

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Working with young people in rural and geographically isolated areas

Introduction

This section focuses on working with young people in rural Ireland who experience isolation. This chapter presents demographics in relation to rural Ireland, explains the varying needs and issues that young people may face living in rural areas and it offers practical advice on working with these young people. It concludes with a list of resources that will help you in your work.

You may be a youth worker who is working with young people in a rural area or you may be working in an urban area that interfaces with a rural space and you may be aware of young people not accessing your service. The following section explains the varying needs and issues that rural young people may face and it offers practical advice on working with young people in a rural setting.



This chapter was developed with input from Claire Barkey (Sphere 17, formerly YWI Cavan/Monaghan), Alison Fox (Kildare and Wicklow ETB Youth Officer), Cora Horgan and Zoe Gogarty (YWI Tipperary) for 'Access All Areas – a Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector' published by NYCI 2018

Terminology

Rural area

There are many types of rural area; ranging from the very remote to more populated areas which interface between town and country. In addition to the open countryside, rural areas include large, medium and small towns. Each type of rural area experiences its own range of challenges, some of which are generic and others are place-specific.

Rural economies

Importantly, 'rural' should not be seen just in spatial terms as this does not take into consideration income variation and differences in social backgrounds. Furthermore, it does not convey the diverse nature of rural areas and communities in Ireland.

Importantly, while farmers and farming has in the past been synonymous with rural areas, the range of social occupation and social issues now evident in rural areas reveals the need for differing ways of working and new policy approaches than was



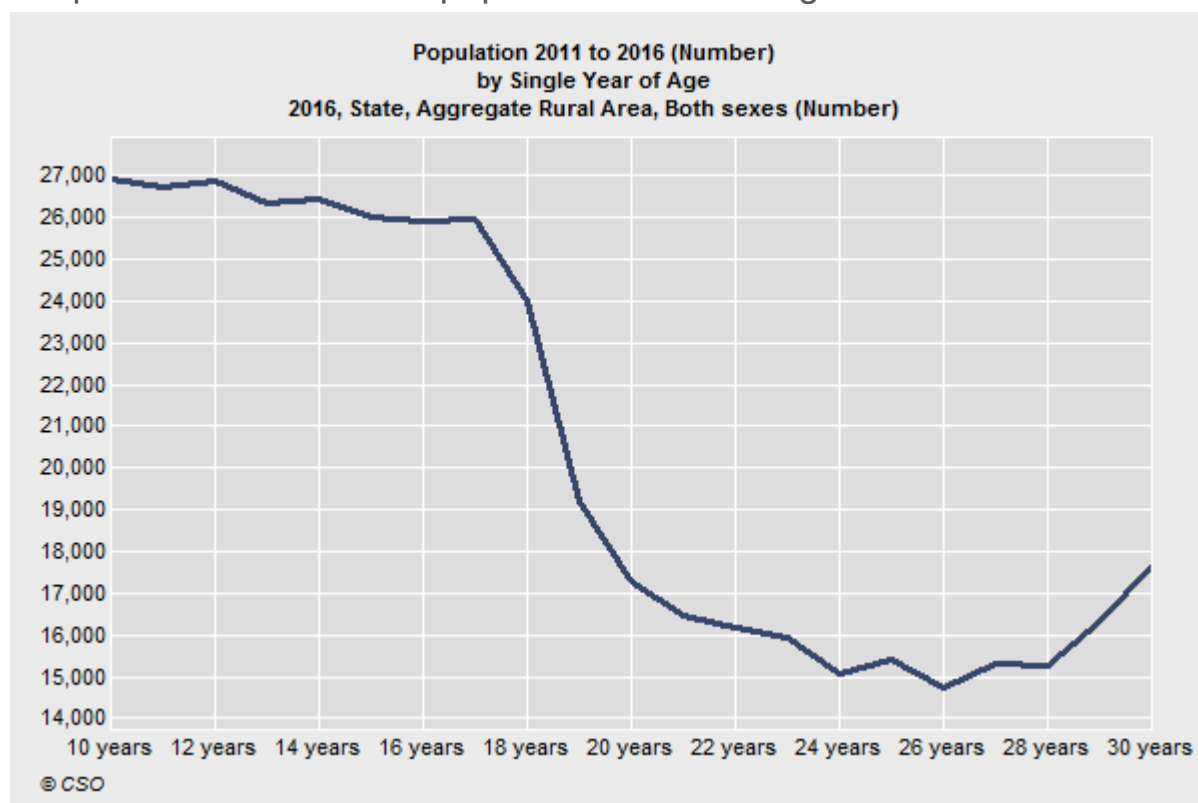
previously the case. The current model of rural development policy in Ireland has a dominant agricultural focus. Yet rural-urban interdependencies and increasingly complex economic and social inter-relations impact significantly on the economic lives of young people growing up in rural Ireland.

Demographics

The number of people between the ages of 10 and 30 living in rural areas in Ireland is 485,782. The corresponding figure for young people classed as living in town areas is 831,649ⁱ.

As young adults move away to study and work, the decline in persons aged 19 to 25 years in rural areas is a strong feature of the rural population (see Graph 1 below). The peak ages for those living in rural areas is age 45, and also age 8, reflecting a family oriented population structureⁱⁱ.

Graph 1 – decline in rural population for those aged 19-25



Needs and issues for young people living in rural Ireland

Transport

Rural areas face a considerable lack of public transportⁱⁱⁱ. Transport that is available is often extremely limited in terms of routes travelled, running times, availability, affordability and accessibility. In many areas the only public bus may be the local school bus which runs on weekdays and only twice a day. Where a young person's home is not within accessible distance of local amenities it can lead to a real sense of isolation or a feeling of being trapped. Absence of avenues that allow young people to voluntarily and independently travel to, and participate in, social activities can negatively impact on their motivation or ability to develop independence. It can also impact on their ability to access specialised services, such as LGBTI+ youth groups, if they feel they are not in a position to share their chosen destination with their families or those who might have to drive them to meeting places.



Rural areas are therefore very car-oriented with most essential services in towns located some distance away from many young people's homes and these usually lack outreach options. Some counties cover a large geographical area and this impacts further on a young person's ability to reach services operating in distant parts of the county. Young people who are under 18, and those over 18 that do not have a license and access to a car, are heavily reliant on someone else, such as friends or family, for transport. While many families may have multiple car ownership, families with single car ownership or no car are directly impacted by lack of accessibility to services, including access to youth services and activities. Housing and access to services is a particular

issue for families on low income who don't have access to their own transport and may have additional needs. Lack of transport also has an impact on access to education and employment opportunities (see below).

Scrutiny

Within small towns and rural areas, an intergenerational history of living in one area can be positive in terms of giving a young person a strong sense of identity and place. At the same time, it can also lead to a sense of being judged and labelled by others, not just for their own behaviour but by association where there is a negative association with other family members.

In addition, young people in smaller communities can often feel that they are under scrutiny and their confidentiality is compromised e.g. in accessing a GP or contraception service etc. This sense of being under scrutiny can impact on their help seeking behaviour, including mental health support (see Chapter 7 on 'Working with young people with mental health issues') or specialist services (see also Chapter 3 on 'Working with LGBT young people'). Young people seeking help who feel they are under scrutiny will often seek support from services outside their counties where they are assured of confidentiality.



Challenges to community & participation

In larger rural towns, particularly those in relative proximity to urban centres, a challenge to community cohesion is a growing social issue impacting on young people. The interface between urban and rural areas has grown with the spread of commuter belts as people commute more for work and school resulting in young people and their families connecting socially with nearby towns and cities more than with their residential community.



In addition, social differences in rural Ireland can often be masked but hidden poverty will impact on many families and young people's capacity to engage. More visible differences in social backgrounds and economic circumstances in an area can also negatively impact on community cohesion because of social divisions across various stratified groups.

Lack of knowledge about services or lack of services

A major barrier for rural young people is lack of information about services especially when they are not advertised on young person-centred on-line platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. A related issue is lack of access to rural broadband which is a key accessibility barrier that impacts on young people throughout rural Ireland.

In addition, in many rural and geographically isolated areas there are no youth services at all. Where outreach or detached youth work services exist they only

operate in a limited or time bound capacity, making it more difficult for young people to know when and where they can see the youth worker.

Education and employment opportunities

Sustained high levels of unemployment and emigration among young people in rural communities has had a knock-on impact on community, economic and social life^{iv}. In addition, the lack of long-term investment in rural broadband and transport services^v, rural entrepreneurship and micro businesses all contribute to the challenges of living and thriving in rural Ireland.

Though youth unemployment has fallen, it remains high at 13.7% nationally as of January 2018^{vi}. In addition, the rate of unemployment in rural regions still above the state average with rural areas being over-reliant on primary industries such as agriculture, construction and low-level manufacturing^{vii}.

Furthermore, emigration is not an option available to all as considerable funds are needed to sustain young people until they find employment and housing overseas^{viii}. Some might wish to leave but cannot; at the same time, it is not an option that everyone wishes to pursue.

Activities and recreation

There is a lack of safe, supervised, affordable and accessible recreational opportunities for young people in rural areas. The GAA may offer the only recreational opportunity in many places leaving those young people that it doesn't suit with no alternatives^{ix}. There may be community halls in some areas but these are often not open to young people.



Adults in rural communities usually have some options for night time recreational activities such as restaurants, clubs, the pub or the movies. These options may not be open to young people because of age restrictions, lack of transport or lack of finances. Recreational spaces, such as skate parks and basketball courts often don't exist in small communities. Rural young people frequently cite 'somewhere to go' and 'something to do' as a priority need in their lives; rural youth have less access to youth clubs than their urban counterparts^x.

In addition, local youth groups rely on volunteers who play an invaluable part in delivering a response in rural areas. However, getting volunteers to provide support to youth groups can also be a challenge, particularly where smaller towns have been impacted by emigration. Until recently, it was also a challenge to ensure quality youth work engagement across all volunteer youth clubs especially where they were not affiliated to a local youth organisation. The ETB are now actively supporting registration for all youth groups and undergoing the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups assessment.



Health

In terms of access to GPs, young people under 18 can experience different approaches in relation to their GP seeking parental consent. In larger towns, GP's may see over 16's without consent; in small towns this is less likely. In addition, accessing contraception can be difficult as young people may be observed by others they know in a local pharmacy or the pharmacy staff member may also be the local GAA coach which raises confidentiality concerns.

Young people may be reluctant to seek help for mental health issues and could fear being labelled. These pressures mean that young people may not seek help as early as they should. In addition, there is a lack of available youth mental health services in some areas and needs can build up^{xi}. The young person may therefore require one to one support prior to accessing youth groups.

LGBTI+ young people may fear negative attitudes, being labelled and discrimination from the local community. As a result, they may not access available support services such as counselling, support groups and sexual health services.

In addition, some rurally based GPs are not skilled in responding to young peoples' complex needs which can require specific expert knowledge.



Drugs and Alcohol

Life in present-day rural Ireland is influenced by prevailing social changes including the normalisation and acceptability of drug and alcohol use in youth subcultures. Linked with increased fragmentation of traditional rural family norms and values, the misuse of drugs and alcohol in rural Ireland and its penetration across all social groups is a growing issue.

Rural areas in Ireland are showing comparable drug availability and prevalence of use to urban settings, with the emergence of unique rural drug subcultures

and the widespread availability of both drugs and alcohol; rural areas within the commuter belts tend to have higher availability of a range of drugs.

For those young people who do not want to engage in alcohol or drugs there can be increased stress in rural areas. Young people feeling the pressure to participate and 'fit in' socially while seeking to avoid alcohol and drugs can find it more difficult in areas with less alternative social outlets.

Accessing support and services

A young person in a rural area may not come into contact with a range of potential services and supports, including community-based supports such as youth work organisations. Therefore, targeted advertising and outreach activities is key (see whole organisation approach in next section).



Risk factors in a rural setting: Life experiences put certain groups at higher risk than others

- Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex + (LGBTI+) often find it more difficult to meet other young LGBTI+ people or access information in rural areas and this can make coming out more difficult^{xii}. In addition, young people may not want to be associated with an LGBTI+ group but may initially look for more focused one-to-one support. An important strategy in running LGBTI+ groups is to change the meeting times and day of the group and sometimes the location so that the young people attending feel safe.
- Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly those who are recently arrived and not linked in to youth services can be at risk of isolation due to lack of a social network. Their ability to engage with services, institutions and organisations may be additionally hindered due to language barriers, cultural differences and or access to interpreter services.
- Youth Mental health: Issues of self-harm and suicidal ideation in rural areas are linked to isolation and the non-availability of support and services. The cultural acceptance of alcohol and the stigma that still attaches to mental illness, as well as higher rates of suicide in rural Ireland (than in urban areas) are also considered risk factors.
- Young people with a physical or learning disability may have limited social contact. They may go to a specialist school at a distance from their home, not have access to their own transport or their parents may be over protective. As a result, social isolation can be a real issue for this cohort in rural areas.
- Youth Unemployment for those aged 18 – 24 is related to low educational attainment, limited job opportunities, marginal farming and dependency on social welfare payments. A lack of economic resources and low educational attainment could contribute to suicidal decisions.

Advocacy, referrals and barriers to access of services

It is important to be aware of the breadth of supports and services in an area and how to refer a young person to services and supports and to assist them in accessing them. Being involved in a referral network and seeking out new services to include in this network is key. Specialist services may also be interested to know how to refer young people to your project.

Where referrals take time, be it for education, training or health related issues, a holding relationship with a young person is an important strategy in countering this time barrier.

Barriers in accessing services:

- Young people may be reluctant to access services due to a fear of a lack of confidentiality in a rural area.
- With lack of access to transport, young people may face an access barrier where specialised services are only available in centralised locations.
- Depending on how a service is advertised, it may or may not be visible to a young person.
- They may also face virtual barriers in accessing information where there is a limited broadband capacity in an area.

Developing inclusive practice for working with young people living in rural Ireland

The following is some practical advice which can be adopted within your organisation to make it a more supportive environment for rural youth. It will also help you deal better with the concerns you may have for the young people.

See it in the context of your ongoing programme of activities. These ideas may take some planning but the methods are proving effective in addressing the inclusion needs of young people in rural areas.

Strategies in responding to identified issues

- Consider creating a mobile version of your service. Some organisations are using buses or transit vans as mobile centres to deliver short-term initiatives and to make contact. These spaces are designed to be youth friendly e.g. with couches, benches and computer space.
- Another way of being mobile is to use a tent to offer a space where young people gather e.g. at GAA training spaces which are attended by young people. Alongside weekly training, a youth service can develop a parallel weekly youth space.
- Plan outreach 'pop-up' initiatives which can respond to a particular need or interest group at a specific time.
- Build transport costs into planning the setting up and delivery of issue based groups.
- Partner with other agencies to share prohibitive transport costs etc.
- Question how accessible your service is to the needs of young people, how easy is it for them to make an appointment with you or to talk to someone when they need to, specifically in terms of ensuring

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confidentiality? Can they speak to someone who isn't from their immediate area if needed?

- Support volunteers involved in delivering services in rurally isolated areas and facilitate partnerships between youth workers and volunteers.
- Youth work volunteers are a critical part of a rural youth response. Ensure the package available for volunteers is worthwhile and links to their interests and skills. Linking volunteers into the regional and national network further facilitates their own development and sense of being valued.
- Plan relevant and targeted training and education responses in collaboration with other local services.
- Work in collaboration with national issue based groups to develop appropriate local responses e.g. Macra Na Feirme who worked with GLEN on producing a booklet, 'LGBT People in Rural Ireland' (2013).
- In working with young people who are 16+, work with local partners and employers to develop responses to youth unemployment e.g. Work Winner^{xiii}, Youth2Work^{xiv}.
- Work on improving your visibility across the rural space.
- Network with people who work in areas that young people frequent, such as the fast food outlets which exist throughout rural Ireland.
- Collaboration between community services and businesses (e.g. fast food outlets) can be a very powerful way of increasing information sharing and advertising. These spaces can also be important meeting places in terms of connecting with people where they are at.
- Regional ITs that offer training linked in to local employment opportunities are key to supporting relevant and obtainable employment options.
- Work with rural parents to provide alcohol and substance abuse education, build visibility of services, including family support for those experiencing problematic substance use.

- Regular house visits to families allows a youth worker to build a relationship with the whole family. Building relationships with families creates stronger ties in the community.
- Plan a flexible element to your service that can respond to changing issues and area based needs as they emerge.
- Don't be risk averse in trying new ideas.

Consider using a Detached Youth Work model^{xv}

Detached Youth Work is a distinct form of work with young people. As with all youth work it uses the principles and practices of non-formal education to engage young people in constructive dialogue within a broad agenda of personal and social development. The basis of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person is mutual acceptance and parity where traditional notions of adult power and authority are challenged. Detached youth work is distinct from all other forms of youth work as it works outside of the geographical youth work centre: detached youth workers work where young people have chosen to be, whether this is on the streets, cafes, shopping centres etc. Workers make contact with young people wherever they are.

The experience of many detached youth workers is that imposing an agenda acts as a barrier to working with young people, many of whom are already disengaged from formal learning. The agenda must, therefore, emerge from a mutually

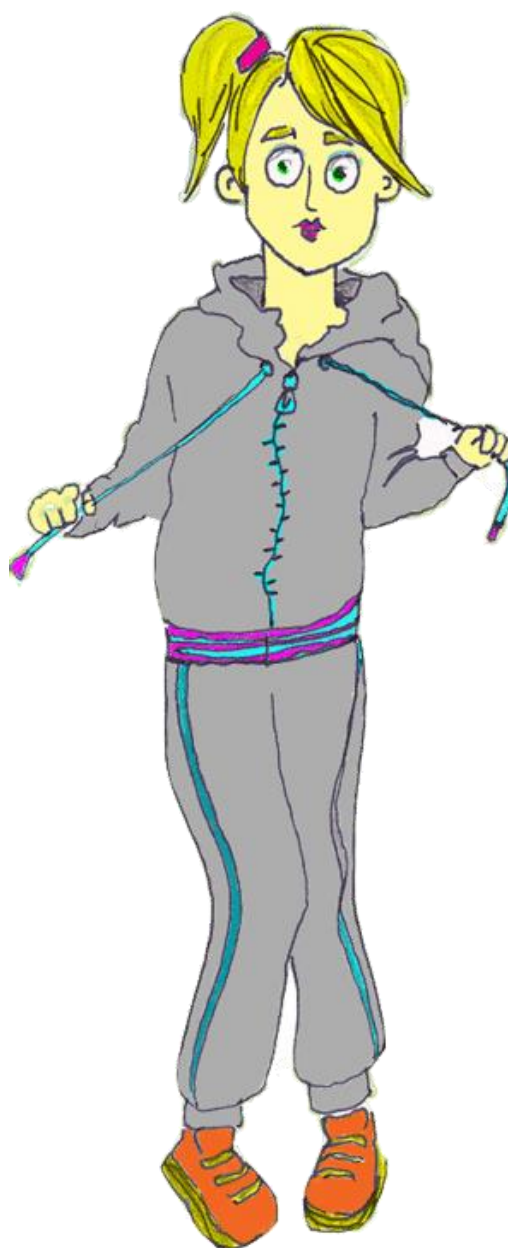


respectful relationship, where hearing the other's voice is as important as articulating one's own. Detached youth work is above all, about working flexibly.

The model, which has been supported as a way of engaging with rural youth in Cavan and Monaghan, prioritises work on Friday and Saturday nights between the hours of 7pm and midnight. Youth workers target “hot spots” where young people meet and they work on building relationships in these spaces where young people may be at risk of anti-social or criminal behaviour, risky sexual conduct and substance misuse; the success of youth work comes from supporting young peoples' capacity to make good judgments in relation to these risks and the possibility of creating more structured engagement with programmes and projects.

One of the identified challenges in delivering detached youth work services is in staffs' capacity to cover identified geographic areas and at the key time slots. This can be a particularly difficult where an issue arises in one area and time slot and it impacts on engagement at a later location and time slot. Extra funding will be necessary to ensure that you have a relief panel is available to keep the routes and time slots consistent each week in order to sustain trust and relationship building.

Notwithstanding the challenges, since the programme has been running in Youth Work Ireland Cavan Monaghan it has made



a significant impact on meaningful engagement with young people who had been previously excluded*.

*** Detached Youth Work project in Cavan Monaghan**

Detached Youth Work is part of the **Bounce Back Youth Service**^{xvi} which commenced in December 2016. It is a collaboration between the ISPCC and Youth Work Ireland to jointly establish a service to support young people in the areas of Bailieborough, Virginia, Ballyjamesduff and Belturbet. The ISPCC works with young people aged 10 – 18 through its rural resilience service, while Youth Work Ireland Cavan Monaghan supports young people aged 10 – 24 through its detached youth work programme, youth café and other youth programmes^{xvii}.

Checklist 15 - How accessible is your organisation to young people living in rural Ireland?

This checklist can help you to identify how you can improve your service for young people in rural and geographically isolated areas

Public image

How we present our service to our community

- Our service actively considers its youth 'friendliness'. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- We advertise our service and programmes in places where rurally isolated young people are likely to see them e.g. doctor surgeries and fast food outlets. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Programme planning and delivery

Our programmes are designed and delivered to include the diverse needs and identities of young people in rural and geographically isolated areas

- Our service is flexible to accommodate the needs of young people in rural and geographically isolated areas. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- We have outreach and mobile options in place to ensure we are reaching people who are rurally isolated **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- We run 'pop-up' initiatives to respond to a particular need or interest group at specific times **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- We use informal meeting spaces where necessary to engage with young people **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Connecting young people to services:

- Our service has developed an understanding of the referral process into statutory service **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- Our service has identified local services and supports and developed links with them. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- Our service has a strategy in place of staying in contact with vulnerable young people while they are waiting for a referral to come through. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**
- Our service works transport costs into programme delivery and actively collaborates with other services to share these costs. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

- | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Staff and volunteers have an understanding of issues relating to rural and geographically isolated areas. | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Staff and volunteers have effective skills in engaging rural young people. | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Our volunteers are supported in their professional development and ongoing commitment to the work. | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Staff and volunteers receive support and supervision (e.g. team meetings, one-to-one formal supervision etc.) | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

- | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Our organisation has a written commitment to equality and inclusion that is inclusive of rurally isolated young people. | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We recognise transport as a key access issue and work creatively to try and overcome this barrier. | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Participation

We make sure we include the voices of young people at all levels of our youth service

- Our service consults with young people about how living in rural and geographically isolated areas affects their engagement with our youth services and on how our youth service can support them
- YESPARTLYNO

Useful contacts

Information on mobile youth work

KDYS Phone: 064 6631748 Web: http://kdys.ie Email: killarney@kdys.ie	KDYS delivers a Mobile Youth Café across the Kerry area. The Mobile Youth Café is also an information hub and a recreation space. It is currently used to help new youth clubs get established in their communities, attend community events and festivals across the diocese and acts as a hub for delivering youth work workshops in rural areas.
West Wicklow Youth Project Phone: 083 4445074 Website: http://www.kys.ie Email: tina.harper@kys.ie	West Wicklow Youth Project aims to deliver a Mobile Youth Bus across the West Wicklow area. With the WWYP Mobile Youth Bus, young people have access to an information and recreation space. It delivers a pop-up youth service in response to identified need and is important to assess emerging issues in rurally isolated spaces.

Information

SpunOut

Web: www.spunout.ie

Twitter: [@SpunOut](https://twitter.com/SpunOut)

SpunOut provides information, support and advocacy opportunities to young people throughout Ireland. Their website provides hundreds of fact sheets on all aspects of youth health and culture including mental health, suicide and sexual health as well as a searchable database of help contacts, moderated discussion forums and an advocacy platform for young people to be heard.

Youth Work Ireland Information Services

YWI Member Organisations:

Web: www.youthworkireland.ie/who-we-are/member-youth-services

Many of the affiliated Youth Work Ireland member organisations operating around the country offer dedicated Information Services for young people. Check out 'Member Organisations' from the main website to get contact information on local services.

Other Youth Organisations offer Youth Information Services. Check out national Youth Organisations that operate throughout Ireland at the National Youth Council of Ireland's website: www.youth.ie/members

Useful Reading Resources

Council of Wales for Voluntary Youth Services (2014). Detached and Outreach Youth Work Method and Resource Handbook for Youth Work Practitioners in Wales. CWVYS.

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Mac Éinri, P (2016). For today's emigrants, home is where they are now. The Irish Times, Sat, July 2, 2016: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/generation-emigration/for-today-s-emigrants-home-is-where-they-are-now-1.2707069>

Macra na Feirme. Macra Youth Employment Resource. E-book: <http://www.macra.ie/what-we-do/community-involvement/youth-employment-resource>.

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National Youth Council of Ireland (2013). Time to go? A qualitative research study exploring the experiences and impact of emigration on Ireland's Youth. National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI).

The Children's Research Centre (2006) Research briefing: The free time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged communities. Trinity College Dublin.

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- ⁱ E3004: Population 2011 to 2016 by Single Year of Age, Regional Authority, Sex, Aggregate Town or Rural Area and Census Year: www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E3004&PLanguage=0
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp3oy/cp3/urr>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Irish Rural Link Pre-Budget Submission 2018: www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Irish-Rural-Link-Pre-Budget-Submission-2018-Final.pdf
- ^{iv} Youth Employment and Education: www.macra.ie/youth-employment-education
- ^v Being a young adult Travelling in rural Tipperary: <http://youthworktipperary.ie/blog/being-a-young-adult-travelling-in-rural-tipperary>
- ^{vi} www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentjanuary2018
- ^{vii} Irish Rural Link Pre-Budget Submission 2018: www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Irish-Rural-Link-Pre-Budget-Submission-2018-Final.pdf
- ^{viii} National Youth Council of Ireland ‘Time to Go’ www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI_Youth_Emigration_Report.pdf Mac Éinri also stated that a majority of emigrants had at least €2,500 available to them (two-thirds of those had more than €5,000) before leaving. (The Irish Times, 2016).
- ^{ix} Walking Against the Wind, a project developed by Merville and District Family Resource Centre in Donegal showed that ‘while there was a huge will among young people to engage, they did not always have the channels or amenities to do so. For example, “the lack of facilities locally witnesses the need for young people who wish to box or engage in other sports to travel to other areas or towns, even into Derry...(and) a number of respondents suggest that they would be encouraged if ‘there are groups other than sports’. www.leargas.ie/blog/merville-watw
- ^x The free time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged community: www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/assets/pdf/ResearchBriefings/ResearchBriefingIssue1PDF292k.B.pdf
- ^{xi} Macra calls for fresh focus on youth mental health in rural Galway: <http://connachttribune.ie/macra-calls-for-fresh-focus-on-youth-mental-health-in-rural-galway>
- ^{xii} Being LGBT in a rural area: <http://spunout.ie/life/article/being-lgbt-in-a-rural-area>
- ^{xiii} Youth Employment, YWI Tipp: <http://youthworktipperary.ie/youth-employment>
- ^{xiv} Youth2Work Scheme: <http://cavanmonaghan.etb.ie/latest-news/launch-youth2work-scheme>
- ^{xv} Detached Youth Work: <http://ywimonaghan.ie/detached>
- ^{xvi} Bounce Back Youth Service: www.facebook.com/pg/BounceBackYouthService/posts/
- ^{xvii} Bounce Back Youth Service launched by Minister Katherine Zappone: <http://cavanmonaghan.etb.ie/latest-news/bounce-back-youth-service-launched-minister-katherine-zappone/>

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