

In a world ruled, financed, and dominated by adults, some might question the significance of youth in our society. Economically, they are a drain on our resources, reluctantly consuming state-subsidised education. Oftentimes they are more inclined to spend their time loitering in their own filth, fixated on a computer screen amidst mouldy crumbs of Doritos rather than productively contributing to society. However, the vital role of young people in our society is to offer a fresh perspective on the world.

A world without youth is a world without change. Some of the greatest innovations of our lifetime, especially in areas such as technology, have been made by young people such as Mark Zuckerberg. The recent phenomenon of ‘teenage millionaires’ is a testament to this, an Irish example of which are the Collison brothers from Limerick.

Established professionals in a field are bound by the limits they set themselves. Young people, adolescents in particular, with their rapidly developing brains, are more willing to break the status quo, and to circumnavigate the boundaries of possibility. In this way, they often generate more innovative ideas as they think more creatively and don’t confine themselves within the limits set by society and, even at times, reality. For youth, the sky really is the limit.

These innovations do not just appear in fields of technology, but also in areas of social injustice. Malala Yousafazi is a prime example of how the uncorrupted mind of a youth can combat the oppressive, conservative views of Pakistan towards women. Although Ireland has no teenage Nobel Prize winners, we are far from devoid of social innovators. Young people, unaccustomed to receiving pay for their work, are willing to devote their time voluntarily to fighting the social injustices of our society. Homelessness is a plight faced by many, and the response of one school was to sleep on O’Connell Street in the days leading up to Christmas, spreading awareness for the cause and raising much-needed funds. There was in fact competition among students to secure a place on the sleep out.

This is because young people are more inclined to strive for perfection in aspects of social inequality. Everyone is born an idealist, but as they mature, they begin to accept the harsh reality of the world. If a child asks why a homeless man can’t just be given a house by the government a ‘wise’ adult may reply that “It’s just not that simple”. But why isn’t it? Often rules and regulations cloud our judgment as to what is right and wrong. Why is it that if a 16 year old boy engages in consensual relations with a girl of the same age, he can be convicted for rape? How are we to look towards laws for moral guidance when the rules of society are so flawed? Perhaps if the young

were given more input into the governing of society, the world wouldn't be such an unjust place.

The Dáil na nÓg clearly demonstrates the interest of Irish young people in the policy and decision making of their country. By expanding and developing these initiatives and others, we could provide the voice that youth so desperately deserve and need. The proposed significant changes in the Junior Certificate examination process have been topical in recent months. Amidst strikes and heated debates, where is the voice of the young people, whom this would most directly affect?

Young people remind us of our hypocrisies. Racism and homophobia are being eradicated by the youth of Ireland. A democratic state, which by very definition promotes equality, still denies homosexuals the basic human right of marriage. Although change is on the horizon, would this ever occur if the political scene was not constantly being influenced by the younger generations?

Although youth are heavily involved in improving the situations of others, they also often provide support for their companions. Peer tutoring, especially in conceptual subjects such as Maths, is a very effective learning tool. A student tutor can often be more effective than a seasoned teacher, as, easily recalling the challenges they overcame when they first learned a topic, they can easily identify the difficulties faced by the struggling student. In this way, and others, young people can often serve as mentors for each other, despite their limited experience and knowledge.

As well as their role as mentors, youth often provide emotional support for friends undergoing psychological difficulties or recovering from a recent trauma. Studies have shown that teenage victims of sexual abuse are more likely to confide in their peers than in their parents. Teenagers can confess their wrongdoing without fear of judgement or reprimand. By alleviating their burdens, young people give their friends the relief and peace of mind to endure the hurdles of life. Communication is unfettered by the lack of common ground that hinders confiding in parents. Despite their reliance on their elders for financial support, youth can almost be self-sustaining in their ability to support each other's advancement in life.

As they progress into adulthood, at the peak of their physical prowess, the youth also serve to entertain and represent their country in a variety of sports and athletic events. As depicted in the heart-warming film 'Invictus', national pride in the achievement of young people can unite a country with unbreakable bonds. A similar sentiment was

expressed in the “Being Young and Irish” consultation that at times of recession, young people’s optimistic outlook and vision for the future can raise the spirits of a nation, inspiring confidence and national pride.

Malala Yousafazi, through her words and deeds, is an embodiment of the beacon of light cast by youth, guiding society into unknown horizons. It should be abundantly clear at this point that the reality of Irish young people is a far cry from the ignominious character comically portrayed in the opening lines of this essay. They are virtuous caring people with a contribution to make and a voice worth listening to. They carry the hopes of a nation, and deservedly so.