



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Opportunities for Youth: An Action Plan for Youth Services

Submission Template

Respondent Profile

Name	Moninne Griffith, Carmel Walsh
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Organisation/Body (if applicable)	Belong To- LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland
Role (if applicable)	CEO, Youth Services Manager

Are you making this submission on behalf of the organisation or body named above or as an individual?

Organisation/Body

Individual

What is your experience of youth services, if any? (200 words max - bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your answer, you may wish to include:

- which type of service you are familiar with*
- if you are a past or current participant, a parent, a youth worker or volunteer, someone working in a different sector etc.*

Belong To is a national organisation supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) young people. Since 2003, Belong To has provided a frontline youth service encompassing weekly youth groups, youth projects, and one-to-one supports in person and by phone, email and text. Belong To provides support, training and education for professionals working with LGBTQ+ youth, and advocates for the rights of LGBTQ+ young people through research and policy.

Belong To's youth service supports LGBTQ+ young people aged 14-23 through a blended direct youth work and support service which encompasses support to parents and professionals working

with them. Belong To provides a crisis counselling service for LGBTQ+ young people in partnership with Pieta and has Ireland's only dedicated drug and alcohol support service for LGBTQ+ youth, along with a specialist preventative programme in the area of sexual health and wellbeing. Belong To support a National Network of LGBTQ+ youth groups across Ireland, to deliver best-practice in LGBTQ+ youth work, and to improve access to LGBTQ+ youth services across Ireland, including the 'Rainbow Award', an accreditation programme for best-practice in LGBTQ+ youth work. Due to demand from parents and young people, we also aim to expand our services to engage young people aged 10-14.

Consultation Questions

1. What are your views on access to youth services? (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your response, you may wish to consider:

- any barriers that exist to equality of access either for all young people or for particular cohorts of young people, including geographical barriers
- any measures you propose to enhance access and the inclusion of all young people

Specialised Youth Service:

As Belong To is a specialised youth service targeting LGBTQ+ young people, we have identified specific challenges that young people from the LGBTQ+ community face in accessing youth services. These include the following:

- Lack of LGBTQ+ Youth Services/ groups within each county. There are currently approximately 70 youth groups/ organisations across Ireland which specifically target LGBTQ+ young people. Unfortunately, these clubs and services are not in every county of Ireland. Our 2022 *School Climate Survey* found that two-thirds of LGBTQ+ students had never attended programmes or groups for LGBTQ+ youth outside of school due to varying factors.¹ Belong To is trying to tackle this issue by supporting youth workers and youth organisations through the development and support of a National Network, which is made up of youth workers from national youth organisations such as Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, Crosscare and local youth and community services that run LGBTQ+ youth groups. As the national LGBTQ+ youth organisation, we facilitate a space to offer subject matter expertise and support to the youth workers who provide these groups. We come together to deliver a standardised model of LGBTQ+ youth work and best practices across Ireland. This is further reinforced by The Rainbow Award which is an accreditation for best practices in LGBTQ+ youth work.
- Further barriers to accessing services for LGBTQ+ young people include some LGBTQ+ young people not being 'out' at home, resulting in issues relating to accessing youth services, and barriers to parental consent for certain activities for young people under 18 prohibiting them from engaging in some projects and services.

- As our youth service is not based limited to a particular geographical location, we find that access to attending our service can be a challenge for young people as they must come from further afield. We have found that some young people (particularly trans young people) do not feel comfortable travelling into the city centre for a club or programme due to safety concerns. Furthermore, we have identified that working with young people from a wide geographical spread makes it difficult for the youth team to know the community and background of all LGBTQ+ young people involved in our services.
- Another barrier that are experienced by LGBTQ+ young people we work with is the lack of physically accessible spaces for young people with mobility issues. Youth-friendly and fully accessible spaces are hard to find in Dublin's city centre. Some LGBTQ+ young people also have sensory needs, and this makes finding suitable spaces for youth work where these young people feel visible, valued and included more challenging.

Recommendations:

- Support greater diversity of youth services.
- Increase universal youth work funding in line with other funding streams to provide greater access to young people
- Invest in access to youth services in rural areas, or for young people facing a number of intersectional challenges.

1. Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022) *The 2022 Irish School Climate Survey*. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy. Dublin and New York: Belong To and Teachers College, Columbia University. Available at: https://www.belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-School-Climate-Survey_Key-Findings.pdf.

2. What are your views on quality in youth services? (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your response, you may wish to include:

- *what do you consider to be the indicators of high quality services*

- *what are the factors that support high-quality services*
- *any proposed measures to enhance the quality in youth services*

Indicators of high-quality services:

Structure frameworks such as the NQSF provide clear guidelines to ensure the implementation of high-quality services. Not only do these frameworks provide common objectives amongst youth services to achieve quality practice, but frameworks such as a NQSF allow the space to provide evidence-based youth work which focuses on a qualitative process. It is important for the Department and the sector to recognise frameworks that encompass an all-Ireland approach to its youth work practice, recognise the need for flexibility to reflect the diversity of the sector, ensure a whole organisational assessment when implementing frameworks and focus on the area of continuous development in which an organisation should review and assess their work over a number of years.

Within Belong To, we have identified the importance of using such frameworks in ensuring high-quality services and best-practice in LGBTQ+ youth work. The implementation of Belong To's Rainbow Award offers youth services an in-depth, action-focused programme to become fully inclusive of LGBTQ+ young people. This new accreditation programme supports a whole organisational approach to being a safe, supportive and inclusive service for LGBTQ+ young people, staff and volunteers through a framework that aligns with the NQSF.

There are six steps on the Rainbow Award journey, including capacity building, a portfolio, a review of standards and a site visit. To meet the Award criteria, Youth Services need to meet standards in six key areas: (the 6 Ps) Policy & Governance, People, Practice, Programmes, Participation & Empowerment and Partnership. Our staff support each Youth Service every step of the way offering resources, briefing sessions, guidance and training.

Factors that support high-quality services:

- professionally qualified youth workers
- safeguarding of staff- ensure the wellbeing of staff is prioritised/ secured employment and sufficient salaries are provided.

Recommendations/Proposed Measures to enhance quality in youth services.

We have identified several measures to support the quality of youth services, not only as an organisation but also within the youth sector. These measures include the following:

- The Continuous Professional Development of youth workers should be recognised and valued amongst the sector and the Department. Funding streams such as UBU prioritise the amount of time a youth worker is in direct contact with young people. Even though this is a justified request, funding streams should also identify the importance for staff to continue to professionally develop to enhance the quality of work they do with young people. The needs of young people have expanded significantly over the years. Not only do youth workers need to continue to be updated in innovative ways to engage and connect young people where they are, but the needs of young people are becoming more diverse. Due to the varying needs of the young people attending our service, we have identified the importance of taking an intersectional approach when working with young people. As a result, we have recognised the importance of the continued professional development of our youth workers to ensure a high-quality approach to engage these young people.
- Multi-Year Funding: The Department should adopt multi-annual funding opportunities to enhance the quality in the Youth Work Sector rather than continuing yearly funding cycles. Not only will multi-annual funding allow the Youth Work Sector to strategically plan for

achieving their organisational / governmental objectives, but it will also allow organisations to adapt to the needs of young people more effectively. Predictability of funding allows for more strategic partnerships, more secure employment of youth workers (which in return will re-engage youth workers back to the sector), and provides more resources to enhance the quality of youth work being carried out due to the secure funding put in place.

- DCEDIY with the Youth Work Sector should develop and deliver a Workforce Development Plan to identify current and future education and career pathways, recruitment and retention needs for paid staff and volunteers. This will not only ensure long-term investment into the sector but also ensure that the resources for recruitment and training are utilised more effectively within an organisation.

3. What are your views on collaboration and cooperation within the youth sector and between the youth sector and other sectors? (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your response, you may wish to consider:

- *any benefits you see for young people from collaboration*
- *any good practice examples*
- *any barriers that exist*
- *relationships with and between different funding bodies*
- *any proposed measures to enhance collaboration and co-operation.*

Collaboration:

Collaboration and the desire to collaborate are strong values within the Youth Work Sector. With investment, this could be enhanced among the Youth Work Sector and between the Youth Work Sector and other stakeholders. Currently, there are no structures in place to encourage collaboration amongst youth work services. Competition for funding and the structure of granting schemes do not nurture an environment in which youth services can collaborate effectively.

Good Practice Example:

Since 2007, we have supported a National Network of youth workers to ensure that LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland have access to dedicated, high-quality youth services and support close to home. The National Network is made up of youth workers from national youth organisations such as Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, Crosscare and local youth and community services that run LGBTQ+ youth groups. As the national LGBTQ+ youth organisation, we facilitate a space to offer subject matter expertise, best practices in LGBTQ+ youth work, and support to the youth workers setting up or providing these groups.

Belong To currently supports 72 LGBTQ+ youth groups across Ireland. This collaboration has increased the number of LGBTQ+ young people who have access to local youth services where they feel they belong.

Belong To also collaborates with mental health services such as Pieta, MyMind and Jigsaw to ensure that LGBTQ+ young people have access to mental health supports and services that can meet their particular needs.

Impact of Collaboration

Collaboration is a vital element of youth work, it not only provides a space to discuss and share good practices and identify challenges in the Youth Work Sector, but it also provides a space for youth workers to connect and amplify the value of youth work to other sectors. Collaboration provides several different opportunities for young people to gain new skills and further develop their personal, social and critical education. By collaborating with other organisations, the Youth Work Sector can share skills & resources, and provide innovative ways to work with young people.

An example of the benefits of collaboration for LGBTQ+ young people is the 'Pride Breakfast' we host annually with Youth Work Ireland as part of Pride. This collaboration provides the opportunity for over 600 young people to connect and meet LGBTQ+ peers and allies from across Ireland. Not only does this provide a space for LGBTQ+ young people to engage and connect but also supported the empowerment of these young people through the amplification of their voices.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Department consider methods to support the engagement and collaboration of youth services, such examples include incentives through funding initiatives to encourage collaboration between different services.

Furthermore, it is recommended that a stronger inter-agency approach is formulated to support young people. We are continuously looking at ways to support and signpost young people to the right services based on their needs. For this to be achieved well, one hurdle that will need to be addressed relates to stakeholders' and other services' understanding of what youth work is. It is important that a clear understanding of the principle and practice of youth work is known to all stakeholders, including the different Departments and State Agencies.

4. How can we strengthen the role of youth services in supporting young people's rights? (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your response, you may wish to consider among other things:

- *young people's rights to safety and development, to be heard, to be treated without discrimination, to have equal access to services and leisure, play and recreation*
- *the youth sector's role in promoting human rights and equality*

The following areas should be considered to strengthen the role of youth services in supporting young people's rights:

- More resources and funding should be provided to support the critical education of young people. These resources should look at the systematic approach to critical education of young people through policies and resources, and through a grass-roots approach in which funding is made available to carry out national projects focusing on the active participation of young people. At a European level, a conscious direction has been made to look at youth work in the context of critical education and active participation of young people. Strategies and resources such as the European Youth Strategy, Youth Goals and SDGs have been developed to support youth workers in this area. These strategies should be reflected at a national level through policies and structures. European funding through Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps should be promoted more effectively amongst the Department, and more national funding should be made available.
- Update the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making Strategy.
- Funding to support alternative education and the recruitment of Youth Participation Officers within the Youth Work Sector.
- It is recommended that DCEDIY leverages the expertise of youth work organisations in the formation of youth policy and strategies affecting young people. Moreover, it should aim to ensure the active involvement of young people in diverse phases of policy formulation.

5. What measures are needed to ensure that we have sustainable and effective youth services in the future? (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

In your response, you may wish to consider the broader structures that support youth service delivery including issues of funding, recruitment and training, access to premises, availability of data and research, and innovation and responses to emerging issues.

The following measures should be considered while developing the new Action Plan for Youth Services:

- Access to premises: many youth services are faced with the challenge of finding appropriate youth spaces to host youth groups. Many services must share their space with other community services which results in many premises not being fit for purpose. It is recommended that Capital Grant Schemes are made more widely available to youth services in which they can purchase or hire purpose-built venues.
- Multi-annual funding: it is important that multi-annual funding is made available to support strategic planning within the Youth Work Sector, and to ensure the long-term impact of youth work. Commitment should be made by the Department to ensure investment in the Youth Work Sector. This should be done by increasing funding and resources into the sector including better working conditions and salaries for youth workers.
- Data and Research: more resources should be available for the Youth Work Sector to compile data and research.

6. Please share below 1) any other proposed measures that you think should be included in the Action Plan for Youth Services and 2) any other comments or information that the Department should take into account while developing the Action Plan. (600 words max – bullet points can be used if preferable)

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- Multi-annual funding: it is important that multi-annual funding is considered to support the long-term impact of the youth sector. Commitment should be made by the Department to ensure the investment into the Youth Work Sector. This should be done by increasing funding and resources into the sector including better working conditions and salaries for youth workers.
- Supports should be made available to youth workers and youth services for continued professional development and resources to be able to engage in programme such as Belong To's Rainbow Award, so that all young people, including LGBTQ+ young people feel visible, valued and included in youth services across Ireland.

