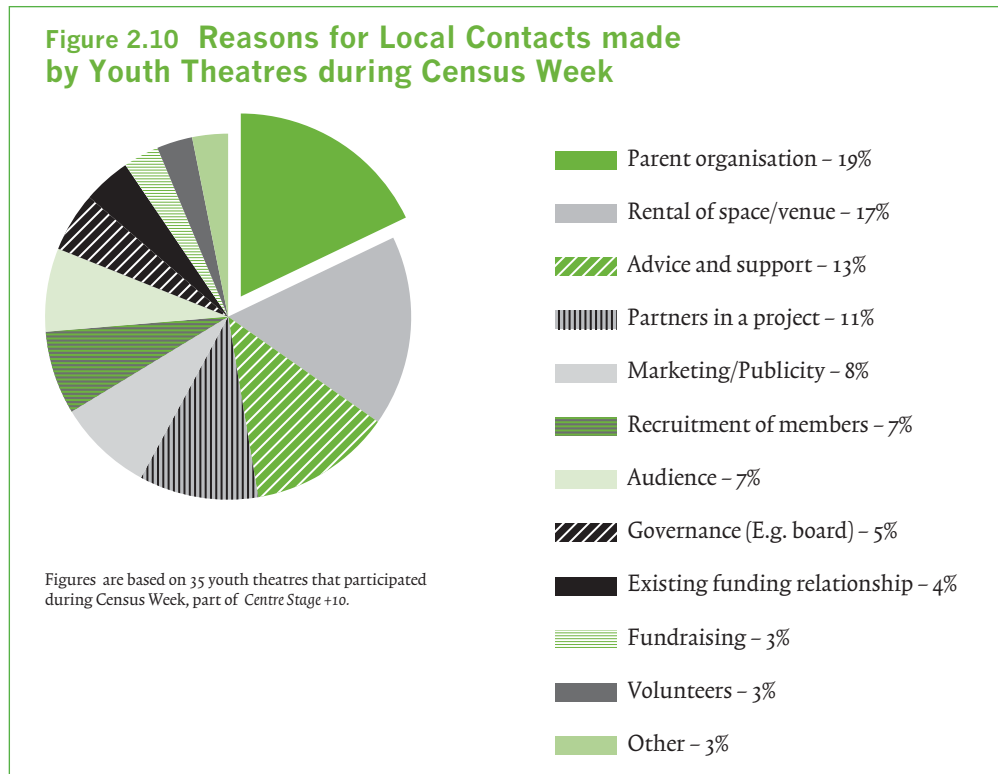
A few youth theatres recorded very low levels of contact with outside organisations during Census Week and seem to work on a relatively solitary basis. Figure 2.9 shows that 10 youth theatres made contact with only one type of organisation during Census Week (eight of these youth theatres reported this level of contact as typical). Half of these youth theatres had contacted their parent organisation and a further three had been in contact with another organisation because of space rental. The large autonomous youth theatres such as Galway Youth Theatre, Co. Sligo Youth Theatre and Limerick Youth Theatre reported very high levels of contact with local organisations. Kildare Youth Theatre reported the highest level of contact: it registered interaction with 14 different types of organisations and individuals during Census Week.

**Figure 2.9 Number of Contacts Made by Youth Theatres**

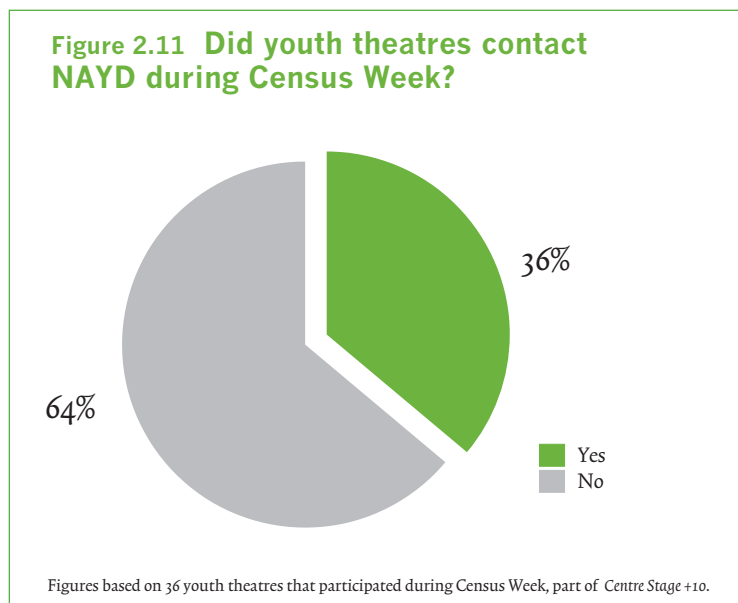


Figures based on 35 youth theatre that completed Census Week Questionnaires as during Centre Stage +10.

Figure 2.10 shows the nature of youth theatres contact with external organisations and individuals. The most common reason was because the organisation was actually a ‘parent organisation’ involved in the running of the youth theatre (19%). These numbers were increased particularly by youth theatres leaders contacting the Arts Officers that employed them. The second most common reason for contact was space or venue rental (17%), one of the regular administrative tasks for youth theatre leaders.



Youth theatres that participated in the Census Week were also asked if they had made contact with NAYD (excluding issues surrounding Centre Stage +10) or another youth theatre during the week. The results for both questions are very similar with 36% of 36 youth theatres reporting that they had been in contact with NAYD and 38% of 37 youth theatres reporting that they had been in contact with another youth theatre. Seven of these youth theatres had been in touch with NAYD and another youth theatre. These youth theatres included three run by Arts Offices, two run by professional theatre companies, one autonomous youth theatre and one run by youth services. Fifteen youth theatres had not been in contact with either NAYD or another youth theatre.



**Figure 2.12 Did youth theatres contact other youth theatres during Census Week?**



Figures based on 37 youth theatres that participated during Census Week, part of *Centre Stage +10*.

## 2.5 Landmarks in the development of Youth Theatres

What are the landmarks in the development of an Irish youth theatre?

Ten years ago *Centre Stage* identified three landmarks that were felt to be significant in the development of a youth theatre:

- 1 To survive the early stages of development, a youth theatre needs at least one adult leader who lives locally and has the necessary skills, vision and commitment. It is equally important that a youth theatre, in its early stages of development, has the encouragement and support from at least one, or a combination of, the following local resources:
  - Youth service;
  - Professional or amateur drama community;
  - Local Authority.
- 2 The next critical stage of a youth theatre's development involves an increasing level of independent identity. Milestones in this process include:
  - Moving from borrowed or shared space to having one's own address.As well as
  - Accessing increased funding and assuming responsibility for one's own budget;
  - Financial and accommodation independence allows the youth theatre to bridge this significant moment in its development, which is characterised by the expansion of its programme and the ability to employ professional support.
- 3 An established youth theatre is a focus and resource for the development of youth and community arts in its locality, in which older and former members assume leadership and artistic roles.<sup>5</sup>

It appears that these landmarks were developed to suit the autonomous youth theatre model, the most common and developed model at the time *Centre Stage* was written. The landmarks follow the progression of a youth theatre such as Dublin Youth Theatre, one of the earliest and most established youth theatres in Ireland.

However, these landmarks don't reflect the variety of youth theatre models that exist in Ireland today. These milestones need to be reviewed and adapted to encompass youth theatres that work within different structures such as professional and amateur theatre companies, youth services, youth arts organisations, arts centres and theatre venues. It is also important that any defined landmarks should respect and encourage the individual character and development patterns of youth theatres.

<sup>5</sup> NAYD, *Centre Stage, the place of youth theatre in Ireland 1997-1998, 1998*, P71

Throughout the *Centre Stage +10* research project, youth theatres added their own individual landmarks to the above list. Developments in terms of structures and resources were still very significant milestones for youth theatre leaders. They mentioned events and meetings that led to the foundation of their youth theatre and the development of local, national and international relationships that were of benefit to the youth theatre.

The most common landmarks that youth theatres mentioned related to space, staff and funding. Improved access to workshop and performance space, the ability to hire and pay staff, an increase in funding and the ability to access regular funding were all major landmarks for youth theatres. The development of boards and contribution of key board members were also cited. Youth theatres that had recently found 'homes' for their youth theatre indicated that this was a very important development for their group.

Leaders were very clear that artistic landmarks were also very important to them and that certain creative processes and achievements were hugely significant in the development of a youth theatre.

Leaders mentioned:

- the first production of their youth theatre;
- the first devising project;
- the first productions directed by senior members;
- participation in festivals or exchanges;
- productions that celebrated anniversaries and past members such as Dublin Youth Theatre's *This is Still Life*, Boomerang Youth Theatre's *Searching for an Enemy* and Limerick Youth Theatre's *Tentacle*.

Leaders were also clear that landmarks in terms of group and staff development were important:

- the recruitment of the first group of members;
- the second intake of members and being able to accept new members into the group;
- achieving a group task such as a production or participation in a festival;
- a new youth theatre leader being able to take over the running of the group;
- an increase in the number of youth theatre members or leaders;
- the development of senior members and their contribution towards the youth theatre;
- the return of ex-members who take on youth theatre leader roles.

The development of a strong identity is still central to the growth of a youth theatre. This is achieved through the artistic programme and the group dynamic as well as strategic developments such as having your own youth theatre home and permanent staff.

It should also be noted that not all landmarks are positive ones. Youth theatre leaders also mentioned the loss of key staff, a drop in funding levels, the decline of CE Schemes within arts organisations, a drop in levels of membership and loss of space as significant milestones in their history.

## 2.6 Sustainability

Irish youth theatres are growing older; their ages are increasing as the youth theatre sector matures. The age of *Centre Stage +10* youth theatres ranged from a couple of months old (Portumna Youth Theatre) to 31 years (Dublin Youth Theatre). The average age of a youth theatre in *Centre Stage* was 6.5 years. It is now 9.6 years.

This does not mean that the overall youth theatre population is ageing, as 22.23% of the youth theatres included in *Centre Stage +10* were under five years of age. As some established youth theatres continue to evolve, new youth theatres are being created each year. In 2008, eight new youth theatres became affiliated to NAYD.

Table 2.2 details the age of the youth theatres that participated in *Centre Stage +10*, the year in which they were founded and gives information about whether the youth theatres have been running continuously since their creation.

Table 2.2 Age of Youth Theatres that participated in Centre Stage +10

| Youth Theatre                           | Age of Youth Theatre in 2008 | Year of Foundation | Notes   |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Dublin Youth Theatre                    | 31                           | 1977               |   |
| Cabinteely Youth Theatre                | 26                           | 1982               |   |
| Waterford Youth Arts                    | 23                           | 1985               |   |
| Dry Rain Youth Theatre                  | 18                           | 1990               | Break from 2002 to 2004   |
| Galway Youth Theatre                    | 17                           | 1991               |   |
| Kilkenny Youth Theatre                  | 17                           | 1991               | Break from 2003 to 2006   |
| Droichead Youth Theatre                 | 16                           | 1992               |   |
| Portlaoise Youth Theatre                | 15                           | 1993               |   |
| Activate Youth Theatre                  | 14                           | 1994               |   |
| Tallaght Youth Theatre                  | 14                           | 1994               |   |
| Boomerang Youth Theatre                 | 13                           | 1995               |   |
| Youthopia Youth Theatre                 | 13                           | 1995               | Break for 6 months in 1999 and from 2006 to 2007  |
| Backstage Youth Theatre                 | 12                           | 1996               |   |
| Cavan Youth Drama                       | 12                           | 1996               |   |
| Kildare Youth Theatre                   | 11                           | 1997               |   |
| Limerick Youth Theatre                  | 11                           | 1997               |   |
| Co. Sligo Youth Theatre                 | 10                           | 1998               |   |
| Cork School of Music Youth Theatre      | 10                           | 1998               |   |
| Stage Craft Youth Theatre               | 10                           | 1998               |   |
| West Cork Arts Centre Youth Theatre     |                              | 10                 | 1998  |
| Clondalkin Youth Theatre                | 9                            | 1999               | Built from drama activities that had been running since the 1980s                       |
| Dreamstuff Youth Theatre                | 9                            | 1999               |   |
| Griese Youth Theatre                    | 9                            | 1999               |   |
| Mayo Youth Theatre - Ballina            | 8                            | 2000               |   |
| Mayo Youth Theatre - Castlebar          | 8                            | 2000               |   |
| Physically Phishy Youth Theatre         | 8                            | 2000               |   |
| Co. Carlow Youth Theatre                | 7                            | 2001               |   |
| Roscommon Co. Youth Theatre             | 7                            | 2001               |   |
| Roundabout Youth Theatre                | 7                            | 2001               |   |
| Celbridge Youth Drama                   | 6                            | 2002               |   |
| Na Crosáin Youth Theatre                | 6                            | 2002               |   |
| Co. Wexford Youth Theatre               | 5                            | 2003               |   |
| Independent Youth Theatre               | 5                            | 2003               |   |
| Lightbulb Youth Theatre                 | 5                            | 2003               |   |
| Rathdowney Youth Theatre                | 5                            | 2003               |   |
| Letterkenny Youth Theatre               | 4                            | 2004               |   |
| Stradbally Youth Theatre                | 4                            | 2004               |   |
| LYTC Carrigallen                        | 4                            | 2004               |   |
| Clare Youth Theatre                     | 3                            | 2005               |   |
| Co. Limerick Youth Theatre - Abbeyfeale | 2                            | 2006               | Co. Limerick Youth Theatre was running groups in different areas during the late 1990s. |
| Co. Limerick Youth Theatre - Lough Gur  | 2                            | 2006               |   |
| LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon                 | 2                            | 2006               |   |
| Mountrath Youth Theatre                 | 2                            | 2006               |   |
| Manorhamilton Youth Theatre (MYTh)      | 1                            | 2007               | Developed from previous youth drama activities at the Glens Centre.                     |
| Portumna Youth Theatre                  | 1                            | 2007               |   |

Of the 45 youth theatres who participated in *Centre Stage +10*, 28.89% also participated in *Centre Stage*. Some youth theatres have evolved from the structure and name they were using 10 years ago. For instance, Waterford Youth Drama is now called Waterford Youth Arts, Cavan Youth Theatre has developed into Cavan Youth Drama and Laois Youth Theatre has evolved into four separate youth theatres that are included individually in the research. Table 2.3 details the age of the youth theatres that participated in *Centre Stage*, the year in which they were founded and gives information on whether the youth theatres are still actively running youth drama activities. The youth theatres that are also involved in *Centre Stage +10* are presented in bold.

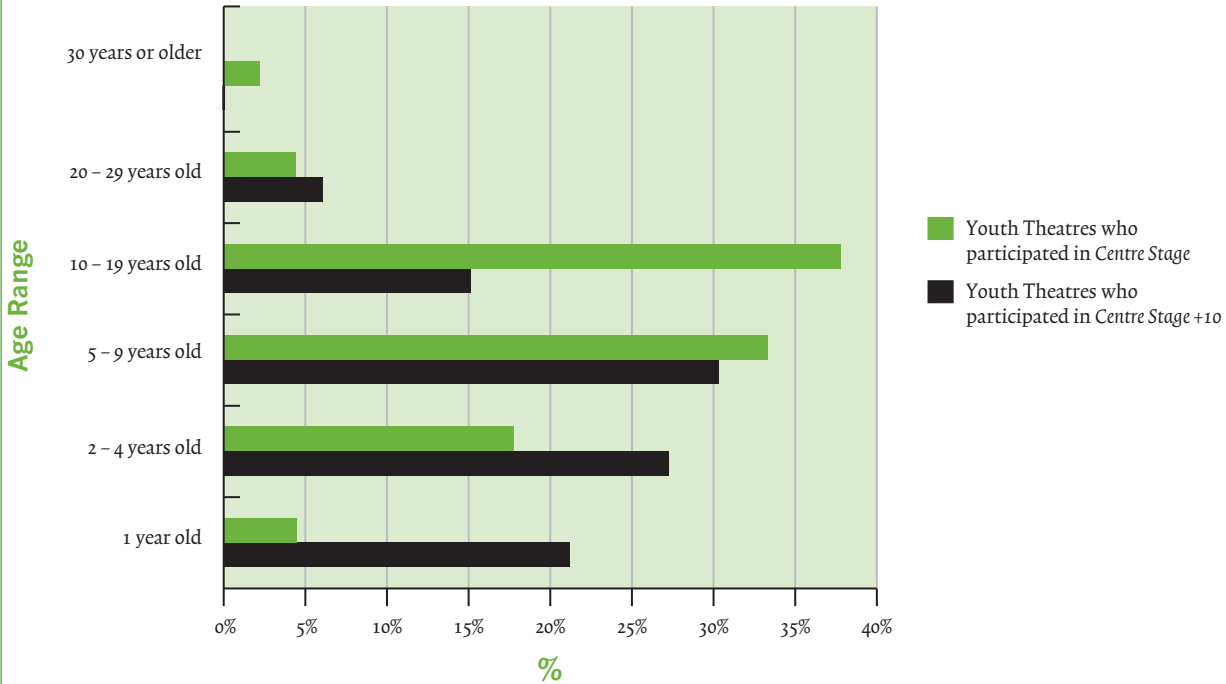
Table 2.3 Age of Youth Theatres that participated in *Centre Stage* in 1998

| Youth Theatre                   | Age of Youth Theatre in 2008 | Year of Foundation | Is the Youth Theatre still running? |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Brewery Lane Youth Theatre      | 21                           | 1977               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Dublin Youth Theatre</b>     | 21                           | 1977               | Yes                                 |
| St Kevin's Drama Workshop       | 18                           | 1980               | No                                  |
| <b>Cabinteely Youth Theatre</b> | 16                           | 1982               | Yes                                 |
| Navan Youth Theatre             | 13                           | 1985               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Waterford Youth Drama</b>    | 13                           | 1985               | Yes                                 |
| Dundalk Youth Theatre           | 11                           | 1987               | No                                  |
| Millbank Youth Theatre          | 9                            | 1989               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Dry Rain Youth Theatre</b>   | 8                            | 1990               | Yes                                 |
| Rainbow Factory Youth Theatre   | 8                            | 1990               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Galway Youth Theatre</b>     | 7                            | 1991               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Kilkenny Youth Theatre</b>   | 7                            | 1991               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Droichead Youth Theatre</b>  | 6                            | 1992               | Yes                                 |
| First Call Youth Theatre        | 6                            | 1992               | Yes                                 |
| Sheriff St Youth Drama          | 5                            | 1993               | No                                  |
| Wexford Youth Theatre           | 5                            | 1993               | No                                  |
| <b>Laois Youth Theatre</b>      | 5                            | 1993               | Yes                                 |
| Corca Bascainn Youth Theatre    | 4                            | 1994               | No                                  |
| <b>Tallaght Youth Theatre</b>   | 4                            | 1994               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Activate Youth Theatre</b>   | 4                            | 1994               | Yes                                 |
| Cryptic Youth Drama             | 3                            | 1995               | No                                  |
| Red Lemon Youth Theatre         | 3                            | 1995               | No                                  |
| Shanakill Youth Theatre         | 3                            | 1995               | No                                  |
| <b>Youthopia Youth Theatre</b>  | 3                            | 1995               | Yes                                 |
| <b>Cavan Youth Theatre</b>      | 2                            | 1996               | Yes                                 |
| Makonde Youth Theatre           | 2                            | 1996               | No                                  |
| Eureka Youth Theatre            | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |
| <b>Limerick Youth Theatre</b>   | 1                            | 1997               | Yes                                 |
| MDG Youth Theatre               | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |
| Monaghan Youth Theatre          | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |
| Stack Youth Theatre             | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |
| Young Rathfarnham Theatre Group | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |
| Youthways Youth Theatre         | 1                            | 1997               | No                                  |

The average age of youth theatres is rising as the sector develops and grows older together. Youth theatres are now beginning to reach their thirties. Figure 2.13 shows that the number of youth theatres surviving 10 years or more has increased dramatically and indicates that youth theatres are becoming more sustainable.

Youth theatres halt activities for many different reasons and the cessation of activities should not always be viewed negatively. Sometimes a simple change in local demographics can cause a youth theatre to close. Youth theatres may stop when the local population ages and demand for their activities drops.

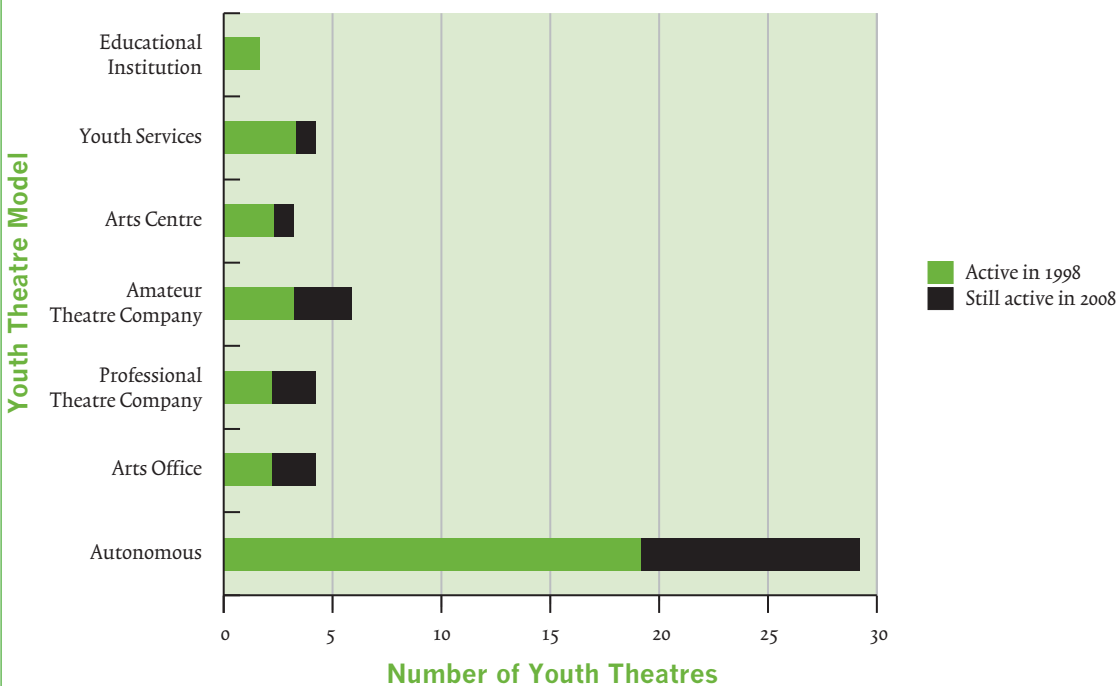
**Figure 2.13 Comparison of Youth Theatre ages from Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage, %**



Figures are based on 45 youth theatres that participated in Centre Stage +10 and 33 that participated in Centre Stage.

More than half of all youth theatres (54.55%) that took part in Centre Stage are still running activities, though a few of them are now operating on a more informal or irregular basis. A variety of internal and external factors can contribute to the survival or decline of a youth theatre. As different youth theatre structures develop, however, it is interesting to look at the survival rate of youth theatres in terms of youth theatre models. Figure 2.14 shows which youth theatres from Centre Stage are still operating and categorises them according to youth theatre model.

**Figure 2.13 Activity status of Youth theatres who participated in Centre Stage by Youth Theatre model**



Figures are based on 33 youth theatres that participated in the original Centre Stage research project in 1997/98.

It appears that the autonomous youth theatre is the most likely to survive. Of the 18 youth theatres who continued work after *Centre Stage*, 55.56% were autonomous youth theatres. Eight out of the 13 youth theatres that participated in both research projects are autonomous youth theatres and are among the oldest youth theatres in the country. Waterford Youth Arts also participated in both research projects after starting life as an autonomous youth theatre and then evolving into a youth arts organisation.

However, the dominance of the autonomous youth theatre model in the 1980s and 1990s also means that more autonomous youth theatres have ceased activities since *Centre Stage* than any other youth theatre model. This factor suggests that the autonomous youth theatre model may not be able to survive and sustain its work above and beyond other models. Youth theatre is still a developing sector. Time and increased numbers of diverse youth theatres are needed in order for each model to demonstrate its sustainability.

#### **CASE STUDY: Cabinteely Youth Theatre – sustainability**

Cabinteely Youth Theatre is now 27 years old. It was set up in 1982 in the house of one of the voluntary leaders. A second leader joined the youth theatre in 1984 and together they moved their activities to a local school hall. Cabinteely Youth Theatre is autonomous and is run by voluntary leaders and a committee of four parents who help with insurance, finance and organising the annual festival. The youth theatre doesn't receive any significant, regular funding. It relies mainly on membership fees, fundraising and box office receipts to keep the youth theatre going, although they have received a small grant from the Local Authority Arts Office in the past. The leaders believe strongly that funding isn't the 'be-all and end-all' and find that their independence from funders and parent organisations has empowered them and created stability.

The same two voluntary leaders have been running the youth theatre continuously for 27 years and have managed to keep activities going throughout changes in their own personal lives such as pregnancy, illness or family pressures.

"It's commitment. The bottom line is commitment. You have to keep it going because you don't want to lose it. You can't say, 'Oh, I don't feel well' and not turn up. If your head is falling off, you're still there. We trust each other. It doesn't work if you're half-hearted. You have to be totally committed to it." – Cabinteely Youth Theatre Leader

One senior member has recently started to take on extra facilitating and directing responsibilities and is currently studying on the NAYD ArtsTrain facilitation course. The daughter of one of the voluntary leaders is also interested in assisting, so Cabinteely Youth Theatre is hopeful about its future sustainability.

#### **CASE STUDY: Dry Rain Youth Theatre –sustainability**

Dry Rain Youth Theatre is an autonomous youth theatre in Bray, Co. Wicklow. The youth theatre was set up in 1990 by local individuals with the support of youth service staff from Catholic Youth Care. The youth theatre was based in a large church hall for nine years, which included space for workshops, performances and administration. A paid staff member managed a team of five to six employees who were on a FÁS Training scheme and reported to a voluntary board.

A combination of funding, space and staff difficulties forced the youth theatre to close in 2002. The Celtic Tiger had increased local property prices and the youth theatre was asked to leave their rented home so that it could be sold and developed. At the same time its FÁS funding was cut drastically (even though they had received an award for excellent quality of service the previous year) and they lost the majority of their staff. The youth theatre was also coming to the end of their cycle of funding through CYC and they were experiencing a drop in the number of volunteers due to career and family pressures. This combination of internal and external factors meant that Dry Rain closed its doors for two years.

An ex-member of Dry Rain came up with the idea of re-starting the youth theatre as part of a Theatre Management project while studying Drama and Theatre at Trinity College. After analysing the reasons for its closure, mapping the available human, funding and space resources available in Bray and drawing up an action plan, he felt that Dry Rain should be given another chance. The youth theatre located a suitable workshop space, established a new committee and began activities again in 2004. It now runs on a completely voluntary basis without any regular funding.

During *Centre Stage +10*, youth theatre leaders were asked to identify factors that contributed to the sustainability of youth theatre.

*Centre Stage +10* youth theatres highlighted **continuity** and **consistency** as important factors in sustainability. They mentioned:

- continuity of funding sources and levels of funding;
- consistency of youth theatre leaders, whether they are voluntary or paid;
- continuity of policy in terms of funders and parent organisations;
- consistency in terms of access to workshop, production and office space.

During *Centre Stage +10* youth theatres also highlighted **variety** and **diversity** as an important factors in sustainability.

- a variety of youth theatre leaders so that the youth theatre isn't dependent on one leader;
- a variety of artistic experiences for youth theatre members;
- diversity within the membership of the youth theatre and active, annual recruitment to refresh and develop the membership.

Youth theatre leaders and stakeholders emphasised the importance of the training and experience of the youth theatre leader and the availability of quality staff. Some staff felt that working within a larger support structure was very important while others believed that it was their independence that contributed to their sustainability.

