

Text of the introductory address delivered by: **DR PÁDRAIC CONWAY**, University College Dublin, on 7 April, 2006, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **CAROLINE CASEY**



A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile, Caroline Casey is one of the most remarkable UCD graduates in the more-than-150-year history of the university and its antecedent institutions. Remarkable in many senses: that we are honouring one so young, that, like Alexander the Great, she has conquered worlds while still in her thirties, and that all this has been achieved while Caroline is visually impaired to the degree that she is registered as legally blind.

Caroline had an outstanding student career at UCD, spanning much of the 90s. She took her honours Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology and Classics in 1992 followed by first-class and first-in-the-class Diploma and Masters in Business in 1996 and '97 at the UCD Michael Smurfit Business School. Caroline worked at Accenture after graduating, achieving highly on projects with both public and private sector clients.

It was in June 2000 when Caroline set up the Aisling Foundation that she first came to public prominence. The very name Aisling connotes a powerful and inspiring vision and it is the aim of the Aisling Foundation to promote the ability of people with disabilities. To foreground the dramatic possibilities latent in this statement of intent, Caroline made a most dramatic gesture: From January - May 2001 she trekked 1,000 km across southern India on elephant back. She raised almost half a million pounds for the National Council for the Blind, Sight Savers International and for the protection of the Asian Elephant while becoming the first western female to achieve the status of elephant mahout. Her trek was chronicled in the National Geographic documentary "Elephant Vision".

Subsequent to her elephant trek, Caroline became involved in *Around the World in Eighty Ways* - an epic bid by three adventurers with disabilities to circumnavigate the globe using 80 different means of transport. *Around the World in Eighty Ways* was an international fundraising, educational and inspirational event which ran from September 2002 - December 2002. The team comprised Caroline Casey and four others. Their aim was to encourage everyone to live their lives to the fullest potential while also raising much-needed funds for deserving charities along the route. They set off from the steps of the reform club on Monday the 2nd of September 2002 to begin their journey around the world. They returned to the steps of the reform club on the 3rd of December 2002 - The UN International Day for people with disabilities. *Around the World in 80 Ways* visited 78 towns

and cities, used 92 modes of transport, raised $\frac{3}{4}$ million worldwide and spoke to audiences from 20 to 4,000 at over 80 events.

Subsequently as part of *Challenge 32* Caroline Casey ran a mile in each of Ireland's 32 counties within 32 hours on 21st / 22nd September 2005.

Since its inception, the Aisling Foundation, with Caroline Casey as CEO, has placed a particular emphasis on the area of employment in the private sector. It has gained an exceptionally high level of both business and news media coverage for its adventurous, unique and positive focus on Ability and has gained the reputation as an organisation that has a real ability to influence lasting change in a positive way.

Today The Aisling Foundation works to influence, motivate, empower and enable business in the employment of people with disabilities.

In 2005, the Aisling Foundation together with disability management consultants, *Access*

Ability, held the first 02 Ability Awards which commend businesses striving to change the culture of employment in Ireland while also encouraging businesses to adopt best practice in meeting and exceeding the needs of employees and consumers with disabilities.

The Ability Awards programme, created designed and directed by The Aisling Foundation, is the first Irish business award for Best Practice in the employment of people with a disability.

Examining all aspects of employment, the awards recognise progressive attitudes, namely in those organisations that see disability and diversity as corporate opportunity and key to its success.

These awards celebrate companies and their business leaders that are successfully employing people with a disability; rewarding professional excellence in this particular area of people-management. The aim of the Awards is to encourage future employment opportunities by highlighting what is already being achieved.

Along with her work for the Aisling Foundation, in September 2002 Caroline was one of the five founding trustees of *Elephant Family*, each of whom own, or personally look after, an Asian elephant. Asian elephants once roamed the earth from Syria to China. Today, they have been reduced to scattered little herds in equally-reduced forest fragments, living under the constant threat of poaching. According to current estimates, only about 50,000 survive in the wild in the whole of Asia. *Elephant Family's* mission is to highlight the plight of the Asian elephant and to lead the way in assessing, managing and funding best practice in elephant conservation.

Through her genuine passion and determination Caroline has successfully set a benchmark nationally and internationally for the promotion of the abilities of those with disabilities. She was named one

of the ESB/Rehab People of the Year 2002; one of Junior Chamber International's "Ten Outstanding Young People of the World" 2002 and one of the RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) UK's People of the Year 2001.

Caroline has been a Board member of FÁS since January 2001, of Comhairle since October 2002 and is also a Board member of 98FM, Jack and Jill Foundation, Sightsavers International and the Irish Charity Tax Reform Group.

This year Caroline was appointed as the first Irish Young Global Leader of The World Economic Forum. She becomes the first Irish person and is one of 44 Europeans chosen to become Young Global Leaders in 2006 and will join a global community now including 410 leaders from all regions and stakeholder groups.

Established in 2004 by Professor Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, the Forum of Young Global Leaders is a unique, multi-stakeholder community of the world's most extraordinary leaders who are 40 years old or younger. They engage together in the 2020 Initiative, a comprehensive endeavour, to understand current and future trends, risks and opportunities both at global and regional levels, formulate a positive vision for the world in 2020 and put forward concrete strategies to translate their vision into action.

The 2006 class of Young Global Leaders includes over 60 business leaders, more than 30 government leaders, and dozens of scholars, media and nongovernmental organization leaders. They come from 50 countries ranging from Argentina to Zimbabwe. Caroline Casey joins a community representing 90 countries that includes the co-founders of Google and the President of Georgia.

When I discussed today's award with her, Caroline inquired "Am I not too young?" I assured her firmly that a free bus pass was not a prerequisite for recognition by UCD or the NUI.

Friends, I am sure that your response to the achievement of Caroline Casey will be the same as mine.

Praehonorabilis Cancellarie, totaque universitas. Praehonorabilis Cancellarie, praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.