



To DCYA stakeholders, funded youth services and organisations

25th March, 2020

Re: Covid 19 advice to DCYA funded youth services and organisations

Dear all,

I refer to previous correspondence relating to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

At the outset, I would like to sincerely thank all of the staff, management and volunteers in youth services across Ireland for the amazing work they have done up to this point and which we know will continue into the future. Youth work is an essential service for many young people, particularly those that are vulnerable and particularly in these challenging, anxious and uncertain times.

The Department wishes to again reassure voluntary youth organisations of its intention to continue funding services as normal throughout this crisis period. In offering this reassurance, it acknowledges that services cannot 'continue as normal' and welcomes the efforts that services are making to innovate by providing supports and managing day to day activities in new ways. As per previous advice, organisations should record the impact of the crisis on their services for future reporting to the Department. They should also record and communicate innovative solutions for maintaining services to young people e.g. online platforms.

Youth Work Service Continuity

Given the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 crisis, the Department asks services to let young people and the general public know that they are active, available and providing a community response. We recognise and welcome all the active steps that services are already taking to get this message out.

Youth Workers have a crucial role to play in supporting young people through the crisis. One of the many key roles they have is information sharing. There will be lots of stories and information being shared about coronavirus. Services should make sure to only follow official sources and share advice from the HSE. Sharing or following advice from other sources could put you and others at an increased level of risk. In the current context, the information role of the Youth Worker could include:

- Advising young people on education issues. Youth workers are recommended to keep on top of advice coming from schools, exam boards and the Department for Education.
- A likely top concern among young people is around training, work and financial uncertainty. **DEASP Income Support Helpline for COVID-19** provides information on available income supports for people impacted by COVID-19. The information team can



advise on the most suitable income supports for your circumstances and provide information on how to make an application. **Phone: 01-2481398 or lo-call 1890800024**
Covid-19 DEASP information for employees

- Advising young people how to protect their physical and mental health is also important. Spun Out Youth Information Portal has some excellent resources and information.

Supporting the most vulnerable

Acute youth work support, focused on vulnerable young people, is essential and should continue. More socially based youth work support should cease in line with the latest Government advice, with resources refocused on outreach to vulnerable young people and to providing online and phone supports. Again, we greatly appreciate the fact that services are already proactively focusing their support on vulnerable young people and seeking to enhance their work in this regard.

Activities such as drop-in sessions at youth services should only be by appointment and social distancing be adhered to in line with HSE guidelines (HSE social-distancing). Youth workers carrying out this work should ensure that any group sizes are small, preferably with only one or two young people. Social distancing guidance from the HSE should be adhered to, this includes avoiding any physical contact such as “fist bumps, handshakes and touching”.

The HSE have made specific guidance document available about preventing the spread of COVID-19 in settings for vulnerable groups, such as Homeless, Travellers, refugees/asylum seekers and others. The measures outlined are mainly focused on congregate settings or facilities managed by staff and can be applied in direct provision centres, hostels, hubs or residential settings (HSE vulnerable group’s guidance).

Management of Services

For those acute services that need to remain physically open for young people (targeting, for example, serious youth violence, child criminal exploitation, domestic abuse, health and wellbeing), the following is recommended:

- Follow all social distancing and HSE guidance.
- Keep group sizes small, having regard to public health guidance.
- Maintain a distance of at least two meters between participants. Avoid physical contact – no fist bumps, handshakes or touching.
- Sanitise and disinfect spaces regularly, with focus on all ‘touch points’.
- Try to operate digitally instead of in person, where possible.
- Keep regular contact with all vulnerable young people, via phone or appropriate messenger service.
- Keep yourself well, self-care is even more important during these times of crisis.



New Public Health measures

You will be aware of the Taoiseach's announcement in relation to the additional measures being implemented to protect public health in relation to Covid-19. We strongly advise all organisations and groups to keep themselves fully informed of available guidance and announcements by the Government, HSE and Department of Health.

Innovation

Notwithstanding these restrictions, it is important that society as a whole, and the youth sector in particular, takes the necessary steps to ensure, in so far as possible, that young people continue to receive the critical supports they require to help them at this difficult time. We are very appreciative of the innovation we have seen in terms of new initiatives for young people and new ways of delivering services and supports. We would ask that the sector continues to consider all available options in this regard, to continue innovating and reaching out, and to establish networks between organisations to share learning and experience.

Societal response to the pandemic

Also of importance is the role that the youth sector can play in the wider societal response to the crisis. We are aware of a number of significant initiatives and offers already in place to achieve this aim of assisting in managing the crisis and, again, we would ask that the sector as a whole continue to consider what part it can play in local communities.

On a related note, we are aware that youth services in different parts of the country have been contacted at local level with a view to providing assistance to other State bodies, particularly the HSE and Tusla. The Department would ask the sector to please do all it can to support such requests for the duration of the current crisis, while ensuring that the required essential youth work services discussed above can continue to be provided. Any such assistance to State bodies should be undertaken with the agreement of the relevant ETB or national office. Similarly, if you are responding to any requests around Covid-19 related issues more generally, we would ask that you communicate this to your local ETB or national office as appropriate.

Stay Connected and Stay Well

It is important that youth workers are connected within their own organisation and professional network. Use digital technology to facilitate connectivity amongst teams and colleagues.

Please keep up to date with local project closures so that you can signpost young people to available services. Check national youth and community work platforms for support, guidance and sharing. Make sure staff have contact details for everyone they need, stored appropriately. This includes contact information for additional supports that young people may need.



Finally, we are mindful that staff in voluntary youth organisations may be juggling work, caring and family duties in light of the current situation and remind them to look after their own wellbeing also.

Accessibility

The Department has also been asked to seek to ensure that any updates being issued have regard to the needs of service users with disabilities, and are made as accessible as possible.

Conclusion

We will issue further communications as the situation evolves.

Please stay well and thank you again for your continued important work in the interests of young people across Ireland. I would also like to thank our colleagues in Cork ETB who prepared a very useful note on the youth work response to Covid-19, parts of which I have included in this note.

Finally, the Department would encourage all services to share their stories with us, and the rest of the country, by tweeting @DCYAPressOffice with their community response efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Laura McGarrigle
Assistant Secretary General
Youth Justice, Adoption, Youth & Participation