



Member Update

15 May 2020

Dear Members and Friends,

Following meetings and conversations with many of you, we have compiled an overview of the issues we have discussed and any relevant progress since our last meeting. This update will cover just some of the issues being discussed with members on an ongoing basis.

The website page is now up and running where relevant resources will be collated. If you would like to add resources you think may be of interest to other members, please email communications@childrensrights.ie

We will be holding regular meetings with members on the most pressing issues brought by Covid 19 and the related restrictions and endeavour to keep you informed in a timely manner. If you would like to raise an issue or be added to member meetings, please contact our Membership Officer, Edel at edel.mcdevitt@childrensrights.ie

Issues raised in the last meeting



Education

Education has been a central discussion point at all of our member meetings on Covid-19. There has been quite a number of updates since we last met with our members, namely, the postponement of the Leaving Certificate examinations. You can read the Department of Education and Skills press release [here](#). During our last meeting, members discussed concerns about how updates and changes to examinations were being communicated out. Many report that students they work with were experiencing heightened anxiety and stress around their exams. Further guidelines on the Leaving Cert and the grading process were published yesterday by the department of Education and Skills ([available here](#)).

Members also raised the inequality in access to both technology and to broadband, which is increasing pressure on some families. The [funding announced](#) by the Department of Education and Skills for ICT is of course welcome, but it is a drop in the ocean for this particular area and the gaps that now exist. Members expressed the need for Government to give further consideration to vulnerable children and young people in these discussions.

At our most recent member meeting, the educational disadvantage that children living in emergency accommodation and direct provision centres were experiencing was raised by several members. The concern for how these young people access education material or spaces to study and do homework is a pressing issue for organisations working with these families.

The Children's Rights Alliance held a separate members meeting with Bernard Gloster, CEO of Tusla and Noel Kelly of Tusla's Education Support Services. Following this meeting, a letter was issued to all schools by the Department of Children and Tusla's Education Support services in relation to supporting vulnerable children.

A question posed by members is how we can support students throughout the Summer months. This is an important question to consider given the recent announcement of a phased re-opening of businesses and services. Schools will not be reopening until the new academic year. Children and young people will have been out of education for six months, which will have a significant impact on their development, their education and their social life and wellbeing. Many of our members agreed that in a phased reopening, vulnerable children and children with additional needs should be considered priority groups to return first and that Government should work with community and voluntary services to help provide relief for families or additional programmes throughout the summer for young people to engage with.

Mental Health

Several members spoke about the increase in helpline calls and enquiries since the Covid-19 outbreak. We have discussed the impact this pandemic will have on the mental health of children and young people but also on their families and the implications this will have when we consider access to support services during restrictions and after they are lifted. There is concern that our mental health services, which are already under pressure, will be severely impacted by an increase in demand. Members voiced the need for further investment in CAMHS services and psychology support services to prepare for this.

Child Protection

The Children's Rights Alliance held a specific meeting with Tusla and our members on the issue of child protection. The concern around the drop in child protection referrals to Tusla has been addressed by the Alliance and members in the media recently. You can read some of the pieces below:

[Children's Rights Alliance and ISPCC on Today with Sarah McInerney](#)
[Children's Rights Alliance and INTO – article on Journal.ie](#)
[Tusla CEO Bernard Gloster interview](#)

Vulnerable Children

The Children's Rights Alliance has been asked by the Family Support Service of the Department of Justice and Equality to produce a newsletter specifically for children and young people in the direct provision centres to point them to important information, support services and resources available to them. If you have any information you think would be helpful to include please contact Emma Archbold at emma.archbold@childrensrights.ie



For more information visit hse.ie/coronavirus

The Children's Rights Alliance wrote to the Chief Medical Officer and the National Public Health Emergency Team to highlight the impact social distancing and Covid19 restrictions are having on children and young people. You can read the letter [here](#).

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla have also issued a paper that outlines the service and support infrastructure that is in place through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. These include those services that have been designated as essential front-line services in the current COVID-19 crisis, other key supports (youth, community, and family services) and coordinating or governance structures (Children and Young People's Services Committees; Education and Training Boards). Read the full paper [here](#).

Child-centred Approach

Members again emphasised the need for a more child-centric approach when considering the phased reopening of society. The example of Northern Ireland was brought up where there has been a more child-centric response, in particular, to reach vulnerable children. All schools were asked to [remain open](#) for vulnerable children and children of key workers. Initial uptake was low so the Minister for Education [wrote to principals](#) asking them to engage with parents and social services so children in need were identified in communities. Their recently-launched [Childcare Support Scheme](#) also included provision for vulnerable children.

Covid19 Member Resources

Some of our members have reached out to share resources and important information they have developed for children, young people and their families during this time. These are included below.

Alcohol Action Ireland – raised recent statistics from the Central Statistics Office that showed households with children had highest proportion reporting an increase in alcohol consumption (27.3%). They will publish survey results on the issue shortly. More information about the Silent Voices Campaign can be found [here](#).

AsIAM – As I Am are running a survey on their website to gather views on how Covid-19 is impacting families. You can find the survey [here](#). They have also included resources on their website including visual social stories to help during this time. AsIAM wrote to Minister Joe McHugh highlighting the need for students to continue to access educational supports during Covid-19 and critically, the July Provision Scheme. Read their letter [here](#).

Children in Hospital have pulled support services together on their website [here](#).

CyberSafeIreland - In light of Covid-19 restrictions, CyberSafeIreland have moved their training online. On their [website](#), you can access webinars for children and parents.

Foróige have put together a dedicated page on their website in relation to Covid-19. The page provides up to date information about their services, resources for youth workers and volunteers, resources for young people and advice for parents. It can be accessed [here](#).

Jigsaw have introduced new ways of accessing support services in light of Covid-19. This includes a new Freephone number. More details are available on their website [here](#).



For more information visit hse.ie/coronavirus

Latest Department Notices

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

- [Minister Zappone to meet EU Ministers to discuss impact of Covid-19 on Youth Sector](#)
- [Cancellation of Temporary Childcare Scheme for Essential Workers](#)
- [Funding to Local Authorities for Refurbishment of Playgrounds](#)

Department of Education and Skills

- [Department Stakeholder Engagement in relation to state examinations](#)
- [Postponement of Leaving Certificate](#)
- [Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020](#)

Department of Health

- For the latest resources, click [here](#).
- [Additional investment in online mental health supports](#)

Department of Justice and Equality

- [Temporary extension of immigration permissions](#)
- [Measures to protect direct provision residents](#)

Events

The Wheel are hosting a Virtual Summit on 27 May, where a panel including Alliance members Barnardos and Daughters of Charity will discuss the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the challenges it presents. More details can be found [here](#).

Funding Opportunities

We wish to better understand the technological needs of our members with a view to accessing potential funding to better support organisations at this time. We have emailed the members welcoming statements of need. If you or your organisation know of children and young people struggling to access IT, please contact Edel at edel.mcdevitt@childrensrights.ie with specific information about the numbers/needs and why these children/families have not gotten support from elsewhere, if known.

We would like to thank all of our members who are engaging with us on the issues this public health crisis is causing for children, young people and their families. We would like to thank you all for your incredible work during this time. If you wish to raise additional issues, find out more about our member meetings or would like to include something in these updates to our members and friends, please contact our Membership Officer Edel at edel.mcdevitt@childrensrights.ie



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