

# Be Well

## Activity Pack

### Working with Young People to Identify & Address Anxiety



Youth Work Ireland



**THE GOAL of this workshop is to introduce the issue of anxiety to young people. The workshop will explore signs and symptoms of anxiety, personal triggers and will support young people to identify personal coping skills to deal with anxiety using the “5-A-Day” approach.**

## **ABOUT THIS PACK**

The Be Well workshop was commissioned by Youth Work Ireland in 2016 as part of a year campaign to promote the work being done by our Member Youth Services around the issue of mental wellbeing. The pack was written by Leighann Ryan Culleton, Carlow Regional Youth Service, with the support of Youth Work Ireland National Office. To ensure the voices of young people are both heard and included in our work, Youth Work Ireland Wellbeing Squad made up of young people from across Youth Work Ireland’s services assisted in the development and delivery of this work.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE, VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF PARTICIPATING IN REGIONAL PILOTS**

In March 2016 150 young people, volunteers and staff from Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services came together at four regional workshops to pilot and evaluate the Be Well Pack. Their time, energy and interest has significantly shaped this pack. Special thanks to the volunteers, staff and young people from Canal Communities Regional Youth Service, CDYS Youth Work Ireland, Clare Youth Service, Donegal Youth Service, Ossory Youth, Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service, Youth Work Ireland Galway, Youth Work Ireland Midlands and Youth Work Ireland National Office.

## **EXTERNAL REVIEWERS**

**External Review of the content of the Be Well Pack was provided by:** Colm Humphries, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Philemon; Maura Leahy, Relationships Ireland; Cecilia Saviotti, NCFP Clinical Psychologist, and Kildare Youth Services.

**THIS PACK IS TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOUR PAGE HANDOUT ‘5 WAYS TO WELLBEING’. EVERY YOUNG PERSON TAKING PART MUST RECEIVE THEIR OWN HANDOUT TO WRITE ON.**

## **DESIGN**

We would like to thank **Fodhla McCarthy** (fodhla.mccarthy@gmail.com) who assisted in design and layout of this pack.

**There are three sections to this booklet -**

**Section One : Facilitators Notes**

**Section Two : Be Well Activity**

**Section Three : Support Services**

**This pack should be used in conjunction with the four page handout '5 Ways to Wellbeing', which every young person taking part must receive.**

## **SECTION ONE: FACILITATORS NOTES**

### **Facilitators Notes**

- 1. Young people's mental health in Ireland - Background**
- 2. What is Anxiety & how does it affect young people?**
- 3. The youth worker's role & the Be Well pack**
- 4. Guidelines for the facilitator delivering Be Well**
- 5. Making it Fun**

### **1. Young People's Mental Health in Ireland - Background**

The World Health Organisation (2005, p.7) defines adolescent mental health as: "the capacity to achieve and maintain optimal psychological functioning and well-being. It is directly related to the level reached and competence achieved in psychological and social functioning."

The number one health issue for young people in Ireland is their mental health. Mental health has been defined as a state of well-being in which the individual recognises their own abilities and is able to cope with normal daily stresses in life<sup>1</sup>. Good mental health in adolescence is a requirement for optimal psychological development, the development and maintenance of productive social relationships, effective learning, the ability to care for oneself, have good physical health and effective economic participation as adults. In Ireland by the age of 13 years, one in three young people are likely to have experienced some type of mental health difficulty<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Anxiety and Young People**

Problems with anxiety are the most frequent mental health problems in children and adolescents. These problems seem to be among the earliest of all forms of significant mental health difficulty<sup>3</sup>. In 2012, The My World Survey<sup>4</sup> was the first national study on young people's mental health and provides a reference point for the mental health of young people in Ireland. It collated data on over 14,000 young people aged 12-25 years from across Ireland. The study's findings suggest that while the majority of young people were doing well across a variety of mental health indicators, over one-third of young people are outside the normal range for both depression (35%) and anxiety (34.5%) and that psychological difficulties increase among young people over time.

In addition, it highlighted that mental health difficulties tend to emerge in early adolescence and peak in the late teens and early 20s. This peak in mental health difficulties, in general, was coupled with a decrease in protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and positive coping strategies. Youth, is a particularly vulnerable period in our lives<sup>5</sup>.

### **Resilience and the “5-A-Day” Approach**

There is increasing evidence that regardless of mental health status or life circumstances, effective mental health is improved by helping people become resilient in the face of difficulties. Resilience can be defined as an ability to cope with life events that place bigger demands on our coping mechanisms. Resilience is developed every day by dealing well with what happens. Resilience can be developed and strengthened through simple daily activities. The ‘5-A-Day’ programme for mental health and resilience is included in this pack because it provides the things young people can do to develop their resilience and promote their mental health. That is, the “5-A-Day” approach helps young people to better cope with normal daily stresses in life.

## **2. What is Anxiety & How Does it Affect Young People?**

Anxiety can be a normal part of childhood and adolescence, and many young people go through anxious times. Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. However, phases are temporary whereas an anxiety difficulty tends to become more chronic and interferes with everyday functioning.

Some stress and anxiety can be a good thing. Being concerned for our future and wellbeing and that of others can motivate us to strive and develop. Such concerns help get us out of bed in the morning, work harder and achieve the things we want.

Too much anxiety, or the lack of coping skills and resilience can be a difficulty for young people. Young people with an enduring anxiety problem usually show signs of this in some symptoms and behaviours. For example, you might see someone become unusually worried when they have to cope on their own or away from someone they trust. New environments can be a real source of worry. Significant anxiety can occur when someone is over thinking about something and cannot stop the thought. Fears and phobias that may even seem silly to the person is not uncommon. Anxiety interferes with how people work every day, doing the daily tasks can become so hard that often they are avoided. That can lead to school refusal, academic difficulties and social problems. If that pattern continues, these problems can become long lasting and lead to depression and behaviours like school or college dropout and poor coping skills like substance misuse.

### **The Anxiety Responses Can Include:**

#### **Physical Symptoms**

**Sweating**  
**Increased Heart Rate**  
**Racing Mind**  
**Feeling Sick**  
**Butterflies in Stomach**

#### **Cognitive Symptoms**

**Racing Thoughts**  
**Negative Self Talk**  
**Irrational Thinking Patterns**  
**Intense Worrying**

#### **Behaviour Symptoms**

**Avoidance of Situations**  
**Withdrawn**  
**Challenging Behaviour**  
**Extreme Self Consciousness**  
**Phobias & Fearfulness**

### 3. The Youth Worker's Role and the Be Well Workshop

This workshop addresses Outcome 1 of Better Outcomes Brighter Future - Active and Healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing<sup>6</sup>. Youth work, through its emphasis on well-being, contributes to a range of outcomes for young people, most notably in the areas of promoting positive mental health. Given that many anxiety problems develop early in life, effective early intervention / prevention programmes represent a significant opportunity to prevent a great deal of suffering for individuals and their families.

For the purposes of the Be Well Workshop, youth workers are well-positioned to deliver awareness raising and information workshops that assist in enhancing resilience. Youth workers can also effectively signpost additional mental health services and supports for young people. It is in these ways that youth workers can contribute to promoting and fostering wellbeing and improved mental health among young people.

The youth worker's role in promoting wellbeing is an important role and one that we should celebrate and promote. We must, however, be clear that youth workers have no role in diagnosing, answering detailed questions on, or providing treatment for young people experiencing ongoing difficulty with anxiety or other mental health issues. If a young person expresses a need for help in managing their anxiety or any other mental health issue, the youth worker's role is to follow the referral process within their service.

### 4. Guidelines for the Facilitator Delivering the Be Well Workshop

#### Preparing for the Workshop

Take the time to familiarise yourself with the content of all the activities prior to delivering the workshop. The outline below is a prompt to be used during the workshop – if possible, try not to read word-for-word from the activity guidelines during the workshop. Be sure that all workshop handouts are copied and ready prior to commencement of activities. When choosing a room for the workshop, aim for a space that is sufficiently large, quiet and well lit. Lastly, it's important that the young people feel they have some privacy and an opportunity to separate themselves for parts of the workshop.

#### Adapting to the group

It's recommended that the facilitator adapts the activities to suit particular group needs, strengths and any particular group requirements including age, gender and culture.

#### Important Information about Sharing Emotions and Experiences

The workshop is a place to safely explore anxiety and the opinions and feelings that young people have about this part of their lives and to name and explore common anxieties. It is not a place for telling personal stories or making personal disclosures as such disclosures can be distressing for others who may have similar stories. With this in mind, it is important that the group collectively make a contract to sensitively establish that the workshop is not a place for telling personal stories. The comfort and security provided in the youth work environment may naturally encourage young people to share and divulge personal experiences – sharing of such stories must be gently, but firmly discouraged.

It is wisest to say that if anything we talk about here brings up personal things that are hard for you, come and speak to us afterwards as we would be happy to listen and maybe direct you to someone helpful. If possible you might attempt to screen who attends the workshop. You might consider that young people who have had a bereavement or large personal event in the last year should not attend as they need to prioritise their own self-care.

At the same time, the youth worker is well placed to encourage participants to share their ideas and feelings. Don't force participants to share their emotions with everyone in a large group unless they feel comfortable. It is okay if a young person in the group doesn't want to participate in a particular conversation.

**At the beginning of the activity, ensure participants understand the difference between:**

1. Everyday stressful life experiences of being a young person which can comfortably be discussed.
2. Very personal experiences (e.g. trauma, experiences of harm). Emphasise that very personal life experiences and feelings are best discussed on a more private, confidential level with the appropriate staff member within your organisation. This ensures that young people have their concerns addressed in a fully supportive environment and prevents inappropriate disclosures during the workshop.

**Paraphrasing / Summarising / Reflecting**

Using techniques such as paraphrasing, summarising and reflecting throughout the workshop encourages young people to open up and talk more freely in a group environment. It also enhances the learning outcomes for participants.

**Facilitating techniques briefly described:**

Paraphrasing feeds back to the speaker the essence of what they are saying, but in a shorter, condensed format. This demonstrates to the group that they have been heard and also reinforces group learning, for example 'so what you're saying is that school exams are very stressful and can impact on other areas of your life such as arguing with family members. Is that what you're saying?'

Summarising is similar to paraphrasing but covers a longer period of time. The skills of summarising involve attending to the key concepts of the conversation and then relaying these concepts back to the group. When summarising the young person's ideas, it's important to use a mixture of the speaker's words as well as you own for example 'so let me see if I've heard you correctly so far. You often find it difficult to go to sleep at night when you are doing exams because you are feeling worried about not doing well. Is that right?'

Reflecting involves observing participant's emotions' and feeding key feelings back to them. This helps participants to clarify their own feelings and indicates that they have been heard correctly for example 'it sounds like you're feeling pretty upset and worried about your exam next week'

**Reflecting on the workshop**

It's important to set realistic goals as a facilitator and for the young people participating in the workshop. When you've completed the workshop with a group, you should evaluate your level of success in achieving the objectives



Reflecting upon your experiences in a focused space is key. Think through all the phases of your experience doing the workshop as this encourages you to think systematically about your facilitation experience - try using all the headings to structure your reflection.

## 5. Making it Fun

It simply doesn't matter how necessary and important this material is, if the young people are bored and not engaged they won't learn! Some tips to make the learning process fun for the young people during this workshop are - Love what you do; Create a safe and comfortable working environment; Appreciate young people ideas, opinions and involvement; Be Fun and Be Involved.

*'If children have interest, education happens'*

Sir Arthur C. Clarke

## References

- 1 WHO, 2005
- 2 Cannon et al., 2013
- 3 Beesdo, Knappe & Pine, 2009
- 4 Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012
- 5 Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012
- 6 DCYA, 2014



Members of Youth Work Ireland's Wellbeing Squad who assisted in the development of the Be Well Pack in 2016

# SECTION TWO: BE WELL ACTIVITY

## OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING PART IN BE WELL

- Young people understand what Anxiety is and develop self-awareness around the effects of anxiety.
- Young people can identify what happens to their body, emotions and behaviours when they feel anxious.
- Young people can identify and use their own coping skills for dealing with anxiety.
- Young people understand that they are not alone and are aware of the different supports available to them.

## 1. INTRODUCING THE BE WELL WORKSHOP (10MINS)

THE RATIONALE for this workshop should be carefully explained to participants because it will influence their level of participation. When explaining the rationale for the workshop make the following clear:

- The aim of this activity is to introduce the issue of anxiety to young people.
- Anxiety is a normal human emotion that we all experience from time to time.
- Work/school, new experiences, social situations and interpersonal relationships can all be sources of happiness and joy, but may also be potential sources of stress.
- All of us from time to time can feel worried, anxious, nervous, sad, angry etc.. and that this can sometimes be overwhelming.
- This workshop will help them to identify when we have those types of feelings and learn new ways of coping and dealing with them, and provide participants with opportunities to learn new life skills

## 2. GROUP AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT (10MINS)

BEFORE STARTING it is important to establish group guidelines to ensure that the group functions cohesively and effectively, as this is a sensitive subject, it is important that what is shared is appropriate.

### MATERIALS:

- Flip chart paper /markers

### ACTIVITY STEPS:

- Ask participants to consider ideas/guidelines to ensure how this is possible – be clear that the workshop is a place to safely explore anxiety, identify anxieties and the opinions and feelings they have about it - not a place for telling personal stories.
- Write ideas and suggestions down on flipchart paper, when the task is completed ask all participants to sign.
- You may wish to include the following guidelines if they have not already been established by participants such as: Respect each other; only one person speaks; full participation so we can all learn from each other and everything discussed in the group is in strict confidence.

### 3. ANXIETY BALLOON POPCORN (25MINS)

#### AIM

THE AIM of the activity is to let participants begin to explore anxiety by learning the different causes and ways of dealing with anxiety. The “5-A-Day” is introduced to young people as a way of coping with anxiety and building resilience.

#### MATERIALS

- Different coloured balloons (this activity can also be done with paper)
- Markers & Pens
- Each participant should get their own 4 page 5 Ways to Wellbeing Handout.

#### ACTIVITY STEPS

- Give everyone a balloon and a marker.
- Ask them to blow up their balloons.
- Ask them to write or draw on the balloon the issue they're most worried or anxious about.
- Lead a discussion in which the “5-A-Day’ and practical steps that young people can take are identified as ways of coping with anxiety and building resilience.

**NOTE: Let participants know that others will see their balloons, so they shouldn't write anything that they don't want others to see.**

#### POPCORN!

- When they are done, lead the young people in a game of “Popcorn” this is a simple game in which the group works together to keep all the balloons off the floor, by bouncing them with their heads, hands and feet. It is basically a game of “keepy upppy” with lots of balloons, rather than one football (if using paper ask them to crumple up their sheet into a ball and have a ball fight).
- After a few minutes, ask them to pick up the balloon closest to them and look at what is written.
- Ask them to go to one corner of the room if their balloon has to do with school, another if it's about relationships, another if it's about family, and the last corner if it has to do with any other source of anxiety

**NOTE: What are the things that fit into the other category? To preserve some confidentiality, ask that young people only mention the general topic of the response, rather than read the response out loud.**

Take some time to discuss the following questions as a larger group:

- What suggestions could you give to the person whose balloon you received? (If the person who wrote the balloon chooses to talk at this point that is fine, but they do not have to identify themselves if they wish to stay anonymous).
- Do you think young people feeling worried or anxious is a big issue in Ireland and why?
- How do you deal with being worried or anxious in your own life?
- Have you seen your friend being worried/anxious? How do you help them?

## INTRODUCING THE 5-A-DAY

- Direct the young people to the “5-A-Day” information on their handout and ask the group if they are familiar with it.
- Explain that the a ‘5-A-Day’ is a programme for mental health and resilience that has been developed to capture the top five things young people can do to develop their resilience, this includes their ability to cope with stress and anxiety.
- Ask the young people if they have found any of the “5-A-Day” things to be helpful to cope with stress or anxiety in the past.

## CLOSING ROUND

Ask each participant to state one thing that they will do to use the “5-A-Day” in their own lives.

## 4. ANXIETY SIGNS & SYMPTOMS (20 MINS)

### AIM

THE AIM of this activity is to help participants to understand their body clues when feeling anxious and identify how this impacts on their emotions and behaviours.

### MATERIALS

- 5 Ways to Wellbeing hand out
- Pens & Stapler

### ACTIVITY STEPS

- Ask the young people to think about how their body might warn them that they are feeling anxious.
- Ask them to use a pen or pencil to circle the part of their body they notice, or symptom that they experience when they feel anxious on their handout.
- Ask them to write on the handout how they feel emotionally when their body feels anxious.
- Ask the group to think about the things (feelings, behaviour, moods etc..) that family/friends/teachers would see when we are feeling anxious.

**NOTE: You can help participants with some examples such as withdrawn, quiet, shout etc**

Ask participants to return to the group and discuss the following questions as a larger group:

- How does your body warn you when you are feeling anxious?
- How does anxiety impact on how you feel?
- How does anxiety impact on your behaviour?

## CLOSING ROUND

Ask each participant to state one thing that they have learned or stood out for them from doing this exercise.

## 5. COPING WITH ANXIETY WITH MY 5-A-DAY POSTER (25 MINS)

### AIM:

To make a poster as a group to identify and share awareness of anxiety, positive ways of coping with anxiety and to learn about local and national supports.

### MATERIALS:

- A large piece of paper, cardboard or other material suitable for making a poster.
- Support and useful websites listing (it is important for the youth worker/volunteer to add in local services).
- Pens and Paper and other arts materials.

### ACTIVITY

- Explain to the young people that the information poster should demonstrate their learning about, and how to cope with anxiety.
- Explain to the young people that the poster would be helpful if it included the following headings - Causes of Anxiety - Signs & Symptoms of Anxiety - Help for Anxiety
- Lead a discussion of the 5-A-Day based on practical examples of how young people can include these in their life that they might include in the poster.
- Go through the support and useful websites listing and add in your own local services or agencies.
- Provide guidance and support as the young people create their poster.



## SECTION THREE: SUPPORT SERVICES

There are various supports for young people locally and nationally which provide safe and confidential advice for young people who may be struggling with anxiety issues.

### YOUTH WORK IRELAND MEMBERS

**Canal Communities Regional Youth Service**  
[www.ccrys.org](http://www.ccrys.org)

**Carlow Regional Youth Service**  
[www.carlowys.ie](http://www.carlowys.ie)

**CDYS Youth Work Ireland**  
[www.cdys.ie](http://www.cdys.ie)

**Clare Youth Service**  
[www.clareyouthservice.org](http://www.clareyouthservice.org)

**Donegal Youth Service**  
[www.donegalyouthservice.ie](http://www.donegalyouthservice.ie)

**FDYS Youth Work Ireland**  
[www.fdys.ie](http://www.fdys.ie)

**KDYS**  
[www.kdys.ie](http://www.kdys.ie)

**Kildare Youth Services**  
[www.kys.ie](http://www.kys.ie)

**Limerick Youth Service**  
[www.limerickyouthservice.com](http://www.limerickyouthservice.com)

**Ossory Youth**  
[www.ossoryyouth.com](http://www.ossoryyouth.com)

**Youth Work Ireland Tipperary**  
[www.youthworktipperary.ie](http://www.youthworktipperary.ie)

**Waterford & Sth. Tipperary Comm. Youth Service**  
[www.wsycys.ie](http://www.wsycys.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Cork**  
[www.ywicork.com](http://www.ywicork.com)

**Youth Work Ireland Galway**  
[www.youthworkgalway.ie](http://www.youthworkgalway.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Louth**  
[www.facebook.com/YouthWorkIrelandLouth](http://www.facebook.com/YouthWorkIrelandLouth)

**Youth Work Ireland Co. Longford**  
[www.lcrl.ie](http://www.lcrl.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Laois**  
[www.ywilaois.com](http://www.ywilaois.com)

**Youth Work Ireland Meath**  
[www.youthworkrielandmeath.ie](http://www.youthworkrielandmeath.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Midlands**  
[www.youthworkmidlands.ie](http://www.youthworkmidlands.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Cavan Monaghan**  
[www.ywimonaghan.ie](http://www.ywimonaghan.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland North Connaught**  
[www.ncycs.ie](http://www.ncycs.ie)

### NATIONAL SUPPORT AGENCIES

**National Counselling Service** – [www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services)

**Primary Care Network Services** – full listing at [www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare)

**Office of Suicide Prevention** – [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)

**Headstrong** – [www.headstrong.ie](http://www.headstrong.ie)

**Samaritans** – [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Reachout** - [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

**Aware** – [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

**Let Someone Know** - [www.letsomeoneknow.ie](http://www.letsomeoneknow.ie)

**Your Mental Health** - [www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

**Spunout** - [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

**See Change** - [www.seechange.ie](http://www.seechange.ie)

**Nat. Office of Suicide Prevention** - [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)

**Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service** - [www.camhs.ie](http://www.camhs.ie)

**Mental Health Ireland** - [www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)

## FRIENDS RESILIENCE

This Be Well Pack is influenced by The FRIENDS for Life programme, which was developed in Australia for children and teens to reduce anxiety and promote emotional resilience. The FRIENDS programme is a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) based on early intervention and prevention programme focusing on anxiety and depression. In 2016 Carlow Regional Youth Service began to provide Friends Resilience to support young people experiencing anxiety in their service.



The programme sessions provide children and young people with opportunities to understand how feelings affect behaviours; learn relaxation techniques; recognise and understand different emotions; learn how to change negative thoughts into helpful thoughts; develop problem solving skills and coping skills and build the support of teams. There is a structured manual which specifies the goals of each session and gives advice on delivery.

The FRIENDS programme comes with a wealth of empirical literature that supports its effectiveness and efficacy. Most notably the programme has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation who states that '*FRIENDS*' is the only anxiety intervention that 'appears to be efficacious across the entire spectrum, as a universal prevention programme, as a targeted prevention programme & as a treatment'.

[www.carlowys.ie](http://www.carlowys.ie)

## Youth Work Ireland

Youth Work Ireland is the largest youth organisation in Ireland. We are made up of 21 Local Member Youth Services and a national office. We support our members to deliver quality youth services to young people in their communities. This means that young people around Ireland can avail of a whole range of services and supports if and when they need them.

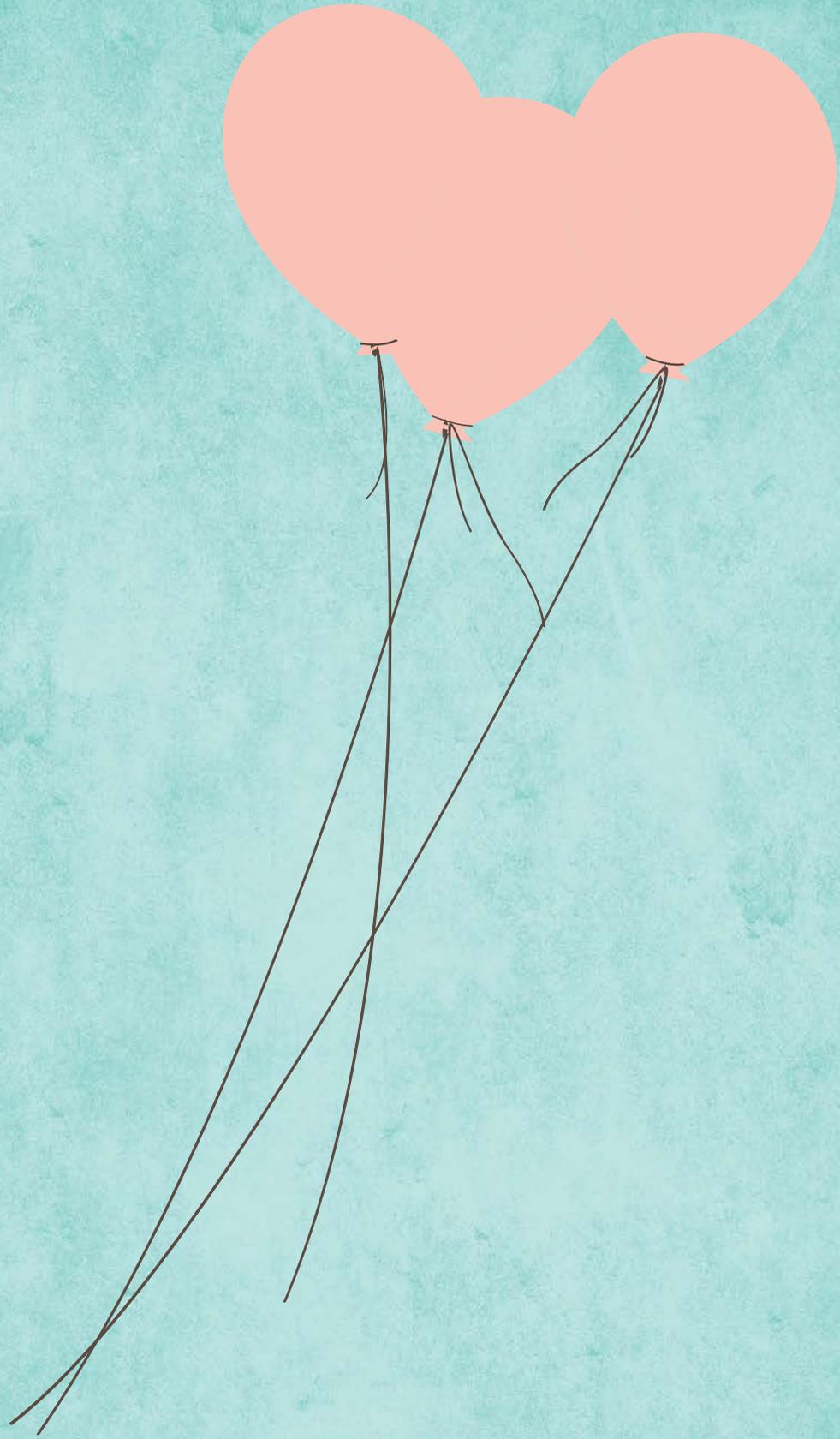


We actively engage with over 116,000 young people every week - that is 20% of all young people in Ireland! Over the years we have developed highly innovative services, supports and programmes for young people between the ages of 10-25 years, including mental health supports, resilience building, anxiety programmes, drug and alcohol supports, LGBT+ youth work, club development, employability programmes, counselling services, rural out reach and fun safe spaces for young people to gather.

Young people are at the heart of our organisation and through our network of clubs, projects, drop in centres, youth information centres, youth cafés, music, arts, citizenship programmes and other outlets, we promote an open, integrated and accessible approach to working with young people. As a Federation of local youth services run by local people, we are uniquely placed to reach young people in their local communities around Ireland. We work to develop the potential of these young people and to strengthen communities in Ireland through quality youth services.

[www.youthworkireland.ie](http://www.youthworkireland.ie)





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**Youth Work Ireland**