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1st December 2020

Dear Group Leader,

A meeting with the County Commissioners and Provincial Commissioners was held recently on the 30th November last. One of the matters we discussed that I would like to follow up with you was around Scouting through Covid and in particular where we need *your* help as Group Leader in protecting the Groups we serve and the Organisation that we all belong to.

The Board recognises that there are Groups who have done a lot of work to provide Scouting for their youth members despite the many challenges COVID 19 has posed. This has been hugely positive, recognised beyond Scouting Ireland and of huge benefit to our young people who have been able to engage in Scouting at this stressful time for them.

We recognise that there are groups who have had difficulty returning to Scouting but have provided Scouting to youth members, as best they can, since March. Also, that there are Groups who have not been in a position for various reasons returned to Scouting since the initial lockdown in March, and do not plan to return to Scouting until 2021.

The most important thing that we can do is to get back to Scouting for the benefit of our Youth Members who need now, more than ever, the supports that Scouting gives them. Currently Scouting can provide them with a safe, structured, educational, and social space for our young people

As we are all aware, in January we have the scheduled Census and there have been communications received by the Board regarding the financial difficulties some Groups may have, in particular those that have not been in a position to return to Scouting yet.

There is an important message regarding the Census that we discussed with the PCs and CCs and I would like to set this out for you also. ***That is the separation of the census return from the registration payments.***

Why is this important?

- We are a Scout organisation first and foremost. Our mission and centre of all our decision-making is, and should continue to be, the young people we serve.
- We need to ensure that the Groups who cannot return to Scouting yet are not closed because of COVID19. We need these Groups to file a census return of all members they expect to return when the Group is in a position to return to Scouting.
- If Groups file a reduced census that does not reflect their current membership, those names removed from the database may not be afforded the supports and protections provided by Scouting Ireland.
- Our funding, or any hope of increased funding or new opportunities to seek funding, will be based primarily on our membership numbers. If this artificially drops by making a reduced census return not reflective of your Scout Group's actual membership, it reduces our ability to retain existing funding levels, to explore future funding and impacts our ability to provide supports for our members

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PATRON Michael D. Higgins PRESIDENT OF IRELAND



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- Although it has always been the norm that census returns are accompanied by the registration fees, we need to look at this as two distinct pieces this year. As explained to the PCs and CCs at the meeting, the Board, at its next meeting on the 12th December, are continuing to examine ways to help Groups that may struggle in 2021. Those that can pay in January as normal, are encouraged to do so as normal.

The Census has two purposes, primarily to collect vital information about our membership numbers for planning and for the grant applications and, secondly, to collect membership fees.

Groups who are inactive or have sections that are inactive because of COVID 19, should begin to communicate with the parents of their members this month, asking them if they want to return to the Group in 2021 when the Group returns to scouting activities. If someone has left and does not intend to return to the Group when it reopens again, they should be removed from the database in the normal way. If, however, they indicate that they do want their child to return when the Group is active again, they should be left on the data base.

For the Census, all Groups, should update the membership database with their information so that Scouting Ireland can plan for the supports of our Groups and, most importantly, our Youth Members.

Secondly the Census is used for the collection of membership fees. Although most Groups have indicated that they will be in a position to return their fees as normal in January, we are aware that there will be difficulties for some members and for some Groups to make their payments. There is a staged payment plan over 3 months and further individual arrangements can also be made with Groups on request.

Early this year the census rebates Scouting Ireland distributed back to Counties was circa €250,000 for the direct support of our Groups.

With that in mind, and again as discussed last night, the Board, at its next meeting on the 12th December, are examining further ways to help Groups that may struggle in 2021. Our aim is to direct funds back to the individual Groups and, in examining all avenues open to us, a communication will issue to all members thereafter.

Please share this information with your Group Councils and we encourage all Groups to complete the Census as normal and, if in the position to, return their fees as normal.

Scouting Ireland has come through a lot in recent years. We have all worked hard together to ensure our survival and we will do the same regarding the impact of Covid 19. Despite the challenges it presents for us all, we will not be defined by this pandemic and we will overcome these challenges, working together, staying strong and Scouting on.

Thank you for your continued service, stay safe.

Regards



Adrian Tennant
Chairperson
Scouting Ireland