**NNI Press Pass Awards 2013**

**Overall Winner – Elayna Keller, Our Lady’s College, Drogheda, Co Louth**

**Kids Can be Cruel**

I remember when it started. I was in primary school. We were having a times-tables quiz and another pupil and I were head-to-head. I was all set on winning the quiz. I had learned my tables last night with my Dad, so I felt on the ball with everything. When my table – which was the last table, was called to answer, all the kids were banging on the tables, making a loud drumroll. That was expected. Suddenly, one person started to cheer my rival’s name, still banging away. Another person joined in, a boy over here, a girl over there… and then most of the class. No one said my name. I remember the sinking feeling, realising now that that was my confidence crumbling away slowly. I won, if you must know, but it still doesn’t feel like a victory to me.

People say that kids don’t know any better. People say that kids say things they don’t mean to say and that if you’re telling on them, you’re basically telling tales, or being a rat, or whatever you may call it. So what if they’re nine years old? They’re not stupid. They know exactly what they’re doing or at least have some awareness and to this day, the things that some kids say really hurt. Statistically, 40% of nine-year-olds were victims of bullying in the last year according to the ISPCC.

I was first introduced to exclusion properly in 5th class. Nearly everyone, including my friends, turned on me. I would walk home with my brother every day and some children would shout at me and call me ugly and fat. They knew what they were doing, I know they did. A recent event made that clear.

In 2nd year, I was sitting on the school bus on the way home and the topic of primary school came up. The girls laughed and said to me; “Oh, yeah, we all used to hate you for some reason! Can’t remember why, we just did I guess!”

That tore me apart. They couldn’t even apologise. They just laughed and to this day, they still haven’t said sorry. I’ve let go of a lot of things to do with what they’ve done, but this is certainly something I can’t shake off.

It goes for everyone. When things like this are said to you, no matter what time of day it is, no matter how old you are, no matter where you are, no matter how long ago it was, no matter how drunk someone is, no matter if you know a person or not- it hurts. And it sticks. And it’s imprinted there forever.

There was once a boy who ran home crying because another boy threatened to beat him up at school the next day. I remember him. He bawled his eyes out as soon as he was out of sight, and sprinted, feet pounding against the pavement, all the way home. I’ve talked to him recently. He still remembers. He still can’t forget. He was never beat up by the boy, but the remembrance of the fear was a punch to the chest in itself.

People say that kids can be cruel. That’s right, they can be… but I don’t think that people should dare to say such a thing so bluntly and easily. It’s disgraceful to think that because kids are kids, they’ll say these things and then they move on. It’s not like that. What makes childhood bullying any different to secondary school bullying? Or bullying in a work environment? What makes it less painful, the fact that it happened a long time ago? The fact that it’s over and done with? The fact that you’re not in contact with those people anymore?

I don’t think it’s very fair to categorize childhood bullying as minor, like some people do. Do you?

I kept journals as a child. I wrote as often as I could, I drew pictures, I wrote about my day. Now that I look back in them, as time went on, I saw the entries get shorter and the pictures become more graphic. I was begging for help.

“Kids can be cruel” as they say. They can. So don’t take it so lightly. Don’t say; “It wasn’t even that bad” or “It happened ages ago, she’s/he’s just being ridiculous now”. If you notice constant cruelty or see a primary school student upset, notify someone about it. Talk to the student. Even if they don’t accept that kind of help, at least you tried to make that person happy again. I know I would’ve loved that. Don’t neglect a child because of a stupid old saying, because God only knows what childhood bullying might do to someone in the future.