

A close-up photograph of a young girl with brown hair, freckles, and purple-rimmed glasses. She is lying in a hospital bed, wearing a white blanket, and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is slightly blurred, showing a hospital setting.

helium arts

Bringing art, creativity and play to children in hospitals and healthcare settings across Ireland.

For children whose lives are affected and often limited by chronic or serious illness,

spending time in hospital can become a normal part of everyday life. They are unable to run out the door after homework and join their friends for new adventures. They have to spend time alone in hospital, away from the routines of family life. They are confined to their beds for fear of further infection or injury. Illness can take over the lives of children—hospital visits and medical treatment become the norm and hospital staff sometimes fill the role of friends and family. Helium Arts opens a creative and imaginative new world for these children—a world where they can experience no limits.



in 2009, Helium Arts was established by Helene Hugel, a hospital play specialist and practicing children's theater maker who wanted to bring her creative work to children whose lives were affected by illness. It has developed into a national, award-winning arts organization based on the belief that sick children deserve child-friendly medical care which honours their right to remain a child no matter what their diagnosis. Helium Arts works with professional artists from a myriad of arts disciplines such as children's sensory theater, music, storytelling, and multi-media and film to deliver four programs in collaboration with healthcare staff. Since 2009, over 4,500 children and their families across 10 counties have benefitted from Helium's work.

Their programs have benefitted from The Ireland Funds' support. The Artists in Residence in Hospitals Program is a sustained engagement whereby an artist works to support a child in hospital. The Community Health Program develops creative projects outside of the hospital environment, such as Helium's Summer Film Camp—The Two Suitcases Project—that provide a sense of community for children and teenagers who experience isolation due to chronic illness.

Outcomes include happier, more confident, communicable, and medically compliant young people in hospital. As one physiotherapist said of the program, "A happy child is an engaged child, and an engaged child is a child that you are going to have good work and progress with."

In 2014, Helium's work impacted on nearly 400 children and young people and 200 of their parents, while indirectly benefiting 400 staff through 16 partnerships. Helium recognizes the great value of gathering an evidence base behind its work and are delighted to announce that Trinity College Dublin and NUIG Galway are both current research partners. BNP Paribas bank has renewed a three-year commitment to supporting Helium's hospital program, a multi-annual funding partnership that is vital for securing sustainability. Helium in partnership with CREATE are also working to advocate for integration of the arts in the New Children's Hospital build which will act as a flagship project and national model of care. In 2014, they were winners of a Business to Arts Award for Best Use of Creativity in the Community.

"I was delighted that my daughter had such a positive distraction after lying in bed for two days. It was interactive, which was fantastic, otherwise she just had TV as she was too ill to read. Many thanks, it was an unexpected pleasure." — the parent of a child participating in the Helium program