

PlasticFreeKinsale

A community comes together in support of sustainability



Kinsale is renowned as one of Ireland's most beautiful coastal towns. With its quaint harbor, colorful boats and flower-filled streets, it is a year-round highlight on the itinerary of many visitors to Ireland. Yet under the beauty, Kinsale faces the same environmental challenges as other communities. Use of unnecessary plastics, litter and beaches under siege from plastic waste are concerns which the town contends with on a daily basis.





Co-founders of Plastic Free Kinsale:
Dr. Tara Shine and **Madeleine Murray**

Photo: Aengus McMahon

The aim of Plastic Free Kinsale is to reduce the amount of plastic in Kinsale and up recycling rates by giving practical, actionable advice.



"I definitely look at labels on packaging a lot more. I have looked up 'What goes in what bin' online - it is still somewhat confusing and it shouldn't be." —Audrey, Kinsale

"Definitely changes in how this house is run, much greater focus on recycling, energy use in the house, and started tuning in to the idea of an electric car." —Sarah, Kinsale





A community beach clean-up and education day supported by The Ireland Funds
Photos: Cian Walsh



Plastic Free Kinsale began when two Kinsale residents, Environmental Scientist Dr. Tara Shine and Media Strategist Madeleine Murray, met while swimming in Kinsale's famous sea. "I had gone for a gorgeous swim one morning and was walking up the slipway," says Tara. "This woman I've never met before comes charging up to me and said she had heard what I did for a living and had a question for me..."

Madeleine laughs at the memory. "Kinsale is such a small community, everyone knows what everyone does. So, I guess my first introduction to Tara was driven by curiosity and frustration. I asked her why my child had all these resources at school for learning about the environment and recycling, but why parents, and mothers in particular, weren't getting the same information? We are the ones paying bills and shaping habits in the home."

That simple question led to Madeleine and Tara having coffee and brainstorming around how they could engage their community. That led to 20 women in Madeleine's home talking about big and small changes they could each make.

"We did an icebreaker which we thought would last 10 minutes but they could have done it all night long," says Madeleine. "We simply sorted household rubbish. And in doing that we realized how little people knew about what could and couldn't be recycled. We ended up talking about issues really specific to our community: our traffic, the climate change, and litter."

"It was a real animated discussion," recalls Tara. "At the end of it all these women were saying 'well what are you going to do about it?' which was a bit overwhelming. But out of that came Plastic Free Kinsale."

EDUCATION FIRST

The newly-formed initiative knew it was tackling an enormous issue but also refused to give in to the idea that individual actions are "too small" to make a difference. Their aim was simple: to reduce the amount of plastic in Kinsale and increase recycling rates by providing practical, actionable advice.

They targeted the places and institutions where people congregate and where impacts could be made. Homes, schools, local businesses, and social clubs within the community. Their approach was practical: don't just scare people with tales of an environmental collapse, offer them tangible and practical ways to make a cumulative difference.

THREE "ASKS" WERE DEVELOPED FOR EACH STAKEHOLDER:

Schools

- 1 Encourage reusable water bottles
- 2 Say no to plastic in lunchboxes
- 3 Say no to plastic straws

Retail Businesses

- 1 Ask customers if they really need a bag
- 2 Increase recycling & reduce plastic packaging
- 3 Stock alternatives to plastic

Food & Beverage Businesses

- 1 Offer to refill water bottles
- 2 Say no to plastic straws, cups and cutlery
- 3 Offer discounts to customers who bring "keep" cups

Home

- 1 Avoid non-recyclable plastic packaging when shopping
- 2 Pick up plastic when out walking
- 3 Use reusable water bottles, lunch boxes and containers

Clubs

- 1 Avoid disposable cups, plates & cutlery at events
- 2 Encourage reusable water bottles only
- 3 Provide bins for recycling and show where things go

SMALL CHANGES, BIG RESULTS

"We rang schools up and said, 'we are Plastic Free Kinsale and we'd like to talk to families about what goes in lunch boxes,' says Tara. "Then we ended up creating an easy step-by-step online guide called PlasticFree4Schools that any primary school across Ireland can adopt and use to become a single-use plastic-free school."

Schools in Kinsale have become incubators for plastic-free ideas. "The 5th and 6th grade classes at my child's school wrote to Glanbia, the provider of the milk in their cafeteria, about the problematic plastic straws that come with every carton of milk. We're delighted that Glanbia is now reviewing the issue."

Support from The Ireland Funds has helped Plastic Free Kinsale bring these educational activities to schools, offer beach clean-up workshops, and inspire young people through competition that propose solutions to plastic pollution and plastic waste. "It's all about behavior-change," says Madeleine. "And the way you change behavior is neighbor-to-neighbor, person to-person."

The organization uses social media and video effectively. Keeping messages simple, easy to understand, and engaging. A video they posted chatting about recycling household trash and plastic after a typical family meal went viral in Ireland and received over 205,000 views. This is typical of the kind of practical, real-life messaging that Madeleine and Tara are so effective at.

Today, Plastic Free Kinsale has launched a new award-winning enterprise called Change By Degrees which helps businesses and communities to create and tell their sustainability stories. "Thanks in part to The Ireland Funds, we were able to build the momentum needed to set up Change By Degrees," says Madeleine.

"It turns out that all people need is good information that they can understand, that isn't tediously boring, and then to feel good about the change they can make," says Tara. "It's that 1-degree of change that begins the rest of the story."