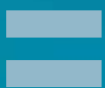


THE GAELIC PLAYERS

ASSOCIATION



HEADSTRONG



**A PARTNERSHIP OF
SPORT + STRENGTH**





Whether it is the lessons learned from the pressures on the field or the pressures in life, Ireland's greatest sports role models are sharing their experience with the young people of Ireland. In an innovative partnership fostered by The Ireland Funds, Headstrong—the National Centre for Youth Mental Health and The Gaelic Players Association (GPA)—have come together to create a mental health literacy programme to help Irish youth.



THE GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (GAA)

is Ireland's largest sporting organization. Active across Ireland as well as internationally, it encompasses the traditional Irish sports of hurling, football, handball, and rounders as well as ladies football and camogie. The GAA promotes the best of Irish culture and sports and is integral to Irish society. Within the GAA, the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) is the body which represents over 2,200 county players and works to ensure all players realize their full potential both on and off the field.

HEADSTRONG is Ireland's National Centre for Youth Mental Health. Through outreach, advocacy, and research the organization works with communities to cope with mental health challenges. Headstrong was responsible for the recent My World Survey (MWS)—the most in-depth study of youth mental health ever done in Ireland. The study mapped the mental health experience across adolescence of 14,500 participants and the report provides insights into the many factors affecting the mental health of young people in Ireland. Self-harm and depression are very real issues for young people. Suicide is the leading cause of death for youth and many families do not know what resources to turn to for assistance. In addition, the perceived stigma of asking for help or admitting to having a problem leaves many young people isolated and at-risk.

The Ireland Funds brought these two organizations together to create an innovating partnership. Caitriona Fottrell, Director Ireland of The Ireland Funds explained how The Ireland Funds serve the nonprofit community not just through traditional funding, but by introducing bodies like the GPA and Headstrong. "The Gaelic Players Association approached The Ireland Funds with a desire to increase their community involvement in a tangible way. We introduced them to Headstrong as we saw the potential for a great partnership," explained Caitriona. "GPA players are looked up to by youth all across Ireland and those young people often struggle with issues that could benefit from a strong role model letting them know it's okay to have conversations around mental health. We're delighted to see that the partnership has grown since the launch in 2012."

Through the GPA, 25 county players have come forward to act as Youth Mental Health advocates in their communities; the players are taking part in a mental health literacy education programme with Headstrong. The programme involves the players being inducted in mental health literacy by Dr Tony Bates and Dr Joseph Duffy, Director of Clinical support of Headstrong.

Launched in February of 2012, the programme devised by Headstrong and funded by The Ireland Funds *Promising Ireland* Campaign involves education around listening skills, how to handle a difficult conversation on mental health and involves the GPA members in public meetings and a social media campaign.

"We know that mental health is the number one issue for young people in Ireland and with young male suicide becoming more prevalent we felt in Headstrong that county GAA players were the perfect fit in this awareness campaign", Dr. Tony Bates, Founding Director of Headstrong said.

"While we welcome an increasing openness to talk about mental health in Ireland, Headstrong wants to go further, we want to grow a new generation who understand what protects and what hinders their mental health. The players will play a vital role in this campaign by helping to change how we talk about mental health and by encouraging young men to reach out and learn healthy ways to handle distress.

Dessie Farrell, Chief Executive of the Gaelic Players Association said, "There is no community, parish or club that has not been affected by somebody taking their own life, we have all heard stories about young people who are in trouble and we know what lies behind these stories is often things they cannot talk about...feeling very down, worry, drinking too much or gambling. We believe that working with Headstrong is one of the positive ways of helping young people find their way."

"When we put out the call to GPA members we were amazed at the positive response. Every player who was asked to participate immediately agreed to support this initiative. Headstrong and GPA see these players as great ambassadors for youth mental health. We hope to work with Headstrong to get the message out there that there are ways to cope with the stresses and worries that young people are facing and we can change how young people talk about themselves and learn to support each other."

The 25 Ambassadors are now active in facilitating support for young people. "As role models in our communities they can further assist in removing the stigma associated with youth mental health and opening this absolutely critical conversation," says Dessie. "It's a conversation that can save lives."



GPA MEMBERS WITH DR TONY BATES (CENTER) OF HEADSTRONG. GAELIC PLAYER ASSOCIATION MEMBERS SERVE AS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

