

CHANGING IRELAND

Spring 2010

Issue 32

The National Magazine of the Local and Community Development Programme
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BEALTAINE
*One of Ireland's
Biggest Festivals 6*



**SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE**
*can LIFT this country
19-21*



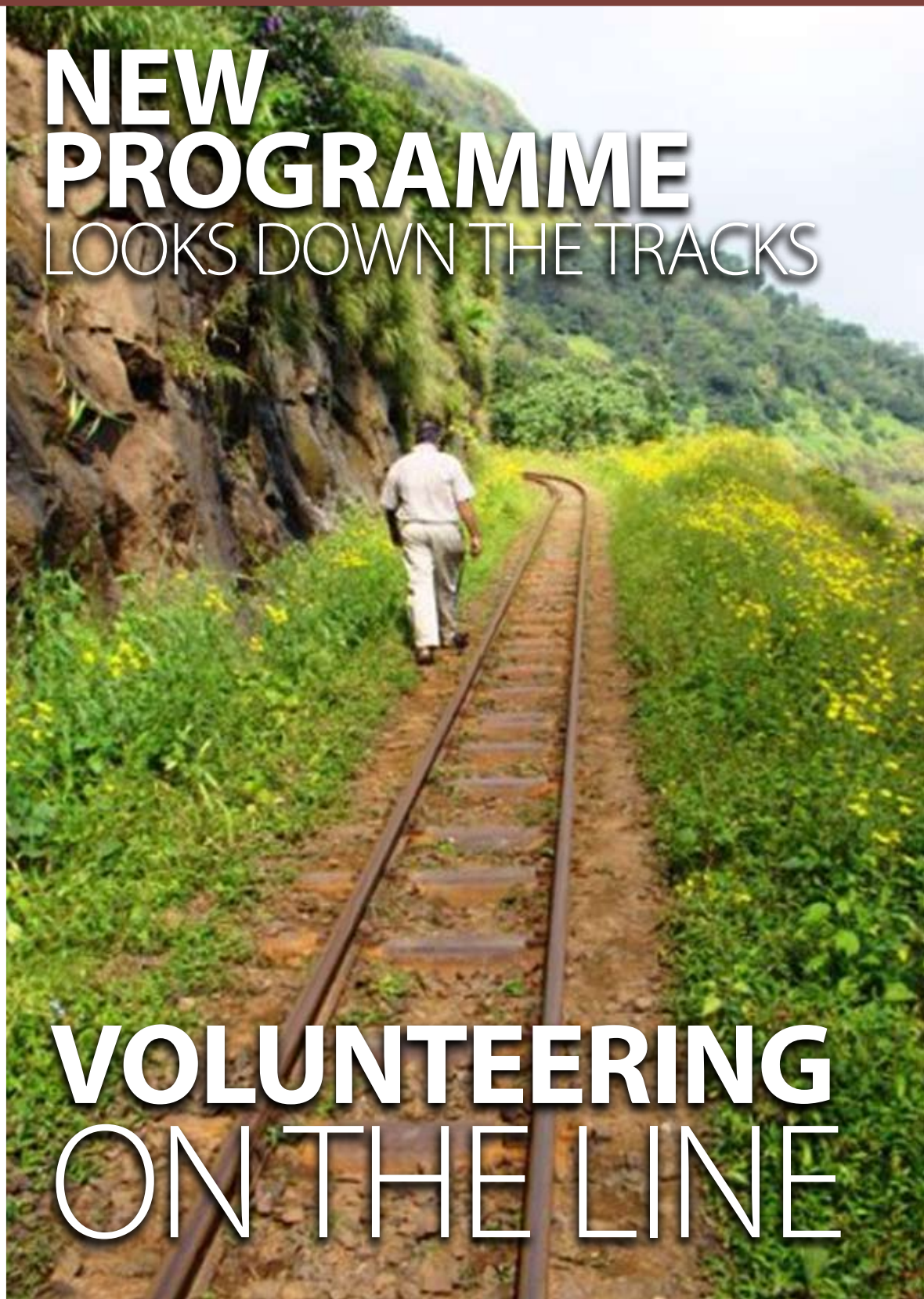
PALESTINE
*Community work
as resistance
22-23*



NEW PROGRAMME

LOOKS DOWN THE TRACKS

VOLUNTEERING ON THE LINE



ISSN 1649-5985



This publication and most projects featured are part of the
LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



NEW PROGRAMME needs to offer volunteers more

The new Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) will be the Government's main community-focussed, anti-poverty programme by the end of the year.

It is replacing two Programmes that it is considered necessary to amalgamate to create efficiencies in these recessionary times, setting clear goals and showing the effectiveness of spending.

The amalgamation of the Community Development Programme and the Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme will reduce the number of companies from around 230 to possibly 53, potentially lowering costs.

However, the Programme has met with resistance, particularly from Community Development Projects. Fears exist that two elements are at risk of being lost – the passion, interest and work of up to 2000 experienced volunteers/activists in disadvantaged communities and, secondly, that real sense of community ownership that springs up when local residents are responsible for managing the funding and staff for a project in their area.

That's why there has been uproar over the plan to disband CDPs. The most precious thing to them is their independence.

Doubts exist at Department level that in some instances it is CDP staff and not management who run the projects. Where this occurs it must be addressed, but the principle that communities have the capacity and right to run their own affairs is still the right one.

The new Programme means that 'Changing Ireland' has a new remit as the national magazine of the LCDP. The role of 'Changing Ireland' however remains the same, to promote Community Development work, to inform people inside and outside the Programme about its development and achievements, to encourage linkages, networking, the sharing of ideas and – very importantly – to give communities a voice, as well as providing space for explaining the thinking behind Government policy.

And we look forward to putting the work of the Partnerships and Local Development Companies in the spotlight.

Previous Ministers Éamon Ó Cuív and John Curran stressed that the amalgamation process was the only way to save the work being done under the Programmes. It also brought about the greater cohesion and efficiency to the way in which the State provides support to communities. For it to succeed, they said it must bring with it the best of the two programmes being merged.

Now we have a new Minister, Pat Carey. It's a welcome development for Minister Carey because he served in the Department before as Minister of State. It's a familiar brief for him and people are now looking to him for his vision for the Programme.

One of three reasons given by Government for wanting to disband CDP boards and absorb CDP work into the LCDP is to reduce the burden of company directorship on volunteers. The theory is the LCDP structure will allow for more volunteering.

This remains to be seen. Many volunteers resent their work being labelled a burden. Certainly, neglecting to mind CDP volunteers now is akin to neglecting good railway track, or ripping it up entirely.

How many volunteers currently involved will be bursting to get in the door for the monthly 'Advisory Council' meetings in two year's time?

Nonetheless, there's a chance the volunteering element of the LCDP will work if the advisory councils are given real teeth, for example, a veto like RAPID community reps have over spending decisions.

One home truth - CDP volunteers had huge ownership of the projects but took little ownership of the Community Development Programme. They were concerned about retaining project independence locally, but neglected the bigger picture.

It could be argued too that Ministers took little ownership of the

Programme. Neither they nor the Department were able to prove what it had achieved. Now we all have a challenge – and the hope is – by both sides taking ownership of the new Programme, we will be able to prove more effectively how the work on the ground benefits real people.

The LCDP must, however, ensure it avoids dismantling the community infrastructure that is now in place, much like Fr. MacGréil stopped Iarnród Éireann from pulling up the railway line linking Galway to Limerick. The trains are now back on track, something that would never have happened if MacGréil hadn't taken action. He even ended up in court and for a time faced a very hefty bill. Today, he's lauded as a hero by the State and by communities up and down the Western Rail Corridor.

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Postal address: 'Changing Ireland', c/o Community Enterprise Centre, Moyross, Limerick.

Office base: Unit 3, Sarsfield Gardens Business Centre, Sarsfield Gardens, Moyross, Limerick.

Tel Editor: 061-458011. **Tel Administrator:** 061-458090.

Fax: 061-325300.

E-mail: editor@changingireland.ie and

admin@changingireland.ie

Website: www.changingireland.ie

Also check us out on Youtube, Facebook and Blogger.

Production:

Editor: Allen Meagher

Administrator (part-time): Tim Hourigan

Research, evaluation and Facebook manager: Joe Sheehan, volunteer.

Editorial team: Viv Sadd, Sean McLaughlin, Juan Carlos Azzopardi and Allen Meagher.

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Disclaimer

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Wanted: News reporters

We're on the lookout for aspiring news reporters who have an eye for Civil Society and/or Community Development stories. Ideally, you should work as a volunteer or paid worker in a CDP or local development company. Contact the editor. If we print it, we'll pay for it.

Thank you!

Thank you to the many community organisations – local and national – that emailed in stories. Letters always welcome. Also, check us out on facebook, youtube, blogger and on our website: www.changingireland.ie.





Poor people still dying younger – latest study

A new study has confirmed what was previously known and added to the data supporting the case that poor people die younger.

The study by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland found that “poverty, unemployment, the environment, smoking, alcohol consumption, diet and physical activity are risk factors for chronic disease” and since people in poor socio-economic conditions often live in the same area, poor health and early mortality can be concentrated in disadvantaged areas or among particular groups of people.

Alarmingly, the study also found that the number of people with a chronic health problem is set to increase by 40% by 2020.

“We need to think about interventions right across the life course, to focus particularly on early childhood and the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged people,” said Dr Jane Wilde, launching the study in March.

Chronic conditions such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke and diabetes are expected to increase dramatically according to the study.

In 2001 IPH published *Inequalities in Mortality 1989-1998*. This was the

first all Ireland mortality report for 80 years and provides information on patterns of mortality by age, gender, geography and socio-economic class.

The executive summary, full report and technical report are available from: www.publichealth.ie

14 projects lose funding appeal - While new Programme remains target of criticism

Joe Sheehan* reports from Dublin



On February 18th, over 70 staff and volunteers from CDPs nationwide met in Dublin to discuss their growing concern for the future of Community Development in Ireland.

The meeting followed an earlier one in December (attended by 100 people) which was called by the Community Workers' Co-operative.

The meetings heard people voice concerns over two issues: the loss of funding to projects and concerns about the new Local and Community Development Programme, in particular its implementation structures.

On the project closures, people were frustrated what they perceived as a lack of transparency in the review process that led to the 30 projects being labelled as “unviable”.

Solidarity was expressed unanimously with those communities, staff and voluntary management effected.

One speaker Aidan felt that, “The Department is going to disempower local people and make them even more marginalised.”

The appeals process open to projects was also much criticised with people saying it was “neither fair nor independent” and that the timescale for mounting an appeal was too short and was made more difficult as it coincided the Christmas holidays.

Of the 30 CDPs given final-funding notices, 24 appealed and 10 of those were successful in their appeals.

Though people at the meetings were angry, everyone concentrated on how to best achieve a future both for their projects and for Community Development in Ireland.

In relation to the new Programme, the meeting saw that it was taking away from the independence and autonomous nature of the Community Sector and participants applauded a speaker when he described the Programme as “weak and detrimental to social inclusion, anti-poverty and equality work at local level.”

Another speaker said that what was needed was an inclusive transparent process including all stakeholders.

All present were unanimous in again stating their opposition to the new Programme.

They agreed to demand a meeting with the relevant Junior and Senior Ministers to call on them to “scrap” the new Programme and to meet with stakeholders to design a new one that takes consideration of the obvious financial constraints but allows “worthwhile, workable and practical community work at local level.”

* Joe Sheehan is from Limerick and currently works voluntary in ‘Changing Ireland’.

Editor’s note: A further demonstration and

conference, held in Waterford in March, attracted around 100 community activists. Our facebook page features 20 photos from the event. Further discussion of the issues raised in these meetings is covered elsewhere in this issue.

Joe Hamill is new Sec. General



Louth native Joe Hamill (Seosamh Ó hAghmaill) is the new Secretary General in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Mr. Hamill joined the Irish public service in the 1970s and worked in a number of Government departments, including the

Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, where he held the position of Policy Adviser on matters relating to arts, broadcasting, cultural institutions, heritage, the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, and the offshore islands.

In 2002 he was appointed assistant secretary of the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and was responsible for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, charities regulation, North-South co-operation, the community and voluntary sector, local and community development programmes, offshore islands, and a range of corporate functions including financial management, human resources and corporate governance.

Mr Hamill was educated at Dundalk CBS and at UCD. He took up his new post on January 19th and replaces Gerry Kearney who has retired.

Equality Minister at Toyosi's funeral

One of new Junior Minister Mary White's first engagements was to attend the funeral of murder victim Toyosi Shitta-bey, the 16-year-old Nigerian-born Irish boy. Over 1,500 people later marched against racism in Dublin.

Pat Carey, in one of his first engagements since his appointment as the new Minister of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, launched the GAA's First Conference on its Alcohol & Substance Abuse Prevention Programme in Croke Park.

The GAA's programme is an all-island initiative which was first introduced in 2005 with the aim of reducing the harm that is being caused by alcohol and drugs.

More info: www.gaa.ie/asap



New Ministers, new Department: IN BRIEF

- ↓ The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has become the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.
- ↓ The Department of Social and Family Affairs has been replaced by the Department of Social Protection.
- ↓ Minister Éamon Ó Cuív, written off by some big media pundits, is the new Minister of Social Protection.
- ↓ Former Chief Whip Pat Carey has been appointed Senior Minister in the new Department of Community, Equality & Gaeltacht Affairs.
- ↓ The new Junior Minister in the DCEGA is Mary White. She is responsible for equality, integration and human rights.
- ↓ Former Minister of State for Community Affairs and Drugs John Curran has been appointed Chief Whip.
- ↓ There is now no Junior Minister with responsibility for Drugs. It falls under Senior Minister Pat Carey's remit.

And Departmental Reconfiguration Makes Sense, Say Activists



Daithi Doolan, Niall Crowley and Ann Irwin at one of a series of conferences and meetings called over the new LCDP.

There has been a broad welcome for the reconfigured Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. The new Department will take charge of social inclusion policy and family policy from the old Department of Social and Family Affairs and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the old Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Community Workers Co-op has welcomed the realignment, saying it was "something the CWC have been advocating for many years."

CWC co-ordinator Ann Irwin said, "We believe this reconfiguration reflects the reality that social exclusion, poverty and inequality are intrinsically linked, and their alignment within one Department provides for a more effective joined up coherent departmental structure."

Separately, equality activist Niall Crowley said: "The new realignment of Government

departments is actually a realignment of issues and it does offer the potential for a more integrated approach."

The National Community Development Forum also saw it as a good step.

Meanwhile, the Equality & Rights Alliance (ERA) a coalition of 130 organisations, gave a "cautious welcome" to the new Department saying it was "a first step towards rebuilding Ireland's broken equality and human rights infrastructure."

However, ERA said state agencies for equality and human rights should ultimately be directly accountable to the Dáil so that they can function as truly independent watchdogs.

Note: Responsibility for FÁS employment services transfers to the new Department of Social Protection under Minister Éamon Ó Cuív. This new Department now has taken on responsibility for operation of the Rural Social Scheme.

Welcome For Minister Carey is Genuine

The recent Cabinet reshuffle didn't win any awards for boldness, but in the Community Sector, the appointments of new Minister Pat Carey and new Junior Minister Mary White were widely welcomed:

The National Community Development Forum, the CDP representative body, welcomed both appointments. Larry McCarthy, NCDF chairperson said, "Anyone who met Minister Carey while he was Minister of State in the Department knows he has a clear understanding of communities' needs and he's a straight-talker. Mary White has a good track record in standing up for the marginalised and we also look forward to working with her."

"A better minister we will not get in that Cabinet," said Daithi Doolan of the Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign. "Pat Carey is very good, he's honest, he's accessible and when he was the Minister with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy, he was excellent. More power to Pat Carey."

While not wishing to take from Minister Carey's achievements and his suitability to the role, Daithi



and his colleagues in the anti-drugs sector are calling for the appointment of a full-time Junior Minister for Drugs and Alcohol to assist Minister Carey.

Meanwhile, Ann Irwin of the Community Workers Co-op said: "Minister Carey has vast experience and a positive track record" while Junior Minister White "appears to have a very good

knowledge" in the areas she is now responsible for.

In taking up her new position, Minister of State Mary White announced she was "very pleased that equality policy will be developed in the same department that works on issues of community affairs."

She talked in a key speech in Waterford on March 27th about working for "a fairer Ireland".

Carey recognises organic approach

In 2008, then Junior Minister Pat Carey told 'Changing Ireland' in an interview*: "If Community Development means anything, it means you have to have an organic approach to the work all the time. We must avoid the tendency to stultify, by doing the same thing year in, year out."

We'll put precise questions to Minister Carey shortly about the big challenges facing communities.

* 'Minister of State Carey has a Volunteering Mind', Issue 24, www.changingireland.ie/archive

Cork Volunteer Week A Major Success



Cork hosted a weeklong series of events in early April to celebrate volunteering, to thank everyone in the city who has volunteered in the past and to show off 200 different groups that people can join.

Some said they came for the chocolate bars, others said it was for the free entertainment. And more people came because they were directed that way by volunteers who spent days paving the shopping streets of Cork seeking out new volunteers.

The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Dara Murphy, led the weeklong celebrations, the main event of which was a three-day Volunteer Fair.

Volunteer Week also highlighted good volunteering practice (focusing on induction, development and training, working contracts) and enabled groups to recruit a new generation of volunteers.

As Lord Mayor Cllr. Dara Murphy said, "Without the dedication, commitment and interest of volunteers many services our citizens enjoy would not be available and many projects would not be completed."

John Mullins, CEO of Bórd Gáis, the title sponsors of the initiative, explained why they backed it: "Many of us do not realise just how essential volunteering is in supporting the more vulnerable in society and how easy it is to become involved."

Women's Aid Cycle

Cyclists of all abilities are being encouraged to polish their spokes and take part in the Women's Aid East Coast Cycle Challenge.

The 70K fun cycle from Dublin to Arklow takes place on Saturday 15th May.

For more details phone 01-8684721, email cycle@womensaid.ie or visit www.womensaid.ie

Bealtaine Festival: May 1- 31

Bealtaine, Ireland's unique festival celebrating creativity in older age, will take place throughout May, with thousands of events across the country.

Some of the organisations taking part include:

- * Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership is hosting a tea dance.
- * South West Wexford CDP is hosting the St Louis Stitchers with lace-making, crochet and beading activities.
- * Kildare Leader Partnership is hosting 'Voices through Art' and 'Ageing with Confidence' in partnership with Older Voices Kildare.
- * Longford Community Resources is hosting creative writing, an arts and crafts exhibition, Intergenerational activities, a local history project and more..
- * Forum Connemara is hosting intergenerational activities.

Bealtaine is Ireland's largest co-operative arts festival and is co-coordinated by Age and Opportunity.

The theme for this year's festival is 'Have dreams and speak them without fear', a line from a poem by Anthony S. Abbott.

Highlights will include the Dawn Chorus involving the Association of Irish Choirs and Active Retirement Ireland.

More information: www.bealtaine.com and www.ageandopportunity.ie



Simple Alarms Still Saving Lives - Community Support for Older People

Prior to his move, Minister of State John Curran announced that 92 groups in total had benefited from a reduced but still operating Scheme of Community Support for Older People so far this year.

The scheme funds community groups to install alarms and home security devices, and provides aids such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, to enable the older person live independently.

The Scheme of Community Support for Older People was initially introduced in 1996. While the scheme remains active, the grant total has declined in recent years from a high of over €4m in 2008.

The full list of beneficiaries for 2010 is available on the Department's website at www.pobail.ie.



Year	No. of CSOP Groups	No. of Older People	Total Value of the Grants
2007	464	10,764	€3,708,019
2008	522	11,762	€4,312,014
2009	116	1,866	€638,976
2010	92 (as of March)	-	€280,000 (as of March)

Community Organisations In Gaeltacht Face Change

A comprehensive review in relation to the funding and organisation of community-based, state-funded organisations in the Gaeltacht is currently underway. It was first announced in late December, 2009.

The realignment will cover Gaeltacht-based Community Development Projects along with other community and cooperative organizations funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

"From 2011 onwards, it is the intention to have one funding mechanism for each geographic community targeted at four main needs - language planning, community development, community enterprise and social inclusion," explained Seamus Mac Giolla Chomhaill, Principal Officer with the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The Department held a meeting on January 18th to consult the relevant groups and

to outline the new structures envisaged from the start of 2011.

"We are asking the communities to see if they can come together themselves within the framework we are offering," said Seamus.

Some 40 groups have made submissions, including alternative proposals.

The Department proposes to set up new funding structures that respect community boundaries that are already in existence where at all possible. In Mayo, for instance, there are three geographic areas identified through which funding could be channelled: Achill, North West Mayo (encompassing Eachléim, Béal an Mhuirthead and Ceathrú Thaidhg) and Tuar Mhic Éadaigh.

"We aim to have a good viable community structure for each area, as far as State-funding goes," said Seamus. "There is general acceptance of the need for coherent and effective structures

in the Gaeltacht, especially having regard to the requirements that will emanate from the 20 Year Strategy for Irish."

The idea – as long-flagged by former Community and Gaeltacht Minister Éamon Ó Cuív – is to increase cohesion and avoid duplication.

In first announcing the move, he said, "I believe that realigning organisations will (ensure) full-area coverage by community structures of all the Gaeltacht areas."

Plearraca Teo is one of the CDPs involved and following a recent meeting with Minister Ó Cuív, it was suggested that the organisation should examine various options, for instance whether the project is primarily arts based, in which case, it might in future be funded through Udaras na Gaeltachta's arts-focused subsidiary company, Ealain Na Gaeltachta Teo.

Help Me Horace!

Looking To The Future

Dear Horace

Camels are the worst offenders in the animal kingdom when it comes to farting, but we're thinking of using them to replace buses on our Rural Transport Scheme. We realise we'll have to begin our morning services at 3am now instead of 8am, because there are issues with speed. We are talking to our drivers about the earlier start time.

Can you think of other selling points?

Carmel Hump,
Long way from everywhere,
The Faraway County

Horace Replies,

No problem, Carmel. This has huge potential. You'll soon have long lines of camels on your roads. This will slow traffic and therefore cut down on car crashes, thereby reducing demands on hospitals. Bord Failte will also be onto it straight away as a tourist attraction. And with the camels nibbling their way along the road, the local authority won't have as much hedge-cutting to do. Your passengers will get used to the smell.

Limerick in lead on multiple levels

Dear Horace,

Why does Limerick always get so much attention?

Frankie Focus,
Looking For New Ways Community Group,
County Leitrim



Horace Replies,

Dear Frankie,

Well, for starters everyone knows that Limerick is the home of 'Changing Ireland' magazine. Thomond Park sits in the shadow of the nearby 'Changing Ireland' bungalow.

And Limerick really is trying to change Ireland and show a way through the recession.

Since the start of the year, the Government has pulled regeneration and in revenge they've got rid of their minister, their bishop, their hurling team and won the right to get drunk on Good Fridays.

No other county can compete at that level!

Volunteers Seek Role-Model

Dear Horace,

Our community/drugs/Traveller/women's group has lost its fundin', but us volunteers are thinking of staying on and keeping things going. It'll take determination and we're looking for a role-model. Any suggestions?

Bustin' Our Gut Community Group,
Making It Happen Street,
Ballygoonoutofthat.

Horace Replies,

Oh easy! I note you didn't ask for clever, contrite or honest. Here are three stubborn Seans who could never tell when they're beat and keep going against all the odds:

Cardinal Sean Brady
Businessman Sean Quinn
Banker Seanie Fitzpatrick

Church Shows Communities How To Retain Power

Dear Horace,

I see Cardinal Sean Brady has kept his job by saying he shouldn't be judged for something he did in the past. Apparently, covering up the abuse of little children a few years ago was ok, it wasn't as illegal as now or something like that. Can CDPs learn from the Catholic church?

Faith Dunaway,
Shattered Trust Ltd,
Cathedral Place

Horace Replies,

Dear Faith,

Absolutely, the church don't want to be judged by today's standards for things they did in the past, while CDPs are still waiting to be judged by today's standards for all they did in the past.

As to the Cardinal, he's full of dynamism and ingenuity, although he is a bit odd. I emailed him congratulations for holding onto his job and he replied asking me to swear I'd never contacted him.

New Network for 53 development companies

As of 1st January 2010, the Partnerships Network (called PLANET), along with the Community Partnerships Network, and Comhar LEADER na hÉireann, merged to form the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

The new network covers every county in the State and represents the views of all community-focused companies that work to promote social inclusion through the development of disadvantaged areas and communities.

While locally some of the companies trade under the name 'Partnership' and others continue to be known locally as 'LEADER' companies, all of them are referred to at national level as Integrated Development Companies.

Up to 160 State-funded, locally-based Community Development Projects are scheduled to be absorbed into the companies by the end of 2010.

The ILDN's office is in Clondalkin, Dublin and a website for the new organisation will be available shortly.

The network employs three staff and is funded through Pobal by the Department of Community,



Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

"Of course it's not been without pain – for example three people lost their jobs and that represented a loss of expertise too," said Marian Vickers, CEO Northside Partnership (Dublin) and vice-chairperson of the ILDN.

The plan had existed for some time to merge the

three networks. "The imperative to join forces came from the networks, then the Department came on board with support and funding," said Marian. "This is early days in the network, but we've committed people on the national committee and the first Council meeting went well."

Since the ILDN was launched, one of its member organisations, the Dublin Inner City Partnership (DICP) has been told that funding under the Local and Community Development Programme will cease on May 30th. An audit found salaries had been paid above permitted limits. The DICP board is appealing the decision.

To contact the ILDN, call Brian Carty (Director), Isobel Fletcher (Small Food Programme Co-ordinator) or Deirdre Fox (Administration).

T: 01-4600091. E: brian@ildn.ie or deirdre@ildn.ie

Address: ILDN, 2a Nangor Business Park, Nangor Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 12.

4 Benefits To The New National Network



The benefits of the merger of three national networks to form the Irish Local Development Network include the following, according to Marian Vickers, national vice-chairperson of the Network:

1. The ILDN is good because it has a representative structure and the hope is we'll be able to influence decisions at policy level nationally, shaping policy from the bottom-up. 3
2. The ILDN is a vehicle for Government departments to meet with companies that cover the whole country when they wish to discuss issues such as rural transport, agri-food, employment and unemployment in severely disadvantaged areas, education, crime in communities, drugs

– there are a whole raft of issues which Government departments can now meet with this body and link in with projects on the ground.

3. There is now great potential for sharing and learning. For example, an approach to a problem in Donegal might be of interest to a company in Kerry. There is great scope there for informing people on new developments and with the economy the way it is we have to use our heads and make the best use of the funding we have.
4. The ILDN will be an important place for the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to come when they wish to discuss issues or consult us.

Early days for the Irish Local Development Network

The Irish Local Development Network says it is early days yet and they have no statement to formally make about the new Local and Community Development Programme.

There are 53 companies across Ireland – variously called urban partnerships, leader companies and

local development companies (rural) – will form the nucleus of the new Local and Community Development Programme.

The ILDN seeks consensus among its member companies prior to making public statements and is still at an early stage in developing positions.

The ILDN is based out of Clondalkin, Dublin, and is staffed by two people.

Brian Carty is ILDN's co-ordinator.

He said the ILDN had "had discussions" with parties involved in the setting up of the new LCDP and the consequent wind-down of the Community Development Projects.

"The issue of the merger will be a big focus point for us for the year, but that is amongst other things such as the Rural Development Programme."

Millions of euro in EU-backed funding is spent on rural development through work carried out by the local development companies.

The ILDN will also look at issues such as funding – the member companies had their funding cut by 10% and more at the beginning of the year and Pobal has now requested boards to further reduce staff costs for the year.

"We're only in existence since January 1st and we're still finding our feet. We operate on a consensus basis and work collectively and we're still in discussions on a range of issues," said Brian.

W: www.planet.ie (temporary website)

Mother's Call Changes National Policy

- Minister Curran mainstreams LGBT Code

In December, three Government-backed Programmes in the community development sector adopted a new Code of Practice on working with LGBT people and communities.

The new code, initially developed by CDPs and Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in the West, was extended nationwide and now covers urban Partnership companies.

But the Code may never have emerged if it wasn't for one concerned mother who went to her local CDP for help after her son, a young gay man, was badly bullied and ostracised by his peers in a rural part of Ireland.

The CDP amongst other things asked their Support Agency for support, and from this a regional network of CDPs and FRCs emerged to tackle such bullying. One of the network's achievements was to develop the Code of Practice.

That story was retold at the launch by one of the guest speakers, Davin Roche of the national Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN).

He said: "Community Development organisations have a critical role to play in encouraging this social progress. The engagement of the three main national programmes in the development of this Code demonstrates their willingness to play a stronger leadership role in fostering social change."

Sadly, the support agency, West Training, has lost all its funding in the recession and the CDP, Plearaca Teo in Rosmuc, may close by the end of the year. However, it is a tribute to all concerned that the Code they developed has been mainstreamed.

The code is designed to promote awareness and understanding of the needs of more isolated and excluded LGBT people and it outlines a range of actions that community organisations should take to address those needs.

Then Minister of State for Community Affairs, John Curran, officially launched the code saying: "Life has certainly improved for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in recent times and our society has seen huge change. But much still needs to be done."



Minister of State (now Government Chief Whip) John Curran launching the Code of Conduct.

PHOTO BY TOMMY CLANCY.

Davin Roche, GLEN's Director of Community Development, continued: "It's critical that LGBT people are supported by their families and their communities. This Code of Practice will enable community development organisations and family support organisations from Belmullet to Belturbet to Blanchardstown to understand the issues faced by many LGBT people and to integrate LGBT people and issues in their family and community development work."

"Community Development organisations have a critical role to play in encouraging this social progress. The engagement of these national programmes in the development of this Code demonstrates their willingness to play a stronger leadership role in fostering social change," he added.

The promotion of the code happens to provide an early example to show how new strategies can be mainstreamed through the emerging new Local and Community Development Programme

EU 2010 Seminars

Four half-day regional seminars will be held in May and June as part of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The seminars will address: Child poverty; Access to quality work and learning opportunities; Access to services with a focus on older people; People with disabilities.

The seminars will be held in Galway (May 11th), Dundalk (May 13th), Wexford (May 18th) and Cork (June 3th).

To register to attend, email: 2010@cwic.ie
For more information: www.cwic.ie AND www.endpoverty.eu

Postal Vote Elects First ILDN Committee

A postal vote elected the first national committee of the Irish Local Development Network (for more of which, read page 8).

The committee members elected are: Secretary, Joe Potter (Westmeath Community Development), John Walshe (Chairperson, Ballyhoura Development Co.) Ger Mullaney, Sligo Partnership, Chairperson Patsy Cronin (Chairperson, South Kerry Development Partnership), Bernard O'Brien, (CEO, Wexford Local Development), Marian Vickers (CEO, Northside Partnership), Sexton Cahill (former chair of Planet and current chairperson of the PAUL Partnership in Limerick), Dóirín Graham (former chair of Comhar Leader na hÉireann and CEO of Clare Local Development Co.), Maire Ni Leime (former Community Partnership Network chair, Meitheal Forbatha na Gaeltachta).

A Good Day For The West Of Ireland

'Changing Ireland's latest video is a report from the first passenger train in 34 years to make the journey from Limerick to Galway. The video is a tribute in particular to community and environmental activist, priest, communist, sociologist and peasant (as he describes himself) Fr. Micheál MacGreil who is also the patron of West On Track.

"Something dead has come back to life," he told us on March 29th.

The video is titled 'A Good Day for the West of Ireland'.



Fr MacGreil congratulates the driver of the first passenger train from Limerick to Galway in 34 years



LCDP Will Have Real Power To Bring About Change

"Partnerships are like CDPs just on a bigger scale"

- THE NEW PROGRAMME HAS "CRITICAL MASS"



Seamus Jackson, Principal Officer, with responsibility for change management in the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, has come to prominence recently within the world of social inclusion and anti-poverty programmes, due to the Department's actions in re-shaping the Local and Social Inclusion Programmes.

The cohesion process has resulted in some job losses in the Local Development Companies, but the overall result is a county-based network of companies charged with engaging in community work, social inclusion work, social enterprise, skills training and volunteering.

Greater coherence was achieved, in line with the Department's policy of simplifying the structure of State support for communities and making such funding more effective at the front-line. Arguments that it wouldn't work didn't wash.

Most recently, he's been applying his skills to help CDPs and Local Development Companies – most say it's help they didn't ask for – as they prepare for implementation of the new Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP).

Here he speaks clearly to dispel concerns CDPs have about assets and properties they own. He also outlines benefits the new Programme will bring to communities once it is established.

"I know people are concerned, but they needn't worry. We've no interest in premises – they are only of use where they are and doing what they already do. We

have no selfish interest in properties.

"Even in a full integrated model, the deeds don't have to transfer over to the Partnerships and Local Development Companies. A facility can be re-invested in another suitable company. It shouldn't be a deal-breaker for projects wondering whether or not to join the LCDP."

Seamus said the merger was "governed by many of the same laws that applied to the transfer of undertakings in relation to commercial company mergers" and nobody was being forced to hand over assets. He said a different company can remain on to own those assets/buildings on behalf of a community.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

"If CDPs are worried about somebody selling the property from beneath their feet, they're wrong. They don't have anything to worry about there.

"And any property owned by a local development company could never be owned by the Department – there's a legal bar on that, it could not be done."

At the same time, when all options are considered, some projects may possibly find that their local Partnership or Development Company is indeed

the most suitable company for them to entrust their building.

"When people look at the ins and outs of it, people might see it as a bigger piece of work to hold onto the property than to safeguard it under the new Programme," he said.

Seamus' views counter the critics' view which claimed the Department, indeed the State, was taking over their properties. Some critics see the local development companies and partnerships as quasi-state or near-statutory bodies and not as fully community-owned Community and Voluntary organisations. They make this claim based on the power-structure in Partnerships. Even though eight board members are always community representatives, they sit with a full board of 24-34 drawn from a range of State and Local Agencies. This contrasts with CDP committees which are required to have a majority of local residents on their boards.

Nonetheless, Seamus is quite clear in his view: "Partnerships are like CDPs just on a bigger scale."

In fact, a few CDPs are bigger than the Partnership companies that are to absorb them.

"But there's no reason why a small Partnership can't take over a CDP that happens to be bigger than it," says Seamus.

If for instance two staff transfer over to work with the Partnership, "There's no reason why they can't just continue on in the positions they were in as before."

"There are plenty of benefits. For example, the new companies will bring to the fore professional management and financial controllers and a bigger board of all the social partners which means there is a wide range of expertise available to the company. This promotes access to new skills, expertise and knowledge. The merged entity will be bigger than the totality of what was there before.

"That's not to say that a different model than we anticipate might not emerge locally," he adds.

THREE TESTS FOR ALTERNATIVES

However, any alternative model or change proposed to the LCDP plan has to pass three tests for the funders to consider it, says Seamus:

"It can't seek to maintain the status quo and the model has to show:



The New Programme - benefits

1. That it holds the potential for integrated delivery.
2. That it has the potential for introducing efficiencies.
3. That it will reduce the burden on company directors in CDPs."

"Any proposal that passes those tests will be considered," he said.

The third 'test' is an iffy one because there are quite a number of CDP voluntary management committees who would argue that they don't see running a company as a burden; they rather see it as a responsibility they gladly "shoulder" since it means the community has ownership of the project.

Seamus didn't particularly want to talk about a model proposed by a CDP in Tipperary, only to acknowledge that it didn't meet the requirements.

MORE FOCUS

Knockanrawley Community Centre have campaigned publicly against the LCDP model which does not meet their local community's bottom line needs, they say. They have not been put off because their proposal was turned down.

However, as the LCDP becomes established, the aim is, says Seamus, that volunteers will be able to concentrate on things of help to the community other than time-consuming management and employment issues. Another wider advantage is that the new stronger Partnership companies have a county-wide remit and can focus resources on previously neglected areas.

Seamus said communities would benefit from the fact that the LCDP is a formal part of one of the four main pillars for social partnership between the State, trade unions, farming and the community sector in this country. (The Community Development Programme never evolved to this level of influence).

53 COMPANIES WILL HAVE CRITICAL MASS

He said the LCDP will therefore help "in building community infrastructure so it can deliver more than it does at the moment. The 53 companies now have some critical mass."

"The new programme also gives us more options. It'll be easier to mainstream and roll-out new initiatives with new structure."

If the LCDP hadn't been proposed to the Department of Finance, the argument goes, the two Programmes now being amalgamated may have been dropped altogether. The need for measured investment won out, say those who argue that the new Programme will have saved the best of Community Development in Ireland at a time when public finances are in such a poor state.

"The new programme has sufficient measurability built into it. It doesn't mean we can measure everything or that all the work done under the programme has got to be measurable, but measurability was the only basis for justifying continuing public expenditure here," said Seamus.

TRUMP CARD

He reiterated what he said in Croke Park on November 25th:

"A lot of CDPs could probably function without our funding support, for example by continuing to operate using the funding it receives from other agencies and sources. We are perfectly happy to help any CDP go it alone and to talk to other funders (of the CDP) about this."

The service level agreement proposal put forward by Knockanrawley CDP and similar alternatives proposed by a host of CDPs around the country seek to bridge the gap. Somewhere along the way, a solution may be found to retain and develop the volunteer involvement, while satisfying the Department's need for simplified structures.

Finally, Seamus drew attention to the ringfencing of CDP money at 2009 levels for this year, noting it was something no other funding stream won. Minister of State John Curran had done very well in that regard, he said, and it was only possible because Minister Curran went to the Department of Finance with "a trump-card", the ready-to-go LCDP proposal, which guaranteed programme measurability.

Some critics see the local development companies and partnerships as quasi-state or near-statutory bodies and not as fully community-owned Community and Voluntary organisations.

Positives About The New Programme

- We have a new Programme with a new national aim.
- Significant funding for it has been secured despite the serious Budgetary constraints overall.
- Funding for the CDPs delivering the new Programme has been ringfenced at 2009 levels which has not been possible in any other area of public spending.
- The Programme will be able to provide demonstrable outcomes for the communities it serves.
- The Programme contains all of what was in the previous programmes but will allow for more effective monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes.
- The Programme continues to support and encourage volunteers as the key to the programme's success in neighbourhoods, but without the burden of compliance with company law requirements, audit and other administrative and management responsibilities.

Source: Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

Alphabet soup just got thicker



Some of the more important new acronyms are contained in the following sentence you might hear spoken by an overly exposed activist or public servant:

As we all know the LCDP was designed with advice from CES to DCRGA in order to ensure that best practice within the CDP and LDSIP was retained. It's been opposed by the CWC, the NCDF, SIPTU and IMPACT while the ILDN have not issued a public statement to date. The reconfigured DCEGA is now responsible for its implementation.

Don't you love it!

Here's a translation:

LCDP = Local and Community Development Programme
CES = Centre for Effective Services

DCRGA = Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs which has now been replaced by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA).

CDP = Community Development Programme. It also stands for Community Development Project of which there were 180 during the other CDP's heyday, up to last year.

LDSIP = Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme.

CWC = Community Workers' Co-op.

NCDF = National Community Development Forum.

SIPTU and IMPACT are trade unions.

ILDN = Irish Local Development Network representing 53 companies that will make up the LCDP.



Ó Cuív believes volunteering must be strong

Interview: Allen Meagher

Bowing out of Community after eight years at the helm, Minister Éamon Ó Cuív looks back most fondly on how RAPID has been transformed into what he terms a people's programme.

At the same time, he accepts the policy of increasing 'coherence', of simplifying State-support for communities, was "quite controversial" but insists it remains the right approach.

"When I was responsible for the RAPID Programme, I insisted that local community representatives - meaning the people living in the housing estates - had a key say in their own future. In urban disadvantaged areas, it's all decided for them, from the shape of their community centre to the shape of their house. Everything in their life is decided by the State and not by them and I set about slowly but surely trying to change that and say 'Now the people that live here have to be the key players in determining the services provided, the type of community they live in.'"

His comments sound remarkably similar to those of community activists who fear that up to 2000 experienced volunteers in the poorest communities are being sidelined as their projects are absorbed into a new Programme this year that has the backing of Minister Ó Cuív himself.

"I'd hate to see that happening. I'd like to see the CDP committees (the proposed 'Advisory Councils') staying very involved but that they wouldn't have all the responsibilities of corporate governance. I think that is frightening people out of volunteering now."

Minister Ó Cuív made it clear that Family Resource Centres will be the next to be absorbed into the new county-wide structures.

"It's still complicated enough and that's why the next step of the process, the bringing (into the new Department) of the family function which includes the Family Resource Centres, and the equality functions... will mean simpler funding streams for the groups and a more coherent plan for providing services for people in all the different areas."

But can the boards of Partnerships be made to listen to these advisory councils? What advisory council has ever been listened to?

"I'm a bit concerned about what CDPs are saying about Partnerships. If what they're saying is true, that



means that firstly, the Community and Voluntary Sector on partnership boards are not wielding the influence they should. Secondly, I'd be concerned that the statutory agencies that are on the boards to serve and not to dominate, are dominating the Partnerships. It means we will have to be very careful that the statutory agencies are on the Partnerships to listen to the Community and Voluntary Sector, not to use some numerical weight to control.

"The Community and Voluntary Sector was meant to be truly representative (on partnership boards) and there was meant to be particular emphasis on disadvantaged areas. If the Partnership is wrong, we have to make sure it is the way it was meant to be. If it's right, then they will be the first people at board level driving that communities have a bigger say in their own future. So it is a complex equation to get right."

He argues that efforts to create greater coherence with regard to State funding to communities is "quite controversial probably, but I think in time it'll be seen as the way to go, that we needed more coherence in

the sector."

Many in the Community Sector oppose the structure of the new Local and Community Development Programme, or oppose it outright. Some say it means the death of true Community Development in Ireland. A CDP conference participant in Waterford, Chris O'Leary said: "We simply won't be here next year".

"Well the CDPs as they were will be gone (yes) but in some areas of the country, there were no CDPs. It really depends on the goodwill of everyone making this work. It will allow for greater focusing of the money and the actions. Something that hasn't been alluded to - if you found you had three CDPs, and one was in an area that wasn't such a disadvantaged area, but there was another (needy) area, there is no reason you wouldn't set up a voluntary committee there."

Doesn't that mean that one slightly disadvantaged community's loss is another more marginalised community's gain?



The New Programme - addressing volunteering

"No, because we're talking about voluntary committees and we've instructed the Partnerships to focus money on RAPID areas, through RAPID local committees. (This will be possible) without having to close one CDP to set up another CDP, because with the big funding going to the Partnerships, they will be able to focus on new areas without having to set up new companies and new offices. And in my view they will be able to get involved in communities we haven't had enough involvement in to date."

Can you see Service Level Agreements working?

"Pat Carey is now taking this over and I've 100% faith in him. He's a huge understanding of the issues. There will be difficulties but I've no doubt he will make this work."

How did the new Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs come about?

"It was totally up to Brian Cowen but he did consult with us."

"There were lots of people saying in recent months that community didn't count and they were predicting the demise of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Instead, all of the community functions are now in the one place, in a way that would be unthinkable eight years ago."

"When you go back to the days when RAPID and Partnerships and Drugs were in the Department of Sport, and Travellers were funded through

(another) Department and so on. Now when you see all these actions in communities brought together under one Department, and consolidated by the recent (Departmental reconfiguration), the place of community in the Government structure has been firmly, firmly cemented. The present arrangement in its totality is way ahead of anything that was there before."

"Without a major changing around of Departments, Brian Cowen has moved key functions that will make a huge difference. Now you have FRCs, CDPs, Partnerships, local action funded by the State (now under the one roof). Isn't it much better that they'll all be funded by the one Department? So you won't have an FRC and a CDP in the one street and nothing in another community. All of the community stuff, dormant accounts, RAPID, charities, is in the one space. That is now confirmed and strengthened."

Many people believe the Government is actively seeking to silence dissent from the margins, to silence community voices, but Minister Ó Cuív says he is "always surprised by that". His work with empowering State-supported RAPID community reps, giving them a veto over spending decisions affecting their community, shows what he means.



"In RAPID areas, I'd always call community reps aside and I'd always be egging them on and telling to take a strong, strong stand."

"Furthermore, I was probably unique in meeting... twice a year I met with the chairs of the

RAPID areas and since not all the chairs were local activists ...I used to organise an annual conference for all the community representatives. It wasn't a question of us lecturing them, but they got the floor and we listened and answered. I don't think anybody could have ever accuse me of trying to silence the community voice, because we very much tried to create structures where they had a very powerful community voice."

He also makes the point that the "vast majority" of community groups receive no State funding and they are "well able to fight their corner".

Could the same strength of respect and recognition given to RAPID reps be given to the Advisory Councils replacing CDP boards?

"I think so. I don't want to lose volunteers. Obviously, the detail is for Pat Carey, but no Minister in Government would want to lose the voice of the local people and whatever structures are necessary to protect that, you can absolutely be assured of."

Dept. interested in Limerick CDPs' alternative - Projects nationally seek to retain volunteer power

In Waterford, Tipperary, north Dublin, Donegal and Waterford – and we are unsure about other areas – CDPs have submitted proposals that would retain a stronger volunteer involvement than spelt out in the plan for the Local and Community Development Programme.

Ideally, the projects want everything to stay as is, but that is not a runner and alternatives have instead been proposed.

The proposal from Limerick suggests having one city-focused CDP to replace the six currently there. The details remain to be ironed out but the Department has signalled it is interested.

The other alternative proposals mostly circle around the idea of CDPs remaining on as companies in their own right, tied in by a service-level agreement with their local Partnership company.

This may not meet with the strict criteria laid down for alternatives by then Minister of State John Curran. However, it is the only way currently that CDPs see to "protect" local ownership. There is a divide between proponents of the new Programme who say it is all good and will strengthen community infrastructure nationwide and those who oppose it by saying it will destroy the community infrastructure in the most marginalised communities.

If mishandled, around 2000 experienced volunteers are likely to be lost to communities nationwide. If handled with care, the volunteers may emerge with a stronger voice than before, although few are predicting that as of yet.

In some places, local Partnership companies – with whom CDPs are being asked to merge – have backed the alternative proposals, in others they have declined



Community radio station Near FM interviews a Donegal woman at a national protest about CDP and other cuts on Sept 30th last year.

to express support.

The CDPs have, depending on the area, received support for their alternative proposals from Social Inclusion Measures boards, from City or County Development Boards and from opposition politicians.

For instance, the Donegal Network of CDPs have the backing for their alternative model of at least seven local politicians and two of the three local development companies (the Inishowen Development Partnership and Donegal Local Development Company).

The Network's alternative model was launched in Letterkenny on March 11th.

"They were fully supportive of the CDPs remaining autonomous," said Finola Brennan,

Secretary of the Network.

The launch came after the CDPs presented their case to the County Development Board (CDB) who gave their unanimous support to the retention of independent local companies. The Donegal CDB and the county manager wrote to the Community Minister to express their support.

The Donegal model proposed retaining independent local companies and that endorsement and coordination should take place under the oversight of the County Development Board and the Social Inclusion Measures Group.

"We believe that many CDPs across the country might find value in the proposals," said Finola Brennan, co-ordinator of Donegal Women's Network.

The nine CDPs in Donegal are seeking a meeting with Minister Carey to outline their proposals as soon as possible.

1st Call On Minister Carey: CDPs

No sooner was he in the job a day than new Minister Pat Carey was called upon to rethink the disbandment of Community Development Projects.

Others have since echoed the call.

Ann Irwin, Community Workers Co-op, called on Minister Carey to "urgently consult with stakeholders to redesign and refocus the Local and Community Development Programme to create a programme and appropriate implementations structures that enable quality community work with lasting outcomes for communities affected by poverty and inequality."

The New Programme - facts & figures

TIMELINE: The story so far



The Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs is working this year to bring together two Programmes to form the 'Local and Community Development Programme'.

The new Programme began to take shape on January 1st and is to supersede both the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme (CDP). Here's the timeline:

2004

Cohesion policy was adopted by the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The work was completed in 2008, resulting in full county coverage by 2009.

November 2008

The Centre for Effective Services was appointed to review the two social inclusion programmes (LDSIP and CDP).

June-August 2009

In June, the National Community Development Forum was set up by CDPs to respond to the threat to the projects.

In July, The McCarthy Report was published. It recommended slashing spending from €74m to €30m on the above-named programmes.

Through June and July, volunteers and workers in the Community Sector organised trade union-supported national and regional protest marches.

September-October 2009

Further street protests were held in September.

On September 18th, then Minister of Community Affairs, John Curran, announced he was setting up a new Programme, the Local and Community Development Programme which would see a "merger" of the CDP and LDSIP programmes.

From September to December, the CDPs campaigned and lobbied against the proposals that would see their projects disbanded.

December 2009

In December, an Oireachtas committee heard from members of disadvantaged communities effected by the merger proposal.

On December 10th, the budget was announced with no change to CDP funding, but cuts to the LDSIP. Meanwhile, some CDPs were to lose out – 30

were told that funding was to be discontinued. 24 CDPs appealed.

By December 31st, the remaining CDPs were urged to sign up to the implementation of the new LCDP or to forego further funding. Almost all signed up

January 2010

The Irish Local Development Network, a new network for local development companies, came into being on January 1st.

On January 27th, the Oireachtas committee convened once again on the issue of the new Programme and Minister of State John Curran was called to explain the plan.

By the end of January, the appeals process was complete and 10 CDPs who appealed the cut in funding were successful while 14 were not.

Also by the end of January, local development

companies had a deadline to sign up to join the new Programme and continue to receive funding.

March 2010

Integrated joint workplans developed by CDPs in co-operation with local development companies were presented by the end of March.

April 2010

In the Cabinet reshuffle, Pat Carey was appointed the new Minister of the reconfigured Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

At the end of April, the National Community Development Forum held a national conference with British guest-speakers to outline their concerns about the structure of the new Programme.

The LCDP has four goals

Goal 1 – Promoting local services

Objectives

Promote awareness, knowledge and uptake of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community services

1. Raise awareness and knowledge of services in the local community.
2. Develop and sustain strategies and mechanisms for improved access to local services.
3. Develop and sustain strategies and mechanisms to better co-ordinate local services.

Goal 2 – Increasing access to opportunity

Objectives

Increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources

1. Work with providers and stakeholders to raise awareness of a wide range of opportunities for educational recreational and cultural development.
2. Work with providers and stakeholders to improve access to a wide range of opportunities for educational recreational and cultural development.

Goal 3 – Increase job readiness and opportunities

Objectives

Increase people's work readiness and employment prospects

1. Develop and sustain a range of services to support, prepare and assist people to enter the labour market
2. Develop and sustain strategies with local enterprises to increase local employment prospects
3. Develop and sustain strategies to increase local self-employment prospects.

Goal 4 – Give communities a strong voice on issues

Objectives

Promote active engagement with policy, practice and decision-making processes on matters affecting local communities

1. Promote dialogue between funders, providers and local communities.
2. Develop and sustain opportunities for communities of place and interest to identify issues and voice concerns.

Take away the tracks and your community will sink!

- By **Brian Dillon**, NEXUS

Brian Dillon of Nexus suggests the stakes could not be higher if CDPs go. It would be as bad as tearing up the railway tracks to remove this community infrastructure, he told a national conference organised by CDPs in Dublin on April 22nd:

Prevailing wisdom many years ago convinced the powers that be of the value in dismantling the railway infrastructure across the country. It is now costing a lot more to re-open it bit by bit. Does the new 'integrated' approach put forward for the new Local and Community Development Programme mean that we are 'tearing up the tracks' and demolishing the stations? What will the cost be of 'fixing' the community breakdown that happens as a result? How much will it cost to rebuild in the future?

We may even find the money sometime in the future to replace the tracks and the stations. But will we ever again be able to convince the volunteers we are now telling they are not needed to re-engage? If we pull up the tracks now, our communities will sink.

"Open street warfare and the rise of a youth gun and knife culture in parts of London has not only become a reality. It also serves to fulfil the clear predictions made by community and youth development workers in these areas before community cuts there. They said, 'Take away our projects, and the support and development infrastructure created by them, and our communities will fall apart.'

At the broader policy level, here in Ireland, how can the very worthwhile and necessary objectives of the Local and Community Development Programme be most effectively delivered? Can we be sure that services delivered in a more centralised way actually benefit



those most in need? Will the most disadvantaged access them if there is no secure space, no outreach, no explanations locally, no trusted local workers and volunteers to mediate the information and the messages?"

The headlong rush to 'save' on public spending has already resulted in the removal of Community Development Projects in some areas, and the 'integration' of what is left into what is now being described as the Local and Community Development Programme.

"A more centralised model, based on service-delivery, will contribute to increasing inequality."

END OF FUNDING TO CDPs

The case has been made on the basis of 'saving' an average of less than €95,000 annually per project in these areas: thereby removing supports that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people depend upon. But it is not difficult to imagine the 'cost' for these communities.

The fact that it will generate the need for significant increased service spending – addressing the effects of individual and community breakdown – demonstrates in reality a reckless disregard for accountability in public expenditure. The cost of ending this work will be in the end a lot higher than the cost of keeping it going.

There is enough evidence from the UK to point the way forward to the social and economic costs of destroying Community Development infrastructure.

'INTEGRATION' OF CDPs

The process of integrating remaining CDPs into what is being promoted as a more coherent local development structure inspires even less confidence in any long-term vision or understanding. At the centre of this is the failure to understand the value of the 'infrastructure' that has been built up in the country's most disadvantaged areas over the past 20 years.

CENTRALISED MODEL INCREASES INEQUALITY

Success and real results for the most disadvantaged depend upon the ability of locally-based projects to be flexible; to continuously communicate with their own communities in an environment of trust; to understand needs as they change; and, most importantly, to involve those who are most disadvantaged in responses to their own needs.

The notion that all this can be taken apart and reconfigured or reassembled under a neat number of service headings is both misguided and reckless. A more centralised model, based on service-delivery, will contribute to increasing inequality.

Dismantling and removing this community development infrastructure, which took almost two decades to build up, will also serve to ensure that the wider goals of the LCDP in tackling social exclusion will not be met. Telling those thousands of people who have given their time voluntarily 'you are longer needed' is the first step in letting the most disadvantaged know 'you will not benefit'.

CHALLENGE FOR CDPs

These few months mark an extremely critical time for CDPs, because the new 'integrated' programme will not reach the most excluded without proactive outreach and positive engagement.

Nexus was involved in an evaluation of the Community Development Programme some years ago that recognised it had tremendous value. See Issue 1 of 'Changing Ireland' in our online archive.

British speaker at CDP conference

A national conference, leaning on the experience of the Community and Voluntary Sector in Britain, was held in Dublin on April 22nd to highlight the need to protect the community and voluntary infrastructure.

The conference was hosted by the National Community Development Forum and supported by the Community Workers' Co-op and NEXUS Ireland.

Among among the guests was Dr. Dione Hills from the Tavistock Institute in London. She has been involved in the evaluation of community development initiatives since the late 1970's and she told the conference three issues stood out for her:

1. The work is slow, a fact often overlooked by funders seeking easy 'results'.



2. Funding is endlessly short-term and conditional – in contrast to the actual work which requires long-term investment and commitment.

3. It is crucial that the right kind of organisation is put in place, one which can thrive in a situation of variable funding streams while retaining the trust of and links with the community. It must be able to sustain and support staff and volunteers to do demanding work on a long-term basis.

The British government has come up with the term 'community anchor organisations': independent, multi-purpose, community-led organisations that operate locally, at the heart of their communities and are able to respond in a holistic way to local problems and challenges.

The New Programme - Community Concerns

'The Programme could be developed, but...'

- Anastasia Crickley, NUI Maynooth



The LCDP could be “developed and changed” but only if the Minister engages in real dialogue with people, says Anastasia Crickley, head of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth.

“One of the key features of the Community Development Programme was it gave the people most affected by issues (eg poverty) the capacity to have a say in some things that effect their lives.

“A key feature of the Local and Community Development Programme is removing that say a further degree. That’s not a good way to do business.

“I believe the Programme could be developed and could be changed. But it can’t happen if the projects are being demanded to change immediately. You have projects being pushed to implement the new Programme while at the same time they’re trying to propose ways in which it might be enhanced and developed.

“They say they want one Programme and they want it in place by the end of the year, but if the Minister is serious about dialogue, they have to put the process on hold, so the single integrated Programme at the end can reflect the needs of all the people concerned.”

Anastasia’s comments were made after then Minister of State John Curran said he too wanted dialogue when he addressed an Oireachtas committee hearing on the issue on January 27th.

Editor’s note: Our congratulations to Anastasia who was in January elected to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to serve for four-years. Anastasia was nominated by the Irish Government and is the first Irish woman to serve on any UN Committee.

For the full ‘Changing Ireland’ interview with Anastasia and others in relation to the LCDP, check out our ‘changingireland’ channel on Youtube, or view via our own website.

'A real voice in real decisions needed'

- Ann Irwin, CWC



The rules laid down by the Department for any alternative model to the LCDP are too stringent and that’s why no national alternative has been proposed.

So says the Community Worker’s Co-operative (CWC).

“Certainly, it’s the reason the Co-op has not submitted an alternative to date,” said Ann Irwin, CWC co-ordinator. “The parameters are too tight and there is no possibility of submitting an acceptable proposal under those rules that would enable quality community work at local level. If a national programme is to work, you need to have local people having a real voice at real local decision-making levels. There are 34 people on the board of some partnerships and there isn’t one seat there for the CDPs.”

Ann suggested the Department should give more lee-way: “The work the Co-op is doing for a considerable period of time requires that there is a greater level of flexibility in terms of the Department’s approach to the current implementation structures.”

“Recent correspondence from the Department has been very unhelpful in terms of creating a positive relationship.

“And this is just talking about the programme’s implementation. There is a bigger problem which is the programme itself, it’s a diluted and weakened version of the LDSIP and it doesn’t carry the elements of good practice forward from both programmes into the new one like it claims to do. It will significantly weaken this country’s community infrastructure.”

“It leaves very little room for (State-funded) quality community work at local level.”

“Change is inevitable, but the most effective change is negotiated change. The point is – the Department are not entering into negotiations and they’re ignoring the Oireachtas on two occasions now regarding the call made on the Minister to enter into negotiations and consult people. The Community Worker’s Co-op and the National Community Development Forum have made it clear that our doors are open.”

Programme “forsakes” people on the ground

- Chirs O’Leary, Faranree CDP



“What company do you know that’s being asked to hand over all its assets to another company?” asks Chris O’Leary, co-ordinator of Faranree CDP. “The banks haven’t been asked to do so. Yet, the check and balances that go on in Community Development work are second to none.”

“The people who manage the projects are experts. You couldn’t ask for a better use of resources. We the workers are now being asked to detach ourselves from frontline services,” he said.

“Communities have given huge service to the State and the State is forsaking people on the ground. ...We want action. We don’t have time. I’d like to say we’ll be here next year, but we won’t and that is reality if this isn’t stalled and stopped.”

Volunteers needed now more than ever

“As unemployment rises and social problems increase, community projects, with voluntary local management committees, are needed now more than ever. In challenging times, they should be expanded rather than cut back,” said Maria McHale, spokesperson for Mayo Community Platform. It represents CDPs, Family Resource Centres, Mayo Women’s Support Services, Mayo Intercultural Action, Mayo Travellers Support Group, and South West Mayo Development Company.

The New Programme - Community Concerns

One project's battle for independence

- Knockanrawley determined to keep its project, says Chairperson

Knockanrawley CDP in Tipperary town submitted an alternative proposal to the Department recently and was turned down. But Knockanrawley is continuing to seek other ways of retaining the funding it receives for two of the centre's core staff while remaining independent as a community group.

Sean McSweeney, Director of Knockanrawley Resource Centre says, "The Government wants to disband our Voluntary Board of Directors, wind up the organisation as an independent legal company and registered charity. They want us to hand over control and be subsumed into a local development company without Knockanrawley getting even one seat (out of 24) on their Board of Directors."

"Let's call a spade a spade, that is a takeover, not a merger of equal partners," he said, emphasising that "our problem is not with our colleagues in South Tipperary Development Company (STDC) because this proposal is being foisted on them by the Government as much as it is on us."

Catherine Sharpe, local resident and chairperson of Knockanrawley explained: "Our boards of directors is made up of people from the local community, they know the local issues and needs and they are the decision-making body that runs the centre. This empowers the local community, it's what our project



and Community Development is all about and it has been pivotal to the success of the Centre. The Government's proposal is an insult to all voluntary boards of directors who have put in a huge amount of time and energy over the years developing support services for their communities."

"We all want to remain as an independent community organisation, but if we decide to do that we would lose €187,500 in funding which would

probably mean a reduction in staffing levels and cutbacks in services."

"Since its inception and its official opening in 1991 under the leadership of the late Sr Joan Madden, Knockanrawley Resource Centre has always been owned and run by the community, for the community."

"Because of the current economic situation, there is more demand than ever for our services, but the Government has decided that CDPs here (Knockanrawley Resource Centre, Tipperary Rural Traveller Project and Suir CDP) are to be 'merged' with the STDC."

Catherine has promised publicly that, "We will continue to serve the local community and I can assure you we will do so for many years to come, no matter what the outcome. We feel strongly that the Centre should remain in the hands of the community, who set it up, developed it and managed it for the past 20 years. The government however, for some reason thinks it is now entitled to take it over!"

Editor's Note: A spokesman for the Department has told 'Changing Ireland' that the Department had no desire to see local community assets being taken away from local communities. This matter had arisen during cohesion and did not get in the way of that process.

What they do in Knockanrawley

Knockanrawley's Community Development programme currently provides services such as five support and education groups for women and two for men, a parent and family support programme and support for residents groups. It also provides a return to work training programme, an IT training centre, and courses such as healthy living, woodwork, car mechanics, welding and community development.

The Daisychain childcare provides 75 affordable childcare places while the Psychotherapy and Family Therapy gives support to couples, families and individuals experiencing stress or difficulties in their lives as well as supporting a challenging behaviour group and a suicide bereavement group.

In the organic garden, courses in horticulture are organised while open days are held to encourage participation. There is also training provided as part of the construction of an Eco-building in the garden.



The New Programme - CES role

Complaint to 'Changing Ireland'

The Centre for Effective Services took on work last year to advise the Government about merging the Community Development Programme with the Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme. However, CES has not been happy with some coverage it has received in 'Changing Ireland'.

Deborah Ghatte of CES writes: "Much of what has been said about (CES) work, both in your magazine and elsewhere, is based on misunderstandings about the nature of our organisation and the brief we accepted in relation to the review of the two programmes."

"The Centre is not a 'consultancy', as stated by your magazine."

Deborah sought to counter what she viewed as negative comment from a number of quarters, us included:

"Much of the negative comment about the Centre revolves around the suggestion that CES is in some way responsible for, or has been instrumental in bringing about the 'merger' of the two programmes, announced by Minister John Curran in November 2009."

She believed a page heading in this magazine (The 'Merger' - How Could It Make Sense?) "perpetuated this myth."

In response to questions we had posed, Deborah said CES needed to point out that it was:

1. "not asked to carry out a wide consultation with the sector."
2. "not asked to carry out any new empirical research on the programmes in respect of their current effectiveness."

Editor's note:

Up to the end of last year, 'Changing Ireland' was the national magazine of the Community Development Programme. It was tasked with promoting, and indeed defending, the work done by volunteers and workers in CDPs throughout the country and promoting Community Development in Ireland in general. We wish to present facts clearly and fairly and we sought last year to interview CES at a time when they were at the centre of a political storm. Our requests were turned down.

Ireland is getting a major new Programme

- CES hopes its work will be valued in time



Deborah Ghatte, director of the Centre for Effective Services, has outlined her company's sense of achievement over the new Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP):

"The Centre's work has contributed to what was, by popular agreement, a long-overdue review of how community development programme design in Ireland could be strengthened to achieve better outcomes for communities."

She said that, "In spite of the undoubted imperfections of the work, for the first time in Ireland, a major government programme now has a design that is documented and articulated within a logic model underpinned by principles of effective practice drawn from the international evidence base."

She said CES "listened hard to the views of the sector as far as we have been able within the constraints of working in 'real world' timeframes."

CES shared "within a very fast timeframe... all of the outputs...with representatives from the (Community) sector" via two meetings and online publication of the summary of their evidence-based review report.

Pointing to the future, Deborah said that in time, politicians, policy makers, the public, and those in the Community and Voluntary Sector "will be in a better position to judge what actually works at a local level and what remains to be improved."

She said she "hoped there will be room for sensible debate about issues of design, content and outcomes for communities as well as other concerns."

She lamented that CES' other work had been overlooked as the debate over the closure of two programmes (being replaced by the LCDP) grew ever louder.

CES would not see a role for itself in commenting publicly on "specific structure and governance arrangements pertaining to" the CDP and LDSIP programmes.

Deborah encouraged people curious as to what CES does have to say on structures "based on sound international evidence" to consult the website: www.effectiveservices.org/

Meanwhile, the main review report by CES relating to the LCDP is currently being edited and will be made publicly available in June.



CES stands up for its work

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) has replied by way of letter to questions we posed about its work and to correct what it views as misinformation. The letter is mostly focused on countering critics and on explaining CES' mission and background.

Deborah's letter contributes to the dialogue she said she would like and that others in the Community Sector and indeed in the Oireachtas have sought.

The main points highlighted in the letter have been posted on our website: www.changingireland.ie

Community Employers Forum charges



The Community Sector Employers' Forum (CSEF) has had to begin charging for one of the services it provides.

While community employers can still join the CSEF for free, the organisation now charges €50 per annum for access to the Employer Resource

Bureau (available on www.csef.ie).

"It is the only way we can keep the service going in the current climate," said spokesperson Jean Somers regretfully.

The aim is to make the service self-financing.

Social Enterprise Can Lift This COUNTRY

What difference does social enterprise make? Gerard Doyle argues that the impact social enterprise can play in the economic regeneration urban disadvantaged communities is immense. He says it can address unemployment, gain assets for community use and stimulate economic activity. This is the first in a two-part series:

With unemployment hitting levels not seen since the 1980s and the 'Celtic Tiger' having bypassed a large number of communities, community activists are looking for solutions. They should consider going down the social enterprise route.

What is a social enterprise?

A social enterprise is a business which is formed to provide employment, services or create income for community benefit. They are present in most urban disadvantaged communities in Ireland, and examples include community childcare projects, community launderettes and community cafes.

Social enterprises share the following features:

Provision of services or products - they are concerned with the provision of goods (e.g. food or furniture) or services (e.g. childcare, security and training) and are unlike traditional community and voluntary organisations which are either engaged in advocacy or charity.

Autonomy - they are formed by groups of citizens who then govern them. State agencies or private companies do not have any direct or indirect control over how they are run.

Community initiative - they are formed in response to an unmet community need. Groups of individuals form them as opposed to one person.

Democratic decision-making - This means their decisions are based on one member one vote.

Participatory character - the users of social enterprises services are represented and participate at all levels of decision-making structures.

Limited distribution of profit - Some social enterprises do not distribute any of the profits to their members. Others, most notably cooperatives, distribute a limited level of profits. This ensures that the primary aim of responding to community needs is prioritised.

What do social enterprises do?

Social enterprises are engaged in most sectors of the economy except those from which they would exclude themselves for ethical reasons e.g. gambling.

Throughout the European Union, supporting unemployed individuals and other groups that find hard to gain employment is the most common objective of social enterprises.

However social enterprises have been successful undertaking other activities:

Providing services to the community

Social enterprises can provide services that meet a local need that the State or the private sector is delivering. Their primary concern is not to make money but instead to deliver a range of services.

Market-driven business

Some social enterprises are formed primarily to produce a service or product that generates income for community benefit.

Important features of this type of social enterprises include:

- Their primary objective is to make surplus income to start other social enterprises to fund anti-poverty initiatives.
- They can generate well-paid sustainable

By Ger Doyle



Ger Doyle's background

Ger has 16 years experience in community development and social enterprise development. He has worked for a partnership company, a community development network and Waterford LEDC, Ireland's first not-for-profit company involving the community and corporate sector.

Today, Ger works with TSA and has assisted a number of community organisations in developing social enterprise strategies.

He recently graduated with an Masters Degree in Local Economic Development and his dissertation on the impact social enterprise can play in the regeneration of urban disadvantaged communities can be downloaded from: www.tsa.ie

employment.

- The social enterprise's services have to be provided outside of their community in order for them to generate sufficient income to become sustainable.

Working for the State

Social enterprises provide services that were once provided by the State, including, leisure facilities and helping individuals get employment.

Sunderland Home Care Associates highlights how social enterprises can provide a greater number of benefits than a traditional private enterprise, in particular, sustainable employment for relatively low-skilled individuals. This enables them to acquire new skills and qualifications. Moreover, the conditions of employment and the culture of the company both contribute to staff motivation. As a result, service users can be assured of a top quality service.

Case-Studies In Social Enterprise Success

By Ger Doyle



Ballyfermot, Dublin

In response to the dearth of cafés and restaurants in the Ballyfermot area, Ballyfermot Community Civic Social Economy Ltd (BCCSE) provides affordable, nutritious meals to the residents of Ballyfermot from Monday to Friday. As a relatively high proportion of the population is over 65 years of age, this service enables older people to access a subsidised hot meal five days a week. It provides approximately 130 meals every day. BCCSE is funded under the Pobal Community Services Programme.

More info from: Tanya Ward, tel 01: 623-8745.

Case Study 1.

Sunderland, England

Established in 1994, Sunderland Home Care Associates offers a high quality range of home care packages and care services for people in the Sunderland area.

Though many of the staff had no formal education before joining, over 150 of them have now gained nationally accredited qualifications. Sunderland Home Care Associates prides itself on providing well-trained and motivated professional carer support. It now employs more than 200 staff delivering over 4,000 hours of care per week.

The organisation has a number of major contracts with Sunderland Social Services, the University of Sunderland and Sunderland Colleges and their work is widely recognised as a market leader in care services.

The company currently has a turnover of £1.75m with staff receiving pay and conditions above market rates.

As an employee-owned social enterprise, staff members play a vital role in the decision-making process. Profits are spent on providing a better service or rewarding the staff. The unique structure means that staff members have the opportunity to take part in democratic general meetings every other month and to help set budgets, pay and conditions.

The commitment to their employee-owners has helped the company achieve very low levels of staff turnover, better relationships with clients and a higher quality of care overall, evidenced in consistently high scores from the Care Quality Commission.

Case Study 2.

Helping social groups acquire an income

Census figures indicate only 30% of Travellers are employed. According to research undertaken by the Equality Authority and Traveller organisations, Travellers tend to engage in income generation instead of employment as it allows greater flexibility and avoids potentially discriminating employee-manager relationships. However, the Irish economy is becoming more formalised and Travellers are finding it increasingly difficult to engage areas of economic activity including recycling that they traditionally engaged in.

Local development and regeneration

Social enterprises also provide services and facilities for business formation in disadvantaged communities. This can include the provision of managed workspace (e.g. community enterprise centres) and help in forming both private and social enterprises.

Community enterprise centres across the country have fostered small businesses to flourish and provide employment. In addition to providing the infrastructure for enterprise to take place, there are many instances, particularly in Britain, where social enterprise has influenced the regeneration

Midlothian, Scotland

McSense was set up in the wake of the pit closures and loss of other employment within the Mayfield and Easthouses area in Midlothian, Scotland. The effects on the local community, its economy and local businesses were devastating. Local miners were looking for a way to revitalise the community and create jobs.

The original idea was to collect £5 per week for one year from local businesses to kick start social enterprises in the area. This grew to £7,000. In 1989 a steering group was formed to research markets for investment. The group consisted of business people, workers and the unemployed, and they went on to form the first voluntary board of directors of McSense.

The first initiative, McSense Heatwise, was established in 1991. This specialises in energy efficiency.

Since then, several other social enterprises have been established. They are all managed by McSense Ltd, which is registered as a company limited by guarantee and has charitable status.

Turnover for the McSense Group is in excess of £8 million and annual profits are up to £250,000. It receives no State subsidies for ongoing running costs. The performance of the companies has created a stable platform for growth, creating 150 jobs. The profits created from these businesses have enabled the Mayfield & Easthouses Grants Association, established by McSense, to make donations to various community organisations, thus achieving the original goal, which was to set up and run a business for the community and to regenerate the community for the benefit of all its residents.

McSense exemplifies how social enterprise can regenerate disadvantaged districts by establishing market-driven social enterprises, also referred to as community enterprises.

W: www.mcsence.co.uk

Case Study 3.



of disadvantaged areas by acting as the catalyst for the physical development of an area – Coin Street Community Builders is one such example.

Important features of this social enterprise include:

- Coin Street Community Builders (CSCB) in London was established by a community development organisation. The process was community-led.
- CSCB established social enterprises that owned property which generated income.
- It became so financially strong that it was able to influence the physical development of its neighbourhood.
- It established a number of social enterprises that lead to each business supporting one and other.

If community organisations can acquire both long-term finance and the necessary expertise, there is no reason why social enterprise could not be the new model of community regeneration to replace the failed Public Private Partnership model.

Strategy for social enterprise development

It can be seen from the examples here that social enterprises benefit disadvantaged urban communities in many more ways than solely providing employment. They have the potential to transform local economies.

They also demonstrate that community development organisations, because of their belief in the collective - rather than in the individual - should determine how communities are developed. Allied to this is their knowledge of communities which is essential in galvanising support for social enterprise development.

For these reasons community development organisations are ideally placed to initiate a strategy

Case Study 5.

South Bank, London

In the UK, social enterprises have played a lead role in the sustainable regeneration of urban disadvantaged communities. One case in point is Coin Street Community Builders, a social enterprise, working in the South Bank area of London. It has acquired assets and property and is providing social and affordable housing for young people, managing leisure and recreational amenities and stimulating employment creation.

The assets are all community owned and have generated income to develop community services and facilities. This was not easy. Coin Street Community Builders had to campaign hard for community led regeneration because the prevailing policy favoured private developer led regeneration.

for developing social enterprises. The following steps summarise the key actions that need to be taken:

Step 1- A group of community activists who are interested in dealing with unemployment and the lack of services in their area come together. This group spends time developing their understanding of social enterprise development and how it can benefit their community. It is important at this stage to draft a broad strategy that aims to have a long-term impact on the community.

Step 2- The group should endeavour to secure finance from a variety of sources and not solely from the State.

Step 3- Identification of social enterprise concepts that have the potential to generate ongoing income. Alliances should be formed with community organisations in more affluent neighbourhoods where the social enterprise's goods and services could be sold.

Step 4 – Social enterprises should aim to acquire buildings and other assets which can be used as collateral.

Step 5- Establishment of a structure that is community-controlled and which would have the

expertise to develop social enterprises.

Step 6 – Collaboration with other communities for mutual benefit. For instance, a number of communities could pool their resources to develop a social enterprise which could provide a service across a region.

Benefits

A vibrant social enterprise strategy could lead to the following benefits for disadvantaged communities:

- Responsive services - it can enable urban communities to influence the type and quality of services that are delivered in their communities.
- Participation – it can provide a mechanism for communities to influence their neighbourhoods' physical, social and economic development.
- Economic development - it can lead to the long-term economic development of a community, unlike private business which is primarily concerned with maximising profit. Social enterprises are rooted in communities whereas private enterprises do not have the same association with a community and in the past have changed locations to increase their profits.
- Community autonomy- over time, a social enterprise strategy can provide community organisations with income which can be invested in anti-poverty initiatives. If the strategy establishes a number of vibrant social enterprises, it is possible for community organisations to become less reliant on grant funding.

Conclusion

Many critics could argue that due to the dominance of 'free-market economics', Irish society does not lend itself to social enterprise development. However, the impact of social enterprise in other EU economies, indicates that it is possible for social enterprise in Ireland to play a central part in regenerating local economies.

Finally, by leaving economic development to the private sector, the potential for democratising small business development will be lost and with it the potential to contribute to a more equal and socially just Ireland, where people and their communities take precedence over profit and greed.

Case Study 4.

Galway

In response to difficulties that Travellers have experienced in securing an income from waste management activities, Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) are developing a social enterprise strategy.

GTM has formed a Traveller Economic Development Unit (TEDU) to establish a number of social enterprises. TEDU has assisted seven Traveller men to form the Galway Recycling Coop (GRC). They are the owners. By recycling waste copper, it provides an income for its members and ensures that other Travellers can secure a higher price for waste copper and other precious metals than from scrap metal merchants.

West Coast Insulation, an energy insulation project is another social enterprise being formed.



International Report from

Palestine

INTRODUCTION

Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin succeeded in visiting the Gaza Strip in Palestine recently and the issues involved are rarely off the front pages. But you rarely if ever hear about it from a community viewpoint.

'Changing Ireland' reporter and community worker Gearóid Fitzgibbon recently returned after three months as a human rights observer in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (with EAPPI*). There he got unexpected lessons in community work as a form of peaceful resistance.

Gearóid went as a volunteer with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), a secular Human Rights programme set up in 2002 by the World Council of Churches.

Community Work as resistance



HOW YOU CAN HELP

The work to renovate and equip Heb 2 Community Centre is ongoing. Anyone who would like to donate and transfer money directly to the Villages Group, an Israeli-Palestinian NGO active in the Hebron area.

Visitors are also always welcome, accommodation can be arranged with families and contacts in Hebron.

Volunteers are also needed for editing and training, fundraising and networking skills.

For any assistance/suggestions, contact Gearoid. E: fitzgibbong@gmail.com
M: 0857409023.

"We gave cameras to people initially to document their suffering and harassment... But of course people also filmed birthdays, weddings, and celebrations!"

Gearóid Fitzgibbon reports from Hebron

If you think of Israel/Palestine, your first image may not be of a Community Centre in the heart of the occupation, jointly funded and run by a group of Israelis and Palestinians.

Mich'ael Zupraner is a Harvard graduate and Israeli documentary maker. For nearly 2 years he has shared his skills in Hebron with other Palestinians and Israelis to oppose the occupation. Here, in the middle of Hebron, with its checkpoints, detentions, house searches and army patrols, Mich'ael, and local Hebronite, Issa Amro, a lecturer in Electrical Engineering, have worked to develop an innovative community project right next to an Israeli settlement. They and a group of committed Palestinian and Israeli nonviolent activists set up a community centre and community television station (www.heb2.tv) in an 'ordinary' house in Tel Rumeida, in Hebron, that Israeli settlers were planning to take over.

According to Mich'ael "The principal idea is to empower members of community to communicate outwards. This part of directly occupied Hebron (H2), is under political, economic and cultural closure and few people on the outside get to see or hear what is happening here."

As someone with a background as a volunteer and latterly paid community worker in Ireland, the centre in Tel Rumeida is an inspiration. The activists are training and empowering the community of Tel Rumeida, how to resist the occupation nonviolently,

and deal with the intimidation of the soldiers and armed settlers. If the residents respond aggressively it only serves as an excuse for further harassment. The Heb 2 Community House offers training in nonviolence, video editing, and foreign languages to young and old members of the local community.

JUST BEING THERE IS RESISTING

The very existence of the Heb 2 Community House, in itself, is an achievement. Located at a strategic point, near one of the Israeli settlements, in a Palestinian neighbourhood, the house was occupied by the Israeli army in 2001, at beginning of 2nd Intifada, or uprising. The owner, originally from Jerusalem, was told that he would lose his Jerusalem residency if he stayed. When the army finally left in 2005, the house lay in ruins.

In 2007, local activist Issa Amro, concerned that a group of settlers would take over the house, met the owner, and offered to rent the house, and keep it from being occupied. With support from Israeli Human Rights organisations (B'Tselem and the Israeli Council Against House Demolitions – one of the organisations funded by Irish Aid), the activists managed to get the tenancy recognised in the Israeli courts. The settlers tried to scare them off. The army even detained Issa saying he wasn't allowed to be there, despite having all



International Report

the correct legal papers.

Eventually, when they finally managed to move in, they found themselves under constant attack by the settlers. The would-be community house had to be monitored 24 hours per day, to prevent it being destroyed or burned. Settlers, armed with M16s, had to be physically blocked by the local Palestinians, supported by Israeli activists, armed only with cameras. With a grant from an Israeli NGO, a group of Israelis and Palestinians renovated the house. It is only in the last 18 months, that the attacks have decreased to the level of verbal argument.

FROM DERELICT HOUSE TO COMMUNITY CENTRE

With the house now becoming a more secure base, those involved began to discuss how to use it. According to Issa, from the very beginning the idea was to have a space open to all the community. Although the House now has huge support from the community, at the beginning every one said that it was impossible. People felt powerless to change the nature of the occupation, and thought that the Israeli army would punish them more because of it.

Within a short time of my arriving in Hebron in August 2009, it was clear to me that something very innovative and brave was going on here. Issa asked me to help out and over the next 2 months, and together with another human rights volunteer (an American Jewish man originally from New York) we ran English classes with the local children there. As part of this, we set up an exchange with Villiers School in Limerick City, and the young students recorded a tour of their area in English. (see 'teamhebron' videos on youtube). Since then, the young people I taught have gone on to start a film and video class with documentary maker Mich'ael.

COUNTERING MAINSTREAM MEDIA DISTORTION

Speaking to Mich'ael, I am surprised to discover that he does not see himself as an activist: "I am NOT an activist. The occupation is the defining circumstance of Israelis and Palestinians' lives. I am lucky that I have the possibility to do something practical to directly affect the situation."

Mich'ael is highly critical of what he calls the virtualisation of the conflict, in a way that could apply to conflicts in Ireland also: "There is too much symbolic action in the West Bank, and a virtualisation of the conflict takes place. The media coverage overwhelms what is actually happening on the ground. It's become a sort of public relations war. You are merely producing images for the media. It becomes all about spokespersonship and not the reality."



The Heb 2 Community House, Mich'ael stressed, was not about making vain symbolic gestures: "Most video activism is just videoing of demonstrations. This project isn't a demonstration, or a symbolic act, like holding up a sign. What we're doing in Tel Rumeida isn't a photo op. Here in Tel Rumeida, we are giving concrete skills to the community, communication skills, videoing skills etc."

ARABS AND JEWS CELEBRATE COMMUNITY WORK

New Year's Eve 2009. Tel Rumeida, Hebron. Instead of the usual deathly silence, and climate of fear which pervades the neighbourhood, the cold air is set alight by the sound of music and dance in the garden in front of the Heb 2 Community House. A group of former Israeli soldiers are dancing arm in arm with the local Palestinian activists. The Israelis, founder members of Breaking The Silence, (a group of ex-soldiers who have collected testimonies on the behaviour of the Israeli Army in the West Bank) have been invited to celebrate the first year in existence of Heb 2 Community House. A P.A. system has been set up, and Issa Amro calls over the microphone, and one by one, Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals, come and accept a small gift of thanks from the community. There must be over 100 people here tonight, Palestinians, Israelis, and Internationals, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and nonbeliever. When peace at last is created in this beautiful land, these people here will be among its heros. But how long more will they have to travel? As with South Africa, international solidarity with the peace makers is crucial. Find a way, any way you can, to contribute to the peacebuilding of these people.

* To volunteer visit www.eappi.org OR to find out more, contact Gearoid. E: fitzgibbong@gmail.com M: 0857409023.

SHOOTING BACK — A CAMERA DISTRIBUTION PROJECT

Issa Amro and Mich'ael Zupraner founded the ground-breaking camera distribution project in Hebron. In March 2007, Mich'ael and Issa gave out cameras to neighbours in Tel Rumeida. The first cameras were purchased by an Israeli group called Children of Abraham. This group asked Mich'ael to buy cameras, and come and train people to use them. "We gave cameras to people initially to document their suffering, and harassment by settlers or soldiers. But of course, people also filmed birthdays, weddings, and celebrations!" Now, there are dozens of cameras in Hebron.

According to Issa: "These cameras are a tool to document the human rights abuses and improve people's security and safety. At the same time, they allow the Palestinians here to express how they live."

Volunteers' dismay over letter

Voluntary chairpersons of CDPs have complained about a letter they received in March from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The letter advised voluntary management to work their staff harder to ensure there was no delay in setting up the new Local and Community Development Programme.

There was an angry reaction to the letter which said that "staff of some CDPs" were not putting enough time into "service delivery/support for the local community" and that some were slow in preparing workplans required to move along the process of integration into the new LCDP.

Principal officer, Clodagh McDonnell has informed us that it is important to point out why the letter had to be sent. "There was a concern in the Department, based on events and contacts with the sector, that the end-March deadline, agreed to by CDPs in the Form of Agreement issued in December, would not be met. It was important to notify Chairs of those concerns, the basis for those concerns, and to emphasise the importance of the deadline in terms of further funding."

"The Department's letter also acknowledged that the kind of issues raised, which have to do with issues like future structures and assets, must be addressed. However, the key message was that priority had to be given to ensuring agreement on what services were to be delivered during 2010 and securing the necessary funding for those services under the new Programme. Once workplans were agreed, the other issues could then be dealt with.

Clodagh said the letter repeated the main message given "consistently since November 2009" when the new Programme was announced and she also "emphasised that any upset or annoyance caused to the CDP Boards or their Teams by the Department's letter, while wholly unintended, is nevertheless greatly regretted. It is Departmental policy to treat all customers with the utmost respect at all times."

NCDF mandate poll

The NCDF met on March 30th and welcomed the fact that their call for confirmation from all CDPs that the NCDF "has a mandate to challenge the proposed merging of CDPs and the Partnership companies in its current format" was a success.

"No project responded in the negative. The National Community Development Forum has accepted this as confirmation that all projects support the campaign," said Larry McCarthy, chairperson.

The NCDF keeps projects updated through regional structures.

Dublin Inner City Partnership loses funding



Community organisations in Dublin's inner city and SIPTU have called on Minister Pat Carey to prevent the closure of the Dublin Inner City Partnership (DICP).

The board of Pobal intends to end the present contract with the DICP on 30th May 2010.

"A gross injustice is being perpetrated here. There is no justification to close the DICP," said SIPTU in a statement.

The Dublin Inner City Partnership (DICP) has been tackling long-term unemployment and acute poverty in the inner city for close to 20 years and is well regarded for its work.

The project employs four core staff and is involved in the management of a further 16.

A number of networks representing hundreds of organisations across the city called for an about-turn and the DICP board is appealing Pobal's decision, despite the resignations of three board members, including the chairperson.

The ending of the contract follows an audit by Pobal, which found that salaries were being paid "beyond permitted limits", among other discrepancies. Pobal said it was "completely unacceptable."

Local community groups are meanwhile left in the lurch. In a statement, Pobal said it will enter into direct funding agreements with the community groups and organisations previously funded through DICP in order to maintain support to communities.

The board members to resign were Professor Joyce O'Connor, Cllr. Mannix Flynn (an independent), ICTU rep Denis Calnan and Dr Noel O'Connor of the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Separately to the Pobal audit, the number of Partnership companies nationally has been reduced in recent years as part of the 'Cohesion' process, or streamlining, that has led to the setting up of the LCDP.

DICP's director David Connolly wrote last year in this magazine as President of SIPTU's Community Branch. Ref: <http://www.changingireland.ie/Issue29.pdf> (page 12, 'Community workers mood is resolute').

11 projects retain independent status

Eleven projects funded by the Department with a special focus on communities will continue to provide support under the LCDP.

In a letter to such groups, the Department said: "In certain projects and groups, which are not Community Development Projects, but address either an important national issue and/or address a significant local issue in a particularly effective and innovative way (they) will continue to receive funding, subject to terms and conditions, under the new Programme, without the requirement to align with a local development company."

They are: Pavee Point, Women's Aid, An Cosán/ Shanty, Cherry Orchard Equine Centre, the Community & Family Training Agency (CAFTA), the Community After Schools Project, DESSA, and the Dublin Institute of Technology, all based in Dublin, as well as the Men's Development Network based in Waterford, the Cork Social and Health Project which works in Counties Cork and Kerry and the National Traveller Women's Forum based in Galway.

Community reps meet Atlantic Philanthropies

National community representatives met with Atlantic Philanthropies in February to outline concerns they had that philanthropic funds were, as they saw it, being used indirectly to undermine and destroy "Ireland's community infrastructure."

The meeting was sought by the National Community Development Forum and the Community Worker's Co-op.

Atlantic Philanthropies funds the Centre for Effective Services (CES) which is credited with proposing the model for the new LCDP. A model critics say is very flawed.

Following the meeting, the CWC issued a statement saying Atlantic "informed us that they do not fund the community development aspect of CES - their funding arrangement is in relation with the Children's Services part of CES - which they vigorously defended. They believe we have a responsibility to disseminate this information."

The community reps updated Atlantic about their concerns for future Community Development in Ireland.

Allow the jobless work in communities and pay them! - Minister Ó Cuív promises “fast and radical” changes



By Allen Meagher

Minister Éamon Ó Cuív will shake up the old Department of Social and Family Affairs – now called the Department of Social Protection – in ways that he is looking forward to.

Not everyone is going to be pleased. He plans to crackdown on social welfare fraud, but crucially he has the agreement of the Taoiseach to be allowed spend any such “savings” on new initiatives.

One of his ideas is to extend the Community Employment Scheme and the Community Services Programme (CSP).

“Yes, absolutely,” he said.

He has always argued that social welfare and schemes to take people off the dole should be under the one Departmental roof and now he’s in a position to help the majority receiving welfare who he says “are very unhappy to be at home doing nothing and who would be happier out working in the community.”

Currently, however, there are a mere 2,700 people employed on CSP work while over 430,000 are unemployed.

Nonetheless, the CSP is crucial he says in offering

opportunities to people who would otherwise be very unlikely to find any kind of work, the long-term unemployed and others facing social challenges who “are not capable of sustaining gainful employment.”

“If you even took ten or twenty thousand off the unemployment figure of the long-term unemployed, you’d make a significant dent and we’d hope one thing would feed into the other.”

Minister Ó Cuív also plans to tackle contradictory policies that make life more difficult than necessary for unemployed people:

“National policies that say that if you’re unemployed, you must be available for work but you mustn’t work (eg voluntary work) are contradictory. I’ve long been very opposed to that attitude to unemployed people. I believe we must give them the legal opportunity to work, to make their contribution.

“One of the ideas I put forward last year was that if I had a registered community group, not only could an unemployed person go work for you for all the week, for free if he wanted, but that you could pay him a modest amount of money and it wouldn’t interfere with the social welfare payment, because there’d be no cost to the State.

‘Changing Ireland’ has benefitted from the voluntary work of one man laid off from a Dell-related company last year. We put it to Minister Ó Cuív. Our volunteer, Joe X, has been cautious about admitting in the social welfare office that he works a day a week for us.

“I think it would be absolutely wrong to discourage people from getting involved in community activity and that we’re saying ‘Sit at home and be afraid to admit you’re involved in community activity.’

He continued, “I also feel that if communities, out of their own resources can raise modest money to pay a little bit of an income, we should take a positive view of that. It would be low maintenance, low structure and so on. Obviously, we’d need to set structures in place so that we could be clear in what was happening. But we need to change our total mindset towards unemployment.

“We need to recognise that we have people who are socially at a disadvantage because they’re not allowed work, but who feel that if they could make a contribution it would be good for their personal esteem and dignity and mental agility.”

The Minister hopes to make the changes within a year: “It will be radical and it will be fast,” he promised.

“I intend making a radical difference here in favour of facilitating participation by volunteers in community activities and so on.

“We have a huge unemployment crisis, but we have a huge resource on our hands as well. All these unemployed people are a resource that this nation needs. I’ll give an example. We’ve spent a millions on fantastic sports facilities and community halls. A lot of these aren’t open except for three or four hours a day. Why not open them all for longer by employing people who are now on unemployment assistance or jobseekers benefit?”

Let Community Volunteers out of the closet!

OPINION: Gearóid FitzGibbon

With all the talk in recent years about social capital, and with the much trumpeted Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, it is astonishing that the Government has not made more practical moves to encourage and reward community volunteers.

Hundreds of thousands of people are now signing on, yet Social Welfare still continues to frown at people volunteering, when they should be “genuinely available for work.”

Anyone giving time to community, sports or other voluntary organisations is genuinely contributing to



society.

Social Welfare needs to open its eyes and ears. Social Welfare should be rewarding these people, and its high time also that a whole range of tax incentives were introduced to encourage such efforts.

WORK PLACEMENTS

Meanwhile, community groups and organisations should take advantage of the opportunities for extra

staffing capacity offered by the FAS Work Placement Programme.

This programme allows private companies and NGOs take on staff for up to nine months. Placement staff do not have to be graduates. The application procedure is astonishingly simple.

Fill out the form from the FAS website and within three weeks you can have an extra pair of hands. Payment is also straightforward as participants continue to be paid by social welfare. The benefit for participants is that of experience. FAS will review progress of the placement twice during the 9 months. During the placement, participants have their social welfare payments made directly to their bank accounts.

W: www.fas.ie/en/WPP/

Editor’s note: The company Gearóid works for recently joined the FAS Work Placement Programme.

Youth Workers' New Online Forum



The very first online discussion website for youthworkers in Ireland is a year old and now has 300 members.

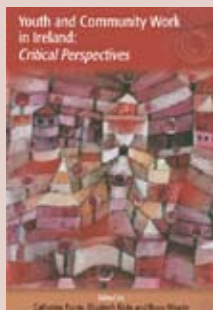
www.youthworkforum.ie provides an online meeting place for youth work discussions.

The site is not connected to any youth organisation and is run by youth workers for youth workers. It is intended as a resource for anyone who is working with young people in Ireland.

"The site brings members the latest in youth work news, training, funding and employment opportunities. It is full of features such as a video directory, links directory and every member can create their own blog page or upload photos to their own gallery," says the Youth Work Forum. "Members can set up their own social group which enables groups of people to work online together."

Joining the forum is free and there are no charges.

New Journal For Youth And Community Work



A newly published journal maps out new thinking on youthwork in Ireland.

'Youth and Community Work in Ireland: Critical Perspectives' stands out for being the only book that covers the theory and practice of youth and community work in Ireland.

The authors describe it as "a key text for youth and community work degrees and related programmes in universities and colleges and a resource for youth and community work groups, organisations and projects."

To buy a copy – or indeed to ask your local library to purchase your copy – log onto the publishers website Blackhall Publishing.

The authors Catherine Forde, Rosie Meade and Elizabeth Kiely are lecturers in the Department of Applied Social Studies in UC

Guidebook For Immigrants



Minister of State Ciaran Cuffe, Josephine Abern and Logan Raju of the Integration and Social Inclusion Centre of Ireland and Councilor Eric Byre at the launch.

'At Home in Ireland – An Integration Guide for Immigrant Youth and Parents' is a recently-published, user-friendly guide for young people, their parents, families and friends who have immigrated to Ireland.

The guidebook is also intended as a resource for community, voluntary, statutory and non-statutory organisations working with immigrant youth and parents.

The 84-page guide was published late last year and can be downloaded from: www.integratingireland.ie

Women's Aid Embraces Twittering

The NGO sector is increasingly represented across the range of online social media.

With Women's Aid, you can now follow the organisation on Twitter (http://twitter.com/Womens_Aid) and facebook.

Meanwhile, Dublin Communitytv and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) are now on facebook, as is 'Changing Ireland'. The Hands Off Community Development page has grown now to over 900 members.

1600 Listen to Our "Savage" Poetry

Our video of John Carmody reading his poem 'Young Guns' has topped the charts on 'Changing Ireland's Youtube Channel, leaving 32 competing videos in its wake.

Over 1600 views is quite remarkable for a poem and fans from mucker00 to millertime236 have commented: "Savage... saying it as it is... a great poem... nice 1... wise man... very moving... love this poem, will always want to listen to it, it's a gem."

Check 'Changing Ireland's channel out on youtube!

CHANGING IRELAND WRITE FOR US!

'Changing Ireland' aims to report in plain English on stories of interest to volunteers aged 18 and upwards engaged in community work. It is the magazine of the Local and Community Development Programme and it promotes participation by readers and all the key stakeholders in its production.

Will you be paid, published and get to change Ireland? Read on!

- Steer clear of jargon where possible, give it to us straight, with quotes from the people you're writing about.
- Send in suggestions for stories or videos.
- If you want to write, try 200 or 400 words for starters.
- If you're a volunteer, your chances of being published are greater than if you're a paid worker.
- We pay a fee per story, photo or video published that can go to you or your project.
- We may provide training. Ideal candidates should be passionate about seeing community work, issues or proven solutions highlighted.

- You might have some experience with the media, but it's not essential.
- Everyone needs to start somewhere! Ask Martine Brennan who started with us is now a published author.
- Martine, during her years writing for us, wrote some empowering stories, getting her information from ordinary people.
- You can do the same. Look at work carried out by Partnership companies or CDPs in your area. How is it hitting the mark, making a difference?
- Original ideas welcome.
- Talk to the editor. Details on page 2.
- While it's easier for us to get the official, spell-checked views of senior staff or elected public representatives, 'Changing Ireland' has to keep this magazine grounded. Having an office in a once-derelict, burnt-out bungalow that was restored and is in the heart of a local authority housing estate in Limerick must mean something for readers.

Hands Up!

- A HANDY way to get through meetings more quickly

Should the Cabinet look at this? Should your community group or board? With more meetings and less time, here's ways to get through committee meetings more effectively!

Advisory note: Boards that take themselves seriously, and particularly large boards, should be the first to consider adopting 'hand-signals' in committee meetings. Don't be put off by the fact that it seems like fun or because one person objects. With practice and patience, this can be a winning formula.

The top 3 time-saving hand-signals:

1. The "I Agree / Good Idea" hand-roll.
2. The "Hurry Up!" hand signal gets a message across without interrupting the speaker. Best directed at the chairperson if the speaker isn't facing your way.
3. "I've a Direct Reply".

Note: The character depicted in this photoplay is fictitious and any similarity to actual living persons is purely coincidental.



This is a really useful signal which can save hours of repetitive agreement if used frequently.



If you want to make a direct reply to the current speaker you can use this to jump the cue – otherwise by the time it is your turn the discussion will probably have moved on. Should only be used when necessary.



A short point of information. Eg "The bus actually leaves at 8, not at 9." The facilitator/chairperson will usually interrupt the current speaker to allow you speak. A technical point should never be an opinion and should only be used when strictly necessary.



If you think the discussion is going around in circles and that consensus has been reached.

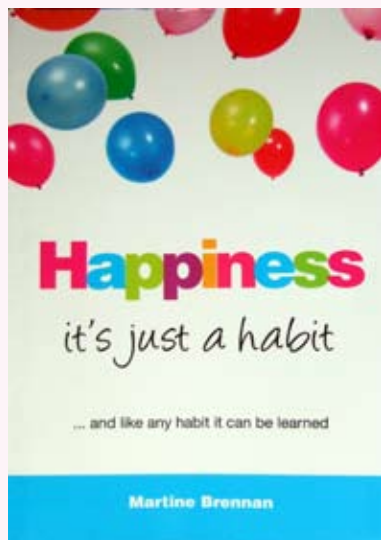


Request for a translation.



The discussion would then restart from the basis of your objections. Almost never used.

Happiness, it's just a habit!



says Martine Brennan

'Changing Ireland' received surprise post recently when a former reporter for this magazine, Martine Brennan, sent us a copy of her first book. 'Happiness – it's just a habit!' is a simple, no-nonsense and fun book that you could fit into your back pocket and which, if you follow daily advice for 30 days, really can prove to you that happiness is something you just need to make a habit of.

The 'Changing Ireland' editor is currently on Day 6 and making great progress.

Martine's book makes simple requests such as – make a list of all the things you've done that you're proud of.

Day 21 will see you buy a small gift or flowers for someone you like. How about picking wild flowers instead!

The book encourages people to volunteer, but not to be doorstep: Day 24 teaches assertiveness, so if someone has been rude to you, you're asked to write a polite, concise letter of complaint.

Where did the happy book come from?

Well, five years ago Martine's life was turned upside down when she lost someone very dear to her. She was a life coach herself, but this didn't stop her being heartbroken. Someone suggested that to help her along she should write out all the things that made her happy. The notes became a book and the book is changing lives.

Said Martine: "One reader, Ann, told me she took her copy home and it disappeared. Her husband took it and said she couldn't have it back until he'd completed his 30 days."

Martine has thanked us for giving her a start in writing. In fairness, her human interest stories remain among the strongest we have published in our nine years. She was the first person in Ireland to interview people with physical disabilities about a then taboo subject, their sex lives.

She is welcome back anytime, although she does seem happy where she is!

More info: Martine once worked and volunteered with Tralee Women's Resource Centre. She is now a qualified counsellor and psychotherapist and lives in Tralee with her husband and two of her daughters. Her book costs €6.99 plus post&packing and can be ordered through her website: www.happinessitsjustahabit.com/

You can follow Martine on Facebook at: Happiness it's just a habit

'Happe House' run solely by volunteers

In the next issue, we'll be reporting from the 'Happe House' in Kilkenny where for nearly ten years volunteers have managed to run a Community Centre in the heart of Hebron Park housing estate, without employing anyone.



It's a prospect that – with funding to communities being pulled – voluntary groups around the country are being pushed to consider.

The aptly named 'Happe House' is named after the late Bill Happe, one of the founder volunteers, and consists of two council houses that were knocked together.

In May of last year, the Centre was extended and it now caters for everything from courses in drug awareness and road safety to model car building. There is also a playschool and a pennybank.

VEC tutor Ronnie Balfe says there's something "special" about the Centre that he has not encountered before: "The quality of the Community Development they do there is excellent."

He says there is a different feel to the place, which he puts down to the volunteers' enthusiasm and the fact that they are all from Hebron.

"Getting funding to employ staff can be a mixed blessing, it isn't unequivocally something that is a help," he says.

While acknowledging that paid employees help a project to be sustainable, Ronnie takes his hat off to the folks in Hebron, two or three of whom volunteer "almost full-time".

Quite a commitment.

Once they continue to cover operating costs – which they do by renting the Centre's space out to groups and by racing model cars – they're happy. Or should that be Happe!

To find out more, in particular about the model car building youth project as an approach to preventing anti-social behaviour, watch out for our Summer edition.

Irish kids happier

An in-depth study conducted in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales showed that children in Ireland have a healthier and happier childhood.

The report covers issues such as health, symptoms, well-being, eating patterns, physical activity, substance use, family and peer relationships and school life.

'Young People's Health in Great Britain and Ireland' showed that Irish children are more likely than their British counterparts to report high life satisfaction, and less likely to report feeling low or having poor body image.

Irish children are more likely to engage in physical activity. They are also most likely to live with both

parents and in bigger households, to be able to talk to their fathers about things that bother them and to spend time with friends after school.

"This report suggests that it is important not just to borrow unquestioningly from UK policy and practice when we are trying to improve child health," said Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn of the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway, one of the authors.

Copies of the report are available if you email a request to: hbcs@nuigalway.ie

Hugger Mugger!

A pickpocket in Limerick has adopted a new approach.

She hugs people.

Before you know what's going on, she's picked your pocket too.

The story was reported in the Limerick Leader and goes to show that crime in Limerick can involve some warmth.

Incidentally, on a truly happy note, crime in the Mid-West's capital is down. The number of murders halved between 2008 and 2009 (down from six to three). As the Mayor said, it was "still three too many" but he nonetheless welcomed the trend. The number of reported murder threats was down from 57 to 28.

For 2 out of 3 other offences, the numbers are also down.

But don't be too quick to take a hug from a stranger if you visit Limerick City.