

TRANSITION YEAR

Young Social Innovators

BY MS. RACHEL O'NEILL

Young Social Innovators (YSI) is a Social Innovation Education Programme that inspires and empowers young people to become “active citizens” in their local communities and beyond. It encourages students to use their talents, insights, passion and creativity to take action and come up with innovative solutions to social challenges and issues that exist in society today.

Here in Mercy Mounthawk, there is a strong tradition of engaging with the YSI programme that has seen a wonderful collection of awards and achievements. And this year, we were absolutely delighted to continue this tradition.

This year, thirty-five teams of student innovators from all over Ireland, including four from Kerry, were shortlisted to compete for a range of YSI Challenge Awards as well as the overall Gold, Silver and Bronze Young Social Innovators of the Year Title Awards.

Our TY YSI project “Catch My Drift” was nominated in the “Make Our World Safer” YSI Category Challenge Award. The project focused on the issue and social concern of the current lack of education and awareness that exists around the area of essential water safety and drowning prevention in schools and local communities. The team dedicated their year to the importance of being “water and beach safety aware” by providing access to basic and essential information as well



ABOVE: The brilliant YSI Team ‘Catch My Drift’ who took home the ‘Make Our World Safer’ award for their project on preventing water-related accidents. Huge congratulations! #YSIAwards2023

as drowning prevention awareness through their campaign in person and on social media.

The team’s main goal was to be as proactive as possible in changing attitudes and behaviours around this social issue. They wanted to contribute to the prevention of future water-related accidents or fatalities from happening in Kerry and beyond so that local aquatic environments can be enjoyed with confidence and safety.

Since September, the team has been extremely busy coordinating a variety of innovative actions, activities and events to raise awareness. Students carried out a series of research surveys, set up information stalls, decorated halls and notice boards with visual displays of “Information, Facts & Statistics” that surround this topic. They ran a successful social media campaign, held a fundraising event in aid of their chosen charities: the Fenit RNLI branch and Water Safety Ireland, by selling “Mermaid’s Purse” sweet bags and proudly raising over €450 euro for these essential services.

Students engaged with the Water Safety Ireland WISE (Water Insight, Safety & Education) programme and used their learning and upskilling in water safety strategies and risk assessment information to create a series of workshops for Junior Cycle students from 1st to 3rd year. The workshops, which were delivered during “National YSI week”, provided important strategies from specific water based activities to hazards. CPR education was also provided to help students to know what to do when faced with potential unforeseen accidents. In May, the students organised a guest speaker event in collaboration with the Fenit RNLI branch to ensure the students in their school community were equipped with essential beach safety and drowning prevention knowledge and strategies in advance of the summer months ahead.

In March, the team travelled to the Lime Tree Theatre in Limerick where they had the opportunity to come together with other young people to share their ideas and actions for change



and perform their excellent YSI Speak Out showcase in front of a panel of judges and an audience of their YSI peers and invited guests. They lifted the roof with their wonderful Speak Out Performance including vital facts, information, prevention strategies as well as a fashion show and interpretative recreation of the song “I follow Rivers”!

In April, the team were thrilled to receive the news that their project had been shortlisted for the National YSI Awards being nominated for the National Challenge Category Award: “Make Our World Safer”.

Students travelled to Dublin early on Tuesday 2nd May to attend the YSI national finals, which took place in Croke Park. Five students represented the team (Conor O’Sullivan, Meghan Rusk, Tyler Hanafin, Caitriona Doyle O’Brien and Sarah Jane Hoffman) pitching their project innovation to a panel of 5 judges which included a questions and answer section.

The official YSI awards ceremony took place at 1.30pm where it was revealed that the team had won the national challenge award for the category “Make Our World A Safer Place”. We were absolutely delighted to have the honour of receiving such an award for raising awareness and seeking to tackle such a vital social issue.

SOME OF OUR HASHTAGS!

**#catchmydrift #YSI #watersafety #haveyoucaughton
#beswiftdontdrift #divingdeep #educatesowedontreplicate
#doyouknowyourH2O #staycurrent
#ReachThrowDon’tGo #AhAhAhAhStayingAlive**



ABOVE: Our award winning YSI group presenting the RNLI with a cheque from their fundraising activities.