

# CHANGING IRELAND

SPRING 2012

Issue 38

The National Magazine of the Local and Community Development Programme  
[www.changingireland.ie](http://www.changingireland.ie) / [www.changingireland.blogspot.com](http://www.changingireland.blogspot.com)

€2.25



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ISSN 1649-5985



9 771649 598005



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**LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

# Mind your tongue, President warns community sector leaders

*Anna Visser and President Michael D Higgins at the Advocacy Initiative conference.*



President Michael D. Higgins has criticised the language of service-delivery, saying he deplored the use of expressions such as “service users” and “clients” to describe people who interact with community and voluntary sector organisations.

He raised what he termed “serious and provocative” issues about the language used by people in civil society organisations. He said this wasn’t just a problem in Ireland but across Europe.

“I noticed there isn’t a substantial difference between the language of the state, the language of the bureaucracy and the language of the voluntary

sector.”

He said he kept searching for the word “citizen” when reading press releases from the Sector, but instead he encountered references to “service users” and “clients” and “client bases”.

“This sets off a certain alert in my own mind. Is the language doing the same damage in all of the sectors, and is it not one of the functions of critical thinking to try to find an appropriate language to deal with the purposes which one is pursuing?”

Addressing 100 organisation chiefs in Dublin at an ‘Advocacy Initiative’ conference on February 13th, he urged the Sector to adopt a “language of the heart

and not of the head” when referring to people who use services.

He said there should be a “language of citizenship” rather than one of bureaucracy. “That in turn is based on a philosophical assumption about the worth of the person you are dealing with.”

He remarked that a time of cutbacks is “also a time for recasting everything about language (and) structure.”

Recommending that people read a paper by Catherine McGuinness about the balance of interests between the State, the voluntary sector and civil society, the President also spoke about crumbling confidence in

statehood across Europe.

“Other options are being developed, radical options suggesting we can begin all over again in a communitarian idealistic way, with other options saying there are different versions of civil society.”

It was in this “strange” atmosphere he said that community and voluntary organisations now operated.

“It is a difficult time, but it’s a time we’ve got to get past. We’ve got to stress what possibilities are there. There are real possibilities in sharp thinking, in sharing information, in focusing, in strategy.”

## COMMENTARY

### *The strange speech the President didn’t deliver*

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

President Higgins, in his address on February 13th, told community and voluntary sector leaders it was “important to turn the language around.”

He led by example.

After acknowledging that a “fairly substantial speech” had been prepared for him, President Higgins proceeded to speak off the cuff completely.

Had he gone with the prepared speech, it included some of the very terms he criticised – “client-base” and “service-users” (used four times).

For example, the audience was due to hear President Higgins talk of the importance to “maximise the value that is being

delivered to the service user” and this is what the President’s website ([www.president.ie](http://www.president.ie)) still states he said.

Another sentence read: “At the best of times, it’s not easy in the voluntary and community sector to maintain one’s sense of enthusiasm and energy.”

That’s hardly the stuff of encouragement and is in contrast to the enthusiasm you’ll meet up and down the country in community settings even with recession and cuts.

I’m glad President Higgins put the speech aside because what he instead chose to say was important, it resonates and his words were encouraging.

It might not make national headlines again (apart from here) but if community workers and



*President Higgins in St. Munchin’s Community Centre, a project supported by the LCDP. The President’s speech-writer(s) could do with a day in a place like St. Munchin’s in Allen Meagher’s opinion.*

voluntary sector leaders were to take what he said onboard, their action could begin to mould new attitudes towards people experiencing poverty today.

In terms of putting the record straight, I suggest the President’s website be amended to carry the actual words he spoke and if it

helps cut down on duplication, we’ve most of it typed up already.

I say that because the phrase “avoiding duplication” was much emphasised, nicely echoing Government policy for a decade, in the speech the President was expected to deliver but didn’t.

Call us, we’ll email on the speech. In the meantime, citizens can view a video-recording of the delivery online at: <http://bit.ly/A3RteW>

PS

The President’s speech-writers could consider spending a day in St. Munchin’s Community Centre in Limerick, the first place the President visited after his inauguration. They’d never again write a sentence running down interest in community development.



# Calling someone a “client” is disempowering

## Sinead Pentony, TASC

The word “client” is disempowering, while calling someone a “customer” implies they have a choice, said Sinead Pentony, head of policy at TASC, a think-tank on economic inequality.

Ms Pentony was present at the Advocacy Initiative conference when President Michael D Higgins made his speech about language usage.

“He raised important questions and it was an affirmation of the work of the Community and Voluntary Sector.

“If you think of people as clients or customers, it implies they have a choice which you don’t if you’re in need of, for example, unemployment assistance. Community work involves advocating on behalf of the voiceless.”

“Public services are there for citizens and a lot of health professionals would be appalled to think of their patients as “customers” and people already pay for these services through taxes.

“Using the word “client” is disempowering. Telling someone they’re a client doesn’t really give that person the sense that they should have any input into the design or delivery of the service they’re using.

“It isn’t that hard to know what language to use. Call people what they are! A man, a woman, for instance,” suggested Ms Pentony.

In February, Ms Pentony was one of the guest speakers at an event organised by LCDP company, Wexford Local Development, where she said the



cuts to community development initiatives had undermined efforts to develop participative structures. She also spoke of the need to strengthen civil society, active citizenship and economic citizenship  
[www.tascnet.ie](http://www.tascnet.ie)

Sinead Pentony,  
TASC

## WHAT IS ‘CHANGING IRELAND’ MAGAZINE ?

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THE NATIONAL MAGAZINE OF THE LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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‘Changing Ireland’ magazine is produced by not-for-profit Changing Ireland Community Media Ltd through funding from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to promote the work of the Local and Community Development Programme.



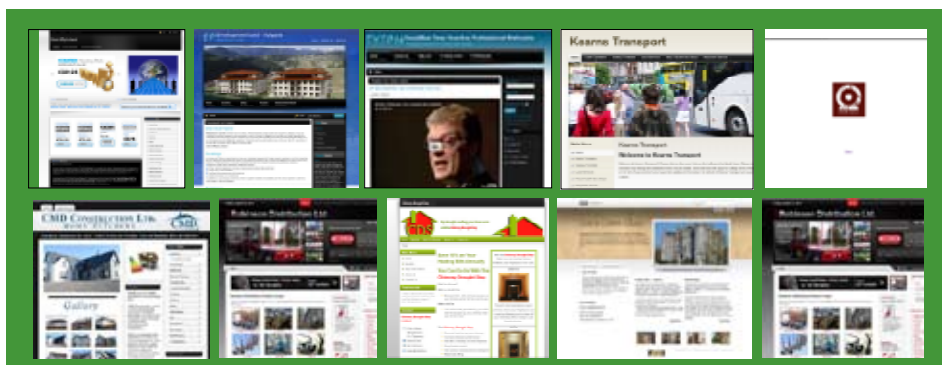
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# I'M NOT ON A SHOPPING TRIP, I'M A CITIZEN



**D**ear readers – let's hear from you on this subject and no "customer complaints" please!

President Michael D. Higgins has walked into the room once noisily occupied

by the forces for democracy, socialism and religion (and to a degree, capitalism) to speak the language of equality, hope, change and collective action.

Notwithstanding the Government's long-term efforts to reduce unemployment, tackle poverty and overcome economic woes, President Higgins is the only high profile person talking about personal attitude, our purpose as members of society, our role as citizens, and he's one of the few talking about inequality.

It's as if he's strolled into a room packed with party-goers to say the drink is about to run out, but they will feel even happier on the dry once they apply themselves and if they tend to those who got drunk and collapsed and let in those who were locked outside all the while.

Obviously, many would be deaf perhaps even hostile to his announcements, but those locked out and the ones lying in a

heap on the floor would be glad someone spoke for them.

Back in the real world, anyone who ends up in A&E from alcohol poisoning is viewed by the system as a "customer" rather than "patient".

It's the same with Revenue – we're "customers."

And – as President Higgins highlighted recently – Community and Voluntary Sector organisations regularly label people "clients", "service-users" or part of the "client-base."

Yes, this is a language of rights, entitlements and responsibilities – customers do have rights, but they also must pay individually; it's not for others to share the bill as happens among citizens.

It is a language of commerce, but not of participation, of inclusion. It's the language of service-delivery, not the language of community development.

The terms have become so widely used that President Higgins' own speech-maker had included some of the disagreeable words in the speech he was expected to make.

President Higgins must have run his eye over the paper on his way to the

'Advocacy Initiative' event and seen red.

A very small percentage of the websites we encounter are written in the language of funding applications and are next-to-useless to local residents/members of the community (and not every company funded through the Programme whose work we promote, the LCDP, is immune from this either). Everything published by a community organisation should have as its first audience the citizens it engages with.

At the same time, radiation-level exposure to product and service-marketing has many people thinking of themselves as consumers rather than citizens.

The President would like people to change their self-perception and he's basically asked organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector to play their part by setting the funding lingo aside and by addressing people as people.

Lest we end up like America, where half the prisons are privately operated and occupied by "prison law clients" who contribute to company profits by paying exorbitant charges for making phone calls home.

So much for free speech!

Front cover caricature by the highly recommended MARK HENG | [www.markheng.com](http://www.markheng.com) | Mobile: 086 2358463

## Published By:

'Changing Ireland' is the national magazine of the Local and Community Development Programme and is managed and published by Changing Ireland Community Media Ltd. through funding from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

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

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**Reporting:** Articles are also written by community development workers and volunteers who have an interest in reporting.

## Packing and Distribution:

Speedpak, Dublin, an award-winning social enterprise.

## Design and Print by:

The Print Factory, Five Alley, Birr, Co. Offaly

## Thanks To . . .

'Changing Ireland' thanks everyone involved in the production of Issue 38.

## Disclaimer

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# EU year for active aging



European Year for **Active Ageing**  
and **Solidarity between Generations** 2012



## Intergenerational work destroys old stereotypes

BY CONOR HOGAN

“**Y**oung people and older people are probably the two most discriminated-against demographics in society. They are also probably the most discriminating in terms of ageism,” says community worker Lynda Wakefield.

She notes that while it is normal to have youth centres and retirement homes, common areas where they both can mix are a rarer thing altogether. “We don’t make it easy for the two to mix,” she says, “so when we do, we need to make it meaningful.”

Having both age groups interact with each other, therefore, can be a very valuable experience, and in her capacity with Mahon CDP in Cork, Lynda has organised several intergenerational groups.

“Before we get a group together,” she says, “we meet the participants beforehand. We ask both the young and older people their opinions about both age groups, getting positive and negative perceptions. It highlights the stereotypes both generations have about each other, and the intergenerational groups then challenge those.”

The participants are always reluctant to have their preconceptions known by the other group, as they realise how wrong their stereotype had been. One of the activities organised was a digital photography course which was a resounding success.

“Young people helped the older people to use the technology, while the older people taught the young people about the history of the area, and brought context to their photographs,” Lynda says.

There was an exhibition in the city library afterwards, and one of the young people was delighted to have one of their photographs purchased. An intergenerational



*Community Development Worker for Older People Lynda Wakefield with Sean Daly, participant of Mahon CDP intergenerational digital photography project.*

photography club has since been set up.

### **SOLIDARITY BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS**

**M**any other activities like these are taking place across the country. They are being especially promoted thanks to it being the EU Year of Active Ageing (and Solidarity Between The Generations) and one is the already successful ‘Log On Learn’ Programme.

Computers and the Internet in general play an integral role in

modern life, be it for shopping, banking or gathering news and information. Only 19% of Irish people between 65 and 74 used the Internet at all in 2011, and the ‘widening of the digital divide’ means that older people are often excluded from many aspects of modern life.

The idea of the ‘Log On Learn’ Programme allows for older people to learn basic IT skills and how to use the Internet over eight one-on-one modules. Tying in with the aim of promoting solidarity between generations, their tutors are Transition Year students, while

the one-on-one nature of the lessons ensures that the older person can learn what they want and at their own pace.

### **2000 PEOPLE TRAINED IN 180 SCHOOLS**

**A**pproximately 2,000 older people have been taught in 180 schools since the programme was launched by then Minister Marie Hootor in 2008 and it is hoped that there will be a 50% expansion by the end of the 2012.

When it comes to intergenerational practice, Lynda found guidelines set by the Beth Johnson Foundation in the UK were most helpful. She says it’s important to have a gender balance in the intergenerational groups.

There were some challenges, however. “The older people had a lot of free time in the day,” she says, “while the younger people were at school in the day and free at night. It was hard to find a compatible time, but we ended up meeting up at teatime, getting food in for the group.”

Other activities include intergenerational table quizzes. “Two young and two older people are put on each team,” Lynda says, “and both groups are always amazed at the level of knowledge of the other. In a short period of time a rapport gets built up. We also have intergenerational walks, while every Valentine’s Day the group organises a meal for older people, where the boys cook and the girls serve the food, which is really appreciated.”

And appreciation can make a day or even change a life.

**More info: [logonlearn.ie](http://logonlearn.ie) and  
[www.centreforip.org.uk/](http://www.centreforip.org.uk/)  
(the Beth Johnson Foundation).  
Contact Lynda Wakefield  
on 021-4359070**

## Clifden's Mary Kirby – 30 years volunteering



FORUM Connemara board member Mary Kirby has given 30 years of her life to volunteering. She lives in Clifden which celebrates its 200th anniversary this year.

### BY ROBERT MCNAMARA

Cancer survivor, volunteer and community organiser. There are many things that exemplify Mary Kirby of Clifden, Connemara, but it is her unwavering optimism that shines through the most.

"I always look at the glass as half-full, no matter what problems you have, whether it's medical or financial, if you really look for the positive side that will take you through. I have found that in my own life."

Mary has been involved in volunteer work for nigh on 30 years with the Irish Cancer Society, the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA) and FORUM Connemara Ltd. Her work has found her taking many roles, from counselling people who have cancer to working on building social housing in Letterfrack.

"It's amazing what a few people gathered together can do. You don't need a lot of money, sometimes it's just a few people together that can make the difference. It's great fun too, it's not all work."

Mary began her volunteering career by using her own experiences with breast cancer to offer support to cancer sufferers.

"I found it really rewarding to talk to people who were upset and feeling that they were going to die. To talk to them and tell them that I was there and I have recovered from this, I found that a very rewarding thing and that's what really started me in volunteering."

Mary was a founding member of ARC

(Area Renewal Company) in Clifden and the first involvement she had with FORUM Connemara came about from a necessity to renovate Clifden town hall where she is a committee member.

"I went to them for funding for a feasibility study and they supported us. We're getting work done on it at the moment and Forum Connemara have given us funding for it through the LEADER programme."

"Connemara is a big sprawling area where there isn't that many people. It's a disadvantaged area and FORUM knows the local needs on the ground," said Mary.

"Through FORUM, a lot of courses have been held here and many women's groups have formed and a lot of social outings have been arranged. It makes a big difference. It's more the men folk that need help here in Connemara, more so than the women. Older farmers that never married. FORUM are working to get them involved socially."

2012 is the 'European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations' and Mary sees the young volunteers doing great work.

"They are very sincere and very honest. If they are asked to do something they are only too happy to do it."

Mary believes the personal touch is the best way to attract new volunteers.

"One to one is the best way of all, you can be putting notices up until you are blue in the face but if you know a like-minded person, just go and ask them and most

people, if they have a few hours spare, don't disappoint."



When she gets a spare moment, Mary enjoys listening to Daniel O'Donnell and reading the paper at her home in Clifden.

The town celebrates its 200th anniversary this year and with optimistic and energetic people like Mary Kirby, it can look buoyantly forward to another 200.



Mary Kirby is one of seven community representatives on the management board of FORUM Connemara Ltd.

The company works with older people, families, young people, community groups, businesses and unemployed people in an area that stretches from Clifden to Oughterard, an area in Co. Galway known to officialdom as non-Gaeltacht Connemara.

The organisation was established in 1989 as a rural development partnership of voluntary, community and statutory bodies.

Its aims to engage in social and community development and to support enterprise and the LCDP is among the programmes it delivers.

W: [www.forumconnemara.ie](http://www.forumconnemara.ie)  
T: 095-41116.

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*"Sometimes it's just a few people together that can make the difference."*

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## Innovative micro enterprise project comes to Ireland



### Community groups giving would-be entrepreneurs a 2nd chance

Allen Meagher REPORTS

**F**ive community organisations have pulled together and pooled resources to bring a new entrepreneurial programme to Ireland, one which has proven a success in the USA in giving social enterprises a start.

**I**n January, the programme helped 20 business hopefuls in Wexford and Dublin who initially had loan applications refused.

The 'Entrepreneurs4change' programme which may be repeated in other parts of the country began when a community organisation in Co. Wexford and four others from Dublin, including a national Traveller organisation linked up.

The organisations are Dublin Simon Community, National Traveller MABS, Job Care, South West Wexford Community Development Programme and (Dublin's) South Inner City Community Development Association. The latter two are part of the LCDP.

Twenty people who had shown they were passionate about starting their own businesses or social enterprises and creating employment took part in the fortnight-long programme. They were supported to develop their business ideas into sustainable business plans and to create their own personal stories in a video format to be pitched at future lenders and supporters.

One unique feature of the programme is 'the Elevator Pitch' which gives an immediate

visual representation of the entrepreneur and his or her business idea.

The term comes from what you would say to a stranger if you were in an elevator and had up to 60 seconds to speak to them before they reach their floor. Participants practiced what they would say so they're able to reproduce it at any time.

One participant Grace O'Mahony from Wexford said it gave her "a vital insight" into what she needed to do to set up her own business.

Sharon Kennedy, SWWCDP manager said that given the hardship people have getting business loans, "It is exciting to be part of a new national programme to support people who have business ideas that may generate employment and profit."

She welcomed the Government's new Action Plan for Jobs 2012 and the development of a new Community Enterprise Development Programme through Enterprise Ireland along with a micro-finance fund which will provide loans of up to €25,000 for start-up businesses like the ones their programme is supporting.

A similar programme run in Los Angeles with homeless people led participants to turn their ideas into successes and they are now turning a profit.

In Ireland, training for trainers was also delivered to the supporting organisations so the programme can be delivered to other communities.

Ron Schultz founder and executive director of 'Lending4change' and 'Entrepreneurs4Change' said it was "incredibly rewarding for everyone involved. This has proven to be the right programme and the right time."

And among those keeping a close eye on the initiative are Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, Social Finance Ireland, Business in the Community (featured in our Winter 2011 edition) and Trinity College Dublin.

For further information, contact Ron Schultz (E: [rschultz@lendingforchange.com](mailto:rschultz@lendingforchange.com)) or Sharon Kennedy (E: [coordinator@swwcdp.com](mailto:coordinator@swwcdp.com)). W: [entrepreneurs4change.com/](http://entrepreneurs4change.com/)



### About the community organisations

- **South Inner City Community Development Association** is based in the Liberties area of Dublin and is committed to promoting social, educational, cultural, economic and environmental development. It is part of the LCDP.
- **Dublin Simon Community** works to prevent and address homelessness in Dublin.
- **The National Traveller Money Advice and Budgeting Service** is focused on the issues of over indebtedness of Travellers and exclusion from financial institutions
- **South West Wexford Community Development Programme (SWWCDP)** is a rural community development project and is part of the LCDP.
- **Jobcare** has worked since 1994 with long-term unemployed people, assisting them gain the confidence, skills and knowledge necessary to find and keep meaningful employment.

## Stepping back into education in Sligo

Sligo Leader Partnership Company is about to evaluate its Community Steps Programme, a back-to-education programme for early school leavers between the ages of 18 and 35 years. The programme has been running for two years. More info from: Geri Bruce, education co-ordinator. T: 071-9141138. E: gbruce@sligoleader.com

## When Dermot met David

'Dublin Valentines', an annual public conversation between playwright and poet Dermot Bolger and well known Dublin writers, took place on February 9th in the Axis Centre Ballymun. This year's guest was David McWilliams, the economic commentator and Irish Independent columnist. It was presented by Axis in association with Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership and the North Dublin Chamber of Commerce.

## DLDC steps in

Donegal Local Development Company has agreed to deliver the Local and Community Development Programme to the Gaeltacht from now on. This partly fills the gap left in Gaeltacht areas after Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta folded last year.



*Employment beckons for people who take up new opportunities to make uilleann pipes. Leading pipemaker Geoff Wooff (pictured chatting to Bill Haneman) says you need to be able to play the pipes yourself to judge your work properly.*

## Fingal's pipers should always have work

By Conor Hogan

One industry that certainly hasn't been affected by the recession is that of uilleann pipe making. The national bagpipe of Ireland is one of the most complicated instruments in the world to build, usually taking a master craftsman somewhere in the region of 400 hours from start to finish.

The waiting list for someone to get their hands on a set,

which can retail anywhere from €7,000 to €20,000, is often more than seven years. Ireland currently commands only 20% of this €7million-a-year industry, so the possibility of expansion, and the creation of more jobs, is significant.

To aid this possibility, Fingal LEADER Partnership and Na Píobairí Uilleann have teamed up to provide a three year course in the 'Art of Uilleann Pipe

Making'. The comprehensive programme will cover all aspects of the trade, including basic engineering, fine precious metal work, the history and evolution of the instrument, as well as how to run a practicing business.

It begins this year and by the end of the course each student will have produced two full and high standard sets of pipes.

W: pipers.ie



## Vigil-keepers told of need to change law

On February 10th, a candlelit vigil was held to allow people in Ireland pay respects to Marioara Rostas on the same day her funeral took place in Romania.

Ms Rostas was abducted while begging in Dublin on January 6th, 2008 and murdered. Her body was found in January this year.

The vigil took place opposite

Pearse Street Garda station, close to the last sighting of Marioara.

Siobhán Curran of Pavee Point, who organised the event, said they wanted to give people the opportunity to show their support and solidarity with her family and the Roma community.

Siobhán's colleague, Martin Collins, said Ms Rostas' tragic death highlighted concerns that Pavee Point and other civil

society organisations have about risks facing members of Roma communities, especially Roma women, in Ireland. He said certain Irish laws and policy serve to marginalise Roma from wider Irish society and outlined what must be done.

For more information, email: siobhan.curran@pavee.ie



## Community work 'alignment' report eagerly awaited

By Allen Meagher

Experts have been studying the way local authorities nationwide and the €55 million Local and Community Development Programme operate to see how the work could be better "aligned".

A report was due to be presented to Minister Phil Hogan as we went to print with a press office spokesperson in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government confirming the report was only days away from completion.

The report is eagerly awaited as it should point the way towards stronger local government, although there are also concerns that the process might be more about a full integration of Local Development Companies (LDCs) rather than a mere alignment.

The proposals may just contain the right measures to strengthen local democracy,



improve services and make service-providers more accountable than up to now to citizens.

There is a lot up for grabs and from the viewpoint of LDCs, the ideal outcome would be for LDC operations to continue partly as

before with service-level agreements between the companies and their respective local authorities. They would therefore retain their independence.

The Irish Local Development Network have made presentations to Oireachtas members and lodged a written submission with the alignment advisory group.

In recent weeks, Minister Hogan has publicly acknowledged in speeches in Roscommon and elsewhere the importance of the "bottom-up" approach. It's also something, as the Minister pointed out that the EU values highly (and on which certain funding streams depend).

Minister Hogan – upon reading the advisory group's final report – has to decide whether or not to publish it and he may well have done so by the time you're reading this.

'Changing Ireland' is looking forward to interviewing the Minister shortly on this and other community-related matters. Readers are welcome to forward us any questions they'd like to see asked.

## ILDN's proposal calls for three key reforms

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) is the representative body of 51 Local Development Companies nationwide and it made a submission to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's Alignment Steering Group.

Obviously, the network sees a continued role for LDCs and argues the "bottom-up" approach it has to offer is optimum.

Significantly, funding requirements from Europe require an independent delivery mechanism

for initiatives such as the multi-million-euro Rural Development Programme that operate in rural areas.

The ILDN submission calls for "a reconfigured system of Local Government and Local Development in response to the Government's objective of achieving better alignment between both sectors."

The ILDN's three-pronged proposal calls for:

Reform of the strategic planning process at local authority level. "For its part, the Local Development Companies based

on their strengths and capacities should be able to take a lead role in ensuring local ownership... through providing the community based, bottom-up (approach)."

Reform "local planning and operational linkages" part of which would entail "including LDC representatives... to deal with barriers to project activation and to avoid potential duplication."

Reformed City/County Development Boards or a joint local authority / LDC monitoring review structure.

The full submission, including graphs demonstrating how it would work, have been uploaded onto 'Changing Ireland's website.



## Volunteers quietly fixing older people's homes nationwide

The Local and Community Development Programme is very active in supporting older people with national agency Pobal logging all the noteworthy actions nationwide in 2011.

Older people are one of the Programme's 18 target groups and last year there were 107 specific actions or projects launched that focused on older people. The work varies from the 'Friendly Call Service' operated by Roscommon Integrated Development Company to I.T. training provided for older people in Ballymun (Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership).

Local Development Companies are adept at recruiting volunteers to support work they do. The care and repair service in operation

in County Wicklow is an excellent example.

County Wicklow Community Partnership first worked to ensure that the 'Young At Heart' older people's group was capable of sustaining itself and linked up with the County Wicklow Older People's Network.

Coinciding with that work, CWCP ran a free minor home repairs service targeting the over-60s and people with disabilities. The company organised to have the repairs done by trained, garda-vetted volunteers and the scheme was first piloted in Arklow just over a year ago.

Two hundred kilometres away, Monaghan Integrated Development Limited last year established a panel of volunteers with DIY skills and an interest in undertaking "odd

jobs" for older people who are living alone or in isolation or are struggling to get by on low incomes.

The PAUL Partnership in Limerick also manages a care and repair service.

This is the type of work happening quietly around the country every day of the week that largely goes unnoticed with the exception of those grateful citizens whose homes are now safer, warmer and generally more habitable.

And volunteer-led, care and repair services and projects were only one of many of the many types of actions taken by LDCs last year for this target group.

## Léargas actively looking for volunteers - Pick a country from Iceland to Armenia

*Irish volunteers at a pre-departure EVS training event organised by Léargas.*

Conor Hogan reports

No Irish demographic has been hit harder in the recession than the young. In fact, of the working population under 30, one in three is now unemployed – a statistic that doesn't bear thinking about. Many are hit with the uncomfortable choice of drawing the dole, working for free as an intern or emigrating. There are some interesting options, however, the European Volunteer Service (EVS) being one of them.

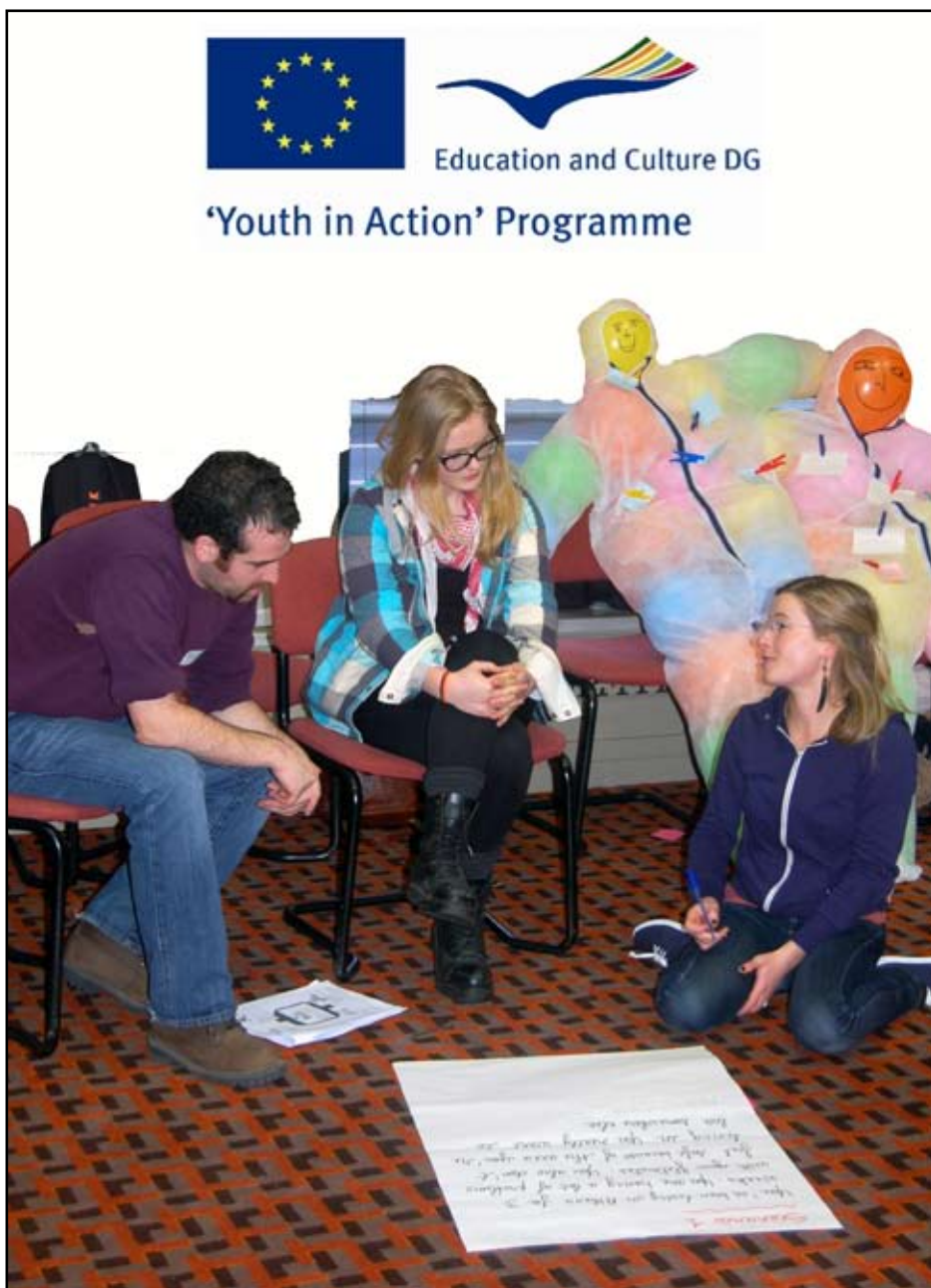
The EVS scheme is funded by the European Union and is open to applications from anyone between the ages of 18 and 30. "The feedback we've gotten from people who've taken part has been almost uniformly positive," Des Burke of Léargas, which manages European exchange and co-operation programmes in education, youth work and community work, tells us. "It isn't easy, but the rewards for people who do it make it more than worthwhile."

In essence, the service is a volunteer swap between different nations in the EU (and some outside of it including in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus). The aspiring volunteer identifies a country and volunteering position they would be interested in from an extensive database. They must also find an Irish organisation willing to support their application.

Generally, the volunteer starts their position three months after their application and undergoes training before setting off. Transport costs are provided for, as are accommodation and meals. The volunteer also receives a small subsistence allowance and language lessons.

"Many countries in the scheme have populations with very good levels of English anyway," Burke says, "so speaking the local language isn't essential. The volunteer will also be mentored and provided with plenty of support in the host country."

Positions available have designated themes including Art and Culture, Media and Communications, Anti-discrimination, Disabilities, European Awareness and Rural Development. Some of the people who have participated in the scheme have ended up working in such diverse areas as helping blind people, working with the homeless, conducting art projects with theatre companies or participating in environmental or conservation projects.



*Irish volunteers at a pre-departure EVS training event organised by Léargas.*

The length of placement can vary anywhere from two months to a year depending on the volunteer. The funds available to administer it are relatively healthy at the moment, so Léargas are hoping more Irish people take up the opportunity to do it.

"We are currently taking more volunteers in than are going out," Des Burke says. "85 volunteers come here as part of this compared to 35 Irish people that go abroad. It reflects the fact that Ireland is a popular destination, because of the English

language and other Irish cultural aspects, but there is an opportunity for far more Irish people to take it up."

For more information, contact Léargas via email [atevs@leargas.ie](mailto:atevs@leargas.ie). Year-round deadlines for applications from organisations wishing to send EVS volunteers are May 1st, October 1st and February 1st. Organisations can register with Léargas anytime to send or receive volunteers.

W: [leargas.ie/evs](http://leargas.ie/evs)

T: 01-873-1411.



## The EVS experience GEORGIA ON HER MIND

Interview By Conor Hogan

**D**oireann Cooney embarked on a placement in Georgia via the European Volunteer Service. She admits she only came across EVS by accident.

"I read an article on the internet about people working in a settlement with refugees in Poland," she says. "The programme they went on was the EVS scheme. I did a bit more research before contacting an organisation in Georgia."

The small mountainous nation on the border between Europe and Asia wasn't one she knew too much about beforehand. "I didn't know anything really," she says, "I read articles about the 2008 war in Georgia and the breakaway regions. Bit by bit, I realised I'd like to go there. I wanted to work with displaced people and the more I read about Georgia it seemed the place to go. My intention was to go somewhere in that region anyway – maybe the Ukraine, maybe Moldova."

When she got to Georgia, she was placed with a local youth organisation called Droni, based in a school in the country's capital Tblisi.

"The people were so welcoming," she says, "I wasn't sure what reception I was going to get, but it was amazing. The pace of life is slower there, but people are warm and friendly. In many ways Georgians are like the Irish, in that they are easygoing and have a strong sense of community."

She worked in refugee settlements, helping people with their English. Doireann also held Irish culture workshops, baking classes and was involved in a photography exhibition. Then, after submitting a project proposal to the Council of Europe,

she received a grant that allowed them to run a children's summer camp.

"I also went to the break-away region Abkhazia," she says. "The Georgians had been expelled from there, but I was able to go as a foreigner. It's a separate state, fiercely nationalistic, but no other country recognise them apart from Russia. It means they are forced to engage with Russia. The situation is complicated, because Abkhazia was part of Georgia during the time of the Soviet Union. While there, I worked with relatives who had been left behind after the war."

Doireann was well supported during her time in Georgia. "Everything was covered by the EU," she says, "flights, health insurance, rent, food allowance. It didn't cost me a cent. I was also able to call on the project coordinator if anything was wrong."

She also didn't

find the language barrier a drawback.

"Everyone in the office spoke English, as did all the volunteers there. With the EVS scheme, the organisation you're sent to must have staff who speak English. Georgian lessons were provided but I didn't learn much – it depends on how motivated you are."

Doireann made a lot of friends during her time in Georgia and is still very much in contact with the country – she's involved in a youth exchange whereby Georgians and Armenians come to Ireland. She highly recommends EVS.

"With so many people out of work, it's a wonderful opportunity," she says. "If I had advice, I'd tell people to be flexible and not to have too many expectations – it is never as you imagine. Be patient. Allow yourself time to settle in and then go with the flow. That way, you'll get the most out of it."



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme

## 77 Irish community groups registered with EVS

**F**or the volunteer, getting a placement via the European Volunteer Service (EVS) is like taking part in the Jobbridge work placement programme except you're going to find yourself in somewhere like Turkey rather than Tipperary.

And similarly to Jobbridge – which is a work placement programme and pays €50 a week on top of the dole – a small subsistence is paid even though the work is seen as voluntary.

EVS is geared towards giving extra support to encourage participation from young people who've had few breaks in life to date, citizens who've seen little but poverty and disadvantage.

The 77 Irish organisations registered to date include West Cork Development Partnership, Ballybeg Youth Project in Waterford, Fingal Volunteer Centre and Blanchardstown Community Training Centre.

NOTE: The following link lists all of the organisations across Europe currently accredited to either host or send volunteers or both: <http://bit.ly/xlkc8L>. This will tell you more about EVS: <http://bit.ly/wtD81g>

In this issue, REPORTER CONOR HOGAN investigates the opportunities available through the European Volunteer Service and talks to a young Irish volunteer who found herself in Georgia.

## Especially for people who've been excluded

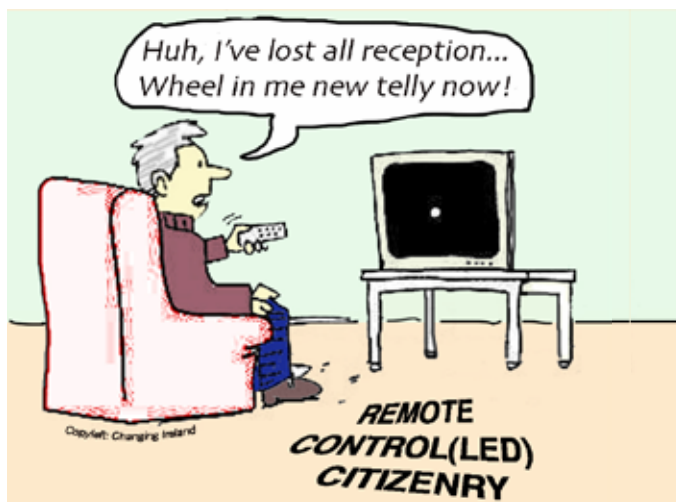


Des Burke of Léargas.

**T**he European Volunteer Service (EVS) contains "specific supports to enable the participation of young people with fewer opportunities, for example as a result of disability, educational inequality, poverty or economic exclusion," says Des Burke of Léargas.

The organisation funded nine young people with fewer opportunities than most to volunteer through the EVS programme in 2011.

Funding is available to meet specific needs such volunteers may have and they can opt to do a short-term voluntary stint of between anything from a fortnight to two months. This may then lead to a longer-term service.



### 1 in 8 risk missing tv switchover

By Conor Hogan

On October 24th, rabbit ears and fuzzy receptions will become a thing of the past in Ireland thanks to the digital switchover. This change will affect roughly a quarter of a million households who are currently using only the analogue service. Most people in that situation are aware of what to do, thanks to advertisements featuring cartoon animals and various versions of Gay Byrne. Saorview boxes generally retail at around €60, while practically all new televisions come with basic digital channels as standard.

About one eighth of the population, however, are unaware of the digital switchover, according to a survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Communications, Energy and National Resources.

Leading national networks - the Wheel and Irish Rural Link - have entered an agreement with the Minister for Communications, Pat Rabbitte, to manage the 'Community Outreach Digital Switchover Programme' aimed primarily at older and disadvantaged people - especially in isolated areas.

Chief executive Deirdre Garvey says the work will "involve community and voluntary organisations in every area of the country in reaching out to the people who otherwise would not make the switch to a digital

television service".

Information can be found at [goingdigital.ie](http://goingdigital.ie), or by calling the helpline number 1890-940980.

### (Very) Good news from Brussels for communities

There's good news from Brussels as more funds may begin flowing towards communities throughout Europe in two years time.

The European Commission talks for the first time in its spending plans about "community-led local development" as it looks towards 2014-20.

The folk who write for LDnet want to know what this gobbly-gook phrase means, while acknowledging the Commission's proposals mark "a turning point in favour of local development".

This is what the Commission has said for now: "(We) propose to strengthen community-led initiatives, facilitate the implementation of integrated local development strategies and formation of local action groups, based on the experience of the LEADER approach."

Will the most marginalised people in communities have any real say in how the funding is spent in their areas, nationally and across Europe? Let's hope that local organisations are at the centre of these developments and the decision-making involved.

Visit [ldnet.eu](http://ldnet.eu) for more.

- AM

## Mary Connors is Traveller of the Year



On December 1, 2011, Mary Connors from New Ross was presented with the overall Traveller Pride 2011 Award at a ceremony supported by ten national Traveller organisations.

She said, "I would hope that my grandchildren will not have to spend their lives fighting for the things that are basic human needs and that many other people take for granted such as accommodation, education and common courtesy which has been in short supply for many a Traveller."

The Wexford grandmother was honoured for her contribution to community and voluntary work. She said she looked forward to the day when "we can achieve inclusion, equality and ethnic status for Travellers in Ireland with recognition of our culture."

The national Traveller Pride Awards are now in their third year and there was a great turnout of celebrities and television presenters for the event with credit due to the Irish Travellers Movement for organising the event. Its aim - to promote positive images of Travellers to counteract negative media stereotyping. Pavee Point, part of the LCDP, were among ten Traveller organisations involved in the event.

## Country's warmest community centres are in Offaly

Over the past two years, 41 community centres in Offaly were audited for energy-efficiency and a half-dozen of them have upgraded their centres through funding from the Rural Development Programme.

Walls were dry-lined and insulated, windows replaced, better boilers installed and lighting changed.

Among the areas with warmer more user-friendly community facilities now are St. Kilcormac, Coolderry, Ballykilmurray, Clonbullogue

and Lusmagh.

The Energy Audit Initiative is now closed.

However, for anyone with queries about how Offaly Local Development Company conducted the audit and the repair/refurbishment scheme, contact Pauline Hocter, OLDC, Millennium House, Main St, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. E:[phocter@offalyldc.ie](mailto:phocter@offalyldc.ie) T: 057 9322 850



## Advocacy Initiative says, “Call us!”

THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE'S  
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FORUM

13.02.2012

“We were very pleased that President Higgins accepted our invitation as we were trying to get people involved in reflecting on social justice advocacy,” said Anna Visser, director of the Advocacy Initiative (AI).

While the acronym tends to bring agricultural practices to mind, the AI project is focused on the development of the advocacy role of Community and Voluntary Sector organisations. It will run for

three years.

Funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, the aim is to get more people to recognise the power of advocating for social justice in a time of deep economic and social crisis.

Ms Visser encouraged anyone with an interest in the area “to contact us directly.”

T: 01-6853291. E: anna@advocacyinitiative.ie

W: www.advocacyinitiative.ie/

## Intergenerational Flash Mob

Transition Year students in St. Mary's Secondary School in Killester, Co. Dublin teamed up with members of the Older Women's Network Ireland in November to take part in an intergenerational flash mob. A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform a routine, usually a dance and then disperse without speaking a word.

## Holy Communion payments

The Department of Social Protection's “exceptional needs” payments to low-income families to cover some of the costs associated with First Holy Communion and Confirmations, was capped in February at €110. The average payment in Dublin last year was €303.

## County Cork's €1m for communities

Cork County Council is currently looking at applications before allocating a record €1million this year to community groups.

The aim is to promote sustainable community development by supporting community and voluntary groups and local organisations in County Cork to undertake projects in their area.

## NI communities to benefit from ‘criminal cash’

Community projects in Northern Ireland will this year benefit from the re-allocation of funds from a pot of £800,000 recovered from criminals.

There have been calls by SIPTU members for a similar approach to be taken in the Republic in respect of funds collected by the Criminal Assets Bureau here.

## \* RESOURCES BRIEFS

### New digital NI magazine

VIEW is a new monthly digital magazine for the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Check out the first edition via this link: <http://bit.ly/view01-january2012>

### European training at a glance

There's a super online calendar for international training in the field of youth and non-formal education. You can add your own course to the European calendar if you think it fits.

Also, it's well worth checking out Leargas' website for links to dozens of courses here and abroad:

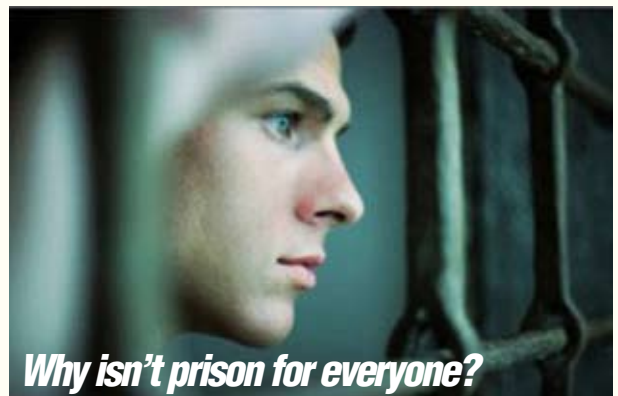
[www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/](http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/)  
[www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie)

### Toolkit for assessing volunteer impacts

Fingal Volunteer Centre (FVC) has produced a ‘Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit’ which has nationwide application.

The FVC ran a one-day training course in late February to guide people in how best to use the ‘Toolkit’.

T: 01-820 9550. E: [info@volunteerfingal.ie](mailto:info@volunteerfingal.ie)



### Why isn't prison for everyone?

If you're poor, you're likely to see more bars than any rich person, once prison bars are included.

The Irish Penal Reform Trust in February published ‘The Vicious Circle of Social Exclusion and Crime: Ireland's Disproportionate Punishment of the Poor’.

It focuses on the unequal approaches to criminal justice in Ireland.

Download from: [iprt.ie](http://iprt.ie)

### A community work approach to conflict

The Community Workers Co-op has a new guide available from its website called ‘The Community Work Approach to Peace Building’. It's described as “a resource guide to inform and engage the sector” and was launched in L'Derry on Feb. 24th.

The report includes eight case studies and the work was influenced by international experience.

So, how do community workers approach conflict? Slowly.

Download from: [cwc.ie](http://cwc.ie)

**"Hilda doesn't work on Friday's anymore"**

**- Community organisations varied responses to cuts**

**Allen Meagher reports**

**A**s a result of the shrinkage in State-funding to the Community and Voluntary Sector, many organisations and local community groups have felt the pinch.

When you call looking to speak to Hilda, the local community or drugs education worker, you're as likely to be greeted with "She doesn't work Fridays anymore" as anything else.

Companies have cut hours in many cases.

To call the impact of the cuts a pinch is putting it mildly. Research conducted using Government figures by IMPACT and SIPTU trade unions found the cut to the sector was in the order of 35%, much higher than cuts to the Department of Education funding for example (most of which goes on salaries).

It's a wonder the Sector hasn't gone out on strike, you might say. However, that's not a route currently favoured by the trade union leadership as became apparent at the launch of the report about the cuts.

A very small number of organisations faced with changes in



the way their funders wish them to work have shut down. The feminist development organisation Banulacht did so recently, with regrets and with dignity.

Throughout this difficult time, community organisations struggling to continue have taken as many innovative measures as they can to raise or save money.

Some community organisations – for instance in Limerick and Cork – have agreed on salary cut deferrals with staff rather than impose straight cuts.

A query with the Department found that most companies supported by the LCDP were taking expected measures to reduce costs.

We were informed, "Where companies could, they've found administrative savings although it's harder this year. A lot of companies have agreed on reduced hours. Some staff are taking unpaid leave over the summertime, which is much the same thing. There have been very few redundancies."

The main thing for the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government – and it has reiterated this on a number of occasions – is that "frontline services are not impacted", or that the impact is as low as

possible.

The Taoiseach Enda Kenny in his state-of-the-nation address late last year acknowledged that frontline services, good services, would suffer.

Nonetheless, people are finding new ways of doing things.

## **ON THE GROUND**

**O**n the ground, the impact of rule-changes in line with reduced budgets nationally has an immediate impact.

A CE supervisor told 'Changing Ireland' that it was now more difficult to find people in the community to sign up for the Community Employment Scheme she supervises because "double-payments" as the Government term it are being disallowed.

This means that someone in receipt of lone-parents allowance cannot avail of the extra CE allowance without losing some of their other social welfare entitlements.

"I'm finding it much harder get people for schemes," said the supervisor.

Many people who want to take part in Schemes don't see it as worthwhile at present.

On a more positive note, the Government has reconsidered cuts to

the training grants per participant for CE schemes, something that threatened the viability of many schemes.

Organisations are rising to the challenge as best they can. The work goes on, albeit with reduced hours and funding.

National events don't need to be cancelled however as Craol, the network for community radio stations in Ireland, shows. It continues to hold a free, annual event combining training workshops with networking, keeping costs at a minimum.

Crosscare with support from Aontas has been holding workshops in Dublin around the theme of 'Creative Approaches to Fundraising'.

Meanwhile, a consortium of Irish charities has come together calling themselves the Irish Charities Tax Reform (ICTR) group to create a Taxback Campaign. The campaign aims to increase the response rate for charities' tax mailings to PAYE donors, many of whom do not return their CHY 2 forms. It will run across several media in the spring.

Organisations are also on the lookout for free services and it's worth looking out for opportunities.

The Chartered Accountants Voluntary Advice service has since January extended its free business advisory service nationwide. This service extends to all sectors of the economy, including non-profit organisations.

If you've heard of any other free services of interest to community and voluntary organisations, let us know and we'll make sure people get to hear.

## **Zumbathon - a fun way to find funds**

**A**n Cosán, a women's centre for learning, leadership and social enterprise based in Jobstown, Tallaght, have taken to some innovative ways to raise money.

Aisling Freeman has a voluntary fundraising role with the organisation. "We hope to do at least two fundraisers a year," she says, "In 2011, we held a do in the Maldrón Hotel which was very successful. We raised €6,000."

Her most recent fundraising activity with the group was

a Guinness World Record attempt, which took place in the National Basketball Arena in Tallaght on February 12th. Dubbed 'The Zumbathon', the attempt was to get as many people zumba-ing in one place at one time as possible.

Zumba is a latin-dance inspired workout routine that is garnering popularity throughout the nation.

"I regularly take part in a Zumba class myself," Aisling says, "It's a great workout, a fantastic way to unwind and a lot of fun



too."

Adults were charged €11 to attend, while a family ticket (two adults, two children) retailed at €25. The hope was to get as many as 3,000 attendees and

they managed almost 500. It was a success when fun and fundraising are measured.

"We raised about €4,000," Aisling says, "and everyone who came had a fantastic time."

The hope now is for it to become an annual event,

and that eventually the record will be broken. "That's the aim," she says, "the more people hear about how much of a fun activity it is, the more people we will attract to the record attempt."



## Community Sector's 35% cut is well above average

Allen Meagher reports from Dublin

There was no soup, sandwiches, or teas or coffees available on February 21st at the Mansion House on the day that community workers and trade union leaders gathered to launch Brian Harvey's report about the scale of the cuts' impact on the Community Sector.

While there was hardly anyone from outside Dublin present (another impact of the cuts) it was an important occasion as people digested the fact that the Sector over a four-year period was taking a 35% funding hit.

The author of 'Downsizing the Community Sector' was hailed a hero for nailing the figure and



Helena McNeill and Brian Harvey (author).



Lord Mayor Andrew Montague, David Begg, Philip O'Connor and Brian Harvey at the launch.

for showing in a lengthy report how Civil Society in Ireland has had the stuffing knocked out of it. Mr Harvey's did his sums exclusively employing Government figures so that the report could not be easily dismissed.

People Before Profit Alliance TD, Richard Boyd Barret, reminded the attendance that "our communities are the most inspiring things about Ireland at the moment". He might truly be right and people may have been dying to hear him give examples, but he was shut down by M.C. David Connolly (SIPTU Community Sector) who wished to pass the mike around.

In his presentation, Mr Harvey said Ireland as a society was doing "okay" in tackling poverty until 2009. Now, our train is slipping back down the hill and the rubber on the brakes is failing. And no other sector had been cut in the way the Community and Voluntary Sector had.

It was like a bad night in A&E. The sector has had a leg amputated and is in danger of having the other chopped off. (There was talk of an impending "collapse of the sector").

ICTU leader, David Begg, rejected calls for protests. It wasn't that the people (two) calling for protests thought it would change anything, but they were angry and wanted to express it.

Mr Begg indicated his preference was for formal discussions - where they can get them - with members of Government.

"Protesting won't make any difference," he argued, thereby missing the point that some people just don't want to take a knocking in silence.

Mr Begg refused to endorse a call by a woman called Roisin to have street protests against the cuts. Helena MacNeill, SIPTU's Community Sector chairperson, backed Roisin.

To no avail.

And so the Sector seems set to continue to shrink from protesting while quietly shrinking in size.

While the 'Downsizing' report was impressive, the only solution Mr Harvey offered sounded weak - the Sector can re-organise after the national policy of bailing out banks and so on ultimately fails. The message was that the Government's recovery strategy

was doomed.

The elephant in the room, as one woman who attended later put it, was the Croke Park agreement.

It's been easier for the Government to cut community services than for instance education spending which is largely accounted for by the salaries of workers who are protected under the agreement.

Afterwards, Darragh O'Connor stressed the need for people to get behind SIPTU's campaign to secure collective bargaining rights for workers in the community sector. It's a basic right, he pointed out.

In fairness to the trade unions, they have successfully encouraged thousands of Community and Voluntary Sector workers to unionise and have given the Sector a stronger voice.

Research like that conducted by Mr Harvey is invaluable in pointing out the great injustices being done to communities.

While other Government-funded sectors have also suffered cutbacks, the Community and Voluntary Sector has undoubtedly borne the brunt of the economic malaise.

## A London perspective for Limerick

Michael Pyner established the Shoreditch Trust in Hackney, London, in 2000 and since then it has become a multi award-winning community investment and regeneration agency.

From growing lettuce indoors on walls (why not?!) to training former prisoners as chefs and buying up property to rent, much to the consternation of some funders, the Shoreditch Trust has shown an eagerness to take a fresh approach to community work.

He shared his story along with his views on the models and the future of community and social enterprise at a



seminar held in Limerick on March 8th.

The event was organised by the PAUL Partnership and Limerick City Enterprise Board at which details of a new training programme for local community leaders were also announced. The programme was designed with cross-border collaboration and should lead to more jobs being created in the Mid-West in social and community enterprise.



Minister Kathleen Lynch at the launch.

## The “embodiment of government policy on mental health”

In her address, Ms Griffin asked Minister Kathleen Lynch to “ensure that community based social projects like Gateway receive sustainable funding as it is a model that is proven to work. It is an inexpensive model that yields results as our research shows and it is an embodiment of the government policy ‘A Vision for Change.’”

The Gateway project came about in Rathmines because there are a number of mental health hospitals and daycentres in the area and there were “a large number of people who had self experience of ill mental health living in the community.” It began as a one-day-a-week pilot programme in a house in Governor Road.

The stakeholders wanted something that was different

to the medical model, that was locally based and that was not structured around courses.

Gateway works from community development principles whereby people have autonomy over their own lives and recognises they have the insight and knowledge to change things for themselves.

In her address on Feb. 15th, Ms Griffin reminded guest speaker Minister Lynch to ensure the Government’s commitment was honoured to spend €6 million of HSE funds in 2012 “to roll out access to talking therapies through primary care for people on medical cards” and to increase the number of staff on adult community teams by 220 personnel.

## New counselling initiative reaching people for first time

CONOR HOGAN  
REPORTS FROM  
DUBLIN

“It helped to give me a kickstart in life,” a participant in the Gateway Project said of it. “It gave my life meaning and made me want to make something of it.”

Established in Dublin in 2004 as a pilot scheme between the then Rathmines Community Partnership and mental health providers locally, Gateway is one of the most successful mental health projects in Ireland.

“The key is integration,” community development worker Martha Griffin said, “giving people autonomy over their own lives and combating the problems of stigma and labeling.”

She was speaking at the launch on February 15th by Minister of State for Disability, Equality and Mental Health, Kathleen Lynch, of a new counselling initiative for Gateway members.

One of the greatest boons of this project, which is based in Harold’s Cross, Dublin, is that its 200 members lead it which ensures that their needs are listened to. The members requested more talk therapies, for instance, and were facilitated by My Mind, a non-profit provider of mental health services, and will receive five sessions each at a cost of only €10 per session. This counselling will assist 85 members.

“For some people it is the stepping stone they need as they have never had access to talk therapies until now,” Ms Griffin noted, “and we don’t



Gateway member Mary Quinn spoke about how access to counselling helped her but was often expensive.

ask for details of people’s illnesses. That is voluntary. All we need is a person’s name and address.”

And services available to members include a drop-in facility – a place for people to interact socially, get the information they need (health promotion programmes for instance) and where they can develop personally and practice creative arts.

Members are given support from the Local Development Company to improve their employment prospects, learning for instance how to prepare a CV and approach an interview. They are kept up to date with employment or educational opportunities that might suit them. They publish a monthly newsletter, receive skills training and take part in social activities, one of which is a creative writing course.



# Community Development approach to mental health



James Foley, ESB.

Speaking at the launch, James Foley of ESB's Electric Aid Programme, funder of the project, said the community-based and member-led nature of Gateway was "what attracted us to it". He described it as "exceptional value for money as part of the fight against the scourge that is suicide."

Research into the Gateway's effectiveness was carried out by its members and the project's achievements to date are exceptional. 84% of the members say they have greater confidence, 86% say they are more relaxed and 86% find it easier to make friends.

"90% believe it has improved their general wellbeing," Ms Griffin added, "44% have a lot more confidence, 75% say they get out of the house more often and 45% said that Gateway was responsible for them being in training."

One member described it as "informal - everyone is on the same level". Another said of Gateway that it provided them with "self confidence, higher self-esteem and belief in myself".

Minister Lynch is an advocate for the programme: "The days of only listening to the medical model are over," she said. "There seems to be an endless stream of courses, which aren't really focused enough. In Gateway, the participant guides the service."

She was invited, said Ms Griffin, to highlight that talk therapies that are available to Gateway members because of the new initiative are "not only a need in this community but nationally."

## WORKER PROFILE: Martha Griffin, Rathmines, Dublin



Martha Griffin, Community Development Worker. Photo: Conor Hogan

### POSITION:

#### Community Development Worker

**M**artha Griffin has worked for the Rathmines Pembroke Community Partnership for three and a half years.

Previously, she studied Legal Studies and Taxation. Last year she spoke publicly about her experience of mental ill health and recovery as part of the 'See Change' campaign.

#### 1. What are you reading at the moment?

The Artists Way: A 12-week course on finding your inner artist.

#### 2. Who is the person you most admire?

Mary Robinson for the energy she put into issues of human rights. She was our first female president and was responsible for a great deal of the liberalisation that has taken place in this country, but she was also personable and down to earth.

#### 3. What are the top four issues in Ireland today?

- The need for less of a focus on economics and more focus on human issues.
- The issues of mental health and the suicide epidemic.
- The environment - our lack of future proofing.
- The breakdown in communities and the gap between the rich and the poor.

#### 4. Nationally we need more?

Good news - a positive unbiased media that reports with less of an economic obsession.

#### 5. Nationally we need less?

Negativity and ... less rain. I'm a gardener so maybe I shouldn't give out about the

rain.

#### 6. How and why did you get involved?

I was volunteering at an event in Tralee and I met with the RAPID co-coordinator and I questioned her about her role. I always had an interest in social justice as I originally studied law but found that the law was being used as a sword rather than a shield and there was an elitism in the profession. After that conversation, I applied for the community and youth work course in Maynooth. I've a huge interest in the area of disability and mental health.

#### 7. What difference has it made to you being involved in Community Development?

I've garnered a more realistic perspective of theory versus practice. I've discovered that things are a lot harder to change than I previously thought. There's a great power imbalance in Ireland and that needs to change.

#### 8. How have things changed since you have started?

Prior to the new Programme, communities identified their own needs, whereas now it is more prescriptive. Education and training have their good points, but we've discovered that they might not necessarily be core to what people need and they will not in themselves change and challenge the status quo.

#### 9. What motivates you as a Community Development worker?

I like that people with experience of mental distress can talk openly about it. A problem told is a problem halved and not being able to speak about this issue can be more distressing than the experience itself.

- INTERVIEW BY CONOR HOGAN

# Social Enterprise, Ireland and the EU

## INTRODUCTION

Last November, the EU Commission announced that it wants “to contribute to the creation of a favourable environment for the development of social business in Europe.”

People working in the world of social and community enterprise see it as a remarkable development.

It seems the EU has finally recognised that social enterprises and entrepreneurship can play a key role in shaping a more equitable society. It can also aid Ireland’s national recovery.



## Social enterprise – has its time finally come?

By Tanya Lalor and Gerard Doyle

Recent moves by the EU Commission on social enterprise will have a significant influence in years to come.

The Commission now sees social enterprise as being at the heart of the drive to create a more inclusive model of economic development than the current market-led one.

Social enterprises are part of the wider social economy sector, which is estimated to employ over 11million workers, or 6% of the total EU workforce. However, the EU Commission acknowledges that if a number of barriers affecting social enterprises are addressed, the sector can play a more central role in developing a more inclusive economy.

So it proposed a number of actions:

Facilitating access to private funding.

Mobilisation of EU funds for social enterprises.

Encouraging member states to put more of the EU’s allocation of structural funds into social enterprises.

In awarding public contracts, social enterprises should be allowed compete for work.

Recent developments

Since the launch of the EU Commission’s ‘Social Business Initiative’ the following has happened.

In December 2011, a review of the Procurement Directives was announced by Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, Michel Barnier. One of the aims is to ensure greater consideration for social and environmental criteria which could really provide an impetus for social enterprises in the coming years. It is hoped legislation will be forthcoming by December coming.

The Commission introduced proposals for

a new ‘European Social Entrepreneurship Funds’ label so investors can easily identify funds that focus on investing in European social businesses.

Also in December 2011, Commission László Andor announced plans for the promotion of the social economy and social enterprises through the European Social Fund. Further financial support will also be provided over the period 2014 to 2020 through the Programme for Social Change and Innovation.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR IRELAND

The Programme for Government has already made a commitment to promoting the development of a vibrant and effective social enterprise sector. This has been followed up to in the recent ‘2012 Action Plan for Jobs’ in which the government committed to commissioning a report on the potential of social enterprise to create jobs, with a view to completion by end this year.

Ms Lalor and Mr Doyle work for TSA Consultancy.

## 25,000 jobs possible, says John Murphy

The EU Commission’s ‘Social Business Initiative’ reflects the value and potential the EU Commission sees in models of social enterprises and entrepreneurship right across Europe. Social enterprises represent on average 5% of GDP in the EU but only 3% in Ireland – so we have some catching up to do. It’s estimated that if over 5 years we could reach the EU average we would create 25,000 jobs.

Giving EU-wide access to private and structural funds are very important developments for those engaging in social enterprise.

However, for the EU Commission’s initiative to have any impact nationally,



it is important that the Government follows through on its commitment in the Programme for Government to explore the potential of social enterprise.

The report of the Social Enterprise (& Entrepreneurship) Task Force provides a roadmap for Government. It makes key recommendations that can support the development of the sector and ultimately the creation of jobs.

Besides the need for a national policy framework for the sector the report suggests:

Designating a Minister of State to have

responsibility for social enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Allowing access to existing support structures and procurement frameworks.

Including social clause provisions within the public and local authority.

Creating a social innovation fund and Piloting a Social Impact Bond Scheme.

If the recommendations are followed up, jobs will result – something this country badly needs.

\* John P. Murphy is the CEO of Speedpak Ltd, an award-winning social enterprise that employs, trains and supports local long term unemployed people through its two commercial businesses; Speedpak contract packing services and Shamrock Rosettes.

Links: [www.speedpak.ie](http://www.speedpak.ie) and [www.shamrockrosettes.com](http://www.shamrockrosettes.com)



# Doris McDermott

## OUR AGONY AUNT



## THE DIARY OF ONE DORIS MCDERMOTT

*(filling in for Horace McDermott, permanently)*

One Horace McDermott, community development worker extraordinaire, normally throws this column together. He has, however, recently emigrated. A big fan of Ancient Egyptian culture, he booked a one-way ticket to the Faroe Islands, warm-weather gear and basic Arabic phrase book in tow. It's probably a good thing he made that mistake, as he was convinced the Arab Spring was a type of North African trampoline.

**My name's Doris McDermott.** You might be wondering if Horace and I are related. Only through marriage – I'm his wife of 20 years. We met in the winter of 1989, when I was starting out my career as a psychiatric nurse and he was pretending to be a doctor in a daring attempt to escape.

I've recently left that profession as part of the public sector early retirement scheme. It was incredibly sad and moving, saying goodbye to my workmates, in the building where I spent most of my adult life.

Don't feel too sorry for me, however. The payoff allowed me to buy

a car and I'll be starting new contract work in about a month's time. It's as a psychiatric nurse in the exact same hospital I just left.

Someone who is also temporarily unemployed is my son Maurice McDermott. He has applied for hundreds of unpaid intern positions with the JobBridge scheme, only to be told that he doesn't have enough experience. He was given some helpful advice though, namely that if he worked somewhere else for free to build-up experience, they might allow him to work there for free in the future.

(One of the positions he applied for was in was a recruitment agency, where his role would have involved finding jobs for other people, so I'm glad in a way he didn't get that one.)

Until something turns up, he is considering volunteering in some sort of community development capacity. I'm glad in a way that Maurice wants to walk in his father's shoes, though Horace is four sizes smaller than my son, so Maurice might have some podiatric problems in the future.

**THE END.**

*Oh dear. I seem to have finished this column a bit early, so I'm going to pad it out with some jokes I found on that Internet.*

Three Failed Slogans used to get People to Volunteer:

**"Volunteer – because what else are you going to do with an Arts degree."**

**"Volunteer – because you'd like your CV to be at least a page long."**

**"Community service – it's not just for hardened criminals on early release."**

And finally, this is probably my favourite joke of all time:

***Did you hear about the unemployed jester?***

***He was nobody's fool.***

***Thank you, I'll be here all week.***

***Yours Truly***

**Doris McDermott**



## Changing Ireland Community Media Ltd 1st Birthday!

'Changing Ireland' magazine is 11 years old and developing anew. Last year, a new voluntary management team took charge of the publication and in January 'Changing Ireland Community Media Limited' celebrated its first birthday. In this photo are voluntary board of management members: Gearoid Fitzgibbon (chair), Viv Sadd, Kay Flanagan, Jim O'Brien (top row) and Ellen Duffy and Breda Lymer,

By Marie Louise Byrne

**2012** is the EU Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations – a somewhat wordy title which aims to raise awareness of the fact that we are living longer and staying healthier than ever before – and to realise the opportunities that represents. Ireland needs people who can make a difference in their communities and many retired people have the experience and wisdom to make that difference.

Those over 55 already make a huge contribution to Irish society. An important challenge exists however, both for policy makers and for the community and voluntary sector: How do we support, nurture and create additional opportunities for community participation within a diverse, ageing population?

Research by Brian Harvey found that while there is a high take-up of community education opportunities by older people, courses available tended to be of a standard variety.

## Let's move on from "cooking and computers"

### EU Year of Active Ageing



Older people's organisations have traditionally demanded "cooking and computers". In 2010, Age & Opportunity began to work on a new project to specifically increase opportunities for older people to develop their self-confidence, critical thinking and capacity for advocacy.

As part of this project members of Gorey Active Retirement Group in north County Wexford

have embarked on a community development course, supported through the LCDP, which is aimed at developing their skills as community organisers. They'll also learn about how to influence policy and work together to address problems in their local community.

This training focuses on skills such as leadership, community organising and analysing issues.

The Gorey group initially got involved in the project through County Wexford Age Equality Network, an alliance of over 40 older people's groups who meet regularly to share information, campaign on older people's issues and run events or training.

The Network is supported by 'Get Vocal' which is Age & Opportunity's flagship community development programme. This works with different organisations nationwide and is rolled out locally through a number of LDCs including Wexford Local Development, the County Wicklow Partnership, Breffni Integrated and Kildare Leader Partnership.

Funding for the national programme comes from Atlantic Philanthropies.

For more information, contact Marie on 053-9155864 or Madge Crowe in Gorey on 087-7674443 (E: madgecrowe@gmail.com).

Marie Louise Byrne works for Wexford Local Development.

See inside pages for plenty more news on intergenerational community work.

## Cut out and keep!

Tell us what's you're doing in your community! We've the widest reach and by far the biggest readership of any magazine in the Community & Voluntary Sector in Ireland!

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W: [www.changingireland.ie](http://www.changingireland.ie)

PS. If you bought this magazine and you work as a community worker (paid or voluntary) and you wish to subscribe, it's free. Just contact the editor.



## LETTERS

### Avoid use of pejorative term!

*Irish Penal Reform Trust, 4th Floor, Equity House, 16-17 Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin 7*

Dear Editor,

Thank you for highlighting prisons-related issues (Winter '11, page 9) in another great edition of Changing Ireland, and also for the mention of IPRT's position on Spent Convictions legislation.

However, I wanted to flag the use of the term 'ex-con' in a panel piece that was otherwise very supportive. We feel this term can be seen as pejorative, language more commonly used in tabloid press (the main dailies do not usually use this term) – even if it is useful shorthand for fitting into a headline.

Also, the lack of Spent Convictions legislation in Ireland affects everyone who has ever received a conviction, from a €20 fine for stealing a chocolate bar more than 20 years ago (true story) to the more serious offences associated with the term 'ex-con'.

Ironically, the stigma of having a criminal conviction seems to be greatest for those who committed the most minor offences – and inclusive references to 'ex-cons' doesn't help to address this stigma.

I don't want to sound like a deranged PC-conscious person, but I was just surprised to see this term used in 'Changing Ireland'!

Best wishes, Fiona Ní Chinnéide  
Campaigns & Communications Officer

### Publication Dates 2012 for Advertisers/ Contributors

EDITION	Deadline for Articles & Adverts	Latest Copy / Advertorial Deadline	Distribution & Sale
SUMMER	Thurs, May 24	June 5	June 18
AUTUMN	Thurs, Sept 3	Sept 11	Sept 24
WINTER	Thurs, Nov 5	Nov 11	Nov 26

Contact editor Allen Meagher on 061-458011 or [editor@changingireland.ie](mailto:editor@changingireland.ie)

The world's oldest head of state in 1973 was Eamon de Valera (90).

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