

For immediate release

## Local Arts Group *Aspiro* Chosen as MSD in Carlow's 'Neighbour of Choice'

- Youth charity to receive funding of €12,000 to support Sing and Shine initiative

19<sup>th</sup> February 2015: Carlow youth organisation *Aspiro* has been chosen to receive funding as part of MSD in Carlow's Neighbour of Choice initiative, part of the company's dedicated corporate responsibility programme. *Aspiro* will receive €12,000 to support the charity's 'Sing and Shine' project, which harnesses the power of group singing to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of young people in the community.

MSD's Neighbour of Choice programme is a global initiative that provides support to projects that address the needs of local communities. A core part of MSD's employee volunteer programme, Neighbour of Choice demonstrates MSD's ongoing commitment to the communities in which it operates.

*Aspiro* is one of Ireland's leading choirs and is dedicated to supporting the social, emotional and musical development of young people aged seven and upwards. Members learn to work as a team and develop themselves personally, while having fun and expressing themselves through group singing. The funding will be used to enhance the choir's facilities and reach by raising public awareness of the group, building a 'Sing and Shine' library resource for teachers and choir leaders, and collaborating with mental health coordinators, professional artists and other choral groups.

Speaking at the presentation of the grant, Mary Amond O'Brien, Artistic Director of *Aspiro* said, "This generous contribution from MSD will make a tangible difference to the people that we work with in the local community and will also allow us to enhance and expand our services in the future. We would like to say a huge thank you to MSD for their continued support."

Jean-Albert Pittaluga, Executive Director of MSD's facility in Carlow, said: "We are delighted to support such a wonderful organisation that does so much to help young people in Carlow. MSD is committed to helping improve health and wellbeing in our communities, and together with our employees and local partners, we are privileged to support projects that will make a real difference now and into the future."

As a global leader in healthcare with a strong presence in Ireland, MSD is committed to leading in the implementation of best practice by addressing critical social, environmental and economic challenges both nationally and internationally. In recent years, MSD has become a leader in corporate responsibility in Ireland through a focus on four priority areas - Access to Health; Environmental Sustainability; Employees; and Ethics & Transparency. Over the past two years alone MSD has contributed over €4 million to support worthwhile and sustainable causes in these areas.

**-ENDS-**

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### **About MSD**

MSD, known as Merck in the United States and Canada, has operations in more than 140 countries. In Ireland, MSD employs over 2,000 people across its five sites in Dublin, Carlow, Cork, Tipperary and Wicklow. Its extensive Irish operations encompass manufacturing, commercial and marketing facilities.

MSD is a leader in healthcare, dedicated to helping the world be well through a wide range of innovative health solutions. This includes the development, production and distribution of prescription medicines, vaccines and biologic therapies as well as animal health products.

MSD's commitment to research and to increasing access to healthcare across the world is demonstrated by clearly focused policies, far-reaching programmes and life-enhancing partnerships.

### **About Aspiro**

Aspiro is one of Ireland's leading choirs dedicated to supporting the social, emotional and musical development of young people age 3+ alongside extraordinary choral music experiences. Believing in the innate musical ability of all children, young people and adults no auditions are held for membership. The singers work together as a team and develop themselves personally, while having fun and expressing themselves through singing. This funding will give Aspiro the opportunity to facilitate an 'outreach' project with four local secondary schools and their teachers in collaboration with a mental health facilitator and visual artist. 'Sing & Shine' will explore the link currently being researched in many countries between mental health and singing alongside enhancing Aspiro's facilities and reach by raising public awareness of the group. Each group will be presented with a visual interpretation of their chosen song that will take pride of place in their school and a 'Sing & Shine' library resource for teachers and choirs will be set up in Carlow local library.