



LEISURE BUDDIES
YOUTH BUDDIES

*“To the world you may be one person.
But to one person you may be the world.”*

[—Anonymous]

LEISURE BUDDIES is a friendship outreach project run by St. Christopher’s Services in Co. Longford. It pairs people with intellectual disabilities under St. Christopher’s care with volunteers from the community who create support systems and facilitate social opportunities. Leisure Buddies caters for adults who are matched with other adults with similar interests. They meet once a month (or more) for social activities, one-on-one. The friends might attend concerts, have a cup of tea or go to a local theater production. Some of the friendships have been sustained for over a decade. Youth Buddies is a youth group that brings together teens and young adults from local secondary schools for

group outings and community activities. At a time when being social is keenly important, this teen group is a unique opportunity for young people with intellectual disabilities to engage with their peers and feel included in the community. It is clear from chatting with the teens that everyone, intellectually disabled or not, is having a great time. Experts readily cite terms such as “social inclusion” and benefits such as “advancement of social and communications skills” when speaking of initiatives such as Leisure Buddies/Youth Buddies. But those involved with the program simply speak about the power of these friendships.

YOUTH BUDDIES AND LEISURE BUDDIES HAVE BEEN FUNDED BY THE IRELAND FUNDS PROMISING IRELAND CAMPAIGN GRANT ROUND IN 2012 AND 2013.

" THANKS TO THE FUNDING WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE TO RECRUIT MORE VOLUNTEERS IN THE PROJECT. IN PARTICULAR THE YOUTH BUDDIES PROJECT HAS BENEFITED GREATLY FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS GRANTS. WE HAVE RECENTLY TRAINED 4 MORE SUPERVISORS AND 13 MORE TRANSITION YEAR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS. IT HAS PROVEN TO BE A VERY BENEFICIAL EXPERIENCE FOR THESE YOUNG PEOPLE AND IT ALLOWS VOLUNTEERS AND BUDDIES TO INTERACT WHILE PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AND PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION. PART OF THE HELP FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS IS BEING USED TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS OUR MONTHLY OUTINGS AND ACTIVITIES. WITHOUT HELP LIKE THIS, OUR LEVEL OF ACTIVITIES WOULD BE INCREDIBLY LIMITED."

[- Michelle Reilly, Leisure Buddies Coordinator]

Steven and Jason



Laura and Cassandra



"I just wish everyone could have this experience. After a while and after getting to know each other, you find you don't even see someone's disability. We just have so much fun together," says Dearbhla, a volunteer.

"My son John has been in Youth Buddies for six years," says Liz. "John is 22 now and he loves it. The program is so important to him, and it's brought a sense of pride to me as a mom. When he comes home from an activity, you know he's had a great day. And it gives me a wee break and a chance to talk to other parents. Not only has it been great for him, but it has taught me how to let go a bit and trust that he'll be OK. Youth Buddies has become a part of our lives."

Dearbhla and Bernard

