

Report on Setanta Choir / Create Louth School's Choral Bursary 2013/15

In order to recognise the contribution that Setanta Choir had made to the local community over the past 35 years it was decided to award a choral bursary of €2,000 to a school in the Dundalk area. The purpose of the bursary was to allow a local school to access the best of choral teaching and thereby promote and encourage choral singing to the next generation. The local Arts Office was approached and an outline of the project was put to them in order to receive support and funding.

Following discussions the following proposal was agreed: In partnership with Create Louth, Setanta Choir Dundalk would set up a Choral Bursary for a local school choir. This bursary would allow the selected school choir to avail of professional choral training. Following this training Setanta would offer the school the opportunity to sing at one of their annual concerts.

Aims of Bursary:

- Promote Choral singing in Co. Louth!
- Improve the quality of choral singing in local schools!
- Assist teachers in developing their school choirs!
 - Instil a love of choral singing among young people so as to ensure future membership for choirs such as Setanta.
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Proposed outline of plan:

- Through contact with the Association of Irish Choirs a suitable professional choral coach would be selected
- Arrange a meeting with this person, discuss the project and agree on a strategy.
- Cost the project
- Announce the setting up of the Bursary in the Local Newspapers
- Set up a committee of Setanta and the Arts Office
- Agree a choral training programme with coach
- Agree on criteria for application form, closing date etc.
- Application form details would include
 - Details of the schools choral commitment so far
 - Number of pupils in choir
 - Name and details of choral trainer
 - A sample CD of music learned/ performed to be included with application
- Application form to be circulated by post to schools by middle of September
- Committee and choral coach would select choir and arrange choral training days/times with coach

Implementation:

Posters and application forms were prepared and distributed to all schools in the area with a closing date of 25th October 2013.

The local newspapers carried articles on the bursary and Una Murphy director of Setanta was interviewed on local radio stations to promote the project.

In consultation with A.O.I.C. Alan Leech, professional singer and vocal coach was selected to head the project.

Response:

There were very few applications received, which was disappointing. It was however felt that this could be due to the fact that the Secondary Schools at the time were on a 'work to rule' and therefore were not involved in any extra curricular activities such as choir.

Some teachers from the primary schools let us know informally they did not apply as they felt they would not be able to give the commitment or have the support from their principal, colleagues or parents for a project like this.

Award:

The application from Réalt na Mara N.S was very encouraging and included a CD of their choir performing 2 pieces that they had in their repertoire. The school has a strong tradition of promoting music over many years and on reading the application we could identify that they would indeed give their full commitment to the project. Following discussion with the Arts Office and the vocal coach it was decided to award the bursary to Réalt na Mara.

Una Murphy and Alan Leech arranged to meet with Ms. Adele Clune (music coordinator) and Mr. Phil Mc Caul (Principal) in Réalt na Mara. This meeting indeed proved very encouraging and we felt that we had chosen a worthy winner for the bursary. Arrangements were made for a photo-shoot with the local press and the announcement was made that Alan would start the programme in the New Year. Details of the programme given by Mr. Alan Leech are attached.

Conclusion:

Overall Setanta feel that this was a very successful and worthwhile project. The aim of the bursary was to encourage and promote choral singing in the area and we feel that this indeed was achieved.

The commitment and dedication shown by the school was exceptional. On any occasion that we visited the school it was evident that the children were indeed enjoying the tuition and their time with Alan. Alan has a truly unique way of communicating both to adults and children and we have no doubt that he was the best person for the job. Not only did he instill a love of choral music to the students but he was also able to bring his love of music to members of the staff as well. One area that was particularly rewarding to see was how those teachers involved with the choir were enabled to develop their skills in choral singing and conducting. This will therefore allow what was learned to be passed on to many more students over the years.

Through Alan's work with all classes and their teachers, the whole school community is now more aware of the importance and value of music in the lives of the children and indeed their families. The benefits of choral singing are well documented and through this project we could all see the benefits for ourselves. Many commented on the joy and energy with which the children sang and how their general behaviour and commitment to other areas of school life improved. Phil Mc Caul the principal commented "Winning the bursary from the Setanta Choir has been a wonderfully enriching experience for the school community in Réalt na Mara. What began as a journey into the unknown has become a seamless part of our school life. Alan Leech has engendered passion and expertise in the staff and the pupils. Musical direction has moved to a new level and the roots have firmly taken hold. This has been achieved through a dual focus on working directly with the children's choir and on teachers musical professional development. Our debt to Setanta is significant. The legacy will be long lived, please God. Thank you to all who contributed."! From Setanta's point of view the project, though successful, presented some challenges. Due to circumstances that developed over the year, changes had to be made to the original plan. Following our initial discussions Alan's circumstances changed. He informed us that although still very much committed to the project, he was moving to California and would be there for a significant part of the year. The programme had to be rearranged to accommodate this. Following this, unfortunately, Alan was then taken ill and again further changes had to be made to the schedule. At this stage following discussions with the school, and taking into account their commitments at the end of the school year, it was agreed that a Christmas Concert with the children would be the most convenient way for all to fulfil the terms of the project. This Concert, took place on the 14th December in St. Joseph's Church, Dundalk. It was a very successful and well received. The school, the children and their parents were delighted with the programme. Attendance was extremely good and as the children performed they brought along family and friends which allowed Setanta to be introduced to a wider audience which hopefully will continue to support us in the future.

Cost: (Account form attached)

The initial budget of €2000 did not cover the costs of the bursary. This was due in-part to the fact that as the project progressed it was agreed that a whole school approach would be more beneficial. In-service was

given to the full teaching staff and Alan had an opportunity to work with each class group. The selected choir from 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class were also given separate tuition. This approach was seen as the best possible way to reach a greater number of students and in working with the teachers throughout the school would ensure a continuation of the project into the future. The overrun in costs were covered by funds from Setanta and the costs of having Alan take part in and prepare both choirs for the concert were covered by the proceeds of the concert. !

Setanta would like to acknowledge the encouragement and practical support given by Denis Darcy in the Arts Office and fully appreciate the financial support given by Create Louth, the Arts Office of County Louth. Without their support Setanta would not have been able to offer this bursary to the school.