



DEREK CHAMBERS HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE DEAL WITH MENTAL ILLNESS, SAYS CONOR DE LION

INSPIRE CHANGE

THE INSPIRE Ireland Foundation runs ReachOut.com, a support service for young people that provides hundreds of factsheets on everything to do with mental health. I'm director of programmes and policy, which means I'm responsible for the tone and nature of the service. I help ensure that it's relevant to the young people we support and responsive to their changing needs.

I'm based in Cork but our headquarters are in Dublin, so Skype and the phone play a big part in my working week. I often start the day with a catch-up conversation by Skype with the ReachOut team in Sydney or Melbourne. Inspire Ireland is based on the Australian original, which was set up in 1996 as a direct response to rising rates of youth suicide. We are completely independent but affiliated to the Australian and now the US foundations.

We have our team meeting on Monday morning and I join the Dublin office by Skype. Our goal is to help build a positive, supportive online community of young people who help other young people get through tough times. At our meetings, we review our crisis communications and check the weekly metrics for the website. We get a full analysis of visits and time spent and we also look at the impact our Facebook page is having.

I travel to Dublin on Tuesday morning and fit as many meetings as possible into the day. This is when I usually see our programme partners such as BodyWhys, a voluntary organisation that supports people with eating disorders, and Headstrong, an organisation dedicated to youth mental health. This is also a good time to check in with funders such as Atlantic Philanthropies. My visit to Dublin is also a good chance for us to get together as a team – we're six people, including one intern. Sometimes this is linked to an event, such as our recent comedy fundraiser at the Sugar Club. We have something like this every three months or so.

GRAFFITI

We had quite a few events this summer, including a reception at the Australian ambassador's residence and the Kings of Concrete festival for skateboarders and graffiti artists. We also went to Oxegen to promote our services. Wednesday is a Dublin-based office day for me. It gives me a chance to work on the implementation of research strategies and to report on progress. Much of our work is project-based and can emerge out of research or from other educational initiatives. Recently, we developed a Facebook application called Whoop! which gives fans a daily dose of inspiration in their newsfeeds.

I spend a lot of my time preparing for meetings with community partners such as youth councils. Friday is a good day to meet them and I often call in on people such as Jigsaw Kerry, Limerick Youth Services or Cork City's Comhairle na nOg.

I joined Inspire nearly a year ago from the Health Service Executive where I was deputy head of the National Office for Suicide Prevention. I still have good links with the HSE and I'm enjoying the challenge of bringing awareness of mental health issues to a wider base of Irish young people.