Who Inspires You?

I chose my cousin Ciara for this project because she is very inspiring to me. She worked on the Repeal the 8th Amendment and the Marriage Equality referendum campaigns. She volunteered in the refugee camp in Calais and has run as a candidate in the local and national elections.

She inspires me because she believes in equal rights for all people regardless of gender, race or religion. I want to be as determined, confident and as kind as Ciara when I grow up. She’s also great fun and really good at fancy dress!

An Interview with Ciara Kennedy

**Mae:** Who or What inspires you?

**Ciara:** I am inspired by many different people, my family inspire me, I am very lucky to have a wonderful extended family that I am close with. There is a caring and kindness to our family that has definitely shaped the type of person that I aspire to be. Growing up I was surrounded by strong female influences so I grew up a feminist, even if I didn’t know I was. I grew up being inspired by the President of Ireland. Mary Robinson is the first President I remember, she was an amazing leader and advocate for the women of Ireland (Mná na hÉireann). Although she was the first woman to hold the office of President I didn’t really understand the historical importance of this at the time, to me it meant that Presidents were women. She went on to serve as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Mary McAleese was elected President of Ireland, cementing the idea that President, or at least Irish ones, were women (named Mary!)

I am also inspired by the next generation (you, your sister, brother, cousins and friends). Your generation’s acceptance of difference is wonderful to witness. There is a long way to go before we have a truly equal society but your generation have the ability to bring us closer then we have before. Yours is the generation of school strikes, Greta Thunberg, Mala Yousafazi and much, much more. I’m excited to see what the future brings.

**Mae:** Why did you go to France to help in the refugee camp?

**Ciara:** The refugee crisis is a massive global crisis, and sometimes when you read the reports in the newspapers or see them on TV it can seem almost too big and you can feel like you have no idea where to even begin to try and help tackle it. So when I heard about the charity “Help Refugees” on a podcast it became a real thing that I could do. There was a charity to contact and someone, like me, telling me they had done it and so could I. Originally I wanted to drive over and bring supplies/ donations with me. The original idea was to borrow my father’s jeep and drive over with female hygiene products and baby supplies. But when I researched more it became clear that driving was a much bigger task than I had anticipated and also that the donations that were needed were men’s shoes and socks. My assumptions were all wrong and that was fine because I did the research.

One of the best things about the experience was that my father came with me, being there with him and witnessing his experience was really wonderful. He really got into it and was so open and accepting of what was very different environment than he was used to.

**Mae:** How did you get interested in politics?

**Ciara:** My interest in politics came late in my life, I was not politically engaged when I was in school or college. I remember when I lived in Australia I was on the beach with a friend and I was reading aloud from a book “ 100 things to do before you die” and one of the things was “be present to your country wins the world cup” but I misread it as “ be president when your country wins the world cup” and honestly I found it more difficult to imagine Ireland winning a world cup than to imagining me or someone like me being president ( Thanks to the Marys) Now I think that I’m part of that was I was only thinking about the men’s soccer team, I know now that there are any sports that have world cups and that our women’s team excel in many of those sports.

The marriage equality referendum was the first time I had experienced the power of a grassroots movement and saw first-hand that ordinary people can make massive changes happen.

After marriage equality I decided I wanted to join a political party, I resented the “big” Irish parties and chose to join the smallest. I was very active in the Together For Yes campaign to repeal the 8th amendment and have been active member of the Labour Party for the last few years. I feel change can only happen if those of us who can stand up or fight for it, so that’s what I’m attempting to do.

**Mae:** Why did you decide to run for the Dáil?

**Ciara:** My decision to run for the Dáil has a few different elements to it. Firstly, I am a member of a small party that has a proud tradition in Cork South Central constituency and I wanted us to have a candidate on the ballot, and the national coordinator felt I was the best choice.

Secondly, in the last election Cork South Central was probable one of the hardest if not hardest fourth constituencies in the country. I was running up against Micheál Martin (Leader of Fianna Fáil), Micheal Magrath (Fianna Fáil incumbent TD), Simon Coveny (deputy leader Fine Gael), Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire (Sinn Féin incumbent TD), Jerry Buttimer (Fine Gael former TD current Senator) and Lorna Broge (Green Party Councillor). So there was very little chance I was going to be elected to a 4 seater with that competition.

So the pressure to win was off but I wanted to run to give people choice to have a female representation on the ballot paper. I knew little to no chance of winning but I felt it was still important to put myself forward so that people had the choice and option to vote for me and what I represented. Choice is important and every vote I got showed those that got elected that not everyone agreed with their views.

Thirdly, I felt it would be a great learning experience and it was. I wanted to see if I could push myself out of my comfort zone and learn something along the way.

Fourthly, I wanted to show the younger generations in my family that you can fight for what you believe in and you can be anything you want to be even if I didn’t win.

**Mae:** Do you think you can make Ireland a better place?

**Ciara:** I do not think alone I can make Ireland a better place, I don’t think any one person can. I also feel that one person’s idea of a better Ireland may not be everyone’s. This is why it is very important to have many different voices at the decision making table. The Irish Government needs to be a reflection of Irish society, that means we need people from different social backgrounds, people of colour, people of all religions and none, members of the traveling community, members of the LGBTQI+ community, people with disabilities etc and not just one but many. Change does not just happen in Government, we have seen here in Ireland that we can change society through grassroots movements. Grassroots movements lead the way for both the marriage equality and the repeal the 8th referendums. I will definitely continue to work with others to try and make change for the better.