

**GET OUT  
INTO THAT DAY**

## **YOUTH WORK OUTDOORS**

Youth Work Ireland Week Programme  
Pack for Youth Workers



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



**National  
Lottery**



**Youth Work Ireland**

# YOUTH WORK OUTDOORS

Due to COVID-19 we have been spending too much time indoors, on screens, separated from each other and generally interacting online. Getting back outdoors and reconnecting with each other in a safe physical way is hugely important for young people's sense of connectedness and mental/physical health. The hard work and passion of youth workers in supporting young people over the last year has been evident and acknowledged.

Youth workers across our Member Youth Services have been innovative in their practice during the pandemic and have developed new exciting ways to bring traditional youth work activities and events into an outdoors setting. This has enabled them to continue to interact, connect and support young people in a safe and socially distant way. This work has been highlighted throughout 2020 by the Practice Group in Youth Work Ireland and you can find out more here >>

*"In this last dramatic year, I have been very impressed by the passion and determination at every level of the youth sector in responding to a wide range of challenges... I have also been impressed at the ability of the sector to harness innovation to the benefit of all young people.."*

Minister O'Gorman

## ABOUT YOUTH WORK IRELAND WEEK

Youth Work Ireland Week now in its 10th year takes place from April 26th - May 2nd. This date coincides with the gradual opening up of Irish society. We hope that we can use the week to celebrate and promote the work local youth services do in communities around Ireland. Throughout the week our services will take part in events and activities that promote, evidence, and celebrate youth work and young people throughout Youth Work Ireland's Member Youth Services.

Each year we focus on a theme and develop an activity/programme pack which provides young people with the opportunity to:

1. Develop knowledge, learning and skills around the theme.
2. Participate in activities that support personal and social development outcomes.
3. Have their voices heard on the issues that are important to them.
4. Showcase and promote the work of our MYS.
5. Have fun!

Each year for Youth Work Ireland Week we ask youth clubs, services, and projects to develop a schedule of youth work activities that can be run during the week. This year we would like you to focus on activities which can be run out of doors. For this we are not necessarily asking you to develop an outdoors workplan, but rather to think about how tradition programmes and activities you have done in your youth centre, can be adapted so they can run outside.



# YOUTH WORK OUTDOORS

This pack and the suggestions in it, have emerged from a Lunchtime Learning Event Youth Work Ireland ran with youth workers in December 2020 on the theme of Youth Work Outdoors.

*Outdoor programmes and activities have been shown to provide positive physical, social, and developmental outcomes...for young people. (Neill J,T; 2008).*

While Outdoors Youth Work is a planned and structured programme of outdoor activities which generally takes place in rural settings. Youth work outdoors is recognising that within our communities, whether they are urban or rural, there is a wide spectrum of open landscapes such as beaches, parks, hills, forests, riverbank, trails and garden, which may not have been utilised as a youth work setting for activities before. With the beginnings of a 'new normal' everything can be reimagined, and we can use the outdoors as a natural living youth centre and space for the development and support of young people.

## **BENEFITS OF ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO BREAKOUT AND CONNECT:**

### **HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING**

While the full impact of Covid-19 will not be known for years, initial research has found that the pandemic has resulted in growing levels of anxiety, stress and depression among children and young adults. However, research on the impact of being outdoors has shown that as little as 90 minutes in a natural environment can increase feelings of emotional wellbeing.

### **NEW SPACES ARE GREAT FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

Being outside the normal settings can create a space for conversation and dialogue and the change of pace and environment can encourage young people to try new things.

### **APPRECIATION AND RESPECT FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT**

Covid has made us more aware of things and places that we hadn't appreciated fully before and with the travel restrictions we are learning more about our local environment like trails we didn't know existed or being able to reflect on what is important to us.

### **ADVENTURE AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Innovating our traditional work can create opportunities for young people to try something new – something they may not have thought about before or had the opportunity to do.

## CREATING A NEW STORY OF YOURSELF

We have a blank canvas to be and do new things, we see social media full of personal testimonies about how people have taken up a new hobbies during lockdown, like remote exercise classes, baking bread, knitting; so venturing into the outdoors and reimagining traditional youth work is a great opportunity for us to mould a new normal.

## BONDING AND RE-ESTABLISHING CONNECTIONS

Lockdown has highlighted for us the importance of personal bonds with friends and family. While Zooms are great and have kept us connected, the levels of zoom fatigue and cabin fever are high!! So getting outdoors gives us an opportunity to connect again in safe way.

## CONNECTING LOCAL TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Getting out doors can make a difference to both the local and global by young people being able to connect any social actions or initiatives that they are involved in in their local communities to global impacts.

# YOUTH WORKERS INPUT

Youth workers from Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services met in December 2020 to discuss the challenges, concerns and actions they take in order to take their youth work activities outdoors – some of this sharing will be useful for workers and volunteers returning to outdoors work

## WEATHER, CLOTHING AND BEING PREPARED

- Community partners who may have kit or clothing or equipment.
- Funds and grants.
- Tesco bags of help grant.
- Make sure young people know not to wear their good runners.
- Confidence - you don't need to be an expert – pooling knowledge and skills is recommended.
- You don't need to reinvent the wheel – there are lots of tips out there.

## CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFETY

- Do a risk assessment prior to the event.
- Adhere to relevant policies and procedures.
- Ensure you have adequate insurance cover for the activity.

## EQUIPMENT

- There is an expense involved with accessing equipment for outdoors, so some suggested were to link in with other local organisations (Scouts, An Óige, Girl Guides etc...) to see if there was a possibility of sharing equipment.

## WHAT ELSE

- Physical Ability - Be mindful of the physical ability or disability of young people within your groups, and ensure that activities are inclusion of all abilities.
- Injuries - these may happen so have a first aid kit handy.
- Toilet Access - with many restrictions still in place, toilet facilities may not be open.
- Awareness of access to greenspaces - check before you go.
- Using other people's knowledge and expertise - are there other organisations in your community you can link in with to share knowledge, equipment or expertise?

## COVID RESTRICTIONS

- Be aware that although some restrictions have been lifted, many remain in place. There will be excitement among both workers and young people to get back to normal and start living an active life again, but adherence to all guidelines must followed....

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Youth Work Ireland's Guidance on Youth Service Provision is a live document which is regularly updated. The document sets out guidance that will assist workers and volunteers to plan and provide services according to Levels and restrictions set out in the National Framework for Living with Covid 19. This document will also be of use to stakeholders and partners in understanding what has informed the service plans and service provision available locally.

**Youth Work Ireland Guidance on Youth Service Provision>>**

Once you have consulted the Framework and are ready to embark outdoors with your group – there are something you need to consider:

- While many of the beaches, parks and trail are open some may have restricted access such as the closure of cafes and toilets, so always check before and bring extra supplies if needed.
- Adhere to specific health and safety / covid guidelines for each venue and remind the young people to adhere to 2 meters from other visitors.
- Remind the young people to bring masks and workers should carry extra supplies of hand sanitizer.
- Some places are restricting the numbers of people who can access the location in order to manage visitor volume so check ahead if you have a large group.
- Leave No Trace – ensure to bring rubbish bins with you in case bins are overflowing or closed, and you need to bring your rubbish home with you to dispose of.
- Where possible ask the young people to bring their own lunch and drinks bottle.

# OUTDOOR ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

## OUTDOOR CHALLENGES

Set some fun challenges for your group that can only be done outside and encourage young people to get involved. Depending on the interests of your groups, these challenges could be sports based, arts based, creative based, environmentally based.

- Run/Walk a certain distance.
- Photography competitions with an outdoor theme.
- Environment challenges – collect plastic waste.
- Scavenger Hunts.
- Using a phone and taking pictures; how many types of insects or birds can they identify etc..

## OUTDOOR FUN

- If you have access to a projector you could hang a sheet on a large wall and stream a film.
- Utilising your locality – coastal pathways – Ancient East, Wild Atlantic way etc..
- Walking groups.
- Arts and Crafts.
- Games day.
- Outdoor's yoga, movement and meditation.
- Picnics or bar-b-que youth café sessions.
- Star gazing.

## USING TECHNOLOGY FOR OUTDOORS WORK

Nowadays everyone has a mobile phone, and the camera and video capabilities are great. So your group could make their own short film or video – for this they need to decide on the 'story' they want to tell. Using the theme of 'breaking out' get them to write a short scribe, assign roles and start filming. There are many simply editing tools that are free that can be used to edit and produce the film.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We have all been isolating and restricting our contacts with our friends and neighbours **over the last year, and we are all so eager to re-connect safely.** Think about some community engagement your group can come up with that would enhance the locality and engage with others.

- Are there areas of the town that need a spring clean?
- Are there walls that could be painted or fences brightening up.
- Groups could plant some summer flowers or a community garden.
- Building bird boxes around the town.
- Organising beach clean ups.
- Chalk pavement art to communicate positive messages.
- Set up an outdoor market/cake sale.

## ADRENALINE RUSH ACTIVITIES

- Biking
- Hiking
- Rafting
- Climbing
- Sea/lake swimming
- Long hikes can build resilience.
- Fishing
- Soccer and team sports
- Bouldering /or rock climbing

## 5 OUTDOORS WAYS TO WELLBEING

Youth workers will be familiar with the 5 Ways to Wellbeing which is an evidenced based way to improve personal wellbeing and mental health. This model resonates strongly with spending time outdoors and linking the benefits of being outdoors with wellbeing goals for young people and youth groups. The key elements are -

### CONNECT

Connecting with friends provides a sense of belonging, and so connecting with people in the outdoors can help to rebuild and re-establish social contact:

- Go for a walk with friends.
- Organise a youth group meet up in a local park.
- Join a nature-based walking group in your area to discover new parks or trails.
- Build a community garden and grow plants and vegetables.
- Do a 'lockout' and lock yourself out of your house for the afternoon.

### BE ACTIVE

Being active and moving your body helps both mentally and physically. There are so many ways that you can be active in the outdoors:

- Go outside and walk, run, swim or ride.
- Take your dog for a walk on the beach.
- Practice some yoga or tai chi in a park or at the beach.
- Help out with the Tidy Towns committee.
- Link in with a local sports club.
- Set walking or running targets both as a group or individually.

### TAKE NOTICE

Taking notice and slowing down helps us to feel calm and relaxed. Spending time outside, taking in the beauty of nature can be of benefit to us all.

- Take notice of the night sky.
- Listen to the morning birdsong.
- Explore your garden or a park and notice the different plants and insects.
- Take a camera on a walk and photograph the natural environment; take the time to really notice the colours and textures of what you are photographing.
- Look out for nature in unexpected places.
- Practice being mindful in nature by breathing in slowly, feel the breeze, take in the sounds, open your eyes slowly and enjoy the view.

### KEEP LEARNING

The outdoors can provide opportunities to try and learn new things to challenge our minds. Chat to your youth group and see if there is something, they would be interested in trying or discover in the outdoors.

- Learn how to cook something different with ingredients you have learned to grow.
- Take a trip to a park or forest and learn about the flora and fauna.
- Build a worm farm, compost system or insect hotel.
- Consider volunteering or organising a cause where you can learn new skills and immerse yourself in nature.
- Link in with other outdoor organisations such as An Oige, The Wild Atlantic Way, Ancient East or the Greenway.
- Try new things, rediscover old interests and challenge yourself to do something new.

### GIVE

Do something to care for your community, clean up or care for the flora and fauna. Try to give what you can. It can be as simple as your time, but you can also give on a bigger scale by caring for the environment and becoming more involved.

- Help a neighbour with some jobs in their garden.
- Volunteer at local clean ups, beaches, parks, or Tidy Towns.
- Join a tree planting day or give your time to caring for the environment.
- Challenge yourself to 'leave nothing behind' when you are outdoors.
- Give some produce from your garden to family, co-workers, friends, or neighbours.



# RESOURCES & WEBSITES

Throughout the pandemic Youth Work Ireland have been collating and inviting youth workers to share their innovative and creative practices with each other, by posting flyers, resources, posters, policies, procedures and generally any evidence of the best practice work that has been going on, on a dedicated Trello website.

One year on and this webpage holds a treasure trove of useful information for all workers and volunteers within our Federation.

To access this page contact [ghalpin@youthworkireland.ie](mailto:ghalpin@youthworkireland.ie)

**Learning for Sustainability** is an educational approach for both formal and informal practitioners to use the outdoors to build sustainable work - there are many activities and resources to be found on their website.

[www.education.gov.scot](http://www.education.gov.scot)

**Inland Fishers** has various outreach and educational activities aimed at young people and at improving social inclusion, environmental awareness and participation. They have also providing funds to some groups to get involved.

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

**Leave No Trace Ireland** provides education and outreach initiatives to raise awareness about protecting and enjoying the outside space together

[www.leavenotraceireland.org](http://www.leavenotraceireland.org)

Before the pandemic Energia.ie would publish a listing of free things to do around Ireland – check out their website for ideas and activities that may be happening in your locality.

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

**Adventure Wicklow** runs outdoor adventure activities for youth groups, including learning through adventure, survival and mountain activities

[www.adventurewicklow.com](http://www.adventurewicklow.com)

**The Wild Atlantic Way** is a outdoor trail on the west coast, and on parts of the north and south coasts, of Ireland, with suggested walks and hikes for all abilities.

[www.thewildatlanticway.com](http://www.thewildatlanticway.com)

**The Ancient East** is another outdoor trail and hike pathways along the Ancient East showcase the living culture and ancient heritage - and again provide trails for all abilities.

[www.discoverireland.ie/irelands-ancient-east](http://www.discoverireland.ie/irelands-ancient-east)



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