

CHANGING IRELAND

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT • COLLECTIVE ACTION • EMPOWERMENT • SOCIAL INCLUSION • www.changingir

**‘I was a lost kid and they
put me on a steady path’
- Seán Óg Ó hAilpín**



There are no racist communities.
End labelling of whole areas as
racist. #Lisdoonvarna
#Achill #YourCommunity



Gandhi's 150th

ISSN 1649-5985



977164959800506

This publication is produced by Changing Ireland Community Media CLG, an independent, not-for-profit NGO funded through the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Anniversary

If only Gandhi was on Twitter . . .

- Find out how India's hero used wit to completely dumbfound racists
- as told by Don Mullan in his Davitt Museum Lecture



Mahatma Gandhi had a sharp sense of humour and would have handled today's online racists with ease.

Accounts survive of how he handled bigots while in London. Some were told by Don Mullan (pictured right) in Straide, Co. Mayo, as part of his lecture to mark the occasion of Gandhi's 150th birthday recently:

Gandhi experienced the sting of racial superiority throughout his life - in India, South Africa and as a young man studying law in London.

Undoubtedly, this is what sensitised him to fight

for systemic change, both against racism and the prejudice of the caste system.

In his autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth', Gandhi writes, 'It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings.'

When Gandhi was studying law, a British professor whose last name was 'Peters' disliked him intensely and always displayed prejudice and animosity towards him. Because Gandhi never lowered his head when addressing the professor, there was friction between them.

One day, Mr Peters was having lunch in the canteen when Gandhi came along and sat next to the professor.

The professor said, 'Mr Gandhi, you do not understand - a pig and a bird do not sit together to eat.'

Gandhi looked at him as a parent would a rude child and calmly replied, 'Oh, you do not worry professor, I will fly away'. And he went to another table.

(Later) Mr Peters, frustrated, asked him, 'Mr Gandhi, if you were walking down the street and found a package and within was a bag of wisdom and a bag of money, which one would you take?'

Without hesitating, Mr Gandhi said, 'The bag of

money, of course'.

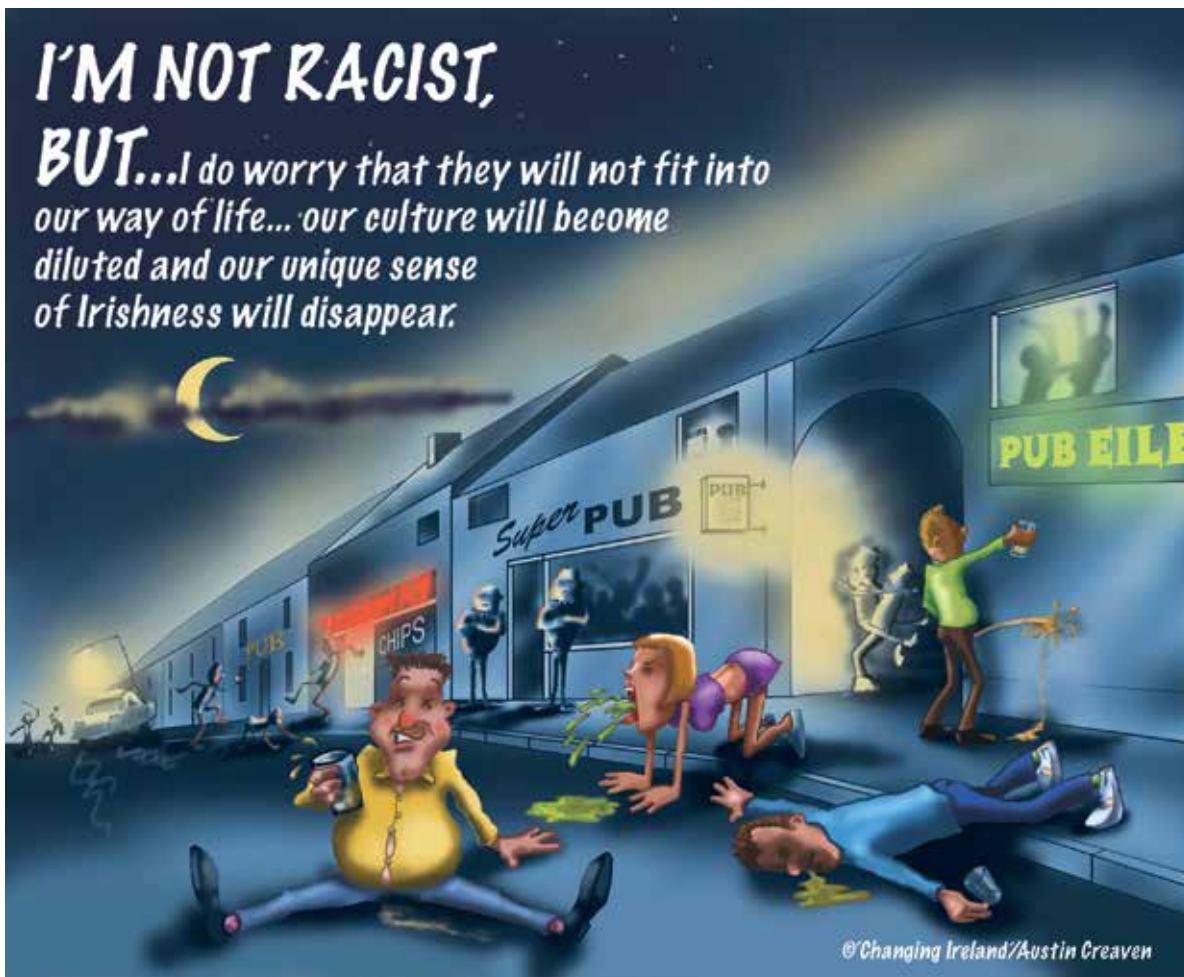
Mr Peters said, 'I in our place would have taken the bag of wisdom'.

Gandhi replied, 'Each one takes what he doesn't have.'



• Don Mullan with a model of Mahatma Gandhi in the Michael Davitt Museum.

*Note: The venue for Don's lecture was the **Michael Davitt Museum** which is supported through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). For more, visit: www.changingireland.ie*



• Cartoon by Austin Creaven for 'Changing Ireland'. It previously featured in our Winter 2004 edition (issue 13).

INDEPENDENT

'Changing Ireland' is an independent not-for-profit publication.

ABOUT US

'Changing Ireland' engages in original journalism to highlight the impact of local and community development and social inclusion work in Ireland. We report on action on the ground and provide a space for reflection on what serves people and communities best.

The magazine was established in 2001 and is based in Moyross, Limerick. We value social justice, equality and fair play and to aim to give people who are rarely heard a voice.

We produce journalism to highlight valuable work funded or supported by Government departments and agencies. We provide a platform for those on the ground in communities.

Our readers include workers, activists and volunteers nationwide, civil and public servants and many more involved in social inclusion and community development.

'Changing Ireland' is core-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

See page 4 for information about the team behind 'Changing Ireland'.

SUPPORT

'Changing Ireland' generates a small amount of social enterprise revenue. It is core-funded by Government since 2001, receiving support from the:



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econcepts

NEWS, VIEWS & ARCHIVE 2001-2019

Trust communities! Quit labelling them!



People new to Ireland need to learn our ways, our history and our laws and customs. The best people to teach them are Irish people.

So says Celeste Khosa. She lives in direct provision in Ballyhaunis, Co.

Mayo, and spoke at a major conference on the theme of 'Embracing Diversity' in the nearby GAA centre at Beken. For her, it's easier than for others because she speaks English.

Celeste was followed on stage by Cork hurling legend Seán Óg Ó hAilpín who revealed he hated Ireland when he first came here. He was only eight or nine years old. He had been uprooted from a happy childhood in Sydney and wondered what on earth his parents were doing dragging him off to cold Ireland. The GAA, as he explains, helped him settle and now he's Irish out and out. It took time though.

The 'Embracing Diversity' event was well-timed. The alt-right in Ireland is a threat

to social cohesion and is stirring racism. However, I fear the authorities are playing right into the alt-right's hands if they don't trust communities more.

The numbers of asylum-seekers coming at present are still in the low thousands and how we respond now is critical. Climate change will force many more from their native homes.

In December, a tragedy unfolded off the coast of West Africa that received no coverage here. At least 62 people - from a country I know and love, Gambia - drowned off the Mauritanian coast when the boat carrying them to Spain's Canary Islands hit a rock. It was the largest known loss of life along the so-called western migration route this year, according to the International Organization for Migration.

There is no doubt truly desperate people need help and we can do so much better if the government just trusts communities. Look at towns and small villages that have happily taken in asylum-seekers without a hitch.

As Dr Steve Stutz, a US-based life coach, says: "One of the easiest ways to build trust in a team setting is by communicating effectively with everyone."

That needs to happen. Imagine if the Government took a community development

approach to looking after asylum-seekers.

It's not as if we don't know how.

As far back as 2008, 'Changing Ireland' had no difficulty finding eight different examples of how best to promote integration of asylum-seekers using a community development approach. (Ref: Issue 26, Summer 2008).

In the meantime, online commentators - including those in politics and those of us in civil society - should be careful not to label whole communities as racist or backwards. Communities - as hosts - are entitled to seek information about asylum-seekers and refugees coming their way. In the type of information vacuums we've seen - created by Dublin - racism and bitterness can grow.

As for the dozens (out of over 2,500 people) still protesting over the Government move without consultation to house 70/40/13 asylum-seekers on Achill Island, I think the time has come to follow President Higgins's advice and stand down the protest. The point about consultation has been made. Let's all have a happy Christmas!

Allen Meagher

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.



Published By:

Established in 2001, 'Changing Ireland' is a national magazine focused on community development and social inclusion. It is managed and published by Changing Ireland Community Media CLG., through funding from the Department of Rural & Community Development.

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Also: lssuu.com

Production:

Editor: Allen Meagher.

Editorial Team: Viv Sadd, Jude Meaney, Kirsty Tobin, Robert Carey, Joe Saunders, Paul Geraghty/Bernie Reape and Allen Meagher.

Packing and Distribution: Speedpak, Dublin, an award-winning social enterprise.

Printed by: Davis Printers, Limerick.

Voluntary Board of Directors: Cathy Jones (chair), George Clancy (vice), Seamus McGiff (sec), Jude Meaney, Andrew O'Byrne, Jason Craig and Danielle Hickey.

Thanks To . . .

'Changing Ireland' thanks everyone involved in the production of Issue 67.

Front Cover: .

Brothers Philip and Mike with Seán Óg Ó hAilpín in Ballyhaunis.

PHOTO: A. MEAGHER



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 CLG, or the Department of Rural & Community Development.

Social Enterprise

Grinds have excluded those who couldn't afford them - until now!

There's no better way to learn about the value of social enterprise in combating social exclusion than through hearing from an award winning example.

David Neville, one of the founders of JumpAGrade, gave a talk on their project at the first State-run national social enterprise conference, held in Croke Park, on November 22nd.

(For photos & a report on the conference, see pages 22-23).

"The cost barrier of grinds is creating huge inequality among students in Ireland," he said.

In a typical classroom environment there are 25 student to one teacher. That makes it very hard to get that personalised support if a student needs additional support. So, students and families often turn to grinds

That involves "headaches" - "trying to find a teacher, the time, the cost, scheduling conflicts, the travel".

They looked at the knock-on effect.

"If 50% of all Leaving Certificate student get grinds, the majority of those come from higher income families. In more affluent areas of Dublin, 90% and above of students can go onto third level education. In Ballinacurra Weston in Limerick 3% of students go onto third level.

"It's not right that our grinds culture is helping to widen that inequality," he said.

HOW IT WORKS

A student completes an online needs analysis and is assigned a personal tutor. The weekly cycle includes a personalised worksheet every Wednesday. Written work must be submitted by taking photos and uploading them by Sunday and the students receive video feedback from their tutor ahead of their next worksheet.

TRAVELLER WOMAN NOW STUDYING TO BE A TEACHER

"For us at JumpAGrade, this wasn't just about solving some of the inefficiencies with grinds, but to have a real impact on a societal problem that's out there," said David.

He gave an example of how they succeed. They are currently working with a student who came to them last October.

"She was struggling and kind of hovering in the past. Support outside the classroom wasn't an option for her. Yet, within two months she improved by two grades, which is fantastic. Imagine how heartened we were to hear that she has now gone on and is studying in Mary I to become a primary school teacher. She is a member of the Travelling Community.

"That is a huge effect. That's far beyond just an improvement in grades. That has a knock on effect on her, her family, her community and that's the impact we're aiming to grow with JumpAGrade."

ISLAND STUDENTS IN DONEGAL

The social enterprise receives support through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme by working with three local development companies in Dublin. Education officers with Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership, Dublin South City Partnership and Empower in Fingal support local students in part by paying JumpAGrade tuition fees.

"We've also worked with Cog - the teaching-through-Irish body under the department of education. We support students at a remote disadvantage and island schools off the coast of Donegal and Galway where there is a shortage of Teachers," said David.



• JumpAGrade was a winner at the Social Entrepreneurs Ireland awards this year.

Their work boosts confidence and mental health. They link with access programmes in universities such as DCU and UCC.

"In the case of DCU we worked with a group of students and over the course of 12 weeks we managed to show an increase of 11.5% on average in their Grades, but just as importantly 85% of those students reported an increase of confidence in their chosen subject. That's really exciting for us."

They see similarities between those cut off by being in remote rural areas and those cut off by socio-economic factors in both urban and rural areas.

"They're not able to access similar kind of resources," he said.

Being a social enterprises means they value social impacts - this gives them a competitive advantage because for-profit companies don't see that.

TEACHERS LOVE IT

"A really good way to show that is the quality of the teachers that we work with. All of our teachers are registered with the Teaching Council and have experience correcting State exams.

"We have had over 750 teachers apply to work with us in the last 12 to 18 months and there are two big reasons why we've struck such a core with those teachers.

"One is the flexibility of being able to work in this modern way - when it suits them and a time it suits them remotely.

"Another big thing - we hear it all the time - is that teachers love working with students that can't access grinds," he said.

IMPACT ON INEQUALITY

"The reasons teachers became teachers is to help students improve and grinds by their very nature exclude those who can't afford them.

"We're able to help teachers work with students where it's not about getting a H1 and going onto do medicine. Instead, it could be about passing a subject you're struggling with or staying in higher level maths and opening up a host of opportunities in third level. Our teachers love that they are part of that and are part of our mission of helping to lower inequality in education."

UL-based JumpAGrade recently won a Social Entrepreneurs Award.

W: <https://jumpagrade.com>

- ALLEN MEAGHER

NEWS

€62 MILLION FOR RURAL PROJECTS

Funding of €63m has been announced for 26 projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

"It is vital that we continue to build resilience in rural communities," said Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring, making the announcement in November.

The €1 billion, 10-year fund provides investment to support projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 people. Before November's announcement, funding of €86 million for 84 other projects had been announced.

The RRDF aims to deliver on the second of four main objectives in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 - to strengthen rural economies and communities. The fund is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The other three funds are focused on urban regeneration and development (€2b), climate action (€500m) and disruptive technologies (€500m).

UN DAYS 2020

FEBRUARY

Feb 4	World Cancer Day
Feb 6	International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation
Feb 11	International Day of Women and Girls in Science
Feb 13	World Radio Day
Feb 20	World Day of Social Justice
Feb 21	International Mother Language Day

MARCH

Mar 1	Zero Discrimination Day
Mar 3	World Wildlife Day
Mar 8	International Women's Day
Mar 20	International Day of Happiness
Mar 21	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Mar 21	World Poetry Day
Mar 21	International Day of Nowruz
Mar 21	World Down Syndrome Day
Mar 21	International Day of Forests
Mar 22	World Water Day
Mar 23	World Meteorological Day
Mar 24	World Tuberculosis Day
Mar 24	International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations
Mar 25	International Day of Remembrance of Slavery Victims and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
Mar 25	International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members



The top 10 performing LEADER Local Action Groups are in: Kerry, Mayo, Waterford, Limerick, Cork North, Donegal, Tipperary, Offaly, Leitrim and Cavan.

INSPIRING: **Awesome people**

ABOUT LANA

Lana Kurasidze was not born disabled, but an aggressive brain tumour in 2006 almost ended her life at the age of 21.

The treatments for her illness and post-surgical issues left her with reduced mobility, requiring the use of a wheelchair, and affected her vision and speech.

At the time, doctors warned that her life expectancy was not good. Thankfully, she confounded medical expectations.

She embraced an active lifestyle and returned to part-time modelling, together with volunteering on behalf of people with disabilities.

ABOUT HER GROUP

Ballymun Active Disability Interest Group (BADIG) has played an advocacy role in making Ballymun a better place to live for people with disabilities for 20 years.

For instance, it highlighted the lack of ramped access to a local bank and expressed concerns over Ballymun Regeneration's building plans that created access problems.

This year, BADIG produced videos to raise awareness throughout the community, with schools, community groups and statutory agencies.

On Youtube:

<http://bit.ly/BADIGyoutube>

On Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/BADIG98/>

DIRECT CONTACT:

For direct contact and information about BADIG, email the group's secretary Gerry Reynolds.

E: badig.secretary@gmail.com

NOMINATE A VOLUNTEER!

If you wish to nominate a volunteer, activist or otherwise remarkable person, contact the editor. E: editor@changingireland.ie

Lana Kurasidze

Volunteer, Disability Activist

What are you reading at the moment?

Reading is not easy for me due to my visual impairment. I keep up to date with news and events by listening to the radio and TV and use audio books occasionally.

What's the last film you saw?

Similarly, I don't greatly enjoy going to the cinema. The last film I saw was on a flight home – Maleficent.

Person you most admire?

Probably my grandmother. In many areas I don't agree with her and we argue a lot, but, in the end, she is my hero and always encourages me to be better!

The top four issues in Ireland today?

Like everyone else I am concerned about homelessness, shortages in our hospitals and the growing use of drugs among children in my community. However, my main focus is on making Irish society more open and welcoming for people with disability.

Nationally, we need more...

We need more opportunities for people who are different, including the disabled, to participate in society at a local and national level. Our current society is largely designed for the able-bodied and changes are later made to accommodate people with disability. We should be building our society to be accessible to everyone from the start.

Nationally, we need less...

...people with fixed, negative ideas and attitudes about people who are different – not only people with disability, which is my main focus, but also immigrants and refugees from other countries. Generally, people have more in common than might separate them.

What's the best thing about the project you volunteer with?

We are passionate that society needs to stop treating people with disability as special – we have very similar needs and abilities to



• Lana Salome Kurasidze is a volunteer with Ballymun Active Disability Interest Group (BADIG) - a local, voluntary group which advocates on behalf of people with disability. Lana is now vice-chairperson and will take over the leadership of the organisation in May 2020.

everyone else. BADIG is proof of this as it is run by people with disability on behalf of people with disability.

What could your project improve on doing?

We do not connect as often or as well as I would like with people with disability in our community. We need to improve our social media presence.

How long are you volunteering?

I've always been interested in helping others. I joined BADIG in 2017.

How and why did you get involved?

I attended an Open Day organised by Ballymun Active Disability Interest Group (BADIG). I was angry about the obstacles to social participation which a person in a wheelchair faces every day. BADIG gave me an opportunity to do something about it.

What difference has being involved made to you?

I feel I am making a difference in my community. I would not be as effective working alone.

NEWS

NEW TOOLKIT TESTED & APPROVED

- Aimed at community workers supporting individuals facing multiple challenges



& Model

Have things changed for your community since you became involved?

We have helped to raise the profile of disability locally. People are now more aware of the needs of people with disability and more welcoming of them in daily life. However, we still have a long way to go.

What motivates you as a volunteer?

I think that people with disability are not as welcomed or accepted as they should be in our society. I want to change this and I want it to happen sooner rather than later. Change only happens when ordinary people like me take responsibility and act!

What inspires you?

Changing attitudes towards people with disability inspires me. I love seeing the look of wonderment on the faces of fellow gym-users when I come into the gym in my wheelchair and then stand to take part in a boxing lesson. Or when I introduce a person with visual impairment to blind tennis and see the happiness that the opportunity to play sport brings to them.

How do you get new volunteers?

Show that you are passionate about your work. You need to be looking out for new volunteers all the time. BADIG is very welcoming to new people and we allow new volunteers the time and space to settle in before expecting them to undertake work for the group.

What brings about change?

The best way to bring about change is for ordinary people to take responsibility and join together with like-minded people to identify what change is needed and work to make it happen. When change comes about like this, from within a community, it is likely to be more acceptable and successful than if it is imposed from outside.



Top: The Toolkit. • Left: Sinead Quinn, Dept. of Rural and Community Development, Maria Farry, Pobal, Bernie Reape, Dept., and Lucy Pyne, Pobal. Above: Bernie and Maria at the Limerick seminar.

A new tool for engaging with and supporting individuals who face challenges in life has been developed and it is stirring interest at home and abroad.

Even though it's just one A4 sheet of paper - printed on both sides - it has taken 18 months to perfect.

The tool consists of a carefully thought out list of questions that guide people towards identifying their needs and planning for their future. It has been scientifically evaluated by TCD.

It has proven popular at community level among 15 Local Development Companies (LDCs) who piloted it. They completed the tool with over 400 people as part of the pilot process to reach validation.

The usefulness of 'My Journey: A Distance Travelled Tool' was outlined by community workers and social inclusion professionals at information days held recently in Mullingar,

Cavan, Dublin and Limerick. The events were organised by Pobal and the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Word has spread and the OECD invited Irish representatives to Paris to explain how it works and the validation process.

The tool was developed through trials by community workers in LDCs that provide SICAP* supports at local level.

More details will be unveiled at a national event to be held in January.

Pobal's Lucy Pyne said, "This is to introduce the tool to the wider LDC sector and LCDCs. Frontline staff will use their professional judgement and expertise to identify individuals who can benefit most from the tool and the discussion it opens up."

Ann Bourke, a community worker with Limerick City Community Development Project, has used the tool. She

showed how it can have a transformative effect. An immigrant in her 50's who had worked here for ten years became sick, lost her job and encountered "insurmountable" challenges.

"She needed to prioritise her issues," said Ann.

The toolkit helped. "It was amazing. It was very positive for me and for her and she came up with a plan."

The woman is still receiving support and is progressing.

At each of the regional information days, attendees also heard from colleagues about examples of best practice - for example, the advantages of taking an inter-agency approach to issues.

Community workers from Kerry explained at one event how this helped them make great inroads in integrating asylum-seekers and refugees.

In Galway, inter-agency work has helped Travellers gain a stronger voice and

more representation in fighting discrimination and striving for equal treatment. (See our website for more details).

* The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) will see €39.2m spent next year supporting disadvantaged communities. SICAP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development with co-funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

- ALLEN MEAGHER



• Ann Bourke gave an example of how the tool works in practice.

If you found the movie 'I, Daniel Blake' difficult viewing, then be prepared for an even greater emotional pummeling with 'Sorry We Missed You'.

IMMIGRATION LESSONS

Seán Óg: “Though I am not - “31 years ago, I hated Ireland, didn’t want to be here” -

Integration takes time. It was only when Seán Óg Ó hAilpín sat down in the dressing room after captaining Cork to an All-Ireland win, in 2005, that he finally accepted he was truly Irish.

“It dawned on me that even though I am not of you, I have become one of you,” he said. Years before that, he hated Ireland. So, what changed? He told his story in Ballyhaunis:

I’m half-Fijian, half Irish, but if someone was to ask me ‘Who am I?’, my first answer would be ‘I’m a hundred percent proud Irishman’.

Like a lot of the population here in Ballyhaunis, we share the same kind of story in terms of we don’t look Irish, but I consider myself Irish every day of the week.

If I was to roll back the clock 31 years ago, I hated Ireland, didn’t want to be here. Hated everything about it - the weather, the people. But go back a small bit before that - you have to understand my background.

I’m from a mixed background. My dad is from County Fermanagh - a very proud Fermanagh man, God love him.

And
my

mum is from - actually I say Fiji, but she is technically from a place called Rotuma.

Rotuma is a very small, tiny island in the South Pacific that is part of the Fijian island group. I found it easier to say ‘She’s Fijian’ when I was asked ‘Where is your mum from?’, because when you say ‘Rotuma’, you’ve to spend about 30 minutes saying where it is, how to get there and so forth. But my mum’s a very proud Rotuman.

When I look at an atlas, I can tell if it’s a good atlas or not. I go to the South Pacific and look for my mum’s island and if it’s not on it, it’s a rubbish atlas.

My dad emigrated from Ireland in the 1970s and worked for 30 years. He met my mum when he went on holidays on mainland Fiji. My mum had left her small island for mainland Fiji like a lot of Rotumans do.

I won’t explain what happened after that, but out comes me.

I grew up in Sydney, Australia.

My first eight years were in Sydney. What a great childhood! What a great life! It was everything a young kid could ask for. Going around in shorts. I barely wore runners or shoes and lived on a diet of ice-cream. Kylie Minogue and Jason

O’Donovan

were my pop idols.

So imagine the shock when, in 1988, dad comes home from work and announces that we’re going to Ireland.

Shortly after that, we land in the metropolis of Cork city, oh Jesus, in the depths of winter in 1989.

You can imagine I’m a shattered kid at this stage.

I had great friends in Sydney. In my neighbourhood, there were different ethnic groups, so I had Lebanese neighbours on

one side, Greeks across the road and Italians and Russians up the road.

When we landed, it was like the invasion of the martians. The Ó hAilpíns landing in the northside of Cork city.

The first three years were the toughest, especially for my mum. It was so hard to adjust to the climate. I wore 4 or 5 jumpers constantly. It was unbelievably cold for the first year.

And trying to understand Cork people; I know I talk like one now, but





of you, I have become one of you”

hurling legend tells of his struggle to integrate

trying to understand one back then was like trying to decipher Hindu. It was impossible.

But basically - when you look at the people we were living with... we didn't look... to fit in. And, unfortunately, people will let you know about that - sadly. And I'm being blunt about that, but it is reality.

So, you can imagine me as a 10/11 year old kid. I'm frustrated. I'm angry and I'm questioning the motives to come to Ireland. Dad painted it as a great place. But in those early years I didn't experience that great place.

I used to pray that there was a return ticket and one day Dad would pull it out and say 'Look, we're going back to Sydney'. I prayed for that the first Christmas, the second Christmas and the third Christmas, but there was no return ticket.

There are a lot of things that our parents decide for us and, when I look back to that time, I wouldn't agree with 99% of them.

But there's one decision the parents made that I will forever be grateful for and it changed my life in Ireland. That was to get involved in sport. My dad enrolled me in the local GAA club - Na Píarsaigh.

To give you an idea of where I grew up in Cork city, people liken it to Beirut or Nicaragua. It's a tough, gritty area, but I love it. I love the area. I don't live there, but I go coaching there because I love it. I go through the gates of the GAA club and it's like - when you watch the 'Chronicles of Narnia' and they go through a wardrobe and it opens up a whole new world for them. Well, that's what Na Píarsaigh hurling and football club did for me.

Did I see huge changes overnight?

Absolutely not, but incrementally; the more times I went through the GAA gates the more I started to see the barriers (disappearing).

It was there I made my first best friends. I still keep in contact with three of them to this day - great buddies.

At that stage, I began to see the value of being part of a team sport and everyone rowing together and having the same common goal. In other facets of my life I don't see that same powerful bond as you get in team sport.

(Seán Óg singled out Mayo ladies football All-Star Cora Staunton who was in the audience):

I'm honoured and exalted to be in Cora Staunton's presence. What a legend! You should be up here talking, not me - I'm an also ran (by comparison).

Cora would tell you about the powerful bond a team can make.

People in the club start calling you by your first name. They know your address. They started to know where my parents - my mum was from. All of that builds up self-esteem. They made me feel welcome.

I started to kinda feel, 'Yeah, I belong here'.

The greatest kick I got was the local community support after games. You'd be clapped off by supporters whether you won or lost and they'd pat you on the back and say 'Thanks for the effort'.

As a young kid with a half-Fijian background

“Don't underestimate the value and the power of what ye do, especially with people like me who come here looking for a home.”

who was trying to look for a place, that was powerful for me.

Now, when I look back, what the GAA club did for me is summed up in what the greatest human need is - to be loved. That's what being involved in a sporting organisation - in my case it was a GAA club - gave me.

Over the years - you got that love, you were appreciated and the more you got it the more you wanted to give it back.

Back then, was I a good player? Absolutely not, I was catmalojan. I couldn't puck a ball, but it didn't matter.

Basically, I kept wanting to go back to a place where I was accepted and loved. And through that, I started to unearth a talent I didn't know I had in me as an athlete and as a player. I was worked on by coaches and mentors who cared. Through the next few years, I started to realise that my talents could take me somewhere.

Fast forward a few years and I started playing with Cork. I made my debut as a 19-year-old, in 1996 - when it was unheard of to have a half-Fijian lad playing with Cork. And it's great when I see GAA games now - in (the club team I coach) we have guys from five ethnic groups.

I have mentioned the power of representing your club at local level. When I started playing with Cork you could multiply that by a hundred million.

I won't go through my Cork years, but it brought me on a 16-year journey playing with the Cork Seniors.

In that time, I met a couple of Taoiseachs and Presidents of Ireland. I met the greatest musicians, performers, comedians and the greats past and

present of the GAA.

And the greatest kick I get and still get to this day is that I travel far and near and I'm greeted by the warmest welcome by local people whether that's in Ballycastle in Antrim or Ballyskenach in County Offaly - you name it lads and I've been there, through the power and connection of the GAA.

One point - over my 16 year career - I've been lucky to be involved in winning teams. You can be a good player, but the key is to play with a great team!

One of the years we won, I was the captain and it was a very proud moment. We won the All-Ireland - beating Galway in the final.

I collected the cup from Uachtarán na Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Sean Kelly, and went back into the dressing room and - Cora will tell you - there is only about a ten minute period in the dressing room that you get to yourself before the madness begins. Then everyone starts coming into the dressing room and you go out and meet the fans.

So, within that ten minutes, it dawned on me that even though I am not of you, I have become one of you. That's what summed up... that 2005 captaining of Cork. It was only then that I declared myself.

And I laughed and I said, 'Dad if you're still holding that return ticket, rip it up because I'm not going back to Sydney.'

I speak on behalf of the great work that the GAA do. Other sporting and other organisations also do great work. Don't underestimate the value and the power of what ye do, especially with people like me who come here looking for a home.

I was a lost kid and they put me on a steady path.

One of my paybacks is I'm now one of those coaches in the club - the wheel has turned - welcoming and helping the next generation of Irish people who come here looking for a new home.

Sin a bhfuil ata a rá agamsa. Go raibh maith agaibh agus go n-éirí libh! (*That's all I have to say. Thank you and good luck!*)



• Seán Óg Ó hAilpín with transition year students from Ballyhaunis Community School - they helped immensely on the day.

I went to A&E and it was full of immigrants. One bandaged my arm. Another gave me an x-ray.

IMMIGRATION LESSONS

Ballyhaunis a leading light - they rise to the challenges in 'embrace

INTRODUCTION

Close to 200 people attended a daylong discussion on integration and diversity in Ballyhaunis, on Friday, October 18th.

The star of the day was Fijian-born GAA All-Star, Seán Óg Ó hAilpín.

Before signing hurleys for local fans, he spoke from the heart about his own experience. His father was from Fermanagh and his mother from Rotuman, a Fijian island, and it was the GAA that helped him to integrate when he came here as a child.

Ballyhaunis GAA Club has 30 teams playing under-age to adult and he advised the coaches to "never underestimate the value and the power of what ye do, especially with people like me."

(See previous pages for Seán Óg's full talk).

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

These remain on the wish-list. People surveyed this year also want a full-time childcare facility, better transport and a revamped local library.

One respondent feared Ballyhaunis was becoming "a ghost town". "Ballyhaunis has been overtaken by Claremorris," said another.

While not detracting from the town's needs, the strong majority view, as an Irish female respondent noted, is the town's "great sense of community spirit, resilience in the face of economic challenges, a can-do attitude and a welcoming feel".

That spirit was on full display all day at Began.

GAA / COUNTY COUNCIL

One place where the barriers are overcome on a daily basis is on the GAA pitch. Ballyhaunis GAA chairman Gerry Lyons spoke of their integration initiatives that have been won recognition through the Pride of Place awards.

Mayo County Council CEO, Peter Hynes, recognises the town's leadership: "Ballyhaunis is the leading light showing where a lot of towns and communities need to be going."

At a time when communities around the county and country are struggling with the Government's practice of trying to resettle hundreds of refugees at short notice and without adequate local consultation in small towns and rural areas, the seminar felt relevant.

DIRECT PROVISION - SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

One of the best received speeches was by Celesta Khosa, a charismatic woman from South Africa who is one of 500 people resident in the town's former convent, now a direct provision centre.

She said, "We are not in a community, we are up the hill, already separated." She called for the often highly skilled people in direct provision to be given employment.

"We have many lawyers and doctors in the convent and it is a shame they cannot work," she said.

(See following pages for Celesta's full talk).

MINISTER RING RECALLED IRISH WHO DIED ABROAD

Minister Michael Ring is enthusiastic about Ireland becoming more diverse.

"We should remember we're a country of emigration. We should remember that our people went abroad."

On Ballyhaunis, he said, "This is a fantastic town. This is a town that welcomed new people into their community."

Turning to "a few people out there that are anti-people coming into the community," he said, "I am somebody that came from a family that saw a lot of emigration, from a county that saw a lot of emigration."

He recalled visiting a cemetery in Savannah, USA, where hundreds of Irish people are buried.

"They went out. They couldn't read or write. Some of them had English, some of them didn't. They were put into the swamps. They died from disease. And they worked and worked and they educated their children. They didn't have that chance of education, but they gave their children that chance."



The most recent national census shows that more than half the people in Ballyhaunis originally hail from another country, making the town unique in Ireland. The town's community council wanted to know more:

Mark Godfrey, chairperson, presented the findings of a recently conducted survey* at the seminar.

TOWN SURVEY FINDINGS

Most residents - 60% - feel positive or very positive about Ballyhaunis. However, as Mark pointed out, "There's a significant block that feel mildly negative towards the town."

On the other hand, when asked 'Do you wish to become involved in the community?', the vast majority (close to 90%) said 'Yes'. He welcomed this while pointing to barriers to participation. Many people cannot speak English, for example. Integration is also a challenge when people do not mix with locals.

Respondents said that out of only 15 of 200 people on Abbey Street and Bridge Street are Irish-born.

The survey quoted another respondent who pointed out that "Knox street has about 150 residents now, but only 15 are Irish."

Many of the challenges facing Ballyhaunis were highlighted by Edwin McGreal in a series of articles in 'The Mayo News' in 2015 when he reported, for instance, that the lack of a hotel or Lidl or Aldi detracted from the town.



* Manar Cherbatji, Minister Michael Ring and John Cribben Minister Michael Ring with Helena Cala - at the Embracing Diversity event held in Ballyhaunis.

t for other towns ing diversity'

*"We should remember
we're a country of
emigration. We should
remember that our people
went abroad."*

- Minister Michael Ring

"We wanted kindness from the people who saw our Irish coming into their country. And, by God, we all remember some of the signs they had up about Irish and coloured people 'not wanted here'.

"To all the new people coming into this county and this country, we should help them, support them and work with them," he said.

He highlighted support through social inclusion programmes and congratulated Minister of State David Stanton, who was also present, for his "great courage and great guts" in his work to support people new to Ireland.

"David Stanton has been one of your great ambassadors who has fought at government level and I know the resources are not there and haven't been there," said Minister Ring. "As a government we don't have the resources we'd like to (but) as the economy improves, more resources will be made available."

TRIBUTE FROM SON OF PAKISTANI ENTREPRENEUR WHO OPENED FACTORIES

One immigrant who needed little help when

he arrived decades ago was businessman Sher Mohammed Rafique who founded Ballyhaunis's first major industry. In June, he passed away and hundreds of local people, many of whom found employment in his meat factory, attended his funeral.

Sher's son Imran Sher Rafique spoke at the seminar.

"Ballyhaunis and the West of Ireland is not doomed to be a regional backwater," he said. "It wasn't in the past and this was through the efforts of immigrants and locals working together in harmony."

He outlined his own vision and noted that, "Brexit is probably making the West of Ireland the most important border area of Europe... Think of the West of Ireland as a new silk road," he said.

Concluding tributes were paid to local community groups, the community school, chamber of commerce, development bodies, government departments and Ballyhaunis GAA for collaborating to hold the event.

ORGANISERS

The 'embracing diversity' seminar was held in Connacht GAA's Centre of Excellence in Began, outside Ballyhaunis. It was funded and organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Justice and Equality, Mayo County Council, in collaboration with South West Mayo Development, Mayo North East LEADER Partnership and schools, community groups and other stakeholders in Ballyhaunis.

** The full survey findings will be included in a report from the seminar due out shortly.*



• Oisín Kelly, Paul Geraghty (Department of Rural and Community Development), Kyah Legg and Helena Cala.



• Naweed Jugoo, Sharon Naughton, Kelan Henry, Helena Cala with Minister of State David Stanton.

RING - LET'S HAVE A NATIONAL DEBATE

Minister Michael Ring, speaking on RTE's Drivetime, on Nov. 7th, called for a national debate on emigration and asylum-seekers.

He confirmed to RTE that he was annoyed at being left out of the loop by the Department of Justice on secretive plans to bring somewhere between 13 and 70 refugees to Achill, Co. Mayo.

The people being given sanctuary here have not yet moved to the accommodation on Achill Sound, with the Department promising it will happen, despite protests by a small number on the island. Achill is in the minister's constituency.

"I was angry that I wasn't told. People were ringing me up. Nobody had the facts.

"I know now that the Department (of Justice) are going to set up an inter-departmental committee to talk to people in future.

"Nobody knew who was coming. You're saying '13 women'. When I got the first message, it was '70 males'. Nobody knew what was actually happening.

"I have no problem. I come from a county where 'emigration' has always been a buzzword. "We have people from Mayo all over the world," he said.

He named towns that had "done their bit" for people coming into his county and into the country.

The minister continued: "We're not afraid of people coming in. The only thing I was giving out about was that they need to talk to communities.

"The time has come anyway now when we need to have a national debate in relation to asylum-seekers and immigration. People can't be saying one thing and doing something else.

"We want to help and support these people. But we have to talk to communities. We have to work with communities and tell them what's happening. And not (to have them) reading it on the internet and getting misinformation - and now that's going to be corrected by the Department of Justice."

"Some of these people are coming into this country under very difficult circumstances. They're fleeing countries it's not safe to be in, both men and women. We're doing our best to provide the best facilities for them. It's not easy. We already have a housing crisis.

"We want to do our best for them, but we need to talk to people (in host communities) and tell them what's actually happening. And we need to explain that these people are fleeing, that it's very difficult for them, that they aren't coming here because they want to come here. What we need to do is tell people what's happening.

"What happened in Achill was wrong because they were getting misinformation and they weren't getting the whole truth. When they got (more accurate) information, another group was formulated there to welcome people into Achill.

"We need to have a debate and to tell people what's actually happening."

Asked "What side would you be on in that debate?", Minister Ring replied: "I'm on every side of the debate. We have to talk to people. And we also have to support and help people to come into the country."

As it happens, the event held in Ballyhaunis may have marked the formal beginning of that debate.

HATE SPEECH

Consulting civil society

The Department of Justice and Equality is consulting the public with a view to improving Ireland's legislation on hate speech.

It wants to hear from civil society groups as part of its public consultation. If you are part of a group that would like to participate in the process, email: hatespeechconsultation@justice.ie

Submissions in writing can be made to the same email address.

For more on hate speech and community action to confront same, see our previous edition.

If people aren't shown how

- Celesta Khosa, who lives in direct provision in Ballyhaunis

Celesta Khosa from South Africa railed against the way in which she and other asylum-seekers are accommodated. She stressed that while the government now talked of "embracing diversity", the Direct Provision system ruled out easy integration.

She warned that we must all take diversity very seriously, or newcomers would not integrate and society as a whole would suffer.

She said Irish people need to "teach us how to be Irish" for integration to succeed.

Addressing the theme of the day, she said, "Direct Provision does not qualify as 'embracing diversity' because it is an institution."

Speaking of her home in the converted convent in Ballyhaunis, she said, "We are not in a community, we are up the hill, already separated."

There are strict rules about visitors - people cannot easily call or enter unannounced.

She said - directing comments at Minister of State for Justice at the Department of Justice and Equality, David Stanton - "I want to know why (visitors) are not allowed to just walk into the centre."

This puts pressure on those inside to step outside. Some who have poor English are very reluctant to leave.

Celesta helps lead a group of fellow DP residents: "We're trying to make people understand us in the convent and then we can understand other people."

"For us to get into diversity, we have to step out, but it brings some discomfort. You don't know the trauma we have, the fear, the things we go through. People have psychological issues, mental issues. There are a lot of things that make us not want to step down the road. We call it 'down the road', they call us 'up the hill' - that's how it goes in Ballyhaunis."

"The mental illness of being locked in and made feel... you are in a mini-prison. People think it is beautiful, because we have free food, warmth, water. Yes, but it's an open prison. Just imagine for someone who doesn't speak English, you have nowhere to go and nothing to do but watch the walls," she said.

Among the residents, there are people who skilled and highly trained

"The jacket I'm wearing was sewn yesterday by one of the women in the convent. She does an amazing job," she said to applause.

"In the years I have spent there, I have learned that there are lawyers and doctors in the convent and it is a shame they (have) no right to work (with these skills), but we are hoping that one day it will change."

A new survey (see page 10) found that a lack of information and communication with the various ethnic groups in Ballyhaunis was a problem. Celesta gave one example.

"There are activities in Ballyhaunis that - up the hill - we don't know about. We went to Claremorris to do drama and (afterwards) we found out there are drama classes in Ballyhaunis."

"We need to open doors. Let's make everyone feel welcome."

Commending the GAA, she said she is eager for her son to play Gaelic football.

Telling
how
Irish

"Number one - from what I ran from I was a fearful person. Now I feel so safe. People around me are very friendly, they are smiling and I don't feel threatened. Two - My son can ride a bicycle without fear of being hijacked or anything else. Number three, I would like to stay because of the Irish people."

She added, to tremendous applause, "I've been here for three years and there's no way you are shipping me out."

Celesta and her son might not have refugee recognition yet, but they are already rooted.

She pleaded with all present to show more respect and to take diversity seriously.

"We are

people greet her, she said, "I'm from South Africa and people always say 'It's beautiful in South Africa. So, why did you seek asylum?' Well, it's a long, sad story, but culture in south Africa can put you in a serious, scary, life-threatening position."

"I have a mindset of being a go-getter. I don't like being put in a corner - that's why I could not respect culture in South Africa and had to end up in Ireland."

Like others she gets sad telling her story and wishes people did not always feel they had to ask.

At first in shock when brought to Ballyhaunis - it had no traffic lights - she is now in love with the place.



IMMIGRATION LESSONS

to be Irish, we'll all lose out nis

fleeing and we are coming to Europe. Other people come for economic reasons. Others come because they love being in Ireland. But if nobody takes diversity seriously..."

She also warned that unless she and others were helped and encouraged to integrate, everyone would lose out.

"There is no way I can learn or respect Irish culture if it is not being taught to me," she said. "I personally want to know the Irish culture. I want to know how to be Irish."

"In Zulu, we say 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu' - meaning a person is a person because of other people."

"If you are Irish, you have to teach me 'This is the way we do it'," she said.

"If we misunderstand diversity, we will have big issues."

"We are fleeing and we are coming to Europe. Other people come for economic reasons. Others come because they love being in Ireland. But if nobody takes diversity seriously... I do things the way I was taught my Zulu way," she said.

She gave a simple example of how easily things can go wrong for foreigners new to Ireland who give offence where none is intended.

"I have learned that in Ireland we must hold doors open for each other. I'm practising that a lot."

She grew up learning the opposite.

"In my culture, you kick that door, walk in and the next person can get the door themselves."

Celesta is but one person and she is engaging. However, she quickly moved to scale up the size of the challenge. How can Irish ways of doing things and the country's basic history and culture be taught when many new people - unlike her - arrive without knowing English. How can people integrate and learn if they live apart?

Referring to the results of a survey by people in Ballyhaunis, she remarked, "If

there are 200 (non-Irish) people living in a street with only 15 Irish people, that is a lot of work for the Irish to do."

Celesta is however part of the community who see the challenges and plan to rise to them and do their part. They also expect the government to play its part and for Irish people to show kindness and respect.

"I have learned that in Ireland we must hold doors open for each other. I'm practising that a lot. In my culture, you kick that door, walk in and the next person can get the door themselves."



• Victoria Burcovschi and Caoimhe Moran from Ballyhaunis Community School with Tracey McDermott, administrator, Ballyhaunis Family Resource Centre.



• Chris Gonley, CEO, Sligo LEADER Partnership and Gerry O'Neill, CEO, South West Mayo Development Company, enjoying a cuppa at the seminar.



• Anastasia Crickley spoke about "inter-cultural community development" and the need to talk about racism if we're talking about "embracing diversity".

IT COULD BE FOR YOU!

New toolkit for engaging young Travellers

A well-researched 20-page guide, or toolkit, is currently being promoted to support community groups to get more young Travellers involved.

After a successful first year using the new toolkit, the 'Involve' group wants to highlight their Supporting Travellers Advance Through Universal Services (Status) toolkit.

The rationale for the toolkit (available online - see below) is to enhance the participation, retention and engagement of young members of the Traveller Community in a broad array of mainstream services across Ireland.

The toolkit came about after research by Nexus indicated that, although youth services felt they were doing great work in terms of Traveller inclusion, that this did not match the experience of the young Travellers using such services.

Over 50% of young Travellers felt that many services were simply not that welcoming and it deterred them from remaining in the service.

"While many would feel that this is simply not the case, and so many go above and beyond to make their services as inclusive as possible, there is no getting past the figures that were returned in the research," says co-ordinator, John Madden.



"Ultimately, if an issue is real or perceived, it is still an issue. We know only too well the massive benefits to consistent engagement with Youth Work on all young people across Ireland," he says.

"The difference with this toolkit is that it looks at the individual organisations and services in totality, from boards of management all the way down to the volunteers who work so diligently in the services."

"It is also fully supported by Involve, so rather than just hand the Toolkit to the organisations and services, the Status team work alongside those who decide to take on the toolkit."

In 2019, the team has assisted CoderDojo, SpunOut.ie, BelongTo and several Youth Work Ireland groups.

The current phase is funded until next November. There is no cost to the toolkit per se but obviously new initiatives and events would be a cost to the individual services or organisations depending on what they want to do or where they take the toolkit.

For 2020, Involve are opening out the Toolkit to more services and organisations. If any services would like to know more, the project is being led by Traveller youth workers and co-ordinator, John Madden.

The toolkit is the product of a Youth Work Ireland led partnership between Involve, YouthAction Northern Ireland and An Muintir Tober / Bryson. It was supported by Erasmus+ and Leargas.

The Status Toolkit can be downloaded through the following link: <http://bit.ly/InvolveYoungTravellers>

For more information on getting support using the toolkit, email John at: john.madden@involve.ie

* 'Involve' was formerly known as the National Association of Traveller Centres.

WHITESTOWN REM - Community garden

BY BEN PANTER

My husband's memorialised in the Garden," said Whitestown resident Colette Murphy.

"That's wonderful" I replied before realising my mistake. "I mean, er it's not wonderful he's dead but..."

"It's alright, at least I know where the fecker is now - least I know he's not in the pub drinking."

We laughed into our coffees in the jovial eating area of Blakestown Community Centre.

The Memorial Garden in question is officially named 'Our Family Roots' by residents. It earned a win for Whitestown housing estate in Fingal's 2019 Greener Community competition and a place in the soon-to-be-held national final of this year's Pride-of-Place Awards.

It was quite a turnaround for an estate plagued by anti-social behaviour.

"There was robbed cars in the area - the place was in bits, in tatters it was," said Colette.

The voluntary group tasked with fixing this was Whitestown Estate Management. It's co-chairperson, Joseph Bennett, a youth worker with Fingal Sports, remembers how he got involved in 2010.

"It was really, really bad, it was looking really rough," he said. So, he took it upon himself to help. "I looked after my road. I started cutting the grass, litter-picking and planting on my street. The committee approached and asked me to join. It expanded quickly and I ended up with the whole estate," he laughed.

The Council recognised the group's potential. "The estate had got neglected," admitted Fingal Council Development Officer, Rafe Costigan. "Whitestown was getting a bad reputation."

Fingal Council recognised the group could be vital in regenerating the troubled estate: "We gave them training in community skills so they were a strong group," said Rafe. "We encouraged them to come up with their own solutions and to come to us for what they needed."

Joseph takes over the story: "In 2014 a young guy in our estate, Daniel Money, passed away. I wanted to plant a tree for him but the Council said it wouldn't be fair to all the other residents who have lost someone."

"There was an area that was ran down and used for bonfires every year, dumping, anti-social behavior. It was a hot-spot for trouble, a ran down open-space."

"We met with a development worker, Ludo Beaumont and he said, 'look, why don't you pick a place on the estate and we can plant more than one tree?'"

"We held public meetings in the community centre around what we should do. Then we put it on Facebook and it went mad. So many residents were interested that we didn't have enough trees, so in the end it was a tree for each street in the

estate. We also have a tree for community workers and one for babies," he said.

Work started in spring 2018 as 20 volunteers cleared seven tons of debris, cleaned the site and painted walls. Flowers were planted and wildlife took advantage of the haven: "We have hedgehogs, foxes and a swarm of bees," grinned Joseph.

As Halloween was target time for bonfires, a pumpkin carving event was conceived last year. To earn a pumpkin, participants had to plant spring bulbs, thus earning them a share in the garden. A Christmas memorial followed and this year's pumpkin competition was a monster success with over 800 flowers planted. The flowers attracted pollinators - bagging a bio-diversity category at the greener awards.

And the anti-social behaviour?

Childcare worker, Anna Regan overlooks the garden on the once derelict site. "People dumped rubbish, furniture, burnt them out. There was



This is our place, our space!

nothing attractive at all about it. Now, you can see that children have more respect for it, they're involved with it and they're going to grow up with more respect for the area."

This, thinks Joseph, is key: "I work with these kids, rather than reporting them because then they get a record - it's better to say to them 'Hey, we're trying to make things different - if you help us we might be able to get new things. Nobody touches it now.'"

Ben visited Fingal as part of Fingal Inclusion Week 2019, an initiative led by Fingal County Council and Fingal Public Participation Network (the PPN). Over 100 events were held in one week in November.

More than 1 million people in Bolivia recently took to the streets to call on President Morales to declare the Amazon Fires a national disaster.

MENT EMBERS



weeds out anti-social antics



• Jamie Shields and Rachel Cummins.



• Joseph Bennet gives bulbs to eager gardeners.



This is a story about four people named **Everybody**, **Somebody**, **Anybody** and **Nobody**.

There was an important job to be done and **Everybody** was sure that **Somebody** would do it.



Anybody could have done it, but **Nobody** did it. **Somebody** got angry about that, because it was **Everybody's** job. **Everybody** thought **Anybody** could do it, but **Nobody** realised that **Everybody** wouldn't do it.

It ended up that **Everybody** blamed **Somebody** when **Nobody** did what **Anybody** could have done.

- As seen on the wall of a community centre office in Limerick city.

That's not my job...
...or is it?

Offshore wind could be used to produce more energy than the world uses. - International Energy Agency.

CLIMATE ACTION, JUSTICE & RIGHTS

CLIMATE ACTION MEANS CO

BY SHARON BESRA

A conference titled 'Exploring Community Work and Human Rights Approaches to Climate Action' was held in Dublin recently. It was organised by Community Work Ireland.

The focus throughout was on climate justice, the need for policy change and on moving away from an economic way of thinking to thinking of the people coming after us. It also highlighted success stories, such as the campaign by 'Love Leitrim' to ban fracking.

Ireland must change fast. We're the laggard of Europe. An analysis by Climate Action Network Europe placed Ireland second last in the EU for action and ambition on climate change.



• Guest speakers at the conference to explore taking a human rights approach to climate change, to ensure that climate justice was to the fore in policy development. Photo by Sharon Besra.

Marginalised communities most at risk - Oisín Coughlan

Oisín Coughlan, director of Friends of the Earth, stressed that "climate change affects everything at all levels."

"It's a global issue obviously, it's a national or societal issue, it's a community issue and it's an individual issue."

He said that communities are central to the challenges and to the responses. Marginalised communities were most at risk. He gave as an Irish example the troubles visited upon Rosspoint and the wider Belmullet area in Co. Mayo by gas companies.

"Shell by building their refinery didn't pay attention to safety, split the community and damaged it, and drove climate change."

On the east coast, however, plans to drill off Dalkey, Co. Dublin, were defeated in six weeks. Oisín said both RTE and the government were more

sympathetic to protests by people from Dalkey, a much more affluent area than Rosspoint.



"Communities are on the frontlines in many ways. Both in terms of the impact of climate change and what is driving climate change and the responses to that," he said.

"Communities are at the forefront of the solutions. Communities are leading the campaigning. Ireland is best at the community level. We have failed at the national level," he said.

Although individualism and consumerism was "at the root of a lot of issues around climate change... for years we have resisted too much individualism."

He gave examples of communities at their best - through tidy towns, the GAA, family resource centres and pointed to "communities dealing with austerity by coming together. It is where we are at our best. And we need, I think, to engage those communities and facilitate their

energy to try and tackle the issue of climate change."

The solutions involve communities working together - from schools to local shopkeepers to the wider community.

As people know by now, governments must also respond at national and international level.

Climate change is "the largest market failure the world has ever seen", he said. It must be addressed by states making the big changes and protecting the most vulnerable - "whether they are workers or lower-income households or communities".

Niamh Garvey, Trocaire's head of policy and advocacy, said the biggest challenge for activists is to keep the "justice element" to the forefront and to address the human rights issues stemming from climate injustices.

Dept's focus: Ensuring most disadvantaged are supported



Paul Geraghty (pictured left) is the principal officer for the social inclusion and communities unit within the Department of Rural and Community Development.

He said that while Ireland had much catching up Ireland to do, there are an increasing number of government supported initiatives at community level. He outlined a range of community-led initiatives with sound green principles receiving department support.

"We now look through the prism of climate change at what we are doing as policymakers," he said. "Our focus is to make sure that the most vulnerable and the disadvantaged can be supported during the period of climate challenges."

He drew attention to projects supported on the ground, for example 27 community gardens.

"Good things are happening through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). It is supporting modest small initiatives around the country that are trying to make a difference and are helping to put a just transition on the agenda," he said.

"At the same time, through the Department's support for social farming, people in communities

are invited to work in farms and most of the farms are of the organic type. That is reaching out to disadvantaged communities, to people with disabilities and is helping them to integrate into the world of work in an ecologically sound way."

He accepted that "a lot more investment is required", for instance through SICAP.

He was encouraged by the fact that An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, recently spoke about a just transition.

Turning to the conference organisers - Community Work Ireland - he commended them for their work on five-year action plans to implement the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

: We're way behind rest of Europe

COMMUNITY ACTION

Love Leitrim leader on how Ireland banned fracking

Eddie Mitchell is a farmer from Co. Leitrim and a community activist with 'Love Leitrim'. In recent years, he became one of the the leaders of the campaign to prevent fracking coming to Ireland.

Like others, Eddie became an expert on an environmental issue not because he wanted to, but because he had to.

They saw that fracking would divide communities across Leitrim.

"The alarm was raised," he said. "We organised ourselves the same way we organise ourselves for anything. The campaign came from the bottom and we quickly developed expertise."

"We also quickly realised that we needed to talk to other communities that were affected."

"We were talking about health impacts, about ways that communities change. We started looking at our future and comparing (fracking plans) to the vision that we had for Leitrim. That was an empowering thing - for Leitrim people to decide 'Okay, now



• 'Love Leitrim' supporters - including Eddie Mitchell - outside Leinster House in 2017 following the passing of a private members bill (presented by Tony McLoughlin TD for Sligo-Leitrim) banning fracking from Ireland.

Photo by Derek Speirs.

we have a real problem and a real threat'.

"We didn't know if we were going to win or not, but we were going to struggle and fight. We asked 'How come we never knew that this was happening - that fracking was happening in Leitrim?'"

He recounted how his group grew from winning over people locally to winning nationally.

"We went from being a local grassroots campaign to partnering with people like Oisín (Friends of the Earth) and others who protect the earth."

That allowed us to step out. We had to learn how allow the people to take ownership of our campaign. A combination of those things allowed our campaign to (get) the government to ban fracking."

He said, "There has been a huge growth in environmental awareness and that now will be useful in the fight for climate change."

On fracking, there is a new campaign gaining momentum to prevent the construction in Co. Clare of a depot for fracked gas coming from the USA.

We must change: Groups "depoliticised" by bureaucracy

Sadhbh O'Neill has served as a member of the National Sustainable Development Council (NSDC) and on other relevant committees and feels that bureaucracy at local level has got worse.

"It is very hard to know as an individual where best to exert leverage. It's a case of looking at the opportunity that the structures at any given point in time provide and looking at your relationship with the power brokers."

She pointed to local authorities structures, their Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and the relatively new Public

Participation Networks (PPNs).

"For environmental groups generally over the last 30 years that I've been involved, it's been really difficult to get out our foothold in the system," she said.

"We seem loud and prominent in the media, but the reality is that in terms of the real power structures, it is quite difficult to have any influence on actual policy locally and nationally."

She reflected on her experience as a member of the NSDC.

"Sitting on Strategic Policy Committees does not mean you have actual powers. You don't have control over budgets and you don't have control over the executive. You have very little control over the elective members and you have very little influence over what Oisín described as the 'policy paradigm'."

She was critical of the nationwide Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) which were established in 2014. She sat for a

She felt there were lost opportunities for "forward-looking development organisations" to bring all stakeholders together. LCDCs in her experience involved "the recycling of all the existing stakeholders into a new process."

"This process of bureaucratising all this local-level policy-making through the PPNs and SPCs and LCDCs depoliticises the work that we do."

"When you're coming to this from an environmental point of view, we're always on the wrong side of everything. We always seem to get ourselves in trouble."

"Environmental groups have found it very difficult to get attention. You come along to these committees and you say, 'But what about the pollinator plan?', 'What about water quality?', 'What about public transport?' And nobody wants to talk about it. It's not on the agenda," said Sadhbh.

She nonetheless sees local authorities as important in taking climate action. They have a role to play in reducing emissions and in climate justice.

"There are people in our communities that are left behind and there's no way we can progress on reducing emissions unless we do it in a way that is socially just," she said.

Local authorities have valuable assets and partnerships and roles

to play in relation to energy usage, transport and spatial planning.

"Every local authority should have a cycling officer... We need to work on energy efficiency in public buildings, private buildings and residential buildings... We need imaginative approaches and bigger budgets," she said.

On air quality - an issue in many urban centres - she wants local authorities to monitor air quality and push for change. She noted "many in poor communities are still burning fossil fuels to heat their homes".

"It's up to governments to issue regulations, but if local authorities call for (action on air quality) then that is very significant," she said.

She urged all stakeholders to be pro-active: "If you see any new energy infrastructure like fossil fuels then oppose it. It may be gas, coal, whatever. It is more likely to be industrial level at this stage or extensions to the gas networks. Scrutinise these projects very carefully."

Ed's note: LCDCs were recently the subject of a review by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Download the report: <http://bit.ly/LCDCsReview>

WELCOMING REFUGEES: Govt steals

LESSONS FROM THE ACHILL SAGA

TO BRAND THE ENTIRE ISL

BY EDWIN MCGREAL

Trying to simplify the complexities of events in Achill isn't, frankly, simple.

People who throw around terms like 'racists' and 'bigots' at the people of Achill are failing (us). It has been a horrible spell in the locality.

Similarly, those demonstrating at the Achill Head Hotel have to understand how their actions look from afar. Regardless of their motivations, their intransigence can and is being interpreted as them being outright against asylum seekers coming to the island.

I'm not from Achill but I am lucky enough to live and be raising a family in the parish (the island itself and villages on the Currane peninsula make up the parish of Achill).

Are there racist people in Achill? Absolutely. That should not come as a shock to anyone because there are racist people in every town and village in the country.

Achill is like anywhere else in the sense racism is held by a very small minority of people.

You can rightly criticise the protesters for their approach, but to label them racist is off the mark.

Of course, by extension, to brand the entire island as racist is clearly wrong.

Speaking to demonstrators and to members of the welcoming group, it was clear they shared much common ground, with both sides criticising the Government for its poor handling of plans to move asylum seekers to the island. Where they differ is how to approach and react.



• ACHILL: People protesting outside the hotel earmarked for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Many people from both sides used the word 'heartbroken'.

The saga has taken a huge toll on the island, on friendships and on relationships. Events on Achill must surely be seen as a template for how not to engage with a local community.

COMPLAINTS

Those on the protest (they call it a 'silent vigil') have two core points that they wish to make - the lack of consultation and what they say is the unsuitability of both the hotel and its surroundings.

Now many people have argued that these arguments are a cloak.

But if we are to learn anything from Achill, the issues have to be examined in their totality.

All sorts of wild rumours spread in the first hours when this story began to leak locally.

The vacuum left by the clandestine management of matters by the Department of Justice and Equality created the perfect environment for rumours, suspicion and fears, often unfounded, to thrive. Especially in an area of Ireland where so many feel they've been

Achill and the bigger picture -

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

The community in Achill, like any, takes time to respond to something new. In the midst of hosting an international harp festival, local people learned that up to 70 asylum-seekers - rumoured to be single men - were coming to live on the island.

Rumours flew about in the absence of hard information and a few dozen people launched a protest that generated headlines in all the national newspapers, stirred debate on television and radio and gave racism a boost.

Racism thrives in darkness and nobody would shed light on what was happening or who was coming to live in this small, isolated, rural community.

Like elsewhere, there was a divide. The population of Achill numbers over 2,500 people and while only a few dozen protested, the island was labelled a backwards, racist place.

Communities are one of the few targets that people and media

can freely defame, for there is no legal protection for a community's reputation. In that environment, Achill was pasted.

Before a welcoming committee could get organised, the island was lambasted on Twitter. Even some civil society heads were agast.

"This will go down in history as a dark moment," said Ruairi McKiernan, recalling visits to Achill.

Dr Panti Bliss-Cabrera wrote, "This is not my Mayo."

StandUpToTheRacists said, "It will effect their tourism. Here is one household who won't visit again."

Labour's Brendan Howlin also blamed local people, saying: "It is truly shocking that a small group of protesters can create a situation where vulnerable women cannot be housed safely. They require 12 weeks' shelter. Surely we can provide that."

Michael O'Lainn weighed in with: "Achill is too closed, too insular and too prejudiced to be suitable to accommodate refugees in need."

Tommie Lehane, on the Mayo News's Facebook page, said, "I thought Mayo people would rise above this type of racism. Shocked and disgusted."

The Women's Council of Ireland said: "A very sad and worrying development, 13 women seeking asylum to stay in accommodation in Achill due to protests."

Others saw it as a cynical move by the authorities in Dublin to shift the focus to "13 vulnerable women".

Caroline Morrin said, "The problem is that people do not have any faith in the system - 40 people become 13 vulnerable women making locals appear heartless. This is manipulation by the government. If there was local involvement at an earlier stage people would not feel blindsided."

In the midst of this, two groups suffered - the community was reputationally damaged while asylum-seekers based in Dublin - who Achill people sent gifts to - were left with concerns for their

safety.

The gifts were delivered by Achill Says Welcome, a group set up in November. Their aim:

"We work to end the State's inhumane direct provision system, while extending a warm welcome to our new neighbours who are victims of that system."

As Edan McHugh, a member of the Achill Says Welcome group, told one newspaper - had the Government approached the community from the outset they would not have experienced opposition.

There were some objections to the branding of the community.

Anne-Marie Flynn from Mayo said, "Branding an entire area as racist is every bit as lazy and ill-informed as some of the ugly stuff that's circulating."

Declan Ganley, whose grandfather came from the island, said, "You won't find warmer people in Ireland than you'll find in Achill. How about gov't engaging them first? ...

h and lack of consultation irks all AND AS RACIST IS WRONG

“If labels about you are being thrown around and you feel that no one is listening ...you can become more hardline.”

forgotten by the State.

The initial news that all 38 asylum seekers would be male sparked concerns locally. Plans were changed: 13 women would be arriving, followed by 25 people, labeled as ‘families’.

An open approach, though not without risks, would have allowed the community to know exactly what was being planned and could have calmed tensions from the get go.

Instead, there was no official statement for eight days. What does the department expect with such a secretive approach?

Department officials confirmed (afterwards) that no assessment or inspection of the area was carried out. This is incredible.

Cost-effectiveness appears to be a greater priority for the Government than finding adequately resourced locations for people fleeing

war and persecution and it is a bit rich for the Government to be trying to take the moral high ground (talking about “our moral obligation”).

It is no coincidence that all the places where direct provision centres and emergency centres have opened or have been proposed are small towns or villages.

It is possible to disagree strongly with the protest yet acknowledge that the Government’s handling of this whole saga and the wider issue of Direct Provision has been shameful.

LESSONS FOR ALL

There are many lessons to be learned from this episode on Achill and similar ones throughout Ireland.

As we see with the homeless crisis – a crisis that should be neither compared with nor expected to compete with asylum seekers – the Government is not very good at reacting with urgency in a crisis.

Given our history and our basic humanity, we should do what we can to help those fleeing from peril.

It was clear from talking to people at the demonstration that they are very angry.

If labels about you are being thrown around, and you feel that no one is listening to you and that you are repeatedly ignored by official channels, instead of being open to compromise, you can

become more hardline, circling the wagons and only trusting those around you. You start to look on anyone else with suspicion.

Sometimes these things take on a life of their own (when) the world and its daughter rushes to criticise you. Sometimes in such situations, when you feel your area and your people are under attack, it can be hard to see the wood from the trees, hard to take a step back.

Right now the sensible course of action would be for the protesters to stand down.

While the Government has been very good at pointing fingers during this whole mess, the reality is that it also needs to take a good, long look in the mirror.

This is an edited and shortened version of an article published locally by ‘The Mayo News’ and available online at: <https://www.mayonews.ie/comment-opinion/133-comment-opinion/34524-lessons-from-the-achill-saga>

Earlier, ‘Changing Ireland’ had provided the newspaper with a report on the ‘Embracing Diversity’ seminar held in Ballyhaunis. Our editor used to work for ‘The Mayo News’ covering Achill among other places.

Welcome mat is out, but location IS a challenge

While Edwin McGreal hopes to see asylum-seekers welcomed to Achill Island, he does point out that the location will be a challenge for those arriving. People will be very welcoming, but it is a remote community.

Edwin believes the government is more interested in cost considerations than in the needs of the asylum-seekers. No feasibility study was carried out:

The location is a huge issue. Any assessment would have shown Achill Island to be an unsuitable location.

The lack of a feasibility study on Achill is incredible.

No assessment of local school capacity. No consideration of the fact that aside from the hotel itself, a church is the sole amenity in the village of Pollagh. Or of the village’s small population, which stands at just 76.

There is little enough to do and, having experienced the last five winters here, I can also attest that winter on Achill can be bleak and desolate.

And take it from me, if there is one thing you cannot survive without on Achill, it is a car. Bus Éireann only comes through the village I live in once a week.

The island is full of kind-hearted people. The welcoming group is a reminder that regardless of what quarrels Achill might have with the State, the vast majority of the people of Achill would offer a warm and sincere welcome to asylum seekers.

Ed’s note: While Achill is indeed an island, it is connected to the mainland by a bridge at Achill Sound.

what people said

The people of Achill are getting pilloried by the media.”

This is also my experience. I’ve worked in Achill and with Achill people and those I met had a very humane view of and were active in helping people in need. This doesn’t mean, as Achill-based journalist Edwin McGreal points out, that there are not racists in Achill. There are, but no more than elsewhere, and to label a whole community as racist is as he says unhelpful.

The bigotry is there. Michael Lenehan reported hearing some people - locals - say: “We didn’t look for handouts when we emigrated”, “Watch out for the brown babies next year”. And so on.

But he also pointed to government: “The high-handed approach of the department (of justice) is not conducive to that at all. Start engaging with the communities ahead of time and

you’ll leverage their goodwill and consign the bigots to the margins where they belong.”

“We want the people coming to Achill to be warmly welcomed and helped to feel part of the community for as long as they’re there,” he said.

These comments were all said in a national environment where far-right bigots apparently set fire to Sinn Féin TD Martin Kenny’s car outside his family home in Co. Leitrim.

Communities that denounce Direct Provision but welcome refugees to Ireland stood up to be counted. They condemned the attack on the Sligo-Leitrim-West Cavan and South Donegal TD.

Community workers and volunteers in Co. Clare gave a coordinated response. If you googled Lisdoonvarna last year it sounded like it was the most racist place in Ireland. The truth is the town has had a very positive experience with asylum-seekers and has

welcomed them. Likewise with Miltown Malbay where 20 men integrated without a problem.

Over in Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary, the community decided not to protest and has begun to welcome asylum-seekers.

Meanwhile, a former asylum-seeker-turned campaigner enjoyed a warm welcome when he accepted an invitation to address a community meeting in Achill recently.

Bulelani Mfaco reporting after his visit: “Good engagement with locals. The Department of Justice shouldn’t be imposing Direct Provision centres on asylum-seekers or neglected communities. Sense of openness prevailed in the room. People listened and engaged.”

Mr Mfaco is a member of MASI, the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland. If he endorses Achill, you know it is a decent place.

Always was.

Unconference / Technology

We looked at bees to better understand community

BY EOIN KENNEDY

For such a familiar word, 'community' is rarely deeply probed as a concept, while it is also frequently hijacked.

In November, the word 'community' was probed, discussed and analysed like never before at this year's 'CongRegation' unconference that took place from Nov 22-25th.

Over 90 people from all around Ireland, all walks of life and ages gathered in the small village of Cong, Co Mayo, to discuss the theme of 'Community', having earned their ticket by writing an article on the topic in advance.

Over the weekend, 11 different events (including all-day workshops for children) helped build a trust where people were not afraid to express contradictory views and open to having their perceptions altered. The uglier sides of community were probed.

Community is also deeply personal, experience based and malleable and many soundbytes emerged from the weekend event, including:



• IN CONG: People who attended the 'unconference' focused on the theme of community.

"Community exists in places but is not a place."

"Community is an act and only exists through participation."

"Without community there is no foundation to life."

Attendees came up with original ways of putting community under the spotlight. They looked at how bee communities function. They

also considered how intergalactic communities might look in the future.

The expected community subthemes of 'belonging' and 'a common sense of purpose' came up.

People also felt there was a need for stronger leadership in communities before we sleep-walk into the future.

The articles written by attendees for the 'unconference' feature on the website: www.congregation.ie

They cover everything from 'How the Outsider can Disrupt Mature Communities and Effect Positive Change' to 'A Death in the Community'.

* Eoin is the founder of CongRegation.

WE'RE NOW AMONG BEST IN EUROPE: 5 free online data sets of use to communities

BY PAT KENNEDY

Community groups need to know their area well. Policy-makers and funders, often one and the same, like to see investment in an "evidence-based approach" and this is often the case when it comes to funding community development.

Traditionally, community groups physically gather information through on-the-ground surveys, but, today, many also tap into top-down data sets that are freely available online.

We were once the laggards of Europe, but are now in the top three for gathering and releasing publicly-sourced data.

Organisations large and small are seeing the value of these data sets. Community groups that embed evidence on a regular basis may see patterns that relate to investment in their work. Consistent measurement over time should help community groups to make strong proposals and run winning campaigns.

The main government website for online data is: <https://data.gov.ie>

It includes data from many local authorities and most government departments and is worth exploring. Five data sets of interest are:

1. Census data compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) helps us understand the social make-up of communities in detail and compare them with others.

For instance, you can find out the number and age of buildings in a small area, how many rooms per house-type, the type of water and heating systems used, etc.

The figures could enable you, for example, to measure your community's energy dependency, or find out how many people speak Irish, or how long people spend travelling to and from work. <https://www.cso.ie/en/databases/>

2. Pobal operates the census-based HP Deprivation Index. The initials 'HP' come from the surnames of Jonathan Pratschke and the late Trutz Haase who were the first to map deprivation in Ireland this way.

From small areas to whole counties, anyone can gather data that shows how affluent or disadvantaged a community is. The data covers employment and education levels, age dependency, lone parenting rates and numbers renting from the local authority in over 18,000 small areas in the Republic. <https://maps.pobal.ie>

3. Following the fiasco over the Garda Síochána's miscounting by millions, the CSO in 2016 stopped publishing crime statistics generated by the Garda's internal Pulse system. Last year, it resumed publishing the statistics while warning users the data does not meet their standards.

The data can be useful nonetheless to community groups seeking to demonstrate needs, safety, detection rates, etc, in their Garda station area. <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/>

4. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides data to make it easier to find, browse

and understand the environment. For instance, if doing community asset mapping, you can seek out data on forests types and peatland. Or, you might equally be interested in the number of licensed emission points in your area. <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/>

5. Bord Failte has data sets on nearly every tourist attraction and activity in the country - a list of over 5,000 places and services. Much of its data is available at county level, though not at community level, on the origin of tourists, their spend, their reasons for visiting and so on. Via: <https://data.gov.ie>

* Pat Kennedy is the founder and owner of eTownz. To see its unique online tools for community planning, visit: www.eTownz.com



Grassroots view

Poor pay in early years education driving people from the sector

Concerns continue to rise over the long-term sustainability of community childcare, in particular in early years settings. Many are close to or have begun to dip into their financial reserves, 'Changing Ireland' has been told.

Following the coverage in our Autumn edition, which included a statement from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, other community-based early childhood care managers spoke to us to express their concerns.

The grassroots view is that the current model is not geared properly towards community needs, low pay-rates are driving people out of the sector, and bureaucracy is growing. There is a fear that these and other issues combined could lead to more closures.

We first heard of concerns in 2017. In Cork, a campaign to have the issues recognised received widespread publicity and politicians took note, but pay rates did not change.

One community childcare facility in Cork city is now due to close at the end of this year. It is in a disadvantaged area.

Issues over the possible closure of childcare facilities made headlines in national newspapers in November and received an airing on Joe Duffy's 'Liveline'.

A childcare manager we'll call 'Deirdre' told us of real

fears that her community crèche would close, as one member of staff after another left the industry over poor pay.

Deirdre did not want to be quoted by name because, if it was known within the community that the crèche was struggling, parents might pull their children out, hastening its demise.

After a strong recruiting drive, Deirdre's project succeeded in hiring new staff. But she and others remain concerned about staff pay being too low and about the model.

Another community provider - again not wanting to have their name published said, "To speak out, you have to register as an advocate and it becomes very obvious then who is complaining."

'Maura' said, "They still won't pay us right. It's worse it's getting. Many workers are now very much part of the gig economy. Why would you work from 8-to-6 for €400 per week? You're as well off on the dole."

"We're asked to take on all of the responsibilities, but without the pay and conditions. For instance, I don't have a pension and none of the staff here do. The real issue is that you cannot run a public service through the private sector. We should be treated like the teaching profession."

"Many staff in early years education have degrees that took them four years to get and they're leaving.

"They can do a two-year conversion to become

primary school teaching and move into permanent, pensionable jobs. The teaching qualification is also transferable to other countries," she said.

"The model for delivery of early years education is not fit for purpose. When we're talking about the care and education of our children, why are we using the lowest cost model? Children are not commodities. This isn't a factory. It's not boxes we're making here," said Maura.

In November, regulatory authorities, asked for fire safety statements to be submitted by childcare providers by early December. After the issue got an airing on 'Liveline' that deadline was changed to next June.

"People see the need for the regulations, but they are bamboozled by the bureaucracy," said Maura.

There is also a gender issue, said Deirdre: "Most early years workers are women and, traditionally, women don't complain."

She said they are being taken advantage of: "Women will work part-time. They want to be working, so their children will see them working."

The very low level of unionisation is another issue. It makes it difficult for SIPTU and IMPACT - the relevant unions - to speak up for the sector.

"Not enough people have joined the unions to give them negotiating power. A stronger union would make a huge difference," said Deirdre. "In the

ESB and in primary and secondary schools,

everyone is in the union."

They and others explained that caught in the middle of all this are voluntary boards of management whose members are concerned that they will be called out for running a facility that does not meet all the requirements from the authorities.

While these boards know the value of community childcare in disadvantaged areas, in supporting parents to get to work, training and education, "people will close rather than get a bad Tusla report," warned Deirdre.

So why don't community facilities do more fundraising?

"Nobody's shaking buckets for teachers' wages. The public service part of their job is paid for. It should be the same for those in the early years childcare sector," said Maura.

Everyone we spoke to said that childcare staff and facilities must be valued more and the situation is more urgent now than it was in 2017.

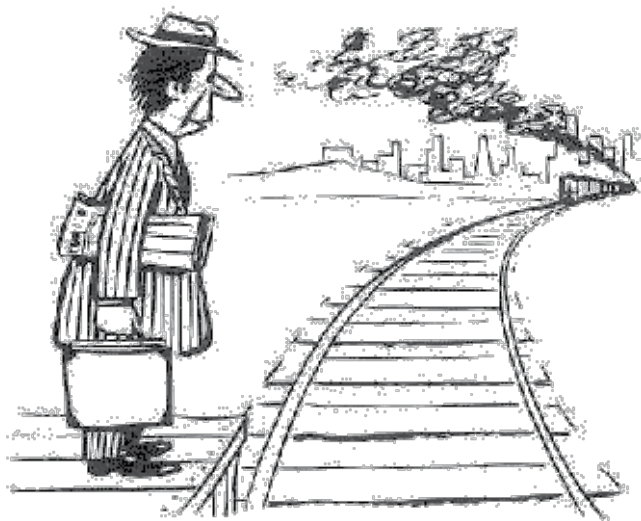
- ALLEN MEAGHER

For more, read our Autumn edition (online) particularly pages 10-11, where Maria O'Dwyer explains how "Community staff are dealing with extraordinary challenges with less-than-ordinary budgets".

The piece is accompanied by a report from journalist Patrick Kelleher and by a full statement from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on the issues raised - under the heading "Department says it shares concerns and is taking action".

W: changingireland.ie





What have you missed?

PROGRAMME SUPPORTED 3,000 GROUPS & 43,000 PEOPLE

Since 2018, through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP):

- Over 43,000 people were supported, of which 40% were from a jobless household and 31% were long term unemployed.
- 16,502 people completed a lifelong learning course.
- 4,024 people set up their own business and 2,168 got jobs.
- 3,066 community groups were helped.
- 334 social enterprises were supported.

SICAP received a 3% increase in its budget for 2020 with €39.2m to be spent next year supporting disadvantaged communities.

SICAP is co-funded by the European Social Fund and supports unemployed people, those living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on low income, members of the Traveller and Roma community and other disadvantaged groups.

More info: <http://bit.ly/SICAPsince2018>

ONLY 4% SPEAK WITHOUT FEAR GLOBALLY

Comhlámh has launched a podcast Only 4% of the world population live in open societies according to Civicus.

"Millions of people marched this year calling for an end to climate injustice, yet around the world just 4% of the world's population live

in countries where governments are properly respecting the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression."

Download the report 'We will not be silenced: Climate activism from the frontlines to the UN' from their website: <https://www.civicus.org>

COMHLÁMH PODCAST CHALLENGES INEQUALITY

Comhlámh has launched a podcast called 'Focus' in collaboration with Near FM. The podcast is a mix of documentaries and interviews looking at global inequality and ways of challenging inequality and injustices wherever they are.

PLANTING TREES TO KEEP STUDENTS AIRBORNE

In an attempt to mitigate the damage their volunteers, scholarship participants and staff who travel abroad are doing to the environment, EIL Intercultural Learning plan from 2020 to invest in carbon-offsetting initiatives.

This will include supporting projects that plant trees and pioneering sustainable energy companies in Ireland and around the world.

"Traveling by air is a key part of delivering our international programmes," acknowledged Kevin Hickey, CEO at EIL, "and the time has come for organisations like EIL to face up to our responsibilities and to engage in action if we're going to continue to use flights as a means of travel."

Social en - Ireland aims to b



• **IN CROKE PARK:** Chris Gordon from the Irish Social Enterprise Network, Margaret Ring, Development, Michael Ring, and Grow It Yourself founder Mick Kelly.

The Republic of Ireland aims to become a world leader in social enterprise. While we've some catching up to do, we left the starting block at speed this year.

On July 18th, the Government's first National Social Enterprise Policy was launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development with the aim of creating "an enabling environment for social enterprise to grow and contribute more fully to Ireland's social and economic progress".

For years, social enterprise supporters had called for just such a policy. Now it's in place and it's game on.

"I am convinced that Ireland can become an international leader in Social Enterprise," Minister Michael Ring said on November 21st when he opened the first official national social enterprise conference.

Over 200 people were in Croke park to hear a progress update and listen to guest speakers from home and abroad. If social media is anything to go by, all present left highly encouraged.

The theme of the conference was 'Unlocking the transformational potential of Social Enterprise in Ireland'.

In his address, William Parnell, assistant secretary general at the Department, pointed out that implementation of the policy had begun.

In September, €800,000 in

funding was announced for the provision of training and mentoring for social enterprises throughout the country.

In October, a €1 million Small Capital Grants Scheme for social enterprises was launched. Funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund, it provides grants of between €2,000 and €15,000 for equipment, repairs or refurbishments which will enable social enterprises to improve their service.

Also in October, details were released about a Government of Ireland Post-doctoral Fellowship Programme worth €100,000 "to develop a methodology to measure the impact of social enterprise in Ireland in the context of the new Policy and international best practice".

Speakers included John McMullan, chairperson of Social Enterprise N. Ireland (where social enterprises have doubled in strength in recent years) and four people in CEO and/or founder positions in their organisations: Brendan Whelan of Social Finance Foundation, Julie Sinnamón of Enterprise Ireland, Iselt Ward of FoodCloud and Michael Kelly of Grow It Yourself.

- Allen Meagher

For more news from the conference, visit: www.changingireland.ie

For detailed information on Ireland's social enterprise policy and implementation, see: www.gov.ie

ARK - National conference

Enterprise become a world leader



...ie Clune, social enterprise manager with Pace, Minister for Rural and Community



• **Above:** Julie Sinnamon, CEO of Enterprise Ireland and Iseult Ward, CEO and co-founder of FoodCloud.

• **Below, left:** Andrew Forde, Department of Rural and Community Development.

• **Below, right:** Colin McAndrew, whose social enterprise came second in a worldwide competition recently. The project uses an app to “map the way” for people with disabilities.



• William Parnell, assistant secretary general at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Donal McKenna, social enterprise consultant, and Michael Doolan, team leader in Athlone of a Brothers of Charity day centre.



• Larry O'Neill, CEO of South Dublin County Partnership and Bernie Walshe from the Sunflower Recycling Project.



• Maria Flanagan from An Cosán Virtual Community College, and Senan Cooke, author of 'The Enterprising Community'.



• From The Wheel: Deirdre Garvey, CEO, and Mairead O'Connor, training and advice manager.

JOHN SPILLANE - IT'S A WAR



• Watch him live at: <http://bit.ly/JohnSpillane2019>
Filmed with permission in Fedamore, Co. Limerick, in November, by Allen Meagher.

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

If you haven't heard of John Spillane - he's Cork's answer to Christy Moore. You might have seen him on 'The Young Offenders' recently'.

"I come from the folk song tradition - you know the whole Christy Moore vibe. I'm following him. He's the big bull, I'm the small bull," he said on the same night that Christy appeared on RTE's 'The Late Late Show' to promote his latest album which is named after and features one of John's hits, 'Magic Nights'.

Currently, John is crowdfunding for his own new album '100 Snow White Horses'. (The Fundit page offers imaginative rewards for supporters: <http://bit.ly/SpillaneAlbum2020>)

As he says himself, "I believe in community and my songs are community based. I wish to form a community around this record."

Q - What does community mean to you?

Community is a big thing in my life. All my songs are actually community-based," he said.

It comes natural to me. All my people come from Bantry in West Cork (where) everybody knows who everybody is. I know people move to cities to escape from that, but I think generally it's a healthy thing - everybody knows what's going on. You can't get away with murder, or it's not so easy.

Q - You say you're a bard. Maybe you're a community development worker with a guitar?

I worked with Foroige in Mahon in Cork, an unemployment blackspot. I worked for Mahon youth development teaching rock and roll to the young fellas who were falling out of school.

Then that developed into teaching music for a number of years in Cork prison and on Spike Island. We were trying to keep the young fellas out of jail. I've done a lot of that kind of work.

I'm currently doing a folklore project with children in the local schools in Passage West and Monkstown. It's a place rich in myths and legends.

Q - How is Ireland doing on equality, fraternity, inclusion? You sing about these.

There's a terrible right-wing thing going on and, unfortunately, the guys who play the right wing card by targeting minorities get into power. It's exactly how Hitler got into power and it's how Donald Trump got into power.

I got threats from right-wing people recently who were going to destroy my life, because I said there was only one race - the human race. The threats were vicious.

There's British alt-right guys over here causing a lot of trouble. I've seen some very nasty stuff. A lot of it is mixed up with republicanism and the North.

And a lot of it is to do with bad education. I've heard these guys ranting on about getting sex education out of schools. Like, what?

There's a small number of people preying on people who are very uneducated.

It's a war.

Q - The Government says it will now consult communities about asylum-seekers coming in...

They should have been consulting with communities all the time. How stupid it was not to. They're building a breeding ground for what we're talking about.

Q - What do you say about challenges we're facing?

We're living in fascinating times. The whole Brexit thing and the border in the Irish Sea is interesting. I'm very against the six counties, the border, which is a gerrymandering drawing of a line around people based on religious grounds. It's the tailend of the religious wars that devastated Europe in the 1600s. Catholic and Protestant are basically the same people. There's hardly any difference between them. So it's fascinating how the old Brexit thing is playing out.

I don't know about climate change. I don't know what's going to happen to the world.

Q - Are communities getting stronger?

Community is always ever-changing. Even in one place, the old people die off and new people move in. It's always ebbing and flowing. Some people build it and some people don't.

Q - If you could ask community development workers to focus on one thing in 2020, what would it be?

'Faraway hills are greener' is a saying. But I think they are not really greener. Exactly where you are is the best place in the whole world.

My theme, with a lot of the songs I'm writing now, is that there's a hidden nobility that you want to bring out. It's in people and in places, in local history and legends, in local legends, in the very soil.

It's all a matter of perception. Change your perception and build up the positives in a place. You live in the most beautiful place on planet earth.