



Healthy Food for All

access | availability | affordability

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CONFERENCE TO HEAR THAT FOOD POVERTY IN IRELAND IS RISING WITH OVER 600,000 PEOPLE BEING AFFECTED

***Healthy Food for All* is seeking additional investment to ensure all DEIS schools can avail of School Meals Programme and to ensure at least one Community Food Initiative in each county**

A *Healthy Food for All* conference will hear today that food poverty is on the rise in Ireland with over 600,000 people now experiencing the problem. The conference on *Eradicating Food Poverty among Children and Young People in Ireland* is taking place in the College of Anaesthetists, Merrion Square, Dublin.

Sinead Keenan, *Healthy Food for All's* Project Co-ordinator, explains that food poverty is a growing problem in Ireland with the numbers experiencing food poverty, according to the Department of Social Protection, rising from 10% of the population in 2010 to 13.2% in 2013 – this represents an increase from 450,000 people to over 600,000 in that three-year period.

“Food poverty is a serious problem for children and young people with one in five going to school or bed hungry because there is not enough food in their home. Indeed, a report published in 2012 shows that one in six school-aged children report that they never eat a breakfast on a weekday” Sinead Keenan says.

Ms Keenan explains that schools provide an important platform to tackle food poverty among children. “The Government is providing almost €40 million this year under the School Meals Programme to 850 DEIS schools. However, over 100 of these schools cannot avail of these monies because they don't have the necessary facilities in place to prepare and serve food nor the trained personnel. Today, we're asking the Government – through the Department of Education and Skills – to provide a once-off investment package of €500,000 in 2016 which would ensure that all DEIS schools have the required infrastructure in place to provide a healthy meal to their students.”

Norah Gibbons, Chairperson of Tusla – the Child and Family Agency, points to the importance of food provision in schools based on her agency's work with the School Completion Programmes.

“The value of breakfast clubs before school cannot be underestimated and behaviours and concentration in class improve following breakfast. In addition, the presence of parents for school meals adds to the sense of community and fosters good relationships between home and school,” Norah Gibbons concludes.

In addition to ensuring that all DEIS schools provide school meals, *Healthy Food for All* would also like to see a five-year investment of €2.5 million from Government in Community Food Initiatives so that there is at least one such Initiative in every county. Sinead Keenan explains that Community Food Initiatives improve the availability and accessibility of healthy food for low income groups at local level through community gardens, cookery/nutrition classes, community cafes, supermarket tours and budgeting courses.

“We know from direct experience that they have a life-changing impact on those who take part in them. *Healthy Food for All* currently supports 10 of these Initiatives in the Republic and we would like to see this number increase over five years so there is at least one in every county in the State.”

Sinead Keenan says that the modest measures *Healthy Food for All* is proposing would make an important contribution to tackling food poverty. However, she believes that ultimately what is needed is a National Food Strategy to tackle the problem on a systematic and structured basis – just as Government has successfully done with the tobacco epidemic.

“We’re calling on Government to put in place a National Food Strategy to ensure the affordability, accessibility and availability of healthy food to all members of society. Such a strategy must involve all the relevant Government Departments and state agencies and be developed in partnership with the food and farming industries, consumer groups, the community and voluntary sector, international organisations, business and the public,” Sinead Keenan concludes.

The Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon, says that much remains to be achieved as regards addressing food poverty among children in Ireland.

“With some preliminary signs of economic recovery in view, we must ensure that effective, sustained focus is given to this vital issue for children. Measures to address food poverty among children in Ireland need to be rights-based and underpinned by the State's international legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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Notes to Editors

Healthy Food for All is an all-island charity seeking to address food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups.