

Statement by President Michael D. Higgins

COVID19 Community Outreach

It is a source of the greatest encouragement and hope for the future to know that across Ireland, community groups and individuals are out in numbers supporting people in their local areas with selfless acts of kindness. *COVID-19 Community Outreach*, an initiative of Irish Rural Link and The Wheel and with funding from Government is a shining example. It links and supports the many community and voluntary organisations across the country to ensure that their assistance goes where it is most needed.

Community Champions are now active in every community across the country. They are connecting people who may need assistance and who will benefit at this time from local supports by providing them with the latest information, and helping to make sure that nobody is excluded. As President of Ireland, I take this opportunity to sincerely thank all of you who have been involved and all who have volunteered for making yourselves available to give a helping hand to those who need it now, at this difficult time.

For so many of our citizens, having necessary supplies such as groceries, medicines and other essential items delivered to their door is simply a lifeline. I am particularly conscious of those in the many rural areas, for whom their isolation makes it all the harder to access essential items and services, and there are those too for whom the lack of physical contact with others at this time is particularly challenging and distressing.

Since the beginning of this pandemic, there have been numerous examples of offers of help from people looking to volunteer their time to help the response to

COVID-19. Some have manned crisis support lines or made phone calls to vulnerable members of our communities. Others assist with groceries or medicines for those in need and deliver these to their doorstep. Some have even volunteered their time on the front line at HSE test centres, providing comfort and support at a time of great stress and worry.

Some of the volunteers are giving of their time for the first time. Many have long been making valuable contributions in the communities and it is their networks and contacts that have been so valuable in the past months. None of you seek recognition but I believe that now, more than ever, that it is appropriate and you deserve it, for you represent the best of the Irish response to this crisis.

The ethos of volunteering and actively engaging with fellow citizens is the lifeblood of our society. Active citizenship is surely a most durable insurance against any sense of helplessness or indifference, which might prevent us from reaching out to our neighbours who are in need. The actions of thousands of people like your good selves over these past several weeks have shown that this sense of solidarity is still very strong across Ireland.

You, and all who have been working with you over the past weeks and months have answered the call of your communities. You have made an enormous difference and are continuing to perform a vital service as we slowly emerge from the dark of the pandemic and into the light of a better, shared future.

Molaim sibh agus gabhaim buíochas libh.

Beir beannacht.