

**GENERATION
PANDEMIC**



**GENERATION
PANDEMIC.**

FUTURES ARE ON THE LINE.

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BACKGROUND.

For children and young people living in disadvantaged circumstances in Ireland, life was already challenging.

Fast forward 14 months and three gruelling lockdowns, where safe spaces were removed and education came to a halt, and we're only now beginning to understand the toll the pandemic has taken on their young lives.

ON THE FRONTLINE

To get beyond the daily statistics and uncover the truth, we've spoken to the young people affected to hear about their lived experiences. The young people we're calling Generation Pandemic.

We've also spoken to the unsung heroes on the frontline: The youth workers. Over 300 men and women who understand these young people's lived realities and are often the 'one good adult' in a young person's life, working tirelessly to support them across the villages, towns and cities of Ireland.

EE

Years of transformative work by youth projects with vulnerable children has been wiped out. While smart subsidies were put in place to keep employers connected to employees, no such support was there to keep vulnerable young people connected to their lifelines.

Youth worker

THE UNTOLD STORY

Our findings prove that while we have been in the same storm, we most certainly have not been in the same boat. This is a stark warning to Ireland that a generation's future is on the line.

This report is not just about the untold suffering of the country's most at-risk children and young people, who are struggling silently across every town, village and city of Ireland, whose voices have not been heard in the media and who were told that 'we're all in this together'.

This report focuses on the immediate actions we can take to undo the catastrophic damage that has been caused. We have created a clear set of tangible solutions with the frontline heroes who have the skills, wisdom and infrastructures in place in communities across Ireland and are ready to start turning things around.

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED

The Irish Youth Foundation has been tracking the lived experiences of vulnerable children and young people over 12 months. This most recent deep-dive was conducted across the months of **March and April 2021** and has triggered a call-to-action to the country to pay attention to the issues and solutions highlighted. It has also prompted the Irish Youth Foundation to triple its fundraising efforts.

Despite the increase in need, 70% of the organisations surveyed by the Irish Youth Foundation in April 2021 reported that their funding had stayed the same in the past year. Therefore, it's crucial we step in and close this gap by increasing our funding opportunities for these organisations.

In this report, the Irish Youth Foundation lifts the lid on the current situation in order to educate the country as to what's happening in every county in Ireland, right now. And it puts children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds at the front of the conversation for the first time during the pandemic.

REBUILDING THE COUNTRY

As Ireland haltingly emerges from the pandemic, we predict that our most marginalised children are likely to be forgotten.

Although this is one of the toughest challenges we've faced, we can prevent a generation from falling through the cracks.

We've listened, we understand the needs, but we must respond **now**. Action must be taken to empower youth services or we're heading for a **generational timebomb**.

As the country rebuilds itself no child's future should be left hanging in the balance because of this virus. If our children aren't rebuilt, the country won't be either.



Lucy Masterson, CEO



METHODOLOGY.

PHASE 1: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

An investigation into the impact of the pandemic on the country's most marginalised young people and children.

We carried out in-depth interviews with 25 youth workers with national representation who provided:

- A clear picture of the key issues on a national level
- A broad sense of the recurring and unexpected themes
- An overview of solutions to critical issues facing children and young people in local communities

We also carried out 20 in-depth interviews with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to uncover the truth of the lived experience and the challenges they've faced over the last 12 months.

PHASE 2: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Guided by the key findings from phase one, an in-depth national online survey with over 300 youth workers representing more than 35,000 children and young people was carried out (pro bono) in partnership with Amárach Research between 15th-29th April 2021.

THOSE MOST AT RISK.

1 IN 5 CHILDREN

**UNDER THE AGE OF 18 LIVES
IN POVERTY IN IRELAND.
AT THE VERY LEAST.**

That's approximately 200,000 children living in poverty in Ireland today who are living in families with incomes below the poverty line according to the most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions published by the Central Statistics Office, 2019 (CSO).

However, these figures do not give us the full picture. There are thousands of 'hidden' children not accounted for in the official numbers according to St Vincent de Paul (Ireland's largest voluntary charitable organisation).

There are thousands of homeless children in hotels and homeless accommodation hubs, as well as those in direct provision centres, who do not show up in official statistics because the CSO report measures households only.

Based on trends following the last recession in Ireland, it's likely there will be an increase of at least 20% in children experiencing poverty as a result of COVID (CSO, SILC, 2019).

And of the 40,000 babies born since the start of the pandemic, 8,000 of them will have left maternity hospital to spend the first night of their brand new life in marginalisation, disadvantage and in many cases homelessness. ("Actions to address the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children experiencing marginalisation and homelessness" – HSE Report, Nov 2020).

8,000 BABIES

BORN STRAIGHT INTO POVERTY DURING THE PANDEMIC



Imagine through an accident of birth and geography that you were born into carnage and chaos of gangland violence on your doorstep? You are still expected to get proper sleep; get up the next morning; have your homework ready; and try to get on with your day and perform like your peers? No child, no matter how resilient, no matter how stable his or her family is, can survive that without harm or hurt.

That's why we exist. And that's why now, we're needed now more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has doubled down on already vulnerable people. Because of the restrictions, we haven't been able to be there for them in the way they need it. It breaks my heart. **It's going to take a massive effort – and extra resources – to save this generation**

DECLAN KEENAN,

Leader of the
JUST ASK Project

04

FINDINGS & PREDICTIONS.

This research signals a crisis.

We're heading for a **generational timebomb**.

If we don't take action now, those working on the frontline predict:

1. A long-term mental health fallout
2. A generation lacking in social skills and the resilience to succeed
3. Education and employment prospects shattered

MENTAL HEALTH CATASTROPHE

82%

**PREDICT SERIOUS
LONG-TERM DAMAGE**

Mental health has been a stand-out theme throughout the research, with nine in ten youth workers believing it to be the biggest challenge during the pandemic. 85% of youth workers say the last 12 months have been extremely difficult for the young people they support and 82% predict there will be serious long-term damage to the young people in their communities.

It's crucial to understand the knock-on effect that mental health takes on all other aspects of life including education and employment. Our research signals that young people's resilience levels, overall sense of motivation and ambitions for the future have regressed, or in some cases, depleted entirely.

When mental health is compromised, it can diminish a young person's self-belief, and ability to overcome adversity and succeed in life. Without the right tools and support to rebuild and repair, the future prospects for Generation Pandemic will diminish by the day.

However, there are solutions, as identified by those working closely with at-risk children and young people. We must put the support in place to empower youth services to create safe spaces, with more resources, manpower and training needed to re-engage young people into society, education and employment.

Four in five youth workers believe that the impact of COVID will be long-term and will have a profound impact on young people and society:

Long-term mental health issues

(73%)

Steep rise in early school leaving

(35%)

A steep rise in anti-social behaviour and criminality

(48%)

Increased cycles of poverty and unemployment

(45%)

A generation lacking in social skills and resilience to succeed

(52%)

Years of work wiped out with disadvantaged communities

(36%)

EE

COVID is accelerating the cycles of poverty, unemployment and lack of education that we have been working so hard to interrupt and break for so long

YOUTH WORKER, LIMERICK

59%

**OF 15-24 YEAR OLDS
ARE UNEMPLOYED**

With youth unemployment at an all-time high and 59% of young people aged 15-24 currently unemployed, youth workers believe that it will be even more difficult to get vulnerable young people back into work.

Support structures are not in place to support young people as they transition into employment after a period of unemployment or early school leaving

(77%)

Significant decrease in employment opportunities

(71%)

Lack of realistic training programmes where there could be jobs in the future

(57%)

A year of lost schooling, the resulting lack of morale and motivation, and a regression of long-term aspirations will pose a significant challenge for many young people in education. Key barriers noted:

Loss of morale and long-term aspirations regressed

(70%)

Lack of resources to support young people at risk of early school leaving

(73%)

Lack of engagement with school

(55%)

Will have fallen too far behind to catch up

(48%)

The housing issue is widely recognised in Ireland, but the pandemic revealed the challenges associated with a lack of space. Youth workers noted that overcrowding and a lack of safe spaces exacerbated mental health issues.

Looking ahead, the creation of safe spaces has been noted as a key solution in re-engaging and rebuilding young people.

Lack of safe spaces where young people can socialise and connect with youth workers was the biggest barrier to providing support to young people

(61%)

Inappropriate housing situations, overcrowding or drug or alcohol abuse are a key challenge

(42%)

Safe and flexible spaces are the most important support needed to help children and young people

(53%)

As the country reopens, youth workers will focus on reintegrating young people back into society. However, they are faced with significant challenges:

- Lack of safe and flexible spaces
- Children have fallen off the radar
- Not having enough manpower to get out into the community and reconnect with young people
- Government funding is not flexible and doesn't reflect the actual needs on the ground
- Break in relationships with children and young people

THE SPOKEN TRUTHS.

05

The young people we spoke to talked honestly about how the pandemic has had a devastating effect on their safety, mental health, wellbeing, prospects and aspirations.

THESE ARE THEIR STORIES.

05

WITH LOCKDOWN I WAS STUCK IN THE SAME ROOM ALL THE TIME WITH MY FAMILY AND HAD NO PRIVACY

“My family lives in an incredibly cramped flat. I’m in one room with my parents and my sister. When there was no lockdown I could go outside, but with lockdown I was stuck in the same room all the time with my family and had no privacy. During the pandemic my aunt, uncle and cousin had to move in with us as well as they lost their space.” **Young person, Dublin**

“My English has been at a decline lately because I haven’t been talking to people. With my friends we barely chat on the phone, it’s usually on social media. I’m speaking to my parents in their first language at home, not English even though I was born in Ireland and have lived here my whole life”.

Young person, Dublin

“My mental health has been impacted - anxiety is a big one. There are times when I’m worried about something I hear on the news e.g. numbers skyrocketing. I feel it in my chest and stomach. My mind is racing - I’m 20 miles into the future worrying about loads of other stuff. It’s very hard to sit with these feelings when all you’re doing is sitting with it all the time.”

Young person, Dublin



**ALCOHOL AND
DRUG ADDICTION ARE
ON THE INCREASE.
IF THERE'S A FEW
DRINKS HAPPENING,
THEN DRUGS ARE
GUARANTEED.**

“Alcohol and drug addiction are on the increase from what I’m seeing. People my age are drinking cos they’re ‘not in the humour today’. It’s becoming a more regular behaviour now and I think it’s being overlooked right now. Mental health issues as well – this goes hand in hand with the addiction challenges. Cocaine is so casual amongst my age group and amongst my peers. There’s 2 or 3 of us who don’t use drugs. The language is ‘we’re dying for a buzz’ because they’re not able to go out to a club now. We’re sitting in a field and people are blatantly taking drugs. If there’s a few drinks happening, then drugs are guaranteed.”

Young person, Dublin inner city



**THERE'S SOCIAL
ANXIETY AROUND
PEOPLE. IT'S BETTER
TO LOOK AT YOUR
PHONE THAN SIT
THERE AND TRY AND
TALK TO PEOPLE.**

“We’re underestimating the impact of people skills. These are decreasing in people all the time over the past year. Social anxiety around people – it’s better to look at your phone than sit there and try and talk to people.”

Young person, Dublin

“When the Leaving Cert was cancelled, I was so shocked. I had worked so hard for 6 years and I would have been able for the Leaving Cert. The way everything then progressed with college being online made me question do I even want this.”

Young person, Limerick



I WAS TRYING TO FIND AN APPRENTICESHIP, BUT PLACES WEREN'T HIRING BECAUSE OF COVID, SO I JUST WASN'T WORKING.

"I haven't met any of my new classmates in person and we're almost a year into our course. I don't know any of the societies in college – I didn't even know they existed. My older sister told me they exist. There's a full portal that you need to sign into for college information, but nobody told us about that. We missed out on a lot of information."

Young person, Dublin

"With my group of friends, we're scared we'll be looked down on in years to come, cos we didn't have to do a Leaving Cert – 'their school was online, they got it easy.' I would take school over anything we went through."

Young person, Limerick

"Work wise – trying to find work was really hard. I was trying to find an apprenticeship for a while but lots of places were not hiring because of COVID, so I just wasn't working."

Young person, Dublin

"I'd probably say work is a long-term challenge for people my age as a result of COVID. A lot of people I know have been laid off. Lots of places won't be looking to hire for a while. The government is not very helpful at all in general and a lot of people will be struggling to find jobs in certain sectors. It's going to take a long time for people to get back to reality and normality. I feel like a lot of people are going to be impacted for a long time to come in terms of not working."

Young person Dublin



UNCERTAINTY IS ONE OF THE BIG CHALLENGES OF COVID FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

“Support wise on the construction side of things, it’s difficult being a 1st year apprentice. There’s a lot of people interested in apprenticeships, but they can’t get access to safe pass certs / manual handling courses etc. We need to be able to access these courses, it has to be a priority. Safe pass certs are really hard to access because of COVID. The government need to start making things like this more accessible. Also, because I haven’t been able to get my driver’s licence it has slowed down my progression at work. I was booked for it last October and it keeps getting pushed back. I can’t be put on different sites where there is more work because I can’t drive myself to them. It’s really frustrating.”

Young person, Dublin

“I think the uncertainty is one of the big challenges of COVID for young people. I’ve also noticed issues with isolation – young people had jobs, they were making their own way, then these opportunities got taken away from them.”

Young person, Waterford

“I’ve missed out on direct, on-the-job learning over the past year. My CE scheme was interrupted, and I didn’t get as much experience as I was hoping I’d get done.”

Young person, Tipperary

THE SOLUTIONS.

6.1 EDUCATION

A strong education is a child's passport to a thriving future. It's the gateway to good physical and mental health, strong personal development, healthy relationships, stable employment and an improved life. But the pandemic interrupted, and in many cases curtailed, young people's education.

FF

This is far from a normal situation. These are extraordinary times... What we know that provides safety, security and stability for children is education, and that's been taken away. One of our central planks for children progressing through the abnormal, would be education. So now we are in really serious straits.

NIALL MULDOON

Ombudsman for Children,
when interviewed on the Brendan O' Connor, RTÉ Radio 1 show.

The research tells us that educational prospects for young people have worsened considerably due to COVID-19:

70%

predict loss of morale and long-term aspirations to progress with their education.

60%

say young people are angry with the lack of engagement with school, and they feel the system has let them down.

55%

of youth workers believe more young people than before will drop out of school without completing a Junior Cert or Leaving Certificate.

41%

of youth workers believe the young people they support will have fallen too far behind to catch up.

1 IN 3

have concerns about negative aspects of online engagement with right wing groups.



THE VOICE OF YOUTH WORKERS

"We will only see the true damage when we see who hasn't returned to school in September and after Christmas and after Easter etc."

"Single biggest issue is school refusal – young people refusing to go to school. Huge build-up of anxiety because they've been isolated for so long. Thought of returning to school is spiking anxiety."

"There are 70,000 young carers in Ireland. The lack of some level of education for these young carers will undoubtedly result in a higher risk of early school leaving."

"Breaking the cycle of school breaks the structure they have in their lives. Kids who would normally be in school picking up an education are picking up charges now instead."

"The ones that have fallen out of school and are getting calculated grades are in danger. Normally when they go in to do the Junior Cert they manage 5 passes to get into an apprenticeship. Problem with calculated grades is if they have disengaged from school, they are most likely going to fail the Junior Cert."

SITUATION PRE COVID-19 (FEBRUARY 2020)

1 in 10 children not making the transition from primary school to secondary school

4,500 children stop attending school before Junior Cert (twice as many drop out from DEIS schools compared to non-DEIS schools)

SITUATION POST COVID-19 (APRIL 2021)

Research from youth workers is suggesting that the numbers not transitioning from primary school to secondary school will increase from 1 in 10 to 3 in 10

69% of youth workers are worried that young people's aspirations have regressed, and they are experiencing loss of motivation as a result of the past year and lack of engagement with school

WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS?

We know that completing an education has a direct impact on outcomes. 96% of inmates in Dublin's Mountjoy Prison do not have a Leaving Certificate.

Between 2021-2025 the Irish Youth Foundation is committed to measurably reducing the number of children leaving education after primary school, and the number leaving secondary school without qualifications. To do this the Irish Youth Foundation will:

- 1** Fund more homework clubs and after school supports around the country which offer 1:1 engagement to bridge the education gap and rebuild the confidence of young people for those who have fallen behind.
- 2** Recover the relationships that have been disrupted due to COVID by investing in youth work support and activities such as Summer Programmes and direct intervention supports.
- 3** Provide more flexible funding for the resources required by youth workers to keep young people engaged in their education.



“For all children, life outside of school affects what happens in school. For children living in poverty, life outside of school may include hunger, a stay in a homeless shelter, or medical needs that are difficult to meet. Low-income families may have less time and fewer resources to invest in homework help or extracurricular activities for their children. Chronic financial stress may cause a parent to have lower-quality interactions with his or her child.”

PROF. MARY WALSH,

Boston City Connects

6.2

SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY

What you do as a job is a potent definer of who you are as a person. It gives you status, focus and purpose. It gives you a sense of place amongst your peers.

The pandemic has caused a youth unemployment crisis with 59% of people aged 15-24 now unemployed. For those that were in danger of falling through the cracks before the pandemic, the prospects for finding employment have deteriorated.

Our research shows that the pathways to employment and skills-based opportunities have been blocked for young people from disadvantaged communities nationwide (as a direct result of COVID-19):

79%

of youth workers believe that there will be a significant decrease in employment opportunities for the young people they support as society begins to reopen.

78%

of youth workers believe the right structures are not in place to support vulnerable young people as they transition into employment after a period of unemployment / early school leaving.



THE VOICE OF YOUTH WORKERS

"We are facing into a Tsunami the likes of which we have never seen before. Local Development Companies like ours will struggle to cope with the levels of youth unemployment."

"We need an access programme to catch the kids that have dropped out of school. DIT have an access apprenticeship programme, but now they can only take half the numbers they usually take due to COVID."

"Funding coming down the line – all European stuff is related to the green agenda. Need skilled people to build wind turbines, people to plant trees, people to put insulation in houses. We're currently focused on barista training – not the right focus, focus on where the funding is going to be aligned."

SITUATION PRE COVID-19

18% of all 15-24s are NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training). One third of these are early school leavers.

25% of early school leavers were unemployed compared to 8% of other persons aged 18-24

SITUATION POST COVID-19

According to the ESRI more than half of people aged 18-24 who were working before COVID-19, claimed the State Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

Now, over 59% of people aged 15-24 are unemployed. 64% are young women.

THE IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

We know that NEETs are 4 times more likely to have mental health issues compared with their peers and that 42% of NEETs come from jobless households. Having the skills and opportunities to secure employment is critical for these young people. The Irish Youth Foundation will:

1

Fund projects and programmes that are actively re-engaging and training young people as an immediate priority.

2

Invest in sustainable training programmes where we know there will be job opportunities over the coming years as proposed by 60% of youth workers surveyed (e.g. Green agenda).

6.3

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Good health in childhood fosters confidence, stability and ensures positive choices are made in adulthood.

But children's lives are now under threat and the health and wellbeing challenges they are facing are enormous.

Of the 6,000 people on waiting lists to see a psychologist, the majority are children. And health officials have warned there has been a four-to six-fold increase in the number of children under the age of 12 being referred to GPs for testing.

Our research shows that we are currently facing a mental health crisis and this will have lasting effects if we fail to make immediate interventions (as a direct result of COVID-19):

86%

of youth workers have cited long-term mental health challenges as a key issue for the young people they support

62%

of youth workers say that loss of social skills or re-integrating back into normal society will be a long-term issue

62%

of youth workers say that hidden trauma / stress from the past year will become an issue for the young people they support, in the near future

1 IN 10

17 year olds said they **do not have one good adult** to turn to for support



THE VOICE OF YOUTH WORKERS

“Young people are feeling utterly hopeless, they don’t engage as quickly as they did in the past. Motivation is a big challenge. Lost the view of themselves – their long-term aspirations have regressed, it’s more about getting by day to day.”

“Resilience is depleted – will need lots of support and capacity building for this.”

“Young people are feeling abandoned as a result of youth groups closing

and being left all alone in these tough communities.”

“Those who were further distanced are even further distanced at the moment. The dejection in these young people is very worrying – anxiety concerns are huge. Young people don’t have the resilience levels built up that adults have. Long-term consequence is that social anxiety and what it will mean for these young people in their future – disengagement from school and all other opportunities.”

SITUATION PRE COVID-19

In Jigsaw’s 2018 My World 2 survey, **49% of 12-19 year olds reported levels of anxiety outside the normal range** (these figures had doubled since the first My World Survey in 2011)

SITUATION POST COVID-19

In an IYF national survey (May 2020) **59% of young people reported being worried about their mental health**

86% of youth workers surveyed cited mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, as the main concerns for the young people they support as we emerge from the 2021 lockdown.

In 2015, Ireland had the seventh highest rate of youth suicide (aged 15-19) across 33 countries

According to the latest ESRI, Growing up in Ireland report, the proportion of young adults with elevated scores on a measure of depressive symptoms increased substantially since pre-pandemic levels, measured at age 20.

THE IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

The Irish Youth Foundation will continue to identify evidence-based dynamic programmes that deliver measurable results and will:

- 1 Urgently fund more evidence based mental health early intervention and preventative support programmes.
- 2 Directly support and fund one-to-one counselling services nationwide for young people.

07

A SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH WORKERS.

Youth workers are best placed to understand the true needs of the young people in their community. Our research shows that the **majority of youth workers** feel the last 12 months have been difficult for the young people they support whilst nearly half believe re-engaging will be challenging.

Also, 6 in 10 youth workers feel the last 12 months have been extremely difficult for them **professionally**.

“

**FOR EVERY HOUR
THEY ARE IN THE
YOUTH PROJECT
WITH ME IT IS AN
HOUR THEY ARE NOT
BEING GROOMED
BY GANGLAND
CRIMINALS.**

Youth worker, Dublin

THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers play a crucial role in the lives of some 500,000 children and young people in Ireland each year.

For many children who are denied their most basic human rights: the right to a decent education, the right to be supported by caring adults and the right to a life that is free from fear and discrimination, a heroic and competent youth worker will step into that rights gap to ensure the most at-risk and excluded children have the right people, programmes, and facilities to go on to lead a fulfilling and rewarding life.

Youth workers help young people break through the persistent barriers and dangers in their lives and to take back positive control.

DEDICATED AND TALENTED TEAMS

There are approximately 1,400 youth workers in a paid capacity in Ireland and over 40,000 who work in a voluntary capacity.

They are often found doing outreach on the streets and steering young people away from dangerous situations or bad choices.

They also run homework clubs (often on a shoestring budget) provide hot meals, help with homework, and offer a safe place for a child to be a child for a few hours. You will also find them at the end of the phone for a child in danger or who has no other adult to turn to. And over the pandemic they delivered food parcels and figured out a way to get education resources to children and young people.

“

**WITHOUT MY
YOUTH WORKER,
I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD
THE CONFIDENCE TO
APPLY FOR COLLEGE
OR KNOWN HOW TO
GET THE APPLICATION
IN. I'M IN COLLEGE
NOW AND I NEVER
THOUGHT THIS WOULD
BE POSSIBLE!**

Young person

OF THE 41,400 YOUTH WORKERS IN IRELAND,

40,000

ARE VOLUNTEERS

YOUTH WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Now more than ever, the skills and the talents of youth workers are needed. They're part of the fabric of our communities and can be the turning point in a young person's life.

For at-risk and marginalised children, their youth worker is often the only person who offers practical, tailored support outside the formal school setting and away from their chaotic home lives.

They will be the key to supporting and rebuilding our country's most disadvantaged youth. And for so many children it will be their only way back to safety, participation in education and building a future.

But our sense is that their role and impact is not yet widely understood in Ireland. A shame in a country that now has the youngest population in Europe and where over 500,000 young people use youth services.

THE EFFECT ON WORKING PRACTICES

Youth workers have really struggled during the pandemic and have been unable to work the way they used to.

As we went into lockdown, youth workers

slowed down the pace of work, as there's only so much that can be done when they're unable to be with the young person face to face. But they're concerned about the young people they can't connect with, because there's no Wi-Fi or because it's just not safe to do so. Sometimes families don't know a young person is being supported by a youth project or maybe there's a member of the family who wouldn't like the fact they're getting support from 'a stranger'. Youth work is dependent on relationships. And this is harder to nurture over Zoom or on the phone.

Youth workers are also missing informal opportunities to connect, such as noticing when a young person in the group is quiet and then inviting them to have a cup of tea with them after the group. This is where a young person is most likely to open up and these opportunities were suddenly not there.

And they're having to be more direct in their questions. Previously, this wouldn't have happened and the work would have been much more subtle. Now they're having to be very direct and say: "How are things going at home during this time with your mum's addiction?"

Youth workers would have never worked like this before and are having to adjust and learn new boundaries with young people, where existing boundaries had taken a long time to establish.

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

- Youth worker burnout is a worry with youth workers exhausted from online sessions and trying to keep young people engaged.
 - Youth workers themselves are very disconnected and are not getting to connect or chat as much.
 - Vicarious trauma / secondary trauma for youth workers is a big concern.
 - Support systems are not robust at all for youth workers e.g. supervision requirements / counselling support services.
 - Youth workers feel forgotten about and not appreciated.
-

THE VOICE OF YOUTH WORKERS

“We have been operating a hybrid street work service – keeping a connection with the young people on the street if they were out and the youth workers could find them. Youth workers had a plan, but had to change the plan constantly with COVID. All the consistency the young people were getting over the past 5/6 years was absent for the last year. All the work is the relationship – we build trust with the young people in order for them to engage with goals for themselves. The relationship is absent and therefore the work for the young person is absent.”

“Youth workers need to be recognised by the government. We kept communities going when everything else closed down.”

“As youth workers, we’re managed, muzzled and redefined constantly.”



**WE HAD BEEN
WORKING WITH
HIM FOR 6 YEARS
– THOSE YEARS
OF WORK ARE
NOW WIPED OUT.**



**WE'RE WORRIED
ABOUT THE
INCREASE IN
CRIME AMONGST
YOUNG PEOPLE
AND THE IMPACT
ON THOSE
ALREADY IN THE
JUSTICE SYSTEM.**

"A young person, aged 16, was living in a tiny inner city flat with his family, where the parents were dealing with substance misuse issues. During Covid, he left the home because it was too intense a situation. He is now living in an abandoned flat on his own, and has started selling drugs to make a living. We had been working with him for 6 years – those years of work are now wiped out. We just have to hope that we have enough of a relationship established with him that he will come to us when he gets in trouble. And he will get in trouble – he'll owe someone money, something will go wrong. Hopefully when that happens he'll reach out to us and we will be able to help him and bring him back in."

"We're worried about the increase in crime amongst young people and the impact on those already in the justice system. There is currently a delay in prosecutions which means that some young people might be tried as adults when their time for prosecution comes along. This will have a huge impact in terms of sentencing and longer term life opportunities."

"I called to one house with a food parcel because I knew the mother was dealing with addiction issues and she was on her own with two small kids. The 4 year old answered the door, looking so dirty. The baby toddled out behind his brother, wearing only a nappy and his nappy was touching the floor it was so full. I asked them where mammy was and they said she was asleep. I couldn't not go into the flat to make sure she was safe and it was safe to leave the kids. She was passed out on the couch after using while the kids were at home."

“Lots of the parents we are working are in what we call ‘active management’ of their substance issues. For those with drug misuse issues, this means they use once the kids have gone to school, so there is a period of time during the day where they know they can use and the kids are not in danger. But with COVID the kids were at home all the time and this has created huge issues for these families. The active management when the kids are in school isn’t ideal obviously, but it’s way better to get the parents to this place than the alternative. Now we’re struggling with how to support them and we can’t get eyes on the kids”.

“For some kids it suits the parents for them to leave school and be selling drugs. If no one in your family has work and suddenly your teenager is bringing in a few hundred quid a week, it’s not in the parents’ interest to encourage them to go back to school. Also you have to remember these families have no value on education because they have not received it themselves.”

“We support one young person and he was the only person in his family to have work during COVID – he had a part time job in the local Centra. His parents both lost their jobs due to COVID. He had to leave school and work full-time because the family had no other way of feeding everyone and he suddenly became the main breadwinner in the house.”



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IF THEY CAN'T GET SUPPORT AND REASSURANCE, THE WORRY IS THE PROGRESS THEY'VE MADE WILL BE ERASED.

"For so many of the kids we support, the most negative factors in their lives became the only factors in their lives. There was no break from a dangerous or chaotic home situation because they were not able to go to school, or come to us in the youth project."

"Lots of kids in crisis addiction. We work with a group of young women age 18, who are experiencing addiction issues - youth workers not there for them to drop into for reassurance and support now. Where else are they going to get that support? And if they can't get support and reassurance, the worry is all the progress they've made up to now will be erased"



THERE WAS NO BREAK FROM A DANGEROUS HOME SITUATION BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL, OR COME TO US IN THE YOUTH PROJECT.

"Lots of young people living in disadvantage but not red flagging for Tusla even though they are still struggling. Not red flagging due to Tusla "thresholds" – certain criteria that has to be met to get involved with a support service / get into the system. They're living in disadvantage but not getting any support services. They might make it to their Leaving Cert, but they could also slip off into anti-social behaviour, crime, unemployment etc. because they're not going to college. As a result of not red flagging earlier (at 10-12 years) they're being missed and then falling through the cracks later on in their lives (18-20 years).

KEY AREAS FOR FUNDING

Youth workers have identified their top three areas for recovery. The Irish Youth Foundation will channel funding into these areas in order to empower youth services to reconnect, repair and rebuild these young people.

SPACE

Safe and flexible spaces needed in the local community to re-engage, rebuild and support children and young people

(53%)

COLLABORATION

Closer connections with schools and other community services to support young people more effectively

(48%)

TARGETED SUPPORT

Increased focus on out of school support to bridge education gap

(47%)

More support on the ground to allow for 1:1 support in after school clubs

(48%)

The table below shows the barriers for youth workers to effectively support the young people and children in their local communities. Safe space and flexibility of government funding is an issue.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of the above	1% 2
Government funding is not flexible enough and doesn't reflect actual needs on the ground	55% 170
Break in relationships/lack of connectivity with children and young people	54% 166
Not enough resources/manpower on the ground	47% 145
Lack of safe spaces where children and young people can socialise and connect with young workers	61% 188
Many children and young people have fallen off the radar/are unable to reach	56% 172
Lack of parental engagement either through family issues or absence	31% 95
Total Respondents: 309	

A MESSAGE FOR THE GOVERNMENT

Because of the pandemic, we're in the midst of a mental health crisis, which has resulted in a generation of young people that have socially regressed, lost education and whose employment prospects have been shattered.

The fallout of this is going to have a long-term and detrimental impact on young people and society. If the government does not take action **now**.

The five immediate actions the government must take:

SHORT-TERM

FLEXIBLE FUNDING.

Increase flexibility of funding to empower youth services to respond quickly to the needs presenting in their communities.

EDUCATION.

Increased focus on out of school support to bridge education gap.

MEDIUM-TERM

TRAINING.

Provide specialised training and support for youth workers to tackle mental health issues.

EMPLOYMENT.

Provide skills and training programmes that are geared towards realistic employment opportunities (e.g. green economy).

LONG-TERM

SPACE.

Create safe spaces in rural and urban areas to re-engage and rebuild young people across the country.

09

HOW CAN YOU HELP.

COVID-19 has the potential to significantly impact the life opportunities of a generation and affect their education, employment prospects, earning potential and health, and that of their children too.

This has the potential to destabilise society as a generation gets left behind.

But you can stop this happening by supporting the Irish Youth Foundation Recovery Fund which is, and will continue to be, a catalyst for greater investment in young people. Throughout this report we have highlighted tangible solutions that could address the realities on the ground.

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, despite the increase in need, 70% of the organisations surveyed by the Irish Youth Foundation in April 2021 reported that their funding had stayed the same in the past year. Therefore, it's crucial we step in and close this gap by increasing our funding opportunities for these organisations.

This will allow the Irish Youth Foundation to:

- Assist youth workers in identifying and reconnecting with young people who have fallen through the cracks to re-engage with vital services.
- Fund proven and innovative programs that can respond to the true needs on the ground: education, health and wellbeing, and employment.

We know where the needs are and more importantly where the solutions lie in communities around Ireland. But, we need your help to **triple our funding to €1.5million** over the coming 18 months through:

- **Individual donations**
- **Corporate donations**
- **Corporate partnerships**
- **Fundraising events**

Why the Irish Youth Foundation

We've worked with Ireland's youth charities and organisations for over 30 years. It means we have a big picture analysis on the key barriers and problems children are facing both before the pandemic and as we emerge from the lockdown.

We also have the most forensic on-the-ground intelligence and work with the most effective grassroots organisations who are best placed to deliver the highest impact in towns, cities and villages the length and breadth of Ireland.

APPENDIX OF REFERENCES;

- (1) That's approximately 200,000 children living in poverty in Ireland today who are living in families with incomes below the poverty line according to the Survey on Income and Living Conditions published by the Central Statistics Office, 2019 (CSO). <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/>
- (2) And of the 40,000 babies born since the start of the pandemic, 8,000 of them will have left maternity hospital to spend the first night of their brand new life in marginalisation, disadvantage and in many cases homelessness (Actions to address the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children experiencing marginalisation and homelessness – HSE Report, Nov 2020)
- (3) 59% of 15-24 years olds are unemployed
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentmarch2021/>
- (4) 1 in 10 children not making the transition from Primary School to Secondary School 'Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools, 2010 Entry Cohort', Department of Education and Skills, 2017' <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/retention/>
- (5) 4,500 children stop attending school before Junior Cert (twice as many drop out from DEIS schools compared to non-DEIS schools) 'Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools, 2010 Entry Cohort', Department of Education and Skills, 2017'
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/retention/>
- (6) 96% of prisoners in Mountjoy prison don't have a Leaving Certificate
O'Mahony, Paul (2002) Criminal justice in Ireland. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- (7) 18% of all 15-24s are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). One third of these are early school leavers.
Pathways to Work', The Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee, Ireland <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Youth-Guarantee-Implementation-Plan.pdf>
<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-social-protection/?referrer=https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Youth-Guarantee-Implementation-Plan.pdf#>

- (8) In Q2 2019, 25% of early school leavers were unemployed compared to 8% of other persons aged 18- 24
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2019/>
- (9) According to the ESRI more than half of people aged 18-24 who were working before COVID-19, claimed the State Pandemic Unemployment Payment
 "Poverty, Income Inequality and Living Standards in Ireland" ESRI, May 2021
<https://www.esri.ie/publications/poverty-income-inequality-and-living-standards-in-ireland-0>
- (10) Of the 6,000 people on waiting lists to see a psychologist the majority are children
 Barry Lenihan, RTE
<https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/living/2021/0329/1206731-everyones-mental-health-is-under-strain-at-the-moment/>
- (11) health officials have warned there has been a four-to six-fold increase in the number of children under the age of 12 being referred to GPs for testing
 ESRI Growing Up in Ireland Report, Key Findings: Special Covid-19 survey
<https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT409.pdf>
- (12 & 13) In Jigsaw's 2018 My World 2 survey, **49% of 12-19 year olds reported levels of anxiety outside the normal range** (these figures had doubled since the first My World Survey in 2011)
 In 2015, Ireland had the seventh highest rate of youth suicide (aged 15-19) across 33 countries
 One in ten 17 year olds said they do not have one good adult to turn to for support.
<http://myworldsurvey.ie/>
- (14) According to the latest ESRI, Growing up in Ireland report, the proportion of young adults with elevated scores on a measure of depressive symptoms increased substantially since pre-pandemic levels measured at age 20
 ESRI Growing Up in Ireland Report, Key Findings: Special Covid-19 survey
<https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT409.pdf>
- (15) Size of voluntary Youth Sector
https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/19045/1/Economic_Benefit_Youthwork_2012.pdf



GENERATION PANDEMIC



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