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FEATURES

Letterkenny teen featured in mental health exhibition

BY CONOR SHARKEY

A Letterkenny teenager battling depression and anxiety is featured in a major new art exhibition aimed at getting people talking about their mental health.

Anthony Foy's image forms part of the **Facing Change** collection which was launched recently in Dublin before going on tour across Ireland.

The exhibition has been compiled by **Genio**, a non-profit organisation working with the government to transform social services.

The collection features ten portraits of people from across Ireland who have been supported to overcome personal challenges related to mental health, disability, homelessness and dementia.

In the case of former Errigal College student Anthony, he began to struggle in his early teens following the passing of his grandfather.

His depression led to difficulties in school and resulted in him spending time in a mental health unit in Galway hospital.

By the time he finished school he had stopped leaving the house altogether and withdrew into almost complete isolation.

"Growing up I was always told by my mum that I was a really outgoing child," says the 19-year-old.

"It was only when my granddad who I was really close to passed away nine years ago that my mental health really hit me. It is still hard to talk about but I ended up spending three months in Galway hospital."

Through the Letterkenny Youth and Family Service (LYFS) and in particular its manager Garry Glennon, the HSE and a number of other support agencies, Anthony is fighting back.

He recently started a course through Worklink North West, a training and support service for people who have experienced mental health difficulties.

He also enjoys football training and loves rap music and tattoos.

"If it wasn't for the HSE I don't know where I would be today," says Anthony.

"It was actually Sharon Ferguson who works with the HSE who asked me if I would like to take part in the **Facing Change** exhibition. She came to LYFS and asked to if I wanted to get involved.

"I was nervous about doing it but now that it is done I felt like I had helped someone. And that was my whole reason for getting involved, to help someone else who may not be as open about their mental health as I have been."

Anthony's portrait was shot in Glenveagh National Park. Striking

in its simplicity, it shows him squatting on a rock, knees showing through his trendy ripped jeans while staring straight at the camera. Under a blue sky, Donegal's snow-capped mountains can be clearly seen in the background.

"Ruth the photographer and Fiona from **Genio** asked me where a nice place to take the photo would be. I told them Glenveagh so we headed up there and it just happened to be the perfect day with the weather."

Facing Change will make its way through Ireland before arriving in Donegal in October.

Anthony says he hopes his participation in the project will inspire others to talk about their mental health.

"It's okay not to be okay, that is my motto. You can have a bad week but just talking to one person can bring you right back up. And that is what I am trying say, that there is always someone out there to talk to.

"I'm still not out of the woods, I am still on my own journey. It is a long road and I am taking my time with it. But you do come to realise that everyone will feel depression or anxiety at some point in their lives.

"And I'll say it again, it's okay not to be okay."



Anthony Foy portrait.



Pictured at the launch were, from left, Catherine Leen, **Genio** Service user from Dublin, Anthony Foy, **Genio** Service user from Donegal with **Ruth Medjber** (centre), the photographer of the exhibition.