

## Responsible Care case studies

# Creating future leaders in sustainability through school initiatives

Jennifer Murphy, Health, Safety and Environment Specialist at Sanofi, Waterford, speaks about how the organisation is supporting future generations through green initiatives at primary and secondary level

For over 20 years in Ireland, Sanofi has been developing and manufacturing healthcare solutions within areas including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and vaccines. Along with improving patients' lives through medicine in breakthrough science, the organisation also realises a shared responsibility to create a healthier planet and make a positive impact on their people and local communities.

Jennifer Murphy says, "We're on a journey towards making our global operations carbon neutral by 2030 and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. To help us achieve this, we have many various measures in place under our Planet Care programme, in areas including waste and energy. This requires commitment from everyone across our company.

"But we realise that while there's a culture across Sanofi to engage employees in environmental ambitions, it also needs to extend outside the company, in the community and at the school level – they are the future generation, after all."

## Educational awareness

In 2021, under its global environmental sustainability programme 'Planet Mobilization', Sanofi called on employees across its global sites to submit ideas for new solutions to improve the environmental footprint. More than 500 employees from 63 sites in 29 countries pitched ideas.

“Sanofi Waterford was selected as one of the three top projects and we were awarded €3 million from Sanofi’s Planet Mobilization fund,” says Jennifer. “Our project was called ‘Waterford Loves Planet Not Plastic’, an education project to help reduce plastic waste.”

From this, Jennifer wanted to build on the idea and use their awarded funding to further develop educational awareness projects.

“Under our Planet Care strategy, we’ve developed two programmes. The first is called ‘It’s our Planet’, a primary school course aimed at third- and fourth-class students, which was developed in conjunction with Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI). “Our volunteers deliver the programme for an hour each week for over five weeks, providing fun and informative modules on topics including water conservation, biodiversity, animal habitats and waste.”

“We believe that as young students become more aware of these impacts, they will carry that message home and equally influence and encourage their families in a shared mission to protect our planet.”

Jennifer adds, “In 2023, we had 102 volunteers delivering 100 ‘It’s our Planet’ programmes across 14 counties in Ireland, reaching 2,091 students from 81 schools.

“The programme is available for delivery across Ireland from the JAI online portal and we have been awarded additional funding from Science Foundation Ireland to extend the reach to schools.”

The second programme, ‘Environmental Leadership’, is aimed at Transition Year students and it has been successfully piloted at Ardscoil na Mara School in Tramore in 2023.

“The aim of the programme is to not only teach the students about environmental topics, but they’re also developing leadership skills, as they share their knowledge by hosting workshops for other students in the school. It’s about upskilling our teenagers, who can potentially become environmental leaders in years to come.”

Jennifer adds, “14 TY students at the school then received an Environmental Leadership award at a celebration at our Sanofi site after completing the programme.”

## Collective change

The programme is now in its second year of development. “There are plans to build on the success of this pilot programme and roll out training to more teachers and schools, with the support of the Waterford Education Support Centre and the Irish Schools Sustainability Network,” says Jennifer. “We’d also encourage other companies to support more schools to implement it.”

Jennifer feels that, as big drivers within the Irish industry, biopharmaceutical organisations have a huge part to play in empowering people to make a change. “The things you do on-site tend to work their way into people’s everyday lives.

“For example, we’ve recently introduced waste audits within our site. By making employees aware of simple things like how to segregate waste, then that’s something they’ll take home and implement in their own daily routine. It all comes back to the collective impact of doing things correctly. Together, we can make an environmental change.”

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