

BARRETSTOWN

a seriousfun camp

Christmas FM Campaign Report for 2019

Barretstown were so thrilled to have been selected as Christmas FM's charity partner in 2019. The original goal of the campaign was to "press play" on over 850 days of life changing programmes at Barretstown, rebuilding the lives of seriously ill children. However, due to the overwhelming generosity of the Christmas FM listeners who supported the campaign this target was far surpassed. The largest amount yet was raised, totalling at €412,021 for Barretstown and for the children living with serious illness we support. This incredible amount of money translates to over 1,400 days of camp being offered to Barretstown families. Barretstown will be forever grateful to the Christmas FM team, volunteers and donors who made this incredible support possible.

2020 was undoubtedly an unprecedented year in the history of Barretstown, with the COVID-19 pandemic spreading so much fear, hardship and uncertainty for so many. In a way, the crisis has given us a glimpse into the lives of the families we serve who are living with serious illness and what they go through on a regular basis. So many continually live with the fear of infection and miss out on normal life events that we can often take for granted.

Due to the pandemic last March we were forced to make the decision to postpone our traditional camp programmes and close our gates temporarily. This was an extremely difficult decision, but an incredibly important step in ensuring the safety of those we serve.

However, we were determined to keep the magic of Barretstown alive and to continue to support families across Ireland during this incredibly difficult time. That is why we got busy and developed our new "Barretstown Live" programme. This live, online, interactive platform allows Barretstown's programmes to be livestreamed directly in to the homes of families living with serious illness nationwide. In 2020, we served over 6,900 campers through our Barretstown Live Programme, including many who would not have been able to attend Barretstown due to their diagnosis.

On the 4th of June, after all the preparations were complete and safety procedures put in place, we were delighted to be able to celebrate the opening of our gates again. We had been eagerly awaiting that day and were beyond thrilled to be able to welcome back children and their families living with serious illness and to be able to provide the 1,400 days of camp and therapeutic recreation funded by the Christmas FM listeners. The work of Barretstown has never been more needed as the children we work with have been among the most impacted by Covid-19. Your donation to Christmas FM will make it possible for us to serve these families and will continue to help us serve families throughout 2021.



You Will Allow Barretstown to 'Press Play' on Over 1,400 Days of Life Changing Programmes

Childhood Stops for Seriously Ill Children, at Barretstown We Press Play on Childhood.

Research and evaluation has shown that Barretstown has helped to rebuild the lives of children affected by serious illness, and their families, through our life changing Therapeutic Recreation programme in a safe, fun and supportive environment. This scientific model of intentional programming is at the core of everything we do – Barretstown treats the child while the hospital treats the illness. Our programme is designed to rebuild confidence, self-esteem and independence through activities that foster growth and development.



Impact of Your Donation

Because of your support Barretstown will be able to look after the physical and emotional well-being of ill children by creating a carefree and safe, medically supported environment where they can make new friends, share experiences and continue their treatment if they need to. Barretstown's work is endorsed by leading medical professionals all over the world and recognised for profound and positive impact it has on the lives of children with serious illness. A recent study by Yale School of Medicine on the impact of our programme found:

- 79% reported an increase in their child's confidence,
- 77% reported an increase in their child's self-esteem
- 75% reported an increase in their child's independence
- 75% reported an increase in maturity
- 66% reported an increase in child's interest in social activities after camp

“As patients are diagnosed, their belief in life, world, self and mortality takes a knock and self-belief is a vital component of the treatment and recovery process. Barretstown empowers these children to regain confidence and restore some normality in their lives.”

- Dr. Michael Capra, Consultant Paediatric Oncologist, Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Dublin.

A Thank You to the Amazing Christmas FM Listeners!

You are helping us to continue to "Press Play" on childhood for those among the most isolated in our society during these difficult times. On behalf of the Barretstown team and all the children and families who will access Barretstown's life-changing Therapeutic Programmes because of your generosity. We would like to say a massive thank you again to each and every one of you who supported Christmas FM in 2019.



"Alex's Story" - Agnes, Alex's Mum.

"That's the difference with Barretstown. It's about bringing the child back."

It all started at the beginning of 2019, when Alex was just 10 years old. He'd always been exceptionally healthy. We went away for St. Patrick's Day but Alex really wasn't well. He was complaining about a pain in his head all weekend. We took him to see the doctor, who noticed a swelling in Alex's face and told us to go to A&E. It was a relief when the team at the hospital told us that Alex was fine and that it might be cluster headaches. But just a few weeks later, we had another scare when Alex's coach called to say Alex had trouble breathing. I was advised to take him for allergy tests, but this time, the doctor seemed more worried. We went for an MRI scan, which is when everything changed. At first, they mentioned it might be a brain tumour, but whatever it was, it was in the base of the skull, not the brain. So they sent Alex to Temple Street for biopsies. That's when we found out what it was. Rhabdomyosarcoma. A rare form of cancer. My son has cancer.



"It's a huge thing for a child to try and take on board. A huge thing for all of us. Alex was very innocent then and didn't really know what was going on. It was completely unimaginable to us all. Sadly, he lost that innocence along the way."

Alex started having chemotherapy and radiotherapy straight away, going forward and back from where we live in Co. Clare to Crumlin for months and months. We spent a whole year completely consumed by everything medical. In late 2019, we even had to move to Germany for seven weeks so Alex could have a specialist treatment not available in Ireland. All of this turmoil hit Alex's big sister Sophie very hard too. Thankfully, a social worker recommended Barretstown to us and we were able to attend camp at the end of February 2020. Straight away, we saw the importance of it because Alex had missed out on so much in his life.



"To see our child smile and do things physically without worry or concern was the biggest thing we took away from our weekend at Barretstown. Seeing a confident and smiling child... we hadn't seen that side of him in so long."



Laughter is a Medicine

My main memory of Barretstown was just watching Alex, seeing how he evolved over the weekend. It was the first time from when he started treatment that he really laughed and was a child again. He let go! There was a silliness about him that hadn't been before that. One thing that really helped him was seeing other children who had lost their hair because of chemo. His hair was just starting to come back at that point and it really helped him to see kids being carefree about it. He started to think "Ok, maybe I can take my cap off."

That incredible weekend at Barretstown became our turning point. After everything we had been through, it felt like we were starting to move forward and get our lives back!



That is the power of Barretstown and what the Christmas FM listeners will make possible for more children like Alex and this family in 2021.