



Welcome to your fourth **HFCS Wellbeing Newsletter**. When the first **Newsletter** was released there were 169 total cases of COVID-19 and 2 deaths in Ireland. Yesterday, the total number of cases reached 15,251, and 610 deaths in Ireland. Many of those who passed away did so surrounded by health care workers, but not their family members who were unable to attend due to social distancing.

Since March 13th when schools closed a lot has happened: third and year oral and practical exams were cancelled, Junior and Leaving State Exams have been rescheduled, and the much stricter **#StayHome** rules have been implemented. You read in the third Newsletter how **Social Distancing** is affecting the lives of eighteen of your fellow students, and you learned how each of these students is **supporting their wellbeing**. Many of you also participated in the **#EasterWellbeingChallenge** from the **HFCS Wellbeing Newsletter**.

This week the **Newsletter** has a special contributor **Gary Cunningham**. Gary has visited our school to speak to students and many of our senior students will already be familiar with him. He is the author of three books: *Joys of Joy: Finding Myself in an Irish Prison* (2017), *Life After Joy: A Prisoner No More* (2018), and *I Am Enough! Words to Live* (2019). I must admit that both times he visited the school this year I was unable to hear him speak. However, on both occasions, I had the pleasure of speaking to him for a couple of minutes and he is an incredibly warm and special person. Since **#StayHome** measures were introduced I quickly ordered all three of his books on Amazon and I am enjoying each one!

- As always, if you have feedback on this resource or content suggestions, please email wellbeing@hfcs.ie

Pádraig Meredith
Wellbeing Coordinator

The Importance of YOU...

Hey there,

How are you? Three words that mean so much more right now - "How are you."
When was the last time you asked yourself this vital question? When was the last

time you stopped the world for a moment and checked in with the most important person living in it - YOU!

I bet you feel uneasy when I lay down the claim that YOU are the most important person in the world. You may be thinking, "Eh...no I'm not *Gar me auld flower!* The nurses and doctors and frontline workers are wayyy more important than I am." I would certainly agree that the nurses, doctors, and *all* the frontline workers are unbelievably important right now - and we thank each and every one of them for their service. But, they are not, or at least they *should not* be the most important person in your world. That person should be YOU.

Still feel uneasy with that thought?

Are you still thinking, "Ehhh...NO GARY...I'm NOT!"

I get that.

So, I invite you to join me now, as I try with all my might, to show you, not only how important you are, but how special, talented, needed and loved you are too :)

Firstly, I would like to thank Pádraig (Mr. Meredith) for reaching out and asking me to contribute to this fantastic newsletter. It is extra special for me, as this is for the students, staff, and parents of the Holy Family Community School - a school so very close to my heart. Every time I have gone there to speak to the students, I have been made feel so incredibly welcome. The staff really go out of their way for me, and as for the students? Well, I'm your biggest fan - you are all NINJA'S! So, I am honoured to be able to do this.

Right...let's get back to YOU...

These are crazy times we are currently living in, and I feel you students are finding yourselves in completely uncharted waters. Not being able to see your friends as easily as you always could is hard. Not being able to see certain family members is torture (*I can't see my mam right now, and it is ripping me apart - but I know how vital it is, so that puts my mind at rest*). Home-schooling is a completely new experience - the list goes on. Can I just say, I am unbelievably proud of you all! You are adapting. You are complying. You are saving lives. You are all heroes. Yes, I know it's really feckin' hard - but I beg you all to hang on in there. "It can't rain forever."

EVERYTHING IN LIFE RESOLVES - and this will too :)

And you will be amazed at what you have learned from these crazy times, and how these days could actually be making you an even *better* human. I'll explain more about that later :)

I am of the opinion that knowing how amazing **YOU** are is actually **vital** right now - and yet, I know so many of you struggle to see just how amazing you truly are.

Sooooooooo, I'm going to help you :)

All I ask is you allow yourself to believe what I am about to share with you. I don't do "b*****t," and will never tell you something just to make you "feel better." What follows is the truth - my truth - my opinion.

I believe in **YOU**...so now? It's your turn to believe in **YOU** too :)

STRAP YOURSELF IN!!

- See you? Yes **YOU**, the person reading this. You are still here and still doing all you can to help, as the entire globe tries to deal with this horrid COVID-19 .. even if all you are doing is staying at home! That *still* makes **YOU** amazing! Go **YOU**!!
- There has never been another **YOU** before, there is currently no one like **YOU**, and there will never be another **YOU** in the future - which not only makes you amazing, it also makes you so very unique, and so very, very important. Go **YOU**!!
- **YOU** are learning so much about **YOU** right now. You're learning what **YOU** are capable of in a crisis. You are finding love, care and concern on levels like you have never experienced before, and this is making **YOU** an even better human (ya big show-off lol). **YOU** are seeing how strong you are - even during your weakest moments. **YOU** and your strength are astounding - and **YOU** will just keep getting better and better. Go **YOU**!!
- **YOU** are the most important person in at least one person's life (there are tons more, but for now? We'll concentrate on one).

For this particular person, their entire world would be miserable without YOU. YOU bring so much joy, happiness, love, and care to this person's life, which makes YOU fantastic! Go YOU!!

- YOU have an abundance of talent. Now, you might not realise just what that talent is, but trust me - you have an abundance of it. Let me explain.

If, say, you play guitar or are excellent at drawing then, YOU HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF TALENT! Which is amazing.

"But I can't do anything Gary - I'm crap at everything." If this statement is one YOU can relate to? Well, sorry for being argumentative but .. **YOU'RE WRONG!**

Talent comes in so many shapes and sizes - it can have so many, many forms. I bet you are a good listener. I bet you are there when those closest to you need you. That is a talent my friend! So, I want you to stop reading this for a sec, and write down three talents you have - and be really proud as you do it! It could be, "I play the guitar" etc, or it could be, "I am a really good son/daughter/friend." Go on - write them down .. I'll wait here for ya :)

Back? Good. I hope you enjoyed admitting you are talented. Go YOU!

I think you get where I'm going with this. But here's the thing. Me telling you all these truths is a complete waste of time if YOU don't believe in YOU! And that can be a bit hard sometimes, right?

Especially during these crazy times .. or can it?

You see, loving and believing in you is hands-down the most important bit of advice I can ever share with you. YOU are not "stupid, fat, ugly, useless" or any other disgusting term you may have heard thrown at you - or you may have thrown at yourself! Those are the opinions of others - so feck them!

The trick is to love and believe in YOU - then you won't care about the negative comments from the unimportant, as you know they are not true because YOU ROCK!

"Eh.....but like, HOW do I love myself Gar me auld mucker?"

Glad you asked :)

Before I shamefully went to prison, I completely hated myself. I suppose I felt I had 'good reason' to - but there is never, ever a good reason to even dislike yourself.

Prison thought me so much about ME. I was left on my own in a cell for hours upon hours and all I had was a TV showing silly programs, and my thoughts. I also had a pen and some paper - but I'll get back to those in a sec.

I knew I needed to change - to be a better person. But I knew I couldn't move forward if I still held this resentment towards myself. So, I dug deep - in the most negative place on earth - a prison cell. I dug until I found something I was proud of myself over, and once I found it, I wrote it down. In the beginning, I was lucky if I got two a night - but it was still progress. I needed to love myself, in order to let others love me too.

As the nights went on? Ah sure, I became Mr. Vain - I was writing down multiple things that I liked about myself - about ME - and as strange as it felt to be nice to myself, I can't deny that it made me feel good too. And do you want to know a secret? These days, if I'm feeling low, I'll grab a pen and some paper, and I will dig deep and find the things I like about myself, and use them as a reminder.

So I beg YOU to do the same. Grab a pen and some paper and let it flow.

And see that page that you are writing on? It is very special that page - it will NEVER interrupt you - it will NEVER judge you - it just wants to listen to whatever you have to say. So tell it everything :)

I said earlier we are all adapting right now .. video calling has never been so popular! We are doing all we can to survive. We are doing all we can for OTHERS - which is why I wrote this piece for YOU.

YOU are the most important person in your world - and that's completely fine to say and feel that :)

So please, please, go easy on YOU, love YOU, believe in YOU - and I promise you, you WILL get through this.

And I am always around if you need a chat - that goes for the amazing teachers and fantastic parents too.

Before I go, I said the following earlier: "... these days could actually be making you an even better human"

Let me explain...

In prison, I was shocked at how quickly I realised all the beautiful people I had taken for granted - especially my Mam. I quickly realised all the little things I had taken for granted too, like a walk around my park, or dropping down to see my friends.

Now, it's my fault I had to experience those days of regret, but I am convinced those feelings of longing and loss made me the man I am today.

One of my favourite words is GRATITUDE - I believe in its incredible power.

When I was released, the amount of gratitude I had for absolutely EVERYTHING was unbelievable! It flowed out of me like a gushing waterfall and still pours from me to this very day. And displaying gratitude is such a wonderful feeling for YOU to experience - as it makes YOU feel good about YOU!

So, I want you to take a minute....

Close your eyes and picture this COVID-19 nightmare to be over. Now, picture that first meeting up with your Nana, or your mates etc....think of how grateful you will all be, and how good you will all feel. That's gratitude right there! Feels amazing right?

And that gratitude, and all its wonderful glow, can and will last, and the more you display it? The better you are as a human! Thus proving, you are actually becoming an even better human throughout all this madness, as I know how grateful you will all be when this is all over.

See? Told ya I was right (lol).

Oh....and you don't have to wait until this nightmare is over to experience this level of gratitude and its incredible power - you can feel it right now if you like. Because I KNOW you guys are so grateful for your families, loved ones, and all those closest to you. For all the teachers who are also doing all they can to adapt, so you guys don't lose out.

So, if you feel like experiencing gratitude BEFORE the madness ends? Show all the Ninja's around you how grateful you are for them - and enjoy how good that makes YOU feel :)

Thank you so much for making it this far.

Please remain safe and well - we are all in this together, so if I can ever be of any assistance? Just shout ;)

And before I go, I would love for anyone who is good enough to read my ramblings, to digest the following...I hope you find it in yourself to believe these words, as they are only the truth:

YOU are beautiful...
YOU are strong...
YOU are unique...
YOU are intelligent...
YOU are amazing...
YOU are YOU...
YOU ARE ENOUGH

Sending an abundance of love and light,

Gary Cunningham.



Many artists and musicians are continuing to work during the lockdown from home and via social media. As a composer, I used the **#EasterWellbeingChallenge** as an

opportunity to compose a new piano piece called "if we winter this one out". The title refers to the first half of the Seamus Heaney quote "if we winter this one out, we can summer anywhere" - this is the first half of a two-part series which I will record during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The piece is about the "winter" of COVID-19 - the isolation, the social distancing, the lack of trust in others, the loss of a sense of community, the loneliness, the deaths and funerals without communities, and most of all it's about the lack of our ability to be able to touch and hug each other.

The image of a young son not being able to hug his mother came from Alex (6th Year) whom I spoke to for our third Newsletter. He talked with honesty and integrity about his experience of social distancing and of his fear that his touch could make his cocooning mother ill with the coronavirus. The fear permeates his home for the past month and will continue to do so until this crisis is over. This piece is dedicated to all those who live in fear. The next piece in the series "we can summer anywhere" will be the complete opposite of the desolation and starkness of this one.

Thank you, Alex, for sharing your story and inspiring this piece.

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KONe--AhcE>

Speaking to Gary during the week was a joy, and I'm going to leave you with his power words:

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