

PAUL O'CONNELL MENTORS THINK BIG PROJECTS IN LIMERICK

IRISH RUGBY STAR LENDS HIS SUPPORT TO THE THINK BIG PROGRAMME

Wednesday 30th November 2011: Irish rugby star Paul O'Connell was in Limerick yesterday to mentor a group of young people who are participating in the nationwide Think Big programme. Think Big has been designed by O2 and Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, to enable young people to do projects in their community that will make a difference to theirs and to other's mental health. At the O2 customer care offices in Limerick, Paul O'Connell mentored participants from five Think Big projects, helping them to bring their ideas to life. The Ireland and Munster Rugby player focused on the importance of positive mental health, teamwork and motivation, drawing on his own experiences as a leader and member of several successful teams.

Mentoring is a key part of the Think Big programme, which is open to any young person in the Republic of Ireland, aged between 14 and 25, with an idea for a project that will make a difference to young people's mental health.

Sinead Smith, Corporate Responsibility Manager at O2 said: "The mentoring process within Think Big is hugely important as it provides useful tools and guidance to support young people in bringing their ideas to life. Almost one hundred O2 employees in Limerick and Dublin have signed up to mentor Think Big projects to date. We're delighted that Paul O'Connell agreed to be involved and has shared his knowledge and inspiration with the Think Big participants."

Speaking at the event, Paul O'Connell said: "I really admire the young people involved in Think Big as they are being proactive about making a real difference in their local communities. The project ideas are fantastic and I was proud to be able to share my ideas with this group and hopefully help them to achieve their goals."

The Think Big projects that Paul addressed include:

- **King's Island Drop in:** Elaine Flynn from Kings Island in Limerick plans to create a drop in café for young people in one of the Limerick Youth Service properties. Elaine's idea came about in response to the amount of anti-social behaviour in her community with many of those involved claiming that there was simply nothing else to do. Elaine's plan is to develop a youth friendly space and invite potential users of the café to paint and help create a space they could relate to and feel a sense of ownership of.
- **FML website:** Robert Gould from Turners Cross, Cork wants to create an online resource for FML, a theatre production produced by and for the Cork Midsummer Festival. The show looks at teenage life in Ireland today and touches on many topics, including bullying, body image issues, depression and suicide.
- **Smiles all round:** Josie McGrath Ryan from Mallow, Cork wants to create a games tournament in her school. According to Josie: "A games tournament would benefit our

school dramatically and give students a place to go at lunch time. The ultimate aim is that students can feel part of something, make friends and feel better about themselves.”

- **Happy thoughts for a day:** Vikki Hutchinson from Birr, Co Offaly wants to spread positivity and happiness in her school by creating posters with positive quotes and decorating her school with them.
- **Footsy Friday:** Jonathon Collins from Garryowen and the Limerick Youth Service organised a once-off Astro turf soccer tournament in November for under 15s five-a-side teams from all over Limerick. Each team had their own different colours jerseys with positive mental health slogans printed on them. Following the success of this project, Limerick Youth Service is working with young people in the area with a view to submitting more Think Big projects in 2012.

The Think Big Programme is open to any young person in the Republic of Ireland, aged between 14 and 25, with an idea for a project that will make a difference to young people’s mental health. In addition to receiving funding, each Think Big project group gets support from O2 and Headstrong in the form of mentoring and training to help them to bring their proposal to life. They also receive a mobile phone (with €50 credit), and a Think Big start-up pack.

Since its launch in September 2010 Think Big has funded nearly 100 projects throughout the country and will be running more mentoring workshops over the next few months with rugby stars Brian O’Driscoll and Johnny Sexton.

For more information on Think Big, log on to www.o2thinkbig.ie

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