

PRESS RELEASE

Supporting LGBT young people is everybody's responsibility!

Everybody needs to play a part in supporting LGBT young people. This was the message delivered by Irish Times columnist and Independent Chair of Ireland's first LGBT National Youth Strategy, Una Mullally, as she officially launched 'LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017' in Roscommon Town on Tuesday, 21st March.

Addressing the large gathering of young people, service providers and community representatives, Una acknowledged that a lot of progress has been made to make Ireland an easier place for LGBT young people to grow-up. However, she also pointed out that growing up is not easy for anyone and that LGBT young people, in particular, can find it difficult. "Being LGBT is not the problem. The problem is the negative attitude that is encountered all too frequently by LGBT young people. It is this negative attitude and the negative behaviours that it can give rise to, that must be challenged and changed. Straight people will be key to bringing about this change." Una spoke about how everybody benefits when services and clubs are more LGBT friendly. "How many promising young footballers have hung up their boots as a result of homophobic comments that they heard on the pitch or in the dressing room?" she asked. "By helping our young LGBT people to thrive, we are helping our teams, clubs and communities to thrive."

Having made a big impact on RTÉ's *Only Gay in the Village* programme, Roscommon farmer Will Keane shared his experiences of growing up as a gay man in Roscommon. "My childhood was a very happy time but as I grew up and became aware that I was gay, this did make things more difficult." Speaking about the power that a symbol can have, he urged every business, every shop and every sports club to get on board with LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017. "Display this symbol. Think about what it is saying. Ask yourself, what are the small steps that I can take to make life easier for the next generation? The actions in the Code of Practice are so simple. They don't cost anything but they could be invaluable to a youngster that you know: maybe your son, your niece or your friend".

Angela Toolis, Chair of Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee and Area Manager of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, congratulated the work of the LGBT Sub-Group behind the initiative. "No single organisation could have delivered this initiative. The Children and Young People's Service Committee is a great vehicle for bringing services together and, in this instance, the HSE Office of Suicide Prevention, Tusla, Foróige, Roscommon County Council and Roscommon LEADER Partnership have all played a part. But special mention must be made to the vital role played by Luke McEvoy and his teacher Brian Higgins from Elphin Community College. Luke designed this Roscommon LGBT Friendly 2017 symbol. This symbol is a great example of young people telling us what they want. It is up to all of us to make the correct response."

Nikki Mullen, LGBT Youth Support Worker for Sligo Leitrim, spoke about her work with the SMILY Youth LGBT Group. She highlighted the difficulties that are faced by LGBT young people and spoke about the need for services to respond to these needs. Master of Ceremonies Lydia Dwyer of Elphin Community College encouraged those present to register for one of the awareness raising workshops scheduled for Roscommon, Monksland, Castlerea, Boyle and Ballaghadeereen. Copies of the Code of Practice template and a schedule for the workshops can be found in the Roscommon CYPSC section of www.cypsc.ie. **ENDS**

For further information, contact: Eleanor Reidy, Tusla Press Office, 01 771 8669 or 087 634 8373

About LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017

LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017 is a public awareness initiative organised by the LGBT Sub-Group of Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee and is the result of a collaboration of many agencies including Tusla Child and Family Agency, Office for Suicide Prevention HSE, Foróige, Comhairle na nÓg, Social Inclusion Office of Roscommon County Council, Roscommon LEADER Partnership and Second Level Schools in the County.

This initiative is aimed at making service providers, community groups and sports clubs more LGBT friendly. The initiative comprises three elements:

Strand 1: LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017 symbol

Designed by Luke McEvoy, a secondary school student of Elphin Community College, the LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017 symbol will help identify services and spaces as LGBT friendly. The rationale for a bespoke, Roscommon-specific, symbol is to encourage people to view issues affecting LGBT young people as locally relevant.

Strand 2: Awareness Raising Workshops

A county wide programme of awareness raising workshops.

Strand 3: Code of Practice Template

This template sets out simple and practical steps that can help service providers, community organisations and sporting clubs to be more LGBT friendly. The template has been compiled in consultation with regional and national LGBT organisations and can be downloaded for free from www.cypsc.ie.

About the Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) are a key structure identified by the Government to plan and coordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. Their overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working. For more information on CYPSCs, please visit www.cypsc.ie.