



## BYSTANDER INTERVENTION – A SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME

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Cathaoirleach and members of the Committee, I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to meet with you here today to discuss consent programmes at second level. The [Bystander Intervention programme at UCC](#) educates and empowers staff and students to recognise all forms of sexual hostility, harassment, and violence, and empowers participants to make safe and effective interventions. It emphasises that no level of unwanted advances or acts of abuse are acceptable, and mandates a collective responsibility to demand better, by recognising and challenging all forms of misogyny, grooming, sexualised comments, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Beyond capacity to recognise behaviours and cultivating a sense of personal responsibility, the programme also emphasises the importance of knowing how and when to make a safe intervention. The considerable range of intervention options is typically a revelation for participants who come to realise that a confrontation is often the least effective approach. Rather participants learn the value of distraction, removal, reporting, creating allies and of course providing support to the victim, and even how finding someone better positioned to intervene may be the best intervention in certain instances. Ultimately all participants realise that whatever their limits, their capacities or their status, everyone has the power to take a stand, we can all be a part of the critical movement for change.

### YOUNG PEOPLE

The RCNI groundbreaking 2021 Storm and Stress study of adolescent experiences of sexual harassment demonstrated the shocking prevalence of sexual harassment and violence amongst young people. As bystanders, 83% had witnessed some form of sexual harassment and 78% said that sexual harassment occurred within their peer community, however, encouragingly 81% felt that, with the support of their peer group, they had the power to address it. Young people must be able to navigate their sexual development, and feel safe in their study, work, home environments, as well as in the greater community.

In noticing and rejecting all unwanted and unacceptable acts young people can effect collective societal and cultural change. A social mandate of zero tolerance and an embracing of each of our capacity to be the difference can shatter the destructive silence and demand a new and shared normal of respect for all.

## SECOND-LEVEL BYSTANDER INTERVENTION PILOT PROGRAMME

Funding was awarded in 2022 by the Irish Research Council to create a bespoke Bystander programme for Secondary School senior cycle students. The pilot content is modelled on the UCC programme but amended to ensure that the language and content is age appropriate, and that the fictional scenarios reflect the lived reality of the second-level audience. The programme was launched in March 2022, with 170 teachers from 50 schools nationally undertaking online training in groups of 10-12 teachers, at 3 hours per training sessions. The appetite for the training and the hugely positive experience reported by the participating schools demonstrates the potential for an all-of-society reach for bystander intervention training. The second level pilot programme has also shone a light on the very challenging and prevalent experiences of young people in Irish society and the urgent need for consistent and evidence-based education to support their better understanding and capacity for proactive responses.

**The overarching aim of the pilot programme is to educate and empower participating students, to identify and demand a new normal of respect, fuelled by a recognition of their own capacity to be agents for change, ensuring a safer and more respectful society for them and their peers.**

The six themed 40 minute workshops are:

1. What is a Bystander?
2. Consent and Healthy Relationships
3. Social Norms and Sexual Harassment
4. Online Harassment and Image Based Abuse
5. Being an Active Bystander
6. Reflection on Learning

Upon completion of the programme, more students agreed that sexual harassment is a problem in their age group, the data gathered illustrates an increased capacity to identify acts of sexual harassment and an enhanced willingness to speak up to support others; second level students feel more capable and willing to participate as pro-active bystanders, illustrating the positive impact of this programme in empowering young people who witness this behaviour within their peer group to respond in a safe way.

## FOCUS GROUPS WITH TEACHERS

Secondary school staff are acutely aware of the issues and harms young people are experiencing and were very enthusiastic about delivering the programme. They found the course content and materials to be age appropriate and interactive for students, enabling rich discussion and peer learning through group work. School staff found the training and support materials provided to them as facilitators, to be very valuable.

**Scoil Chaitríona Glasnevin - *Cian Giblin***

Expressed that what he loves about this programme is how incredibly practical it is, that all the detail is there for teachers ready to use, that it's user friendly, giving him confidence in delivering it. His students really enjoy having a space to debate respectfully with each other

on the issues that arise from the programme. All of the parents signed the consent forms showing the hunger for this education.

**Hamilton High School Bandon - *Deirdre Wolfe***

Expressed how well the programme is being received by students at their school. If there is a match on and half of the class are absent, the rest of the group is visibly disappointed that they miss out on the Bystander class.

**Christian Brothers College Cork – *Neil Lucey***

Regarded the programme as both very interesting and challenging, with great interaction and extremely positive feedback from students.

### **THE FUTURE OF THE BYSTANDER INTERVENTION SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAMME**

The evidence based transformational learning and impact of the programme reflects the committed and skilled facilitation of the programme by teachers across the country who seek to support the positive learning and teaching of sexual harassment and violence prevention and responses for young people. As educators we are incredibly encouraged by the positive learning and teaching experience of participating schools. There is great demand from more schools to deliver the training and we maintain a waiting list of these schools.