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FUTUREPASTPRESENT

DROGHEDA LEGO PROJECT REPORT



# Museum *of* Childhood Ireland

## Músaem Óige na hÉireann

### OVERVIEW

The Drogheda LEGO Project was a themed event initiated by the Museum of Childhood Ireland, created & facilitated by Jessica Farrell Brick Artist and the museum, supported by Upstate Theatre Project and funded by The Heritage Council for FuturePastPresent.

The event was a combination of visual display and hands-on activity with the purpose of giving the children of Drogheda an opportunity to voice their opinions on the future of their town centre, using LEGO bricks as a fun and inspirational communication tool. It arose from a Child Youth Voice workshop facilitated in June by the Museum of Childhood Ireland for children in Drogheda and was based on the children's perspectives and the ways in which they'd like to participate.

### FORMAT

The features were as follows:

- Display of a detailed, microscale LEGO model of the full length of West Street, featuring all of the buildings as they are in current time excepting vacant & underutilised properties, which were depicted as dark grey with blacked-out windows. This 12ft long model was an impactful way for families to realise the extent of dereliction and underused buildings in the town centre; a simple challenge to "count the greys" prepared the children to engage in the hands-on activities.
- A standalone LEGO model of Lawrence's Gate on display to provide a link to one of the free build activities.
- 3 activity stations:

'No More Empty Buildings' (Children considered possible uses for the empty buildings on West Street and used colour-coded LEGO bricks to build their suggestions as "votes")

'My Wish, My Town' (Children chose from a range of potential improvements to the town and built their 'votes' in icon form to place on a voting table)

'Build My Town' (A free-build where children described what they'd like to see in certain areas of the town centre, creating their ideas as fun LEGO models)

### PARTICIPATION

The event was open to families throughout the day with pre-booked time slots via Eventbrite. Walk ins were also welcomed.

Activities ran continuously during the day; although the activities were to be completed by children aged 7+, adult family members were encouraged to engage with the project alongside them.

Jessica Farrell, three of her team members and three members of the Museum of Childhood Ireland were present and working throughout the event to ensure maximum engagement and smooth facilitation of the activities, along with promotional and evaluation work. Venue co-ordination, logistics on the day plus meet-&-greet for the participants was provided by Upstate Theatre Project.

### OUTCOME

There was a steady stream of visitors throughout the day. The provision of time slots ensured the flow was easy to handle. The level of participation from the public was gauged from direct

conversation with the children and their families, as well as the quantity of LEGO models created by the children. These were recorded per activity as they were placed on the “voting table”

Results as follows:

➤ ‘No More Empty Building’ ----- 57 total votes

- 5 -- necessary shops (groceries, clothing, tools, etc)
- 15 -- other shops (toys, hobbies, novelty, etc)
- 11 -- food service (restaurants, cafes, snack shops, etc)
- 13 -- community buildings (youth clubs, art & drama, social hubs, etc)
- 6 -- entertainment (bowling, cinema, paintball, etc)
- 7 -- homes (apartment units, shelters)

The most popular suggested use for an empty building on West Street was a bookstore. Second most popular was an art gallery/museum, followed by an ice cream parlour.

➤ ‘My Wish, My Town’ ----- 91 total votes

- 7 -- recycling bins
- 12 -- trees & planters
- 5 -- open spaces
- 16 -- street lighting
- 20 -- pedestrian crossings
- 18 -- seating
- 6 -- street art
- 7 -- bus shelters

Somewhat surprisingly, the foremost request for most children was a safe place to cross the street. Second choice was outdoor seating for eating and socialising, followed by more (and nicer) street lights. For older children, being able to navigate the town on their own was a concern, as well as getting to and from school safely.

➤ ‘Build My Town’-----59 total suggestions

The children were asked to create “free build” models depicting what sort of development they’d like to see in two specific areas of town: The plaza surrounding Lawrence’s Gate and the old Bellew’s Grain Store located at Fair St./Georges Square.

Responses were varied but a recurring theme was a desire for a public recreational area.

Examples:

“Pretty flower park with benches” (Kitty, age 9)

“Sensory garden” (Lucy, age 11)

“Play area for dogs and people” (Jack, age 11)

“Meditation space” (Emma, age 16)

“Garden for relaxing” (Molly, age 8)

Second most popular theme was for integrated food & social areas.

Examples:

“Eco friendly restaurant and flower garden” (Luke, age 10)

“Social hangout square” (Lochlann, age 12)

“Bubble tea shop with lots of outside chairs” (Eleanor, age 9)

“Burger place where you can borrow bikes” (Teo, age 7)

“Picnic spot with superhero dress-up area” (Mitchell, age 6)

## SUMMARY

The event was successful in that the majority of children were able to grasp the concepts being presented to them and gave thoughtful responses, participating with a high level of engagement. Parents took an active interest in the project; some saying the LEGO model of West Street made them realise for the first time just how many vacant buildings there were.

Happily, having heard about the success of the project, the local Library & Arts Service is currently in communication with the Museum of Childhood Ireland and Jessica Farrell regarding a repeat of the event in Drogheda Library.