



HeadStart Fund 2023 - 2026
Evaluation Tender Briefing Document

Executive Summary

Rethink Ireland is seeking a consultant to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the HeadStart Fund in achieving its stated goals.

Tenders must be submitted by **12pm on Friday, 15 August 2025** to carolinem@rethinkireland.ie with the subject 'HeadStart Fund Evaluation Tender [your name]'

Shortlisting will take place during the week commencing 18 August 2025. If interviews are required, shortlisted candidates will be contacted for availability.

Applicants must be based in and have the right to work in the Republic of Ireland. We expect the successful candidate to commence work in September 2025, with a completion date of August 2026.

The budget available is €25,000, inclusive of VAT and expenses.

If you have any questions about this tender process, please contact:
carolinem@rethinkireland.ie

1. Introduction to Rethink Ireland	4
2. Purpose and intended audience of the Evaluation	4
3. Objectives of Evaluation	4
4. Approach and Methodology	5
5. Criteria and Details of Tender Application	5
6. Deliverables & timeline	6
7. Award criteria.	6
8. Budget	6
9. How to apply	7
Appendix 1	8

1. Introduction to Rethink Ireland

Rethink Ireland is inviting proposal submissions for its HeadStart Fund evaluation.

Rethink Ireland supports the most innovative non-profit organisations working in communities across the country within our key investment areas; Health, Education, Equality, Social Enterprise and the Green Transition.

The HeadStart Fund is a €3 million fund created by Rethink Ireland in collaboration with the Z Zurich Foundation and the HSE. The objective of the fund is to support projects and organisations across Ireland that have an innovative approach to effecting positive mental health outcomes for young people (aged 15 – 24), with a proven track record of impact and a vision to scale.

2. Purpose and intended audience of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to comprehensively assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the HeadStart Fund in achieving its stated goals. This involves a detailed examination of the fund's initiatives and the extent to which they have succeeded in effecting positive mental health outcomes for young people (aged 15 – 24).

With this evaluation we also aim to promote organisational learning and accountability for both Rethink Ireland and our awardees.

The evaluation will generate information on the results achieved and lessons learned to inform Rethink Ireland and the relevant donors (Z Zurich Foundation and HSE). The evaluation results will also inform future fund design and implementation.

3. Objectives of Evaluation

The main objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess to what extent the fund achieved/ did not achieve the objectives of the fund and why.
 - Assess the extent to which the fund has affected positive mental health outcomes for young people (aged 15 – 24).
2. Assess and gather evidence of the fund impact at 3 layers: 1) Awardee impact, 2) Beneficiary impact 3) System Level Impact
 - To determine how well the fund aligned with system level approach to mental health interventions in Ireland;
 - To determine how well the fund aligned with the current needs and priorities of young people experiencing mental health challenges;
 - To consult with awardee organisations to understand to what extent our non-financial supports were effective in building their organisational capacity
 - Engage with a select sample of participants (final beneficiaries) to understand the impacts the projects/services/programmes had on their lives.
3. Formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future fund design and implementation.

4. Approach and Methodology

We welcome applicants' suggestions on suitable methodologies and approaches to undertake this work, but we anticipate elements of the following:

- Desk review of existing information on the fund and awardees' work;
- Primary data collection such as focus groups and key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to Rethink Ireland staff, awardee staff, and people participating in awardee projects. These can take place online or in person, depending on feasibility and mutual agreement with key stakeholders.

Rethink Ireland will make available existing information at the start of this work. We anticipate working closely with the successful applicant to review and facilitate the process. The successful consultant will have a key contact to support with guidance for this work and to facilitate internal and external stakeholder engagement.

5. Criteria and Details of Tender Application

To be the Evaluator of the fund, you will need to have the following skills and expertise;

1. Demonstrate previous experience in mental health related areas
2. Demonstrate lived or learned experience of working with young people (aged 15 – 25)
3. Demonstrate understanding of Ireland's health system and relevant government policies
4. Demonstrate experience in producing published original research and or evaluation reports (where you are responsible for data gathering, analysis, report structure and production)
5. Experience of working collaboratively with others including working with civil society, third sector organisations, NGOs, not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises etc.
6. Clear understanding of relevant social impact metrics that will be used to measure the social impact
7. Proven experience with designing a research methodology – this might include qualitative and quantitative approaches to research design
8. Significant research credentials in the sectors of social impact and health
9. Demonstrate an ability to provide a detailed Budget Plan, Timeline and proposed Team

Applicants must be based in and have the right to work in the Republic of Ireland.

6. Deliverables & timeline

1. Inception meeting with Rethink Ireland team to confirm scope, expectations and communications - on contract signing - August 2025
2. Inception report detailing the approach of the evaluator, a detailed work plan for data collection and evaluation framework - August 2025
3. Data collection, analysis and meetings (including direct engagement with Awardees where feasible) - September 2025 - March 2026
4. Mid-term progress check-in and report (formats to be mutually agreed) - January 2026
5. Presentation of preliminary findings to Rethink Ireland team - July 2026
6. Final evaluation report (format to be mutually agreed) - August 2026

Regular communication with Rethink Ireland team to be mutually agreed.

7. Award criteria.

Tenders will be assessed on the following criteria;

Criteria	% [Percentage]
Quality & Experience	45%
Methodology & Approach	30%
Price	25%
	100%

Rethink Ireland will select the successful candidate on the basis of written applications but may also arrange to interview applicants if necessary for final selection.

Rethink Ireland, at its sole discretion, will select the successful proposal and shall be free to:

- Accept the whole, or part only, of any submission
- Accept none of the proposals
- Republish this request for proposals

8. Budget

Total Budget: **€25,000** inclusive of VAT and any other applicable taxes.

It is expected that any consultant expenses incurred (e.g. travel) will be covered by the daily rate of applicants.

If you anticipate expenses will be required to engage other stakeholders, please make this clear in your proposal, for discussion if you are successful.

9. How to apply

If you have any questions about this tender process, please contact:

carolinem@rethinkireland.ie

Tenders must be submitted by **12pm on Friday 15 August 2025** via email to carolinem@rethinkireland.ie. Please include the subject line 'HeadStart Fund Evaluation Tender[your name]'

- Your written proposal, maximum 10 pages, including;
 - a. Summary of proposed methodology/approach to data gathering and analysis.
 - b. Breakdown of expected allocation of days, including key milestones and timeline
 - c. Budget: please include daily rates, anticipated expenses and any other costs
 - d. References: contact details of two referees we can contact if your proposal is shortlisted, who can speak about your skills and experience regarding past work in this area or a similar area of evaluation.
 - e. Team composition: roles and responsibilities, CVs of main team members (2 pages maximum each)
 - f. Links to any relevant publications from you or your organisation to support your application
- A cover letter which details your relevant skills/experience as listed in the 'Skills and Experience' required section

Appendix 1

The HeadStart Fund is a €3 million fund created by Rethink Ireland in collaboration with the Zurich Foundation and the HSE. The objective of the fund is to find and back projects and organisations across Ireland that have an innovative approach to effecting positive mental health outcomes for young people (15 – 24 y/o), with a proven track record of impact and a vision to scale. It is composed of 10 awardees, spread across Ireland.

Liquid Therapy – A Drop in the Ocean

A Drop in the Ocean (ADITO) is a program that blends beach workshops with ocean time through activities such as surfing, bodyboarding, and bodysurfing. The project is delivered in three Donegal locations; Bundoran, Ballyshannon and Donegal town. Designed with psychologists and psychotherapists, the beach workshops are designed to build a toolkit of resiliency in each young person, imparting practical resilience tools that support everyone in their everyday life, whilst facilitating social connection, physical activity and access to nature.

Childhood Matter – CHIPPS

CHIPPS is a multidisciplinary mental health service designed with an attachment and developmental trauma focused approach to target the complex mental health challenges experienced by children exposed to early adverse experiences. The main areas of therapeutic provision include Play/Art Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Individual Psychotherapy and direct work with carers and foster carers, Group based therapeutic intervention to promote self-esteem and stress management/coping strategies, and consultation with professionals working with children experiencing mental health difficulties.

First Fortnight - Creative Therapy Services for Young Adults

First Fortnight offer creative therapy services, through the modalities of art, drama and music, to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These services are free of charge to support beneficiaries, and for this project, these services are offered specifically to young people aged 15-24.

Hair Together

The Hair Together programme is an early intervention programme tackling the social determinants of mental ill health in young people. Over a 10-week programme, young people are supported by industry volunteers to develop practical hairdressing and barbering skills, alongside evidence-based wellbeing strategies from a psychotherapist to support them to manage mental, social and behavioural issues. Over the course of the programme, young people are challenged to address limiting self-beliefs and develop their skills in teamwork, time management and self-expression, whilst providing them with a career pathway.

Way 2 Work – Leave No Young Person Behind

Way2Work is a wrap-around service promoting and supporting employability to help to improve and maintain the mental health of young people emerging from the Tusla care system and DEIS students. Their mentoring and training programmes support young people with entry into employment, work experience, internships and apprenticeships, as well as acquire new skills including coping mechanisms and mindfulness practices, leading to improved mental health outcomes. Participants are introduced to basic psychoeducation on managing challenging thoughts, feelings, and difficult

situations, as well as activities such as Choice Point, identifying Values, setting Goals and Acceptance skills.

Involve – No Shame Mental Health Programme

The No Shame Mental Health Programme engages members of the Traveller Community to break the shame and stigma of discussing mental health, and increase their confidence and emotional resilience. The project has a multi-tiered approach, comprised of diverse, youth-led programmes that are reflective of the different interests of participants and designed to foster social and emotional learning. Programmes are mostly creative in nature, including game development, podcasting and video creation. Youth leadership training also takes place, led by Youth and Community Workers who mostly come from the Traveller community.

Bohemian Football Club- Pride on the Pitch

Pride on the Pitch provides a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ young people to participate in physical activity and access mental health resources, and challenges discrimination and harassment in the football community. This project delivers a 20-week football training and coaching programme that functions as a safe space for LGBTQI+ young people aged 15-24 to come together to enjoy the mental health and social benefits that football can bring. Mental health resources include counselling services and a dedicated Mental Health Support Worker. A wider systems change agenda exists to increase the inclusivity of Football Clubs through a replicable project toolkit and decrease levels of homophobia and transphobia in football culture.

ShoutOut- ShoutOut Educational Programme for Young People

ShoutOut's free educational programme for secondary schools addresses the urgent need for LGBTQI+ inclusive education to promote resilience and positive mental health outcomes for LGBTQI+ young people aged 15-24. The programme is delivered through Youth Workshops, educational resources and support and training. Youth workshops are delivered in classrooms and cover LGBTQI+ terminology and identity, the impact of bullying, and offer access to support. Educational resources for students include posters, reading lists, and storytelling publications. Resources for teachers and staff include how-to guides, policy templates, informational booklets, and lesson plans.

Tacu Ballinrobe Family Resource Centre – SPACE

The SPACE for Young People project is an early intervention and prevention model working with young people aged 15-24 yrs, who have a higher risk of mental illness and social isolation. Operating from the Ballinrobe Family Resource Centre (FRC), SPACE utilises social prescription to provide support on a one-to-one and group basis. A personalised wellbeing plan with defined goals is created by each participant in collaboration with a Youth Link Worker who connects them with participation and/or educational opportunities in the community. Educational opportunities are provided in collaboration with Youthreach, ETB's, iScoil, etc. Peer groups also take place.

Spunout Academy

spunout Academy is Ireland's first mental health and emotional wellbeing e-learning platform that will provide a range of free online course curriculums to equip young people aged 16-24 with the tools to improve their emotional literacy, emotional regulation, and ability to engage with pathways to support. Course content is youth-informed and directed to meet the needs of marginalised groups.