



Youth Work Ireland

# YOUNG & TRANS IN RURAL IRELAND

GUIDE TO SUPPORTING  
YOUNG TRANS PEOPLE  
LIVING IN RURAL IRELAND

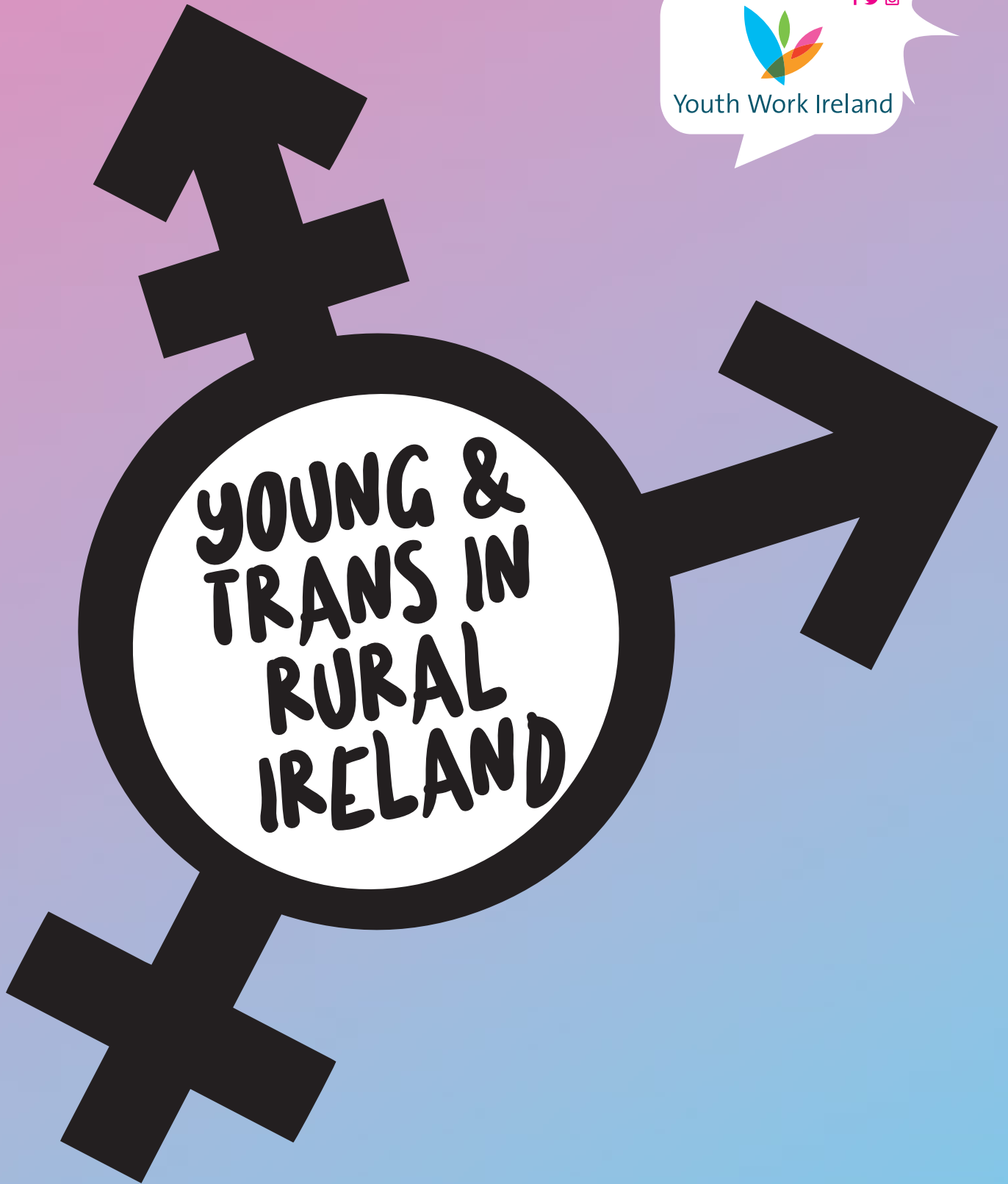
[WWW.YOUTHWORKIRELAND.IE](http://WWW.YOUTHWORKIRELAND.IE)



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Oige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs







# SUPPORTING YOUNG TRANS PEOPLE IN RURAL IRELAND

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## FOREWORD

In recent years Ireland has become a more inclusive society with the passing of equality-based referenda and legislation. In our work with young people we have seen an increase in the numbers of young LGBTI+ people attending our clubs and services, and we know from our work that they feel the changes in society have had a positive impact on their lives.

However, this inclusivity and steps towards positive change, has not been experienced equally by all young LGBTI+ people, with trans people, particularly those growing up in rural Ireland, continuing to face high levels of transphobic bullying, social anxiety, discrimination and isolation. There is therefore a continuing challenge for society to better understand the needs of this group and to be aware of what actions we can take to better support them.

In 2018 Youth Work Ireland was grateful to receive funds under the LGBTI+ Capacity Building Initiative to run two Learning and Sharing events for young trans people. The aim of this was to provide a safe space for young trans people to identify the supports they feel are needed to help their community to be accepted, respected and valued.

In the past the format of our Learning and Sharing workshops has proven to be a successful way to support young people have their voices heard on issues that matter to them. Through a facilitated youth work process, young people gather and share their experiences and views on a topic or issue.

We were delighted to have TENI co-facilitate these events as we had previously worked with them on our Equality 17 campaign. The events brought together 15 young trans people aged 16 – 20 years, and what they had to say forms the basis of this resource. The struggles they face in their everyday life, be it in school, at home or in society generally are challenging and there is an added pressure on these young people to be the educators of trans issues, to be political and to change society. While all of this is admirable, these are young teenagers who are facing their own challenges and need to be support.

By highlighting the issues faced by young trans people and the supports they say are needed, we hope this booklet will continue to bring us further along the road to true equality for all, irrespective of gender or identity.

A poster to raise awareness on how to be an ally to young trans people has also been produced as part of this body of work, see [www.youthworkireland.ie](http://www.youthworkireland.ie) for more information. We would like to acknowledge Gina Halpin for her lead in this project and author of this resource.

**Geraldine Lacey, Chair Youth Work Ireland**  
**Dr. Patrick Burke, CEO Youth Work Ireland**

# SUPPORTING YOUNG TRANS PEOPLE IN RURAL IRELAND

## YOUTH WORK IRELAND AND LGBTI+ YOUTH WORK

Youth Work Ireland has a long history of working with and providing supports to young LGBTI+ people. Through our services and our strategic partnership with Belong To, we address issues and concerns that affect LGBTI+ young people. We also work to increase the acceptance of the LGBTI+ community, challenge issues of homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination.

In recent years Ireland has become a more inclusive society, however, in terms of young trans people there is a challenge to understand their specific needs and there is a lack of mainstream information on how professional workers can best support a young trans person, particularly those living in rural Ireland who are more vulnerable and have less access to supports and services than those living in urban areas. As outlined in GLEN – ‘Being LGBT in School’, The LGBT Ireland Report, young trans people growing up in rural Ireland face specific challenges including transphobic bullying, isolation and discrimination (TENI - STAD: Stop Transphobia and Discrimination Report: 2014-2016).

The aim of this resource is to raise awareness of issues and challenges young trans people experience growing up in rural Ireland and to provide youth workers with guidelines and suggestions on how they can better support this group of people.

## TRANSGENDER EQUALITY NETWORK IRELAND (TENI)

TENI is a non-profit national agency, founded in 2006 that seeks to improve conditions and advance the rights and equality of trans people and their families in Ireland. They engage in activities that promote the equality and well-being of trans people in Ireland in the areas of healthcare, employment, education and legislation. TENI’s vision is an Ireland where trans people are understood, accepted and respected and can participate fully in all aspects of Irish society. Youth Work Ireland and TENI have a history of working together to raise awareness of issues and challenges facing young trans people living in Ireland.

“WHEN CIS TEENAGERS CUT THEIR HAIR OR DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT IT IS SEEN AS BRAVE BUT WHEN TRANS TEENAGERS DO THE SAME, MORE IS READ INTO IT... LIKE WHY ARE YOU DOING THAT?, WHAT DOES IT MEAN”?

“PEOPLE SAY IT’S JUST A TREND OR A PHASE TO BE TRANS AND THAT YOU ARE ONLY DOING IT TO BE COOL OR POPULAR, BUT BEING TRANS DOESN’T MAKE YOU COOL OR POPULAR!”

## LGBTI+ CAPACITY FUNDING

In 2018 Youth Work Ireland received funds from the LGBTI+ Capacity Building Initiative of the Department of Children & Youth Affairs to run two Learning and Sharing workshops for young trans people living in rural Ireland. These events brought together 15 young trans people and took place in Youth Work Ireland’s national offices in late 2018. The events provided a safe space for young trans people to share their experiences of growing up in rural Ireland – both in terms of the challenges they face and the supports they feel are needed to support their community to be accepted, respected and valued.

## LEARNING AND SHARING WORKSHOPS

The workshops were facilitated by Alex Lawson and Andy Martin from TENI, and Gina Halpin from Youth Work Ireland. They followed a participatory method of sharing and exploring issues, experiences and identifying supports. The aim was to stimulate conversation and interaction amongst the young people to identify and surface:

- The challenges young trans people face growing up in rural Ireland.
- The issues of most concern to young trans people growing up in rural Ireland.
- The key things young trans people feel youth workers and the general public should be aware of in order to support their community.

**Young people from the following youth services attended the Learning & Sharing workshops:**

Carlow Regional Youth Service  
Gorey Youth Needs  
Kildare Youth Services  
Youth Work Ireland Laois  
Youth Work Ireland Meath  
Youth Work Ireland Midlands  
Youth Work Ireland Tipperary

**Please see the glossary of terms on page 12 for an explanation and definition of the phases, words and terms used in this resource.**

# WHAT YOUNG TRANS PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT...

## GROWING UP TRANS IN RURAL IRELAND

- There is more of a chance of being ostracised from a smaller rural community than an urban one when people see you as being different from everyone else.
- It is harder to date in a rural community because there is a very small pool of people to choose from and everyone knows everyone, and because of this there is a tendency for young trans people to use dating apps which can lead to risky behaviour or unsafe experiences.
- Within rural communities you can find yourself becoming the piece of town gossip, and you have to learn to navigate local dynamics around who accepts you and who doesn't.
- There is a lack of amenities and very little services and supports in rural areas and of those that exist, many are not effective enough.
- There is a lack of transportation in rural towns which means if there are other groups you want to go to out of town, you have to have your own transport or rely on parents.
- There may be no other trans people in a rural area, so there is no peer support and you can easily be misunderstood, leading to isolation and depression.
- It can be lonely being trans in rural Ireland.

## SERVICES

- Parental consent has to be given for lots of things, which is ok if your parents are accepting and understanding, but for those whose parents aren't supportive, this is really difficult and stressful.
- It can be hard to find information on social and medical transitioning in rural areas, which makes it harder for young trans people to access the information they need.
- Doctors appointments can be very expensive and the choice of doctors in rural Ireland is limited.
- Where there are services to do with mental health, accessing them is an issue, and you can be on the waiting list for ages.
- Sometimes counsellors think problems with trans people aren't big enough for them – sometimes you feel you need to be suicidal to be seen!
- There are different services from different CAMHs and different levels of understanding amongst counsellors.
- If there is no real understanding about trans issues, it makes communications with counsellors harder and can lead to mis-diagnosing young trans people.

"WHEN I FIRST CAME OUT I WAS TERRIFIED TO WEAR GIRLS CLOTHES, AND AT THE START MY FAMILY SAID THEY WOULD FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE IF I WORE A DRESS, SO I STUCK WITH HOODIES, BUT NOW SHOULD I WEAR FEMININE CLOTHES & FEEL COMFORTABLE, BUT UPSET MY FAMILY, OR WEAR MORE ANDROGYNOUS CLOTHES TO PLEASE OTHERS?"



“BEING YOUNG AND TRANS ALLOWS YOU TO UNDERSTAND YOURSELF A LOT MORE AS YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH A HARDER PROCESS”

## SCHOOL

- ➔ In a lot of rural areas there is only one school, so there is no option of changing if you feel isolated or out of place as a young trans person.
- ➔ Everything is gendered in schools and this causes cis conformity issues, more so if the school has compulsory uniforms or is a single sex school.
- ➔ Toilets are a huge issue which can lead to stress and confusion. Sometimes young trans people will hold off going to the toilet for hours, which can then lead to kidney and urinary infections. Some use disabled bathrooms but again they can experience anxiety as they have to go get the key and then explain why they want to use the disabled bathroom rather than the other ones.
- ➔ Participation in PE in schools can be difficult as you have to deal with gendered changing rooms and sometimes trans young people are afraid to take part in sports as it can make them feel uncomfortable with both themselves and others.
- ➔ It is hard to change school policies or the attitudes of some teachers who are trans-phobic or homophobic, so a young trans person's experience in school can depend upon whether they have an understanding teacher or not.
- ➔ There is a lack of education and information in schools about trans people and their needs, particularly in RSE.

## AWARENESS

- ➔ There is a general lack of understanding about trans issues in society and even more so in rural communities.
- ➔ It can be confusing getting messages from society about how you 'should' be while knowing that this doesn't fit with how you actually feel.
- ➔ Sometimes friends and family can try to change a young trans person's mind or suggest they are going through a phase! This is very hurtful.
- ➔ Many young trans people feel they have to be the educators on trans issues, which they feel is an added and unfair burden on them and something they would prefer not to have to do.
- ➔ Young trans people can experience body image issues when they dress as another gender and they feel there is pressure to conform to a certain body type - this is especially true for young trans women who feel pressure to be skinny.
- ➔ Teenagers find it particularly hard as trans issues bubble up to the surface during teenage years and this is often when body dysphoria issues come up.
- ➔ When people disagree with trans people it can feel like a personal attack.
- ➔ Young trans people can experience general safety and wellbeing issues when it comes to romantic and sexual relationships, as a trans person may not be comfortable doing certain things because of body dysphoria.
- ➔ There are higher rates of mental health issues during puberty, and when you are trans you may have to deal with the additional stress puberty blockers bring, and this can make life even harder.

“YOU CAN'T BE JUST CHILLED AND TRANS. ONCE YOU ARE TRANS YOU HAVE TO FIGHT AND BE POLITICAL. THERE IS PRESSURE ON YOU TO BE ANGRY, BUT YOU CAN'T BE ANGRY ALL THE TIME”

## WHAT YOUNG TRANS PEOPLE WANT YOUTH WORKERS TO KNOW AND DO TO SUPPORT THEM!

1. Don't make assumptions about a person's gender based on how they present physically.
2. Respect non-conformity and individuality.
3. Educate yourself on trans issues: know, understand and use correct terms and language (see a glossary of terms on page 12).
4. Normalise pronouns and have more respect for alternative pronouns, it would be good for youth workers to wear pronoun badges.
5. Have gender neutral bathrooms in youth centres where possible.
6. Support the young trans person even if you initially think it might be a 'phase' – they know themselves better than you do.
7. Help a trans person learn how to advocate for themselves at school or with parents.
8. Have trans policies and trans training for all youth workers and volunteers (not just the ones who run the LGBTI+ groups) so they too are aware of how to best support young trans people.
9. Learn and respect boundaries – sometimes young trans people aren't ok about taking about themselves, so it is ok to ask what they are ok to talk about and what to avoid. Don't ask invasive questions about body parts, dead names or surgery.
10. Talk to and help educate local TDs and councillors about trans issues.
11. Be the supportive adult and advocate for trans people in local community by running trans awareness events and campaigns on trans awareness issues.
12. Bring in reputable and qualified speakers on trans issues.
13. Be careful of gendered language, e.g. dude, sis, guys, lads, etc. try to use gender neutral terms like 'young people', 'partners', 'humankind' and 'students'.
14. Don't force an expectation on trans people to behave in a certain way.
15. Know trigger warnings and be understanding of young people's moods – they may be pre or post op or on hormones and this can affect moods and general wellbeing.
16. If you mis-gender someone, apologise and move on.
17. It only takes one bad experience for a young trans person not to come back.
18. Be sure to affirm people's gender to them.
19. Understand that there is a difference between someone's sexual identity and their gender identity.
20. Be an ally – listen, be open, don't judge, remember it's harder for the trans person than it is for you.

# WHAT THE LAW SAYS

## Gender Recognition Act

The Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides a process enabling trans people to achieve full legal recognition of their gender. By filling out a statutory declaration, trans people can receive a gender recognition certificate. With this certificate, they can obtain a new birth certificate that reflects this change, have their passport reissued in the correct gender, and have their gender marker associated with their PPS number changed. The Gender Recognition Act allows all individuals over the age of 18 to self-declare their own gender identity. Young people aged 16-17 can also apply to be legally recognised, though the process is more onerous. They must apply for an exemption to the act and present at family circuit court and have parental consent and letters from two medical professionals (including a psychiatrist or endocrinologist).

Currently young people under 16 cannot access gender recognition. The gender recognition legislation has been reviewed and recommendations made to include all people under 18 and non binary people.

## Irish Equality Legislation

Under Irish equality legislation discrimination is banned on nine grounds. They are - gender, marital status, family status, age, race, sexual orientation, disability, membership of the Traveller community and religion. Trans people are not explicitly protected in this legislation, however the gender ground has been interpreted to include trans people.

## UN Convention on the Rights of a Child

The UNCRC protects the rights of young people up to the ages of 18. The UNCRC has 54 articles, 42 of which are rights belonging to children and young people up to 18 years of age. The following UNCRC articles are particularly relevant when supporting trans young people:

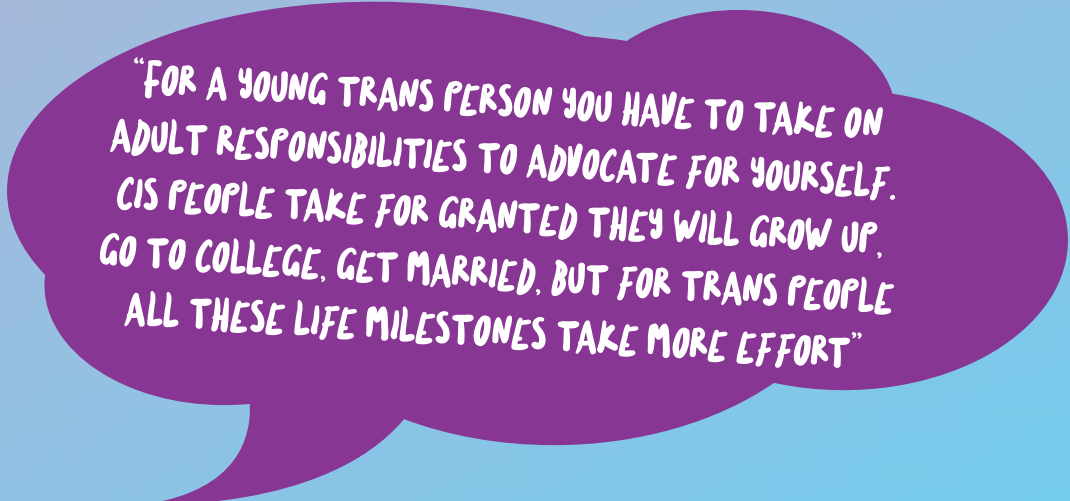
Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

Article 13: Children have the right to get and to share information as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others.

Article 16: Right to privacy – Children have the right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life.

Article 24: Right to health – Children have the right to good quality health care.

Articles 28 and 29: Children have the right to an education. Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full.



**"FOR A YOUNG TRANS PERSON YOU HAVE TO TAKE ON ADULT RESPONSIBILITIES TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF. CIS PEOPLE TAKE FOR GRANTED THEY WILL GROW UP, GO TO COLLEGE, GET MARRIED, BUT FOR TRANS PEOPLE ALL THESE LIFE MILESTONES TAKE MORE EFFORT"**

# TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

## ANDROGYNOUS OR ANDROGYNE

A person whose gender identity is both male and female, or neither male nor female. They might present as a combination of male and female.

## BIGENDER

A gender identity which can be literally translated as 'two genders' or 'double gender'. These two gender identities could be male and female, but could also include non-binary identities.

## CIS OR CISGENDER

A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression is the same as the sex assigned at birth.

## DYSPHORIA

The distress a person experiences as a result of their gender identity not matching the sex they were assigned at birth.

## GENDER EXPRESSION

How we portray our gender to the world. Gender can be expressed through grooming, mannerisms, physical characteristics, social interactions and speech patterns.

## GENDER FLUID

Gender fluid individuals experience different gender identities at different times. A gender fluid person's gender identity can be multiple genders at once, then switch to none at all, or move between single gender identities.

## GENDER IDENTITY

A person's deeply-felt identification as male, female, or some other gender. This may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is less about our appearance and how we present to others and more about how we feel inside.

## GENDER QUEER

A person whose gender varies from 'norm'; or who feels their gender identity is neither female nor male, both female and male, or a different gender identity altogether.

## HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY OR HORMONES

The use of hormones to alter secondary sex characteristics. Some trans people may take hormones to align their bodies with their gender identities. Other trans people do not take hormones for many different reasons.

## INTERSEX

Refers to individuals who are born with sex characteristics (such as genitals or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time. In the past the word 'Hermaphrodite' has been used, this is generally considered derogatory; has been replaced by the term intersex.

## NON-BINARY

A non-binary person is a person whose gender identity is not simply male or female. Some individuals move between genders, or feel a mix of many genders or may be genderless. Non-binary people express their gender in many different ways. It might not fit with what other people expect

## PRONOUNS

Words used to refer to someone. Gender specific pronouns are 'he' and 'she' which are usually used for men and women respectively. Many nonbinary people do not identify with these pronouns and choose to opt for more gender-neutral pronouns like 'they' or use no pronouns at all. Many non-binary people choose to use gender-specific pronouns as these are not exclusively for binary people.

## SEX

The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones).

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's physical, romantic or emotional attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity and gender expression. Transgender people may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer or asexual.

## TRANS

Commonly used shorthand for transgender. Avoid using this term as a noun: a person is not 'a trans'; they may be a trans person.

## TRANSGENDER

Refers to a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities.

## TRANS MAN

A person who was assigned female at birth but who lives as a man or identifies as male. Some trans men make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.

## TRANS WOMAN

A person who was assigned male at birth but who lives as a woman or identifies as female. Some trans women make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.



## TRANSITION

A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

## TRANSSEXUAL

A person whose gender identity is 'opposite' to the sex assigned to them at birth. The term connotes a binary view of gender, moving from one polar identity to the other. Transsexual people may or may not take hormones or have surgery.

## TRANVESTITE ORCROSSDRESSER

A person who wears clothing, accessories, jewellery or make-up not traditionally or stereotypically associated with their assigned sex. Some transvestites refer to themselves as male to female transgender people who do not wish to transition or change their assigned sex but prefer to live "dual role".



# YOUTH WORK IRELAND MEMBERS

**Canal Communities Regional Youth Service**

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

**Carlow Regional Youth Service**

[www.carlowrysblog.wordpress.com](http://www.carlowrysblog.wordpress.com)

**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)

**Waterford & Sth Tipperary Community Youth Service**

[www.wstcys.ie](http://www.wstcys.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 Laois**

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

**Youth Work Ireland Longford**

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

**Youth Work Ireland Louth**

[www.facebook.com/YouthWorkIrelandLouth](http://www.facebook.com/YouthWorkIrelandLouth)

**Youth Work Ireland Meath**

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

**Youth Work Ireland Midlands**

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

**Youth Work Ireland Cavan Monaghan**

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

**Youth Work Ireland North Connaught**

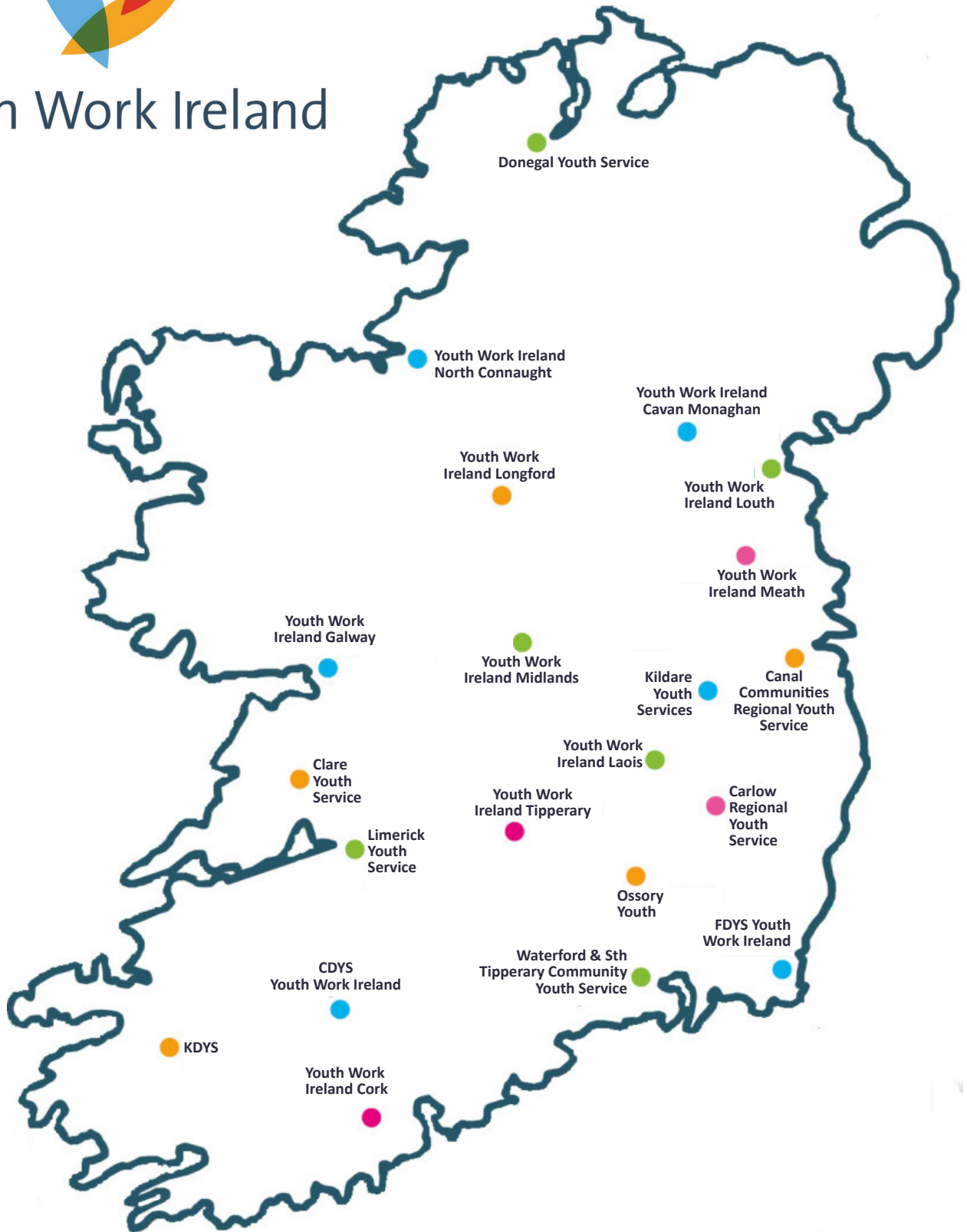
[www.ncyos.ie](http://www.ncyos.ie)

**Youth Work Ireland Tipperary**

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



# Youth Work Ireland





[WWW.YOUTHWORKIRELAND.IE](http://WWW.YOUTHWORKIRELAND.IE)

Transgender Equality Network Ireland  
National Lottery  
An Roinn Leasail agus Crechtaí Oige  
Department of Children and Youth Affairs  
LGBTI+ National YOUTH Strategy  
Youth Work Ireland