

Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland

Thursday 26th July 2018

MIND YOURSELF, MIND EACH OTHER – YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK OUT ON IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Young people from all over Ireland have come together today, Thursday 26th July, to speak out on the issues that affect their mental health and wellbeing, and how we can work together to improve it, at an event hosted by YAP Ireland in the Croke Park Conference Centre today.

The young people, who are all participants on the YAP programme, have been working on projects throughout the year on the theme of 'Mind Yourself, Mind Each Other: Young People Speak Out on Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing.' The theme came directly from the young people themselves from discussions on what they thought was the most important issue affecting young people today.

Siobhán O'Dwyer, YAP Ireland CEO speaking at the event said, "The issue of youth mental health and wellbeing and how we can all work to improve it, is so important to the young people we work with. They are all very aware of the things that can damage their mental health, such as school stress, bullying, poverty, substance abuse, family breakdown and social media. The projects they have presented today focus on the problems they are facing within the community and on how we can work to solve these problems."

"The young people have been working with YAP staff on these projects throughout the year with all the ideas coming from the young people themselves. Some of the projects presented today include a song written and performed by a young person from Louth; sculptures made by young people in Cavan; a presentation from parents in Dublin who started a fitness group; an animation made by young people from all over the country about the hurdles they face that challenge their mental health and how when they can get help from family, friends or professionals things can become easier to manage; and a project from young people in Dublin who met with the Gardaí to discuss how their interactions with the justice system can affect their mental health and wellbeing."

"The projects represent the wide-range of experiences that young people have around mental health and wellbeing and the variety of ways that they find to express their thoughts on the issue. It's vital for us in YAP that we support the young people and families we work with to use their voices to find solutions to the issues they are facing. This annual event is a cornerstone in our work to amplify the voices of young people and parents in society. It's wonderful to see young people who have faced such difficulty in their lives work together and create such powerful and inspirational

projects and to get the opportunity to present them to key decision-makers such as Fred McBride CEO of Tusla and Dr. Fergal Lynch, Secretary General of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.”

Craig Ronaldson, Connacht rugby player and YAP Ireland Ambassador speaking at the event said “Youth mental health has become a growing topic of conversation and rightly so. It’s so important that young people feel comfortable talking about their mental health and that’s why it’s great to see it becoming an increasingly publicised issue.

“Being a professional athlete, the mental side of the game is as important if not more so than the physical side and that is why we have grown to place a lot of importance on maintaining our positive mental and physical health. We are constantly under the spotlight in our profession and at the hands of plenty of public criticism, so I have learnt personally how important it is to be able to talk to people if times are getting tough. Everyone may be dealing with their own issues at some point or another, but the important thing is to find a way that works for you in dealing with them and knowing that talking to someone is a sign of strength and not weakness.”

ENDS

For further information, please contact Aideen Blackwood, Communications Officer, YAP Ireland on 087-2312111 or by email at ablackwood@yapireland.ie

Siobhán O’Dwyer and other YAP representatives are available for interview.

Notes for the editor:

- YAP Ireland is a leading provider of intensive support programmes for young people and families. It uses a strengths-based, family focused approach delivering intensive support over 6 months to young people with complex needs helping them to achieve their goals. For more information, please visit www.yapireland.ie
- YAP Ireland was founded in 2002 and today is operating in 22 counties across Ireland. YAP Ireland employs 32 permanent staff and approximately 150 advocates. In 2017, 487 young people and their families participated on the YAP programme, including 280 referred for the first time.
- In 2017, 83% of young people on the YAP programme reported an improvement in their self-esteem and confidence, 89% reported an improvement in self-harm behaviours, 86% reported an improvement in substance abuse, 77% reported an improvement in anger issues and 83% reported an improvement in their emotional wellbeing. These outcomes are based on data for 1690 young people who YAP have worked with between January 2011 and October 2017, with views of the young people, families,

referrers, advocates and managers measured when the young people enter the programme and then again at their exit.

- The YAP Ireland National Event was attended by young people and families from all over Ireland as well as professionals from social work, youth and mental health sectors. Other speakers on the day included Aidan Waterstone, National Manager, Tusla, Professor Ursula Kilkelly, Chair of the Board of Oberstown Children's Detention Campus, Superintendent Colm Healy, Director Youth Diversion Programme An Garda Síochána, Dr. Fergal Lynch, Secretary General of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Craig Ronaldson, Connacht rugby player and YAP Ireland Ambassador.