



IRISH CHILDREN  
FROM ARD NA GRATH  
PRIMARY SCHOOL  
IN ATHLONE, CO  
WESTMEATH

# A PLACE CALLED HOME

THE IRELAND  
FUNDS ARE  
HELPING BUILD  
A DIGITAL  
BRIDGE FOR  
CHILDREN  
IN IRELAND  
AND THE US



AMERICAN CHILDREN  
IN HOLSENBACK  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
IN GEORGIA





MUSICIAN  
JAMES DONOHUE

## A NEW PILOT EDUCATION PROGRAM,

A Place Called Home, is being funded by The Ireland Funds in partnership with Atlantic Corridor, a local development company serving Ireland's Midlands area. A Place Called Home allows students in Georgia and Athlone take a virtual walk through each other's history, culture and "home" in a collaborative online learning environment. The process is celebrating the Irish cultural legacy and the contemporary artistic connections that exist between the United States and Ireland.

High definition video conferencing is used in the classrooms to connect the schools, along with artists in the Athlone location. The content is directly aligned to existing primary school curriculum standards for music, language arts, history, and social studies.

"It's about bringing primary school children an awareness of other countries and other cultures," says Jackie Gorman, CEO of Atlantic Corridor. "The links between Ireland and Georgia are deep on account of the number of Irish people that went to the southern states in the US. To now explore music and art and culture through technology is exciting because they have the opportunity to directly interact with people from schools in that actual location that they are learning about."

And so while the Athlone school children learn onsite from guest musicians and poets about prose, art and music, children in Georgia are discovering the tin whistle and Irish poetry alongside them through the video feeds. And through the interaction, children in Athlone are discovering a world beyond their immediate rural area.

"It's been a magical experience really," explains James Donohue, one of the musicians involved with the program. James not only teaches musical components of the program but has been a key driver behind the company Virtual Classroom that facilitates the technology. "Straightaway when the children in Athlone got to see the artwork from the elementary students in Georgia, they started spouting out questions such as, 'You also have green fields there? What is it like to attend a school with over 1,000 kids?' and the American school children wanted to know things like, 'What is Gaelic? What are Irish sports?' To watch the engagement is really fascinating."

James knows that while the digital connection between schools seems like fun to the children now, A Place Called Home has the potential to impact them far into the future.

"In 20 years' time, there is no doubt, if you were to ask any of the children here about the project, while they might forget other things that happened in elementary school, I can assure you that this is something that will stick with them for life."

"This project demonstrates the strengthening links between Ireland and the United States and provides a basis from which further business and education links can be developed," concludes Jackie. "It is also a distinct example of Ireland using innovation to deliver cultural programming in a fresh and unique way. And without the help of The Ireland Funds and other stakeholders, it just wouldn't have happened."