



THE ARK TAKES CHILDREN ON A CULTURAL JOURNEY WITH HELP FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS



THE ENERGY OF TWENTY 7-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN EXPLORING A NEW ENVIRONMENT IS A JOYFUL THING TO WATCH.

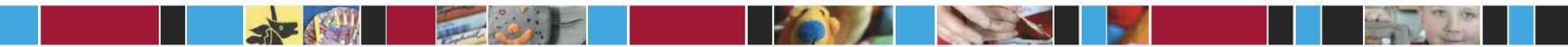
Some go straight to the clay; others stare with wonder at jars of sea creatures and coral. Artist Terry O'Farrell gathers the group together in the sun-filled room and asks, "Tell me, what is important to you? What would you like to carve into this clay?"



The Ark is a place where children age 2-12 are empowered and encouraged to answer such questions through creative expression. Opened in 1995, it was Europe's first cultural center for children. The multi-story building in the heart of Dublin is laid out with children in mind: colors, textures, and

A "TOUCH EVERYTHING" ATTITUDE MAKE CHILDREN

FEEL ENGAGED AND WELCOMED. The Ark's deliberately broad definition of "culture" is inclusive: literature, dance, music, new technologies, and film are just some of the mediums used to inspire children, their families, schools, and communities. Programs are developed in-house with an eye to hands-on interaction. These programs are complemented by a cadre of visiting artists who hold workshops with children.



A RICH CULTURAL LIFE

One of the first things parents and teachers note when children come to The Ark is the quality of engagement. It is not uncommon to see children who struggle in the classroom develop newfound confidence and concentration through creative activities at The Ark. Parents report that children who don't speak about what they are doing at school have come home and not been able to stop talking about their visits.

"EVERY SINGLE CHILD, REGARDLESS OF BACKGROUND, INCOME, OR ABILITY, HAS A RIGHT TO A RICH CULTURAL LIFE," SAID EINA MCHUGH, DIRECTOR OF THE ARK. "WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT ART CAN DO IN A CHILD'S LIFE."

Eina explained that while fun is an ever-present theme for children as they come through the doors, there are larger benefits that come with it. "Outside evaluators have shown us that children who are involved in our programs miss fewer days at school. They have a higher level of well-being. Their communications skills improve. A key quote from one of the reports was, 'The Ark has proven that high-quality arts can make a transformative difference in communities.'"

The Ireland Funds were early supporters of The Ark back before the doors even opened. In 1991, the Irish Government decided to establish Temple Bar as a "cultural quarter" and a space geared toward children was explored. The Ireland Funds identified The Ark as a project with great potential and provided early funding. Today, over 1,000 artists, including award-winning authors, poets, and musicians have partnered with The Ark to bring quality arts experiences to children. The name "The Ark" was chosen not only because it was a word that children found easy to say, but also because it represented a voyage to someplace new and wonderful.

MUSIC AND THEATER-A RENEWED FOCUS

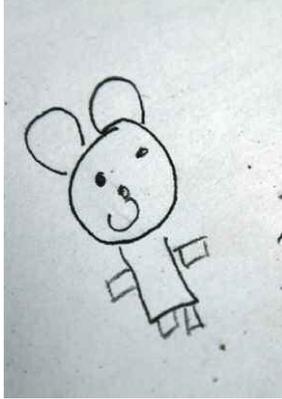
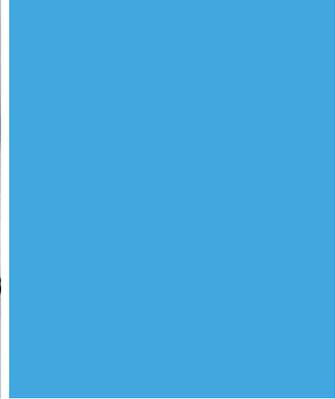
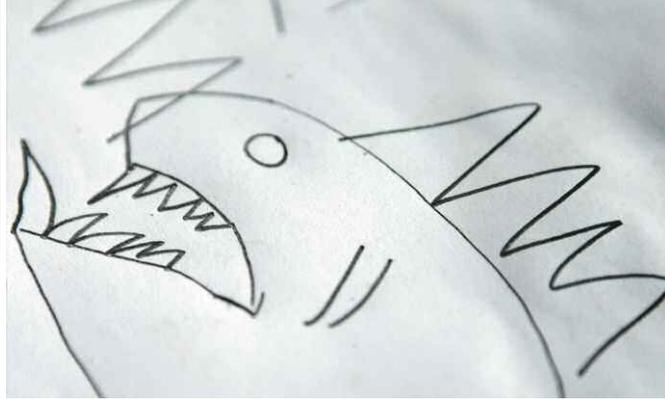
Maria Fleming, Theater Programmer at the Ark expressed gratitude for The Ireland Funds' involvement over the years. "It makes such a difference to have people alongside us like The Ireland Funds. Projects like The Ark are for dreamers and visionaries, for people who see beyond today and actually believe in and commit to the future. That commitment is so rare and we are grateful."

In June 2011, The Ark launched a three-year focus on music programs for schools and families. The most recent grant from The Ireland Funds has supported this initiative by funding a music program called "Play", which was a series of hands-on workshops and concerts for children that were held with world-class musicians. The theater program at The Ark continues to drive forward the next generation of new theater work for children and is additionally exploring performances that are geared to children with autism.

"This is a difficult time for Ireland," said Maria. "We have a unique culture here in Ireland and it really is our strength. When we get funding from the diaspora it is such a vote of confidence. The Ireland Funds are known to many people and the funding is a stamp of approval that we deeply appreciate."

Gallery spaces, a theater, a rooftop garden, and interactive digital exhibits are all part of The Ark experience. In addition to the content-rich programs for children, the organization advocates for arts education through symposiums, workshops, and initiatives that have shown benefits across Ireland.

The evaluations show the organization's impact and after 17 years, the methodology used is proven. But a seven year old doesn't much care about these things. All that really matters to her is the joy of her hands in clay, a jar of terrific sea creatures, and an opportunity to have fun while learning. The Ireland Funds are proud to support The Ark, where the children can begin a creative and cultural journey that hopefully lasts a lifetime.



**"I LOVED IT, I'D COME A MILLION TIMES IF I COULD."
- ELIZABETH, AGE 9**



"THE IRELAND FUNDS HAVE BEEN HUGELY IMPORTANT TO THE ARK. IT HASN'T BEEN JUST ABOUT THE MONEY, THOUGH THE MONEY REALLY MATTERS. THE SUPPORT OF THE IRELAND FUNDS IS PHILOSOPHICAL. IT IS AN ABSOLUTE ENERGETIC SUPPORT THAT STANDS FOR THE CREATIVE LIFE, FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR POTENTIAL. IT IS THE ACT OF COMING ALONGSIDE AND STANDING WITH US. WE ARE CONSTANTLY REINTERPRETING CULTURE AND THE IRELAND FUNDS ARE PART OF THAT JOURNEY."

- EINA MCHUGH, DIRECTOR OF THE ARK

