

# Guten tag: German students boost economy



Young people from the Recklinghausen District in Germany who arrived in Limerick this week for a three month training programme to improve their language skills at University of Limerick and on work placements

By ANNE SHERIDAN

MANY of Limerick's young jobseekers are leaving the country, but this week Mayor Maria Byrne will welcome a group of 15 young jobseekers from Germany to the city.

The group - 18 to 25 year old males and females from Recklinghausen District in Germany - are staying in Limerick city for three months as part of an eight-month program called "EU fit".

The goal of the program is to reintegrate unemployed or disadvantaged youths into the local job market once they are back in Germany.

This is the second year the program has been run

in Limerick. The programme is entirely free of charge for its participants, while its annual direct and indirect investment in Limerick is estimated at €100,000.

In Limerick, the participants attend full time language classes at the University of Limerick Language Centre and receive unpaid work experience with Irish companies and institutes in Limerick and Shannon Free Zone.

"This program is all about giving disadvantaged young adults a second chance. Attending the university gives a major boost to our youth's self-esteem," said Shimon Grossmann, the program co-ordinator in Limerick.

Melanie Richardt, a 22-year old single mother from Recklinghausen, said she is experiencing a completely new way of life. "It is completely new to me, to go to university and meet students from all over the world. I love all what student life and UL campus have to offer. For the first time in my life I feel I belong to the winning team!"

During an intensive, three-month preparatory course in Recklinghausen, 30 young German jobseekers get to improve their English language skills, learn about cultural differences and life in Ireland, and hone their employability skills.

Of those initial 30 only the best 15 are eventually

awarded a boarding pass on a flight to Ireland and for many this is their first time abroad.

Upon their return to Recklinghausen District, they attend a series of sessions in which they reflect on their experience in Ireland and pursue their career goals with renewed vigor.

"Almost all of last year's EUfit participants found a job once they were back in Germany thanks to having their stay in Limerick chalked up on their CVs," added Mr. Grossmann.

"It is important to stress that without the European Union such international programs could have never gotten off the ground. It is a win-win situation

for both Limerick and Recklinghausen which strengthens the ties between our two local economies. Despite these trying times for Ireland, we are going to expand our operations in Limerick city," he said.

Next month a group of secondary school students from Recklinghausen will come to the city to do their work experience here.

The program is funded by the social arm of the European Union with contributions from the German government and the local job centre.

The program "EU fit" cooperates with PAUL Partnership and Limerick City Enterprise Board.

A second chapter of "EU fit" is about to open in Cork City this April.