

THE IRELAND FUNDS
SUPPORT A LOVE OF LEARNING
THROUGH PROJECT TARA



LOOKING UP TO LEARN

MOST PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW THAT JUPITER HAS 63 MOONS. THEY MAY HAVE NEVER HEARD OF THE CONSTELLATION "VULPECULA" OR KNOW THE NAME OF THE FIRST PLANETARY NEBULA EVER DISCOVERED. HOWEVER SCHOOLCHILDREN IN CORK AND CALIFORNIA DO, THANKS TO PROJECT TARA.

Above: The Blackrock Castle Observatory in Cork



"LOOK AGAIN AT THAT DOT. THAT'S HERE. THAT'S HOME. THAT'S US. ON IT EVERYONE YOU LOVE, EVERYONE YOU KNOW, EVERYONE YOU EVER HEARD OF, EVERY HUMAN BEING WHO EVER WAS, LIVED OUT THEIR LIVES. THE AGGREGATE OF OUR JOY AND SUFFERING, THOUSANDS OF CONFIDENT RELIGIONS, IDEOLOGIES, AND ECONOMIC DOCTRINES, EVERY HUNTER AND FORAGER, EVERY HERO AND COWARD, EVERY CREATOR AND DESTROYER OF CIVILIZATION, EVERY KING AND PEASANT, EVERY YOUNG COUPLE IN LOVE, EVERY MOTHER AND FATHER, HOPEFUL CHILD, INVENTOR AND EXPLORER, EVERY TEACHER OF MORALS, EVERY CORRUPT POLITICIAN, EVERY 'SUPERSTAR,' EVERY 'SUPREME LEADER,' EVERY SAINT AND SINNER IN THE HISTORY OF OUR SPECIES LIVED THERE—ON A MOTE OF DUST SUSPENDED IN A SUNBEAM."

— an excerpt from Astronomer Carl Sagan's *A Pale Blue Dot*

PROJECT TARA

is an Irish-led collaborative program designed to encourage cross cultural relationships between students around the world through the inspiring topic of astronomy and space science. Led by the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) Blackrock Castle Observatory, Project TARA gives students in Ireland at the Blackrock Castle Observatory, and in Portola Valley, California at the Ormondale Elementary School, mutual access to two telescopes in each location.

Located in the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) Blackrock Castle Observatory, the Irish telescope is the center of a far-reaching educational program enjoyed by children who visit from across Ireland. The late 16th century castle is a fascinating juxtaposition to the modern technology housed within. School children at both the primary and secondary level come to the Observatory to build their knowledge and excitement around science, technology, engineering

and math. The program allows them to take data from the telescope in California while also interacting with the sister telescope there in Cork.

"Thanks to The Ireland Funds, we've enabled over a thousand children to participate in Project TARA," explains Clair McSweeney of CIT Blackrock Castle Observatory. "Astronomy for us is an incredible vehicle for learning. No matter who you are, whatever your age, or where you're from. We're all living under a sky that we share. Astronomy is something we find everybody can relate to."

The critical thinking and astronomy lessons delivered through Project TARA are clearly enjoyed by the schoolchildren (and their teachers) that visit and participate in the project. Visiting classes not only climb the castle roof to see the TARA telescope, they also create their own moon photos, crawl into an inflatable planetarium to see animations of the local night sky, and send email

to space via radio waves. The CIT Blackrock Castle Observatory and Project TARA are fully interactive and are proudly instilling a passion for science and astronomy.

The exchange of knowledge and shared-experience between San Francisco and Cork (which are sister cities) has been cemented with a visit to San Francisco by several Cork students to experience the California satellite. In addition, a visit to Cork was made by San Francisco Mayor, Edwin Lee when he launched the program in 2013. The visit was of note as it was his first official trip outside the USA as Mayor.

"THE IRELAND FUNDS' SUPPORT HAS BEEN CRUCIAL TO PROJECT TARA," explains Dr. Niall Smith, Head of Research at Cork Institute of Technology. "But it has also been symbolic. This is really an Ireland/US project that is anchored between the two countries. It's a two-way conversation and it benefits so many children who are under this one sky."