

# TIME TO READ

**T**he Local Institutes are Inspiring and Encouraging Young Children to Become Confident Readers with their involvement in nationwide 'Time to Read' programme

Reading opens the mind up to a world of possibilities – it allows us to connect with ideas, experiences and perspectives across any and all disciplines. It encourages imagination, cultivates empathy, increases vocabulary and comprehension and helps develop listening and concentration levels – it's even been proven to reduce stress! Thus, to say it's an essential skill in the modern world is an immense understatement – being able to read proficiently is fundamental to everything we do in life and in work – it provides us with boundless opportunities and enables us to engage with the world in meaningful ways. It goes therefore, without saying, that teaching children to read and inspiring a love of it within them is hugely beneficial, not just for the potential prospects it creates for them, but for their overall well-being and sense of self. Also, for those teaching children to read there are of course benefits too – it can be a wonderfully fulfilling experience and seeing children improve in their ability can be very rewarding.

'Time to Read', a Business in the Community initiative, is an extremely impactful programme which sees volunteers give their time (one hour per week) to provide one-to-one reading support for young children (aged between 7-8 years old) in primary schools, with the aim of helping them become more proficient readers. The primary schools involved are usually ones who need additional support and who might not have the capacity for reading in small groups or English may not be their first language.

The Local Institutes around the country have teamed up with 'Time to Read' and are currently running a pilot programme with a Kilkenny primary school – the hope is that the next stage will see The Local Institutes implement the initiative in each region (in Galway, Sligo, Dublin, Cork and Limerick) throughout 2022.

The Local Institutes are always looking for initiatives that can allow them and their members to engage in purposeful ways within their communities, while also enabling them to create positive change – therefore teaming up with 'Time to Read' is in many ways the perfect alliance. The hope is that members of the Local Institute's, in each location, will volunteer and provide one to one reading support to small groups of children on a weekly basis. Originally, 'Time to Read' took place in person, with volunteers going to the individual schools for one hour per week, but most programmes are now taking place online, and, in many ways, this new digital format means the model is easy to embed across the Institute's national network.

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“Time to Read gets to the heart of what we’re all about” says Dermot Murray, CEO, The Insurance Institute. “We are an educational body with a passion for learning and we place huge importance on continuous development at every age. We are also extremely aware of the benefit of providing educational support to those who need it and the impact it can have – and so in terms of what we can contribute to society, this is one of the most effective initiatives

where we can actually make a real difference.”

Mr Murray continued, “Over six years ago we, at the Institute, took part in a 'Time to Read' programme in Dublin, and the feedback from staff around how much they enjoyed it was incredible. Time to Read is all about inclusion and getting in touch with individuals who may be experiencing exclusion and for that reason may end up being locked out of many opportunities. In today's world no child should miss out on reaching their full potential and when you think about it, reading and having the ability to confidently communicate through language is vital for success in life – therefore we're providing support



in these schools where it's needed and hopefully it will be of great value."

## Pilot Programme

In December, The Local Institutes set up an initial pilot programme with a Kilkenny primary school, Gaelscoil Osraí. The school is Irish speaking and so additional support to help the children to read in English was needed. As a way to get to grips with what is involved and to get a deeper understanding of how the programme works, Council members from all five Local Institutes volunteered their time and are currently partaking in this initial pilot programme which will continue until May.

Cian O'Dea, President of The Institute of Limerick said it has been one of the most rewarding and enjoyable activities he has ever been involved in, "When I heard we had the opportunity to take part in this programme I was honestly somewhat sceptical of how it might work – I knew it had the potential to be extremely beneficial, but I wasn't sure if the online element would have the same impact as being with the children in person. I can say wholeheartedly that I was wrong – for the past four weeks I've given one hour every Thursday morning to reading with a group of four children from Gaelscoil Osraí and it has been an incredibly humbling and rewarding experience, not only that but the engagement and enthusiasm from the children has been fantastic to witness." "Every Thursday I look forward to our time together, and there is something quite transformative about the entire process. It's quite simple - we read together, and they each take turns, and what has also taken me by surprise is the improvement already in some of the children's reading ability. It's wonderful to see the progress already and so I can only imagine at the end of the programme how much further they will have come!"

Majella King, President of The Institute of Galway has also been involved in the pilot programme in

Kilkenny, she says "This has been a hugely fulfilling programme to be involved in – The Local Institute's ethos has always been about giving back to the local community and about trying to make a real and tangible difference – Time to Read helps us to do this in a very honest and focused way."

Ms King continued, "It's been remarkable to see the children so eager each week – obviously when you consider the size of classrooms these days and the ratio of teachers to children you can see how it's impossible for teachers to provide this kind of one-to-one support. Also, in some schools, like the one in Kilkenny, English is not always the first language and so helping the children to read English language books can be of great benefit. It would seem therefore, that there is a real need for this kind of help and when the impact is so obvious and can be felt almost instantly, we know we're doing something really worthwhile."

The pilot programme that is currently taking place in Kilkenny has been a great success to date. It is hoped that later this year each of The Local Institutes (in Galway, Sligo, Dublin, Cork and Limerick) will be rolling out their own individual 'Time to Read' programmes, and so they will be seeking support from members and employers.

**If you would like to learn more or would be interested in volunteering your time, please contact [events@iii.ie](mailto:events@iii.ie).**

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