

Hello, thank you for having us here today. My name is Amy Carey, I am the CEO of Solas Project and am accompanied today by Leanne Lowry, our Youth Work Manager.

Solas Project was established in 2007 as an after-school club and has grown into a wraparound youth work organisation. Based in the Liberties area of Dublin we run a range of programmes - after schools, in schools programmes, youth work, youth justice, streetwork, programmes in prison and a social enterprise.

Our model is one of Long- term consistent intervention. Across our programmes we aim to provide consistent support to the young people most in need in our community. This support begins age 5 and continues into their mid 20s. Ideally, a young person moves from one programme to the next receiving continuous support.

One of our core values as an organisation is Love. By this we mean that every young person deserves to be loved. We are relentless in our pursuit of building long term relationships of trust. We persistently target and pursue young people who are seen as 'hard to reach' and have a fundamental principle that we do not give up on any young person.

A key part of our approach as an organisation is collaboration, one of the most important partnerships we have is with our schools. We currently run programmes in schools supporting young people from 5th class through their transition and into secondary school. In addition to the direct impact of these programmes they also enable us to identify high risk young people and build relationships with them that can lead to support in the community through our other programmes.

This work in schools is currently completely privately funded. Under the UBU rules our UBU youth work team are not allowed to participate in these in school programmes as it is wrongly seen as double funding. We are part of a collective of UBU project leaders who have been petitioning to allow up to 10% of our working hours to take place in schools, we believe that the unique youth work relationship can allow youth workers to deliver programmes, meet young people from gated/new communities and to collaborate with schools as significant stakeholders in the lives of young people.

Last year I came to speak to this committee as part of the Dublin 8 After School Alliance. We were advocating for the restoration of adequate funding for After School projects in disadvantaged communities. Sadly, this situation has since exacerbated.

Currently there is supports in place for children 0 – 6 years under early years funding and then from 10 years up through youth work funding streams. However, for at risk children aged 6-10 there is no statutory funding to support them in their community.

Again, through private fundraising we have kept our after school clubs in place for high need children in our community but our capacity is limited and there are many young people in need of support prior to turning 10.

We recognise that this is not the role of youth work as currently understood but would request that funding be put in place to provide essential supports for these young people. Waiting to offer a young person support when they turn 10 is too late. We all too often see young people under 10 who have disengaged from school and are being drawn into criminality including involvement in the drugs trade in our community. Our inability to offer them much needed supports is short-sighted and will inevitably lead to further costs to the state in the years ahead.

Being based in the South West Inner City, an area that is experiencing significant gentrification, we face the additional challenge of space with a complete lack of suitable youth work or community space in the area. Our community is one that is categorised as very disadvantaged due to high levels of poverty, generational unemployment, high levels of substance abuse, youth crime and antisocial behaviour. We are passionate about breaking the cycle of poverty and believe that youth work is central to this, however the absence of a safe space limits the depth of our work. Historically the young people of our community have been overlooked and we passionately believe our young people deserve a safe space where they can be supported to reach their full potential.

To conclude –

Across our work, currently we fill the gaps in funding we face through private fundraising but this should not need be the case. Today, we are calling for 3 things –

1. Funding for earlier intervention with high risk 6 – 10 year olds.
2. For the UBU programme to allow 10% of youth work time to be spent in schools.
3. For support in developing a designated youth work premises for the young people of the south west inner city.