

Scouting Ireland
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BOD-OUT-20-2019 – Board Update

27th February 2019

Statement from Scouting Ireland in response to Tusla Letter.

The publication of a letter from Tusla to Scouting Ireland will have caused concern to parents whose children enjoy scouting activities every day in Ireland and to the thousands of volunteers who give unselfishly of their time to these children.

The Board of Scouting Ireland reassures these parents and volunteers, in the strongest possible terms, that safeguarding is front and centre of all our operations. We also fully understand our obligations to meet the expectations of our Minister, Minister Zappone. Over the past 18 months we have put in place an extensive safeguarding programme, led by one of Ireland's most respected safeguarding experts, Ian Elliott. We have fully co-operated with Tusla and the Gardai and have informed them of all we are doing to make sure that Scouting Ireland is safer than it has ever been for our children and volunteers.

Everyone in Scouting Ireland is fully committed to continuing to follow best practice in safeguarding. We recognise the hurt caused to past members and we have acknowledged that our legacy organisations were not as safe a place for some children as we thought them to be. We are working hard to respond to alleged victims who were let down by our organisation.

Scouting Ireland's safeguarding team is constantly engaged with Tusla since that agency was established, with our most recent meeting being on Monday 25th of February. At all times the meetings were conducted in a spirit of co-operation, as both organisations were determined to ensure that any and all allegations of sexual abuse were dealt with in a most comprehensive manner, keeping the alleged victims to the forefront of our discussions. The letter received from Tusla which raises serious questions about safeguarding in Scouting Ireland is deeply concerning

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PATRON Michael D. Higgins PRESIDENT OF IRELAND



Member of World Organisation of the Scout Movement

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and we have sought an urgent meeting with the Chair and CEO of Tusla to understand better their concerns to better enable us to act on them.

Scouting Ireland also wishes to engage urgently with Tusla to better understand the following issues;

- To allege that “the actions of key personnel holding a role in safeguarding may have been compromised” is a serious statement to make and we would like to understand why Tusla has made this statement. This is a most serious allegation, which we would have responded to immediately, had we known or understood Tusla’s concerns. It has not been raised in any of our meetings with Tusla.
- Why is there a need for a subcommittee to be put in place to review the child safeguarding statement and procedures when Ireland’s foremost safeguarding expert, Ian Elliott completed a very comprehensive review in 2018 and Mr. Elliott’s recommendations are currently being implemented by the organisation? Indeed, Tusla has confirmed in writing that Scouting Ireland’s child safeguarding statement is compliant with the legislation.
- Why does Tusla believe “an urgent review of the manner in which Scouting Ireland manages current child protection concerns and disclosures should commence”, given that key statutory agencies in respect of child protection are the Gardai and TUSLA in this jurisdiction and from the outset we have worked closely with both agencies? We have convened interagency meetings to ensure that they understood our procedures and how we were managing disclosures. We have provided Tusla with details of allegations made to us, and fully co-operated with them. We have consistently confirmed that what we were providing to them was what they needed.
- What evidence does Tusla have for to support the request for “an immediate review of the supervision of children involved in scouting”? Scouting Ireland has completed the most comprehensive review of safeguarding, which was conducted by the independent safeguarding expert Ian Elliott. The organisation was also one of the first youth organisations in the country to adopt Children First legislation. Providing a safe environment for young people is a priority for Scouting Ireland and many positive changes have taken place to ensure that children in Scouting today are safer than they have ever been previously.
- It would be helpful to understand what evidence Tusla has for suggesting that "Scouting Ireland should consider the viability of continuing with overnight trips." Overnight trips

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and the experience of camping outside at night is an experience every scout should have the opportunity to enjoy and we have a strong policy framework in place to support this activity in Scouting Ireland. Again this matter was never raised by Tusla in any meetings with our organisation.

- There were one hundred and seventy-five calls to our helpline all of which were responded to quickly and evidence referred to the relevant authorities. we can provide testimonials from satisfied and grateful callers who took the time to thank us for our responses to them.
- The CEO of Scouting Ireland is very much involved with the extensive safeguarding work programme in place so Tusla's nomination of him as the principal liaison person in relation to this work can be put in place immediately.
- Tusla and An Garda Síochána has the statutory responsibility to assess and investigate child protection and welfare concerns. Scouting Ireland has not investigated any cases. However, our safe guarding team has a duty of care to ascertain the basic information required to bring the matter forward.

We are available, as we have always been, to meet with Tusla at any time.

Yours in Scouting,

Scouting Ireland

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