

Laois Down Syndrome Association



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laois Down Syndrome Association to Bring Speech Therapy School to Laois and Surrounding Counties

Laois Down Syndrome Association promotes inclusion, equality and choices for people with Down syndrome and their families.

Laois Down Syndrome Association's goal is to help people with Down syndrome make their own futures as bright and independent as possible by providing them with education, support and friendship every step of the way.

Ray Harte, the Chairperson of the Association, and father of 12 year old Aaron who has Down syndrome, quickly realised one of the key areas he could make the most difference to people with Down syndrome in Laois and the surrounding area, was to deal with the provision of speech and language therapy.

**Laois
Down Syndrome
Association**

**Ray Harte
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Secretary
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At the Laois Down Syndrome Association meeting held on 30 May, Ray stated, "One of the most crucial aspects to independence is communication—not just speech, but all forms of communication. One of our Association family members who attends Release in Dublin suggested I look into it. And after some preliminary discussions and further research I invited Tara Cunningham, Managing Director to speak about her programme."

Release Communication Intervention is a speech and language therapy programme which has worked successfully with over 670 children of varying communication difficulties in Dublin and Dundalk since 2005.

The programme focuses the training around caregivers, involving parents, teachers, special needs assistants in every aspect of the speech and language therapy.

The children are placed into groups, by their disability and their communication ability, thus leading to peer support for both the children and the caregivers.

Since Release opened their doors, 15 previously non-verbal children have begun to use verbal communication as their primary method of communication; nine children have transitioned out of mainstream school and six are currently transitioning.

Both Release and Tara have received national and international recognition for this innovative, non-profit, social enterprise in the form of the Ashoka Fellowship. Tara is only one of two people in Ireland who hold this honour. Denis O'Brien's "O'Brien Foundation" and Social Entrepreneurs Ireland have both supported Release over the past years.

Tara is very quick to state, "Release is not a miraculous programme, it is not 100% guaranteed to work with the child and the caregiver. No therapy is—and if anyone tells you their programme is guaranteed, run away!" However, Tara went on to say, "The more hard work you put in, the more benefit both you and your child will receive. Apart from our first session, all of our children have come

from speech therapist, parent or teacher referrals. 98% of families state Release promoted new skills acquisitions, the speech therapist took on parent's viewpoints and would refer a friend."

The meeting ended with Ray given the all clear from members present to inform the Down syndrome and Autism Associations, as well as local press in the surrounding counties to everyone an opportunity to participate in this exciting new programme.

The course costs €350 for an assessment including the report, and each one hour class costs €75. Medical Card and GP Visit Card holders receive a discounted cost to €40 per hour. All families can claim these costs on the Med1 Form, and some insurance companies will give a partial refund.

To find out more about Release please visit www.release.ie or call 01.853.1578.

If you have any questions about Laoise Down Syndrome Association or are interested in registering your interest for this programme, please call Ray Harte on 086.806.4135 or email freddyharte@eircom.net.

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