

POSITIVE SEXUAL HEALTH

BE BOLD - BE HEARD - BE THE CHANGE

Youth Work Ireland
Press Release
Wednesday May 15th, 2019

Young people take sex education into their own hands

Thousands of young people are taking direct action to change the way sex education, and consent, is taught in Ireland

Resource aimed at helping open-up conversations about sex launched today as part of Youth Work Ireland Week

Embargoed until 00:01 Wednesday 15th May 2019: New research unveiled today shows that Young People are determined to change how sex education is taught in schools, particularly around issues of consent and inclusion, and are prepared to take direct action to make that change. The research also shows that young people want to be heard on matters relating to sex education and the law, as well as morality and values, including consent. On the back of the research, Youth Work Ireland has launched a petition to urge Government to remove religious ethos as a barrier to inclusive and safe sex education for all, irrespective of sexual orientation.

Youth Work Ireland, the largest youth organisation in the country working with over 100,000 young people every week, has launched the petition and a useful resource for starting conversations about sex education with young people. The actions come as part of Youth Work Ireland's Positive Sexual Health Campaign which has included an online survey of over 1,300 young people on their views on sexual health, a national consultation with over 400 young people and a series of national and regional workshops to better understand the needs of young people in Ireland around their sex education.

The urgent need for inclusive sex education emerged as a key issue for young people. Youth Work Ireland's Positive Sexual Health Campaign has revealed that young people's opinion of current Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is that it is inadequate, not fit for purpose and does not reflect or address the needs of young people growing up in Ireland today. Ireland has changed in the last decades, it has become a more inclusive, equal and progressive society and sex education in Irish schools must reflect this.

The Positive Sexual Health Campaign today launches a resource for youth workers designed specifically to address the thorny issue of sex education. The resource, 'Talking About Sexual Health' aims to:

- Identify opportunities to start conversations around sexual health and safety
- Create positive environments to encourage safe conversations on sexual health
- Provide handy tips for starting conversations with young people around sexual health
- Provides a check-list for youth workers to consider before engaging in conversations.
- Provide information on sexual health, consent, legal issues, sexual health clinic, contraception and STIs
- List of support services and referral agencies for young people

Dr Patrick Burke, CEO of Youth Work Ireland said: “It is clear that there are serious issues around how we are talking to young people about relationships and sexuality in schools and more generally. Young people themselves have told us they want to see change and the NCCA is indicating it is listening in its current review of the subject. However progress is extremely slow. We welcome the fact that young people from around the country in our organisation want to move things along much faster. They are particularly frustrated that the idea of a schools ethos can impact on such an important area. They want to see this changed and are now going to campaign on that issue. This is the type of youth led advocacy that youth services are facilitating today responding to real issues that young people raise, in a timely fashion to make an impact on decision makers”

These initiatives take place as part of Youth Work Ireland Week which will see events and activities taking place across Ireland to celebrate young people and the role of youth services in local communities. Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services take part in activities and events.

Petition can be found at this link: www.youthworkireland.ie/petition

Consultation Research results in detail:

What Young People wanted to learn About:

- Health & Safety 20%
- Sex Education 17%
- Contraception 17%
- Law 15%
- Morality & Values (including consent) 9%
- Relationships 8%
- Teen Pregnancies 7%
- Other 7%

What Young People wanted to change:

- Sex Education 25%
- Law 19%
- Morality & Values (including consent) 12%
- Contraception 10%
- Teen Pregnancies 8%
- Relationships 8%
- Privacy 6%
- Other 3%

What Young People wanted to be heard on:

- Sex Education 18%
- Law 17%
- Morality & Values (including consent) 13%
- Teen Pregnancies 11%