Executive Summary

**ART WORKS | Harnessing the power of health and the arts for children**

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) study of the Helium Arts Creative Health Hub Programme

January 2019 – December 2020
Acknowledgements

This study was funded by the Creative Ireland Programme and sets out a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Study of the Helium Arts Creative Health Hub Programme for the two-year period January 2019 to December 2020.

Research and report development was conducted by the team at S3 Solutions.

All photos are credited to Marcin Lewandowski and Jed Niezgoda. Artwork by Maia Thomas. Executive summary authored by Jennifer Ruthe of Written by Jen.

The full version of this report is available at:
https://helium.ie/about/our-impact/

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It is over 10 years since Helium Arts set out to capture the hearts, minds and imagination of children and young people with long-term health conditions. We reached 300 people in 2010, and today our Creative Health Hub Programme engages 1,500 children and young people every year – and demand is rising.

The link between art and health is well documented, and we know—through programme evaluation and lived experience—that our work can help children feel happier, healthier, more connected and supported in their everyday lives. This is just the start. As Helium grows, so does our understanding of its impact, not just on children and young people, but on families, volunteers, artists, and the arts and health sectors as a whole. Creativity is more powerful than we ever imagined, and there is real value to be explored here. This report marks an important step forward in this discovery.

"Stronger pathways between the arts, health and social care can provide creative solutions to help to achieve the Health 2020 targets and the Sustainable Development Goals." World Health Organization

As we look ahead to 2024, we want to see our Creative Health Hub Programme available in communities across Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Galway, and the Midlands – with our remote hubs connecting us to families in all 26 counties reaching at least 5,000 children every year, that’s almost half of the estimated 12,000 whose everyday lives are severely hampered by their condition.

The following pages offer a summary of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) research study conducted by S3 Solutions. Confirming a return of €1.98 for every €1 spent, the findings and recommendations presented here will be used to strengthen our business case, build organisational practice, and develop and evolve Helium’s creative programmes, taking us closer to our goal.

To be successful, we must continue to practice and advocate for our signature ‘cross-cutting’ approach, and work as part of a larger, more sustainable whole. It is for this reason that we call on our Government and Ministers responsible for children, health, disability, the arts and rural development to expedite their response to national and global recommendations, unite in their thinking, and come together to:

1) Support mainstreaming and scaling of Helium Arts Creative Health Hub Programme model to national level to deliver support to children living with conditions in rural and urban settings. Include, embed and uphold the role of arts and culture across health and social care services, for example through the upcoming National Standards for the Care and Support of Children Using Health and Social Services.

2) Ensure national representation of the arts as a promoter of health and wellbeing in the Integrated Care Programme for Children (ÉG ICP Paediatric Health and Social Care Professionals Expert Group), Child Health Governance Group and National Steering Group for Children and Young People’s Services Committees.

3) Create a framework for social prescribing for the arts and culture, removing barriers to access for children and young people living in Ireland.

By using national frameworks, policies and charters to forge stronger pathways between the arts and health, we can raise the profile of this transformational pairing and embed ‘the arts’ as an integral part of Ireland’s child health and social care services. Only then can we be sure that the physical, emotional and social needs of children living with long-term health conditions are met, now, and in the future.

Helene Hugel
CEO Helium Arts
All children deserve a good childhood, but those living with health conditions face many challenges such as loneliness, stress and anxiety, and often feel like their lives are defined by their condition. We can help change this. Established in 2010, Helium Arts empowers these children through creativity and the arts, giving them an opportunity for connection, belonging, imagination and joy. Through our programmes, they develop their confidence, talent and independence, while we foster creative healthy environments around them, so they have better personal, health and social outcomes.

“...because there’s been a lot of medical stuff happening. But doing the art and stuff has been good for when I need a distraction from everything going on in my head.”
(Participant aged 13-15 years old)

Our Vision
We believe in a world where all children living with long-term health conditions in Ireland are connected to their creative powers so they can live life to the full.

Creative Health Hubs
Linking hospitals to community-based care, our ‘arts on referral’ process gives young people at outpatient clinics the chance to create while they wait, meet the Helium team and register for our community programmes. From here, workshops and specialist camps encourage children and young people to take artmaking into their own hands – transforming lives through art, imagination and play, and supporting national policy by providing more—and better—care, closer to home.

Remote Creative Health Hub
To inspire creativity during the COVID-19 crisis, our team reimagined the Creative Health Hub format and brought Helium Arts to children online and in the post with ‘Distance Creates’. Reaching 25% more children in 17 more counties, activity sheets and step-by-step guides were delivered straight to the family inbox every week for six weeks. Whether it’s crafting collages, recreating famous masterpieces or surprise postal drops, virtual sharing and ‘post pal’ connections bring a unique magic to this new, home-based experience.
IMPACT FIGURES
From January 2019–December 2020

- In person and remote programme locations
- Remote programme locations across 21 counties

- 2,086 children got creative with outpatient hospital activities
- 6 artists received training, mentoring, and shadowing opportunities
- 117 children joined our Community Programmes in Cork, Limerick, and Dublin
- 145 children and young people found lockdown inspiration with our remote programme, ‘Distance Creates’
- 65 medical staff joined our ‘lunch and learn’ talks
- 46 volunteers gave their time to Helium Arts

Creative Health Hub Programme
- Dublin: Creative Health Hub Pilot
- Limerick: Creative Health Hub
- Cork: Creative Health Hub

Map of Ireland showing programme locations across 21 counties.
In Ireland, there are 120,000 children and young people living with long-term health conditions, with an estimated 12,000 severely hampered in their everyday lives [1]. Meeting their physical needs is essential, but this must be done within a broader context of emotional, social and mental well-being. Research shows that children with long-term health conditions often experience feelings of stigma, loneliness, depression and anxiety, and a feeling that their lives are defined by their diagnosis [2]. Creative arts are an important part of the healing process, with research showing a positive link between arts, health, and wellbeing (specific outcomes include a reduction in stress and anxiety, improved ability to cope, increased well-being, confidence, social interaction, sense of self-worth, hope, and the ability to connect with valuable parts of oneself) [3-5].

The new World Health Organization synthesis report and European Arts and Health Sector briefing support these findings – acknowledging the growing evidence-base for the role of arts in improving health and well-being, and the value such crosscutting connections can bring [6,7].

In line with this, UK and Irish governments recognise and promote the role of creative arts in achieving broader health and social care goals [8,9]. In particular, Ireland’s Culture 2025 recognises the value of creativity in individual and collective well-being, with Creative Ireland seen as a pivotal tool that puts policy into practice by encouraging, facilitating and supporting collaborative programme endeavours. This ambition fits with new national health policies (including, but not limited to the Healthy Ireland Framework, the new Paediatric Model of Care, and Slaintecare) [10,11,12], all of which share a vision that connects long-term clinical care with community-based models, such as those delivered by Helium Arts.

We are proud to be part of this process.

REFERENCES
As an award-winning creative arts programme, Helium Arts recognises and uses the power of art to support children and young people living with long-term health conditions. As we work to understand and evidence the impact of our services, we asked independent consultants, S3 Solutions, to define, measure and calculate the social return of our Creative Health Hubs and Remote Creative Health Hub ‘Distance Creates’ programmes. S3 Solutions evaluated programme activity between January 2019 and December 2020, and the findings support what we have long believed. Helium Arts doesn’t just impact children and young people, the effects are felt by everyone involved – from families, volunteers and artists to health professionals and the arts and health sectors as a whole.

Building on this, evidence shows that for every €1 invested, our work generated a social return of €1.98.

Generating €671,593 of social value means that our impact on stakeholders is worth almost twice as much as the funding that we received to create it.
From outpatient clinics to community workshops and even the kitchen table, Helium’s creative programmes are truly transformative and demand is rising. Between 2008 and 2010 we reached an average of 300 children living with long-term health conditions every year. Today that figure comes in at over 1,500 and we are proud to see many of our young participants:

- Make new friends, connect and engage with others
- Feel more confident, relaxed, happy and healthy
- Be more independent
- Improve their creative skills
- Better able to deal with their condition.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**Children & young people**

**OUTPATIENTS PROGRAMME**
2,086 children reached
61% have better well-being (1,277)
20% are more creative (408)

**COMMUNITY PROGRAMME**
117 children engaged
90% feel less isolated (105)
90% have better well-being (105)
100% are more creative (117)
68% can cope better (80)

**REMOTE PROGRAMME – ‘DISTANCE CREATES’**
145 children connected
41% feel less isolated (60)
44% have better well-being (65)
29% are more creative (42)
24% can cope better (35)

**SOCIAL VALUE = €434,208 or 64.65%**
KEY FINDINGS
Parents & families

When a child is sick it affects the whole family, from the anxiety of diagnosis to the reality of life with a long-term health condition. We love to see our work helping parents and families rediscover the joy of childhood and:

- Feel less stressed
- Enjoy better family relationships, even between siblings!
- Find greater independence
- Build a more positive, resilient family environment and stronger identity.

Benefits:

- Creative get-togethers
- More conversations
- Happier children
- Better family relationships
- Less stressed
- More able to let go
- Better understanding of health conditions
- Stronger and more resilient
- Connect with others in similar situations
- More positive family environment

“The activities were so creative, they were unbelievable... My son loves art, he has arthritis and lupus and this activity with Helium Arts enabled him to use his hands. Kind of like physiotherapy without him realising”.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
117 Families reached
50% stronger and more resilient (58)

“I think it is really fun, because you get to experiment with different types of art”. - Participant

I absolutely can’t stress how much this helped my son and us.” - Mum

“My child had been going through a really difficult time previously and it helped build her confidence with peers just like herself.” - Parent

REMOTE PROGRAMME – ‘DISTANCE CREATES’
145 families reached
50% stronger and more resilient (73)

“We loved it and found it helpful when we were bored. It is an amazing programme and felt it was a huge help with our time.” - Participant

SOCIAL VALUE = €56,979 or 8.48%
AISLING’S STORY
Redefining diabetes

Aisling held out the beaker for more. It had only taken a few minutes to drain it dry, but she was still so thirsty. Her mum looked down at the empty cup in her two-year-old daughter’s hands. All the signs were there. This wasn’t a bed time delaying tactic. Her perfect little girl had Type 1 diabetes.

They were lucky, in a way. Diagnosed when she was two, Aisling didn’t know any other world. It wasn’t until she got older that she became conscious of just how different she was. None of her friends had to style an insulin pump and glucose monitor into their outfits. They didn’t have to watch what they ate or have an adult sit with them at lunch.

It was all so humiliating. Aisling didn’t want to live a life defined by diabetes.

“The staff we so kind and considerate of each child’s needs. They let her be herself in a room of people just like her. It’s like she looked up and realised, ‘I’m not alone’.”

“Aisling still has the notebook she made. She loves thumbing through the pages and reading the messages from her new friends. She doesn’t miss them though. There isn’t chance! She wants to wear her Helium t-shirt the next time she sees them. It’s her signature piece. The perfect memento of a perfect 12 weeks.”

“Some of the things she used to say, they really worried us. She stopped engaging at the clinic. It was a nightmare. We could be there for hours. She would just cling to me and cry”.

“‘I can’t keep that t-shirt clean enough! She was so proud of everything she brought home. She got so much encouragement, she’s really confident now. In herself and her art’.”

It was a nurse who first suggested Helium Arts. Aisling had always loved making things, and she had to admit – 12 weeks of art workshops did sound like fun.

She was right. From animal masks to t-shirt making and pedal-powered paint machines, Helium took Aisling’s love of art to a whole new level. Surrounded by a group of potential new friends, every week there were new ideas to try – and a dedicated arts and medical team to keep her safe and happy while she tried them.

Secondary school starts in September. Inspired, Aisling’s looking forward to art class the most. She practices at home in the kitchen – her pump clipped to her jeans and a smile on her face. The change is clear to see. Because thanks to Helium, Aisling knows that nothing—not even diabetes—can stop her now.

“Those 12 weeks with the Helium were just amazing. She’s a happier child. Proud and more confident. You can’t put a price on the change they made in my daughter’s life”.

It was all so humiliating. Aisling didn’t want to live a life defined by diabetes.
Every masterpiece starts with a little creative inspiration. Our artists are ours. Imagining a world of artistic possibilities, they do all this with an acute understanding and awareness of children’s health and social needs. As well as creating an opportunity to trial new tools and techniques, Helium can help its artists to:

- Sustain their professional independence
- Learn more about and access opportunities in arts and health.

Helium’s work is an opportunity for the arts sector to engage and connect with a new and diverse audience, including families from disadvantaged areas (a demographic the sector has previously struggled to engage). Breaking down barriers, Helium Arts helps build new understanding around the need to be more adaptable, inclusive and accessible - to counter stigma and develop services that proactively engage young people with long-term health conditions.

90% of artists improved their skills supporting children with long-term health conditions (6)

100% of arts sector organisations diversified their reach (6)

KEY FINDINGS
Artists & the arts sector

“I really enjoyed the work, particularly the contact experience with the children and young people in community settings. There were so many highlights for me in the experiences we had together. It felt truly transformative”.

“During COVID, there was good consistent work, it was really beneficial learning to deliver remotely”.

“All of this is normal for Helium and they are brilliant at it”.

SOCIAL VALUE = €24,960 or 3.72%
Sinead tried to listen, to take it all in. She felt numb with grief. Grief for the future she had imagined for her new family. Grief for the baby whose life would be over almost as soon as it began. Even if they went for open-heart surgery, she knew the odds would be against them.

That was eight years ago.

Jack’s last operation was a huge success, and he has spent every day since showing the world exactly what he’s made of.

“"He never lets it stop him... He’s a picture of health, even though his heart is working harder than anyone’s"."

His family won’t take a single heartbeat for granted, and when COVID-19 hit, Sinead and her husband knew they would have to shield their son. Face pressed up against the window, Jack had no choice but to watch from the sidelines. It just wasn’t fair. His friends were allowed to play outside, and he wanted so badly to join them.

“"He kept crying, ‘I want to be normal’. I didn’t know what to say. He had to be safe. We had to cocoon ourselves in"."

The mask and Perspex shield on his school desk helped, but it wasn’t enough. It pained Sinead to see her son so cut off from the life he had defied the odds to build. Slowly but surely, Jack’s spark was fading. So, she turned to Helium Arts to help keep it burning bright.

Jack had always loved art, and Helium’s workshops were an instant hit. He was a little less sure about ‘Distance Creates’, but once he got going he was hooked. Jack loved sitting at the kitchen table, making things with his mum. He listened with delight as she told him all about her childhood pen-pals. It was such an old-fashioned idea – writing letters! Still, even he had to admit, there was something pretty cool about getting your own post.

“"It was a brilliant way to stay connected. Pen-pals and Zoom made it all so real. Seeing other children and being part of a group, it gave him something totally different. It took him away from it all"."

A regular at our Spring, Autumn and Winter programmes, for Jack, one of the highlights was Zooming with the other kids to see what they’d made, and to show off his latest creations. Sinead stands by the door and listens, smiling as Jack chatters away happily. Through Helium, he has found a way to reconnect – not just with other children like him, but with his spark for life. He still misses playing outside of course, but he doesn’t need to spend as much time staring out of the window. The road out of COVID-19 might be a long one but, thanks to Helium, Jack and his new friends can shield alone, together.
KEY FINDINGS
Volunteers

Coming to us from all walks of life, volunteers bring new skills, creativity and a great sense of fun. We want to give as much as we get, and are proud to hear that volunteering with Helium Arts inspires feelings of fulfilment, pride and empowerment as well as...

• Building confidence and self-esteem, and improving mental health
• Gaining new skills to support people living with long-term health conditions
• Creating better social and community connections.

65% improved personal development (30)
80% better mental health (37)
65% more social and community connections (30)
80% learnt new skills (37)

46 VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

“I built the skills to pursue a career working with children with long-term conditions.”
- Social Worker

“I’m looking forward to helping my grandchildren get into art.”
- Proud grandparent

“I found purpose after I retired, made new friends and connections.”
- Children’s nurse

“It gave me a way to follow my interest in art and give back to society.”
- Corporate professional

“I’ve been inspired to build a career working with children starting their own ceramics class.”
- Fine art student

SOCIAL VALUE = €119,196 or 17.75%
KEY FINDINGS
Health professionals & health sector managers

Transforming idle and anxious moments, 2,086 children joined Helium’s Outpatient Programme between January 2019 and March 2020. It’s about more than just awareness-raising, our ‘arts on referral’ process helps create a ‘feel-good’ factor in outpatient waiting rooms and a better working environment for staff. It has also helped advocate for the role of the arts in achieving positive health and social outcomes, and as a potential tool for Ireland’s social prescribing programme.

The connections facilitated across hospital and community health services, local authorities, cultural and art departments, and patient support groups are a noteworthy outcome. With Ireland’s historical clinical health policy, the recent shift towards community-based care creates new opportunity, with Helium Arts as a powerful example of cross-professional networking and the possibilities that exist when you connect arts, health, hospital and community-based care.

SOCIAL VALUE = €30,000 or 4.67%
KEY FINDINGS
Social Return on Investment

This report shows that for every €1 invested, Helium Arts generated a social return of €1.98. Generating €671,593 of social value means that our impact on stakeholders is worth almost twice as much as the funding that we received to create it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Social Value €</th>
<th>% of Total Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Young People</td>
<td>€434,208</td>
<td>64.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>€56,979</td>
<td>8.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>€119,196</td>
<td>17.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>€6,960</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sector</td>
<td>€30,000</td>
<td>4.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Organisations</td>
<td>€18,000</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Support Groups</td>
<td>€6,250</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: €671,593.5 100%
LOOKING FORWARD
Actions for the future

Though it had humble beginnings, Helium Arts is now an award-winning creative arts programme. Every day is a new adventure. We will always be learning and we will always be growing, and this report shows us just how important that process is. As we look to 2024, we are adopting three new focus areas that will help us realise our ambition – reaching at least 5,000 children and young people every year with creative arts programmes that shine better and brighter than ever before.

1) Reflecting on the whole: This report shines a new light on the people, groups and sectors that benefit from the creative energy of Helium Arts. We want to make sure that our monitoring and evaluation reflects and engages each of these groups, and that our systems capture, showcase and share the true impact of our work.

2) Understanding health impact: While the findings from this study evidence the positive impact of Helium Arts’ work, there remains insufficient data to prove its long-term clinical impact and the cost savings this would bring to the health service through, for example, reductions in hospital appointments, GP consultations and medication. As such, Helium Arts is committed to exploring new research opportunities that build evidence around the value of our creative programmes for health stakeholders.

3) Expanding our reach: This report is a positive endorsement of our Creative Health Hub Programme. Whilst the impact is generally greater from face-to-face activity, our Remote Creative Health Hub, ‘Distance Creates’ extended our reach dramatically – engaging children and young people from communities who would otherwise be unable to access Helium Arts. Building on this, future programmes will see us bring remote and distance-based creativity together so that more families can experience the magic of Helium Arts.

We cannot do this without the people, donors and institutions whose commitment to protecting the health of children and young people in Ireland creates the platform and space for Helium Arts to grow. Reinforcing the pathway for health and arts, together we can make sure that children and young people living with long-term health conditions are given the chance to create a healthier and happier future.

“I enjoyed it a lot, it was relaxing and allowed me to have time for myself while doing the art. I needed it a lot.”
(Participant aged 9-12 years old)

If you would like to support Helium Arts, please visit our website at www.helium.ie. For more information about our work, to hear testimonies and watch highlights from the Creative Health Hub Programme please visit our website or use the QR code to the right.
BEHIND THE SCENES
Methodology

This study was commissioned by Helium Arts and conducted by S3 Solutions. Reflecting on 24 months of programme activity from January 2019, the aim was to:

• Identify all material stakeholder groups linked to Helium Arts
• Articulate the ‘journey of change’ for each individual group
• Map and evidence stakeholder outcomes
• Calculate the social return on investment
• Identify and report key learnings and recommendations.

To do this, a mixed-method approach for data collection was used. This included analysing existing data for historic activity and collecting new evidence through the use of baseline, follow-up surveys and semi-structured interviews. Existing measures included the five Creative Habits of Mind (CHoM) put forward by Bill Lucas in 2016, with well-being measures using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) and The Standardisation of the Stirling Children’s Well-being Scale (SCWBS) report. Analysis of this and new data collected was conducted using traditional thematic approaches, with SROI valuations assigning proxy costs to services and interventions that would achieve similar outcomes. To estimate the final ratio, calculations were adjusted for deadweight, displacement, attribution and drop-off for each of the outcomes achieved.

For full information on the methodology behind this report, please visit: https://helium.ie/about/our-impact/

For questions linking to this report, please contact: Helene Hugel, CEO, Helium Arts, helene@helium.ie

SROI Methodology

01 02 03 04 05 06

Stage 1: Establishing scope & identifying stakeholders
Stage 2: Mapping outcomes
Stage 3: Evidencing outcomes
Stage 4: Establishing impact
Stage 5: Calculating SROI
Stage 6: Reporting & embedding
We are hugely grateful to all our project partners, supporters, and funders without whom our community and remote Creative Health Hub models would not have been realised. In particular, we would like to recognise:

Our partners at Cork University Hospital’s Arts and Health Programme, University Hospital Limerick, HSE Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Health and Well-being and HSE Mid-west Community Healthcare.

The support of our funders: Rethink Ireland, the Arts Council of Ireland, Limerick City & County Council, the JP McManus Charitable Foundation, the BNP Paribas Foundation, the Creative Ireland Programme, Cork University Hospital Arts Committee, the Hospital Saturday Fund, the Community Foundation for Ireland, and the National Lottery through the HSE.

And of course, we want to take this chance to say a huge thank you to our team of artists, Siobhán Clancy, Paul Bokslag, Chelsea Canavan, and Ciara Harrison, and to our wonderful team of staff, volunteers and supporters.

We could not have done it without you.
GALLERY

Artworks produced by the children and young people in 2019 and 2020. Go to the Helium Arts online gallery to experience more at the link or the QR code:

Listen, look, and read the work created by clicking on the links.

Kosmic Krew

Kosmic Krew (2019): A group of teenagers performed their original song “Ignite” at Kosmic: A Showcase of Creative Work from the Cork Creative Health Hub. The song was created as part of the summer adventure arts camp at Rebel Recording Studios in collaboration with music producer Eoin Hayes and musician Ealain Fenton. Photo Credit: Marcin Lewandowski.

Read More

Tiny Captured Rainbows

Tiny Captured Rainbows is a beautiful book bringing together the artwork of 32 young artists between the ages of 9 and 12. In spring 2020, when our worlds were turned upside down, these young artists joined artist Ciara Harrison over six weeks to document and colourfully celebrate the tiny moments in our everyday life. The book was created on Helium Arts’ new remote programme, ‘Distance Creates,’ which combines home-based activities, postal surprises and virtual sharing. Check out the digital flip book version below!

Read More

The World of Scribes

The World of Scribes (2019–2020): This interactive publication was created by teenagers with Cystic Fibrosis in collaboration with artist Eszter Némethi during the Summer Stars online project. The young people wanted to make a ‘land of magic’, a world that ‘we would love to live in’.

Read More

Space Between Us

Our ‘Distance Creates’ Remote Programme brought connection and creativity to teenagers with similar life experiences of living with long term health conditions during the COVID 19 pandemic of spring–summer 2020.

Working with Helium Artist Chelsea Canavan and Wired FM Station Manager Ray Burke, the teenagers worked to create a podcast that explored the effects of lockdown on the group. In the programme, they discuss their observations and fears, and the positives they hoped would come from an enforced period of pause.

Read More
This study was researched and developed by S3 Solutions.