

Intervention by Frances Fitzgerald TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland

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The advertisement you have just seen was made because young people in Ireland said they wanted a mental health awareness campaign aimed at teenagers.

It was launched on World Mental Health Day, in October 2009 and is still screened on TV and in cinemas today.

It was developed in an unusual way, which involved two Government Ministers, two Government Departments, two State agencies, non-government agencies, the national youth parliament and many other young people under the age of 18.

During 2008, it was recognised that young people had not been included in the consultation process that informed the National Mental Health Policy *A Vision for Change*. A commitment was made to get young people's views on mental health services and to develop an awareness campaign aimed at young people.

By complete co-incidence, the top recommendation from the national youth parliament 2008 was the need for 'a positive mental health advertising campaign aimed at teenagers'.

The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) agreed to organise consultations with teenagers on mental health during 2008, in co-operation with the Health Service Executive, the National Office for Suicide Prevention,

the Department of Health's Office for Disability and Mental Health and young people from the youth parliament and the OMCYA Children and Young People's Forum.

Every second-level school in the country was invited to send students to consultations in six locations throughout the country, called *Teenage Mental Health: What Helps and What Hurts*.

277 teenagers aged 12-18 years, took part in the consultations during October 2008 and were selected to ensure a broadly representative spread regarding age, gender, geography and social background. Young participants were told that their views would inform the development of a national awareness campaign aimed at teenagers. Adult decision-makers from relevant Government Departments and agencies observed at the consultations.

The consultations were conducted by the OMCYA with an independent consultant and children's participation officers who are funded by the OMCYA. An Open Space method was used, that allows participants to identify the issues of most importance to them, which become the discussion topics. This is particularly useful with children and young people, as it allows them to set the agenda rather than adults.

The report of the consultations was launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and young consultation participants in June 2009 and received huge media attention.

The report noted that the top 'hurts' to teenagers' mental health were being judged for how they look; school and exam pressures; the death of a family member or friend; the lack of facilities and; the effects of peer pressure and bullying.

The top ‘helps’ to their mental health were having a youth cafe or safe space to hang out with friends; reform of the exam system with a move to more continuous assessment and; having less homework with more time to socialise and relax, especially at the weekends.

Pre-Advertising Campaign quantitative research was conducted in 2009 and obtained the views of 505 young people on issues that affect their mental health. This research confirmed the findings from the *Teenage Mental Health: What Helps and What Hurts* consultations on the negative impact on teenagers of poor self-image, school and exam pressures, family problems, bullying and isolation.

Following the consultations and research, concepts for the TV/cinema advertisement and awareness campaign were focus tested in several forums of young people around the country, including a group of young people who had taken part in the consultations.

A reference panel of 25 young people was set up to become involved in the development of the advertisement. Young people from the national youth parliament, the OMCYA Children and Young People’s Forum and other organisations were involved in this panel.

The reference panel gave feedback on creative concepts and messages at every stage of the process of developing the advert. They advised on everything, from the ideal accent for the main character to the most appropriate clothes for the actors, to appeal to the widest possible audience of teenagers. They also advised on the TV time-slots for screening the advert to ensure viewing by a maximum number of teenagers. Young people from the reference panel featured as extras in the advert.

Post campaign quantitative research was conducted in 2010 with 505 young people and found that the TV/cinema advert had an exceptionally high level of recall and awareness among teenagers of 87%. A recall/awareness rate of 49% is the Republic of Ireland norm for TV/cinema advertisements from a cross section of industries.

The research shows that the advertisement had the following impacts:

- **Motivated 3 in 4 young people to talk to someone if something is getting them down**
- **Encouraged them to find out more about looking after their mental health**
- **Made them think differently about mental health**

The unusually strong impact of the advertising campaign in achieving excellent and lasting results highlights a number of key messages for Ministers and Governments in meaningfully involving children and young people in decision-making:

- **The importance of inter-departmental and inter-agency working;**
- **The importance of allowing children and young people the space to identify the issues of most importance to them;**
- **The need to stay with the process of getting the views of children and young people, even if it is intensive and prolonged;**
- **The importance of involving children and young people from the beginning and at every stage of a project.**

Optional and if time allows.....

The last time I saw this advert screened was at the Working Together for Positive Youth Mental Health Forum, hosted by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in June of this year.

I was involved in this Forum because I have a strong interest in youth mental health and because staff in my Department played a pivotal role in supporting the involvement of young people in the making of the mental health advertisement.

Over one hundred young people and representatives from organisations who work in the mental health area also took part in the Forum.

The Forum was addressed by Dónal Óg Cusack, a very prominent national sportsman, who spoke passionately about his own journey from shame and secrecy to openness and confidence about his homosexuality. He compared stigma to the lack of confidence that this country feels about itself in the wake of so much that has gone badly for us in recent years. 'Now, more than ever', he said, 'we need confident strong young people to get the country back on its feet'.

Adel Hickey, a 17 year-old member of the national youth parliament, spoke about the need for improved Social, Personal and Health Education in schools, particularly in the areas of mental health and sex education.

The main themes that emerged from the Forum were:

- the need to overcome stigma surrounding mental health,**
- the role of schools in supporting all young people to achieve positive mental health, and**
- the role of young people in listening to and mentoring their friends and peers.**