

# PLANET YOUTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Rejkavik

14<sup>th</sup> September 2022

I am truly fascinated with the work of Planet Youth, with its creation of a preventive methodology, to combat substance abuse and misuse, among youths by empowering them with the skills of resilience.

I was even more intrigued when I went through the statistical findings of Iceland, and how this methodology has managed to control and drastically reduce, the abuse and dependency within the Icelandic younger generation.

The positive results achieved by Iceland in 15 years, is amazing. From being among the highest ranking countries in Europe for children between 15 to 16 years of age that misuse substance, Iceland became one of the lowest ranking countries in Europe. This is evidence of the effectiveness of this preventive methodology.

No wonder that Planet Youth is now working in 14 different countries, and the methodology has been adopted across the world, in 5 continents.

It is encouraging to know of this tremendous impact. And as Jun says:

**‘Yes, Prevention is Possible’.**

As a former President of my country Malta, and as President of Eurochild, together with my lifelong focus on children, I am a believer of preventive approaches, for sustainable impact.

I believe that investing in our children by empowering them with the necessary life skills-set of resilience, is undoubtedly not only a short-term effective action, but even more so, it ensures a long-term positive impact.

It is the most sustainable of ways to address a myriad of continuous challenges that the young generation of today is facing in such an uncertain world.

It is also, the most effective of ways, to ensure that our young people will be able to enjoy their lives, their physical and mental health, their wellbeing and their potential prosperity.

Our education systems are fundamental and crucial. They must be adapted for our children and young people to be able to overcome these worrying challenges and built resilience to face this uncertain and turbulent world of ours.

I wanted to be present in person for this conference to discuss deeply with you the essence of this preventive methodology with its different models..... however fate had it otherwise.

I will therefore look forward for the conference proceedings and outcomes.

I have learnt through my lifetime experience working with and for children, that it is fundamental for a preventive methodology to be based on: **Learning from yesterday and Working hard today for a Better tomorrow.**

Through the work within the Foundations, I lead today, we work very hard on advocacy. We focus primarily on the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, and in particular on Article 12, that establishes the right of every child to freely express their views, in all matters affecting their lives.

We truly believe that giving children a voice is not only empowering but is the gateway to other rights.

EMPOWERING our children and young people by creating the necessary safe spaces for their participation, is ensuring inbuilt skills in decision taking, and policy making.

All societies are in need of HEALTHY ACTIVE CITIZENS and RESOURCEFUL CRITICAL THINKERS, to ensure healthy resilient communities.

Research shows that when children feel valued, supported, and listened to, they are able to develop a sense of belonging and confidence to voice their opinions without fear.

Evidence shows that children will be able to also develop lifelong skills that will support them in their present, as well as in their future.

Children need to be empowered, by having a support system that they can trust and that it makes them feel valued. Family support is undoubtedly extremely important.

I therefore believe that we also need to work with families to help in building the necessary support systems for our younger generation.

Your Mission at PLANET YOUTH is honouring yet another of the important Articles enshrined in the United Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I am referring to Article 33 of the UNCRC that says that children and young people have a right to be protected from harmful drugs.

To be effectively protected from drugs, children and young people should not only be made aware but also educated and informed about the long term effects of substance misuse.

Children and Young People should be taught that substance abuse will not only harm them physically but even more so psychologically and hinder their life prospects.

Their mental health is ruined, their human dignity perishes, and their holistic wellbeing and meaningful prosperity will be unattainable as a consequence of addiction.

As the famous African proverb says “**It takes a village to raise a child**”. Yes, we need a collective commitment to support the young generation to be able to grow in a safe and healthy environment. We need more than ever before, a sense of unity, collaboration, understanding and commitment to work together, as professionals, practitioners, academics, organisations, as communities and authorities together with the individuals.

Our societies cannot be complacent.

We need to intensify our actions.

Planet Youth is playing the role of a guiding light in all this.

Dear Friends and Colleagues, though you work in difficult, and diverse circumstances and settings, please believe in yourselves, be brave, be innovative, and be the catalysts to bring together the necessary networks for the much-needed preventive methodology to save children, young people, their families, and their communities from the scourge of substance abuse and misuse.

I appeal to the Children and Young People caught up in addiction and remind them that NO MATTER WHAT THE SITUATION IS:

**YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE. YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK. YOU ARE WORTH IT.**

On concluding Dear Friends and Colleagues: Your work is difficult and challenging but never give up. Just remember that your work together with that of others is crucial, for a better world for all of our Children and Young People.

Every life saved is a world saved.