



Helium Arts

CREATIVITY CHANGES LIVES

Photo Credit: Paul Corey

OUR IMPACT | 2023

Growing our impact, reaching more children,
inspiring life through art across the country



I loved the creating art things.
I had never done a camp anywhere before.

- Young Participant

Photo Credit: Paul Corey



Helium Arts is a children's charity committed to improving the wellbeing of children and young people living with lifelong physical health conditions.

In Ireland, 156,437 or 12% of all children and teenagers live everyday with the effects of illness or disability. Research shows children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who live in more rural areas face greater challenges due to their condition.

Children and young people with long-term or chronic health conditions often experience:

- Stigma associated with their condition
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Fewer quality friendships
- Disengagement from managing their conditions
- Wanting to be 'normal'
- Depression and anxiety

Through our free creative workshops offered in communities, hospitals, and online, we provide safe and accessible spaces where children navigating health conditions can come together.

Helium Arts uses creativity to inspire these children to feel more confident. By empowering them with tools such as friendship, community and new skills, Helium Arts helps these children to become more prepared and capable of overcoming adversity.

From 2022 to 2023 we've grown our impact, expanding the reach of our hospital-based programmes 140%, meaning that even more children can have improved outcomes in health, wellbeing, social connection and creative expression. And while we grow, we are making sure to maintain and even increase the quality of our programmes!

"The heart of our impact lies in ensuring that these children and families, who experience so much difficulty and isolation due to the conditions they live with, have a chance to find creative expression and confidence through art, to connect with each other, and to lead better lives and have improved wellbeing through the programmes we run. In this first year of our new strategy, we are seeing more children from diverse backgrounds have new opportunities, while we ensure the quality of their experience never falters."

- Helene Hugel, CEO Helium Arts

OUR STRATEGY

2023 is the first year of our new five-year strategic plan, as we work toward our vision of an Ireland where all children are connected to their creative powers so they can live life to the full.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS ARE:



CREATE TO GROW:

Generating creative encounters with children who have lifelong health conditions, in the heart of their own communities



SHARE:

Sharing our model in partnership with others to increase access to creative practices



IMPROVE TO INCLUDE:

Commit to the development and delivery of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy



ADVOCATE:

Working with children and young people to advocate for the child's right to participate in culture



SUSTAIN:

Continuing our strong track record of governance underpinned by a solid financial model, ready for the next stage of growth

In 2023, we made great strides in implementing our new strategy, embedding new approaches that will support our growth targets, reaching a diverse range of children and families across our target locations, and we have been so delighted to relaunch our national online programme so that no matter where children are they can benefit from the power of the arts.

TIMELINE

2023

3000 children
4 hospitals
8 locations

Fundraising, marketing and DEI strategies written

National online programme relaunched

2024

50% of participating children are from disadvantaged backgrounds

2025

4000 children
6 hospitals
12 locations

2026

12% of participating children are from migrant communities

2027

6000 children
8 hospitals
16 locations



I liked making new friends...
doing different things.
Everybody makes us feel
very welcome.

- Young Participant

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS

2881 children and young people engaged in our programmes from hospital outpatient clinics, community and online programmes.

As part of our work to track the difference we make and continuously improve our programmes, we asked parents, children and health professionals questions before and after they took part in our Creative Health programmes. Here's what they had to say!

100% of children, parents and doctors said their healthcare experience was improved by our hospital and community programmes

They participated in our Creative Health Hubs across 344 hospital clinics, 47 community-based camps and meetups across 6 counties, while 114 children **also got to have a fulfilling creative experience by joining us virtually through our relaunched national online programme.**

IMPACTS OF OUR OUTPATIENT PROGRAMME

In Paediatric Outpatient Clinics our artists work closely with the medical community to provide children, young people, and their families with the opportunity to try out different age-appropriate creative activities. Following their participation in the hospital clinics, children can be referred to our community and online programmes for longer term workshops and camps.

84% of children reported they **felt happier when going to hospital** and 100% of parents said that their **child's mood was positively impacted.**

Not only did parents say their children felt better, but seeing their children happier meant that:

98% of parents reported their own **mood was positively impacted** while in the waiting room.

97% of **medical professionals** reported that their experience of delivering healthcare to children with lifelong physical health conditions was positively impacted. They not only saw positive impacts for their role but also for the wider health sector, for example **patients feeling more comfortable** meant faster appointments, and having a **more positive experience of the hospital** meant children would be more likely to show up for follow-up appointments.

"Helium Arts kept the children engaged and then the children weren't stressed. They really make a difference. People are engaged in something positive, and everyone is involved. It's not just for a specific age; everyone can get involved. It's very difficult to find something universal like this."

- Hospital Clinician

IMPACTS OF OUR COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

In 2023, our community programmes took place in 8 locations across 6 counties, whether as a series of Saturday workshops, meetups, camps, or our new year-long youth programme, where children can explore their creativity supported by our professional artists.

Parents see a big difference in their children before and after the community programme:

82% said their children were **happier**

82% had improved **mood**

75% had improved **self-esteem**

42% had improved **coping skills**

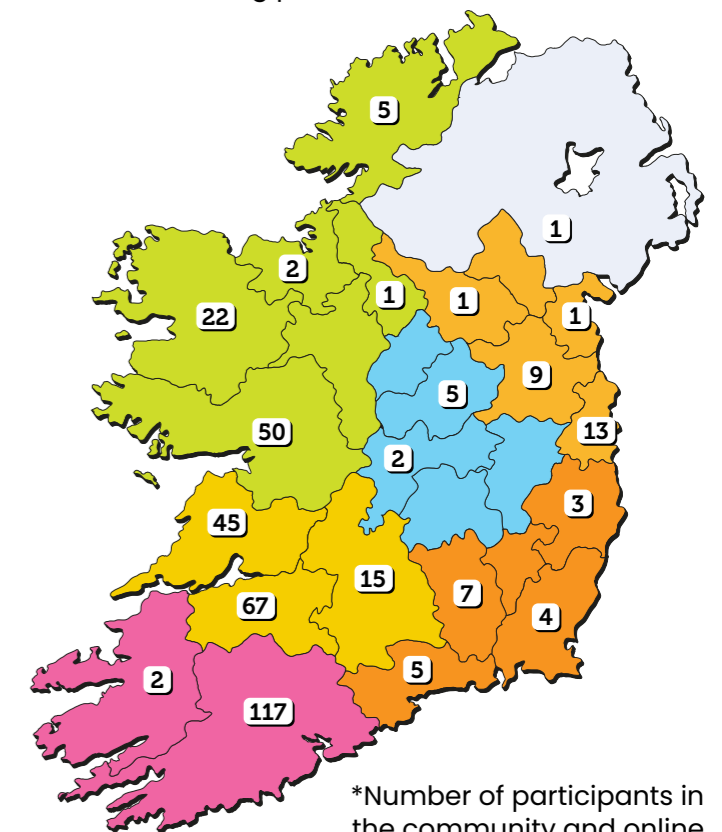
65% had improved **connectedness**

What children and young people love the most about the programme:

- **Variety and choice of art activities**, such as using different materials and methods like clay, painting, animation and the opportunity to look at art exhibits.
- **Social opportunities in their local communities**, having the chance to meet new friends and other young people with similar experiences to their own.
- **Learning experiences and chance to develop new skills**, learning new things such as how to "project images to help create something" and "mix colours using paint."

100% of children in the community programme would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts.

99% of parents would recommend Helium Arts to others.



*Number of participants in the community and online programmes by county

IMPACTS OF OUR NATIONAL ONLINE PROGRAMME

Our online programme allows children from around the country, particularly those for whom attending in person is challenging, to fully participate in activities with resource packs and artists facilitating their online experience.

77% of parents indicated that their child had an **improved quality of life** after engaging with the online programme.

"Even during his sessions you're in the background helping out and you can chat to him about it. It's nice from a family point of view; we could work on it together and work on stuff outside of the programme."

- Parent Feedback

ARTS & CREATIVITY IMPACTS

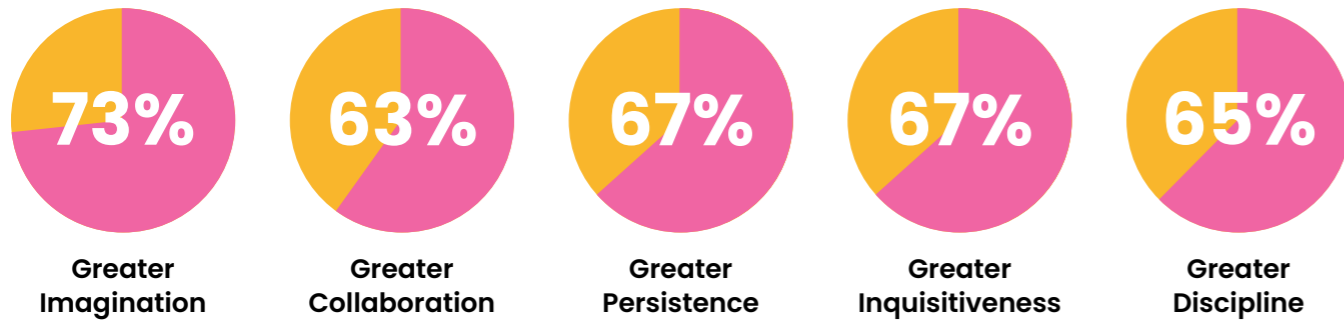
Creativity drives every aspect of how we work with children and with each other.

Our work is underpinned by our evidenced-based model to build creative habits. Children are encouraged and enabled to be: **imaginative, inquisitive, collaborative, persistent and disciplined** in their creative exploration. We know that these creative habits will enable children to flourish not just creatively but in other aspects of their lives, like school, with their peers, at home, and in their communities. In this way we nurture the whole child and foster resilience.

Our programmes lead to **greater artistic and creative engagement**, with parents saying their children displayed:



Winchester University's Centre for Real World Learning (CRWL) Five-dimension Model of Creativity (Lucas, 2022).



91% of children and 50% of teenagers in our community programme felt they were **more frequently participating in arts/creative activities** following engaging with Helium Arts

73% of parents reported an **improvement in their child's creativity** following the community programme

"My favourite part of the sessions would have to be the conversations the children would lead. It was so incredible to see them bonding over similarities in their lives and learning so much about the differences too."

- Chelsea Canavan, Artist



Read more on the mural

IMPACT ON ARTISTS

Our work brings improvements not just for the children we work with, but for all of those that come into contact with our programmes. Our artists are at the heart of this work, bringing their talent and new ideas in interesting and unique ways.

Feedback from artists shows that the Creative Health Hubs Programme has delivered three main impacts for artists in 2023:

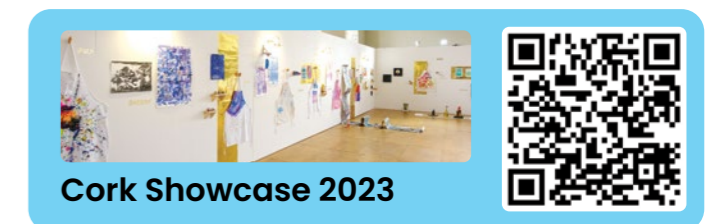
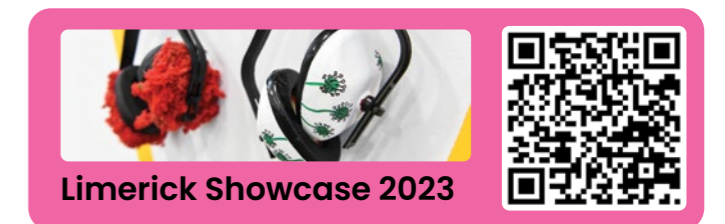
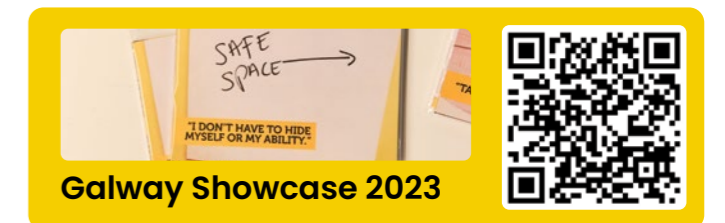
- **Networking and relationship development**, making new connections through their work with Helium Arts.
- **Skill development**, the experience of working with Helium Arts and accessing training provided opportunities beneficial not only within Helium Arts workshops but also in the artists' external projects.
- **Feeling fulfilled and rewarded**, the artists felt they were "making a difference," as a result of engaging with children with long-term health conditions.

SHOWCASES OF THE ART

Words cannot express the brilliance and creativity of the work that the children and young people have produced, facilitated by our talented artists, so why not see it for yourself!

The impact of artmaking not only remains a significant positive memory, but parents anecdotally report a deeper influence on life choices as their children progress with their own studies and career, such as for Ruth whose story you can read on page 10.

Take a moment to explore the creative showcases by scanning the QR codes.



**It made me happy -
I had fun. I get to be
an artist.**

Young Participant



Photo Credit: Marcin Lewandowski

IMPROVE TO INCLUDE

A core ambition of our strategy is to ensure that we are reaching children from all walks of life, and that they have opportunities to engage with our programmes no matter where they are or what barriers they face.

In 2023, 51% of our community programme participants came from **rural areas**, 39% are from **disadvantaged backgrounds**, and 53% had a disability or additional needs.

We increase access by ensuring the programme is medically supported, with onsite medics for our community programmes; by providing free workshops in accessible venues that are close to home in the children's communities; and having volunteers present who can provide 1:1 support. Our online programme allows children to participate no matter where they are.

A comparison of data with the Creative Health Hubs 2022 Programme. Evaluation demonstrates that a greater number of children and young people had rare diseases (32% in 2022 and 42% in 2023) and disabilities/additional needs in 2023 (26% in 2022 and 53% in 2023).

Also, the proportion of children that engaged with our programmes from rural/urban areas became balanced in 2023, while children and young people from deprived and disadvantaged areas remained consistent.

This shows that we are taking positive steps to promote inclusive access and will continue to reach out to ensure that more children and families know about our work and continue listening to them so that we break down the barriers to attending our programmes.

"Research shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are three times more likely to be hampered by their condition. We provide free local workshops in accessible buildings, with a paramedic at every session, and offer options to engage with us online. For some young people with lifelong health conditions, we may be the only activity they can attend, without a parent outside school or the health service"

- Helene Hugel, CEO Helium Arts



Photo Credit: Lucy Dawson

100% of children said that the online programme was inclusive of their needs.



Photo Credit: Lucy Dawson

100% of parents reported that their child had an improved quality of life after engaging with the Community Programme.

FURTHER IMPACTS

The impacts on children’s wellbeing and opportunities for artistic expression are at the core of our work, and so many people contribute to making this happen. We love seeing the positive impacts for others that we work with, whether that be

- Families feeling greater cohesion and having the ability to solve problems together
- Medical professionals having more positive interactions with their patients
- Artists feeling they are having a positive impact on children’s lives

VOLUNTEERS

A key part of our work are the volunteers who support our workshops and other activities, they have told us that:

AWARENESS RAISING

100% of parents and medical professionals reported that **their awareness of the positive impact of arts and creativity for wellbeing was increased**

100% of volunteers had an improved sense that they were **making a useful contribution**

100% improved their participation and **involvement in their local community**

90% gained an **improved sense of purpose**

Volunteer Emma’s Story

When I first heard about the opportunity to volunteer with Helium Arts, I just knew this was for me. I’m studying to be a nurse and have spent time on wards with children who have lifelong health conditions, but I only see them when they’re in hospital for treatment.

girls saw me do that, she grabbed another shell and did it too. And she said to me, “Oh! I did it!” And she just kept doing it over and over and saying, “I did it! I can do it!” And she was so proud of herself, and so positive and happy.

“Volunteering with Helium Arts would be a chance to see them outside of the hospital, when they’re being children, not just patients.”

“It brings tears to my eyes now remembering the smile on her face.”

I didn’t expect the workshops to have such a big impact on me. On my way home after every session, I’d feel so good. So positive.

The children were so proud of what they were doing. In one of the sessions, when we were playing with acrylic paint, I dipped a seashell in paint and used it like a stamp. When one of the

This is the first time in 10 years ever doing a camp - he has more confidence in himself, he was very proud of himself. His anxiety reduced! The set up really suited his needs. The helpers and artist really understood his needs. It was lovely for him to have something to go to.

- Parent



Photo Credit: Marcin Lewandowski

CASE STORIES

RUTH'S STORY

Isolation and anxiety have been the biggest struggles in recent years for Ruth, who has spina bifida hydrocephalus and scoliosis, and is paralysed from the waist down.

"I went through horrible back pain for years, then I had the surgery," she says of the spinal rods that were fitted when she was 10. "I was in recovery for months after that and then we went straight into Covid. That was quite a lot of isolation and not seeing people."

It was "quite a difficult time for me", says Ruth, an only child, who lives with her parents Annette and Timothy Cotter in Fermoy, Co Cork. But when she spotted a notice advertising a Helium Arts workshop on the wall of the outpatients department in Cork University Hospital and told her parents it was something she would like to do, it heralded the start of a positive change.

"I have always been interested in art and creative science and activities," she says. Since attending that first workshop at Mayfield Arts Centre in Cork city two years ago, she has been involved in other camps during the school holidays and attends monthly meetups.

"At home, I have sketchbooks that I am always drawing in and working on. I feel I can really express myself through art and my creations. I am confident in my art and what I make and whatever method I use."

For Ruth, art can be like an escape; therapeutic and relaxing. She also enjoys the company of other teenagers she has met through Helium Arts, who, like her, are coping with lifelong physical conditions and share an interest in art.



Photo Credit: Marcin Lewandowski

"We would find that we had other things in common. Some of them are wheelchair users as well. It is nice to have that friendship with others that relate to me and my experiences."

She often encounters physical barriers to participation in activities but that is not a problem with Helium Arts. "Accessibility can be hard to find. I use a power wheelchair and it's even harder."

In a three-day Halloween half-term camp during 2023, the group focused on completing work to exhibit in the Helium Arts Showcase.

"We were given different methods of creating and we got to choose what we would like to do, what we would like to have shown at the showcase. I am doing a lot of paintings and drawings."

Ruth will be doing her Junior Cert this June, and says "when I leave school, art is something I would definitely like to do in some way. I would like to do something creative like that."



LEAH, ELLIE AND AMELIA'S STORY

No-one can remember when Helium Arts became an excuse for a day out, but they're glad it did. For sisters Ellie and Leah, the creative arts workshops and camps were a great way to squeeze in a few extra hours with their new best friend, Amelia. For their mums, Helium was a chance to catchup, take a breath, and just 'be'.

They loved watching the girls plot their day together. There was no pretence here, no need to explain why. Ellie and Leah had been living with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome all their lives, and Amelia with juvenile arthritis. The connection was instant. They all knew how it felt to live with an 'invisible condition'. To never know when it would flare-up. To feel exhausted and spend every day in pain. Even if everything looked fine.

"It can be very isolating. People don't get it. From the outside, everything is perfect. On the inside, I know that Amelia's world is crumbling. She misses out on so much. All three girls do."

- Tina (Amelia's Mum).

It's why, when their physiotherapist suggested Helium Arts, the girls wanted to give it a try. Designed for young people with lifelong health conditions, here, it wouldn't matter if they had to take time out. Acceptance and understanding, not to mention a paramedic, were part of the deal. It was the perfect escape. Whether they were making bird boxes or clay sculptures, Helium was a place where they could relax and be themselves – and it was here that their budding friendship really began to flourish.

"You don't get the sense there's any illness in that room. They're always laughing and talking. It's a place of play. Somewhere the girls can forget for a while."

- Mairead (Ellie and Leah's Mum).

They've been going together for six years now. There have been a lot of ups and downs in that time. Good days, and bad. An important constant, through Helium the girls have found an essential creative and social outlet. And with just nine miles between them, they are now a regular part of each other's lives. It's been a welcome development for everyone, including their parents who, like their children, have found an important and unconditional source of support.

"We'll be friends for life. There are days when they are the only person who can get you through. We're there for each other. The girls are too."

- Tina and Mairead

It is a bond that has grown so strong, that when Ellie and Amelia start secondary school next year, their parents have made sure all three girls will be in the same place together. Each the other's support, both families know that no matter what life throws at them, they will help each other through. And with their next session already booked, they know that Helium Arts will be there too.

Helium Arts

CREATIVITY CHANGES LIVES



This is a summary of the Helium Arts 2023 Evaluation Report, an independent and objective evaluation of the Helium Arts Creative Health Programme between January-December 2023 undertaken by S3 Solutions.

For full report and impact video please scan the QR code:



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Helium Arts is a registered charity and compliant with the requirements of the Charities Regulator, the national regulatory authority for charities in Ireland, while also being a double Good Governance Award winner and awarded 'Triple Lock' status by the Charities Institute Ireland (CII).

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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Oige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

