

Reduce Reuse Recycle ReCreate

ReCreate is a national social enterprise in Ireland that takes end of line and surplus stock from businesses and reuses them as arts materials. Its warehouse outside Dublin is full to the brim with all types of fantastic arts materials such as paper, wool, plastics, fabric, tubing, foam and many other unusual and unexpected surprises. With help from The Ireland Funds, the organization has kept unused materials out of landfill and given them new life as educational arts materials, often to disadvantaged areas that previously had no arts programs. *Dara Connolly is the Executive Director of ReCreate. Here, he shares how this dynamic organization is working to make their arts and education materials accessible to every community in Ireland.*



It has been a phenomenal year...

for ReCreate and thanks to The Ireland Funds support, the future is bright for this dynamic and innovative social enterprise. In its 3 years of existence we have supplied quality art materials and educational supplies to over 150,000 children and adults all over Ireland via our membership base of 1700 schools and community groups. We have also completed over 600 workshops and events teaching all and sundry the nuances and techniques of Creative Reuse. This concept is a brilliant holistic solution where materials unwanted by industry (that otherwise would be going to landfill or recycling) are reused for all kinds of educational and creative projects.

By sourcing, collecting and then redistributing free of charge tons of unwanted stock to those that need it, ReCreate is a link. It is the bridge between the community and the corporate sector. The organization is making all kinds of creative and inventive pursuits possible where before many of its members did not have any arts program at all due to lack of budgets.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CREATIVITY

In this period of incredible growth, we have discovered that the unique, flexible materials that are now accessible and affordable from our Warehouse of Wonders have many other positive attributes and we are unveiling more every day. Through the many workshops our group of over 20 amazing artists facilitate, they have identified the open ended nature of the materials offer real opportunity for creativity and outside of the box thinking to flourish.

There is no right or wrong way to use the materials. It is up to the individual, they are indeed failure-free. Therefore, feelings of wellbeing, confidence and improved communication result from creative exploration with the materials. This is particularly powerful with those with special needs as observed below by Deirdre Rogers, Arts Director at ReCreate at a workshop in an inclusive school in July 2016:

"I noticed one girl standing with her back to the class, her jacket on and hood up. She was non-responsive to the excitement and activities of the other pupils around her.

Her teacher informed me that she had learning difficulties and was better left alone. I honoured this request but quietly left a selection of materials near her and observed her response throughout the workshop.

Within half an hour she had removed her hood and was engaging with the materials with help from her teacher. By the end of the workshop she was vocalizing her delight, showing off her creation and actively taking part in the clean-up process. Her delighted teacher commented on the transformation in her participation levels when introduced to the materials and noted that she would use them again as a learning tool."

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Our members and staff are forever observing the flexible nature of the reused materials, as well as their sensory and tactile attributes. We gained the understanding that ReCreate's materials are bringing people together, encouraging communication and collaboration as individuals experiment and discover new uses and combinations, producing objects of beauty and wonderment.





ReCreate sought to prove our social impact with the help of Trinity College Dublin. We adopted an ‘artist in residence’ model within 18 educational and community based groups with children, young people and adults with diverse learning needs. During 300 hours of workshops we studied if the open-ended materials encouraged greater flexibility and creativity in classrooms. The results were overwhelmingly positive and the whole project is a massive confirmation to the work we are doing.

HEADS UP: THE DOCUMENTATION OF CREATIVE REUSE

To further share the results of this research, ReCreate has published a beautifully designed, engaging publication called *Heads Up*. This book, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, displays the results of the study and creative tips for practitioners as well as stunning photographs and graphics to depict the ReCreate story. It is a book for everybody and is available online and free of charge.

We will now scale up the project in 2017 to produce the first fully-documented, third-party, confirmed research paper with the aim to influence national policy, recognizing the multiple benefits of creative reuse in the areas of education, active community and mental health. This will enable ReCreate to also produce a comprehensive training manual and an educational module in conjunction with Trinity College for both artists and teachers.

The definitive findings in the *Heads Up* study that visual arts education training in inclusive schools using open ended materials was very limited, is an area ReCreate will action in 2017.

THE IRELAND FUNDS ENABLE THE SENSORY PROJECT

2016 saw ReCreate solidify its position as an enabler of arts in Ireland with major awards from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, winning the National Community Recycling award as well as the Dublin City Enterprise Award. ReCreate now hopes to take what was learned in 2016, and thanks to a grant from The Ireland Funds, build on this in 2017 with “The Sensory Project.” Focusing on play, the Sensory Project is using open-ended reusable materials to engage children’s senses, provide provocations and enhance existing environments.

Our aims are to create sensory areas within crèche settings for all children to use while the carers and teachers can utilize the space as an additional learning tool that focuses on the child’s individual needs. We are documenting this process with the help of Early Childhood Ireland to enable reconstruction of the spaces as the knowledge we have gained can be easily repeated. This will be supported with evidence-based research of the tactile and sensory attributes of the materials.

A VISION OF GROWTH : THE CREATIVE HUB

Our biggest challenge in 2017 is to keep up with the insatiable demand for the materials. Our main objective for the year is to secure a new premises in Dublin as we have quickly outgrown the ‘Warehouse of Wonders’ and we need double the space we currently occupy. In fact, we are bursting at the seams with fantastic materials, and have to turn away large groups that want workshops and refuse very large deliveries of materials. As well as opening up other centers around Ireland via social franchises, we have a vision of creating a Creative Sustainable Hub with shared spaces for other social enterprises and large workshop spaces where sculptures can be created. We would like to install recording equipment to record our programs and put online the learning of the team and our large body of artists. This concept of the online Creative Hub has the support of our new partners, the University of Massachusetts who are very interested in our work especially the results of the Heads Up project. The online Hub will signify a huge development and will greatly add to the sustainability of the organization, ensuring quality materials in abundant quantities can be accessed for all kinds of creative projects whenever and wherever they are required. We are very confident and with the help of our supporters we will create another ‘Aladdin’s Cave’ for an even wider community to explore and enjoy.

— Dara Connolly is Executive Director of ReCreate



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