

On the Crest **of a Wave**



Pictured above: Learners from National Learning Network in Portlaoise catch a few waves in Tramore, Co. Waterford.

THEY SAY THAT LAOIS IS THE only county in Ireland that doesn't touch a county that touches the sea. So you can only imagine the pent-up frustration of 12 learners from National Learning Network's training centre in Portlaoise when they recently set off on a surfing adventure to Tramore, courtesy of Laois Surf Club.

The idea was the brainchild of local National Learning Network manager, Emer McCarthy, who has been a member of Laois Surf Club for the past 12 months. For a number of years now, Laois Surf Club has raised funds locally to take groups of children to the seaside to experience the thrills and spills of surfing and this year it was decided to extend the invitation to learners from the local National Learning Network centre.

With both the sun and the surf up, the excited group set off on their adventure last September. "While we had assigned each learner to their own personal volunteer instructor to master the surf, perhaps the most challenging part of the day was not getting up on the board and riding the waves, but actually getting in and out of the wetsuits," laughs Emer.

"We spent about two hours surfing, getting to know the basics, the correct positioning, and so on and, thankfully, the waves were just the way you want them for people learning to surf for the first time – not too big. We had quite a few naturals who took to it really quickly."

Derek McGinn, was one of the 12 lucky learners to

participate in the excitement. He says, "I was delighted when my name was picked out of the hat. I had been surfing a couple of times before and loved it so I jumped at the chance to do it again.

"When we arrived in Tramore, the sea was calm, which was great. We had a lesson on the beach before we actually got into the water – it's much more difficult to keep your balance in the water than it is on dry land! I didn't actually manage to get up on the board, but hopefully next time, as I'd love to go surfing again. I just want to thank everyone involved in organising the day, particularly Laois Surf Club, for looking after us – we all had a great time."

Emer says that activities such as this are important for learners in linking them more closely into their local communities. "People get to interact with their local clubs and then feel comfortable in continuing to access these facilities in their own time, outside of National Learning Network. It's about supporting people's independence and, indeed, encouraging them to have a healthy lifestyle by engaging in physical activity. In National Learning Network, we always like to challenge ourselves to do different things and so, when these opportunities arise, it's important to grab them with open arms."

So, with that thought in mind, it seems certain that this is the first of many adventures for National Learning Network's Laois learners! ■



Pictured right: National Learning Network learners relax after their surfing lesson.