



Donegal Youth Council
Comhairle na nÓg Dhún na nGall
Shaping Our Future Ag Múnla ár dTodhchaí

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DONEGAL YOUTH COUNCIL TO RECEIVE MAJOR EUROPEAN AWARD

Donegal Youth Council were informed this week that they are to receive a major European Award in recognition for one of their major projects from last year. The 2013 SPARKS Mental Health Roadshow was selected as the 2014 winner of the Assembly of European Regions “Most Youth Friendly European Region” Special Award.

The Assembly of European Regions is made up of 230 regions from across 35 European countries and present this award every consecutive year to a particular project as a means of acknowledging best practice in youth participation and involving young people in democratic life. The award jury met in Brussels last week where they selected the Donegal group’s project as the overall winner.

A delegation from Donegal Youth Council will travel to Poland at the end of May for an Award Ceremony which coincides with the annual AER General Assembly. As part of the prize the group will travel to Jönköping in Sweden in June to present their Annual AER Youth Regional Network project.

Donegal Youth Council's chairperson Shane Hegarty says the group were excited and delighted to have been selected as winners of this prestigious award. “We entered this prestigious competition knowing that there was great competition from so many other regions of Europe but we knew that our SPARKS Mental Health Roadshow was very special and successful as we put a lot of time and effort into it. It is great to be acknowledged at European level and we have more strategies to look forward to with pride and confidence. This is an amazing honour and achievement, not just for Donegal Youth Council and its supporters, but for County Donegal and the whole country. We believe that we have created a great legacy regarding mental health and we hope that young people especially will benefit from their various struggles in life.

Áine Mc Laughlin was Chairperson of the group during the roadshow and stated that it is a credit to all the Youth Councillors for what they have achieved. “What started off as just an idea of ours has grown into a huge and important project, and a successful one at that! We are over the moon with excitement. It just goes to show what you can achieve with hard work, dedication and with your heart in the right place.”

Mayor of Donegal Cllr Ian McGarvey congratulated Donegal Youth Council on this major achievement "Since its inauguration in 2002 Donegal Youth Council has provided a platform for young people in the county to contribute young people's views on a range of issues and also to undertake a range of projects for young people in the County. They have made and continue to make a valued contribution to the County and this Award is well deserved."

County Manager Seamus Neely has also commended Donegal Youth Council on its work and congratulated the Youth Councillors on their success on a European Stage.

The Donegal Youth Council SPARKS Mental Health Roadshow saw them work with over 800 young people from all over the county. The roadshow, which kicked off in Letterkenny on World Mental Health Day, also visited the Finn Valley Centre in Stranorlar, Ionad Naomh Pádraig in Gaoth Dobhair, the Plaza in Bunrana and Abbey Hotel in Donegal Town during October and November 2013. In total 24 of the 27 secondary schools in the county participated in the roadshows as well as having participants from 4 different Youthreach centres.

The event had a huge input from a range of organisations including Donegal Youth Service, Donegal County Council, Jigsaw, Letterkenny Youth and Family Service and Mental Health Ireland, with other guest speakers from the wider community who have each conquered their own personal challenges in life, such as Mount Everest conqueror Jason Black, Shay Given, Donegal footballer Mark McHugh, Open Sea swimmer Anne Marie Ward and Cycle for Suicide Ambassador Breifne Earley.

Donegal Youth Council is supported and funded by the Donegal County Council, HSE Health Promotion and the Department of Children & Youth Affairs and is co-ordinated by the Donegal Youth Service at local level. For more information on Donegal Youth Council you can contact Co-ordinator Martin Keeney on 087-6806676.