



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí Department of Social Protection

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Minister Burton addresses the GAA's National Inclusion Forum

Burton: GAA - building a sense of community and identity at local and national level

Minister for Social Protection, Ms Joan Burton TD, today (*Wednesday, 25th May 2011*) addressed the GAA's second National Inclusion Forum. The Forum showcases how far the GAA and the family of Gaelic games have come in terms of being inclusive. The Forum also marks and celebrates African Liberation Day, the UN's International Year of Youth and the EU Year of Volunteering.

Speaking at the Forum Minister Burton said: "The overall theme of today's forum, 'A game changing conversation about inclusion and sport in Ireland', interests me greatly as Minister for Social Protection.

"The GAA has been at the heart of communities throughout Ireland over the past 127 years. The Association was never solely about sport or recreation. It is about building a sense of community and identity, at both local and national levels. We have in the GAA a great national institution focused on pride in the club, community, county and country."

The GAA's National Inclusion and Integration Strategy outlines practical steps to "attract and retain members from all sections of the community" and ensures that "they welcome people from all nationalities, ethnicities, religions, ages and abilities into their sports". The GAA have made significant inroads in terms of inclusion in recent times.

Some of the main projects in 2010 were Disabilities Games Formats which included Wheelchair Hurling and Blind Rounders. 'Have-a-Go/International Days gave members of the new Irish Community a chance to try out Gaelic games' activities. Equality and Disability Awareness Training was provided to GAA Games personnel and the Respect Initiative at the International Rules Series in October clearly reflected the message that the GAA is a diverse Association. This year sees the expansion of the Respect Initiative, an Intercultural Gaelic Football Tournament and Have-a-Go/International Days.

Minister Burton also spoke of the goodwill, generosity of spirit and commitment shown by those who work and volunteer with the GAA. "There are so many socially positive aspects and outcomes associated with the work of the GAA, including the improvement in health that comes from physical activity, the gift of giving people a sense of themselves and boosting morale.



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The Minister continued: "The Government wants to ensure that all people are encouraged and given opportunities to participate in sport and to enjoy all the benefits that sport can bring. To help achieve this, almost €46.9 million was allocated to the Irish Sports Council this year. And of course, GAA County Boards and clubs throughout Ireland have benefited by almost €212million under the Sports Capital Programme helping to transform the quality of facilities available, including dressing rooms, pitches, lights and equipment."

Minister Burton concluded by paying tribute to the President of the GAA, Christy Cooney, and all his colleagues, including Tony Watene, the GAA's National Inclusion Officer, for the wonderful work they are doing in developing and promoting Gaelic games and she wished them well in their future work.

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