
The Story of 5Ten Trust: A Passion for Giving Back



Louise McElvaney,
Trustee of the 5Ten Trust

In the remote and picturesque peninsula of Inishowen, Co. Donegal, an inspiring story of community-driven philanthropy has unfolded. Louise McElvaney, alongside her childhood friend Sean McDaid, co-founded the 5Ten Trust during the pandemic. Their mission is clear: to support children and young people in the Northwest by fostering resilience and providing opportunities for those who need them most while incorporating a 'Pay it Forward' ethos, supporting the Trust's beneficiaries to continue to share the impact of the funding initiatives with the wider community.

A Pandemic-Driven Vision

Louise's journey into philanthropy didn't begin in a conventional way. "Like many, I had always been busy with work, but the world changed during COVID," Louise shared. Through her work in HR, she witnessed firsthand the struggles that people faced, particularly in maintaining their mental health and resilience. She realised that the pandemic was especially tough on children and young people.

"Children weren't going back to school; their mental health was suffering," Louise explained. Motivated by the statistics and stories in the media, she and Sean decided to act. "We knew we wanted to do something to support people and make them more resilient, but we had no idea how to go about it."

From Idea to Action

The decision to start the 5Ten Trust wasn't an easy one, particularly since neither Louise nor Sean had previous

experience in philanthropy. "We knew we could raise money, but we didn't know the governance, how to set it up, or even what to set up," Louise recounted. They reached out to Philanthropy Ireland for advice, which marked the beginning of their journey.

After exploring options such as giving circles and foundations, even sitting in on an Irish giving circle meeting in action, they decided that setting up a trust was the best route for them. "We wanted to make an impact in our local area, so a trust felt right for us." In 2020, the 5Ten Trust was born, with a focus on improving educational outcomes and building resilience in the young people of Inishowen.

Building Resilience and Opportunity

One of the first initiatives the 5Ten Trust undertook was creating a bursary program for students facing financial barriers to attending third-level education. Louise learned that many students in the area were either deferring their studies or not pursuing higher education due to financial constraints. "We realised that even small amounts of financial aid could make a big difference," she said.

The bursary programme started modestly, with just a few recipients. Today, it supports 15 students, with more being added each year. "The students tell us that the bursary has allowed them to take courses they wouldn't have considered otherwise," Louise said, noting how the funding enables students to study in cities like Dublin, Galway, and Belfast, and even internationally where students can access the education they are interested in and not just what is available locally.

Holistic Support: Beyond Financial Aid

But the work of the 5Ten Trust goes beyond financial support. Louise and Sean wanted to take a holistic approach, offering more than just monetary aid. They worked with local schools to implement programs that would develop young people's mental resilience and life skills.

One such initiative was the introduction of the Shona Project to local schools, a program focused on empowering teenage girls. "We didn't even know school refusal was a thing," Louise admitted, but through the Shona Project, they've seen real progress in helping young girls build confidence and resilience. Louise especially felt the impact of this work when her own daughter came home from school speaking about how empowered she felt attending the workshop and

Right 6th year students who took part in and completed the 2023 very successful Peer Tutoring Programme, supported by the 5Ten Trust.



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sharing her insights with the whole family, all while having no idea her mother was the one encouraging schools to engage with initiatives like the Shona Project.

They've also supported peer tutoring programs, where older students tutor their peers in subjects like math and science, building leadership and communication skills in the process. “It's not just about education; it's about helping these kids stand up and lead,” Louise emphasised.

Learning by Doing

Reflecting on her philanthropic journey, Louise has gathered valuable insights for anyone thinking about starting their own giving project. “Don't be afraid to make mistakes,” she advised. “Some things won't work, but that's okay. It's all about learning what works and what doesn't.”

Louise also emphasised the importance of asking for help. “We had no idea what we were doing in the beginning, but people were incredibly generous with their time and expertise. Don't be afraid to reach out to others who've been in philanthropy for advice.”

The Power of Partnership

The work of the 5Ten Trust is very much a partnership between Louise and Sean, as well as the local community. “We work closely with the schools to understand what the kids really need,” she said. This collaborative approach has enabled the Trust to tailor its support, ensuring it meets the needs of students and teachers alike.

Looking ahead, the Trust plans to expand its initiatives into primary schools, fostering resilience from an even younger age. “It's about catching them early, giving them the tools to navigate life's challenges before they reach secondary school.”

Conclusion

For Louise, the most rewarding part of her work with the 5Ten Trust has been seeing the ripple effect that their efforts are having in the community. “It's not just about helping one child; it's about building a better future for everyone connected to them,” she said.

As the 5Ten Trust enters its fourth year, Louise and Sean's commitment to making a difference in their community remains stronger than ever. Their story is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when passion, purpose, and philanthropy come together.

Key Takeaways for Aspiring Philanthropists:

- > Start small, but think big: Small steps, like offering a few bursaries, can lead to larger, community-wide impact.
- > Ask for help: Don't be afraid to reach out to experts or those who have already been down the philanthropic path.
- > Be patient: Setting up a trust takes time and effort, but the rewards are worth it.
- > Embrace failure: Some projects may not work, but each experience is a learning opportunity.
- > Partnerships are key: Collaborating with schools, educators, and professionals enhances the impact of philanthropic work.

Louise's journey offers valuable lessons for anyone considering a foray into philanthropy—showing that with determination and the right support, community-based trusts can make a profound impact.