

Good evening everyone,

I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak and represent the views of young people today. When given the topic from my youth group leader “Life as a teenager in Ireland today” I knew exactly what to speak about.

My name is Eric O’Connor and I am a 17 year old student from Mountmellick, Co Laois. I am the definition of a “young person” and today I am here to speak and describe life through the eyes of a young person.

Growing up in Ireland nowadays is very different than previous generations. The rise of social media plays a key factor in the lives of young people today.

A quick disclaimer before I begin. No, not all teenagers are the stereotypical, moody troublemakers who sit in their rooms playing video games, contrary to popular belief. Teenagers and young people are incredibly inspiring and motivational people who are the very future of our nation.

As I mentioned earlier, the rise of social media has been an important factor in the lives of young people today. With the ability to instant message someone half way across the globe, the convenience and reliability of the internet proves itself day after day, however this reliance can often lead to over reliance and in a lot of cases even more serious outcomes.

The rates of self harm and suicide in young people has sky rocketed as opposed to previous decades and social media has played a menacing role in this. Too many young people are affected by this devastating experience, which leads me on to my next point.

I am sure young people can agree with me when I say that there isn’t a young person in this

country that doesn't know what mental health is or what it means. In young society, the words are buzz words and ones that everyone has had experience of at some point or another. In young society the rate of bullying including cyber bullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying is still high. This is being tackled and I hope someday young people can live in a world where we are all respected and our voices are heard no matter who we are or where we come from.

Another issue affecting young people today is how we feel that adults and decision makers are talking at them and not with them when it comes to issues affecting them. Youth participation and consultation is a vital part in research gathering especially when the topics being researched are youth based. As you have heard, young people today still have a lot to improve on but progress is being made. With supports and groups for youth empowerment young people today are given so much more potential to express themselves and these opportunities should be grasped with both hands.

The Mountmellick Youth Development Centre is a perfect example for youth development and empowerment for young people and families in the town of Mountmellick. As a member for ten years I have drastically changed since I walked through the doors in 2007. This group has not only made me more confident, but so many others too. I could not describe the passion and respect I have for this project and all the leaders who devote their time for the betterment of young people.

I thoroughly believe there needs to be more groups like MYDC in this country because I can honestly say I have never met a more hardworking and beneficial group of people in my life, to be honest with you I probably wouldn't have gotten up and given this speech had it not been for the confidence I have developed.

Another platform that young people can use to have their voices and opinions heard is Comhairle na Nog and the Comhairle na Nog national executive who work on projects based on feedback from young people on issues affecting them, both on a county and national level respectively.

As the former chairman of Laois Comhairle na Nog and with three years experience I have seen incredible work done to listen and take into account the opinions and voices of those who may never have the opportunity to speak up.

One last topic I would like to discuss is about second level education and the transition to third level education. Nowadays in secondary school students are no longer worried about being given a slap of a wooden ruler like in previous decades, instead students are applying unhealthy tension and pressure to themselves with the new CAO and marking scheme for third level education. This is because college is changing and there are more courses now than ever before. In our modern and constantly changing society there are so much more opportunities, and courses are changing to account for the world of work and the demands from each sector. Also I could talk about Brexit in relation to young people but I believe that is a speech for another time.

In conclusion, life as a young person in Ireland today like anything has its pros and cons, but the future of us young people is bright and anything is possible.

I want to thank you all for listening and I hope this gives you some insight into life through the eyes as a young person in Ireland today. Thank you.