



Generation Pandemic – Mental Health, isolation, and education the burning issues for most vulnerable children and young people as a result of Covid-19

New research shows that the majority of youth workers and professionals believe that the prospects for Ireland's most vulnerable children and young people have greatly worsened as a result of Covid-19, exacerbated with "the inevitability of a tough follow-on recession". Many see the pandemic as the worst crisis for Ireland's most vulnerable young people.

In a survey of over 700 youth groups, after-school clubs and sports clubs across the country, 50% of youth workers and professionals say that the pandemic's long-term impact on the mental health of young people is a major concern. Nearly 47% say that falling behind with studies and exam stress is the biggest issue, and over 21% are worried that young people may not get back into education or a normal routine.

These stark concerns are mirrored by young people themselves. In the first of a complementary series of tracking surveys with marginalised teenagers and young adults (age 15 to 23), 64% say that they are having difficulty maintaining routine and structure and 53% have mental health concerns and 35% are concerned that they are falling behind in school significant 42% highlight that they are facing uncertainty in the current climate. In addition, 39% are experiencing social isolation and over one in five are living with family conflict.

The twin-track research was commissioned by the Irish Youth Foundation, an independent charitable trust founded in 1985, and was carried out by Amárach Research. Together, it forms the evidential backbone for **Generation Pandemic**, a major new IYF recovery strategy and €1.5 million fundraising drive which aims to address the damage that Covid-19 has inflicted on Ireland's most excluded children and young adults.

"We are extremely concerned from this snapshot that the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown has seriously damaged the lives and prospects of the country's most marginalised young," said Lucy Masterson, CEO of the Irish Youth Foundation. "As youth workers have explained to us, years of transformative work by youth projects is being 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, to the youth workers and programme they so rely on."

"The stakes are as high as they could be for many young people. Their education prospects hang in the balance. Their wellbeing and mental health has taken a battering," she continued. "As the country rebuilds, no child's future should hang in the balance because of this virus or a lack of support. If our children aren't rebuilt, the country isn't either."

Generation Pandemic is the Irish Youth Foundation's most ambitious fundraising drive ever. Aimed primarily at businesses, corporations and private donors, it will go directly to the youth groups and community organisations on the frontline. The fund will be used firstly to assist youth workers to identify, reconnect with and persuade young people who have fallen through the cracks to re-engage with crucial services. Secondly, the fund will be used to resource innovative programmes,

facilities and supports across the key areas of education, health and wellbeing and further learning and employment.

The research shows that 47% of youth workers are concerned that the young people they are working with are falling behind with studies and school work because of Covid-19. A significant 64% are concerned about the lack of employment opportunities and access to learning new skills that will arise with what they regard as an inevitable follow-on recession.

While most on-the-ground organisations have tried to maintain their support services for children and young people, mainly by switching to on-line support (66%), 45% of workers say that they now desperately need more funding to be able to reach out and provide the intensive support needed by the children and young people in most difficulty. Ironically, with the added spectre of recession, 42% also say that lack of funding or forced closure is the greatest threat to their future.

The Irish Youth Foundation is the only Foundation dedicated exclusively to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people by providing financial support to national and local community and voluntary youth groups. Over the past 30 years, it has raised over €20 million and has supported more than 2,000 projects.

Generation Pandemic is being launched on the day that the state examinations were to start. However, many children never get as far as these exams. Every year, over 1,000 children don't transition to primary school, 4,500 children stop attending school before they get to their Junior Cert and 10% of boys and 7% of girls drop out of school before the Leaving Certificate.

The survey to youth groups, after-school clubs, sports clubs and organisations working with young people was carried out in late March 2020. The first tracking survey of the attitudes of young people themselves was carried out in mid-May. This tracking survey will continue over the coming months.

For more information contact: Edel Hackett, Tel: 087-2935207

Generation Pandemic – the age of crisis

Youth workers and professionals

- 70% predict that mental health issues will be areas for major long-term concern – 50% are concerned about mental health and 20% are concerned about weight gain and poor diet for young people.
- 47% say falling behind with studies and exam stress is the biggest issue for young people.
- 20% are concerned about the impact of isolation and loneliness for young people.
- 64% are concerned about lack of employment opportunities and/or access to learning new skills
- 6.4% are concerned that children and young people are living in inappropriate housing situations and are experiencing drug and alcohol abuse in the home.

Young People – First Tracking Survey

- 64% say they are having difficulty maintaining routine and structure.
- 53% have mental health concerns.
- 42% say that there is uncertainty in the current climate.
- 39% are facing social isolation.
- 21% are experiencing family conflict.
- 18% have physical wellbeing concerns.

- 11% have physical safety concerns.
- 52% say that they miss being with their friends.
- 35% are concerned that they are falling behind in school
- 6% say that they don't have resources at home for learning.