**THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD - MENTAL HEALTH: By Shannon McInerney, Sean Rooney and Kathleen O’Hare, Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick (Slide 1)**

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**Shannon** – Hello everyone. Our names are Shannon, Sean and Kathleen. We are past and present members of Knockevin Student Council. Every year the pupils vote on who can be on the council. This year I am the head girl and Sean is our head boy. Some pupils in our school can’t talk but we make sure we are there for everybody

We get to have meetings and visit the student council at another school. We choose a charity and speak at assemblies and big events. Kathleen and I even got to speak in Stormont about women’s rights!

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**Sean** – sometimes we visit Down High School or they come to us. We meet with their student council to talk about the big issues that are important to us. Even though our schools are very different, we all have the same thoughts and feelings and we all have students in our schools struggling with mental health. We’ve found out that more than 20% of young people struggle with mental health and it’s much worse in Northern Ireland than the rest of the UK

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**Kathleen** – our two schools have worked together to help make things better. Last year we learned about how important it is to take 5! Action mental Health told us all about the 5 ways to wellbeing

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**Shannon** – we went to see ‘Wonder’ and held choose kind campaigns in our schools. We also took art in activities all linked to the 5 ways. We learned new circus skills, gave back by fundraising for children in crossfire, took notice by doing yoga, got active with a mental health awareness dance day and even connected by going to Tayto Park to have fun together!

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**Sean** - Pupils did lots of art about children’s rights and we made this book

**Kathleen** – every pupil in Knockevin and Down High got a leaflet that we made about the 5 ways. That’s over 1000 pupils who know more about mental health

**Shannon** – we got a gold compassionate school award from children in crossfire too. We raised over £1300 for them

**Sean** – we inspired others in our school to do their bit too. The eco committee got a green flag and took part in the global protests

**Kathleen** – we also got a Makaton friendly award for making sue every pupil gets to have their say through their voice or signs

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**Shannon** – Article 24 says that we have the right to be healthy and that includes mental health. We have an amazing school counsellor called Claire. She even took us to Lick to see ice-cream made at the end of term.

**Sean** - We’ve all had the chance to talk to her when we’ve had a problem and that’s great.

**Kathleen** – but school counselling is only provided by the Department of Education for post-primary pupils. That means that younger children in our school who have problems like illness, disability or death in their family have nobody to talk to. That can’t be right. If the UN CRC was a law then maybe everyone would get this.

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**Shannon** – the children and adolescent mental health service isn’t fair. In Northern Ireland there is a real problem getting services for people with both a learning disability, autism or complex needs and mental health issues. This isn’t ok!

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**Kathleen** – our school tries hard to do things to help us with our mental health like relax kids and roots of empathy. I’m even in charge of our Pets as Therapy dog!

**Shannon** – in RSE we learn about the emotional effects of puberty and we even went for a bra fitting in Marks and Spencer to help us cope with this change. Sadly most schools don’t do this.

**Sean** – our school has to make decisions, write programmes and pay for these things itself. We want more advice and more money!

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**Shannon** – big changes are needed to support all children, especially those with disabilities, to cope with the world and have good mental health

**Kathleen** – we are doing our bit and we hope you will too

**Sean** – help us to make the world a better place!