

Malala Yousafzai is certainly a huge inspiration for the youth of today because of the work she has carried out in relation to the right of girls to education. Malala has been advocating for girls' education since she was eleven. She was fifteen years old when she was shot in the head and neck by a Taliban. She is the youngest ever person to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Many young people feel they are portrayed unfairly in newspapers, radio and television, with too much emphasis on the wrongdoings of a small minority. They feel there is not enough coverage of the good things they do and not enough representation of their viewpoints. When was the last time you saw a headline like: "Young Student Volunteers for Special Olympics"? Headlines like these are not very common as they don't exactly sell newspapers. A tiny minority of young people make a destructive contribution, engaging in anti-social rather than constructive patterns of behaviour. Too often this taints adult society's view and media representation of young people. Consequently, the commitment and achievements of the majority are not fully valued or recognised. In the media, there are often publications about the crisis of underage drinking in Ireland. It is reported that over 60% of young adults have consumed alcohol excessively. There is a vast array of information online about underage drinking among youths. Statistics can be very impersonal when they are constantly being thrown at people by the media. What is often overlooked is the fact that there is also the other 40% that abstain from alcohol. I feel this alcohol related statistic is equally as significant. Think about your own child or a young person close to you. There is a good chance that this person is clever enough and socially responsible enough to abstain from alcohol altogether. If you'll pardon my positive spin, almost 50% of my generation is less likely to develop depression or liver failure. This is good news. Unfortunately, to a journalist, good news is often not news at all.

One group of students in particular have decided to try to reduce the fallout from the current binge drinking crisis. They have set up a campaign called 'Mental Drinking' which aims to explain clearly the link between binge drinking and mental ill-health. They aim to encourage students to be good role models for the younger generations. The 'Mental Drinking' roadshow will travel to colleges throughout Ireland and hopefully will get the message through to some people that binge drinking is unhealthy. This is a fine

example of some of the good that is being done by Ireland's more caring and proactive young citizens.

In addition to the 'Mental Drinking' roadshow, there are many more youth organisations that young people can get involved in which are important in society. Foróige, Macra na Feirme, The Gaisce Awards and Scouting Ireland are just a few. Dáil na nÓg is the national parliament for young people which is hosted every second year. One representative from each of the thirty-four Comhairle na nÓg is elected to the Dáil na nÓg council which follows up on recommendations from the Dáil and tries to make changes for young people in those areas. Two-hundred young people took part in Dáil na nÓg in 2013 to discuss all aspects of youth mental health including topics such as Leaving Cert reform and exam pressure. They also examined wider social issues such as bullying, cyber-bullying, peer pressure, abuse of drugs and alcohol. *'Young people need to be asked what matters; not be told what matters'* – Jeff Martin.

Youths also have the opportunity to join Foróige, a youth group working in Ireland for more than sixty years. Foróige run a programme called the Youth Citizenship Programme which empowers young people to use their talents and initiative to make a positive difference to the world around them. It involves young people researching the needs of their community and organising practical action in response. The programme allows young people to define what citizenship means to them and to also have a bit of fun along the way.

Irish youths are beginning to make much needed changes in Irish society which are similar to the changes Malala has made to improve her situation. Issues like bullying, cyber-bullying, suicide and mental health problems are all being dealt with in schools today and these problems are decreasing. Spunout.ie, bully4u.ie and Pieta House are just a few of the many brilliant organisations that are part of the reason for the decline in these issues. Young people are working with organisations like Pieta House within their own school communities in order to find real and lasting solutions to social issues and problems, just like Malala did and continues to do. Even when living in a world of comparative freedom and equality, Irish youngsters are striving to right society's wrongs. Shouldn't the work of such young people be praised? Malala did not wait for the government or anyone else to speak up for what

she believed in but she decided to do that herself. It showed her strong nature and that she is an independent young woman willing to do anything for what she believes to be right. Think about what you would do in her situation. Would you sit back and leave everything as it is? Or would you stand up to your oppressors?

In today's society, young people must stand up on their own two feet and start preparing for adult life. The harsh reality is that nobody is going to fight your own battles for you. There may be support available, but in the end, it is up to you and only you. As Malala Yousafzai said: '*Some people only ask others to do something. I believe that, why should I wait for someone else? Why don't I take a step and move forward*'. So as you can see, there is much that we are already doing to improve society but there is also much left to do.