



IRISH  
AMERICAN  
PARTNERSHIP

40  
YEARS

# Impact Report

WINTER 2025

## Royal Irish Academy of Music

Driven by the core belief that talent deserves opportunity, RIAM launches the *Strings Attached* program

p4

## Sisters IN

A pioneering mentorship and skills development program for Northern Ireland's future female leaders

p10







## Dear Friends,

*As we approach the Partnership's 40th anniversary, I find myself thinking back over the many moments shared—lasting moments that have stayed with me.*



---

*Every gift you make  
becomes part of a  
young person's story.*

---

From visiting schools in rural Ireland, to meeting students whose confidence soared because someone believed in them, to gathering with so many of you at events on both sides of the Atlantic—this work has given me meaningful memories.

Your commitment to Ireland's young people has been at the heart of it all. Because of your generosity, students across the island, whether in a small village classroom or a university lab, are discovering new opportunities that reflect their talent, ambition, and potential. This year alone, **you have helped provide more than \$3 million in support for schools, teachers, and students.** It is an extraordinary testament to what this community can accomplish together.

Within this *Impact Report*, you will see how deeply your giving resonates, with stories of students accessing new

opportunities that open doors and change the trajectory of their lives. Every gift you make becomes part of a young person's story.

Many of you have been part of this journey as long as I have. If you have a memory—an event, a visit, or a moment when you felt the impact of this work—I invite you to share it with us at [40@irishap.org](mailto:40@irishap.org). Your reflections will help us honor four decades of community, connection, and impact.

Thank you for your generous support of the Partnership's remarkable journey so far. We are honored to count you as part of our community as we continue to invest in a brighter future for Ireland's next generation.

A handwritten signature of Michael T. Clune in black ink.

**Michael T. Clune**  
*Chairman, Irish American Partnership*





# Cooking Up Skills for Life

*O'Connell Secondary School prepares students for life beyond the classroom.*

O'Connell Secondary School serves more than two hundred boys in the heart of inner-city Dublin, many of whom face significant socioeconomic challenges long before they enter the classroom. Teachers identified a growing need within this diverse school community—to equip students with practical life skills, especially around food preparation, nutrition, and self-sufficiency.

**“Many of our students have never had the chance to learn how to cook a simple, nourishing meal,”** said Principal Liam Newell. “Basic cooking and food preparation skills build independence, confidence, and well-being—tools they will carry long after they leave school,” he continued.

Yet the school lacked a proper space to teach these essential skills. Determined to change that, Principal Newell applied for Partnership funding to transform an unused science lab into a fully functional home economics classroom.

The new classroom is a safe, warm, purpose-built space where students learn to prepare meals and understand nutrition. By taking on new challenges in the kitchen, these young men not only develop culinary skills, but also cultivate a sense of confidence and self-reliance.

But **perhaps the most powerful part of the classroom is what happens around the table.** Cooking becomes a way for students to connect, share a meal, and feel part of a supportive community. Says Principal Newell:

***“This is about far more than a kitchen, it’s about belonging, dignity, and community.”***

Thanks to you, the Partnership is able to support schools like O'Connell Secondary School by creating spaces where young people can learn, connect, and truly thrive.



O'Connell Secondary School, Dublin





Strings Attached students at the Royal Irish Academy of Music

# Expanding Access *To Music Education*

Through its *Strings Attached* program, the Royal Irish Academy of Music is creating new opportunities for talented young musicians.

In one of the Royal Irish Academy of Music's (RIAM) rehearsal halls, the sound of bows on strings and last-minute tuning fill the air. As conductor Cillian O'Breachain assumes the ready position, members of the Junior Strings Orchestra come to attention, eager to begin their rehearsal.

Among the skilled musicians rehearsing with Junior Strings Orchestra are twenty-four students from four local primary schools in Dublin, all of which have been designated high-need by the Irish government. Having excelled in their schools' introductory music programs, each of the students hoped to further their music education. However, without access to instruments or the financial resources to pay for private tuition, these talented young musicians had few opportunities to continue their training.

**Driven by a core belief that talent deserves opportunity, RIAM established its *Strings Attached* program.** Over the course of three years, each participant receives tuition-free lessons and performs with their peers in the Junior Strings Orchestra.



For the students, the educational and performance opportunities provided by *Strings Attached* are transformative, helping them to flourish both musically and personally. As participants learn new compositions and improve their musical capabilities, they also grow in confidence, develop teamwork skills, and reap the benefits of hard work.

***Strings Attached* has ensured that young people from disadvantaged areas have equal opportunity to pursue their interests and achieve success.** Whereas music might have become an abandoned childhood hobby for many of these students due to lack of resources and access, *Strings Attached* has enabled participants to develop their talent, overcome challenges, and enjoy experiences that set them up for future success.

---

*“I feel excited when I go to RIAM! It is my favorite thing I do every week.”*

---

Thanks to you, the Irish American Partnership is proud to support RIAM in creating new opportunities for Ireland’s youth.



**RIAM**  
Royal Irish  
Academy of Music

Founded in 1848, the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) is Ireland’s oldest and most vibrant conservatory, dedicated to nurturing the next generation of Irish musicians. RIAM provides world-class music education to students of all backgrounds—ensuring that every young person with passion and potential has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.



“

I love going to Junior Strings Orchestra. I feel happy when I am playing with the group, especially after practice when the pieces sound great.

”



# Hands-On Learning in Galway Bay

Atlantic Technological University is training the next generation of teachers and fostering care for Ireland's precious blue spaces.



ATU Early Childhood Education and Care students

A cold wind whistled across Galway Bay as over one hundred primary school children, families, and university students gathered on the beach. Atlantic Technological University (ATU) students had transformed the local strand into a living lab, using the natural landscape to deliver learning experiences that encourage care for coastal spaces and marine life among Ireland's youngest learners.

This community beach day was organized by Dr. Rita Melia as part of the **Developing Ocean Literacy in Early Childhood** project at ATU. Created for students studying Early Childhood Education and Care, this unique program prepares Ireland's next generation of teachers to educate primary school children about their natural environment in a safe, age-appropriate way.

Guided by their professors, ATU students regularly visit the local beach over the course of several months to develop hands-on activities that will engage school children and teach them to understand and care for Ireland's coastal ecosystems.

For the trainee teachers, the beach day is an opportunity to deliver lessons in a real-world setting, while the children get to explore a new environment, learn about Ireland's natural landscapes, and, most importantly, have fun.

“  
*I think their parents were frozen, but the children had a blast! They were running around and taking in all the new sights, sounds, and experiences at the beach.*  
”

- Dr. Rita Melia

The Partnership funds innovative educational programs like Developing Ocean Literacy thanks to your generous support.



ATU's Developing Ocean Literacy program





# Introducing the Inaugural Advisory Council

As the Irish American Partnership prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary, we are delighted to share the establishment of our first-ever transatlantic Advisory Council. This distinguished group of leaders will play a vital role in guiding the Partnership into its next chapter of impact, supporting our mission to empower young people across Ireland through education and community investment.

The Advisory Council brings together respected voices from across government, education, philanthropy, business, media, and science—individuals whose experience and leadership reflect the very best of Ireland and Irish America. Their shared commitment to opportunity, community, and heritage will help strengthen our programs and expand the Partnership's reach on both sides of the Atlantic.

The members of the Advisory Council are:

**Prof. Brian MacCraith, Chair**

Former President of Dublin City University and a leading voice in science, education, and public service.

**Samantha Barry**

Global Editorial Director of *Glamour*, award-winning journalist, and international advocate for women's empowerment and education.

**Ambassador Claire D. Cronin (Ret.)**

Former U.S. Ambassador to Ireland and the first woman

to serve as Majority Leader of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

**Paul Geaney**

President & Chief Commercial Officer of Avolon and 2024 recipient of the Partnership's Business Leadership Award.

**Secretary of Labor Martin J. Walsh (Ret.)**

Former U.S. Secretary of Labor, Mayor of Boston, and lifelong champion of equity, opportunity, and working families.

**Susan K. Whoriskey, PhD**

Biotechnology pioneer and founding executive of Moderna, Momena, Vera Therapeutics, and Cubist Pharmaceuticals.

“

*We are honored to work with such an exceptional group of leaders whose passion for Ireland will help guide our impact over the next forty years.*

- President & CEO Mary Sugrue

”

We look forward to sharing updates as the Advisory Council begins its work in 2026, marking an exciting new chapter in the Partnership's story—one rooted in collaboration, vision, and unwavering support for Ireland's youth.





Members of the victorious 2024 Scoil Mhuire Loughgar Gaelic football and hurling teams

# A New Pitch for Big Dreams

An astro-turf project at Scoil Mhuire Loughgar, County Westmeath, celebrates the school's long-standing sporting tradition.

For much of its history, Scoil Mhuire Loughgar has been known for its vibrant sporting culture, with students eagerly taking part in physical education lessons, Gaelic games, and more. Recently, the Scoil Mhuire Loughgar community celebrated its Gaelic football and hurling teams, both of which were victorious in the 2024 Cumann na mBunscoil Championships.

By participating in the wide range of athletic activities offered at this rural primary school, two hundred students develop connection and camaraderie, cultivate discipline and resilience, and learn healthy habits.

**Despite the school's rich sporting tradition, Scoil Mhuire Loughgar has never had adequate outdoor athletic facilities.** The school's existing pitch becomes waterlogged and unusable in cold, wet weather, and the surface is uneven in places, which raises the risk of injury to students and limits their access to physical education lessons and team training.



The local community fundraised to build a new all-weather astro-turf pitch at the school. With the project well underway, Principal Niall Brennan applied for Partnership funding to ensure the completion of the pitch. The Partnership awarded a grant to Scoil Mhuire Loughegar to support the community's efforts and get the astro-turf project over the finish line.

*“This project would not have been possible without support from the Irish American Partnership. Your investment has strengthened a long-standing sporting tradition within our school.”*

- Principal Niall Brennan

The new pitch will provide a safe outdoor space at the school where students can enjoy physical education lessons, active play, and recess throughout the year – rain or shine. The astro-turf pitch will also significantly expand training opportunities for Scoil Mhuire Loughegar's athletic teams, ensuring continuous skill development, high-quality coaching, and increased participation.

Now only weeks away from completion, **the new pitch is already enriching the school community.** “Sport has always been a cornerstone of life at Scoil Mhuire Loughegar, and our students can hardly wait to use the new pitch,” Principal Brennan said.



Partnership member Larry Furlong has family connections to the area and also expressed his delight, saying, “I’m thrilled to see this project come to life. It’s wonderful to be able to support Scoil Mhuire Loughegar in this way.”







SistersIN work shadow day

# Inspiring Tomorrow's Female Leaders

*SistersIN is Northern Ireland's pioneering mentorship and skills development program.*

“

My mentor showed me that no matter how much you think you can't do something, there is always a way.

”

“**T**he girls in my class really seem to struggle with confidence, social anxiety, and self-esteem,” said one Belfast educator.

Studies show that teenage girls' confidence levels decline dramatically between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. In Northern Ireland, only twenty-three percent of eighteen-year-old girls describe themselves as confident, and teachers notice the effects in their classrooms. For these young girls, SistersIN is the boost they need.

SistersIN empowers teenage girls across Northern Ireland by equipping them with the skills, confidence, and networks they need to lead with purpose. Its signature Leadership Program is an 8-month skills development course designed specifically for teenage girls in their junior or senior year of high school.



SistersIN leadership workshop



Throughout the program, participants attend intensive leadership workshops and work collaboratively on a project that will benefit their school or community. From supply drives for local homeless shelters to mental health support groups for their peers, the girls develop a sense of pride and accomplishment in responding to the needs of their communities, all while improving their leadership, teamwork, and project management skills.

Each participant is also paired with an experienced female professional who provides mentorship throughout the Leadership Program. **This year marks a particularly exciting milestone for SistersIN as First Minister Michelle O'Neill and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly have joined the Leadership Program as mentors.**

Two students—Clodagh from St. Pius X College in Magherafelt and Sophie from Strathearn School in Belfast—will benefit from their one-to-one guidance over the course of this academic year.

“Supporting the next generation of female leaders is something I feel very strongly about,” said First Minister Michelle O'Neill. “I look forward to sharing my experiences with Clodagh, while also learning from hers. This is an exciting journey for us both.”



First Minister Michelle O'Neill and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly with mentees Sophie Murray and Clodagh Conroy

“*I have learned that not only do I have the confidence to stand up and share my opinions, but that there are people who are willing to listen to what I have to say.*”  
- SistersIN Participant

Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly shared the sentiment, saying “I am excited to listen, support, and help open doors for Sophie as she shapes her own path.”

With your generous support, the Partnership is helping SistersIN expand its reach and strengthen its impact, ensuring that girls from every corner of Northern Ireland have access to meaningful leadership, skills development, and mentorship opportunities. Together, we are investing in connection, new experiences, and a brighter future for Northern Ireland’s young women.





## Join Us In 2026

JANUARY 8	Nollaig na mBan Women's Leadership Breakfast - Washington D.C.
JANUARY 15	Nollaig na mBan Women's Leadership Breakfast - Boston Harbor Hotel
MARCH 13	St. Patrick's Day Breakfast Celebration - Union League Club of Chicago
MARCH 17	St. Patrick's Day Breakfast Celebration - Intercontinental Hotel Boston
APRIL 16	Business Leaders Breakfast - Union League Club of New York
MAY 6	Young Partners Summer Speaker Series - New York
TBD	Albany Golf Tournament - Schuyler Meadows Golf Club
JUNE 1	Chicago Golf Tournament - Sunset Ridge Golf Club
JUNE 10	Young Partners Summer Social - Boston
JUNE 15	Newport Golf Invitational - Newport Country Club
SEPTEMBER 30	Young Partners Speaker Series - Boston
OCT 18 - 22	2026 Leadership Mission - Dublin & Belfast
DECEMBER 1	Young Partners Holiday Social - New York

[WWW.IRISHAP.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.IRISHAP.ORG/EVENTS)

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael T. Clune  
Chairman  
Chicago, IL

Mary Sugrue  
President & CEO  
Boston, MA

Dessie Farrell  
Dublin, Ireland

David Greaney  
Boston, MA

Jim Kelliher  
Boston, MA

Michael J. Kilbane  
Chicago, IL

Thomas A. Leonard, Esq.  
Philadelphia, PA

Lorna Martyn  
Dublin, Ireland

Donal O'Brien, Esq.  
Chicago, IL

Kathleen O'Toole  
Boston, MA

Maureen Pace  
Boston, MA

Niall Power Smith  
Dublin, Ireland

Sir Bruce Robinson  
Belfast, Northern Ireland

Brian Ruane  
New York, NY

Regina Sullivan  
Boston, MA

### BOARD EMERITI

Charles L. Donahue Jr.

William J. Reilly Jr.

GIVE BACK  
CHANGE LIVES  
Donate securely here



Create a legacy that reflects your heart, your heritage,  
and your hope for Ireland.

Please consider joining the Irish Legacy Society, a special community of forward-thinking supporters who invest in the future of the Partnership's transformative mission through a planned gift or provision in their estate plans.

Create a lasting legacy for Ireland with a gift  
that will benefit generations to come.

-THE-  
**Irish Legacy Society**