



Radio boss reaches out to youth via new charity

By Catherine O'Mahony

Elaine Geraghty has a 20-year history in the Irish media, kicking off when she joined the start-up team for 98FM in 1989. Most recently, she was chief executive of Newstalk 106-108 FM, having overseen the Dublin-based talk station's successful application for a national broadcasting licence.

Now she's made a surprising move into the charity sector, where she is heading a new online service promoting mental health for young people. Centred on a website called Reachout.com, the service helps young people get through tough times by providing information, support and resources on mental health issues.

Geraghty said her new job had more in common with her previous career than one might think.

"Essentially, it's another start-up," she said. "This is a business and, in those terms, my job is to grow the brand and also to establish the Inspire Ireland Foundation [which is behind the brand] in the whole space of mental health in Ireland.

"People do think that, because it's in the charity space, it must be a bit fluffy, but I am doing exactly the same as I've always done. I have a strong board that I report to, I have clear objectives, and I need to establish us and seek more funding from new sources.

"We're trying to develop innovative technologies, we're looking at mobile phones as a way of delivering our service and we're looking at web-based applications. It's not really foreign territory for me at all."

Reachout.com's core target audience is the 17 to 26-year-

old age group. According to the 2006 census, there were 632,732 Irish people between the ages of 15 and 24.

What is new for Geraghty is the amount of goodwill that charity work tends to provoke. Her marketing budget may be relatively small – a familiar problem in the radio sector – but it has stretched further than usual as a result.

Inspire Ireland had the benefit of considerable pro bono help and some discounted media space in developing its marketing campaign for Reachout.com's launch.

The first tranche of advertising – created by Cawley Nea\TBWA – broke last January in Dublin and Cork. There will be another spurt of advertising in May, in the run-up to exam season.

The messaging is positive and colourful, featuring attractive, fresh-faced young people in regular situations, but with slogans emphasising that superficial happiness doesn't mean all is necessarily well.

The result of that first blast of publicity is that Reachout.com now has 30,000 unique users among the target user market of 17 to 26-year-olds. Promotions continue on Facebook, Twitter and other sites popular with youth audiences.

Geraghty's target is to grow usage to 150,000 unique users by 2012, although this target may be increased over time. She is also hoping that 450,000 people will have an awareness of the site.

The website is designed specifically to appeal to a generation that lives much of its life online. Users swap stories about relationships, exam stress and their experiences of depression. There is information on the site about various

mental health issues and users can also use the site as a stepping stone to access professional services.

Inspire Ireland is working closely in this regard with fellow charity Headstrong, which integrates existing mental health services to better support young people in the community.

Inspire Ireland is a branch of the Inspire Foundation, an international charitable organisation established in 1996 in direct response to Australia's then-escalating rates of youth suicide. In Ireland, its chairman is Colin Hunt, managing director of Macquarie Capital.

A feasibility study, prepared by McKinsey & Co, identified three key criteria for determining the ReachOut.com service's applicability to Ireland: a clear mental health need, high technology and media consumption, and a good fit within Ireland's existing services.

Like Headstrong, the charity is backed financially by the One Foundation and Atlantic

Philanthropies.

Inspire Ireland, which has five full-time staff, has funding for three years and must thereafter be funded by some other means, via the state or corporate backing. It's Geraghty's further job to source this funding.

Geraghty said she was hopeful that corporate Ireland would embrace the concept. This was a perfect time to focus on youth mental health, she said, since so many young people were facing uncertain financial futures, having been brought up to expect quite the reverse.

"Individually we all do very well in terms of our support for charity but in corporate Ireland we've not been so good," she said.

"But there is a whole segment of the population of this country who are in a place than none of us really understand. If we're thinking smartly about this, it's clear that here is a group of people who really must be looked after."



Elaine Geraghty of Reachout.com