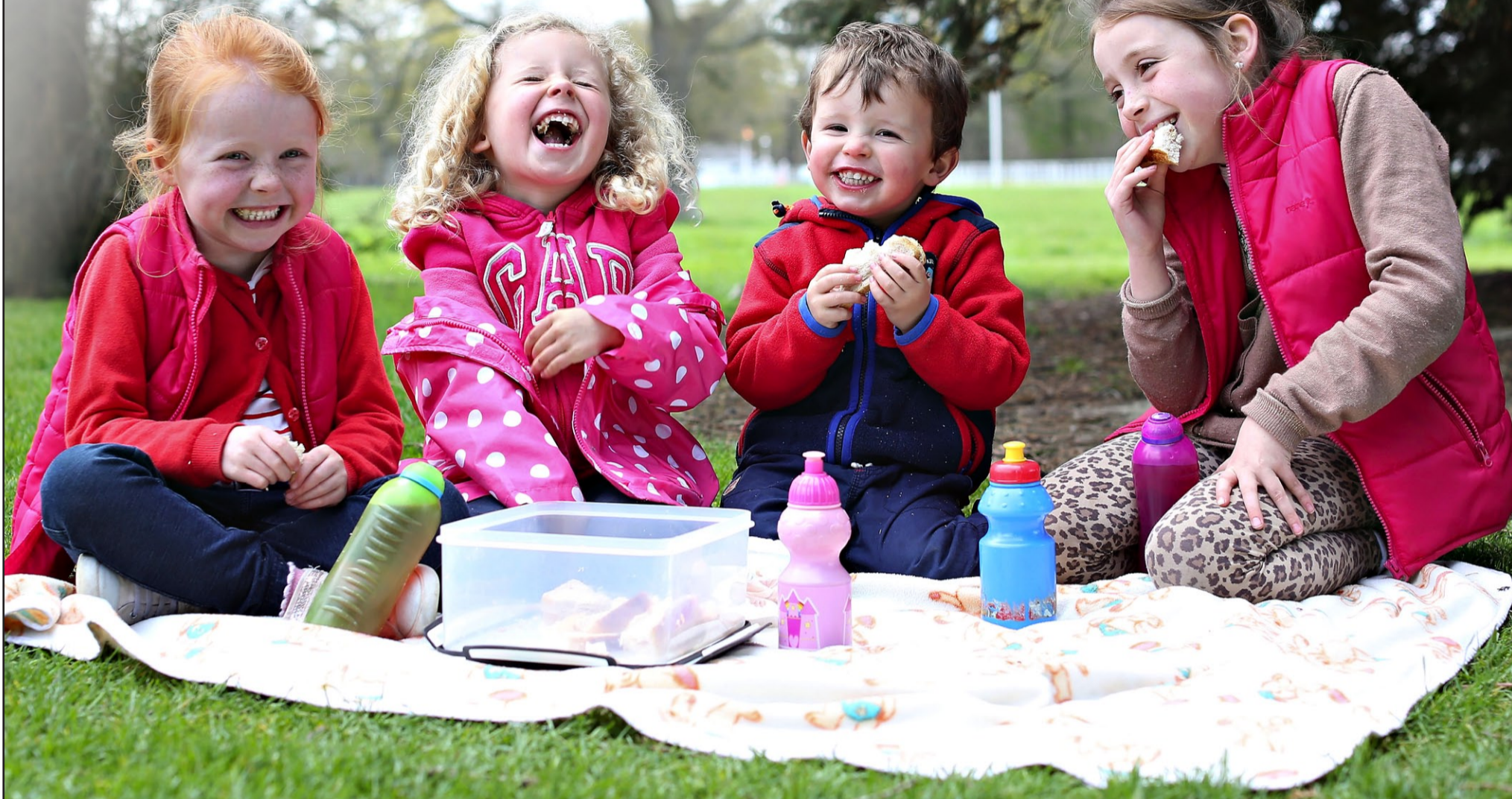


Life's a picnic when the Easter bunny is around the corner

Happy gang: Sophie O'Donoghue and Shona Cross, both five, with Anthony Cross, two, and Ella O'Donoghue, eight

Picture: FRAN VEALE



IT'S supposed to melt in your mouth, not in your hands and the Easter Bunny will have to hotfoot it around with his deliveries of chocolate goodies tomorrow.

Eight-year-old Ella and Sophie O'Donoghue, five, and five-year-old Shona and Anthony Cross, two, headed to the Phoenix Park in Dublin yesterday at the start of what promised to be a gloriously sunny Easter holiday.

Temperatures are expected to reach as high as 16C over the weekend, with Met Éireann saying that the best of the weather would be today and

By Eamon Donoghue

tomorrow, with a lot of dry weather and sunshine expected. 'It won't be sunny everywhere but it will be in most places,' the forecasters said. And any cloud is expected to clear early.

Sunseekers in the Midlands and the West are expected to enjoy the highest temperatures.

Meanwhile, those travelling on the roads this weekend were urged yesterday to be cautious as those who put all their eggs in one basket and headed off in afternoon endured traffic delays.

DON'T FORGET THE SUN CREAM!

TODAY

SPELLS of good sun. Mostly dry but showers may hit the West.

High: 14C Low: 4C

TOMORROW

GOOD sun but fresh winds will cool Leinster coast.

High: 15C Low: 3C

MONDAY

MOSTLY dry but showers are likely in Leinster and Munster.

High: 16C Low: 6C

Exam stress? Step into the puppy petting therapy zone

By Eamon Donoghue

TRINITY College will help relieve their students' exam stress next week by supplying a roomful of puppies for them to pet, cuddle and play with.

The Trinity Students' Union have organised for up to ten puppies and dogs from the Peata Ireland charity to create a canine therapeutic zone.

Starting next Thursday, hundreds of stressed students are expected to visit the puppies, and if all goes to plan they may still be around for the start of exams which kick off at the end of the month.

Students' Union President Tom Lenihan said it is something they've wanted to do for some time. 'We



Trained to be gentle

ALWAYS THERE WITH A HELPING PAW

DOGS of any breed, size or age may be eligible to become therapy dogs.

Temperament is the most important factor: the dogs need to be confident, patient, calm, gentle and receptive to training. As well as helping adults, dogs have been instrumental in helping children to read.

Children with learning difficulties can have low self-esteem when reading in

public but by reading to a dog, children relax and focus on the dog and the words, therefore building self-confidence.

Therapy support dogs have a legal entitlement to accompany owners in most areas. After training, they can help disabled children and adults with practical tasks such as opening doors or emptying the washing machine. Each dog is trained with the needs of each client in mind.

looked at different research and we saw it done in the UK, and then the general vibes when we put it to the students and the class reps was fantastic.

'It's nothing gimmicky and it's not just about relaxation, it lifts the

whole mood during exam and study periods.' Last year Aberdeen University in Scotland introduced a similar initiative, but Mr Lenihan says nothing similar has been done in Trinity or anywhere in Ireland before. 'Basically, we had an idea where

people can go into a room to pet the dogs and play with the dogs, basically, as part of a less stress week.

'When we floated the idea to council we got a lot of great feedback, so it took a while to get insurance but once that was sorted we decided to

go ahead with it.' Research into animal-assisted therapy claims that from these simple interactions with animals, people can experience significant reductions in the stress hormone cortisol. They can also experience increases in oxytocin, dopamine, endorphin and phenethylamine, the hormones for happiness, energy, satisfaction and elation.

It's good news for the dogs, too, as they experience similar feelings.

Students can give a suggested donation and the funds gathered will go to Peata Ireland.

Similar stress-reducing methods are offered in universities in the US and in Canada. In Harvard Medical School and Yale Law School, students can 'rent' resident therapy dogs during stressful study periods.

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