

## **Oberstown Children Detention Campus response to COVID-19**

Like many children's services, COVID 19 poses a significant risk to the safe and secure operation of Oberstown Children Detention Campus. In Oberstown, we have been preparing for COVID-19 since early March 2020, determined to protect young people and staff from the risk to their health posed by COVID-19 and to ensure that, as far as possible, any impact on the routines and the rights of young people is minimised. As of today, 7 April 2020, the Campus remains COVID-19 free.

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Director and the senior management team activated the Campus emergency planning procedures and a range of diverse and responsive systems have been put in place to restrict COVID-19 coming onto the Campus. The initial priority was on providing accurate public health information to staff and young people and the Campus has formally linked with the HSE in providing up-to-date and relevant material to staff and ensuring that all communication is in line with Government guidelines.

Priority messaging to everyone working and living on Campus is designed to ensure that handwashing, social distancing, and etiquette around coughing and sneezing is adhered to.

**Young People:** Early planning to identify measures to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 was undertaken.

The Director used his authority under the Children Act 2001, which involved a robust risk assessment process in consultation with the Probation Service and An Garda Síochána, to return eligible young people to the community. All young people on permitted absence are being supported and monitored on a daily basis by a dedicated member of staff. A range of community supports are in place to ensure young people adhere to the conditions set down by the Director as part of their leave.

For young people living on Campus, the focus is to maintain positive and active routines as much as possible.

Family visits, except in exceptional circumstances, have been suspended in line with Government directions, but alternative forms of communication, including Skype, FaceTime and Zoom, have been increased so that young people can maintain regular contact with their families. Feedback from families and young people on the measures the Campus has taken to support and encourage ongoing family interaction has been very positive.

The Oberstown policies and procedures continue to apply, as normal, and no derogation from or modification of these policies has either been sought or granted. If the Director identifies changing circumstances and such derogation proves to be necessary, the Board of Management will be required to grant such approval and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will be notified.

**Care:** Residential Care Workers (RSCW) continue to provide primary care to the young people. The young people continue to enjoy group living within their units, but do not mix with others across the Campus due to COVID-19. They are also continuing with activities and normal routines in their residential units.

**Education:** The school is closed in line with Government directions to close all schools nationally and teachers are not on site. There has been ongoing discussion, between the Principal and the Director, involving the Education and Training Board, as to how best to ensure that education and learning continues to be made available for young people. Due to the importance of ensuring there is direct engagement with young people, to maintain motivation and interest, arrangements to provide education remotely are being implemented. The situation continues to be kept under active review by the Director and the Board of Management.

**Health:** The medical team on Campus continue to address the medical needs of young people. They have been active in managing the risks associated with COVID-19 and developing responses should symptoms of the virus be identified in a young person on Campus. The Assessment Consultation Therapy Service (ACTS) and Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (F-CAMHS) continue to be available to young people as needed while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions. Young people's needs are being addressed. Plans are in place in the event that there is an outbreak of COVID-19 amongst young people with units identified and equipped to provide isolation facilities.

**Offending Behaviour:** Group programmes to address offending behaviour have been discontinued in the current circumstances but individual interventions continue to be undertaken.

**Preparation for Leaving:** Young people on permitted absence or temporary leave are being supported and monitored closely by a dedicated Manager. Direct engagement with families is also in place in a planned and routine manner. These young people will return to Campus if they do not continue to meet the conditions of their absence.

There is daily communication between the campus and the Board of Management and with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. There has been consultations with An Garda Síochána and the HSE and other core services to ensure the safe and secure operations of the Campus at all times.

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