



**Home Education  
Network**

# **Welcome Booklet 2019**

HEN Ireland is an all-embracing organisation and we have a very diverse bunch of members! From unschoolers to structured learning, from tots to teens, they are all here. Some of our members have very kindly written a few words about their experiences of home education, which we hope you will find as inspiring as we do.

# Welcome to Home Education Network Ireland

## Introduction

In the early 1990s, two home educating mothers in the rural west, Theresa Murphy and Marguerite Egan started producing a newsletter called Sa Bhaile, Irish for "At Home" several times a year and distributed it, at cost, to interested home educators. After several years, the subscription list reached about 100 families and it was estimated that this covered perhaps half the HE families in the country. For a number of years, as each summer approached, Sa Bhaile would announce that one or other of the families would hold a "Gathering" on a particular weekend and home educating families would attend to spend a few days meeting with each other.

At the end of the 1990s, there was talk about forming a more formal organisation and eventually the group evolved into HEN, the Home Education Network as a mutual support and lobby group and the first meeting was held in July 1999.

Since then, HEN has supported many families through their home education journey.

The primary aim of HEN is to support home educators in Ireland by pursuing the following objectives:

- To support parental choice in deciding the most appropriate form of education for each child;
- To raise awareness of the fact that home education is a viable and legal option;
- To help parents share educational techniques suitable for the needs of each child;
- To provide a means for the interchange of ideas and experiences among home educators through social gatherings, newsletters and other means, such as internet, text, telephone, and email;
- To build understanding between home educators and the public;
- To build connections between home educators and the authorities;
- To act as negotiators and/or lobbyists with state authorities as the need arises;
- To strengthen the position of home education as an integral part of the Irish Educational system.

Further information can be found in the HEN Constitution which is on the HEN website.

# How to contact other home educators!

## Contact List

Attached to you welcome email was a PDF Members' Contact List. This provides contact details of the HEN Ireland members who voluntarily consent to share their contact details.

## Facebook

**Official HEN Public page** <https://www.facebook.com/HENIreland/>

The public Facebook page is open to everyone and provides basic information about HEN.

**Official HEN Private Group**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/189804657877549>

Our private group is strictly for members only, so this is great place to ask questions or reach out to others in you area.

**Other Home Ed Groups**

The following Facebook groups are not run by the Home Education Network, but offer excellent support to home educators in Ireland. Links are clickable !!

[Irish Home Education](#)

[Special Needs Home Education Ireland](#)

[Irish Homeschoolers Buy, Sell Swap](#)

[Dublin Area Home Education](#)

[Home Education Laois and surrounding Counties](#)

[Mayo Sligo Home Educators](#)

[Home Education Northern Ireland](#)

[Westmeath Home Ed Families](#)

[County Armagh to Craigavon](#)

[Wicklow Home Edventures](#)

[Galway Home Education](#)

[Home Education in Cork](#)

## Contact Officer

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# HEN Annual Gathering

The Gathering takes place in Drewstown House, Athboy, Co. Meath

Every year the HEN committee arranges an Annual Gathering.

It's a great way to meet other home educating families, listen to speakers talking about home education and generally have fun. There are activities to suit all ages both adults and children alike. Accommodation consists of dorm rooms and camping with catering or self-catering options. There are also Bed & Breakfast Guesthouses available locally.

"A few summers ago, my husband and I decided to take what seemed like a huge leap to homeschool three of our four kids. This meant a huge shift in our mindset as up until that point we believed education and learning was the realm of schools and teachers. So I brought the four children to the HEN gathering in Drewstown House and my fears about homeschooling were put to rest. At reception people were warm and helpful, but not at all intrusive. Another mum offered to keep an eye on my children while I sat in on a talk, I discovered my questions and concerns were shared by others, but were easily overcome. It's actually quite straightforward to homeschool. Afterwards I

became accustomed to the feel of the event. I parked my natural shyness and opted to chat with anyone in my vicinity. So many questions and all so helpfully answered by anyone who had the misfortune to stand beside me that day! The children played together. Not just with their own age group, but with children of all ages. There was a balance between letting everyone be, with an attentiveness to an upset child or a worried parent. That evening heading home in the car, we tried to get our heads around our day. The whole experience had been positive. The competitive atmosphere we had always experienced at school events up until then just wasn't there. All the kids had a brilliant time. "



*"That first Gathering set us up to home school and we've never looked back."*

**The Gathering**  
**2020**  
August 20th - 23rd  
Drewstown House

**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

## “Our Home Educating Story” By Emily

When our eldest, Thomas, was only two or three, I heard a radio interview with someone who was home educating here in Ireland. I was fascinated, and thought it sounded like the most wonderful way of life. This was before the Internet was freely available, and didn't know where to look for more information at the time, but it sat in the back of my mind.

We moved to east Galway the year Thomas was to start school, and he went into junior infants in a really lovely country school. But he experienced school as being stressful and boring, even though he found the academic aspect of it very easy. In the meantime, we had met some home educating families in the area, and were going to home ed workshops and outings. In the end, we just took the plunge when he was about eight, just before our second son Michael started Junior Infants. Initially we just took him out for 6 months. I contacted the principal and he was very encouraging and supportive. It was about a year later, we realised that we were still here, home ed-ing, life had de-stressed almost completely and the children were content, healthy and engaged in lots of projects. More importantly, our lives were so much happier; we were engaging with our environment, the seasons, our varying interests and with each other in a very natural, organic way.

A while after we took Thomas out of school, we registered with (the agency that existed before) TUSLA. The process was fine, it's just a bit strange for all of us: this is simply our way of life, there isn't a disparity between “school” and “home”, it's just life and their learning is simply part of that. Our two older boys are in college now (neither sat the leaving cert; my eldest son (19) did a FETAC level 5 course, and got his chosen degree course from that; my second son (16) decided he wanted to go this year, and is following the same route) and the to-ing and fro-ing can be enormously disruptive at times, even though they are now pretty self-sufficient. So I do relish and am very thankful for the years where we didn't have any imposed timetable to knock us off our rhythm and those days we are just at home “living”!

We don't have a set timetable or structure, the learning is very much child-centred and child-directed (technically we would be “unschooling” – educating without a curriculum). I find they tend to get interested in something and can spend days or weeks exploring every facet of it rather than short half hour segments of lots of things within a day. Having said that, within the normal rhythm of our day, there would be lots and lots of reading, drawing, writing (notes, books/titles on paintings etc), maths (in so many ways: baking, number squares, lego, building blocks, maths books), history, geography, plenty of outdoors/trampoline and we have a forest at the end of our garden. We do workshops in specific things, science etc.

We facilitate what the child needs at the time, they do most of the “work” themselves. Throughout the day, we spend time with them writing (making books/letters/letter shapes etc), numbers, maths, reading and more reading, drawing. Our “learning” doesn't happen between two set times, it happens all day, and sometimes until quite late (one of our sons was teaching himself Spanish and did it at night every night, he felt he could think best at that time; and just last week our 6 year old was making a book on medieval history, and needed me to write some long passages to explain the drawings and history, and we were up making this for hours, until

long after his bedtime. But he was so full of ideas and was in full flow, so we just went with it. And we could because he didn't have to be up in the morning for anything).

The older ones are, and were, completely self-directed. They do maths with Khan Academy, use Duolingo mostly for languages, they are voracious readers; history and geography are just things that enormously interest them. They do a lot of coding and programming, art and photography. The internet is such an amazing resource too. You just have to do a bit of searching around but there are fantastic Youtube tutorials, documentaries, apps and programmes that gives you the freedom to be able to learn anything you have an interest in. We have a comprehensive library in our house and use our local library too. Home education has benefitted my children in so many ways. They are generally very relaxed and stress-free, they have as much time as they need to create and to think. They are under no pressure to "learn", they do it without thinking, because children are naturally curious and left alone, they DO all a lot of the work themselves, especially as they become teens.

The disadvantages I have found are more for the parents: you are very much 100% responsible, you have to be very tuned into your kids to see and know what they need and want. It's being very involved when needed and then standing back, and knowing when to stand back and giving space. Another disadvantage is that it can be hard to carve out time for yourself to switch off. But, while there are days where you just want to be "left alone"!!, most of the time, the kids are all involved in their own stuff and aren't really interested in having me playing with them or being around, so our days tend to be slower and pretty peaceful. I'm there for providing food and drinks, many hugs and cuddles and to talk about (amongst other things) weird dreams, whether chickens could be house trained, how cities formed and the importance of waterways for their development and all the possible life forms on Mars...

People are always asking about socialisation, and whether it is a problem, but that hasn't been our experience at all. We make sure they meet up with lots of friends several times a week, we go to organised meet-ups once or twice a week, and meet with friends and cousins too. Very often at the start of the week, we have to sit down and prioritize what needs to be done, so everyone meets up with friends, and everyone gets to do what they need to do.

Our older boys are both in college now. They are involved in their youth club and college societies, with enviable social lives!

My experience as a home educating parent, is that it is a really lovely way of life; it is an honour to spend time with your kids and watch them grow into interesting, funny, happy and successful humans. I would say that to do this you need to trust your gut and trust your kids that they inherently want to learn, and sometimes their learning isn't quantifiable, but that's okay. They are doing things at their own speed and often processing things in the way they need to, to understand it. We regularly say that this has been, by far, the best thing we have ever done for our family as a whole.



## “Our Home Educating Story” By Tracy

When I had my first child, I didn't think about home education as an option. I knew a family who were home educating their children, but I didn't think it would be for me. I even asked them “what about socialisation?”. Having a child wasn't going to really change my life, or so I thought.

However, once my child was born, my whole outlook changed, and as she approached the age of 3, people started saying “she'll be starting playschool soon won't she?”.

I got as far as visiting the local playschool to see about enrolling my child, but there wasn't anyone there as it was closed on Monday afternoons, and that was as far as my foray into formal education went. It just didn't feel right to me. I didn't want to hand my child over to strangers, not yet anyway. Then, the home educating family I knew, gave me a leaflet about the Home Education Network Conference. I wasn't able to go that year, but it did get me thinking. Their children were happy and well adjusted, so the next year, I ventured into a home education meetup in Carlow, and was very impressed, particularly with the teenagers – how social they were, and how well they interacted with the younger children. I made the decision then to attend the next Home Education Network Conference and after that, I decided to give Home Education a try. My eldest was 5 and my second child 3 at this stage.

I didn't really attend any meetups at first, but I got so sick of people asking me when my daughter was going to start school, and constantly having to defend my decision to home educate, that I started going to meetups regularly to get some much needed moral support. I registered my daughter with TUSLA once she reached 6 years old. It was quite nerve wracking. There were 2 assessors as one was being trained, and the trainee queried the fact that my daughter wasn't yet able to read small words. Fortunately, I was ready with my statistics and able to inform her that Swedish children who begin reading at 7 years outperform their UK peers who begin at 4 years. We were approved for registration.

However, when I did begin to teach my child to read in earnest, I soon discovered that phonics weren't for her, and swapped to the whole word approach. She is now a keen reader with a huge love of books. I'm not sure this would have been the case if she had gone to school, where phonics is the accepted method by which children are taught to read.

She also struggled terribly with maths, and would have been left behind very quickly in a classroom environment.

I registered my son with TUSLA when he turned 6 years old, and at this point we also had an “Ongoing Assessment” for my daughter. Having the 2 assessments done at the same time was an intense experience, but we were well prepared with many examples of learning, from books and games to lego models and art work. My eldest child was more than willing to talk to the assessor and participate in answering the questions he was asking of me.

My son learnt to read using a completely different method to my daughter, where he randomly selected scrabble tiles and used them to make words. He is a born mathematician, but hates

maths workbooks, and I realised early on that I would turn him off from maths if I continued to push him to use them. He is now a keen Arduino coder and loves using Computer Aided Design Software, so I know that his maths will develop naturally from using these applications.

My daughter was diagnosed with dyspraxia (developmental coordination disorder) a couple of years ago. This affects her ability to plan, sequence and deal with abstract concepts, as well as her physical coordination, and probably explains why I never felt she was ready to be handed over to strangers. She is incredibly creative and being home educated has meant she is confident and outgoing. Any of the difficulties she had with reading and maths have been dealt with in our own way, and prevented her from having her confidence knocked. She is currently writing a children's book, which she plans to turn into a musical animation – not bad for someone who might never have learnt to read!

Both my children have opportunities to socialise – my daughter attends singing, drama and dance classes and my son goes to a chess club. In addition, I go to around 3 or 4 meetups a month. Here my children get an opportunity to socialise with other home educated children, and I find them very helpful in reaffirming why I home educate.

However, the highlight of our home education year is Annual Home Education Network Conference (or gathering as it is now called) and I've attended this each year since 2009. My children really love being able to spend 3 days with their friends, some of whom they see at local meetups, and others that live further afield. I always thought my children would go to secondary school, and my daughter turned 13 this year. She decided that she didn't want to go and is happy at home. She can always go at 16 if she really wants to take her leaving certificate, or she can study for FETAC qualifications if she prefers a different route.

Home education isn't easy, but it is immensely rewarding. There are ways around any of the problems, and I get a huge amount of pleasure from participating in, and witnessing, the ongoing development of my 2 wonderful children.



# College Entry without Leaving Cert

## By Monica O Connor

Oisín left for Kinsale to study acting in August 2011. That month, we were in the car on our way back from a home education picnic and swim at the outdoor pool in Bunclody, County Wexford, when Emmet said that he'd like to try a course. I thought he might be worried at being the senior teen at home now that Darragh (25) and Oisín (18) had left for work and study.

The Carlow Institute of Further Education, ten miles away, offered various Post Leaving Cert. courses. He checked a media/film course but it was full. The music course appealed but his fear was they would not accept him. Course entry requirements included being eighteen (he was sixteen) and they required music at Leaving Certificate level, or equivalent. His Grade 6 piano was accepted as more than the equivalent of Leaving Certificate music. The college checked if he would be allowed to attend, though he was younger than they accepted students and the Principal agreed to make an exception to their age requirement. He had an interview and was then refused the place. I phoned to ask if there was any further information we could give and to enquire what was the reason for refusing him the place. The course director explained that the interview hadn't been very illuminating. Apparently the first question was "what's it like being home schooled?". It's a question I'm sure prompted by curiosity and informed by the very different educational experience of the questioner, but probably akin to asking a fish what it's like to live in the ocean. How do you come up with a coherent response, when you've no direct lived experience of the school system?

We chatted and the director said I had explained more in a few minutes than had been gleaned from their half hour chat with him. She allowed that he was young and it can be hard to portray oneself well at interview. It felt to me that her make-or-break question was "how do you think he will cope in a classroom and with a timetable?". I said he'd been to the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking region, where students live with families and attend classes and activities to learn spoken Irish), that he was self-motivated as shown by his grade level in piano and that he really wanted the course. She said she would confer with the other interviewer and that evening, she called me to offer Emmet the place. His course, like other FETAC level 5, had eight modules and included one on Communications and another on Health and Safety at Work. Many students find these parts of the course irrelevant. He enjoyed the Musicianship and Sound Engineering. By January (deadline for applying for third level courses in that September), he was looking at university music courses. He had an audition and entrance exam for the Dublin Institute of Technology in March and in May was told he would be accepted on the course if he achieved five "Distinctions" in eight modules. On June 6th 2012, he received his results and had been awarded eight Distinctions, the highest in his class. The date is significant, because it was the beginning of the two or three week marathon of Leaving Certificate exams which students were undertaking that year to determine their college entry. I was grateful that with his own diligent application to his passion and the gracious help of many on the path, Emmet was spared the ordeal of the Leaving Cert. Four years later (June 2016), he graduated with a 1st class honours degree in Music (Composition).