



St Patrick's  
Mental Health Services

**WALK**  
IN MY SHOES



PROMOTING POSITIVE WELL-BEING AT  
**DONABATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
2016/2017



Connect



Be Active



Take  
Notice



Keep  
Learning



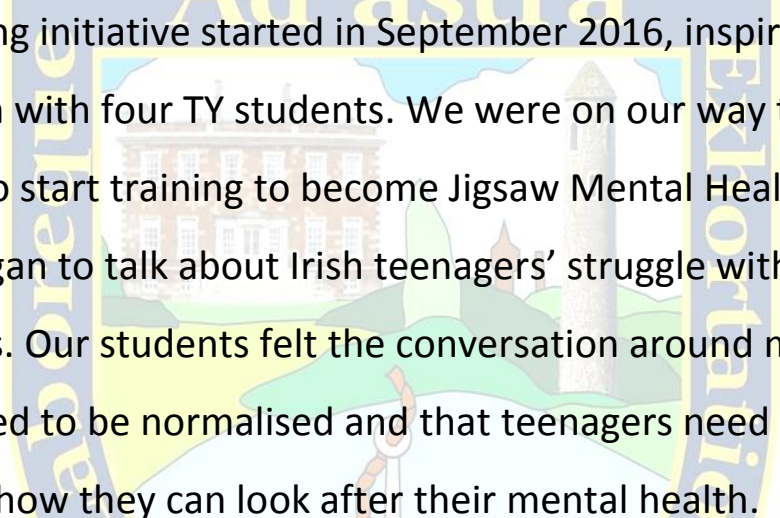
Give

**5 Ways to Wellbeing**

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# Well-being at Donabate Community College

## How it all began...



Our Wellbeing initiative started in September 2016, inspired by a conversation with four TY students. We were on our way to Jigsaw, Balbriggan to start training to become Jigsaw Mental Health Mentors and they began to talk about Irish teenagers' struggle with mental health issues. Our students felt the conversation around mental health needed to be normalised and that teenagers need to learn more about how they can look after their mental health.

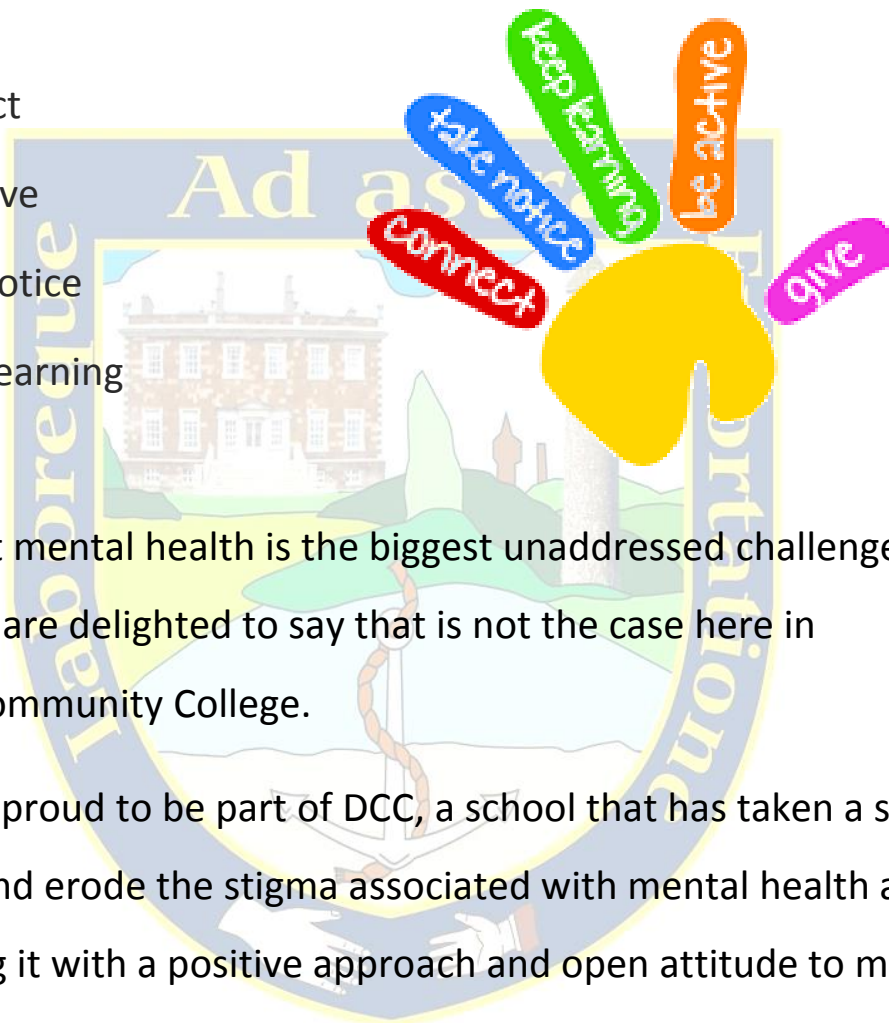
Inspired by their vision, we felt here at Donabate CC we could try to do something about this!

The idea very quickly grew legs as so many teachers felt passionate about the issue of mental health and got on board. A committee of 22 staff members was formed under the leadership of two well-being anchors. From that committee, some teachers have become wellbeing mentors, looking after the wellbeing of individual year groups and some have even starred in our mental health videos.

The main aim of our wellbeing initiative is to normalise, promote and celebrate the conversation around mental health. The framework for the school's well-being initiative has been guided by the “**5 Ways to Wellbeing**” framework, promoted by Mental Health Ireland.

These are:

- Connect
- Be Active
- Take Notice
- Keep Learning
- Give



It is said that mental health is the biggest unaddressed challenge of our age. We are delighted to say that is not the case here in Donabate Community College.

We are very proud to be part of DCC, a school that has taken a stand to destroy and erode the stigma associated with mental health and are replacing it with a positive approach and open attitude to mental well-being. DCC is a school where students understand it's OK not to be OK and know the importance of speaking to someone you trust when you are feeling down. This has been our first year and we are really excited to see what the future brings.

**K. Whelan**

Wellbeing Anchor

**A. Chaloner**

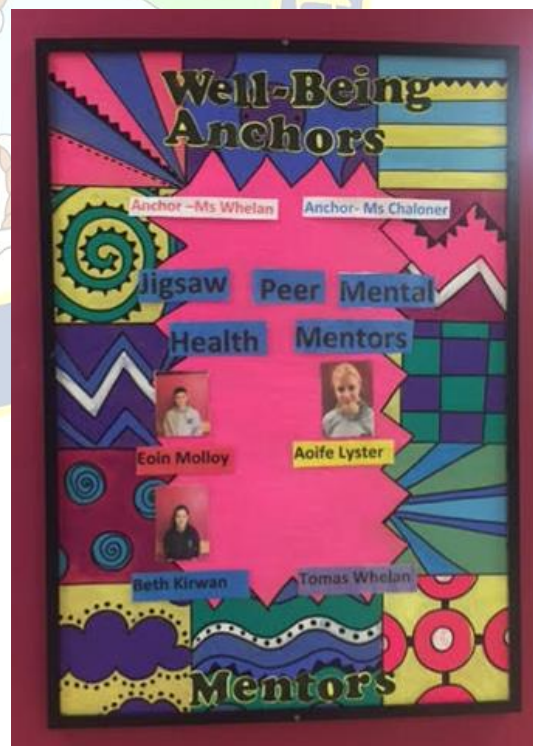
Wellbeing Anchor

# Well-being Mentors

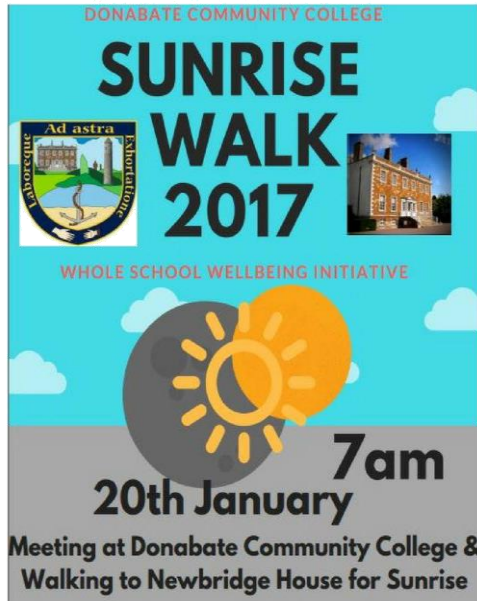
Following the formation of our committee, teachers were assigned to each year to act as wellbeing mentors. Their role was to look after the wellbeing of their year group and to promote any wellbeing events within their group. If students had any ideas on how we could promote wellbeing they could approach their mentor.

We also had two wellbeing anchors whose role it was to look after whole school wellbeing and to organize and coordinate events.

The wellbeing mentors and anchors meet every three weeks to discuss, reflect and evaluate our new initiative.



# Sunrise walk



The inaugural DCC Sunrise Walk took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, with over 150 students, staff and parents in the community rising to the challenge and walking to Newbridge House for sunrise. The goal of the walk was to promote positive mental wellbeing in the Donabate community by

highlighting the close link between physical activity and good mental wellbeing. This was a fun, active community event to kick start the New Year in a positive way. Students were welcomed back to the school for a warm breakfast – a great opportunity to make new connections with classmates while keeping active and setting them up for the school day.



## Positive Notes

Throughout the year, members of the Well-being Committee distributed positive quotes to students and teachers as they arrived at school. Over 800 quotes were hand-written on post-it notes by our TY students and they said this act alone helped lift their mood and had a positive impact on their mental health.

Students and teachers were not aware when these notes would be distributed. We usually picked a Monday, as many students and teachers tell us that Monday is always the hardest day to be positive.

This small action had a huge impact on the school community. Even weeks later, teachers have their post-it hung on their classroom wall and it is common to see a 'Positive Post-it' carefully stuck inside a student's journal. Students spoke about how this had a very positive effect on their well-being and they felt noticed and cared for



## 1<sup>st</sup> year Mentors:

This year we also introduced a 1<sup>st</sup> year mentor system. The supportive role of the Peer Mentor has been very important in helping students settle into school life. Peer Mentors helped and supported first year students in during their few months in school, answering questions, helping with lockers and organising games during lunch.

TY students can apply for this role which is coordinated and monitored by our first year well-being mentors.



# No Social Media Day

In November, after Dr. Harry Barry gave a talk to parents on the impact of social media on mental health, the committee decided to have a 'No Social Media Day'.

Students and staff were asked to give up social media for 24 hours. Students were encouraged to either 'Connect' with a friend or 'Be Active' instead of clicking into their social media in their free time.



We used this day to highlight the impact social media can have on mental health in SPHE and Life Skills classes. Students were also reminded of the dangers of being online and given some advice on what to do if they experienced cyber bullying.

We asked students to get a slip signed by parents to confirm their son/daughter hadn't used social media for 24 hours. The event was sponsored by our local gym who offered a prize of one month's free membership to the local gym.

# Gratitude Tree

In a unique twist on a Christmas tree, in December we put up a gratitude tree.

The tree was decorated with grateful notes from every student and member of staff. The tree was in our main assembly area, where staff and students pass numerous times a day and was a very bright and positive addition.



We also highlighted to students the positive effects of practicing gratitude such as:

- Improving physical health
- Enhancing empathy
- Improving sleep patterns
- Improving psychological health

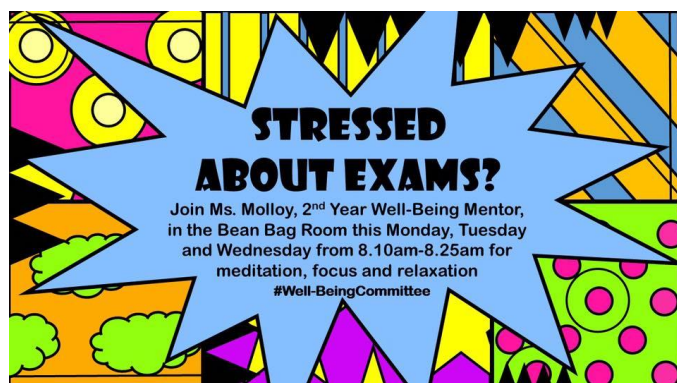


## Meditation classes



In our school, we are fortunate to have a bean bag room which is used as a meditation room. Many of our years attend mediation and mindfulness classes.

One of our well-being mentors also runs meditation classes after school on a Monday and also before all house exams. During these sessions students get the opportunity to learn how to cope with daily stress through emotional regulation.



# Well-Being Murals

A key tool in our promotion of Well-Being in DCC this year has been the creation and display of several Well-Being murals.



## '5 Ways to Well-Being'

Painted by 5<sup>th</sup> year students, these large murals now hang proudly in our assembly area.

## 'Transformation'

The result of 'mindfulness painting' during Well-Being week, this painting is now displayed outside our school. Painted by staff and students it was designed to show how we as a community look after our mental health.



## 'Get Active'

Showing silhouettes of our students 'getting active'; this painting also has portraits of Aisling Thompson and Jonny Cooper- inspiring athletes who have spoken about looking after their mental health.

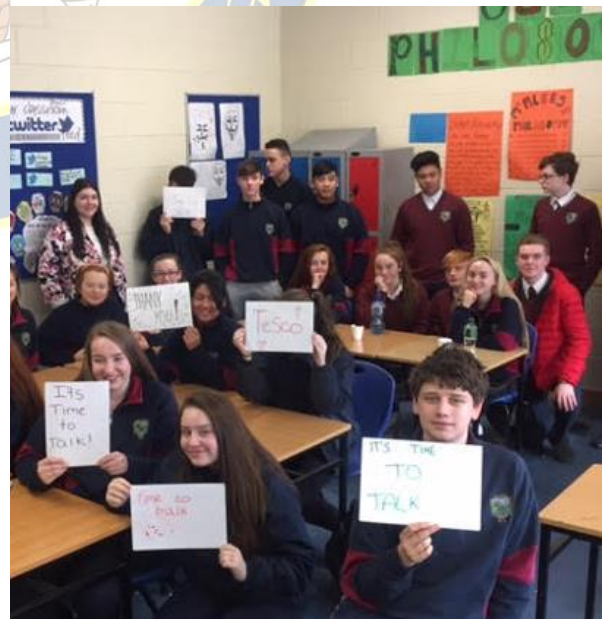
## 'Time to Talk'



Sponsored by Tesco, every student in our school had 'Time to Talk'. Everyone a cup of tea/coffee and biscuits and had a chance to connect with their peers.

The aim of this event was to raise awareness around the importance of talking about your problems and to get our students talking about their mental health.

Students also watched and discussed two videos made by staff members, TY and senior students.



## Staff Bake Off

Staff well-being mentors have been working hard throughout the year to look after the mental health of the school staff. They have organised events such as cakes and flowers for the staff room, encouraging positivity and connection.

This year we also had our first staff 'bake off'. This was a lot of fun and it reminded staff that it is not just the students who need to look after their mental health, but staff too! Students also got to sample the delicious bakes afterwards!



## Staff fancy dress

On the last day before mid-term break, teachers arrived to the school wearing Halloween costumes. From Storm Troopers to Power Rangers, the level of effort that went in to the fancy dress competition was amazing. Connecting together as a staff has been vital in our promotion of Well-Being in the school.



## Jigsaw Talks:

This year four TY students were selected for the Jigsaw schools peer - education programme.

Jigsaw is an early intervention mental health service which provides mental health supports to

12–25 year olds. As part of this programme, peer educators were trained to deliver a 40 minute workshop entitled 'It's Time to Start

Talking' (ITTST). The focus of ITTST is on promoting help-seeking behaviours among young people.

This interactive talk was delivered to over 800 students and staff in DCC!

The objectives of ITTST are to:

- (a) Promote positive attitudes to mental health by exploring holistic definitions of mental health;
- (b) Promote help-seeking by encouraging young people to talk to someone they trust when feeling worried, sad, or down; and
- (c) Help young people to identify trusted informal sources of support and to provide information about how to access formal support.



# Well-being Week



During the week of the 6th of March, Donabate Community College held their first 'Wellbeing Week'. Throughout the week, there were many events to promote mental wellbeing. Each day was based around the five ways to mental wellbeing identified by Mental Health Ireland - Connect, Be Active, Give, Keep Learning & Take Notice.

Every day began with students were welcomed to school by teachers. The entrance hall was decorated with balloons and upbeat music filled the air as students arrived. Each day, students were given a small gift ranging from a packet of love hearts to lollipops, bookmarks, fun facts and positive quotes.





Monday was a day to highlight the importance of connecting. The week began with our first ever whole school assembly. The school band performed and students were reminded that we are committed to their mental well-being.





Tuesday burst into action with a reminder to 'Be Active'. Throughout the day, every year group participated in different sports events and tournaments.

In the morning, Junior students began their day with a whole year game of 'British Bulldogs' and a giant game of 'Connect'. Seniors had their chance to get active after lunch.

The day finished with a teacher vs student football match.



Wednesday was a day to 'Give'. Staff and students were reminded of the importance of random acts of kindness and during lunch the teachers surprised students with a flash mob to perform in front of the fifth and sixth year students – 'giving' their gift of some out of tune singing!

Impromptu certificates were also given to students who were seen acting kind throughout the day.



Giving Day Appreciation		
Your kindness has been noticed and appreciated Thank you		
Donabate Community College	Teacher	Date





On Thursday, the entire day focused on 'Keep Learning'. Students each received a random fact as they were greeted at the school door that

morning.

Teachers were encouraged to share interesting facts and information about their subjects to their classes throughout the day.

During lunch four workshops were on for students. These workshops included céili dancing, ukulele classes, sign language classes and braiding. It was great to see so many students and teachers sharing their skills and talents and so many others interested in learning new ones!





Friday was a day to 'Take Notice'. With the support of the student council, our committee decided the only way to finish off such a busy week was by having the world Take Notice! We decided to break the World Record for the most odd socks worn by a group of people gathered in one place.

Staff, parents and students arrived in school looking quite odd but by the end of the day (after some serious counting and paperwork!) the record was broken with 667 people wearing odd socks in the one place.



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The feedback from parents, staff and students after well-being week has been overwhelming. As a committee, we have decided to continue some of the events throughout the year - Our recent Parents Council Spring Fair featured a gratitude tree for the community, and we plan to greet our students with music and a smile on the first Monday of every term.



## So, what's next?

As we move into our final term of 2016/2017, we have two events planned.

The Well-Being Committee will be hosting a 6<sup>th</sup> year breakfast for our outgoing 6<sup>th</sup> years in May. We have been working on a video showing the advice staff would give to their 6<sup>th</sup> year selves. We're hoping that this openness and honesty from staff will encourage our students to talk during this stressful time in their education.

We are also planning our first 'Pride Day'. This will be a day to celebrate our school's diversity and to encourage students to be themselves.

Our school's management and Parents Council has been incredibly supportive our initiative this year and we are excited to see where the momentum generated will carry us into the next.