



In County Limerick there is a place where art, science, music, health, stories and digital learning for children all come together to make up what is known as the Learning Hub. In a disadvantaged area of Limerick where some neighborhoods see only 6% of young people progress to a university education, instilling a love of learning is key. The Ireland Funds have recently supported the Science Hub by funding a Science Coordinator position.

# LEARNING HUB LIMERICK

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU learn!



## "WHO KNOWS WHAT STATIC ELECTRICITY IS?"

asks Science Coordinator Sean O'Brien of the 20+ children in white lab coats vigorously rubbing balloons on one another's heads, gleefully making their hair stand on end. "Did you know you're making static electricity right now?"

Initially piloted in 2011 with a group of 12 primary school children who attended after-school workshops at the Hub, the science program has grown and extended its range of services. Workshops are run twice a week for children all over Limerick County and partnerships with local universities bring in volunteers and student mentors. These mentors not only assist in hands-on teaching, but provide the children with first-hand exposure to someone receiving a 3rd level education.

"The age group between ages 8-15 is a key time," explains Learning Hub Manager Jennifer Moroney Ward. "Personal development happens, a lot of ideas and aspirations are formed, or hopes are dashed. We're here at that crucial time to provide a learning experience they might not otherwise receive."

The grant from The Ireland Funds has been crucial to growing the Science Hub. It was in a pilot phase when then-student Sean O'Brien came on board to teach as part of his final year project at the University of Limerick. Now, thanks to The Ireland Funds' grant, he has come on board as the Science Coordinator and can devote time and energy to instilling a passion for science in the children that attend.

"A lot of kids in Ireland drop science after first year in secondary school. They don't even get to do it to junior level. So we're here to try and plug that gap," says Jennifer. "The funding we received from The Ireland Funds allowed us to leverage even more support. That's a real key role for Ireland Funds' grants: it's a stamp of approval. We were successful with another grant application afterwards and if we hadn't gotten the funding from The Ireland Funds, that might not have happened. It truly made us more attractive to other funding partners."

And so in the midst of music lessons, art classes, computer models and health tutorials, children from Limerick are also learning about what happens when you insert electrical wires into lemons and how kinetic energy can actually be exciting. As Jennifer sums it up, "It is our job to tell the story of how wonderful these kids are and what can be achieved. They are as capable of taking on a science experiment as any other kid is. It doesn't matter what their address is or what school they go to. They have the capacity to give it a go."

Sean O'Brien, Science  
Hub Coordinator, instills  
his love of science at  
the LearningHub