



Caroline McGee (14)

Barista

Caroline is the youngest of three girls. She is very independent and wants to do everything for herself. Her favourite thing is going to the shops and having coffee.

"I would like to be a waitress in a coffee shop or a restaurant. At home, I like making my own tea and sandwiches, cooking scrambled eggs or omelettes, and helping out in the kitchen. I like going to coffee shops.

I would love serving all the people; my mum and all my friends. I would serve coffees, teas and sandwiches and muffins. I'd be good at this career because I like tidying up the kitchen table after dinner and putting dishes in the dishwasher. I like making teas and sandwiches and helping people."

All that I can be

Photography by **Conor Healy**



Kyle McLaughlin (7)

Artist

Kyle, the oldest of three, is happy, funny and adventurous. Kyle likes football, going on his scooter, jumping on his trampoline with his sister and brother, and going horse-riding. He loves an art and craft box and could spend an hour scribbling, cutting, sticking or painting.

"I want to be an artist. It's fun to paint big pictures. I love painting and mixing colours. My favourite colour is red. The best thing about being an artist is that I can paint every day, and I am good at painting."

Today's children with Down syndrome dream big. They dream not just of jobs but of careers, and can look around the world at other people with DS who have achieved those ambitions. In Ireland, we need to move fast to ensure that these children can seize their hoped-for futures. In LIFE, in celebration of World Down Syndrome Day, **Sarah Caden** talks to six Irish children about their dream careers

Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness," according to Sigmund Freud. Love and work are what give our lives a sense of meaning. Loving, and being loved, allows us to feel that we matter. Having a purpose makes us feel that our lives have meaning.

To whom would you deny those feelings, that sense of owning a place in the world?

In Ireland today, less than 5pc of adults with Down syndrome are in paid employment. This is not for want of desire to work on the part of adults with Down syndrome. Nor is it through lack of interest from employers in giving adults with Down syndrome a job.

One of the greatest impediments to an adult with Down syndrome gaining paid employment is lack of certified qualifications. This is changing, but slowly, and possibly too slowly to keep up with the ambitions and expectations of the children on our pages today. There remains an issue around translating courses that teach life skills into jobs in the modern workplace, where specific qualifications count.

These are children who have benefited from early

intervention that has suffered severe cutbacks, but remains better than what was available to children with Down syndrome 30 years ago. These are children who are in, or have been in, mainstream education. These are children who expect to contribute; to be busy; to be fulfilled.

They believe this is their right, and this is only right. If we are, as we claim, committed to equality of opportunity, we will give them the right to work.

These children will be young adults sooner than we think, and they will wonder why we thought they dreamed of less and did not put structures in place to equip them for their ambitions.

Around the country, two notable enterprises for young adults are Cork's Field of Dreams and the Blue Diamond Drama Academy in Dublin, where the drive to get adults with Down syndrome into meaningful, life-affirming work is very real and active. Both, however, have their origins in parents and families of young people with DS, who couldn't see wasted all the years of early intervention, education, passion and effort.

On our pages today are six out of 18 of the children, aged between six and 16 years, whose images will appear

around Dublin as part of the Down Syndrome Centre's 'I Could Be' campaign, in celebration of World Down Syndrome Day, March 21. These children have Down syndrome and they also have the ambitions of their peers. They know what they love and they know what they would like to work at when they grow up.

The Down Syndrome Centre, who organised the 'I Could Be' campaign, provide services and supports to enable children with Down syndrome to enjoy opportunities in life, to feel included in society and to enable them to reach their full potential.

Images of all the children will be on view in Heuston and Connolly Stations, and also dotted around locations in Dublin city centre on March 21, with links to the children's stories and to the stories of other people with Down syndrome who have realised their specific ambition.

It's one thing to dream of what you could achieve, quite another to know what you really can be.

For more information on the 'I Could Be' campaign and all 18 children, see downsyndromecentre.ie



Lauren Newman (7) **Dance instructor**

Lauren is the oldest of three. She loves to dance and the bigger the mirror, the better, for Lauren. Her dancing is contagious and when Lauren is moving, her whole family join in.

"I would like to be a dancer, because I could dance all day and teach people to jump and twirl and move around on their tippy-toes. Me and my brothers dance to *Strictly Come Dancing*, and Mam and Dad give us scores. My favourite is dancing in front of the mirror with my teddy, Monkey Jim. I go to hip-hop and ballet classes. Mam says when I put on my ballet skirt and shoes, I become a real ballerina. Some day I want to teach my friends how to do dance, because dancing makes me happy, and we can all be happy together."



Blaise Coates (6) Photographer

Blaise has one little sister. He is great fun and fiercely stubborn. He loves running, sports and painting. He loves to show his family the things he makes at school. Blaise communicates successfully with his friends and family through speech and through Lamh sign language. His mum explains his ambitions here.

“When I ask Blaise about his dream career, he makes the Lamh sign for taking pictures. Then he says his uncle’s name: Ray. His uncle Ray is a published nature photographer.

“Blaise puts the family camera around his neck and takes pictures of everything and anything. ‘Momma, look,’ he says as he shows me the photos.

“Blaise tells me, ‘I like photos’. When I ask why he would be good at it, Blaise answers, ‘Happy’. Then he starts clapping his hands and laughing.”

Ruthanne Gallagher (11) Politician

Ruthanne is the youngest of four. She loves hockey and her dog, Freddie. She is well known where she lives, and is greeted by everyone in the shops and on the street when she and Freddie walk to school in the morning.

“I want to be a politician, because it is very interesting. I love meeting people, and all kinds of people. I have been to the Dail with my mum, when she was telling politicians that children with Down syndrome and other special needs need help in school. We were on the RTE news and in the newspaper. The protest won the battle, and now we get extra hours of help in school.

“My mum is teaching me the bus numbers, so when I am big, I can take the bus to the city centre and the Dail. If I am a politician, I will help my friends and people with Down syndrome.”



Cameron McNamara (13)
TV presenter

Cameron is the youngest of three. He sings in a Glee Club and attends drama classes at the Mel Ryan School, and has already been to a few castings.

"I want to perform, to be a worker. I want to have the X-factor, to be famous. My dream career is to be a weatherman on the telly, or to be Ryan on the *Late Late Toy Show*. I want to show the kids the toys. Or [be] Nicky in *Dancing With The Stars*. The best thing would be to dress up like Nicky, to see the dancers and have a great time doing teamwork. It's fun to laugh and crack some jokes.

"My godfather Des [Cahill] will teach me stuff, and I'll be good at it because I'm handsome and friendly, and like being happy." ■

