Opening statement

from

Dr Joseph Duffy, CEO Jigsaw

to

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

25th of September 2019
Jigsaw warmly welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the vital work of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs.

We all know that adolescence is a time of huge change and upheaval. The journey from childhood to adulthood is complex and challenging, and for many young people that journey can be particularly tough to handle.

Jigsaw’s vision is an Ireland where every young person’s mental health is valued and supported. Jigsaw was established in 2006 (as Headstrong), to meet an identified gap in service provision for young people struggling with their mental health, possibly with emerging mental health issues who did not require the support of specialist mental health services.

Previous research by Jigsaw has shown that a third of Ireland’s young people have experienced mental health difficulties. Our evidence, and our experience of working with young people, tells us that many across Ireland struggle daily with anxiety, low mood, stress and isolation.

The cost of this mental health crisis to Ireland’s economy is a staggering €8.3 billion a year. Not to mention the devastating personal cost to an individual’s quality of life and their physical wellbeing. We know social inequalities are associated with higher rates of mental health difficulties, the more unequal the society the greater the rate of distress. In Ireland, this is particularly relevant given that the gap between rich and poor is growing and the numbers of people finding themselves homeless is on the rise.

The young people we see tell us about how they often feel under tremendous pressure to succeed and excel at school, at home, on the sports ground and in social groups. Jigsaw supports thousands of young people across Ireland every year through our community-based youth mental health services, through our work educating parents, teachers and young people, and through our information and guidance at www.jigsawonline.ie

Since Jigsaw was founded, young people have been involved in helping us to develop and design our services. We now have a Youth Advisory Panel in each of our services and the national office. These panels are made up of young people aged 16 to 25 who may or may not have experience of the mental health system but who all are passionate about this area.

Our youth advisors asked me to emphasise the following to you today:

- A holistic approach is needed to address the causes of mental health difficulties.
- Young people are worried about big issues in society such as inaction over climate change, increased homelessness, academic pressure and the pressure on minority groups.
- More specifically, they are concerned about wait times for mental health support, gaps between child and adolescent and adult mental health services and the cost of private therapeutic support.
- Awareness campaigns are not enough – young people respond better to information from their peers.

In Jigsaw, we believe in intervening early with mental health difficulties, offering a therapeutic service to young people at primary care level. We also believe in listening to each young person’s judgement of their own needs, hence we have a service with no ‘lower threshold’. We aim to construct an
understanding of what is happening in a young person’s life with them, rather than solely through the objective assessment of the clinician as the mental health ‘expert’.

We know that there is no easy fix or miracle solution for mental health problems which can be complex and challenging. But there is much that government and policymakers can do to better support young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

That is why we are calling for an increased focus on mental health services that are proactive, community based, integrated and early interventionist in nature. Investment in keeping people well, rather than waiting until they are very unwell, has the potential to save many lives and significant financial resourcing.

Investing in early intervention, implementing the recommendations of the National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017 will contribute to making a real meaningful difference to the mental health of Ireland’s young people, and give them the best possible chance for a full and healthy future.

We in Jigsaw very much welcome this opportunity to discuss some of the issues that we have raised further during this meeting.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this process.