

CHANGING IRELAND

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Issue 49 - The national magazine of the Local and Community Development Programme - www.changingireland.ie

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Cork's favourite co-op - 19



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Positive development news from Connemara, Roscommon, Kilkenny, Dublin, Limerick...



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INDEPENDENT

'Changing Ireland' is an independent publication core-funded by Government since 2001:



Comhshool, Pobal agus Rialtas Aitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

CHANGE TO SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME



The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the main community development programme operated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in support of the voluntary and community sector. It had a budget of €48m in 2014.

The programme tackles poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government and its agencies and people in disadvantaged communities.

Most of the work on-the-ground covered by this magazine is funded through the LCDP.

The Programme concludes on March 31st and is being replaced from April 1st by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).



Editorial

W₂ I₁ N₁ N₁ E₁ R₁ S₁ A₁ N₁ D₁ L₂ O₂ S₁ E₁ R₁ S₁



Child poverty has doubled since 2008 according to CSO statistics (see pages 16-18).

Yet, stories on the issue only occasionally make headlines.

It feels personal when you know some of the faces behind the CSO's statistics. Even more so

when you believe it was avoidable.

Human rights advocates, community, youth and childcare workers and activists are at one in seeking to reduce the gulf between winners and losers in our unequal society, ideally with State support.

Uncomfortable as it sometimes is, to fight inequality, you must tackle the causes as well as the effects. That's in the nature of true Community Development.

That involves telling it as it is and challenging government policy and sometimes public attitudes.

In that vein, after seven years of cuts, it is reassuring to see that funding has been secured long-term for 17 critically important and often outspoken women's projects, five island projects and 14 Traveller projects (page 4). Minister Alan Kelly and his colleagues' efforts demonstrate that the Government does indeed value community work.

Nonetheless, trade unions fear there will still be redundancies this year in the Community Sector: A protest (pages 12-13) was held recently outside the headquarters of the Department of the

Environment, Community and Local Government.

And after changes over recent years, Community development now sometimes appears even stronger among groups operating independently of State funding (eg Cork's Quay Co-op, page 19).

Meanwhile, in a sign of the changing relationship between the Community and Voluntary Sector and the State, private, for-profit corporations were last year for the first time invited to bid for social inclusion contracts.

As we went to print, community organisations that tendered to be part of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme got their results (see page 7).

Also, State-funded community work has now been tied in with the work of local authorities, undermining our autonomy, argue opponents.

Whether you welcome it or bemoan it, we're in a new era.

As for ourselves, *Changing Ireland* was first set up, in 2001, because the considerable outcomes of government spending on community initiatives received sparse attention nationally.

We believe we help redress that imbalance while highlighting Community Development and giving communities a stronger voice. Ideally, we will continue shining a light on the on-the-ground impact of social inclusion work funded through Government programmes and other sources.

Indications are, one way or the other, we will have news on future funding shortly.

Allen Meagher

PS

Follow us on social media. Ideas welcome for our 50th edition in June.

FILE A REPORT FOR US!

If you believe in Community Development and enjoy writing, why not file a report for us about your community project and what makes it unique. 300-400 words is plenty (and a photo if possible). Certain criteria apply. Your first point of contact should be the editor.



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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this magazine are those of the author concerned. They do not, by any means, necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the editorial team, the voluntary management board of Changing Ireland Community Media Ltd, or the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

**MADE IN MOYROSS
LIMERICK**

NEWS

17 WOMEN'S PROJECTS ASSURED OF FUNDING

- Statement by Ministers Kelly & Fitzgerald
- Relief 33 days before contract ran out



Minister Alan Kelly met on February 27th with the South Kerry Women's Association to assure them their funding and that of 16 other women's projects nationwide was secure for the future.

Two Government Departments have collaborated to ensure funding will be continued for the 17 women's projects operating under the National Collective of Community Based Women's Network (NCCWN).

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

The projects had engaged in lobbying and campaigning for nine months.

"We are absolutely delighted," said Miriam Holt, NCCWN co-ordinator.

Minister Alan Kelly said the decision "demonstrated the Government's commitment to social inclusion and community development."

Under current arrangements, the Network is funded until the end of March through the LCDP and will from April onwards be supported through the Department of Justice and Equality.

The NCCWN employs 44 staff including specialist community development workers to work with women experiencing discrimination, poverty and disadvantage; 200 more people are employed through directly associated services.

Miriam said, "We are heartened that campaigning at grassroots level actually works. The department had more PQs (parliamentary questions) about retaining the NCCWN than about any other community group for years. We received cross party support and support from independents. We held a briefing session last July and 43 TDs and Senators attended. They really got behind us," she said.

She thanked the projects, their supporters, the Ministers and their officials and commented: "In moving to Justice, we think we're a good fit under equality."

A joint statement issued by Ministers Alan Kelly, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, and Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Justice and Equality, said: "The (new) scheme is based on the work of the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks and is aimed at promoting equality between men and women and to ensuring that women can achieve their full potential while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life."

"The scheme will continue to give a voice to women and will help to address poverty, social exclusion and gender inequality experienced by women. The scheme will be

subject to on-going review by the Department of Justice and Equality and to such changes as may be appropriate," it continued.

Minister Kelly said his Department is "contributing significant funding to the scheme to maintain funding at close to his Department's 2014 levels to the NCCWN."

His Department will transfer €1.4 million to the Department of Justice and Equality vote to support the revised scheme.

Minister Kelly emphasised that both Departments are fully committed to ensuring that the delivery of the range of supports, currently provided through his Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP), are maintained in the Department of Justice and Equality led scheme.

The 17 projects coordinate and run development programmes including Equality for Women, health and wellbeing, active citizenship, community education, domestic abuse support and progression pathways to training and employment.

Services they provide include childcare centres, drop-in/information centres and affordable accessible counselling.

The projects had campaigned to have funding kept at 2014 levels.

Junior minister Aodhán Ó Riordáin will have responsibility for the scheme.

ISLANDS & TRAVELLERS

Meanwhile, funding arrangements have been put in place, under a new Department of Justice led scheme, to support 14 Traveller community projects, which are managed by the National Traveller Partnership based in Pavee Point.

Similarly, the funding stream for five island Community Development Projects will transfer from Minister Kelly's Department, this time to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, from April 1st.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is contributing significant funding to the new schemes.

EQUALITY - R

Charity shop also funds community development

- Townspeople loyally support project



Jean Kennedy at work.

A charity shop, set-up after an appeal for donations when funding was threatened, serves the dual purpose of fund raising for Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) while also providing women with work experience to enhance their CVs.

Soft-spoken shop manager Jean Kennedy could not hide her gratitude for the RWN.

"I got the job a year ago. I organise all the volunteers, they are a very nice bunch of girls to work with - they're very reliable, very friendly and we work as a team.

"I got into the job after I went through a rough patch.

"The Women's network helped me get back on my feet and now I try to give a bit back, for example on Mothers day we do things like tea and coffees to spoil the mothers a bit.

ALSO BREAKS A 'CATCH 22'

"The charity shop gives people the chance to break the catch 22 in which people cannot gain the experience needed to get a job," said training co-ordinator Maria Harris.

"Young people who have no experience can work in the Charity shop and say they have worked a till."

"We have people who have progressed to further and higher education as well as full employment."

The shop's profits help support community development work in the area, partly filling the gap created by government cutbacks to civil society groups nationally.

"We are very fortunate with the support we get from the people of Castlerea," added Jean.

ROSCOMMON WOMEN'S NETWORK

ON THE GROUND ISSUES

"WE HAVE TO REMAIN BOTTOM-UP"

- Project must stay in hands of people using the service, says Nora Fahy

BY BEN PANTER

One of the most striking things about the Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) is the team-spirit within the office. This is not surprising since many of the women employed in the centre started out by using RWN's services and they provide real-life examples of how Community Development can change people's lives.

I arrived at the picturesque snow-dusted Old Mill building in Castlerea and was greeted by Nora Fahy who is extremely passionate about all the Network does and the challenges facing rural women in the area.

RWN views rural isolation, childcare challenges and the plight of carers in the community as big issues.

Nora believes there should be much more support for carers looking after older people or children with learning difficulties: "A lot of these women are single parents. Even if they never availed of our (employment) services, many still drop in and get social support. We listen to them and we support them, if we feel they are being treated unfairly we will also advocate on their behalf."

RWN evolved out of a Women's drop-in centre in nearby Strokestown. In 2007 a voluntary board was set-up and they saw that the biggest need for services was in Castlerea and, with help from the Community Employment scheme, the Old Mill was turned into Roscommon Women's Network headquarters.

Today, the Old Mill is a one-stop shop for everything from counselling services including family therapy, addiction counselling and group therapy to a creative writing group that grew out of a lone-parents support group.

This evolution highlights what Nora calls the "organic nature of community development."

One writer Jessamine O'Connor has won prestigious awards including the iYeats and



Jean Kennedy, Rita McLoughlin, Nora Fahy, Lorraine Campbell, Maria Harris, Noirín Kavanagh, Jay Plunkett (some of the staff and volunteers in RWN). PHOTO: BEN PANTER.

Francis Ledwidge awards (see her writing at: jessamineoconnor.com).

The Old Mill also houses a training centre and there are currently 21 students enrolled.

"It benefits all age groups with the younger ones getting advice and encouragement from older members," says training co-ordinator Nóirín Kavanagh.

They generally work with people with few or no qualifications and help them improve their chances of finding employment.

Nicola Plummer who was on her last day of a FETAC Level 5 course in information processing said she now wanted "to go to college."

Incidentally, RWN is not a women-only

project, men are involved too.

Despite the tangible results achieved by the network, Community Development workers and service users are facing challenging times.

Nora says that the biggest challenge is the "erosion of community development – it has to remain bottom up and it has to remain in the hands of the people who use the service."

She "wholeheartedly" welcomed the news that funding had been secured, albeit slightly below 2014 funding levels.

For more info, contact: RWN, Unit 5, The Old Mill, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon

T: 094-9621690.

W: rwn.ie



Tonya Caspers owner of the Dutch Flower Shop in Castlerea, Colm Eakins RWN Tús worker, and Susan Davis, local community supporter.



Nicole Plummer and Jason Sharkey, students in RWN Training Services which is funded by Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board.

ROSCOMMON WOMEN

2015-2017

NEWS:

SENSITIVE WORK: FUNDING ASSURED

'Changing Ireland' reporter **Ben Panter** travelled through the rural West of Ireland in poor weather conditions in January to visit Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, home to one of the country's most inspiring women's projects.

While funding was a major concern when he called, on February 27th, Ministers Alan Kelly and Frances Fitzgerald announced that funding had been secured long-term for the project and 16 partner projects nationwide working with women.

Minister Alan Kelly has earlier described the work by RWN as being among "the most impressive in the country" and he was "quietly confident" six months ago that the work would continue to be supported.

One gets a glimmer of insight into the sensitive nature of RWN's work and the vulnerability of some of the women they work with from a sign posted in capital letters on the top of every page on their website: "If you need to exit this site in a hurry, click here!!!"

Like all the LDCP funded projects, Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) excels at connecting with vulnerable people that other (larger) agencies struggle to reach.

"AS SOON AS I GOT A JOB, I CAME BACK AS A VOLUNTEER"

- Longest acronym award to Roscommon's W.I.N.D.O.W.

BY BEN PANTER

One of the more memorable acronyms in a sector that should employ Carol Vorderman as a code-breaker is W.I.N.D.O.W. which stands for Women Initiating New Development Opportunities for Women.

Development worker Maria Harris runs the initiative and describes it as a "one-to-one mentoring service designed to help people into employment and education."

"Basically we help those that for whatever reason need a helping hand.

"People shouldn't slip through the net in this day and age, but for various reasons they do.

"We look to help disadvantaged women such as single parents, those suffering from domestic abuse and women that get referred from addiction services."

The project is supported by Roscommon Women's Network (RWN).

Maria believes that the biggest problems for rural women are transport and confidence.

"I know men suffer from this too, but the biggest thing women have to overcome is confidence in themselves.

"They'll see that a course is available and think to themselves 'I can't do that'."

One of the first women to avail of the scheme was RWN volunteer Lorraine Cambell.

She explains, "I had no background in community development or even reception and computer skills.

"I took part in a Community Employment scheme which gave me the opportunity to

do lots of training.

"At the end of my term the W.I.N.D.O.W project had just started, in a sense I was a guinea pig.

"Through the help and support they gave me – and I needed a lot of it – they learnt where a lot of the needs were.

"As soon as I left I got a job, but I also came back as a volunteer on the board, I was chairperson for a while and I'm now the treasurer."

She has since done something remarkable:

"What I had always wanted to do; what I never had the confidence to do was to go to college.

"This time last year – possibly this day last year – I filled out my CAO forms.

"I'm now in Castlebar GMIT studying heritage and I absolutely adore it, love it!

"W.I.N.D.O.W. changed the direction of my life."



Kerri Garvey, former participant. Photo: Gerard O'Loughlin.

About the new Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme

The Government's new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) launches on April 1st and replaces the Local and Community Development Programme.

It has a budget of €28m for the remainder of 2015 and will run until 2017.

SICAP aims to "reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration."

There are three main goals. (see below) while the Programme's vision is "to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration where the values of equality and inclusion are promoted and human rights are respected."

The Programme is underpinned by a Community Development approach and seeks to support communities, groups and individuals.



GOAL 1

To support and resource disadvantaged communities and marginalised target groups to engage with relevant local and national stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues.

GOAL 2

To support individuals and marginalised target groups experiencing educational disadvantage so they can participate fully, engage with and progress through life-long learning opportunities through the use of community development approaches.

GOAL 3

To engage with marginalised target groups/individuals and residents of disadvantaged communities who are unemployed but who do not fall within mainstream employment service provision, or who are referred to SICAP, to move them closer to the labour market and improve work readiness, and support them in accessing employment and self-employment and creating social enterprise opportunities.

SOCIAL INCLUSION:

WINNERS & LOSERS....

- Tender results still to be formally published; main outcomes known

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Contracts will shortly be issued to companies that tendered to provide services under the Government's newest social inclusion initiative.

From Monday, March 2nd, companies were given 14 days to decide. However, no company is expected to turn down an offer to be part of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP),

The offer letters were issued by Local Community Development Committees around the country. Celebrations were tempered by a lower level of funding than in the preceeding programme and the knowledge that not every community organisation that tendered had won.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government stated: "Following contract signature, Pobal will publish a Contract Award Notice in the Official Journal of the EU (www.ted.europa.eu/) and on the eTenders website (www.etenders.gov.ie) announcing the results of this nationwide competition. Such notice is likely to be published in early April."

It added: "It should be noted that there is currently a 14 day standstill period in place, the public procurement process is still ongoing and, therefore, all information is still confidential."

Nonetheless some companies took to social media to express delight at being offered a contract, with a small number expressing shock and disappointment at losing out.

"All jobs secure. So relieved!!! Well done all. Massive result!!!" tweeted Cllr. Mary Roche after Waterford City Partnership were successful in their bid.

In Wicklow, the Bray Area Partnership announced: "We have just learned that we have been successful with our tender to deliver the Government's new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme in the Bray and Greystones Municipal District areas, in conjunction with our consortium partners."

RTE's 'Drivetime' interviewed people from companies facing redundancy and named the following as having "lost out": Rathmines-Pembroke Community Partnership (RPCP), Fingal Leader Partnership, Forum Connemara, Waterford Leader Partnership and Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership (BWAP). Other sources confirmed the same to 'Changing Ireland'.

Richard Costello from RPCP said staff were "devastated" - we've been working in the community for a long time."

On the northside of Dublin city, Cllr. Noeleen Reilly, who is a director of BWAP, said: "Pitting the Tolka Area Partnership and the Ballymun/Whitehall Area Partnership against each other always meant one would lose out."

It appears that all other indigenous, not-for-profit Local Development Companies that up to now received funding through the LCDP will from April receive SICAP funding.

Since it was an open tender process, community development advocates and trade



unions feared that private, for profit companies might enter the competition (see centre pages).

It appears none did, or if they did, they were unsuccessful on this occasion.

A government statement stressed that SICAP "was not, as has been cited by certain community activists, a move to privatise programme delivery."

Funding under the new programme will be slightly below 2014 levels compared to the funding for communities spent via the LCDP. For the remaining nine months of this year, €28m is budgeted for SICAP.

Meanwhile, Traveller projects, island projects and women's projects' futures have been secured, with Minister Alan Kelly's Department collaborating with two other government departments to ensure a continuation of funding. For more details, see page 4.

About the new Programme

The Government's new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) will be launched on April 1st, to replace the Local and Community Development Programme. For more information, see page opposite.

YOUR VIEWS SOUGHT ON LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Aim is to fill policy gap with new framework

- April 10th deadline for submissions



A new policy document inviting public comment has been published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government with April 10th set as the deadline for submissions.

The 25-page draft "Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland" recounts a history of how the State got behind Community Development groups as a means of tackling poverty and unemployment.

While it does not refer anywhere in the text to inequality, with Ireland now topping 'the charts' across Europe for social and economic inequality, it does talk about the need for supporting work that promotes equality.

The document commits the Government as a matter of principle to "strong community participation... with 'bottom-up' or com-

munity development approaches retained as integral features of local and community development."

The devising of a new framework is intended to "fill a policy gap" and counter the "ad-hoc development of local and community structures across the country."

We need "an overarching policy for local and community development" it states because change has occurred in recent years in both the local and community development sectors without an overarching policy framework.

It refers to but mostly skims over the impact of cuts on the Community Sector and uses a diluted definition of Community Development*, as compared to how the term is used by long-established community groups on the ground.

It quotes international agency LEED which says: "Any action has to be based on comprehensive local economic intelligence."

It asserts that "Community engagement is the central tenet upon which the framework is founded." It further marks out intentions to "provide local people with a real voice and real power in the development of policies and strategies that identify and seek to address their communities' needs".

Currently, many organisations in the Community Sector that expect long-term funding from the State are required to be able to work at county-wide level. This has replaced an earlier support structure for hundreds of small, truly local organisations.

(...Continued inside on page 22).

COMMUNITY RADIO - A MEANS TO ALL

GRAINNE O'MALLEY, CONNEMARA COMMUNITY RADIO

- It's all about community development, but the fun

It's been a tough year at Connemara Community Radio with serious funding worries, yet the station continued to broadcast 71 hours a week of seriously good original radio programming. Here, we take a tour of the pioneering station - 20 years old this year - with some of the people who help make it all happen. Funding is now secure:

ALLEN MEAGHER REPORTS FROM LETTERFRACK

For ten years, Gráinne O'Malley, now station manager, was in charge of training, production and co-ordination.

"We began with 2 small studios, my office was in the kitchen and there was a great buzz," she said.

Connemara Community Radio is a community development project first and foremost - this is core to the station's raison d'être.

"But this doesn't ever get fully recognised by funders," said the Cleggan woman.

"We provide access, information, participation and tackle isolation, yet funders often say, 'You don't really fit in here because what you do is not really community development'. But it is. The station is our community development tool. We've 90 people a week volunteering here, they're at our core," she said.

Fundamental to the idea of community media is participation by all, shared ownership, and community building. However, that doesn't mean Connemara Community Radio produces programmes preaching the virtues of Community Development.

"We've a great record in recovering lost dogs. And the odd cat. We're the community's focal point, or hub, we're the first point of contact for most people."

However, an independent study* confirmed the station's immense worth to the community in promoting participation, social inclusion, reaching out to marginalised groups, all key aims of any community development project.

The station covers controversial issues that effect the locality, as well as national issues.

There are issues in the area - one of the most sparsely populated parts of the country - including homelessness, with reports of one person who recently lost their home now living in a car.

Among the most listened-to broadcasts are the death notices.

Inexplicable as it might sound, occasionally people - if they believe someone in



Grainne O'Malley - started when the station was in its pirate days.

their area might have passed away - phone the station to ask if anyone has died and who they were.

Researcher Kevin Heanue said the death notices are critically important to keeping the spread-out community knitted together.

While community radio doesn't measure audience size (that's not what community radio is about) from a population of 10,000 to 12,000, Gráinne believes that around

"We've a great record in recovering lost dogs. And the odd cat. We're the community's focal point."

half the population listen in.

She said, "My life here began in 1988 when we had a pirate station and a neighbour of mine got me to do the phones. Then I did a Community Development and Enterprise course run by Forum Connemara.

"I had a flair for the technical side. I'm good on production, we've won lots of awards," she said. Among their wins was a New York Festival award four years ago for Mary Owens (with Gráinne on editing).

This year, the station celebrates 20 years and it has funding for the foreseeable future (albeit less than before). It was until January funded through the Local and Community Development Programme (and before that

the Community Development Programme). Now it has become a client-project of the Department of Social Protection's Community Services Programme.

"With all the changes, we're preparing to do a strategic plan for the station for the years to come," said Gráinne.

On the way out the door, she stopped me to almost apologise that it was quiet: "Normally, you can't move with the number of volunteers here."

It was a festive time of year, but as it was I was nearly run over by the number of volunteers I met at every turn.

Fiona Scullion is a researcher with Connemara FM. Her three-year stint through a Community Employment scheme was nearly up.

"One of the biggest problems we have is we train people up," said Fiona, "and it takes a lot of time, but then they have to move on. It's worst of all for people on Tús," she said, "because they're only with us a year."

The outcomes for people who join the station are often remarkable, sometimes leading people to return to education.

"The station's been a life-changing experience for people, without a shadow of a doubt," said Gráinne.

She gave a number of examples.

Star of the station is website manager who goes by the name 'Prince William the 1st of Connemara': the station's website includes daily podcast uploads and uniquely features non-stop onscreen rain when you open the homepage.

What is Community Radio?

The phrase 'a radio service by the people, close to the people and for the people' sums up the ideal essential features of community radio (Sánchez, 2003). This means that community radio must not only be run by, but also serve the interests of, the community.

N END

COMMUNITY RADIO'S PIRATE QUEEN

unders don't always get it

For devilment, 'Prince William' designed, printed and mounted on the wall a certificate that saluted his self-awarded status as "Employee of the Year".

He took it down to give us a closer look.

"Jeez, I never noticed that," said his colleague Colleen who co-ordinates the volunteers.

Not much she could do. William smiled. He keeps everyone on their toes. He wasn't for being interviewed.

Neither for that matter was station mascot "Miss Piggy" (pictured) probably the only cat in Ireland that has a free run inside a radio station. She was the centre of attention when RTE's Sean O'Rourke visited recently and is, as it happens, tone deaf.

Miss Piggy doesn't know all she's missing out on.

W: connemarafm.com

W: craol.ie

* *'Static Structures and Dynamic Processes of Participation and Access - A case study of Connemara Community Radio'* by Kevin P. Heanue, Áine Macken Walsh (available online).



Station mascot
Miss Piggy.



Volunteers such as Anne are the
lifeblood of the station.

Two years ago, Anne Norris from Renvyle heard the regular appeals to people interested in trying something new and signed up to become a volunteer.

"I said I'd be quite happy to answer the phones, but that was all. That was on a Monday; by Thursday I was sitting in with presenter Breandan O'Scannail on his programme 'The Great Outdoors' and I'm there ever since. I'm a technician now and I've done three music shows myself.

"I used to keep saying the word 'okay'. I don't do that anymore."

"It's amazing all the people you meet," she said.

Nicaragua's influence on West Connemara

- via Co-founder Mary Ruddy:

Imagine being so inspired by community radio in your locality that you head off to Central America to learn more.

That's what Mary Ruddy, co-founder and first station manager of Connemara Community Radio, did and – inspired by what she saw there – she joined the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (known by its Spanish acronym AMARC).

Starting off, the people in Connemara considered producing a community newsletter, but figured that a radio station would be "more interesting".

"At that point, we didn't even know there was a model for underpinning radio broadcasting with a community development philosophy.

Through a connection, Bray Local Radio put them on the right path.

"Then I went to Nicaragua on my holidays, while we were waiting to get a license, to attend an AMARC conference and I learned very innovative ways of using radio, for example to address literacy and health issues."

"In Central America, they broadcast educational and hygiene programmes for example and use radio drama to teach people. That really sparked it for me, it was innovative."

Community radio in Ireland is not as "politically progressive or left-wing" as Mary has seen in other countries.

"People here are not phoning up to know their rights, it's harder. In other countries in Europe, they'd have a more progressive ethos, they'd be more overtly political.

"Elsewhere in Europe, it attracted people from left-wing movements whereas in Ireland it seemed to draw people from the Community Development Sector and a broader cross-section of people, more conservative people."

"We get a mixture of the radicals and the conservatives here. I suppose that's more reflective of the community and our focus was always on inclusivity, we're very conscious of that," she said.

She still laments the "five lost years" from 1990-'95 when the station, which had been operating as a pirate, went off-air awaiting licensing approval promised within months. Referring to a tribunal of enquiry

later set up to enquire into dodgy deals over licenses, Mary said they wished they had known then that cronyism appeared to be the order of the day, because they would have reopened the pirate station.

"We were innocently writing out proposals and little did we know it had little to do with merit and was all about politics then. By the time we got the license, we'd lost some of our energy."

She credited the eventual award of the licence to former ministers Éamon Ó Cuív and Michael D Higgins, now President.

As to the future, Mary believes the station will certainly be around in five and 10 years' time.

"It's well rooted now," she said modestly. "When I was manager, money was very tight, but my main worry wasn't finances."

She was focused on keeping volunteers involved.

"But I needn't have worried, that's never been a problem, people are very loyal to the station and we've 90 volunteers."

"Now, I don't mean to minimise the issues with finances. That is a problem and really community radio stations need to take a sectoral approach to the cuts."

While Connemara Community Radio may not be as radical and innovative as she'd like, she remains dedicated.

It's not everywhere you find former managers back in the workplace giving their time as volunteers.



Mary Ruddy, co-founder & still involved.

COMMUNITY RADIO

"I WANTED TO BE A HAIRDRESSER AND HERE I AM IN HEUSTON STATION!"

- Colleen Curran, volunteer co-ordinator

Colleen Curran from Derryinver, Co. Galway started in Connemara FM in January 2003 through a FAS scheme

Today, she is the station's full-time volunteer co-ordinator with 90 people to look after.

Colleen said, "It's like Heuston Station in here, it's a social hub for people.

"We start people off doing the weather. We've everyone from Joseph from Cameroon to Peter from England, we're covering everything from archaeology (with Michael Gibbons) to the political families of Connemara," she said.

"One of our most popular programmes is 'The West Wind Blows' with Kathleen Faherty, featuring music and poetry," she said. That programme led the station to produce a CD last year (some copies of which are still for sale). Colleen said there is a constant need to fundraise with State

funding in decline."

"We broadcast ten hours daily, 365 days of the year. Christmas Day is very important because there's no postman that day and a lot of people have nobody calling to them."

The region is one of the most isolated in the country.

"Students in cities can attend grind schools, but there is no such thing in Connemara so the station has filled the gap by producing ten exam-related programmes each year. We find parents make their children listen in."

"We've produced many award-winning programmes," she said, reaming off programme names and awards.

The pride is obvious.

Yet, like many of the volunteers, Colleen was initially shy: "I wouldn't go on the radio at the start." Now she encourages others.

"And do you know what - all I ever wanted to be was a hairdresser!" she laughed.



Janet O'Toole, Connemara Community Radio volunteer, interviewing school-children at Supervalu, Clifden, Co. Galway.

€216k to be spent on attic archive

Michael D Higgins opened the station when a minister and paid a return visit as President last year. Everything broadcast by Connemara FM in the intervening years has been kept safe and sound.

The archive in the attic, wall to wall with cassettes from 1995 to 2007, is Grainne's pride and joy.

"We've everything we ever broadcast," she said.

It's been immaculately kept and the station is piloting a national project to establish the best way to digitally archive the material so that other stations can follow their lead.

The station is receiving expert advice from RTE and was awarded €216,000 from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to digitise the archive.

For those interested in knowing more about the development of community radio in Ireland, Grainne recommends 'Bicycle Highway' by Dr Rosemary Day (2007), available from the Liffey Press for €16.95.

For a full list of publications of interest on community radio in Ireland, visit: craol.ie



What next?

By Gearóid Fitzgibbon, chairperson



People have been asking us where does 'Changing Ireland' go from here? What next?

We've provided an independent voice on issues facing communities and highlighted how best communities and government can rise to the challenges. We've championed community development because it's what we believe in. We've served Government well by highlighting how their investment in communities is spent. We've brought issues to the fore.

From the beginning, in 2001, our magazine has been based in one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country.

Still to this day, those suffering most from prejudice, poverty and marginalisation have the weakest voice.

We continually seek to correct that imbalance through quality, original journalism. We have also sought to speak truth to power.

However, we're not very good at blowing our trumpet. In fact, we are the most widely distributed - and dare I say most popular - magazine emanating from the Community and Voluntary Sector. Our print run of 5,000 copies is augmented by online downloads.

The magazine is sold in Easons, goes nationwide to thousands of civil society folk and to every elected politician in the country, giving them insight into how funding is spent on social inclusion and local and community development.

We believe people want to hear good news and want to play a part in changing Ireland.

We have asked Minister Alan Kelly and his officials to continue to fully support this independent voice as we share positive stories of community initiatives supported through Government social inclusion programmes nationally (eg SICAP, SSNO) that use the tools of Community Development.

In the meantime, we're making plans to mark our 50th edition in June. Thanks to all our readers for your ongoing support and interest.



Limerick Northside Youthreach staff and students visited 'Changing Ireland' in January for a workshop in part fulfillment of their studies. Lots of questions!

THE SOUND OF INCLUSION

LAOIS CHOIR GOES BENEATH THE GRASSROOTS

- Laois Partnership's example of how to embrace diversity

BY BEN PANTER

One of the most heart-warming experiences I have had as a reporter for 'Changing Ireland' is witnessing the 'Sing For Joy' choir which meets on Wednesday mornings within the stunning architecture of the grass-roofed 'Parish Centre' in Portlaoise.

The choir members are care assistants and people with a variety of care needs who come together to express the joy of living.

When I arrived the singing had already begun and judging by the multitude of smiling faces the choir was proving a great success.

Storm Powell from the Laois Partnership explained how 'Sing for Joy', now entering its second year, grew.

"I was watching a TV programme about a choir and the next day I was driving home from work when it suddenly hit me - 'Why don't we start our own choir?'."

"I pulled straight into a lay-by and rang Maureen Culleton, a singer and dancer who had experience directing a school choir," said Storm.

At first she was hesitant, but Storm convinced her, and now Maureen directs 'Sing For Joy': "It's a very important part of my life. I believe in it totally and when you believe in something you are committed."

"I really look forward to meeting everyone each week. I enjoy singing and passing on the joy to others and you can see that it helps relieve anxieties and worries."

Initially organisers toyed with the idea of auditions but decided that the choir was to be open to all.

"It was the right decision and worked well. The vast majority of people involved can sing," said Maureen. Having heard them sing, I can verify they made the right decision."



The grass-roofed exterior of the much-loved Parish Centre in Portlaoise where the choir meets for practices.

As 'Changing Ireland' has highlighted before, music can be therapeutic for all.

Perhaps the most remarkable success story of the choir was of a young man from a psychiatric facility who had not spoken in years.

He attended choir sessions but did not

"So overwhelmed they started crying"

contribute vocally until one day, out of the blue, he stood up and sung a song.

"The nurses who were with him were so overwhelmed they started crying," said Maureen. "Music is often overlooked in the mental wellness toolkit."

The highlight of the choir's short career to date was performing the opening slot at a national conference held by the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland entitled 'Caring for Carers'.

Fortunately for locals, the choir does not keep all its talents to itself. Plans were afoot to hold Valentines and Paddy's Day concerts.

The choir's set-up and operations are geared towards fulfilling LCDP Goal 4 and in a very cost-effective way.

Portlaoise Parish Centre provides a room for a nominal fee in an eye-catching building that opened in 2005. Inside, singers mix with the wider public over a cup of tea in the centre's community cafe.

Everyone agreed choir-singing reduces stress and anxiety, improves confidence and in cases, according to Storm can even help support LCDP Goal 3 by "getting the client ready for work placements."

By the end of the practice I almost floated out of the building such was the up-lifting effect of a couple of hours spent in the company of 'Sing For Joy'.

Still, times are hard for community development so what does the future hold for such a worthy project?

They are resilient: "Even if funding is cut the choir will still carry on," said Storm. "We are looking into the idea of participants donating - in that way the project can stand on its own two feet whatever the future brings."

For more on how music has been used as a tool for personal and community development, read our feature on the Ballymun Music Programme which has engaged over 1,000 children:

<http://www.changingireland.ie/ISSUE34.pdf> (page 21).



The 'Sing for Joy' choir in rehearsals inside the Parish Centre, Portlaoise: People have been truly transformed by participating.

SIPTU PROTEST MARCH

REDUNDANCY & PRIVATISATION FEARS LE - Community groups, workers, unions nervous as

ALLEN MEAGHER REPORTS FROM DUBLIN

"Surely you've heard the one about the frog heating slowly in a pot of water?" a protester asked me.

Standing outside the Custom House, Dublin, I'd asked how had it come to this: a day when we would hear who had won contracts for community work nationwide. The 400 or so people protesting were annoyed but also apprehensive, knowing that even if their companies' bids were successful, they might still be made redundant. The budget from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government for this kind of work is being cut for the seventh year running. Funding in Dublin may be cut by 38%. In other places, it's zero.

Eddie Mullins of SIPTU said that 2,000 workers, some of whom have worked for 20 years in the Sector, faced uncertainty and he feared there could be "hundreds" of redundancies.

He said SIPTU is to ballot members for industrial action shortly, up to and including strike action, as the Department has not "engaged" with the unions despite a Labour Court recommendation to do so.

The layoffs are likely when the extended Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is replaced on April 1st by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

The LCDP and earlier programmes supported hundreds of groups in disadvantaged communities nationwide that in recent years were pushed into mergers to continue qualifying for State funding.

The new programme pushed not-for-profit community groups to make combined bids, to compete with each other and with unknown private sector companies for county "lots".

While SICAP certainly has its merits, it did not receive high praise on the day. The application process and the manner of its roll-out was much criticised.

On the issue of redundancies, Linda Jo Quinn from Westmeath Community Development asked "Why do we continue to be excluded despite a Labour Court recommendation that says the Department needs to engage with us?"

She lamented possible job losses with the changeover to the new programme.

Additional to the concern over cuts to funding was the opening up of social inclusion work to private sector companies keen to tender for State



SIPTU's Eddie Mullins and community worker Tommy Coombes (inset) outside Custom House, Dublin. Eddie said workers had been "compelled by a public procurement process to almost cannibalise each other in pursuit of their jobs".

contracts.

Speaker Rachel Doyle from the Community Workers Co-op (CWC) accused the Government of "turning its back" on communities, workers and "on the very essence of community work itself."

She said it would have "a detrimental impact on the communities that have suffered most during the recession and will benefit least if at all from economic recovery."

Eddie Mullins said: "Minister Kelly belongs to a party that supposedly has a strong belief in community, shared values and collective action."

"This government also purports to believe in community development values and principles."

"Why then is this government totally indifferent?" he said, "to job losses, the decline of the bottom-up approach to community development, to the unraveling of the tangible and the intangible."

He said the SICAP tendering process would "open the floodgates to privatisation on a grand scale across the sector. The Local Employment Services, the Drug Taskforces, et al, are now in the government crosshairs."

He rejected "a nice statutory redundancy payment" and said workers would not go on those terms.

SIPTU's Darragh O'Connor warned: "Privatisation will be an issue for everyone in the sector unless we take a stand now."

Among the chants people hummed was one that went: "Hogan's gone, but what's surprising is why are you still privatising?"

As well as showing that the unions need to hire a finer lyricist, it reflected the fact that people attending the protest distinguished between the current Minister Alan Kelly (Labour) and the previous Fine Gael incumbent.

The policy document that underpins SICAP was called 'Putting People First', but community worker Donnie O'Leary from Cork, said, "It should be more appropriately called

'Putting Profit First'."

The Department, while it funds work in the area, points out that it is not the employer and has therefore nothing to discuss in regard to redundancy payments. In response, SIPTU erected a sign reading "Department of Silence" in place of the official sign outside the Department's HQ.

While outright anger was not on display on the day, that may change in parts of the country when the tender results are made known. As it turned out, February 18th was not to be the day. The issuing of tender letters was postponed.

As people milled around on the footpath beneath banners from the Community and Voluntary Sector, the protester with the analogy about the frog explained further:

"If you pop a frog into a pot of boiling water, it'll hop out pronto. But, if you place the frog in a pot of cold water and heat it slowly it will stay there until it's boiled alive. That's what happened to community development in Ireland."

While speaker Tommy Coombes from Dublin felt the "battle" over privatisation was already probably lost, people should still join a trade



One protester likened what's been happening the Community Sector to how a frog reacts when placed in a slowly heating pot.



Community workers and supporters came from Louth, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Donegal and other counties. Politicians including Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald also attended.

LEAD TO PROTEST AT DEPT HQ s tendering changes relations

union, join the CWC and support the campaign to defend the "the Sector's principles and best practices".

Inner-city based Community Development stalwart Seanie Lambe said "Alan Kelly would be better off listening to the communities" than to officials.

Rachel Doyle highlighted what was at stake:

"Community work is about building solidarity, it's about building a strong voice for change, it's about challenging poverty, inequality, injustice, racism, sexism and prejudice in all its forms. It's about working with communities to meet their real needs as identified by themselves."

Meanwhile, a well-known academic said there were probably weren't enough people out protesting on the day "to make a difference".

In 2009 and 2010, community-led marches attracted up to 15,000 and upwards over the withdrawal of support for Community Development and related projects.

However, as youth worker Danielle McKenna (pictured above) from Rialto, Dublin, said, while it was "hard to know" what impact the day's protest would have, "we can't just lie down because within the youth sector too we'll face privatisation."

Danielle may have hit the nail on the head, as Comhlámh's Mark Cumming would see it. He has an unique perspective as co-ordinator of an association that is very well informed about international development practices.

"It's all heading towards 'results-based payments' for non-government agency work. And if you think that putting community work out to tender is bad, it's only a storm in a teacup compared to the changes coming if and when TTIP* the trade agreement between the USA and



Danielle McKenna and her son at the protest. Danielle was one of five youth workers from Rialto, Dublin, who took part.

"If you think putting community work out to tender is bad, (wait until) you see what's coming if the trade agreement between the USA and the EU goes through"
– Mark Cumming, Comhlámh

the EU goes through."

Great change is afoot.

He encouraged people to join Comhlámh's working group opposing TTIP's corporatist aims.

Incidentally, the scientific community is split over the anecdote about frogs. An 1880s experiment found the temperature has to be raised exceptionally gradually for the frog not to notice.

Otherwise, of course the frog will leap to escape the heat.

Postscript: As of March 4th, it appeared unlikely that any for-profit company had won a contract under SICAP, if indeed any applied. (For more, see the back page).

* TTIP stands for the 'Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership'.

Minister Kelly's statement



Minister Kelly reportedly "gave assurances" on Feb 28th "that SICAP is not a process to privatise community development programmes". Photo by Tony Grehan.

Speaking in the Dail on February 18th, the same day as a Community Sector protest outside the Custom House, Minister Alan Kelly addressed the issues raised.

He said community development is "an integral part" of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and underpins the entire programme:

"I am confident that supports for the most disadvantaged in our society will continue under SICAP and that the programme will continue to provide supports to those most distant from the labour market."

In relation to the Labour Court's recommendation Minister Kelly said, "I am well aware of my responsibilities and will not shirk them. However, the fact remains that the local development companies are private entities."

He was replying to opposition TDs Éamon Ó Cuív and Aongus Ó Snodaigh who said the Department is the "de facto employer" because it provides the funding. They also argued that tendering was unnecessary in the first instance.

Minister Kelly defended the tendering process as being "in accordance with the public spending code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients".

"The public procurement process is a competitive process that was open to local development companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new programme."

He said that after the tender process was complete, the Department "will review the outcome, mindful of the need to observe procurement regulations and ensure front-line services delivered through the new programme are protected in so far as possible."

"The outcome of this independent process will be known soon," he said, "and I am confident that the Government will address any issues that arise in the area of service provision to ensure people will receive the services they need."

On February 27th, Minister Kelly announced that arrangements had been made to secure long-term funding for 17 women's projects funded up to now under the LCDP. For more on this story, see page 4.



Community development workers from Limerick with their banners.

SUPPORTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT

*What's
your next
move?*

TEASING OUT THE D.I.Y. AMONG SLIGO'S UNEMPLOYED

- Ten years, 250 participants; 140 of whom are still trading



MAIREAD MCGUGH:

"My background is in hairdressing but I gave up my career to raise two children. I'm on lone parents allowance, I'm am re-skilling to get back to where I was."



LISA MCMANUS:

"I'm a qualified beautician, I have my own premises and I'm trying to get business up and running. I'm also a qualified gymnastics teacher so I would like to teach that to beginners."



MARIA CASEY:

"My background is in hairdressing but I gave up my career to raise two children. I'm on lone parents allowance, I'm am re-skilling to get back to where I was."

BEN PANTER REPORTS FROM SLIGO

Michael Glennon from Sligo Leader Partnership must have had some sensitive information to divulge as he arranged to meet me in a lay-by outside of the town. Then he sought to bribe me with lunch.

The exceptionally friendly Michael is in charge of a LEADER/ FAS* co-funded self-employment activation programme called 'Next Move'.

The initiative had just achieved the laudable milestone of its 20th intake of participants. Over its ten years Next Move has racked up some very impressive statistics.

Over 250 participants have completed the course to date and over 200 progressed on to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) at which stage LCDP Funding kicked in.

Perhaps most impressive of all, 140 of the participants are still trading.

Outside of self-employment Seamus said that, "a sizeable minority took up PAYE jobs"

'Next Move' was designed to support LCDP Goal 3, which aims "to increase people's work readiness and employment prospects."

With statistics comparing favourably with the national average it has certainly achieved that goal. When one takes into account that the Programme targets the hardest-to-reach groups (eg the long-term-unemployed, lone parents, former prisoners) and given the geography of rural Sligo, it is an impressive achievement and represents value for money.

Currently on the course, Debi Birt went to art college and now does pencil portraits of photographic quality, specialising in babies, toddlers and children: "I really need help with the marketing, she said."

Fellow-participant, Kevin Hickey said: "I would like to fish for lobsters and maybe take tourists out on the boat down the line (no pun intended)."

Why has the next move programme been so successful?

Michael said, "The course is very innovative and Seamus Caulfield who leads the course puts huge emphasis on getting people's heads right."

"After a period on the dole confidence is at a low ebb, people get deflated; we try to give them that confidence back."

Seamus agrees: "I have yet to find someone lacking in ability, there is no such thing. All people need is clarity about where their idea is going and what they want to do."

The course runs one day a week over

22 weeks. During the rest of the time participants are expected to do as much market research as possible.

The course has a 'blended learning approach' where participants can avail of online resources adding to the hours they put into preparation for their business start-up.

Next Move covers essentials such as marketing and advertising, bookkeeping, taxation and pricing.

The 12 participants on each course also support each other.

"They have a huge amount of life experience and knowledge," said Michael.

Sharing skills and ideas, they make mutually beneficial future business connections.

According to Michael, a number of people learnt that self-employment was not for them, which he described as "a result in itself."

"Self employment isn't for everybody, there are risks. The huge difference between PAYE and self-employment is PAYE workers know what they are getting paid every week; with self-employment you don't know.

*"Life might knock
you off course but
never let go of
that vision."*

"It's a totally different attitude and mindframe in relation to sourcing work – it's up to you. You work, you get rewards – if you don't work you don't get rewards."

There were also over 2,000 others who did not participate in the full course who were able to avail of personal mentoring and a one-day business start-up course.

Once the course is over the would-be entrepreneurs are not left stranded: "We build up long term working relationships with the clients," said Michael.

So what type of people are attracted to the Next Move programme?

"I meet every type, I meet people who come in with low self-confidence and I meet people who have super duper confidence and all in-between; There is no one-size-fits-all here."

"All people need to do is present an idea and any potential is teased out and the best way forward is identified."

Some of the businesses that sprouted from the last intake included a fashion designer whose clothes have already attracted national attention, a bookkeeper, a jam-maker and an engineer who set up his own workshop.

So the million-dollar question is what is the secret to success?

"You have to have a vision of where you are going," said Seamus. "Life might knock you off course but never let go of that vision."

Nationwide, hundreds of thousands have been given similar support through the Local and Community Development Programme.

POTENTIAL EMPLOYED

are still trading



ANDREW KILFEATHER

"I'm a photographer specialising in weddings. I have been doing it for the last three years and want to turn it in to a proper business."



CARALANNE RUSHE:

"I am a vegan chef about to launch something exciting regarding uncooked food. It's been a dream of mine for a long time and I'm about to make Sligo a lot healthier."



BORIS SHAMOV:

From Russia, Boris hopes to introduce fresh approaches from his own country to youth work to Ireland.

PHOTOS: BEN PANTER.

LIGHT BULBS, ETC.

HORACE GOES ON THE RUN - KNOWS THEY'RE GUNNING FOR HIM



Horace is on the run since he upset those ministers. It's understood he just wouldn't let it go about the Not-For-Prophet Sector.

With nothing to do, he's been popping up around the country asking how many community workers does it take to change a light bulb?

Best replies so far:

None. They're bright enough by themselves to light up any room.

Just one. But try finding one!

Two. One community worker to change the bulb. Another who will start work at the same time to fill out the paperwork, include it in a workplan, log the results (especially outcomes) and see where it fits into the 'National Programme for Creating Thousands of Jobs Fast (before the next election)'.

Three community workers, if you want it done quickly (one week). One to open consultations with the light bulb to ensure they are comfortable about the proposed change. A second to go to three hardware shops to get quotes (and see if any of the older cheap bulbs are still available). A third to call a sub-finance committee meeting to be sure there's enough in the kitty to pay for a new bulb.

Lesson of the day: Sometimes, you're as well off in the dark.

With Horace too busy to write, we can however reveal some of his latest gaffes:

In a recent speech on change in the sector, the Minister advised that

we all needed to be optimistic for a successful future; that we need to see our glass as half-full.

Horace interrupted him to say that since a pessimists' glass was always half-empty, then that left the optimist and the pessimist at the exact same place.

Dazzled for a moment by Horace's intellect, the Minister on the spot offered him a post as a senior advisor... but hastily withdrew the offer when Horace started f'ing and blinding and dribbling uncontrollably.

Then came the fiasco where Horace, delayed at temporary traffic lights, got into an altercation with the female county engineer because he kept calling her 'Beyonce'.

Horace said:

"Dat's hall very well to be-hons-ya."

The engineer heard:

"That's all very well too Beyonce!"

When she got fed up, he started making raspy noises in his throat while pointing at his ear.

"Engine-Ear, do ya get it. Engine-ear, yeah!"

The engineer reported Horace for motoring offences, sexism and being a crap comedian.

News also came in about Horace's Valentine's card to the Government:

Roses are red, water is blue
Roses are pricey, now water is too
Lots of Love from H

Was he drinking, they asked.

in Fact Horace was in good spirits - he'd won a Valentine's Weekend B&B voucher for the Horse & Jockey Hotel for his winning suggestion to name the new local curtain shop.

Horace's entry: Love is Blinds!

ABOUT HORACE:

A former civil servant, community worker and agony uncle, Horace knows it all.

He has addressed everything from world poverty to extraordinary rendition and estate enhancement, and has a huge readership among people seeking change in their pockets.

A few of his better columns are available exclusively on the 'Changing Ireland' website.

CHILD POVERTY -

Doubling in child poverty levels

- Forget about the Bank Enquiry or Aer Lingus, this is the biggest story so far this year

- Childcare workers in national protest

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Probably the most shocking news to emerge this winter in Ireland has been about child poverty – the rates have doubled.

CSO figures were published in January, at the start of a year officially designated by the EU as the European Year for Development.

Between 2008 and 2013, the number of children living in consistent poverty went from 6% to 12%, according to CSO figures published in January.

Nationally the figures mean that around 135,000 children – one in eight – are experiencing material deprivation on a daily basis.

"We see it," said Teresa Grant, manager of Bray pre-school Fun Dayz Community Childcare.

Low-income families are among the LCDP's 18 target groups and Fun Dayz is supported by Bray Area Partnership.

"We do the subvention scheme and see parents struggling to even pay the minimum cost, they just can't afford it," said Teresa. "Even though the Government pays half, it's not enough."

"Parents getting the subvention pay €31.25, but they used only pay €15 going back three years ago. The Government should be subsidising childcare more because people need it, but they can't afford it."

"Our service is very important to families. For some children, their three hours here each day would be the only bit of routine they get, because the parents are stressed out especially if they also have older children."

"People can't afford to pay their bills, for food. We're based in Bray and I haven't seen the economy lifting. It's about the same if not worse. Before, you had both parents working. Now, we see a

lot of fathers who are now unemployed bringing children into us – the mothers might be the ones working now. When you have both parents unemployed, it obviously has an impact."

"There's a lot of stress in the family, the parents can't take the children out like they used to. The children notice it and they're not able to reach their full well-being," she said.

Child poverty can mean:

- Growing up cold, with no heating in their homes.
- Going hungry or without proper winter clothes because family finances are insufficient.
- Living family life in cramped hotel rooms when homes are lost.
- Missing out on many of the joys of childhood.

The Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP) held a national day of action on February 17th to raise awareness of the many issues impacting early years workers. They petitioned the Taoiseach saying, "Our profession is undervalued and under-resourced for the role that it plays in supporting the youngest citizens of this state."

They criticised "a long history of underinvestment in the early childhood sector that shows a complete disregard for the rights of the child and of the professionals working with them."

There are estimated to be 25,000 childcare workers in the country, most of them subsisting on low pay. Approximately 2,500 people marched in the rally, according to ACP.

Meanwhile, community workers and social inclusion activists can use the **European Year for Development** to highlight best policy responses and to draw attention to the despair behind child poverty figures.

Roscommon's Big Blue Playbus

- Double-decker becomes a familiar sight countywide

A Big Blue Playbus has become a familiar sight on the roads of County Roscommon, **REPORTS BEN PANTER.**

The eye-catching double-decker is the result of collaboration between the County Roscommon Traveller Development Group (RTDG) and Roscommon LEADER Partnership.

The retired bus was given a stay of execution in 2008 after the two groups applied for a grant from the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The idea was to bring play sessions to isolated areas, in turn encouraging families to get involved with early childhood education.

Over the years the focus has widened to include supporting parents also.

Equipment and toys on the bus are provided by the RTDG supplemented by donations from the Roscommon County Library.

The bus visits communities in Boyle, Ballaghaderreen, Ballyforan and is a big feature at community fairs.



The playbus now provides an educational service for parents as well as children.

Multi-agency collaboration makes a difference

•Funding for running the bus comes from TUSLA and the HSE's Traveller Health Unit.

•The project is managed through Roscommon LEADER Partnership.

•Bus Drivers are provided through Tús and Community Employment.

•Childcare workers are provided through Tús and the Community Employment and Rural Social Schemes.

•Support for equipment and toys and book donations comes from Roscommon County Library.

• A steering group involving all the statutory and voluntary players including for example Roscommon Women's Network helped with the start-up.

ON THE GROUND

Austerity hurt children most of all

Austerity has had a catastrophic impact on children.

The latest CSO figures show 135,000 children are now experiencing poverty.

It's in that context that the impact of cuts to social inclusion programmes and projects needs to be examined.

What is surprising is how little media coverage or political comment it's received.

When compared to the outcry over child abuse and the rights of children, the near silence is astonishing.

Maybe it's because nobody is surprised - and they shouldn't be - that the doubling of child poverty is a direct result of austerity.

The Government's focus is now on reducing youth unemployment.

This means that at a time when resources are being cut, they are also being diverted away from the soft supports for children and families who face additional challenges, apart from being a long way from the labour market.

The concentration on supporting individuals over groups puts more of a focus on personal progression plans rather than community action plans.

Community development, as supported by the Government, has been pushed into becoming more like social work and an employment support service.

Those services are important and are already being provided by others. The question is - why are local and community development groups also being asked to focus on this as well, to the detriment of local empowerment and collective action.

The Celtic Tiger glorified the individual's ability to prosper and the Government seems to think that the way out of austerity is to return to that model.

Yet, at the height of the Celtic Tiger when you had the highest rates of employment and prosperity, you still had the highest rates of anti-social behaviour and crime (which led to regeneration programmes around the country).

There is no direct co-relation between individuals becoming employed and communities being empowered, improved and becoming less disadvantaged.

It takes a village to raise a child. Community development supports this view.

If you've a dysfunctional village, you may end up with a dysfunctional child. If you cut the resources to the village, you may well end up with a child growing up poor. The CSO figures suggest that you will.

- Juan Carlos Azzopardi, community development manager, Limerick City CDP.

Buggie traffic jam marks launch of loveparenting.ie



At the launch of a new positive parenting website: Maria O'Dwyer, Startright project manager, Jeanne Ryan, loveparenting.ie co-ordinator, Dr. Eileen Humphreys, sociologist and author of 'How Are Our Kids?' and Richard Lynch, ilovelimerick.com.

A traffic jam of child-buggies at Thomond Park, Limerick, is a most unusual sight. However, on January 23rd, parents and children outnumbered statutory agency and community sector workers by two to one.

They were in attendance for the launch of a new website - aimed at an international audience - to help parents.

It includes articles and videos on topics such as 'Top 10 tips for brand new Dads' to 'Learning about playing with your one-year-old'.

"Not everyone can or will access one-to-one or group support, but all parents have questions, doubt themselves, etc. This website is a one-stop shop that provides advice, tips and reassurance about positive parenting," said co-ordinator Jeanne Ryan.

The site loveparenting.ie was set up by Parenting Limerick - in conjunction with the local Children and Young People's Services Committee and Start Right.

Launching the site, Minister Jan O'Sullivan said, "It's very important that from the very beginning the parents realise that the support websites are there and that we listen to them."

The site takes people through the "Ages & Stages" of their child's development and offers practical advice. There is advice from experts on how to build strong relationships, playing with your child, bullying, avoiding and managing tantrums and supporting developmental milestones.

"We also have lots of downloadable publications on parenting and links to other websites. Support is just a click away!" said Jeanne.

The project is underpinned by community development principles and is supported by the PAUL Partnership among others.

If you have any suggestions or articles that you would like to see included on the site, contact Jeanne Ryan at ryan@paulpartnership.ie or on 061-419388.

BEST PRACTICE: Parenting course in Donegal

In Donegal, Springboard Family Support Project in conjunction with Raphoe Family Resource Centre are running an eight week Parents Plus Programme - a practical & positive guide to parenting children.

Topics include:

- Being a responsive parent.
- Encouraging and supporting children.
- Promoting children's language and development.
- Helping children concentrate and learn
- Building co-operation in young children
- Managing tantrums, misbehaviour and problems
- This programme is being offered free of charge to parents.

CHILD POVERTY

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS NEED TO SUPPORT PARENTS FOR EVERYONE'S BENEFIT

- What looks promising?
- Sharing good practice

It's a widely-shared view that, setting aside social class and other determinants, a good home improves the chances that children will "do well" in life.

Conversely, research shows that poor parenting can lead to aggressive behaviour, delinquency, depression, anxiety and drug and alcohol abuse.

The Government says it is committed to supporting parents in their roles and does so in a range of ways. by providing information, support, education, training, counselling, welfare supports and so on.

On February 24th, an all-island group with a focus on sharing good practice in this area held a conference in Dublin. It was attended by senior Government officials from both jurisdictions.

A paper* produced by the group claims that if we properly support parents in their role, everyone gains:



170 people attended the conference.

Benefits for Parents

1. Better family relationships.
2. Better mental and emotional health.
3. Better socio-economic prospects.
4. More active community participation.
5. More knowledgeable about their child's development.
6. Better home learning environment.
7. Increased understanding of the importance of play with their kids.

Benefits for Children

1. Better child/parent bonding and attachment.
2. Better social and emotional outcomes.
3. Better health, eg less likelihood of childhood obesity
4. Better self-identity and self-esteem.
5. Better resilience and readiness for school.
6. Better outcomes in later life.

Benefits for Society

1. Reduced social costs.
2. Effective use of resources.
3. Productive, well educated workforce.
4. Reduced inequalities.
5. More active citizens.
6. Stronger social capital.
7. Improved cross-departmental and cross-sectoral co-operation.

* The paper is available online at: <http://bit.ly/1ArTGmR>

CO-OP NEWS

How Canadian youths take on homelessness



High-energy events are the key to success, says founder Michael Bazzocchi.

Young people in Ireland could follow Ontario, Canada's example, WRITES BARBARA FORBES, a post-graduate student in UCC.

She has first-hand knowledge of an unique project in Toronto founded by a 23-year-old and involving homeless young people from top to bottom in its operations.

Community development principles are embedded in the foundation's approach and membership at the highest levels includes people with direct experience of homelessness.

The 'Trek for Teens Foundation' was begun by eight students in Toronto in 2007 and is a volunteer-led response to the issue.

In Ireland, multiple organisations host sleep-outs where volunteers sleep on the streets to raise funds and highlight homelessness.

'Trek for Teens' uses many diverse approaches in pursuit of the same goal – fashion shows, concerts and an annual citywide adventure race help fund three homeless shelters for youths.

"In Toronto alone, 10,000 youths are put out on the streets each year," said president and founding member Michael Bazzocchi. "There's very little funding into services to help homeless youths," he said.

Their strategy is to highlight the issue and get young people "to embrace volunteer service as something they can enjoy doing".

Michael said, "We have had executives, event directors, student leaders, speakers, participants and attendees who have been, at one point or another, a homeless youth."

Each year, members of the foundation in up to 65 high schools and five universities hold events across the province of Ontario.

Now, the goal is to expand to other cities in Canada.

W: trekforteens.com

COLLABORATION

'Changing Ireland' and researchers and students attached to the Centre for Co-operative Studies in UCC have teamed up to cover issues that go under the radar in relation to community affairs, particularly regarding co-operatives.

The articles here were produced as part of that collaboration.



QUAY CO-OP KEEPS A HEALTHY DISTANCE FROM STATE FUNDING

- Not-for-profit neither seeks nor receives a cent from Govt.
- Latest expansion sees flagship store double floorspace
- Cork's only co-operatively run health food store
- 60 staff in three shops & one restaurant
- Why hasn't it expanded nationwide?



**BY KATHARINA ZWIELICH (l)
& BARBARA FORBES (r)**



It's not often a shop is set up from scratch by volunteers.

Yet, Cork city centre's Quay Co-op is a well-known worker's co-operative whose flagship health food store on Sullivan's Quay has just added a café, doubled its shop floor space and redesigned its vegetarian restaurant.

It was founded in 1982 by a collective effort of feminist, lesbian and gay, environmental and other alternative groups and individuals and aimed to be a radical and alternative community project.

Amazingly, at no point in its 33-year history has the Co-op received external development funding.

The latest expansion – it opened two more organic food shops in Ballincollig in 2009 and Carrigaline in 2010 – shows how the Co-op takes advantage of opportunities as they emerge; in this case, the former fire station next door became available to rent.

'Changing Ireland' spoke with committee member John Calnan, who joined the Co-op 30 years ago, about the organisation's most recent growth spurt.

"Most of the work and the energy to get the place off the ground was done voluntarily," recalls John.

Similarly, the most recent expansion was completed without external help.

NO EXTERNAL HELP

"We have a carpenter, an electrician, a plumber, a plasterer ...we do all the work ourselves," said John.

In the beginning, a membership base of 120 individuals supported the cause of the original community co-op; it evolved into a worker's co-op with membership now open to all full-time staff.

While the Quay Co-op has its roots in the co-operative movement, it was also "founded on the whole idea of political activism," says John.

It became a meeting place for civil

society groups – from feminists to nuclear disarmament, anti-apartheid and lesbian and gay activists – and helped to shape Irish society in the 1980s when the Co-op felt society and the economy "seemed to be going backwards."

This history continues to attract a particular segment of customers, says John: "A lot of people still come in here because it's a co-op."

Mainstream consumers also shop there, seeing it as another option for buying groceries and eating out in the city.

WORD OF MOUTH

Products that are organic, local and free-from additives line the shop shelves and while the shop is buzzing with customers, surprisingly the organisation lacks a marketing plan.

John said, "We're well known in Cork, people seek us out and we're a unique business."

In recent months, members used word-of-mouth to spread news of the expanded store. It seemed to work.

While the Co-op now has three outlets in the county, it seems surprising that it has not expanded even more over the past three decades.

However, further expansion like any major decision, would require consensus by all members and, in a co-operative structure, the decentralised decision-making it can be difficult to come to a consensus.

For example, there are many suggested names for the new café, from 'coffee dock' to 'downstairs restaurant'. A decision on the name has yet to be made.

When we visited, members were still busy



John Calnan, 30 years involved.

putting the finishing touches to the skirting boards in the expanded shop.

Being a member in a cooperative often is more than a full-time job but the long hours are worth it.

"I pull my hair out on a regular basis," said John, "but I'm hugely proud of what we have here. It's taken us thirty years to get to where we are and it's an amazing and unique place."

W: quaycoop.com

Barbara and Katharina are post-graduate UCC students on the Dip/MSc course in Co-operative Organisation, Food Marketing & Rural Development.



Noémie Garcia at work in the Quay Co-op.

PRISON ALTERNATIVES & ROAD SAFETY

'Pro-Social Drivers' course almost certainly saving lives

- Not one of 90 participants has re-offended
- Donegal Local Dev't provided start-up support
- Course likely to be rolled out nationally

BY BEN PANTER

Activists in Donegal have set up a 'Pro-Social Driving Programme' which is deterring high-risk drivers from re-offending.

If expanded, it has the potential to help change the behaviour of young rogue drivers nationwide.

Community worker Gary Doggett (pictured right) has developed the project known as Pro-Social Ireland. He is assisted by course facilitator Martin McFadden and the Congress Centre in Letterkenny. Much of their work is voluntary.



Currently Donegal has the third-highest, reoffending driving rate in the country with 24% of disqualified drivers getting back behind the wheel.

Gary told 'Changing Ireland': "In rural Ireland there is a difficulty accessing public transport and eventually offenders will risk getting into a car."

The programme has achieved spectacular results in its first two years.

Gary said, "According to recent figures, not one of the ninety drivers who went through the programme has reoffended so far."

"Judge Kelly was looking for something to lower re-offence rates and fines just weren't helping.

"We had a look at what was happening internationally and came across the work Robert Ross and Jim Hilborn were doing.

He added: "It appealed to us because it looked at the social aspect of bad driving. Jim Hilborn gave us training at his own expense."

The pair have strong credentials:

Doctor Ross is a Canadian lecturer in criminology and Mr Hilborn works in the Estonian justice system where he has helped to overhaul the probation service.

The course is based around four separate modules focusing on emotional control, social responsibility, driving under the influence and the consequences of dangerous driving.

The holistic approach to better driving is helping participants outside of their vehicles.



Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Paschal Donohue, and course facilitator Martin McFadden.

One ex-offender told us: "It gives an insight into how your emotions in the car can follow into your family life... if you had a bad drive then you'd be tense when you got home and have a fight."

Gary, who is also a board member of Donegal Youth Service, said "We encourage people to have an opinion, for example they might complain about being picked up by guards. By allowing the verbalisation of issues we can make people realise they are ninety-nine percent responsible for their actions."

Is there a danger that the public may see it as a get-out-of-jail-free card?

Gary answered "We don't like to see it like that. Of course people want to do it for a reduction of sentence and generally the Judge looks favourably on people who have completed the course."

One participant said, "I just thought it was red tape, but it changed my views."

The course is attracting high-level attention: Minister for Transport Pascal Donohoe recently met the organisers with a view to rolling it out to seven more counties.

Pro-Social Ireland is open to collaborating with other community initiatives and with local authorities:

W: pspdireland.com T: 086-0754-695.

"Judge Kelly was looking for something to lower re-offence rates and fines just weren't helping."

DEFINITION:

The Pro-Social Drivers Programme seeks to improve the driving behaviour of some of the higher risk groups of drivers.

Candidates for the course are initially identified through the justice and legal system and commit to completing a course consisting of four three-hour modules.



Role of Donegal Local Development Company

The project has been supported by Donegal Local Development Company (DLDC) through pre-development work and support in local planning and delivery, under Goal 4 of the Local and Community Development Programme.



U-TURN BY BANNED DRIVER TURNED TUTOR

- "I have experiences that I pass down to the lads"

BY BEN PANTER

Dwayne McDonnell, originally from Meath, was facing a 40 year ban for a string of driving offences.

He agreed to share his experience with 'Changing Ireland':

"I had been banned five times – I got my license when I was 17 and had lost it by the time I was 18.

"I was banned again for two years and then four until eventually the judge put me off the road for life.

"I was lucky, an appeal got it down to two.

"I volunteered for the pro-social driving course as I knew it was something I could benefit from.

"It helped me take a step back and look at the bad things I was doing behind the wheel, driving with no tax, no insurance, that kind of thing.

"I had no problems getting behind the wheel drunk.

"I never really thought about the ripple effects – how it affects my family, the emergency services.

"Since I finished the course I have never gone a month without tax and insurance. I learnt a different way of thinking – I learnt to stand back and think of the consequences.

"Sometimes you forget that other people have things going on in their lives.

"They might do something on the road that annoys you, but they could be facing bereavement or relationship problems; you have to consider that."

Dwayne said his life had already reached a turning point before he participated in the course and it is clear he has gained enormously from the lessons learnt. He also has new responsibilities as he and his partner recently became parents.

In the 18 months since he completed the course he is helping people learn driving skills of a different kind.

"I am teaching the European Computer Driving License and am currently studying a course in information technology."

If that was not enough, he is also preparing to enrol at Ulster University's McGee campus in Derry to study either philosophy or psychology.



He has also taught a pro-social driving class: "I have experiences that I pass down and share and I tell the lads it's not all doom and gloom when you get a ban."

So what advice would he give to anyone facing a ban?

"Don't ever drive when you are banned," he laughed.

Joking aside he continued, "I would like to give something back to the community I took from."

Dwayne has managed to perform a major u-turn, legally of course.

COMMUNITY HEROES: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

- Mary Carmel still bringing colour into children's lives

Sr Mary Carmel O'Donoghue and Austin Creaven founded a local art therapy centre for children in 1997 that has grown to have national reach.

For ten years, they worked "temporarily" out of a freight container in Thomondgate, Limerick. It was nicknamed "the blue box" by the children because of its colour which gave the project its name.

"It was always freezing in the winter," recalls Mary Carmel.

She and Austin set up the project after seeing the education system fail to address children's grave emotional needs due to neglect, abuse, violence, drug and alcohol issues, depression and poverty.

Now officially retired, Mary Carmel continues working voluntary with children in schools.

Looking back at the photo exhibition she took part in that turned her into a page one cover model, she recalled:

"It was great fun that day, I still remember it. They put boot polish on my face to give me a man's look and an ice lolly young people like. The idea was to challenge stereotypes."

"A nun with a beard... No-one would believe it was me, even looking at the picture."

- Sr MC O'D.



- Sr. Mary Carmel O'Donoghue. She is pictured here being presented by Allen Meagher, editor, with a framed first edition of 'Changing Ireland' in which she featured as the cover model. Check out the project she co-founded: www.bluebox.ie



NEW FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

(Cont'd from page 7)

...The paper acknowledges that, "Delivering public policy as 'one size fits all' is not effective."

While it says that "local solutions to local problems are the key to success", the term "local" is ill-defined.

The word is listed in the glossary as: "Local refers to activity in the areas, communities and neighbourhoods where people live. This activity is carried out by a range of place based agencies..."

The paper makes the point that "It is important that available resources are targeted where they will have the most impact and in response to identified need."

While that makes sense, the paper only barely acknowledges the decimation visited upon communities through austerity measures since the economy crashed.

Previously published national and EU policies relating to this area include:

- The 'Europe 2020 Strategy',
- The 'White Paper on Rural Development (1999)',
- The 'White Paper on Supporting the Community and Voluntary Sector (2000)',
- The 'National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016'
- and the 'Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship'.

Written submissions may be posted to: 'Consultations on the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development',

Dept of the Environment, Community and Local Government,
Ballina, Co Mayo.

Submissions can also be emailed to: comm-pol.submissions@environ.ie

* **The draft framework's definition of Community Development refers to:** "a distinctive approach to working for social and economic development and change... enabling and supporting members of a community (of place, identity or interest) to work collectively to improve the quality of their lives, their community and their society."

- ALLEN MEAGHER, EDITOR

INTRODUCTION

Kilkenny Leader Partnership runs a 'Kickstart' programme that provides eight-week placements – and a lot of people are getting full-time jobs straight from the programme.

It's a good news story about unemployed people who completed a course that changed their lives, as they themselves explain here.

Day-to-day running of the course is provided by private sector company iResource headed up by Ann-Marie McSorley.

Mark Savage – "I tried volunteering, but everyone wanted experience"

Mark Savage writes:

"After I finished college the prospect of me getting work was very low. I travelled to America for work, but couldn't find anything in my field. I tried to volunteer but everyone wanted experience. I had none. I was highly skilled and confident in my field but on paper that wasn't enough.

"If it wasn't for the "Kickstart Programme", I would never have been given the chance. After Kickstart's eight-week placement, I had proven myself and I got offered an internship. The doors all opened for me then.

"I progressed onto full employment in Dublin with Eileen Cantwell Architects and worked there for one year until I decided to head off travelling and see the world.

"I went to the Canadian Expo in Dublin and acquired a job in my field. I am currently working in Regina, Saskatchewan, as a Project Manager/Estimator for a large Architectural/Engineering/ Project Management firm.

"I know I ended up immigrating to Canada, but I wouldn't have got this position without all the experience I gained over the last year and nine months. I went from unemployable on the live register to become a project manager in that time. All I needed was a start."



Mark Savage pictured at work.

Not all national internships will suit you - "Excellent example of the private sector, statutory agencies"

Three years ago, Kilkenny Leader Partnership (KLP) developed Kickstart to connect unemployed jobseekers with "real opportunities" locally.

For KLP, it was an important plank in its Employability Strategy launched in 2010 and 38 people locally have since graduated.

While national internship programmes such as Jobbridge suit graduates best, the profile of people unemployed in Kilkenny included many ex-construction

sector workers and people who had skills but were made redundant and needed to develop a career in a new sector.

The programme has expanded beyond Kilkenny to Waterford and Naas and 250 people have participated to date.

It is supported by KLP, the Department of Social Protection, State Street Corporation and is described by Brendan Walshe of iResource Ltd as "an excellent example of the private sector, statutory agencies and local development companies co-

Romanian couple realise their professional dreams



BY GABRIEL MAXIM (above)

In Spring 2014, both my wife Julie and I had no profession to speak of.

It was quite awkward when people asked us, "What's your profession?"

Since 2008 when we arrived in Ireland from Romania, need compelled us to take whatever job we could find. One needs to be able to pay his/her bills, especially

when there's a little one to think about.

And so the years passed. I was driving a van for a catering company in Kilkenny and Julie was on and off tending tables in a local coffee shop, even though I held a Masters in Psychology and Julie finished a Bachelors in Law from Carlow, and that was on top of her Bachelors in Media earned in Romania. It really was time for a change and we could both feel that pressing on our shoulders more and more everyday.

Fortunately, the Irish economic climate still allows, as we were to find out from Kickstart, that one can take a few steps back, analyse the situation in its whole and go from there.

One day Julie came home and told me about this programme that runs in Kilkenny and helps people in our situation. I was a bit unsure to say the least at the beginning.

You see, even if we were in the country for a good few years, enough maybe to know the ins and outs quite well we thought, what we found in Kickstart was people that knew People (capital P).

A common misconception is that

money makes the earth go round. I would argue it's people and not money that do it; people with money, granted, but still people. We didn't know any, at least not in the lines of work that we were interested in.

That's where Ann Marie McSorley, Robert Monks and Una McGrath came in.

They helped us draw up proper CVs by Irish standards and put us in contact with the right people in our desired lines of work. I got a fixed term contract with a local crèche where I was able to awaken my skillset and hone new skills.

The Programme even paid for some courses for me and covered exam costs for Julie. For all that and more, we will always be grateful.

Skip a few months forward to the present day and Julie is working as a freelance interpreter mainly for the District and Circuit Courts and actively pursuing her career in Law in Ireland.

As for me, if anyone would ask me the dreaded question these days, the answer is: I'm an Educational Consultant specialising in Child Psychology and a freelance interpreter for the Gardai.

"Short, sharp work placement" wins Canice Maher's support

Canice Maher has tried quite a few career-development and internship programmes, but made a breakthrough with 'Kickstart' in Kilkenny and is now in full employment.

He wrote to those behind Kickstart afterwards to say it was "the best programme he'd ever been on".

"I've tried a few," he said, listing four including Jobbridge and Springboard.

"I respect the fact that you and your partners together with the training provider have done the 'joined up thinking approach' - perhaps it stems from real life shared experiences.

"You and the team are not just pen pushers/box-tickers, but you are doers. I also like the fact that you have incorporated 'real' short sharp work placements giving hands-on experience which is at the core of the course. And you are out there evolving with business."

Canice now works for Select Roofing and recently sent Kickstart a follow-up email saying he was doing well and was proud to say he had pulled in business for his new employers that represented a high, six-figure sum.

Unemployed people: Kickstart is different agencies and local development companies co-operating."

operating."

CANDIDATES

Working with mid-career unemployed candidates, Kickstart teaches them IT, communications, presentation skill and project management, the aim being to equip them with the skills and experience to gain permanent employment in a new sector. In addition they have the opportunity to undertake a specialised piece of on-the-job training. There is no cost to the employer,

Kickstart has a fund for on-the-job training and candidates retain their benefits while on the course.

Kickstart's matching process begins with pre-placement screening and group training to build participants' confidence and skills. Although there is no obligation on companies to hire participants after a placement, over 30% of trainees have been taken on by their host employers. Other candidates return to further education or access new opportunities while in the

work environment.

PROJECTS

Companies are asked to identify a project in their workplace for Kickstart trainees to implement over eight weeks, working three days a week.

For more info, contact: Brendan Walshe, iResource Training & Education.
W: iresource.ie

PAYBACK BY IRISH WHO WERE HELPED ABROAD

BEN PANTER REPORTS FROM PORTLAOISE

'Fáilte Isteach' is a programme set-up by the Third Age Foundation to marry the talent and experience of older people with the needs of immigrants who came to Ireland, many seeking work.

The programme, originally founded in Meath in 2006, was adopted by the Laois Partnership in 2011.

According to Storm Powell of the Laois Partnership, "This project encompasses the best elements of good community development using partnership, pooling of resources and integration methods."

The partners in the project are the Third Age Foundation, Laois Partnership, Respond Social Housing which provide a building and the Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board.

For the volunteers, the programme allows them use their abilities and provides mental stimulation and a social network.

One such volunteer, who modestly describes herself as "quite a bit over 70", is Agnes Conroy.

She told 'Changing Ireland', "I enjoy it very much, the pupils have a great sense of humour which makes the whole thing fun."

"It adds purpose to my life – at my age it is nice to know that I can still be of use."

"Over the years many Irish emigrated, had problems and were helped by the natives. I feel like I am paying a bit back for all the help we received in the past."

"It's really nice to learn about other cultures and now and then I might pick up a word in another language," she said, smiling.

Co-ordinator Collete Maleady said, "This led me on a voyage of self-discovery, I'm over sixty now and now I've an insight into what I want to do when I retire."

Participants are a mixed bunch, from stay-at-home Mums to out-of-work actors but they all

have one thing in common, a willingness to improve the English language skills needed to engage with potential employers, local schools and community groups.

Fáilte Isteach also reduces the risk of social isolation for volunteers and pupils and according to Storm "provides a platform for social exchange."

Outcomes have been extremely positive.

Roberta Brokeviciene from Lithuania has lived in Ireland for two years: "I used to be very shy. Now English has become a normal language. This has given me the confidence to go on to a Community Employment scheme working at the Tourist Information office."

Natalie Podviseuski has lived in Ireland for six years. "I would like a higher level of English to work as a care assistant with older people," she said.

Not all of the benefits are employment focused - Marta Wolska from Poland has lived in Ireland for seven years and said, "I planned to stay for two years but now I have four children and they are all settled in school so plans changed. I'm not working at the moment, I am at home looking after the children, I haven't got any Irish friends so it is very good when I meet with friends (at Fáilte Isteach) to speak English."

Storm sees the risks: "The kids learn English at school and some of the mothers are in danger of being left behind."

The English conversation classes are taught on a weekly basis and 142 students enrolled in 2014, up from 113 the year before.



'Fáilte Isteach' breaks down the barriers that migrants and communities face: Older volunteers welcome new migrants by running conversational English classes. **PHOTOS: BEN PANTER.**

Priority is given to the long-term unemployed highlighting the multi-faceted goal outcomes of the Programme. There are currently four groups in Laois including one for asylum-seekers in Emo.

Such is the increasing popularity of the classes that another weekly class was planned for early 2015. With latest CSO figures showing that Laois now has 11,029 foreign nationals within the county boundaries it seems the additional class cannot come too soon.

* Third Age has 68 branches in Ireland and is a national voluntary organisation celebrating the 'third age' in life "by valuing older people, empowering communities and enriching lives". It supports people who may no longer be in paid employment, but can remain healthy, fulfilled and continue to contribute to society.

Links: www.laoispartnership.ie
and: www.thirdageireland.ie

Purpose to life:



Agnes Conroy: "Over the years many Irish emigrated, had problems and were helped by the natives. I feel like I am paying a bit back."

Two years here:



Piotr Peksuk: "People are very friendly, I like this country, even the weather. After two years doing this course, now my English is a lot better."

Plans changed:



Marta Wolska: "Plans changed. I'm not working at the moment, I am at home looking after the children."