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Schools' Newsletter

Issue 6, September 2019

Schools and Wellbeing

Welcome back to school and to the sixth edition of the Walk in My Shoes Schools' Newsletter!

We hope you all had an enjoyable summer. To help you get organised for the academic year ahead, we have enclosed a Year Planner which highlights key dates throughout the school year including World Mental Health Day (10 October).

New School Portal

The School Portal is a private online platform that enables schools to highlight and share what you are doing in the classroom to promote mental health and wellbeing.

The portal will enable you to upload your school projects and share your ideas. It is a private platform with registration required and password enabled.

You must contact WIMS to register and we will provide a log-in password. Only school staff will be permitted to register to gain access.

There are lots of ways to get involved. Inside, you'll see a range of initiatives you can take part in. For a full list of the resources available please visit www.walkinmyshoes.ie.

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New Website

We are delighted to announce we have a new website. We hope you find the content useful and the resources beneficial. We are also thrilled to announce our NEW School Portal.

To stay up to date on all our events and initiatives, sign up to our eNewsletter. You can do this on walkinmyshoes.ie



Foreword by CEO, Paul Gilligan



The mental health of a school has a significant impact on the community it serves. Most children benefit from the psychological and emotional reinforcement school gives them and even those with the greatest emotional challenges will thrive emotionally with the right school experience.

This is why focusing on mental health and emotional wellbeing is so important.

Children are our greatest asset

Embracing a whole school approach to education has been central to the Irish education system for a number of years. Educators have led the way in understanding the value of seeing the unique potential and challenges of every child and on helping them develop emotional strength and resilience as a means to achieving their potential.

Schools are not only driving psychological health but are often at the front line of responding to mental health challenges. Most schools are grounding their ethos in a human rights approach, seeking to empower the young people they work with. This work deserves to be supported.

Working in partnership with schools

Over the last eight years, St Patrick's Mental Health Services has sought to work in partnership with schools across Ireland to enhance the mental health of young people and indeed, all those involved in the school community. Through our Walk in My Shoes awareness campaign we have developed initiatives such as #MindYourSelfie, the Mission Possible School Achievement Awards and the Frame of Mind film competition as a means of providing support to the tremendous efforts schools in Ireland are making to create mentally healthy cultures.

We realise that the greatest resource available to schools is the work that other schools are engaging in around mental health.

For this reason, we will be launching 'The School Portal' this September. This will be a member-based online platform that enables schools to highlight and share what they are doing in their schools, classrooms and communities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. It will be the first, and only platform in Ireland that seeks to capture in one place, the great work that is being done in both primary and secondary schools around the country, and will enable school staff to upload their projects and share their ideas.

Walking the walk

Promoting mentally healthy living among our young people can only happen if we protect and enhance our own mental health. Schools are beginning to broaden their approach to include promoting mentally healthy work practices. This, alongside the work being engaged in to support parents and families, is to be commended.

Teaching has become more complex and more demanding. The breadth of responsibilities and tasks teachers are expected to perform alongside academic instruction are now broad ranging.

Through dedication and commitment teachers are a driving force of change within Irish Society, helping young people to value diversity and difference. This is particularly apparent in young people's attitudes to mental health and the stigma surrounding those experiencing mental health difficulties. Through the education system, Irish Society is beginning to tackle the deeply ingrained stigma, enabling people not only to openly discuss their mental health, but also to seek help when they require it.

A success worth protecting

The Irish education system, despite its many challenges, is recognised internationally as one of the best in the world. Over the last number of years it has led the way in embracing the enhancement of mentally healthy living and through these efforts is transforming communities. This work by committed staff, empowered pupils and engaged parents is worth celebrating and protecting.



Students from Rathbeggan National School

Schools' Corner



Friendship Initiatives at St Kilian's Junior School, Tallaght

We are a Junior School, based in Tallaght in Dublin, that caters for both girls and boys between the ages of four to eight. Over the past number of years, wellbeing has been at the core of our programme at St Kilian's. Several years ago, our local Men's Shed designed and constructed a beautiful 'Buddy Bench' in the school yard. At the beginning of each academic year, class teachers teach the rules of the Buddy Bench. If a child has no one to play with at yard time, they sit on the bench and other children come to them and ask them if they want to play. The concept promotes happy and inclusive playtime for all children.

At the end of the school year, NINA, our local suicide prevention organisation, present Buddy Bears to the ten kindest children in the school, one per class. Buddy Bear himself comes to present the awards and it is a lovely occasion for all the children.



Teachers and students of St Kilian's NS, Fergus Finlay (Former CEO, Barnardos), Paul Gilligan (CEO, SPMHS) and Amanda McArdle (Project Manager, Walk in My Shoes)

In our Junior Infant yard, we have a Friendship Stop where children can wait for someone to play with. This alerts other children to the fact that there are children who are very shy or have poor language skills who often need a friend at yard time but don't have the skills to ask. Our school celebrates Friendship Week in February every year, with a week full of wonderful strategies to promote friendship and positive mental health. We have a beautiful tree lasered from wood in our school hall, which is called Our Tree of Thankfulness. All children received a leaf shaped tag on which they drew and wrote about being a good friend.

In recent years, we have become aware of a huge increase in levels of anxiety in the children we are teaching. During this year's Friendship Week, all teachers engaged in lessons about red thoughts (negative thoughts) and green thoughts (happy thoughts). The lessons helped children to identify both and gave them the skills to turn their negative red thoughts into positive green thoughts. Any anxieties that developed from friendship and inclusion issues were specifically dealt with during Friendship Week.

Noreen Coll, Deputy Principal and Wellbeing Co-ordinator.



Walk in My Shoes TY Programme

I applied for the Walk in My Shoes programme because my dad was a service user at St Patrick's University Hospital and I wanted to understand more. The programme was an eye-opening and educational experience and it gave me an opportunity to understand how St Patrick's helps people with mental ill-health. It also gave me the motivation to raise awareness on taking care of our minds as much as we do our bodies.

Mental illness scared me. I always thought that the word "illness" meant a physical injury that can be fixed with a visit to the doctor but when my Dad got sick, that idea was turned on its axis.

It is human nature to fear the unknown - if mental illness was discussed at all, it was usually a negative portrayal. I learned so much from the doctors and nurses who took the time to talk to us about everything, from coping with anxiety in young carers to pressures for adolescents in society.

I really benefited from, and enjoyed taking part in Cardiac First Aid, and being involved in a mock multidisciplinary team meeting which involved analysing a scenario and learning how the team managed the service user's difficulties.

It was a great privilege to be asked to speak at the graduation ceremony in May. When I returned to school I was involved in The Amber Flag Committee and we organised a Mental Health and Wellbeing Week where we organised multiple activities to help raise awareness on mental health. I addressed all our students at assemblies with a little presentation on taking care of your own mental health but also about being understanding to others around you.

I cannot recommend the programme highly enough - it was an experience that will stay with me for a long time to come.

Sarah Hennessy, Cross & Passion College, Kildcullen.



Call to Action at Rosmini College

We in Rosmini Community School have had a wonderful year promoting mental health amongst our student body. We prepared a series of initiatives to help empower the young people in our school to play a more active role in caring for their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Friendship Day

We organised a Friendship Day in September for our first-year and TY students. Through a series of group activities such as speed dating, musical chairs and model building, both year groups got to know each other in an informal setting. Our TY students were encouraged to help them settle into secondary school life. The success of Friendship Day could be seen clearly in the fun and laughter of all students who mixed well.

Wellbeing Week

In November, we held a Wellbeing Week for the whole school community. Each day of this week was focused on raising awareness of a key indicator of wellbeing as outlined in the Junior Cycle.

On Monday of Wellbeing Week, third year students explored the holistic benefits of creatively managing stress in a workshop that included Mandala Colouring and Play Therapy. Fifth year students identified effects of anxiety on the body and learned mindfulness skills to help prevent the onset of distress. Sixth year students developed personal care plans to be more mindful of their wellbeing in a busy exam year.

Tuesday kicked off with second year students learning about healthy eating and nutrition and preparing a table of fresh fruit, snacks and vegetables. A lunchtime 'dancercise class' was organised to promote exercise. Even some of our teachers and SNA's showed off some of their dance moves for this event. We felt it was important to bring first year and TY students back together again for our 'Walk a Mile with a Smile Challenge' where they were paired up for a morning stroll in the local area - a reminder to students that switching off the games console and getting active outdoors with friends can also be fun.

On Wednesday of Wellbeing Week, we reminded students of the powerful role that they each can play in improving the mental health of others. Our fifth year student mentors gave every one of their peers, love-heart sweets and an uplifting message, reminding them of how valued and appreciated they are.

Our school choir organised a special concert for the elderly residents of Nazareth House. Our students served tea, coffee and cakes to the residents afterwards. It was so lovely to give our students the opportunity to see the joy and light they can bring to the senior members of their local community.

Thursday's theme focused on making students more aware of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Third year students learned that their response determines how well they can overcome difficult circumstances in an 'Improve our Wellbeing' workshop. They engaged in a series of mindfulness exercises to help reduce stress levels and to increase relaxation, self-esteem, confidence and resilience. Fifth years were encouraged to practice self-compassion more in their lives in a Loving Kindness Guided Meditation.

Wellbeing Week came to a fitting close with 'Laughternoon' on the Friday. During this event, the drama club showcased a series of stand-up comedic performances to bring fun and enjoyment to the students in the audience. The message behind this event was to encourage students to not always take life too seriously and as a reminder that there are lots of healthy mediums in which to express their thoughts and feelings. Money raised went to Pieta House.

Promoting Inclusion

Our school caters for students who have a visual impairment. In recognition of their bravery in learning to be more independent and overcoming the many obstacles that they face daily; our mentors invited our visually impaired students to create works of art from clay with peers who they were buddied up with in March of this year. This recognised and celebrated the ability, determination and creativity of our visually impaired students, which is fundamental to sustaining their overall wellbeing.

We are so grateful for the support that we received from Amanda and her team in St Patrick's. It was an absolute privilege to receive an invitation to the Mission Possible School Achievement Awards and never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that we would win first place in the Secondary Schools category. It was a wonderful recognition of our work and the highlight of our year.

Chris Gueret, Rosmini Community School

Youth Mental Health

Promoting positive mental health in the classroom



One of the most pervasive problems that is emerging in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is the rise in referrals for anxiety and depression. Although these are common presentations over a number of years, the volume and intensity of these difficulties seems to be changing. Traditionally, these issues could be associated with an incident of trauma or an adverse life event, such as a bereavement/ loss, a history of extensive bullying or an acrimonious parental separation. However, what is observed more recently is an increase in the incidence of these symptoms in the absence of such events.

Some of the young people who present, report a relatively uneventful upbringing and good experience of childhood, yet there seems to be a numbness or an emptiness that is being described which is causing them to be anxious and feel low. This seems to be centred around a sense of not feeling 'good enough' and is often accompanied by a collection of high expectations. Some of this has been explained by suggesting that children lack resilience and mental toughness and so even the slightest adverse life event can spiral them into a crisis.

Although this may appear to be the case from the outside looking in, my experience of talking with these young people suggests something different.

For me, this experience of unexplained unhappiness is best understood as a problem with expectations. There is a contemporary narrative out there that we need to be happy all the time, and the advent of social media and mass communication means that young people are being sold an idea of what life should be like, which is not representative. The social media narrative suggests we need to be happy all the time and that we need to share this with everyone. And if we are not happy or 'not ok', then we need to talk about this too and this will solve the issue. However, this advice is not always true. Sometimes talking to someone about a life of subjective discontent, does not immediately change how the young person feels and perhaps they may need to develop skills to readjust the way in which they see the world, which often requires more than just a 'chat'. The 'have a chat and you'll feel better' although well intended may be further inflating unrealistic expectations and leave young people feeling that nothing can work to help them to feel better. In my view we need to address this culturally.

We need to provide children with an accurate narrative about the concept of life. Explaining that it has its ups and downs and that unhappiness, disappointment and boredom is part of living and a part of life that we should expect, and therefore learn to negotiate.

We need to challenge the social media narrative which suggests that we should all be happy all the time and we all need to be 'special'. Remember if we are all special then no one is special. There will be things in life where we excel and things where we will struggle. There are aspects of life that are to be enjoyed but there are also aspects that need to be endured. Having a realistic view of this will help us to cope when adverse events inevitably happen.

As the adults in the room, we have a responsibility to provide young people with an accurate expectation of the world and as parents and teachers we have a pivotal role in creating a lens with which our children that includes context, reality and perspective.

Dr Colman Noctor, Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytical Psychotherapist, St Patrick's Mental Health Services.



WILLOW GROVE

Adolescent Unit

Willow Grove Adolescent Unit is a specialist mental health service for young people aged between 12-17 years. Located at St Patrick's University Hospital, we provide a multidisciplinary assessment of adolescents where the referrer has significant reason to believe that the adolescent has a mental health difficulty that requires inpatient care.

Willow Grove offers a comprehensive range of interventions including medical, psychiatric, psychological, social and educational interventions and support. Our inpatient unit operates a Therapeutic Milieu model which is a safe and supportive environment in which we work to enhance the young persons' motivation to move towards recovery and developing skills to improve and maintain optimum mental health. Our staff work towards a young person's recovery in collaboration with them and their family. We provide treatment for a range of conditions including the following:

- Mood disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Eating disorders
- Psychosis
- Hyperkinetic disorders e.g. ADHD

Dean Clinic

The Adolescent Dean Clinic is based in Sandyford and Cork and is an outpatient service providing assessment and recovery-focused therapy in the community for a wide range of mental health difficulties. Referrals to both Willow Grove and the Outpatient Dean Clinic are accepted from Child and Adolescent Mental health teams and GPs.

Ways to Get Involved



Mission Possible: School Achievement Awards



Mission Possible recognises the great work schools do and acknowledges their effort and contribution to tackling the stigma surrounding mental health, both in the classroom and in the wider community. All schools are welcome to apply for Mission Possible; the shortlisted schools are invited to an award ceremony

in St Patrick's Mental Health Services. The application process will open in January 2020 and will close in March. The awards ceremony will take place before the April midterm.

Walk in My Shoes Radio



Walk in My Shoes Radio (WIMS FM) is Ireland's only pop-up radio station that is dedicated solely to the promotion of positive mental health. Run by St Patrick's Mental Health Services during World Mental Health Week each October, WIMS FM broadcasts over 70 hours

of live shows from a pop-up studio at St Patrick's University Hospital. Schools can get involved in our School Special Programmes which will air throughout the week. For more information and to see the schedule visit www.walkinmyshoes.ie

Funky Shoe Days

We encourage schools and students throughout Ireland to highlight the importance of taking care of our mental health by hosting 'Funky Shoe' days where students and teachers step out of their comfort zone by wearing shoes they normally wouldn't wear to school. This can be a great alternative to a 'no-uniform day'. Posters and flyers are available for download on www.walkinmyshoes.ie. There is no specific date to hold a Funky Shoe Day. Schools can pick any date. Don't forget to send us your pictures... we love to see them!

Film Resource and Teacher Guide

This resource was created for teachers to use in the classroom with their students. The film has a 'pause, play' system where teachers are prompted to 'pause' the film and refer to their 'teacher's manual'. The manual consists of questions which teachers can ask their students, along with important points to reiterate. You can access the film and download the teacher companion guide on www.walkinmyshoes.ie



#MindYourSelfie Day

Each year on #MindYourSelfie Day we ask schools to post a selfie to their school's social media accounts, using the hashtag #MindYourSelfie, to promote positive mental health and encourage conversation around mental health. Why not get your entire school involved? The next #MindYourSelfie Day will take place in April 2020. On #MindYourSelfie day, we release a new schools resource, so watch this space!

Short Film Competition



Every year, Walk in My Shoes runs a short-film competition called 'Frame of Mind'. Budding film makers are asked to submit a short film (2-3 minutes long). The shortlisted films are viewed at a film screening and award ceremony each year where our judges select the three winning films. There are two categories; Secondary School and General. The competition will open in September 2019 and will close in late November. The awards ceremony will take place in early December.

Keep an eye on www.walkinmyshoes.ie for confirmed dates on all of the campaigns featured.

Teacher Training Day

Due to the success of our first information day for teachers and those who work with children, we will be running another event in Spring 2020. Keep an eye on www.walkinmyshoes.ie for further information.