



Blossom Ireland

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Creating New Possibilities for
Those with Intellectual Disabilities

For a Life

Blossom Ireland is an award-winning organization that provides skills-based training designed to prepare young people aged 14 to 20 years with an intellectual disability (ID) for life as an adult. It offers a practical education and life skills program – the Personal Empowerment Program (PEP) – which teaches the young people to be as independent as possible in the community, socially, and in the workplace. The program also provides bespoke support, advocacy and information for both the young person and their family during important transition periods in their life.

Blossom Ireland Like Any Other

Here, Auveen Bell the co-founder and CEO of Blossom Ireland, shares how The Ireland Funds has invested in its success:

Blossom Ireland's relationship with The Ireland Funds began back in 2014 when we received our first grant of €3,000. Our program at that time was little more than an idea at the kitchen table.

We had built up no evidence of its impact, we had no proof that it would work but we had the power of our convictions and we believed 100% in what we were aiming to do. The Ireland Funds backed that belief, something no other funder did at the time. In addition to the financial boost it gave us, it also reassured us that our idea had potential. We knew what we were doing was right. We knew it was making a difference. We received two further small grants from The Ireland Funds in 2015 and 2016 of €3,000. In 2017 we were absolutely delighted to be awarded €100,000 for the Flagship Grant.

The financial support along with the endorsement from The Ireland Funds has been instrumental in allowing the expansion and development of the program to-date. The security that came with that Flagship Grant has allowed us to develop a program that is filling an important gap in educational provision for young people in Ireland with intellectual disabilities and one that is having very visible and measurable impact for them.

Thanks to the platform which the Flagship Grant provides, we were also introduced to a private trust who donated €75,000 p.a. from 2018 – 2020. Having two multi-annual grants has enabled us to change how we think and to increase our ambitions for the Personal Empowerment Program.

Our main target over the 2-year period of the Flagship Grant was for 14 participants to have completed the program. We achieved this and more. By 2021 we anticipate that we will have worked with 70 young people and their families along with over 20 employers and community-based organizations. In 2020 we will pilot Blossom PEP in a school. Should this prove to be a success we can then potentially access young people in all schools across Ireland to learn the vital skills to prepare them for adulthood – something schools are very often under-resourced to do. However, in order to achieve this we are seeking a small number of investors who are interested in supporting our work. If you are interested in learning more about our Program, please do not hesitate to contact The Ireland Funds at US 212-689-3100 or Auveen Bell at auveen@blossomireland.ie

One thing we pride ourselves in is being innovative in everything we do. We don't ever sit back and say, "That's done now." We constantly test. We constantly evaluate. We constantly adapt and change as we see fit. A funder like The Ireland Funds allows you to do that and in fact, encourages it.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in The Ireland Funds both in Ireland and around the world who have supported us enormously on our journey from the kitchen table to one where we are planning to give every young person with ID a chance to live a life like any other.

Taking the bus and train without mom and dad. Buying a coffee and snack with friends at the local café. These are steps to confidence and independence that most young people take for granted. But for young people like Howard, these are milestones to be especially proud of.

"Howard has a global developmental delay, explains his mom, Laura. "As a result, we found it difficult to get Howard into various clubs around the local area because he wasn't Down syndrome. He wasn't autistic. Blossom was inclusive and welcomed Howard first into the summer camp program and now into PEP. The program is always pushing and stretching our children and their goals. Howard has evolved every step of the way."

Howard began the Blossom program when he was nine years old and moved into the PEP program when he was fourteen. Soon he was learning skills and tasks that once seemed daunting. "He [Howard] couldn't order something in the café when he started with us," says Imelda Fitzpatrick, Program Director, Blossom Ireland. "I remember him just sitting on his chair watching everyone else go up to order and not move. Now he is the employee of the month and teaching others."

Today at age 19, Howard is one of three paid teen mentors with Blossom's PEP program. Along with Blossom staff he now helps conduct the program but brings a unique perspective having gone through the program himself. "Being a teen mentor is good for me because I help people," says Howard. "I show them how to take the bus. We have to help and train people. They may be nervous, but they are ready for it!"



Howard and his mom, Laura

Howard has come through the Blossom Summer Camp and Personal Empowerment Program. He now serves as a peer mentor.

Howard

*A Personal Empowerment
Program Success Story*

Thanks

to The Ireland Funds' Flagship Award support
of Blossom's Personal Empowerment Program...

80% of parents said their child now
seems confident when out in the community

83% of parents said their child is now
engaging with peers in a
meaningful way



participants have increased their preparation
for after-school life skills by

51%



VIDEO: **Watch how The Ireland Funds has strengthened the work of Blossom Ireland**