

Family Week March 5th – 9th 2018:

Mercy Secondary School Mounthawk celebrated their theme of 'Family' in a special way this year during the week of March 5th -9th under the slogan of 'Family First Forget Fones'. For the week, the focus throughout the school was on the importance of communication in the home and in particular the sharing of meals in the evening for the duration of that week. The school invited all students and their families to disconnect from all screen time for one hour every evening and to spend that hour reconnecting and sharing a family meal where possible.

Families were encouraged to turn off their phones and to turn to each other and share common time around the table, cook and share a meal and to "hang out" and chat. One of our Young Social Innovator groups: "Family First", together with teachers and management were the driving force behind this initiative.

The Family First group overseen by Ms. Nolan and Ms. O Carroll encouraged students to organise a **Fancy dress family fun walk** which took place at night on Friday 19th January. Despite the bitter cold and rain almost one hundred students, teachers, parents and pets donned their dress up clothes and walked along the canal from town to Blennerville and back again. The enthusiasm of all was plain to see by the generously happy atmosphere present on that very cold evening.

Family first then turned their gaze to **Family week** in March and focussed on preparing for that week. The main initiative for the week was for families to reconnect at home and to spend quality time together without the distraction of mobile phones, social media and the internet. The week before saw the school host **talks** for all first and second years on how social media can impact negatively on family life. The idea for these talks came from a survey of 150 students in the school about their phone/social media habits. This **survey** threw up the statistics that one third of pupils spent more than 4 hours a day on their phones, 43% of pupils felt that their phones impacted negatively on their family life and that 30% of pupils ate meals with their families three days a week or less. A similar **talk was held for parents** during the evening, where they were exposed to some of the dangers that social media, gaming and the internet might pose for their children. The talk proved eye opening and quite shocking at times. Parents were introduced to a number of systems which would enable them to safeguard and monitor their children's internet usage. It was this aspect of the talks that parents found most practical as they felt there was a need for help and guidance in this matter.

"Family First" also produced a **short video** about Family. It was used to promote the theme of Family for Catholic Schools Week. They surveyed 150 students around the school and asked numerous staff and students what family means to them. The video contains pictures of our school community's response. It ended on the question 'What are you going to do to make the time you have with your family matter?' The song used throughout the film is called 'build a happy home' and all teachers of Religion and CSPE were to ask students during their classes that week how they think this could be done in families, how they can promote positive family relationships?

During Family week there was a "**Class Challenge**" whereby all first and second year pupils were encouraged to connect over dinner with their families for as many days as possible during the week. They were encouraged to play games together, go for a walk, visit a neighbour and cook for their family. Each pupil was given a "check card" to be validated by a parent and the first and second year classes that could demonstrate the greatest effort won a Pizza Party.

To celebrate Family, the **Parents council** organised the “Family Fun” **Table Quiz** which sold out Centenary Hall to the extent that at the last minute, nearly one hundred extra chairs had to be sourced from near-by class rooms. Students were encouraged to attend with their parents and so many did that the hall was full.

As you know 2018 is the Year of the Family with the highlight being the “World Meeting of Families” in Dublin in August. Mercy Secondary School Mounthawk will be sending 98 students and teachers to volunteer at the Papal mass in the Phoenix Park on Sunday 26th August.

The YSI group “Family First” was one of two groups from Mounthawk who reached the national **finals of Young Social Innovators**. We had two groups out of hundreds nationally to reach the final round of thirty. This was a fantastic achievement in Ireland’s primary competition for social activism. The “Family First” initiative will continue into the next academic year with the promotion of all that is good and important about families.