

MINISTER FITZGERALD LAUNCHES SCHOOLGIRL'S 'THINK BIG' MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

20th February 2012: Frances Fitzgerald T.D., Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, was in St. Joseph's College, Lucan today to officially launch a mental health awareness project developed by student Maeve DeSay, with support from Think Big. Maeve's project, entitled 'Need a Hand', saw her and members of the St. Joseph's student council develop a hard plastic card featuring names and contact details of eight mental health organisations that they felt were relevant to young people. Maeve received funding and support for her project from Think Big, a programme 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 young people's mental health.

Minister Fitzgerald said of the project: "I would like to congratulate Maeve and all her class mates involved in this fantastic initiative. This project asked young people throughout the country to 'think big' – and that's exactly what happened here in Lucan. The 'Need a Hand' card, developed by Maeve and her team, is a practical tool for young people in need of support. Teenagers in difficulty often turn to one another to seek support; and that's why it's crucial that our young people are mental health aware and know where to seek help when it's needed. This handy card is the perfect guide. It provides direction on the next steps forward and I have no doubt that it will make a real difference to young people across the country.

"I have worked very closely with mental health organisations such as Headstrong, Amnesty International and Pieta House and I look forward to working with all my ministerial colleagues, in particular Minister for State Kathleen Lynch, as we seek to improve child and adolescent mental health services, to take on board the views of young people in this regard and to deliver on the programme for government commitments on mental health. Congratulations to Maeve and the students here in St. Joseph's College on their success. I hope that more schools, right around the country, get involved in the 'Think Big' Campaign."

Maeve explained the background to her Think Big project: "The student council wanted to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues in our school and create a support system that encourages people to reach out to each other. Think Big provided us with the support and resources to bring our vision to life. We developed a card featuring the names and numbers of various mental health services that we felt would be helpful for any young person in distress. The outstretched hand on the card symbolises that help is always on hand. We also created bracelets featuring the same logo which was designed by my classmate Diane Meyler. To date the project has been a huge success and the positive change in the school atmosphere is amazing."

Sinead Smith, Corporate Responsibility Manager at O2 said: "The Think Big Programme is open to any young person, aged between 14 and 25, in the Republic of Ireland with an idea for a project that promotes positive mental health. Ideas can be submitted at any time for consideration at www.o2thinkbig.ie and successful projects receive funding and support from O2 and Headstrong in the form of mentoring and on-going training to help bring the ideas to life. Since Think Big was launched in September 2010, over 120 projects have been developed by young people to make a difference to young people's mental health."

Tony Bates, Founder Director, Headstrong said: “Maeve’s project is an excellent example of how young people, given the opportunity, have an important role to play in changing how we think about mental health. Through Think Big, Headstrong can give that opportunity to young people across Ireland. There is an extraordinary breadth and depth to the projects - of which there are over 120 - now up and running. It is very inspiring to see young people’s commitment to creating positive mental health for their peers.”

More information is available at www.o2thinkbig.ie

-Ends/-

Contact Details:

Ruth O’Byrnes, Q4 Public Relations

01 475 1444 / 086 055 8331