

Joint media release from the HSE/Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland

Improving mental health services for children and young people in Kerry - launch of a new independent advocacy service for young Kerry people using Child and Adolescent Mental Health services

(Note – Domnick Walsh will issue photos to your picture desk as soon as possible after Wednesday's event, which takes place at 3pm).

The Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People Mary Butler, TD today officially launched a new advocacy service available to young people using Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Kerry.

The service is provided by Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland and funded by the HSE.

This is the first time that an independent advocacy service of this nature has been provided for young people using Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in the South West. Independent advocacy services have been available in Galway and parts of Dublin and have successfully helped young people to engage with mental health services in a meaningful way.

An Independent Mental Health Advocate has already started work in Kerry, and is now available to young people using CAMHS in all parts of Kerry.

The goals of the independent advocacy service are to:

- ensure that the voice of young people using CAMHS is heard.
- empower young people and their families.
- ensure there is good communication between young people and their CAMHS team.
- empower young people to raise issues as early as possible.
- assist young people and families to resolve any issues that may arise as early as possible.

Speaking in Kerry today at the official launch, Minister for State Mary Butler said:

“This important new initiative represents a significant step in Kerry to improve an independent advocacy service for young people using CAMHS. I am proud to be here to launch this initiative to empower young people and families to speak up for themselves, to ensure good communication with keyworkers and teams, and to support those requiring advocacy to raise important issues when this is necessary. It is grounded on a rights-based and person-centred approach, which is core to me as Minister. It is widely accepted that meaningful participation and engagement by those using our care services are essential to assisting recovery and this service can only help in that regard. I take this opportunity also to stress that any young person, or their family, who has concerns around mental health should seek help without delay. Our wide range of care services provide real help that makes a real difference to many young people day-in and day-out.”

Also speaking at today's event, Siobhan Dwyer, CEO of YAP Ireland said:

“We are delighted that we are now providing Independent Advocacy Services for young people and families who are using CAMHS in Kerry. We look forward to working with young people and families to ensure that their voices are heard while engaging with our services.

Our independent mental health advocate has already started work in Kerry, and we know that her work is already making a real difference for young people and their families.”

Siobhan Dwyer added:

“This new independent advocacy service gives young Kerry people and their families support, so that they can be clear about the service provided to them. This in turn can enhance their participation, and support young people in their recovery.”

Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer of Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (HSE community services in the region) said:

“We feel very fortunate to be able to offer this independent advocacy service for young people using our Child and Adolescent Mental Health services. At the core of all our mental health services must be a commitment to working towards recovery. We hope that this investment will help young people and their families feel that we are listening to them and consulting with them in a meaningful way. We also hope that our commitment to working with young people will help us to rebuild trust and confidence in CAMHS in the region.”

ENDS

Notes for the editor:

- YAP Ireland was founded in 2002 and today operates in 23 counties across Ireland. YAP Ireland employs 36 full-time staff and approximately 150 advocates. In 2021, 548 young people and their families participated on the YAP programmes, including 399 referred for the first time. For more information, see www.yapireland.ie.
- **About the Independent Advocacy Service:** The aim of this work is to allow young people and parents access to an independent advocate to ensure clarity and understanding of the service provided to them and to enhance their participation in service provision. In 2021, YAP delivered group advocacy to 757 young people and delivered 120 individual 1:1 consultation with young people and parents. YAP’s work is done collaboratively with the staff and involves delivering regular group Advocacy sessions, individual 1:1 consultation, raising the profile of the service through networking to relevant stakeholders and contributing to developing services for young people. The Independent Advocacy Service has been successful in enhancing the voice and participation by young people and families to ensure ownership and involvement in decision making.