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**In Conversation**

Chicago-born, Florida-based Partnership supporter Larry Furlong



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# Impact Report

SPRING/SUMMER 2023



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# In Conversation

Partnership member **Larry Furlong** has supported **more than 15 schools over the last five years.**

Chicago-born, Florida-based with roots in County Carlow, this University of Mississippi alumnus and life-long supporter of education tells us how he connects with his heritage:



Larry and Emily (Caldwell) Furlong in Ireland

**M**y connection is from my father - both of his parents were born in Ireland. I didn't have the Chicago Southside Irish upbringing, but I've been almost obsessed with Ireland since I was a kid.

I came across a Partnership mailing with a list of all of the schools that received support. I noticed that Carlow didn't have any schools [listed]. People from Carlow have this sort of idea that we're the forgotten county... So I called up Mary Sugrue, and said, "I got a question for you, how come nobody in Carlow's getting anything?" And she said, "Oh, no one's ever asked!"

One thing led to another, and I began to support the Partnership.

I started supporting one of the schools in the area of Carlow where my family came from. And over the years, I visited Ireland over half a dozen times and brought my kids and really got to connect



The three Larry Furlongs: Maitland, Thomastown, and Ballymurphy

it to family. I've been back and forth there over a 43 year period. I mean, I've got to know them.

**“ I love supporting small towns and rural schools... small contributions can make a big impact. ”**

So I realized that maybe I could direct funds to schools where my own cousins, albeit distant, attended. And probably as an aside, I've been a big proponent of education my whole life, as were my parents. It was their way to promote education, giving you the best chance to be successful, and I turned out the first college graduate of my father's family.

I love supporting small towns and rural schools. I know what that takes, you know, a lot of these schools have only maybe 30 families that can support the school, because there's just not a lot of people in the countryside anymore. And that's tough, so small contributions can make a big impact.

Education has changed Ireland. I've been going there for 40 years, and I've seen it firsthand and in my own family.

I was elected to the school board where I live here in Florida and I served eight years in Seminole County, which was one of the largest districts in the country. So education has always been very important to me and as a way to provide support to schools in Ireland is a way to reach back and connect with family and support the land of my grandparents, it just was a perfect match for me. And I have loved every minute of being involved with the Partnership ever since, and I hope to keep going as long as I'm able.



# Fighting Words

## NORTHERN IRELAND



Young Writers meet Belfast Lord Mayor Kate Nicholl with Director Hilary Copeland

**F**ighting Words Northern Ireland (NI) based in Belfast, aims to ignite young imaginations by encouraging young people’s creativity and confidence through creative writing. Their vision is simple – to advance the education of young people aged 6-18 in all aspects of the art of creative writing, fostering their imaginations, literacy and creativity.

This past January, the Partnership was delighted to welcome Playwright, Producer, Writer and Creator of *Derry Girls*, Lisa McGee, along with Editor-In-Chief of *Glamour*, Samantha Barry, as our Nollaig na mBan Boston women’s leadership honorees.

A grant of \$10,000 was given to Fighting Words NI in honor of Lisa McGee and her incredible accomplishments. This allowed the organization to run a series of creative writing workshops with schools and community groups in Derry-Londonderry.

Since launching in 2015, Fighting Words NI has provided more than 15,000 creative writing engagements, focusing their resources on children experiencing marginalization and disadvantage. They have trained more than 400 adult volunteer mentors who assist at workshops and hundreds of trainee teachers at Teacher Training Colleges in Belfast.

By integrating the values of peace-building and cross-community work across the entire program, Fighting Words NI also tackles the challenges of societal division and educational underachievement.

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

“We’re now embarking on the most important and transformational phase of our journey - to provide every child on the island of Ireland with a creative writing experience that ignites their creativity and expands their potential to contribute to building a strong civil society in NI. It is our goal to work with 10,000 young people annually by 2025.”

“None of this would be possible without the support of amazing donors like the Irish American Partnership. We really do appreciate your support.”

– Hilary Copeland, Director



Partnership Ambassador Lisa McGee, writer and creator of *Derry Girls*





# Literary Belfast

The Library at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University

**I**n March 2023, as a longstanding supporter of Queen's University Belfast, the Irish American Partnership welcomed Professor Glenn Patterson, Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's to Boston to share exciting plans to expand the facilities and influence of the Centre.

Established as a Centre for excellence in poetry and research, the Centre has also been the home of Creative Writing at Queen's. It embraces, as Heaney did in his lifetime, playwriting, prose, translation and song, as well as poetry, criticism, and practice.

While thanking Partnership members for their vital support, Professor Patterson described as "an enormous step for Queen's University and literary Belfast", the redevelopment of the Centre which will see it move to a new purpose-built location at the heart of the University campus, launch an outreach program in the local community and appoint a Chair in Creative Writing.

The appointment of the Seamus Heaney International Visiting Chair of Creative Writing and the move to the new premises are planned for autumn 2023, in honor of the tenth anniversary of the Bellaghy poet's death and also the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Centre.

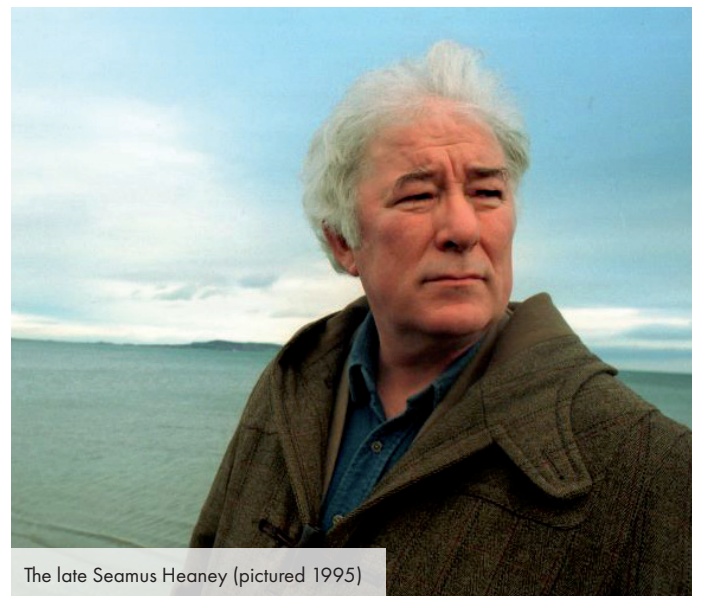
The new location for the Centre will be housed in a Victorian listed building on University Road and will feature an exhibition space, a digital archive of Seamus Heaney's TV and radio appearances and social areas.

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*"The Seamus Heaney Centre is all about becoming, bringing into being new ways of thinking and seeing; new writers and scholars give those new ways voice and personality."*

- Professor Glenn Patterson, Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast

"Now, in time for our 10th anniversary, we are preparing to move to a new landmark building with potential for future growth, starting with the appointment of a distinguished international visiting chair of creative writing."



The late Seamus Heaney (pictured 1995)



The Irish American Partnership is proud to support the expansion of the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University, particularly as it will offer a wider program of outreach and engagement for the wider community.

“This new building will represent an enormous step for The Seamus Heaney Centre, the university and literary Belfast, with an exhibition area, a venue for lectures and readings and an abundance of space for students to sit and begin to craft the words that will shape how we understand ourselves and our world in 10, 20, 50 years from now,” said Patterson.

He went on to say that as a result of these outreach projects the Seamus Heaney Centre will “more than ever be a link between the past and the future, between the city and Queen's University, between writing here and elsewhere. A centre with Heaney at its heart – a stellar poet who excelled in other genres and forms and who never stopped enquiring – a centre where writing lives.”



Professor Glenn Patterson at the Partnership's St. Patrick's Day Celebration in Boston



## QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

In April, CEO Mary Sugrue traveled with fellow Board members and supporters to represent the Irish American Partnership in marking the 25th anniversary of the historic Good Friday Agreement – to look back at the long road to peace, to reflect on where we are today, and to call for the rededication to the work that remains.

The Belfast Good Friday Agreement peace accord, signed on April 10th 1998, largely ended decades of violence known as the Troubles.

The focus of the world was on Belfast as global political leaders past and present arrived to participate in a three-day conference around this landmark peace accord hosted by our friends at Queen's University. Former Senator George Mitchell, former US President Bill Clinton, former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and former Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the Chancellor of the University, Secretary Hillary Clinton, were among those attending Agreement 25: a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.

## THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT MARKING 25 YEARS



Global leadership and key architects of the Good Friday Agreement



Board member Sir Bruce Robinson, Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, Partnership CEO Mary Sugrue, Monica McWilliams, Janet Robinson, Board member Tom Leonard





Students from St. Anne's Primary School, Finaghy, Belfast

**S**t. Anne's Primary School serves the Finaghy community in Belfast, enrolling almost 900 children ranging in age from 3 – 11, with most coming from Catholic backgrounds. The nearby Finaghy Primary School, while predominantly serving children from the Protestant community, now welcomes children from all backgrounds and traditions, irrespective of race, religion or creed. Although each school historically served one segment of the Finaghy community, both have become more diverse in recent years. Now, by giving back to both schools, Belfast-born Partnership supporter Gary Kerr hopes to help students from his neighborhood, while supporting the ongoing transition away from a divided community.

Gary says, "St. Anne's was where I went to primary school. It was a material part of my younger life. We lived in the parish. I was the first person in the history of my family to ever stay at school past the age of 16. That was very much driven by my mother. It wasn't until many years later that I look back and I understand that education is the great equalizer. It truly provides a stepping stone for people to help themselves. That's why I fundamentally believe it's so important that with a strong education, you can go and do whatever you want."



Finaghy Primary School students, Belfast

Growing up, Gary recalls a cross-community event, where he and students from St. Anne's participated in team building activities with students from Finaghy Primary School. With the Partnership, Gary hopes that in time, planned cross-community events will no longer be needed as schools increasingly bring students from all communities together on a daily basis. The Partnership is proud to support this goal.

“As a school community we are very appreciative. We were delighted to hear that Finaghy Primary School was to receive such a generous gift. Our plan is to develop an outdoor learning zone for our pupils, including a community garden.”

- Principal Rosalind Corbett





# SCIENCE BLASTS OFF

Kilkenny National School student scientists

**E**SB Science Blast, designed and delivered by the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), aims to inspire the next generation to fulfil their potential and to provide them with the necessary skills to tackle future challenges, through engagement in a primary education STEM programme.

The RDS is committed to building ESB Science Blast into a program that is embedded in the school calendar, and delivers an exceptional learning experience every year.

The support from the Irish American Partnership has enabled the RDS to engage with over 45,000 primary school children through ESB Science Blast since 2019, growing ESB Science Blast into one of the largest STEM-based primary school education programmes in both Ireland and Europe.

The close relationship between the RDS and the Irish American Partnership continues to be instrumental in encouraging students across the island of Ireland to develop life skills, whilst interacting with STEM in a dynamic, creative, and fun way.

ESB Science Blast Dublin 2023 was the first in-person showcase since March 2020, and enjoyed high interest from participating schools. Due to the demand, an additional showcase day was added to accommodate all schools who wanted to join. ESB Science Blast Belfast showcase, was held in the International Convention Centre in April with more than 1,000 primary school children from 30 schools in attendance.



## MAKE A GIFT

Your gift helps the Partnership respond to the many requests for our support from schools, universities and communities throughout Ireland.

## QUICK STATS

- 4 event days - Belfast, Dublin, Limerick
- 12,000 primary school children
- 840 teachers and resource providers
- 256 schools
- 262 Judges
- 22 counties represented
- 88 Irish language projects
- 77 DEIS schools\*

\*ESB Science Blast / the Partnership specifically focus on DEIS schools to include children who might normally be overlooked by STEM programs.



Young students enjoying ESB Science Blast in Belfast





# NORTHERN IRELAND

A unique and vibrant place to grow your business



Partnership supporters have long recognized the important work of Invest Northern Ireland, the region's economic development agency.

From tech stalwarts in Silicon Valley to media giants in New York City and all states and sectors in between, over 200 U.S. companies have now discovered why Northern Ireland has rapidly become a location of choice for international expansion.

Invest Northern Ireland has supported more than 100 US-headquartered businesses expand to everywhere from Derry City & Strabane in the west to Belfast in the east. In the last five years alone 33 new US businesses have established operations in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland boasts world-class strengths across a range of areas, including cyber security, precision medicine, fintech, software development, food security and advanced engineering and manufacturing. Aflac, Allstate, Baker McKenzie, Citi, Globalization Partners, Rapid7, Seagate, Terex and Whitehat Security have successfully established operations in the region in recent years.

Companies looking to expand across borders won't find anything in Europe quite like Northern Ireland's Assured Skills Program, a fully-funded, pre-employment training program that guarantees that incoming companies can secure the right talent with the right skill sets. The Academy Model is flexible and has been used to help companies recruit new staff in areas such as software development, data

analytics, cyber security and financial management.

Besides the people and their skills, there is something special about the way of life in Northern Ireland. From short commutes to long hikes amid unsurpassed natural beauty, there are very few places where you can travel from city center to the countryside in a matter of minutes. With a low crime rate, friendly people and a supportive business environment - Northern Ireland is a great place to live, work, study and visit.

Executive Vice President with Invest Northern Ireland - Americas Andrea Haughian commented, "When I speak to our clients, they are continually impressed by the spirit of innovation and the innate problem solving skills of our people." Ms. Haughian went on to say:

*“ I want to thank and acknowledge the phenomenal work of the Irish American Partnership as they continue to invest in the transformation of the Northern Ireland economy. ”*

#### IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE

contact Andrea Haughian, Executive VP, Head of Americas: [andrea.haughian@investni.com](mailto:andrea.haughian@investni.com)

If you are a Northern Irish ExPat, or a friend of Northern Ireland interested in joining the global diaspora network please visit [www.niconnections.com](http://www.niconnections.com)



# Stronger Than Ever

2023 is proving to be another year of significant progress for Integrated Education throughout Northern Ireland.

In April, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland published its first ever Strategy for Integrated Education, following the passing of the Integrated Education Act (2022).

In the words of the Act's sponsor, Member of the Legislative Assembly Kellie Armstrong, "I think it's a start to something we all have been looking for."

While more than 90 percent of schools in Northern Ireland are divided on faith based lines, our partners at the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) share the vision held by 66% of people in Northern Ireland, who believe Integrated Education should be the main model of education.

Integrated Education has grown from just 28 pupils in one school in 1981 to over 25,000 pupils in 68 schools today. Children from Protestant, Catholic, other faith backgrounds and none, are educated together in the same schools, where the symbols, ethos, and traditions of the entire community are valued and respected.

More parents and schools than ever before continue to engage with the IEF and in March, parents at Ballymena Nursery School voted overwhelmingly in favor of beginning the process of Transformation, with 95% of parents voting to say yes to beginning the process of transformation - the legal process that allows a school of any management type to transform to an integrated school.

Actor and IEF Ambassador Liam Neeson continues to advocate for this vision of a united community and a shared future, saying,



Fort Hill Integrated Primary School announce the latest Northern Ireland attitudinal poll result

"I am delighted that so many parents across Northern Ireland are choosing an integrated future for their children... I want to congratulate all of the parents, staff, and governors in schools right across Northern Ireland, who are taking courageous steps to ensure children from different traditions, will get to learn and play together, every day, in the same school. You are actively helping to build inclusive communities."

“ The Irish American Partnership have been loyal long-standing supporters of our work for so many years, and in doing so they have made an invaluable contribution to Integrated schools across Northern Ireland. ”

- Paul Caskey, Head of Campaign

**ief** integrated  
education fund





Students from St. Vincent's at the Student Enterprise Awards

St. Vincent's Secondary School educates almost 400 male students in Glasnevin, on the northside of Dublin city. The aim of St. Vincent's is to develop students into self-confident individuals with a sense of social responsibility. A designated "Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools" (DEIS) school - needing assistance to address educational disadvantage - the head of the business department, teacher Frank Kiernan, has long aimed to help foster a culture of enterprise among the students in the school community.

"We host a mini-company market day where students can sell their products/services. Being a DEIS school, especially in the current cost of living crisis, seed money is the barrier to student participation. Having a grant available to support students on their entrepreneurial journey is invaluable."

Partnership funding has enabled students to participate in Market Day. Enterprises were given seed money to start their business with two of these enterprises selected to represent the school in the Dublin City final of the Student Enterprise Awards. They both performed exceptionally well with one enterprise earning second place in their category.

*“ Thanks to the Irish American Partnership, the remainder of your generous grant will enable us to support even more enterprises in the next academic year. ”*



Dublin City Final of the Student Enterprise Awards 2023

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