

PRESS RELEASE



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs' Message to the Young People of Ireland

“We have never needed you to step up so much, and you have never made us so proud.”

Friday 24th April 2020

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone is today sending a message to the young people of Ireland. She wants to thank and commend them for their efforts over the past weeks, and recognises the contribution they are making to the national effort to tackle the COVID-19 crisis.

“I want to say a few words to the young people of Ireland.

I have been so incredibly impressed by the patience, kindness and bravery of you all, in these very difficult times. Things are so strange right now I know, and I guess that at times you may have been a bit scared, a bit bored, a bit frustrated. But I draw inspiration from the many stories I hear, from all around the country, of the efforts and attitude of our youngest. I would also like to thank you personally, and on behalf of the Government for listening to and cooperating with the advice being provided by the Taoiseach, Government and our health experts.

Whether it is helping grandparents get the knack of a smart phone so they can keep in touch with family; helping out at home and assisting busy parents; sending messages of support to our essential workers via social media; or respecting social distancing rules whilst trying to study or just hang out online with friends. The list is endless. And endlessly inspiring.

I want to also pay tribute to those of you who may be feeling isolated or vulnerable at this time. I want you to know you are not alone. Your school may be closed; your sports or youth club may not be running as normal right now; your grandparents may not be able to hug you; but we are all finding ways of doing things differently and supports are out there.

There are a range of important supports out there and I want to encourage young people to avail of them. Stay connected - you are not alone.

I would encourage you to make contact with your local youth services at this time.

In my time as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I have always been proud of the many inspiring examples of Irish young people as creators, innovators and leaders in their own right. The young people in our local Comhairlí are just that. Across the country, they are working with local authorities to listen to young people, hear what's important for them at this time and communicate directly with them. They have been quickly adapting to the Covid crisis by reaching out to their communities in positive and creative ways. They have been reinforcing the public health messages about staying at home, and focusing on the positive things we can all do to mind our mental health at this time, as well as acknowledging our amazing frontline workers. Information on all the great work going on around the country is being featured daily on their website <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/>.

Remember that, while our physical world might have shrunk, our imaginations are limitless so please keep creating, innovating and connecting to one another and to your communities.

You are shining examples to us all, and we look to you to continue your efforts for a bit longer.

Please also keep looking to the future. You *are* the future and your energy, commitment and passion on issues such as climate change and social justice is what inspires all of us to strive for a better world.

We have never needed you to step up so much, and you have never made us so proud.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Detail on a number of actions being taken throughout the youth sector:

- the Digital Youth Information Online Chat Service - an online information service directed at young people aged 16-25 who can ask questions to a trained youth information officer on live chat. This new service is the first of its kind in Ireland and has been launched by four partner organisations including Crosscare, SpunOut, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland.
- Spun Out- The spunout.ie website also hosts a variety of valuable and useful information and advice. It also offers a 24/7 text support line, supporting young people with their anxiety, and isolation.
- Foróige's 'Activating Empathy Programme' social media campaign- a campaign to enable young people to feed their mind, body and soul positively throughout this period of Covid-19 isolation. The campaign is developed in partnership with the Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway.

- Supports for LGBTI+ young people- Working directly with LGBTI+ young people, BelongTo and its network of local services, have moved all their services on-line providing one to one and groups based youth work to continue to support young people during this time.
- The 'Gaisce at Home' initiative which encourages young people to stay active and engaged in their personal development and community action as the country and the world responds to the challenge of Covid-19. The initiative enables young people to think differently – and creatively – so they can achieve a Gaisce Award at home. It recognises, not just the desire young people have to make a positive difference, but their action.
- Scouting Ireland's Betterworld: 17 Days 17 SDGs Challenge- Scouting Ireland has made its at-home educational programmes available to all young people (not just scouts), including its 17 day challenge to young people in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

APPENDIX – Additional detail on a number of actions being taken throughout the youth sector

The Minister and her Department thanks all of the young people and youth services across Ireland for the valuable, innovative and important work they are undertaking at this time.

Belong To

Across its network of LGBTI+ groups, Belong To is providing phone, text and email support, as well as group meetings and games via Google Hangouts and Zoom. For further information about how to engage with these services or to access podcasts and other resources, please see the Belong To website at <https://www.belongto.org/> or email Belong To at: info@belongto.org

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg across the country are working with their local authority to communicate directly with young people. They have been reinforcing the public health messages about staying at home, and focusing on the positive things we can all do to mind our mental health at this time, as well as acknowledging our amazing frontline workers. Information on all the great work going on around the country is being featured daily on <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/>. Examples include:

- Mayo Comhairle na nÓg wrote letters of reassurance and offered help to all the elderly people who avail of meals-on-wheels provided by Castlebar Voluntary Social Services.
- South Dublin Comhairlí created a short video with a positive mental health message about the importance of making time to do the things that you love.
- Louth Comhairle has been very active on social media, sharing positive messages as well as getting their members involved in cooking and active challenges.

Crosscare

Crosscare's youth service staff have been directly supporting their residential homeless services, residential child care facility, Care Call service for older people, central and community foodbanks, as well as a new home food delivery programme which is reaching out to particularly vulnerable families across the city. In addition, they are supporting the

establishment of a new HSE funded cocooning service for homeless people from an inner city hotel (100 beds), providing 11 cocooned staff over to the Elderly charity, ALONE, to join their professional helpline team, and facilitating Critical Incident Debriefing support for Focus Ireland.

Their supports for young people at this time include:

- Development of a Youth Mental Health website in conjunction with Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Children & Young People's Services Committee.
- Online life coaching sessions, online counselling and key working sessions for young people.
- Online learning, dance and music sessions for young people.
- Balcony Bingo with volunteers within flat complexes.
- Positivity Boxes and Weekly Positivity Worksheets to help young people with their mental health (contents include sunflower seeds and pots, journals to record Covid 19 impacts, postcards and stamps to keep in touch with family, movie night kits to encourage staying at home etc). These were delivered to vulnerable young people's homes who are now using them through social media with each other for checking in.
- Young people using Zoom video calls with Youth Workers and peers to go for walks within the 2km, making the walk less lonely while staying safe.

Digital Youth Information Online Chat Service

An online information service directed at young people aged 16-25 years has just been launched. Young people can ask questions to a trained youth information officer on live chat. The service involves four partners, Crosscare, SpunOut, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland. The initiative has the strong support of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. More information on <https://spunout.ie/question> .

Foróige

Foróige staff and volunteers continue to support young people, particularly the most vulnerable, using digital technology. Programmes including the Big Brother Big Sister Youth Mentoring Programme, Leadership for Life Programme, NFTE Youth Entrepreneurship Programme and Aldi Foróige Youth Citizenship Programme have adapted and are being delivered online. Through Foróige's Leadership for Life programme, young people are taking on challenges to support their families, friends and communities, particularly older people who are cocooning. In addition, specific new initiatives have been developed, as follows:

- Foróige has launched a social media campaign to enable young people to feed their mind, body and soul positively through Covid-19 isolation. The campaign is based on the 'Activating Empathy Programme' which Foróige developed in partnership with the Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway.
- It has also launched a Covid-19 specific social media campaign aimed at young people highlighting the important role they have to play in helping in the fight against Covid-19. The key messages were informed by official guidance from the HSE and developed in consultation with young people. The campaign focused on social distancing, hand washing, not sharing objects, staying at home and staying away from (but in contact with) older relatives.

- Foróige is working in partnership with other community organisations to deliver bespoke care packages to young people and families right across the country. These care packages are tailored to the specific needs and interests of the young people and include such things as food, simple meal kits and recipes, hygiene products, sanitary products, board games, phone credit, arts and crafts materials and in some cases tablets/reconditioned laptops to enable young people to stay engaged with school work and their youth workers. Foróige has secured Philanthropic funding to support this.
- As a means of supporting young people and families experiencing food poverty, Foróige staff are dropping simple meal kits to homes and hosting 'cook along with' sessions in the evening so that young people can cook a meal for their family and learn a new life skill.

Young people involved in Foróige are continuing to support their local communities in imaginative ways. Some examples include;

- Ballinlough Foróige Youth Club in Cork hosted a drive-by Easter Parade for their community where each family decorated their car with positive messages.
- Ballina Foróige Club in Mayo are sending letters to the elderly in a local care home so that they know that their community cares for and values them.
- Aghada Foróige Club in Cork are helping their families and learning a new skill by doing a live 'cook along with' session with one of their volunteers who is a chef.
- Duleek Foróige Club in Meath are promoting online safety for young people.
- Foróige Clubs in Cavan are promoting positive mental health and resilience amongst young people in the county with daily check in questions and positive messages,
- Foróige Sligo are offering free digital Zumba classes for young people.
- Kanturk Foróige Club are encouraging the community to post old photos of community and Foróige events to keep their shared memory alive.
- Roundfort Foróige Club in Mayo sent Easter Eggs to the residents and staff of their local nursing home.
- Foróige Blackwater Valley (Cork/Kerry Border) are hosting an online wildlife club for Foróige Juniors and younger members of the community.
- Foróige Futures in Longford hosted a competition to encourage young people to pick a member of their community who might be struggling with isolation measures and write to them. The winning entry was an 11 year old girl who wrote to the local post mistress, whose husband had recently passed away, outlining how important she was to the community.

Gaisce

Gaisce – The President’s Award has launched ‘Gaisce at Home’/ ‘Gaisce sa Bhaile’. The campaign encourages young people, precisely as the country and the world responds to the challenge of Covid-19, to stay active and engaged in their personal development and community action.

‘Gaisce at Home’ seeks to support and encourage the over 18,000 registered young people already involved in the Award to continue their Gaisce journey by finding alternative activities they can undertake at and from home. Gaisce is sharing suitable and safe ideas online using the hashtags #GaisceAtHome and #GaisceSaBhaile.

Gaisce at Home maintains the integrity of the Gaisce programme and has been developed and launched to encourage and support young people to think differently – and creatively – so they can achieve a Gaisce Award from or at home. It will provide a means of publicly recognising, not just the appetite and desire young people have to make a positive difference, but their action.

Anyone who wishes to find out more about the ‘Gaisce at Home’ campaign can visit [Gaisce At Home](#) where you can find suitable activities for undertaking Gaisce. Alternatively, contact home@gaisce.ie if you are interested in signing up to Gaisce.

Scouting Ireland

All across Ireland, young people in Scouting Ireland are working directly in their communities, as part of each Local Authorities coordinated community effort, delivering groceries and prescriptions to those who are cocooning. Younger scouts are also playing their part: For Easter Scout Beavers and Cubs sent Easter cards (scanned and emailed) to nursing homes around the country, and also baked scones and cakes which they hand delivered to their neighbours. Scouts Volunteer task force meet via Zoom every week to coordinate new ideas of support for local groups.

Supports to Young People

- Scouting Ireland has modified its programming for family use and for online use- Scouting at home. <http://scouting360.ie/wp/>. Daily new activities are published online to keep scouts occupied. Programming now includes age ranges so non scout families can join in the activities online <http://scouting360.ie/wp/age-section-resources/>
- It has also launched a national campaign encouraging all young people to participate in the 17 day, 17 SDG’s Challenge <https://betterworld.ie/bw/sdgs/17days17sdgs/>
- Scout Groups are meeting online in closed FB pages or Zoom meetings.
- Earlier this month there was an indoor Jamboree where Families with Scouts joined in by camping in their own back gardens. Scouts can also participate in the International online Scout Jamboree <https://www.jotajoti.info/>
- Scouting Ireland is currently partnering with Spunout in the delivery of its Text crisis help line.

Spun Out

The spunout.ie website also hosts a variety of valuable and useful information and advice. Young people involved in SpunOut.ie volunteer as trained listeners to other young people on our 24/7 text support line, supporting them with their anxiety, isolation, including the 1 in 5 young people texting in who are thinking about suicide. In the current national emergency:

- Young people have been creating supportive information resources to help provide reassurance and advice to other young people during the crisis
- A number of young people have been offering free grinds to Leaving Cert students who have no access to teaching right now
- One young person who works with SpunOut in Monaghan has been making protective face shields for local nursing homes and hospitals with a collection of 3D printers

Youth Work Ireland

The following are some examples of initiatives being taken by youth organisations who are members of Youth Work Ireland:

- County Longford YS in partnership with Gaisce are rolling out the online award with the young men in direct provision - adapting activities/goals to make it achievable while keeping to social distancing guideline
- Young people from KDYS (Kerry) have co-created a video on physical distancing. The video is being produced by Irish and Italian young people who participated in an Erasmus + exchange- this will be disseminated through all KDYS social media platforms. This is a peer lead approach to getting the message out to young people about the importance of physical distancing. <https://youtu.be/mJ2tJZxKDfs>
- Carlow Regional Youth Service have worked with young people in Carlow to decorate the outside of their houses to help bolster community spirit.
- FDYS (Wexford) have worked with young people to make posters to thank front line services
- Youth Work Ireland Laois have organised a series of online social distancing walks to bed down the concept with young people <https://www.facebook.com/laoisywi/videos/704648636946990/>

National Youth Council of Ireland

In addition to the work of the many organisations described above, member organisations of the National Youth Council of Ireland are also delivering lots of services. Some examples include:

Kildare youth theatre – quarantine festival

QUARANTINE FESTIVAL, an online gathering of young people creating in multi-media, expressing their reactions to the current crisis, and making new work shared publicly online in social media channels,

Source/more info:

<https://www.facebook.com/peter.hussey/posts/10157780674950180>

Localise Youth – message of thanks to Mater Hospital staff

Some of our volunteers wanted to say thank you to all the staff working hard at the Mater Hospital. So we teamed up with

[@NCAD Dublin](#)

and <http://printroom.ie> to create this wonderful card sending love and support to our true heroes. [#StayHomeStaySafe](#) [#VolunteeringForAll](#) Source/more info:

<https://twitter.com/LocaliseYouth/status/1248177463974379520>

Kerry - Positive activity program for all the family

Introducing the [#kdysonlineclub](#). Everyone is welcome young & old! Positive activity program for all the family updated weekly! We have everything you need to have fun & get active with your family in your home.

Source/more info: <https://twitter.com/KerryYouth/status/1243571233565954049>

Meath Online activities

Online quizzes and pictionary happening on our Instagram and Facebook, #youthworkworks, #MentalHealthMatters #digitalyouthwork, @DCYAPress @nycinews @TaoiseachDept @ywirl
Source/more info: <https://twitter.com/YWIMeath/status/1242489793877082112>

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