

## Sensational Kids breaks new ground on National Child Development Centre



Cathal Keane, Jason Healy, Niamh Lynch and Michael Landers

A SOCIAL enterprise and charity dedicated to supporting children and adolescents with additional needs has broken ground on its new national child development centre in Kildare town.

Sensational Kids' new centre aims to support over 300 children each week, providing 13,000 therapy sessions annually for children in need.

Additionally, it will equip

thousands of parents, teachers, SNAs and clinicians with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to better support the children in their care.

One in four children in Ireland has an additional need, and Sensational Kids has been a beacon of support since its founding in 2008 by Kildare woman Karen Leigh. Karen set up the enterprise after struggling to get therapies

for her own children and wanted to provide a better future for all children with additional needs.

Sensational Kids provides affordable and accessible developmental assessments and therapies, bridging the gap between long waiting lists in public services and costly private alternatives. Over the years, Sensational Kids has positively impacted over 10,000 children and adolescents through its child development centres in Kildare, Cork, Mayo and Monaghan.

With a staggering 86,000 children on public waiting lists for assessments, diagnosis and development therapies, the demand for Sensational Kids services has never been more urgent.

Timely intervention is crucial for children to reach their full potential in education and life. In response

**'We are now embarking on our most ambitious project to date' – Karen Leigh**

to this growing need, Sensational Kids is embarking on the construction of a state-of-the-art national child development centre in Kildare town.

Karen Leigh, CEO and founder of Sensational Kids, expressed her vision for the future, saying:

"Sensational Kids was founded by parents with a vision for a better future for children with additional needs who need therapy supports to help them reach their potential. It has been our privilege to support over 10,000 children since we first opened our first child development centre in Kildare town 16 years ago.

"Just like the children we have supported are growing, so has the demand for our services grown, along with our vision for how best to support our families and children. We are now embarking on our most ambitious project to date; to build a flagship national child development centre, to change the lives of 30,000 children over the next ten years.

We are doing this because we believe that access to essential therapies like speech and language therapy and occupational therapy are a fundamental right and should not be a privilege denied to many or something that families must fight for. We also believe in providing children with a fun therapeutic environment that is designed and equipped to help them achieve success."

The centre will boast a cutting-edge 17,000 sq ft facility on a 2.4-acre greenfield site strategically located just off the M7 motorway.

This flagship facility has been expertly designed by EML architects to meet the evolving needs of the children and adolescents supported by Sensational Kids. The project is being spearheaded by project builder Flynn, ensuring the highest standards of construction.

Mick Flynn, chief operating officer of Flynn, said: "Knowing that our work will directly contribute to improving the lives of so many children is incredibly rewarding. We look forward to delivering a facility that meets the highest standards and fulfils the unique needs of Sensational Kids and the children they serve."

Michael Landers, managing director of EML architects said: "The building will create a centre of excellence for Sensational Kids to provide services to the highest level. It will be an exemplar in the provision of therapeutic supports



Sean O Fearghaill, Sonya Kavanagh, Amanda Cahir, Connor O'Donnell and Sensational Kids CEO and founder Karen Leigh CEO and founder

Photos: Jimmy Fullam



Senator Fiona O'Loughlin, Jane Manzor and Aisling O'Toole



Jennifer Lonergan, Dara-Kate Murphy, Elaine McCormack and Laura Daly



Mark Leigh, Karl Maher, Joy Booth and Rob Foley

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to children, as well as being fun and uplifting for staff and visitors.

It is of significant design quality to reflect the high-profile nature of the site as a gateway to Kildare town.

We look forward to realising the project with the entire team."

The facility will include 11 therapy rooms, four sensory motor therapy gyms, therapeutic kitchen, training rooms, a play, develop and learn store, therapeutic playground and sensory gardens.

With thanks to the generosity and kindness of supporters, the new national child development centre is currently 60% funded.

The national child development centre offers an amazing opportunity for strategic, tangible giving that will deliver long-lasting impacts for thousands of children and families for many years to come.

Sensational Kids would be hugely appreciative of any financial support to complete this truly transformative project for children in need and is reaching out to companies, groups and individuals for support to complete and equip this much-needed project for children with additional needs.

For corporate sponsorships, partnerships or individual donations, contact Karen Leigh directly at [Karen@sensationalkids.ie](mailto:Karen@sensationalkids.ie).

Donations can also be made online at <https://www.sensationalkids.ie/childdevelopment-centre/>.



Gillian Kinsella, Tom and Maureen Leigh, Sonya Kavanagh and Karen Leigh



Minister Martin Heydon, Nina Carberry, Deputy Catherine Murphy and Pat Ballfe

Speakers at an event to mark the breaking of ground were Sean O'Feaghail, ceann comhairle; Martin Heydon, TD, minister of state at the Department of Agriculture, Food and

the Marine; Karen Leigh, CEO and founder of Sensational Kids; and Dana Katz Murphy, clinical manager and senior occupational therapist at Sensational Kids.

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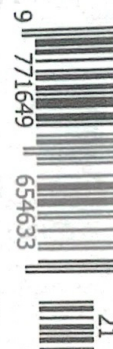




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## TD's home targeted by far-right protestors

By Finian Coghlan

LOCAL TD James Lawless has become the latest politician to have anti-immigration protestors turn up at his home address.

Around a dozen protestors wrapped in Tricolours on Tuesday evening last to shout about various issues outside the home of the chair of the Dáil's Justice Committee and filmed themselves doing so.

Speaking with the *Kildare Nationalist* last week, deputy Lawless voiced some concern about giving the incident any further oxygen.

"I was out of the house on a canvass and quite a bit away when I got a call from a neighbour saying there was a gang going up my road," he said.

"I was shocked, but I kind of expected it sooner or later," he said.

"The mood around politics has been getting darker, to be honest, and this is happening a lot," he noted.

"I was a bit apprehensive something like this might happen, I had an inkling," he revealed.

"The gardai came back to me because there have been threats before, there was a man before the courts in Naas for making threats and another in Maynooth, it's unfortunate in the public eye," he said.



Local TD James Lawless  
Photo: Eamonn Farrell/RollingNews.ie

"But it's an absolute minority of a minority and since then I've had an absolute flood of support on the phone and people stopping me on the street," he revealed.

"One fellow stopped me, life-long Labour supporter, said he'd never vote Fianna Fáil, said this was just wrong and there was no place for it," he said.

"Colleagues in the Dáil - from all sides - have come over to say 'we're all in this together'," he said.

"It's a plague on politics," he added.

"That evening, I went out and spoke with the group and asked what's this about, saying I was readily available in clinics to talk about housing or planning issues with constituents, but most of what I got was immigrants, Covid and the World Economic Forum," he revealed.

"They claim more support than they have and that's why the local elections are a good thing," he said.

"The local elections will be a very public test of their support and we'll all be watching this very closely," he said.

"If constituents have an issue, they can come and have a word in my clinics, not outside my home," he said.

**'It's a plague on politics' - James Lawless**

"I did put that contradiction to them - of waving the national flag and wanting to

close the border - I believe in a unified Ireland," he said.

"How can people call themselves nationalists and want to close the border? I don't know how they can figure that one out," he concluded.

## First Communion



Bobby Molloy with his family after making his First Communion in St Ita's Church, Kilmead  
Photo: Aisling Hyland  
See more photos from First Communion days in Kilmead and Kildangan on pages 22-25

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