

As the great philosopher Aristotle once said- “*Good habits formed at youth make all the difference*”. I believe that in today’s society, this has been exemplified by the inspirational Malala Yousafzai. Despite her young age, Malala has contributed more to her society than most adults. The work she has done for women’s rights to education is astounding, and shows determination far beyond her years. She provides clear proof that we, as children and young people, can contribute to improving our own situation to our personal advantage. Having begun her crusade at such a tender age we can only expect that Malala will pursue philanthropic goals throughout her life. By following Malala’s example we, the youth of Ireland, can make a massive difference to our society’s future, most definitely for the better.

From an incredibly young age, Malala Yousafzai has been an activist, fighting against the harsh restraints of her native culture. By the age of eleven, she was already giving speeches condemning the Taliban who stripped her and the female population of their rights. At twelve years of age she began writing for the BBC about this oppression. Her bravery and persistence in the wake of her attempted murder are inspirational- not only to young people in Muslim societies, but to those worldwide, especially in Ireland. As a nation, our youth is not known for its political activism. We are not like our French or Greek peers- we do not march through the streets, waving placards screaming of injustice, as recently seen in the Greek anti-austerity marches and the 2005 French youth strikes. In fact, in comparison to our European neighbours, Ireland, as a whole, is quite a placid nation. Our teenagers tend to care more about technology and social media than our (dare I say it?) errant political system or overwhelming national debt. Thus, we should turn to leaders such as Malala for inspiration in these somewhat apathetic times. Undoubtedly, young people play a massive role in the Ireland of today. We will, after all, become the leaders of our country within the next twenty years and I believe that we need to take a firmer stand to improve our own situation, just as Malala did.

Although there is little comparison between the Pakistani and Irish political systems, we should draw strength from the courage of our foreign peers. If the young people of Ireland act now, perhaps we can undo the damage of our parents’ generations, turn back time and give new life to that long dead Tiger. If we take an interest in our future, in our country’s policies and laws, we will establish lifelong altruistic habits, and we will build generations of interested politicians and law enforcers, who work for the benefit of their country, not just their pockets. Young people are key to Irish society, just as they are to Pakistani society, and each of us should work to improve *our* situation; just as Malala Yousafzai has done.

It is, therefore, a proud testament to our generation that we can count among our numbers inspirational teenagers and young adults who have made a change to our world. The most publicised case was, of course, the late Donal Walsh, but many others have recently made beneficial changes to our society. Through her blog, Sinead Burke (otherwise known as Minnie Melange) explains the daily struggles she has faced as a result of her dwarfism, and encourages others with her condition to be confident and love themselves for themselves. Eighteen year old Joanne O’ Riordan suffers from Tetra- Amelia Syndrome, and has actively campaigned against disability funding cuts in Ireland. Despite her young age, she has already addressed the United Nations about how technology helps her everyday life, and, like Malala, she is making an impact on the world.

In the world of Irish politics, young people are also making a change. Twenty year old Adam Gary Wyse recently became Ireland’s youngest politician, and Sinn Féin councillor Lisa Marie Sheehy became our youngest female politician when she was elected in May 2014. Even more impressive is Saibh McCaffrey, a second level student who has been heavily involved in The Y Factor, a youth initiative of the National Women’s Council of Ireland, aimed at empowering young people to

become leaders for women's equality. The work of these people shows that although we may not have the politically active youth majority of our European neighbours, young people here are just as important to Ireland as Malala Yousafzai is to Pakistan.

When discussing the role of young people in Irish society, we cannot ignore organisations such as Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg. Having been an active member of the former myself, I can honestly say that it is an invaluable organisation, which really helps young people throughout the country. The work done by the various Comhairlí has had a massive impact on Irish youth and their dedicated projects have addressed problems including alcohol awareness, body image, political involvement, inter-generational and cross-border relationships, exam pressures and technology. Dáil na nÓg is equally important, as it brings young people from all over the country together to work for a common goal- improved representation for the youth of Ireland in government. Thus, these organisations play a vital role in Irish society by encouraging activism in young people; they help us contribute to changing our own situation for the better.

*“Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh siad”* As the old Irish proverb says; “Advise the youth, and they will flourish”. I believe that this is most undoubtedly true today. Like the inspirational Malala Yousafzai, we can contribute to improving our own situation, both politically and economically. Young people in Ireland are instrumental in defining our country's future, and will be for years to come.