

Opening Statement to the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs by Scouting Ireland

22nd March 2017

**John Lawlor –CEO
Christy McCann- Chief Scout
Noel O’Connor- Operations Manager
Dubheasa Kelly- Research Officer
Ray Moran – Youth Volunteer
Ciara Keegan – National Rover Representative**

Introduction

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach agus a bhaill den Chomhairle. Ar son Gasóga na h-Éireann táimid buíoch as ucht an deis labhairt os comhair an Chomhairle inniú.

Many thanks for the opportunity to address the committee today. I am John Lawlor Chief Executive Officer at Scouting Ireland. It is our first time to come before an Oireachtas Committee, and so for us today is an important occasion. We see this as a milestone for Scouting Ireland, and a recognition of the opportunities scouting provides for young people across all age groups and across the entire island.

Scouting is a collaborative effort and I would like to introduce our team today:

- Chief Scout, Christy McCann,
- Operations Manager, Noel O’ Connor,
- Research Officer Dubheasa Kelly,
- Rover Scout Ciara Keegan,

and

- Volunteer Ray Moran.

We hope to clearly convey a sense of who we are, of our position within the youth sector and within education and of how we can develop further over the coming years. Our Chief Scout, Mr Christy McCann will speak briefly about Scouting in a general context, and give you a clearer picture of what we do. I will then outline our structures and strategic aims for the future with the help of my Colleagues Dubheasa and Noel.

You will then hear from our youth members who will convey to you a real life context for what Scouting means to them.

Chief Scout Contribution

Good Morning Chairman, my name is Christy McCann and I am Chief Scout of Scouting Ireland. The Chief Scout is the senior volunteer position and President of organisation. As Chief Scout I chair our National Council and National Management Committee. I am responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the organisation and I am honoured to be invited here to speak on behalf of the membership of Scouting Ireland.

Scouting is a worldwide movement of young people with a membership of 40 million people in 160 countries and territories. Scouting Ireland represents 50,000 of those members' across the island of Ireland. We are coeducational, we are non-denominational, we are non-political and we have proudly served the young people of Ireland for 110 years. Our programme has never been as popular or as relevant. Our work for in the development of young people is spread over 500 communities, across the island. The aim of Scouting is simple – 'to create a better world'

Scouting is based on friendship, fun, challenge and adventure for young people. While Scouting is delivered in fun and friendship, a powerful educational method is at play in our programme. Positive outcomes for young people include the encouragement of character development, of leadership skills development, of caring, of self- awareness and a sense of personal responsibility. Scouting develops young people to become the leaders of tomorrow in their own lives and in their community. Scouting is about nurturing pro-active and caring citizens. To be specific; academic research shows that Scouts and former Scouts are more likely to vote, to be politically engaged, they are more likely to be in positions of leadership across the communities and contribute to our society.

Mr Chairman, I think the make-up of this committee might bear this out.

Scouting Ireland has 519 local groups working with and in partnership with local communities. Our youth membership age ranges from 6-26. They are supported by 12,000 volunteers. In 2017 our organisation benefits from an impressive gender balance given our male orientated history. Scouting Ireland is open to all and our membership reflects the communities we serve.

A staff of 35 full-time employees, headed up by our CEO John Lawlor supports this volunteer led organisation. I will now pass you back to John.

CEO's Contribution

Mr Chairman,

Scouting Ireland was established as a successor to the historic scout organisations in Ireland in 2004. Since then it has thrived and currently is at an all-time high in membership.

Membership is growing at a rate of 4% year on year for the last seven years. Based on the most recently available CSO figures, we currently reach 5% of the youth population (6-17 years). In a few moments I will ask our Research Officer, Dubheasa to put context around these figures, which provide insight to the impact we make for young people.

The 12,000 members mentioned by the Chief Scout, represent 30% of all youth volunteers in Ireland. No other organisation is comparable in scale when it comes to total number of trained and vetted youth volunteer's working week in week out with children. Our ratio of professional staff to volunteers is the leanest and most efficient in the sector.

Scouting Ireland's objectives and programmes are aligned to the national policy framework for children and young people: *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* and to the National Youth Strategy. The targeted national outcomes of: being connected, being respected and contributing, of achieving in all areas of learning and development, being active and healthy, having economic security and opportunity and being safe and protected from harm are well served through the Scout educational method and programme.

We strongly believe that the role of non-formal learning, as delivered through Scouting, and its complimentary interaction with formal learning in the development of young people will become increasingly important as we embrace what is generally described as 21st Century Learning. There is clear evidence that positive out of school activity which promotes empowerment and leadership has a powerful effect on outcomes for young people. Very significantly, recent research has demonstrated the positive long-term effect on mental health. Our Scouting method work, our increased membership and youth engagement is a testament to that 110-year method. We have waiting lists for membership in most of our existing Groups.

Like any organisation, or sector of society we have challenges. As an organisation we are finding it increasingly difficult to support our volunteers and youth members in the way we would like due to the cost of implementing additional compliance requirements in areas such as safeguarding, NQSF, charities regulation and governance to give four examples. Noel O'Conner, our operations manager may briefly speak to this.

Like most organisations the impact of Brexit is going to be significant for us. As Ireland's only all island youth organisation it becomes an even bigger challenge, we currently have 60 groups operating in the North. Access to Erasmus+ funding for our groups, access to Peace and Reconciliation funding which help build our world class Scout Centre facility at Castle Saunderson on the Cavan /Fermanagh border, our good working relationship with the Scout Association UK which also operates in the North all now have to be addressed in light of a Brexit. Not to mention our significant number of volunteers and youth members who cross the border on a weekly basis to attend meetings, how will a hard Brexit effect them?

Finally, before I pass you on to Dubheasa and Noel I want to say that we are a project-based organisation and have been engaging in several large project which is it worth bringing to your attention as they better create a sense of what it is we do as a youth movement.

Our Youth Employability scheme is a project we are particularly proud of, and is something we hope to replicate and expand upon in the future. Our 'Lelievlet' boat-building project based in Limerick City aligns with the Government's National Policy Framework objectives. The project aims to provide young people with the skills such as welding and woodwork, to give them FETAC standard qualifications in order to prepare them for work.

Scouting Ireland's is also working on a number of programmes aimed at supporting refugees in Ireland. We run a Refugee Access Programme in conjunction with the City of Dublin Youth Services board aimed at integrating unaccompanied minors into Irish Society. We are also establishing links with Direct Provision Centres around Ireland to break down the stigma that exists in relation to these centres.

In 2015, Scouting Ireland has won an international bid to host the World Scout Moot, to be held in 2021. This 10-day experience will see 6000 international Scouts aged 18-24 from over 120 countries travel to Ireland. It is our hope to showcase Ireland in the best possible manner, but perhaps even more importantly use the experience of hosting such a world prestigious event to develop our organisation.

The single most important objective in winning and hosting this major international event, is to use its preparation and its successful delivery, as a platform for transformational development in Irish scouting. It is that programme of development, that we actively seek your support for today. It's a wonderful opportunity to have the World Moot come to Ireland. It's an opportunity we want to ensure, leaves a lasting legacy.

These are some of the projects Scouting Ireland are currently working on. I would now like to hand you over to Dubheasa and Noel before your hear from our Youth representatives who will give you a sense of what Scouting really means to young people and the impact in their lives.

