

Minister O’Gorman launches the publication of ‘How’s Your Head – Young Voices during COVID-19’, a national consultation with young people on mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19

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A new report from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has found that the Covid-19 pandemic has had negative effects on young people’s health and wellbeing, especially amongst marginalised groups.

The report, based on the findings of research undertaken by SpunOut and the Department’s Youth Advisory Group, shows how young people struggled with being separated from their friends, and faced significant mental health impacts as a result of Covid-19 and the restrictions.

The report found that:

- Missing friends was most commonly cited as a challenge faced during Covid-19 (cited by 35% of respondents), followed by impact on health (20%), school/college problems (18%), and cabin fever (16%)
- Young people’s feelings towards the future were mixed. Over one third of respondents reporting optimism for the future. However, negative feelings such as anxiety, uncertainty, pessimism and fear were also common
- Young people mentioned a range of positives that they wished to take forward, including maintaining a healthy lifestyle, self-care, quality family time and relief from pressure of commutes and school or college. However, almost one in ten respondents were unable to name any positives.

On the publication of the report, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman TD said:

“Young people have faced profound and unique challenges throughout the Covid-19 restrictions. Yet despite schools closing, separation from friends and family, and economic uncertainty, they have shown remarkable resilience. We have a generation of young people who are rising to the challenges posed by Covid-19.

“I’d like to thank everyone who participated in the research, and to SpunOut for facilitating the work. As the Recovery and Resilience Plan sets out, supporting young people is not merely a whole of of society task. My Department is committed to playing a lead role on this as we look to overcome the challenges ahead.”

The Department’s Youth Advisory Group, which was invited to respond to the consultation findings, expressed the need for more empathy and compassion towards young people, and felt that young people overall have been unfairly scapegoated for spikes in COVID-19 cases.

The Advisory Group said that, now more than ever, mental health services, educational institutions, and youth services need to work together, so that each is aware of the challenges young people have been facing and can help ease them back into everyday life in the next stage of the pandemic and beyond.