

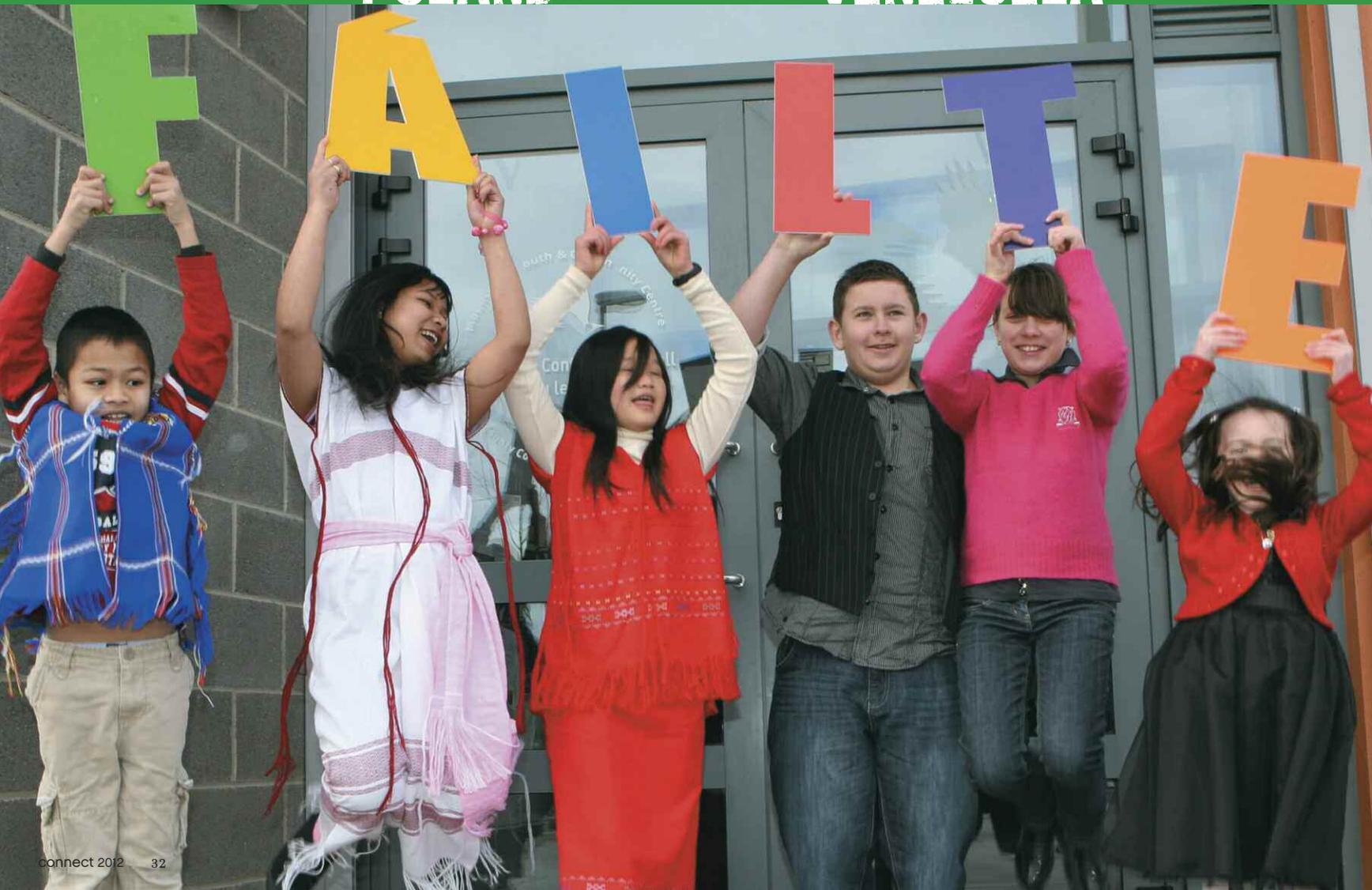
CÉAD MILE FÁILTE

*Fáilte Isteach Embodies the Spirit of
A Hundred Thousand Welcomes
to Ireland's New Communities*

POLAND



VENEZUELA





“When I first came to Ireland, my world was so small. I was afraid to go to shops and I couldn’t tell the doctor what was wrong. Today, I can speak confidently in English, my children do well in school and my daughter speaks with an Irish accent.”
— Rima, from Lithuania

LITHUANIA • CHINA • ROMANIA

Mary Nally stood in the grocery store aisle and watched as the young mother from Argentina struggled to read the back of a can. “She had two small children with her, and was clearly frustrated at not being able to understand the label. My heart went out to her as I realized how isolating it must have been to not be able to read English.”

That experience six years ago in the small village of Summerhill, Co. Meath was the beginning of a nationwide movement to teach English language skills to those who have come to Ireland from other countries. Mary Nally was CEO of Third Age, a national organization that works with older and retired people to remain engaged with their lives and their communities. She asked what role Third Age might take in helping people who wanted to learn.

“I came back to Third Age and shared the story with the volunteers here,” said Mary. “So we began teaching conversational English. We put the word out in the community and on the first night we had twelve tutors and six students from Eastern Europe. Then, by word of mouth, it spread. It became so clear that there was a real need to make people feel welcome because Ireland has changed, especially within the last ten years. There are new communities of people who want to contribute.”

The offer of free, friendly, conversation-based classes struck an immediate chord in the community and soon the number of students and tutors grew. While English classes are often taught in urban centers of Ireland, it was apparent that there were many non-English speakers living in rural areas who wished to learn English as well. This fact, paired with senior citizens with the time and desire to teach, created a perfect opportunity to address a previously unmet need.

Not surprisingly, the effect was positive not only for those who were learning, but for those who were teaching. “We find that the communities have become stronger,” explained Liam Carey, Head of National Development for Fáilte Isteach. “The students begin to meet their neighbors. And our tutors learn about a world beyond Ireland while offering a valuable skill to the community.”

Liam addressed the question of whether the current economic struggles in Ireland have made immigrants feel more, or less, welcomed by local communities. What message does Fáilte Isteach impart to those who may be unsure of these new arrivals? “At an economic level, it does not benefit a community if part of that community can’t participate,” explained Liam. “We want people to come and be able to contribute to society, not be

“Ireland is a place of a thousand welcomes. It is so important that we uphold that. The new communities that we have in Ireland are bringing so much and they are enriching Ireland. We must not just welcome it, we must value it.”

— Mary Nally, CEO of Third Age



LATVIA

FRANCE

SPAIN

reliant upon it because they can't speak English. Diversity is a fact of life for Ireland today. A warm, friendly welcome has a positive impact on the existing community. We should all want to build a better society, a society where people don't feel alienated.”

And so today, all across Ireland, neighbors are reaching out to neighbors. Fáilte Isteach has retained the program's personalized and friendly feel by encouraging small classes that use conversation as the primary teaching tool. The initiative has evolved to offer professional training to those who volunteer. Every week, over 550 trained tutors now teach over 1,400 students in 19 counties across Ireland. With help from The Ireland Funds Promising Ireland Campaign, the program has recently opened its 53rd branch. “Support from The Ireland Funds has meant we can sustain our growth throughout the country,” explained Mary Nally. “Funding has made a real difference. It says that people see the value of our project and its impact. What I love about this project is that it works because of its simplicity. English is just a way to bring people together and it is life-changing. People tell us they are no longer isolated. They

are no longer afraid to say hello. Parents don't depend on their children to translate. They become active citizens.”

One example of an “active citizen” is Anna, a Fáilte Isteach student who came to Ireland from Poland speaking no English. “I was shy and embarrassed. I wanted to be independent and not rely on other people. And I wanted to meet Irish people. They are so friendly. They have open hearts. For those of us that are coming here, that makes all the difference. I learned about this program and thought, ‘It's free, and so close to where I live!’ I had taken another course but it was far from home, and it was expensive. Fáilte Isteach is so different. It's not just grammar, it is conversation. I feel comfortable asking about things I may not understand. I can ask anything here.”

Anna is now giving back to her local community. “Last July, I opened a local business here in town. I didn't take a bank loan; I saved in order to open this. It's a tough time in Ireland and I want to do my small part to give back and provide jobs. I didn't come here to take, I came here to give. Thanks to Fáilte Isteach, I'm able to do that.”



- 1 Every week throughout Ireland, in 19 counties and in 53 different Fáihte Isteach branches, more than 1,400 migrant students are taught English by 550 volunteer tutors.
- 2 Small classes and conversation-based teaching have been components of Fáihte Isteach's success across Ireland.
- 3 A map of the towns and villages in the Dublin area where Fáihte Isteach centers have opened.

FINLAND

GERMANY

