

# BARRETSTOWN

Rebuilding Lives Affected  
*by* Childhood Cancer

**At Barretstown camp in County Kildare, children who have known the pain and trauma of cancer and other serious conditions transcend their illness in a magical Irish setting.**





**The Boothman/Flanagan family  
with Barretstown campers  
Niamh and Aislinn**

“If it’s too touchy-feely...we’ll just go home,”

whispered Patricia to her husband Damian as they came through the gates of **Barretstown** in County Kildare. Their daughter Niamh had been diagnosed with cancer and they had been told about the camp at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains where not just ill children but their siblings and families could come for a break.

Patricia and Damian explained the reluctance they had about the unknown. “We had just vacationed as a family elsewhere and Niamh had gotten so many stares with her bald head. It was heartbreaking. We weren’t sure what Barretstown was all about, but we decided to come as a family. When your child has cancer, you live in another world. But it turned out that Barretstown was also a different world – a safe environment where they let kids go at their own pace, and that includes their siblings, with no talk of sickness. Cancer takes many things and it took some of the fun out of our family. Barretstown brought us back to finding that fun again. We left our troubles at that gate.”

Founded by **Paul Newman** as part of his **Hole in the Wall camps** in the US, Barretstown opened in 1994 and has received supported from The Ireland Funds since its beginning. Children from all across Europe come, free of charge, to enjoy transformative fun at a time when they and their families need it most. Through Barretstown’s unique, medically supervised program offering family, summer, and teen sessions, these children are given back their childhood and encouraged to rediscover their confidence and joy.

In its first year, Barretstown welcomed 124 campers. Today, they welcome 1,800 campers and families and have a volunteer base of 700 people each year.

As Barretstown reaches its 18th year, The Ireland Funds talked to two grown campers, to see how Barretstown has touched their lives.



# KAREN

**Karen O'Neill** was a camper at Barretstown when she was 16 years old. She was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia and underwent grueling treatments as a child before coming to Barretstown. Her father Andrew said, "The support from The Ireland Funds has enabled Karen to achieve today what she has reached. Three years ago when she was ill, we had no expectations...."

*Here's how Karen recently expressed her feelings about her time at Barretstown:*

"It's impossible to describe the impact Barretstown has had on my life. There's no combination of words that could fully describe it. I arrived at camp a shy and apprehensive teenager, just six months after finishing my treatment.

I remember before I went I met a family who'd experienced the camp before. They told me that Barretstown was the Hogwarts of the real world, where magic really did happen. 'Yeah right, magic!' was about all I could manage to say.

Driving through the wrought iron gates towards the idyllic castle set by the glistening lake, it felt like entering into a new world, and I was overwhelmed by the warmth that embraced me. Some friends I'd made in hospital were campers too. It was nice for us all to make the transition back to normal teenagers together; to share our experiences and strengthen our friendships. I have since returned to Barretstown on two occasions, the most special of which was when I got the chance to share the experiences with my family. I feel Barretstown offered me a chance to regain all the confidence I lost due to my illness. Barretstown inspired me to stand up and make a difference. It gave me back my independence. And allowed me to explore my creative side and overcome fears. (I arrived terrified of heights – I left with the will to go skydiving, which I did last year, jumping out of a plane at 10,000 ft!) But most importantly . . . Barretstown taught me to smile and laugh no matter what happens. It taught me to embrace the world in all its glory. To realize there is life after cancer."

## **Karen in 2008**

**after completing four courses of chemotherapy.**



## **Karen today**

**A college student studying medicine at Trinity College Dublin.**





**The Ireland Funds have supported Barretstown with over \$4 million in grants since they opened.**

“in 1994 Barretstown welcomed only 124 campers. Today, I'm glad to tell you that we welcome over 1,800 campers. The support from The Ireland Funds over the years has allowed Barretstown to grow and develop into the wonderful place it is today.” —*Dee Ahearn, CEO Barretstown*





**Declan Molloy**

Over a decade ago, The Ireland Funds visited Barretstown and took this photo of children at Barretstown. Who would have thought that in 2012, **Declan Molloy**, one of the boys in the photo, would reach out to The Ireland Funds with words of thanks for our donors' support. Today, Declan Molloy is a 20 year old student in Trinity College. Here he tells of how Barretstown has influenced him so many years later: "I went to camp back in 2001 -2003 as a camper. I had battled Acute Myeloid Leukaemia for the year prior to camp and to say the least, was left drained from the roller coaster journey that finally brought me into remission. I was left a very self-conscious young boy always worrying about my appearance. Post-treatment I was always nervous and even embarrassed by the fact that I was bald and pale all the time. Barretstown replaced something in me that had been missing since I met Leukaemia and it's only now as an adult I realise that as corny as it sounds, Barretstown gave me back my childhood.

Barretstown instilled a level of confidence in me that had vanished for a while since Leukaemia made an appearance. I realised as a camper that I could do anything I wanted while at camp and no disease or amount of drugs I was on could stop me. I climbed 40 foot poles at the high ropes course; hit bull's eyes at the archery range, caught fish at the lake and so much more. At camp, I realised that Leukaemia shouldn't affect my daily life and so I changed for the better and took this way of life into the real world. My mother to this day still says she collected a different child after my attending Barretstown!

Today, I am a confident young man and I am sure that if I hadn't experienced the magic of Barretstown as a child, I wouldn't be half the man I am today. I feel having conquered the mountain that is childhood cancer, nothing can stand in my way. I regularly volunteer at Barretstown's weekend camps and fundraise whenever I can to try and show my gratitude for this inspirational place.

I hope my story can help inspire the donors of The Ireland Funds to realise by donating to Barretstown how much of an impact they are having on the lives of not only the children brought to camp but also the families affected by childhood cancer.

On behalf of all the campers I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart for your continued and much needed support. Words cannot describe how truly grateful we are."





One Ireland Funds' donor who has made a commitment to Barretstown is National **Board Director John Fitzpatrick**. John continues to honor his late parents, Eithne and Paddy Fitzpatrick, through his annual golf tournament named in their honor. To date, the tournament has given over \$1 million to assist Irish charities including Barretstown. An amphitheatre and a cottage where families stay on the Barretstown property have also been established in their honor. John was recently featured in the Irish television series Secret Millionaire and is known both in Ireland and the US for his interest in Irish charities that focus on peace and children.

"My parents were a tremendous influence on me and I wanted to do something to make sure they would always be remembered. Through The American Ireland Fund, I honor them by supporting the work of the Corrymeela Community and Barretstown Camp, advancing two causes that were important to them: peace and children."

**The Ireland Funds have continued to support Barretstown with a grant in 2011. Our donors' support allows The Ireland Funds to offer assistance to this magnificent Irish project that brings care and comfort to the lives of children and their families so that the gate will always be open and troubles can be left there.**