

## Student Leader's Congress

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> of January, the Cycle Against Suicide Student Leader's Congress took place in the RDS Dublin. The core aim of the Student Leader's Congress is to promote positive mental health, help-seeking behaviour in young people, and the Cycle Against Suicide's message *'It's okay not to be okay, and absolutely okay to ask for help'*.



*Caroline Leetch speaking at Leadership congress 2015*

The Congress is student-led and a large portion of the day involves students: discussing projects they have engaged with, providing entertainment, conducting peer interviews and interacting with a range of mental health organisations exhibiting on the day, signposting students in the direction of where that critical help is available. The theme of this year's congress was **'Appreciate Your Mind'**. This theme was chosen by myself and the 13 other Student Leader Ambassadors in the country at our recent training programme in Co. Wicklow.

30 schools including St. Louis C.S attended the congress, totaling an astounding 4000 people. Each school is an Ambassador school for Mental Health in relation to Cycle Against Suicide. The Ambassador School Programme aims to encourage schools to become actively involved in mental health promotion. The programme provides a framework, structure and incentive for schools to integrate mental health activities into the school plan, and rewards schools who go the extra mile.

Each school was asked to produce a project based on the theme of the congress '*Appreciate Your Mind*'. Creating project work is an enjoyable and interactive way to get students engaging and participating in the promotion of positive mental health.

Schools could make a video centred on '*Appreciate Your Mind*', or they could create a poster campaign in their school community. Other ideas are the creation of an artefact or an inspirational wall.

St. Louis chose to create a video, '*10 ways to Appreciate your mind*', and our ingenious video clip was played during the project's showcase.

Throughout the congress there was an abundance of speakers all of whom had their own unique story to tell.

The congress began with an inspiring talk by Bressie, then there was a Panel Discussion on Mental Health. The panel consisted of: Bressie as the chair and Alan Quinlan, Conor Cusack, Seamus Hennessey and Ellie Mc Namara . Each captivating discussion left each and every person in awe of how brave, courageous and willing the speakers were throughout their journeys and struggles.

After being involved in the Cycle Against Suicide campaign and being awarded a Cycle Against Suicide Ambassador school status, there has been a prodigious increase in the existing awareness of positive mental health here in St. Louis.

***'It's ok not to be ok, and absolutely ok to ask for help'*** . This is the message that we here in St. Louis endeavour to impart on all our students and staff alike.

We strive to continue our work in raising awareness of this prevalent issue, eliminating the stigma towards mental health, and to help break the cycle of suicide on the island of Ireland!

- Caroline Leetch