**Minister Zappone publishes Youth Sector Guidance**

**Guidance provides a pathway to assist youth organisations with the phased re-introduction of full service provision after Covid-19**

**2 June 2020**

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone, today published the Youth Sector Guidance for Youth Organisations on Resuming Full Services after COVID-19.

Since the very beginning of the Covid-19 crisis youth services have been working to maintain supports, particularly to vulnerable young people most in need. Representatives of the youth sector, along with officials in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), have been working to prepare youth sector guidance for the phased re-introduction of full service provision. This work has been informed by the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Consultation has also taken place with key stakeholders in the sector, other Government departments and public health officials.

The purpose of this document is to provide high level guidance from which individual youth organisations and services can develop their own protocols. It includes a sequence of actions for the youth sector to consider at each of the five phases set out in the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. The guidance also includes a suite of templates to assist youth organisations.

Importantly, the guidance is intended to be a living document that will be updated as wider Government advice is received.  It is emphasised throughout the document that actions at all phases should be carried out in line with public health advice, including social distancing measures, as advised by Government.

The Department will continue to meet with sectoral representatives to review and update the guidance as we progress through the phases set out in the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.   DCYA officials are also continuing to work with sector representatives and colleagues in other Government Departments on issues such as training supports for the sector, access to facilities, the further contribution of the youth sector to the overall Government well-being initiative as it relates to young people, and ongoing review of the guidance.

Publishing the guidance Minister Zappone said:

*“I am delighted to be able to publish this pathway for youth organisations, to provide them with guidance as to how they can move to fully recommence the vital services they deliver to children and young people, many of whom who are particularly vulnerable during this very difficult period.*

*“I’d like to acknowledge the vital work that youth organisations have carried out during the period of restrictions, and the key role that they will now play as we navigate our way out of restrictions into the summer months ahead. I would also very much like to recognise the support and input of representatives from the youth sector who have worked diligently with my officials to very quickly pull together this important piece of guidance. “*

**ENDS**

**Notes for Editors**

**Youth Sector Guidance for Youth Organisations on Resuming Full Services after COVID-19 [INSERT LINK]**

The youth sector guidance was developed by DCYA in conjunction with representatives of the youth sector from Crosscare, ETBI, Foróige, National Youth Council of Ireland, Scouting Ireland and Youth Work Ireland. This group will continue to meet to keep the youth sector guidance under review. As a living document, it is anticipated that the guidance will be regularly updated in response to evolving public health guidance and emerging need.

The guidance for youth services provides that, in Phases 1 and 2, a maximum of 4 young people, accompanied by up to 2 youth workers/volunteers, may meet in outdoor settings in a socially distanced manner. From phase 3 onwards, it proposes that maximum group sizes may align with those agreed for school age childcare services, thereby providing for a maximum size of 12 young people plus 2 youth workers/ volunteers.

Youth work is a vital service, especially to many vulnerable children and young people who have been even more marginalised in the past months. The youth sector adapted quickly in response to the restrictions by providing alternative online and phone supports for young people. Some examples of the supports and initiatives provided are set out in the box below.

Notwithstanding these supports, there are also reports that many young people are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, isolation, loneliness and depression at the present time. For example, the mental health youth service, Jigsaw, has seen a 575% increase in online visitors to jigsawonline.ie.

There is an opportunity for the youth sector to play a key role over the summer in terms of services and programmes that offer purpose, structure, social connectedness, and enhanced health and wellbeing, as well as overall social and emotional development for young people.

**Examples of Supports and Initiatives by 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 was recently 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 the period of Covid-19 isolation. The campaign was 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, 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 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 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).