

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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CHANGING IRELAND

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COMMUNITIES SERVING THE COUNTRY

Eileen Lucey
from Mucklagh,
Co. Offaly
welcomes
a caller



SLIGO: 1st of it's kind community space
Students don't accept fees at full rate
Q&A with Minister of State Joe O'Brien
Carers & volunteers recognised in budget
Volunteer Diary - What I learned in 50 days

PRESIDENT HIGGINS PAYS TRIBUTE



KERRY - DUBLIN - CORK
- LIMERICK - GALWAY -
OFFALY - VOLUNTEERS
- LEADERSHIP - INSIGHT -
POSITIVITY - HUMOUR

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INDEPENDENT

'Changing Ireland' is an independent, community-based, 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'.

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• Wet wipes often contain plastic. They clean surfaces while destroying the environment. Dr Liam Morrison and team on Galway's beaches. (Page 28)

PHOTO COURTESY GALWAY CO PPN / AENGUS MCMAHON.

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(Almost) invisible people doing invaluable work



There are 350,000 carers in the Republic of Ireland.

Those carers, operating with community support, have saved the country from being in a more precarious state due

to Covid-19. This is clear from our report by Ray Lucey in Offaly where he and his mother Eileen speak from experience.

Eileen kindly allowed him to turn his journalistic focus inwards and describe his life as a carer and to gently interview her as someone who receives care.

Thankfully, well-embedded community supports make Eileen's life comfortable and enable Ray to commute to work - essential to provide for his family.

We should be grateful to Ray and Eileen because this aspect of Irish life is usually hidden from view. Any of us could end up as a carer, or being cared for. Whether or not we would receive a carer's allowance is another story - see side column.

Ray also talks to Family Carers Ireland (FCI) which puts the story in a national context.

MORE GOOD NEWS STORIES THAN WE CAN TELL

While FCI had well-reasoned reservations about Budget 2021, most community sector commentators were pleased. Some were gushing in praise.

"Wow! Change is coming," wrote one community worker greeting the "fantastic" news the government would invest €8m in "a dedicated Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund".

Similarly, people working with youths were impressed. While budget 2021 only grabbed headlines for a day or two, the impact will be felt next year when communities get a boost.

However, I was surprised the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) did not get more funding. It's a programme that's doing very well.

Research by the ESRI found SICAP's achievements "remarkable" in getting people

into employment and training and the findings were welcomed by Minister of State, Joe O'Brien - who we interviewed, by email, for this edition.

Speaking of this edition, it runs to 36 pages, a miracle really. Working from home aint all it's cracked up to be when the dog is literally running around with a fiver your child got for her birthday and you're trying to focus on the challenges facing Garryowen (next issue!).

The stories we received tip-offs about were many more than we could get to. What you have here is a tribute to all of you working in, volunteering in and supporting communities across the State.

I was concerned that being so positively focused this could be an issue without bite, but that's not the case. The voice of people on the margins comes through on different pages, sometimes directly, sometimes through community development workers.

More please!

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.



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Front Cover:

Eileen Lucey, Tullamore, greets caller Caroline Bryant from Mucklagh Community Development.



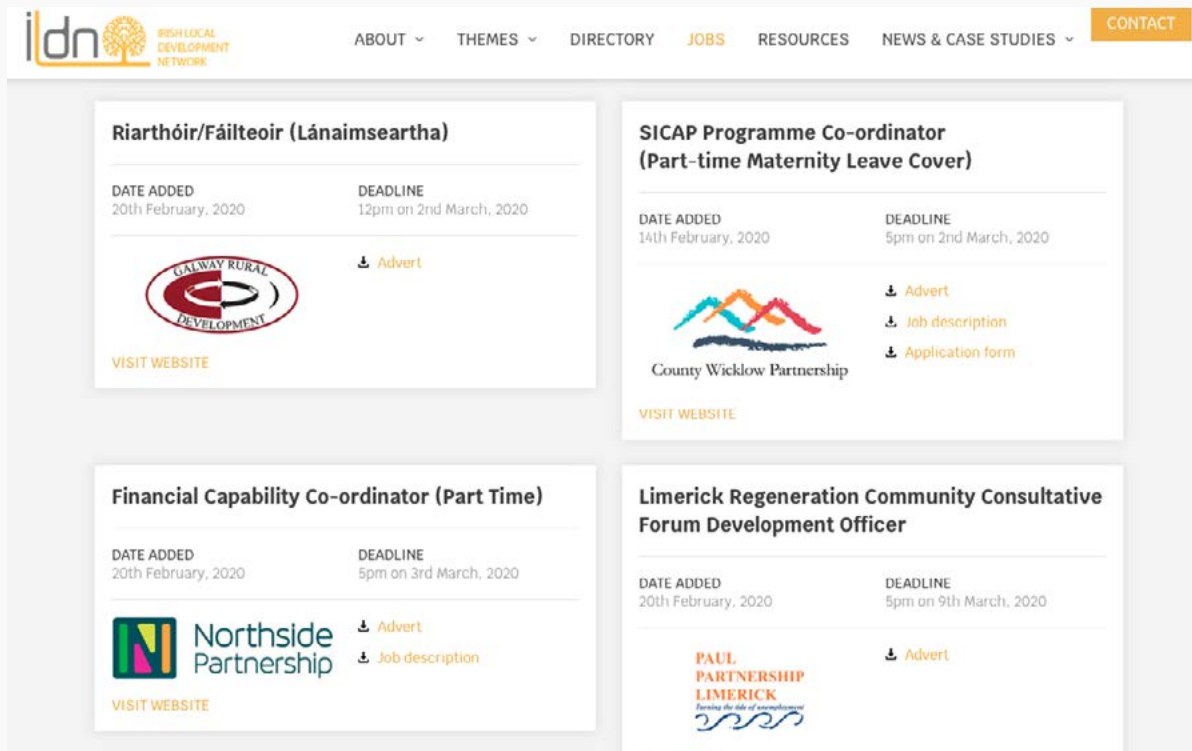
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The views expressed in this magazine are those of the author concerned. They do not, by any means, necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the editorial team, the voluntary management board of Changing Ireland Community Media CLG, or its core-funder the Department of Rural & Community Development.

*One thing we can be pretty sure about (and we've said this before):
Whoever invented hand sanitiser is definitely rubbing their hands together.*

Visit the Jobs Section on www.ildn.ie

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The screenshot shows the Ildn Jobs Section website. The header includes the Ildn logo and navigation links: ABOUT, THEMES, DIRECTORY, JOBS, RESOURCES, NEWS & CASE STUDIES, and CONTACT. The main content area displays four job listings, each with a title, date added, deadline, logo, and links to 'Advert', 'Job description', and 'Application form'.

Job Title	Date Added	Deadline	Logo	Links
Riarthóir/Fáilteoir (Lánaimseartha)	20th February, 2020	12pm on 2nd March, 2020	Galway Rural Development	Advert
SICAP Programme Co-ordinator (Part-time Maternity Leave Cover)	14th February, 2020	5pm on 2nd March, 2020	County Wicklow Partnership	Advert, Job description, Application form
Financial Capability Co-ordinator (Part Time)	20th February, 2020	5pm on 3rd March, 2020	Northside Partnership	Advert, Job description
Limerick Regeneration Community Consultative Forum Development Officer	20th February, 2020	5pm on 9th March, 2020	Paul Partnership Limerick	Advert



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Join us in showcasing best practice in communities across Ireland - online and in our print magazine.

We are also open to reporting enquiries from people who have experience in a community setting and work/volunteer in civil society. This invitation is open to young volunteers as well as senior professionals.

Enquiries to: editor@changingireland.ie



'Changing Ireland' was established in 2001.

Based in Moyross, Limerick. W: changingireland.ie

- Community Development -
- Empowerment - Participation -
- Social Inclusion - Best Practice -
Solutions - Collective Action -

Invisible people doing in

- Valued citizen Eileen Lucey says she welcomes help; son

BY RAY LUCEY



• Ray (author) with his mum Eileen Lucey.

Like others, I became a carer through extraordinary circumstances after my life changed and I made a conscious decision to be near my mother in County Offaly. I thought it would be an interim measure, but, over three years later, I am still here.

To be honest, in some respects it suits fine, but in others it is quite restrictive. Enduring a long commute doing shiftwork (in Dublin) and with my family living in Kerry, and Mum to care for too (in Offaly), it has taken its toll, eventually, on my quality of life. However, there are rewards and in future years fond memories I will have. I think my mother benefits from me being nearby, at least sometimes I hope!

There are numerous supports available to elderly residents in County Offaly and the offers of all sorts of assistance amazed me when the Covid-19 virus struck. Local community contacts, some who I already knew and some not, rallied around and made sure my mother was supported in all sorts of ways. From Meals-on-Wheels to PPE, to offers of grocery and medication deliveries, everything was taken into consideration for elderly people, especially those vulnerable and isolated.

Having me as a carer is a great comfort to Mum. She says, "It is the company. You have somebody there all the time to talk to, that is the most important thing."

The various supports Mum receives from external community sources is of great importance to her too. She says, "There's always someone there

"Like others, I became a carer through extraordinary circumstances. It takes its toll on my quality of life. However, there are rewards."

on the end of the phone. Oh, I appreciate them all, they are all really nice people."

I agree. Firstly, an absolute godsend is the HSE homehelp, who always goes well beyond her call of duty. The routine and stability she gives is a solid foundation to my mother's life and the social aspect gives her a great start to every weekday.

Family Carers Ireland's (FCI) national office is located in Tullamore offering a wide range of support services. I have attended several of their courses and carers' forums, while my mother receives ongoing valuable support from them too.

Beth Wogan, FCI's carer support manager for Laois/Offaly, has seen her role expand significantly recently "to include the wide distribution of PPE and a huge influx of calls from carers in crisis due to services being closed or in emergency situations due to Covid 19."

Regarding the most urgent issues for carers and their loved ones (speaking before the budget was announced) she said, "There is a lack of clarity around the country on when or if ever the day services for dementia and disability services will resume. Carers and the people they have protected and cared for during the pandemic were invisible to the government and were not being respected as they should have been. Carers are a hidden group in our society and in my opinion they are as valuable as the front line staff in the hospitals."

INVISIBLE PEOPLE DOING INVALUABLE WORK

FCI's slogan is 'No one should have to care alone'. "We are the voice when they (the carers) have no voice. We are their support system and advocate in times of need," she said.

For over 350,000 carers in Ireland other issues include, as Ms. Wogan describes it, "the lack of emergency respite for the carers and their loved ones and financial difficulties that carers face across the board. Even the financial aspects of being home all day, the heating, the food, you don't consider."

Dr. Frank Conaty, the Acting Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), said in their annual report that the ongoing Covid-19 crisis has highlighted "in the starkest terms, existing inequalities in our society." Ms. Wogan added, "If anything, Covid-19 should highlight the tremendous work that the carers have



• ABOVE: Eileen Lucey, Tullamore, welcomes caller Caroline Bryant from Mucklagh Community Development.

PHOTO: SIOBHAN BRODERICK.

done keeping the vulnerable safe in their homes, working non-stop since March."

It is obvious to see that without worthy organisations like FCI and Offaly Local Development Company*, with their gallant workers and many volunteers stepping up to the plate, we would be in a more precarious state during this Covid-19 crisis. Their courageous and selfless work is almost hidden, so it should be made known and celebrated often.

* (Offaly Local Development Company feature in the following pages).

www.familycarers.ie
www.offalyldc.ie

nvaluable work

Ray speaks for carers nationwide



The various supports Mum receives from external community sources is of great importance to her. She says, "There's always someone there on the end of the phone. Oh, I appreciate them all, they are all really nice people."

• RIGHT: Eileen Lucey on a birthday outing in pre-pandemic days.



Some Budget 2021 measures welcomed, but national carers' group still "deeply concerned"

Family Carers Ireland (FCI) welcomed measures announced by the Government in Budget 2021, but felt that it was a missed opportunity to honour commitments made in the Programme for Government.

For instance, many people still don't qualify for the Carer's Allowance because the income threshold has remained static for 13 years.

"While we welcome the €150 increase in the Carer's Support Grant (currently €1,700 and paid to approx. 115,000 people)... the majority of Ireland's 355,000 family carers do not receive this payment," it said in a statement. It also pointed out that the payments increase won't take effect until June 2021.

"Many family carers are already struggling financially," said Catherine Cox, FCI's Head of Carer Engagement. A survey published earlier this year by FCI found that 70% of family carers find it hard to make ends meet.



She acknowledged "some positives" in the budget, namely: "1,250 community beds, 600 rehab beds, confirmation of the Christmas Bonus, a €5 increase in the living alone allowance, a qualified child payment increase of €5 for over 12s and €2 for under 12s and an increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit from €70 to €245."

However, FCI was "deeply concerned" that many family carers will be worse off as a result of measures introduced as part of Budget 2021:

"Whilst there are a number of welcome measures (in the budget) it has not gone far enough to adequately support family carers. They have played a significant role in suppressing the coronavirus, whilst saving the economy €10bn annually."

"To date only 35-40% of day services have been restored following the initial Covid-19 lockdown phase. Plans are in place to increase this to 60% - which still means that families will experience a reduction of 40% in their supports for the foreseeable future," she said.

FCI's 'State of Caring' report is available at: <https://bit.ly/FCI-2020report>

LOCKDOWN 1: “It was very intense for

OFFALY: Development workers read no phone, never mind an internet

**SIOBHAN BRODERICK, OFFALY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT,
IN CONVERSATION WITH RAY LUCEY**

INTRODUCTION



Siobhán Broderick co-ordinates the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) across the county for Offaly Local Development Company. Her work involves supporting a team - of community development workers and others who provide one-to-one support - to implement programmes and a range of supports and projects in disadvantaged communities and to people experiencing disadvantage in the

county.

They work mainly with community groups, the county's Local Community Development Committee and Pobal. The work ties in with other funding programmes OLDC is involved in.

In planning ahead, her work also entails being “a sounding board for new projects” as well as seeking opportunities for new developments - for example, Just Transition.

1. HOW DID COVID-19 IMPACT ON YOUR WORK?

Our team began to work from home from mid March. However, as we were classed as essential workers and were available to do deliveries, a number of us were in and out of the offices co-ordinating Covid responses.

The level of work was very intense for the 11 weeks of the lockdown. As the weeks went on, each phone call took longer. Mental health issues were to the fore and people needed a lot of support.

While the work was constant, it was good to be busy, providing much needed supports and working alongside other agencies - the Gardai, SVP, homeless services, addiction services, the GAA and others.

We found so many people were willing to help. We had shops and charity shops giving us supplies. Everyone helped, from knitting shop owners to local butchers. Every request for help we made to businesses was met.

For some of us - working by phone and Zoom - the lack of separation between work and home was difficult, and we were glad to return to the offices on June 29th.



• Offaly Local Development Company's fleet of vans ready and waiting in Kilcormac to support the distribution of Meals on Wheels. INSET: Some of OLDC's staff packing food hampers - supported by SICAP and St Vincent de Paul - ready for An Garda Síochána to deliver to homes in Offaly.

Source: OLDC's Facebook page.

ached people who had connection

“The recurring theme in a lot of our work was that we were the only contact that person had each week.”

2. WHY IS YOUR WORK CRITICAL IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES?

The work of SICAP is always critical – we work in areas and support people that sometimes don’t see any other interventions, or help, from agencies.

The recurring theme in a lot of our work during the lockdown was that we were the only contact that person had each week and we supported people through crisis points. Those were mental health, food poverty or other areas of concern.

From 18th March, our work ranged from:

- Offering to provide collection and delivery services,
- Online training for social enterprises,
- Meals on wheels expansion in the west and south of the county,
- Our business development programme went online,
- Our MenPower project (formerly Mojo) continued via Zoom.

We also delivered ‘Stay at home’ packs to young and old, purchased food packs for delivery, ran interactive youth projects, competitions, online community get-togethers, employment supports, and supports to asylum seekers in centres in Offaly.

We worked with individuals via telephone, Zoom and as soon as it was practicable we met them one-to-one.

We worked with additional agencies to ensure that we provided the best service we could to our clients, community groups, social enterprises and the wider population in Offaly.

Face-to-face contact resumed in July. We were out in communities with summer camps and equine assisted learning programmes, and progressing community plans. This contact was welcomed by children, families and communities.

3. WHAT WERE THE MOST URGENT OR COMMON ISSUES YOU EXPERIENCED DURING LOCKDOWN?

The most urgent or common issues were the:

- Need for food supplies as people cocooned and/or services closed down.
- Intensity of work via phone/Zoom.
- Mental health issues arising with people that were isolated in their homes – we were the only ones many of them saw.
- Unemployment and the loss of self-employment.
- Some people are afraid to venture out and are very nervous about rejoining groups.
- Loneliness – people wanting to be engaged in activities.
- Lack of supplies and items in shops.
- Need to support other agencies.

A common issue now is space, due to social distancing. For example, Men’s Sheds may not have the correct spacing and they cannot use machinery; yet they need to meet each other.

4. HOW DID COVID-19 HIGHLIGHT THE INEQUALITIES IN IRISH SOCIETY?

The lockdown highlighted the plight of children experiencing disadvantage, of lone parents, working parents (childcare issues) and carers. It highlighted the lack of IT in many homes.

Our team encountered adults without access to communications technology. Some don’t have phones and can only be accessed via a family member. There were children who couldn’t engage digitally with their school.

There were also situations where adults who couldn’t teach their children – for example, because of literacy and language challenges.

It is also very difficult to provide a continuity of services to support high dependency clients, especially with the switch to online for many supports.

Also, many adult children moved home - because of rent payment issues, the shut down of colleges, relationship issues - and this caused difficulty and disagreement in some homes.

“Many adult children moved home and this caused difficulty and disagreement in some homes. It upset the balance.”

It upset the balance in the house. You had cases of parents trying to work from home and balance things with adult children now back and experiencing restrictions they find hard to cope with.

In some cases also, adults with disabilities who would have had day care/engagement in day facilities were at home full-time.

And, with childcare a challenge, some parents had to take unpaid leave during the summer to cover childcare requirements.

Meanwhile, older people - regardless of their ability - were forced to cocoon, to abandon worthwhile roles they played in the community. They were all treated the same.



Mahon proves the value of new Community Development Projects

For the past couple of years, there was talk at high level of re-starting a Community Development Programme, starting with local pilot projects.

Budget 2021 will see €1million allocated to set up new Community Development Projects (CDPs) - in stark contrast to the situation a decade ago when the government, following the bank crash, cut funding to CDPs and closed the programme down.

The Community Development Programme had run for 19 years and supported 180 superb local projects.

Mahon's incredible project, one of the first CDPs, is now HSE-funded along with a half-dozen more in Cork. They were among 50 or so CDPs that survived the cull of 2010.

We asked Viv Sadd, Mahon CDP co-ordinator, to pick out one major thing about the value for communities generally of having CDPs.

He replied, "CDPs are connected to the community and to outside agencies. In the current Covid climate the HSE, Cork City Council and the ETB channelled supports and resources through Mahon CDP and were able to speedily support the most vulnerable. This would not have been possible without the CDP being in place."

Two decades ago, Mr. Sadd served, with others from grassroots organisations, on the then Community Development Programme's National Advisory Committee. They reported to and gave advice to the minister.

Asked for a key observation, or warning, for those involved in helping to set up new CDPs, he said, "The CDP model is bottom up and is one of empowering individuals, groups and communities to question, challenge and bring about change. The funders must ensure the space and openness is there for this to happen and their voice to be heard."

Researchers from Nexus, in 2000, found the impact locally of the Community Development Programme was "extremely impressive". A summary of the report was published in our first edition of 'Changing Ireland' (here, on page 2): <https://bit.ly/CDPevaluationP2>

COMMUNITY WORKERS INTO PEOPLE'S LOCKDOWN

- Being well-off "doesn't mean you're not lonely"

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Mahon Community Development Project (CDP) in Cork reached out in heart-warming and novel ways during the early months of the pandemic. From the moment then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced the lockdown on March 12th, they have kept the community connected ever since.

The project's community development staff and volunteers went door-to-door, or to the doorsteps or windowsills to chat and add some fun to people's lives while cocooning. For many living alone, the community workers were the only people those residents met all week. They didn't come empty handed - they surprised people by showing up with gift packs containing the most intriguing of items.

Mahon CDP was one of many community projects around the country that set up new Meals-on-Wheels services, or expanded existing ones. But not everyone needed food.

Seeing the isolation first-hand, project staff composed poems, quizzes and artwork for giftpacks they gave to 150 cocooning residents in Mahon and Blackrock. They called regularly, delivering items as varied as home-baked cookies, wildflower seeds and a HSE physical exercise programme. They gave out their mobile numbers and responded to calls to replace fridges and washing machines and were a shining example of Ireland's 'Community Call'.

They called to homes in both wealthy and disadvantaged areas. As Viv Sadd, Mahon CDP's co-ordinator said: "Just because you're rich doesn't mean you're not lonely."

"Isolation is an issue, especially in these strange times and one way to deal with it is to have fun. One of our mottos here comes from George Bernard Shaw who said - 'We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing'," he said.

While the lockdown shut the project's crèche, community centre and youth facility, staff showed imagination by finding new ways to reach people and raise spirits.

It helped that the project was long established and it had, since



• Lynda Wakefield, Mahon CDP.

2008, employed a community development worker specifically to support older people. Funding for Lynda Wakefield's position initially came through the Dormant Accounts Fund and the project is now HSE funded. Having connected over the years with the people, Ms. Wakefield immediately knew who to call on and where they lived. Soon, she and colleagues were taking calls and responding seven days a week. The days blurred into one another.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing" - GBS.

"We had to respond quickly and in new ways," she said. "People were brave at the start of lockdown, knowing it was for the national good - but they began to flag. Living alone isn't easy and we saw the difference it made calling to people who were experiencing loneliness. We were often the only ones they met during the entire day. We are so used to chatting now through windows we'd find it strange to return to meeting people face-to-face over a cuppa. If only!"

Ms. Wakefield and the team gave out mobile numbers for Community Gardaí, for Cork City Council's support helpline and for Alone and Age Action helplines. Much of this work was replicated up and down the country - some of it was organic and spontaneous - but it was also part of a nationally co-ordinated response to the pandemic by the HSE, the

"We are so used to chatting now through windows we'd find it strange to return to meeting people face-to-face over a cuppa. If only!"

Department of Rural and Community Development and projects they support.

In Cork, as elsewhere, people who were once quite independent have been reluctant to go out and about as before.

Ms. Wakefield said that different people face different challenges. Some miss socialising more than others. Some people she supports have been through great hardships in life. Mental health issues are common. Some like to volunteer and serve others, but cannot do so anymore as so many activities ground to a halt, especially for people aged over-70.

"We're there for people from crèche age right up to older people. Everyone has that human need to feel cared for and valued," said Ms. Wakefield.

In a concerted effort, Mahon CDP staff went live on Facebook to connect with the community. They did things they had never done before, things they never imagined.

Crèche manager, Dawn Murphy, broadcast from home to show people how to make home-made play dough with their children. Her colleague, Ger O'Flynn, sang nursery rhymes online for the first time.

The crèche's gift packs online videos were done to keep connected with the children and to ensure a smooth return to crèche after an abrupt ending. They were also to reach out to parents who may have been struggling with having their kids at home and being out of routine.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sadd took to Facebook to give a shout-out to everyone, sharing his mobile number and urging people to call, even just to chat. His phone was hopping afterwards.

Locals were deeply appreciative of the care shown.

"Well done Lynda and gang - thanks for the goodies. We would all be lost without you," said Tina

ed projects have an advantage



S BROUGHT COLOUR AND FUN OWN LIVES



• Lynda Wakefield (centre) with members of the Mahon area community call response team in May.

PHOTO COURTESY CORK CITY COUNCIL.

Reynolds.

“Fair play lads, keep up the good work,” wrote Paul Sheehan.

The first national lockdown lasted from March to May and for many it has continued since then as they feel they must cocoon.

Community work was recognised from the start by the Government as an essential service and while it is delivered in ever evolving ways, the aim is to ensure the level of care, connection, support and dedication remains consistent.

Community development workers don't do it for the glory - it's the opposite if anything - but this year they appreciated having a spotlight shone on their communities. When RTE sent a film crew round to Mahon, people got excited. Texts flew about and the message went out on Facebook to turn on the telly - Mahon's frontline community work was going to feature on RTE 1's 'Ireland On Call'.

They got 20 seconds. “Blink and you'd miss it!” they wrote afterwards, still grateful. The Irish Examiner, still called ‘The ‘paper’ in Cork, was more generous and ran a news feature on the CDP's Covid-19 community response work.

The project continues to keep people connected. On World Mental

Health Day, on October 10th, Lynda called on local people who in normal times meet in a community setting to focus on one thing for the day - connecting!

She asked people to do so in three ways: “Connect with yourself. Connect with others. And connect with nature”.

In September, Mahon CDP reopened its community creche and youth centre and has been able to run most of its adult education programmes.

“As you can imagine the children, young people and their parents are all delighted to have these services up and running again,” said Mr. Sadd. “We are especially happy to get the adult education programmes going again. Many of our participants who are in their 70's and 80's couldn't wait to get back to their courses which include chair yoga, photography and outdoor health and fitness programmes. Everyone wears their masks and respects and follows all the social distancing and other Covid procedures we have in place,” he said.

Whilst doing this work Mahon CDP had to sadly deal with the non-Covid related deaths of three local people closely associated with Mahon CDP - John Kennedy, Pete Duffy and Donal O'Regan.

Donal O'Regan, RIP

Mahon CDP was saddened to hear of the passing away, on May 8, of Donal O'Regan. He was a talented, long-time member of the project's Men's Art Group.

Donal (on left) featured on our front cover in Spring 2008, alongside Jim Barrett, with bronze-cast artwork they produced. The work titled ‘Communicate’ was put on permanent public display by Cork City Council.

Photo: A. Meagher.



COMMUNITY IN ACTION



• The CDP encourages a healthy lifestyle. Autumn can be awesome.



• Above: Mahon's photography group met on October 14 for the first time since March. Below, right: Playing frisbee in the park.



• October 14th was a momentous occasion with the CDP welcoming back its first indoor group since March. "Everyone was so happy to see each other," said Viv Sadd, co-ordinator.

What ARE community groups doing around the country? Take Mahon CDP - where they are reaching out in new ways.



• Mahon's outdoor exercise group is led by tutor Declan Cassidy. They are pictured here on Oct 15th. All are wearing pedometers to monitor activity levels.



• Mahon CDP established Mahon Wheels on Wheels with the support of the HSE last April, as an emergency response to Covid-19. "It has been a wonderful lifeline for many," said Viv Sadd, CDP co-ordinator.



• On October 10, World Mental Health Day, the project encouraged people to head outdoors, or if staying in, to watch comedy shows. To mark the day, some staff headed to the beach at Youghal, Co. Cork, for a walk.

Covid-19's impact on women/men

In a Covid-19 survey by the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks, 62% of 3,369 women surveyed said they experience a strain on their mental health and wellbeing as well as feeling isolated and disconnected from friends and family. 35% of women, especially in rural areas, said that inadequate internet access had exacerbated this.

Read the survey (13 pages) here: <http://bit.ly/NCCWNcovidsurvey>

Meanwhile, the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) and The National Centre for Men's Health Carlow IT held a webinar on International Men's Day, November 19th, to look at the pandemic's impact on the mental health and wellbeing of men and boys. It was titled 'Men's Mental Health in these Challenging Times'.

Recently, the MHFI has also looked at the implications of Covid-19 for farmers living alone and for farm households with children.

W: <https://www.mhfi.org>

121 Family Resource Centres delivering for the country

Family Resource Centres have played and will continue to play a vital role in the battle against Covid-19.

The 121 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) around the country have proven they can "effectively communicate the changing public health advice and provide vital supports (that) respond to the direct needs of some of our most vulnerable in society."

On Oct 21st, the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) launched a new report called 'Our Story' which outlines the historical, current, and potential future development of the National Family Resource Centre Programme.

The programme has been in operation for over 25 years and the new report has been well received by supporters. Deirdre Hegarty called the 60-page read an "outstanding piece of work outlining the huge amount of support being provided to communities all over the country not just in this time of crisis but all the time".

Ballyduff FRC in Co. Kerry said it was "a brilliant read" because it described "all the hard work we do as a team, a workload that makes us proud of who we are, what we do, how we do it, when we do it, where



we do it and the biggest reason - why we do it."

As the country entered level five restrictions, FRCs prepared to promote important Covid-19 public safety recommendations and advice amongst harder-to-reach communities.

Clare Cashman, Forum chairperson, said: "Since the outbreak of Covid-19, Family Resource Centres throughout Ireland have played a key role working on the ground supporting communities."

In the run up to Halloween, FRCs were determined to see that public health guidelines and restrictions

were communicated effectively. They saw that people were "tempted to socialise... or let their guard fall which may inadvertently result in the spread of Covid-19."

In the first lockdown, FRCs experienced an increase in the number of people seeking mental health support and food and essential home supplies. They received more calls than normal from migrant communities, including those in direct provision.

Since March, FRCs have broadened the range of services they provide, having experienced an increase in demand "from many new people who had never used FRC services before, such as older people cocooning".

For example, all FRCs now use a 'Digital Toolkit' and use social media to reach their target audiences.

The 'Our Story' report shows how FRCs work with individuals, families, communities and government in responding to locally identified needs. The report can be downloaded from the Forum's website.

W: www.familyresource.ie

Walkers for Life

Limerick City



• On the eve of World Suicide Prevention Day, we interviewed members of Limerick Treaty Suicide Prevention, welfare officer Marian McGuane and the group's chairperson Matt Collins. While we were chatting, fellow volunteers hurried off to help people who showed up feeling distressed. The video was shared many times. See: <https://bit.ly/changingireland-LTSP>

Dublin's Inner City: **Regeneration progress**

Gardaí became part of the community during lockdown

- Meanwhile, concerns expressed for homeless people in private hostels

During the first Covid-19 shutdown when pensioners were cocooning, they often needed someone to collect their pension or prescriptions.

In Dublin's north east inner city, as elsewhere around the country, they were happy to trust the Gardaí to do the job.

Gardaí became part of the community, by calling to people's homes and offering practical services.



BY LAOISE NEYLON

In an area that has issues with drugs and crime, relations between local residents and the Gardaí got a boost, said Noel Wardick, CEO of Dublin City Community Coop - an alliance of 13 community organisations.

"The return on investment for the Gardaí was unbelievable," he said. Investing in community policing reduces crime in the area, he said. "This is the way to go."

Back in July 2016, following a number of high profile drug-related shootings, the then Taoiseach Enda Kenny launched a ministerial taskforce to lead the regeneration of the north east inner city.

Four years on, community leaders have different views on how successful regeneration has been in tackling drugs and crime.

Some are very positive about aspects of the regeneration, but they say open drug dealing is still a major problem and that those involved should be arrested like they would be in any middle class area of the city.

A Garda spokesperson said that they have run two successful operations in the north east inner city, Operation Cribbage and Operation Canter, aimed at tackling anti social behaviour, drug dealing and money laundering.

Community police based at Store Street Garda Station "recorded a significant reduction in reports of criminality and anti-social behaviour from local residents in the area due to these operations," said the Garda spokesperson.

AGE OLD PROBLEMS

"Some of these issues have been around for a long time, so you can't expect them to be sorted straight away," said Sarah Kelleher, CEO of Lourdes Youth & Community Services.

"I wouldn't like to be working in the north inner city without the taskforce," she said.

The north east inner city is fortunate compared with other areas and the way the regeneration board is structured means that the community organisations there have links to top civil servants and government ministers.

"We have access to people at the highest levels, to try and find creative solutions to age old problems," she said.

There are so many positive initiatives as a result of the regeneration that often locals are not aware of everything that the taskforce is doing, she said.

Each year a pot of around €6.5m gets divided up as a result of the regeneration, said Mr. Wardick, who is one of the community representatives on the implementation board for the regeneration.

"Obviously that is welcome," he said.

Statutory agencies take a slice, but the community and voluntary sector also benefits.

For example, over €1m of that funds a pilot social employment programme, which means 55 jobs for people in local community organisations, youth work projects,

childcare projects and the like, he said.

The money is vital and without it "some of those organisations would be incapable of providing their services," said Mr. Wardick.

Those are temporary contracts for 30 hours per week, so he is advocating for those roles to be mainstreamed, he said.

A work experience programme for transition year kids in local secondary schools, "was hugely successful," said Wardick. "That was done in conjunction with all the big companies in the Docklands."

Young people got traineeships in places like Price Waterhouse Cooper, in some cases that entirely changed their perspective on their career options, he said.

The employers were impressed with the young people too because they are bright and witty, he said.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

"There has been no major regeneration of the north east inner city in recent years," said independent Councillor, Anthony Flynn, CEO of Inner City Helping Homeless.

"There is a serious lack of investment in community development programmes and services," he said.

Two social housing flat complexes have been regenerated, he said. The council has made commitments in relation to other complexes but there is currently no timeline in place for

those works, said Cllr. Flynn.

"The fundamental issue for the area is drugs and crime," said Mr. Wardick. "They have destroyed these communities and created all sorts of intergenerational problems."

There are strengths too - this is a tight knit community and most parents are really trying to keep their teens away from drugs, he said.

OPEN DRUG DEALING

However, during the last recession there were cuts to Garda numbers and the drug economy grew. Nowadays open drug dealing is very visible.

"We would be able to see drug dealing going on, walking about," said Mr. Wardick.

He lives in Clontarf, and there is no way that open drug dealing would be tolerated there, like it is in the north inner city, he said.

"Someone would call the police and the police would be down like a flash," said Mr. Wardick. If the Gardaí didn't respond quickly then the professionals living locally would contact their politicians, he said.

"All the social capital that exists in more influential communities doesn't exist in these communities, so they can be abandoned," he said.

Everyone recognises that there is a policing problem, said Kelleher. "Definitely there is a need for drug dealers to be taken off the streets," she said. "They are allowed to deal drugs openly, where that wouldn't be allowed in another part of the city."

As part of the regeneration Gardaí got extra resources to tackle the open drug dealing in Liberty Park, said Mr.



• **ABOVE:** St Mary's Mansions on Sean McDermott St which was recently regenerated. **BELOW:** The Torch of Hope Monument - in memory of all the people of the North East Inner City who have died due to addiction, poverty and deprivation. **PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE BY L. NEYLON.**

Wardick.

A Garda spokesperson said the force embarked on Operation Cribbage in May 2019, to tackle drug dealing and criminality in that park.

As part of that operation, they installed CCTV. Uniformed Gardaí patrolled the park, full time, backed by "intelligence-led, covert operations," said the Garda spokesperson.

Combined, those efforts provided "a vital and dynamic policing response for the local residents," he said.

Now, community groups are helping to ensure that Liberty Park is reclaimed by local residents and workers, said Mr. Wardick. "It goes to show that with resources it can be done," he said.

DRUG TREATMENT AND HOMELESS SERVICES

People working in homeless services still can't get their clients into drug and alcohol rehabilitation, said Cllr. Flynn.

"I had someone here half an hour ago," he said. "I'm going to have to do referral after referral after referral, to try and get him into rehab."

We put queries to the north east inner city (NEIC) regeneration taskforce, which is managed by Dublin City Council, about how many drug and alcohol rehabilitation beds are funded through the regeneration programme.

"Addiction treatment and rehabilitation services have been enhanced to support community members, including those who are homeless," the strategic plan for the NEIC 2020 -2022 states.

In the last year the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has opened numerous for-profit,

homeless facilities in the area, said Cllr. Flynn.

He said, "All of the hostels that are opening up are in the Dublin 1 area or within that vicinity."

Those private hostels don't offer any addiction support, mental health supports or move-on plans, so that puts added pressure on the existing services in the area, he said.

The local authority's regeneration taskforce insisted support is provided (see statement).

Meanwhile, Mr. Wardick said that the influx of homeless people into the north east inner city puts pressure on local services, including schools. At one point around 800 homeless children were accommodated on Gardiner Street alone, he said.

It can be difficult to regenerate an area without looking at national policy, he said, like "the beyond disastrous housing policy of the state." Nevertheless, said Mr. Wardick, investment in law and order combined with proper social supports could make a big difference in the north east inner city: "Any problem can be addressed with sufficient resources and willpower."



STATEMENT:

SUPPORT IS PROVIDED TO HOMELESS IN PRIVATE HOSTELS

A spokesperson for the NEIC Programme Office, which is part of Dublin City Council, said there are approximately 17 homeless facilities in or around the NEIC area and these are managed either by NGOs or private operators.

She said the Council's Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and the HSE have joint responsibility to provide support services to the homeless population.

The NEIC contributed €394,342 towards the set up and running costs of a HSE 'stabilisation unit' in 2019, and €255,000 toward the running costs in the first half of 2020. It provides 10 beds for people with substance use issues who reside in the north east inner city.

"Since the pandemic, the collaborative approach between the DRHE and the HSE has intensified and there has been an increased emphasis on the provision of health supports to clients in private emergency facilities," said the spokesperson.

The Ana Liffey Drug Projects team is now delivering supports to some people in private hostels too, she said.

The spokesperson said that there are sufficient Garda resources in place to tackle crime in the north east inner city.

"Whilst increases in the number of Gardaí are always welcomed, Gardaí consider that there are currently sufficient resources available to deal with all crime and anti-social matters in the area," she said.

She welcomed the setting up of the new Community Safety Partnership.

PARTICIPATION

PILOT TO GIVE COMMUNITY A SAY IN POLICING PLANS

Changes to policing are coming at local and ultimately national level. The Department of Justice and Equality intends to pilot three Local Community Safety Partnerships, including one in Dublin's North Inner City. (The other two are in Waterford and Longford).

The new partnership will take over from the existing Joint Policing Committee structure and will include residents, youth representatives, business representatives and community activists together with the Gardaí, Tusla, Dublin City Council, the HSE and local councillors.

The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee, confirmed the two-year pilots on Nov 13th that will see local communities work with State services to draw up local plans to prevent crime in their own areas.

The Community Safety Partnerships will be independently chaired and

have the capacity to hold State services to account.

Minister McEntee said:

"The community safety approach recognises that the problems communities face are not just limited to policing issues. Bringing the right services together, working with each other to tackle the underlying issues which impact on our community and the sense of safety within the community is at the heart of the Local Community Safety Partnership model.

"But what will drive the agenda and objectives of the Partnerships will be the community itself. The community needs to be central in identifying what it needs and helping to shape solutions."

Eventually, every local authority area will have these bodies, with dedicated funding and staff, once the policy is rolled out nationally as part of reforms outlined by the Commission on the Future of Policing.

CLIMATE ACTION

Thurles sees the world is changing



"The world is changing, the climate is changing, there's a lot of deforestation and a lot of other things that are going on in the world which are having an impact on how the ecosystem works," says John O'Shaughnessy explaining the thinking behind a new park in Thurles, Co. Tipperary.

Soon, the organisation that he chairs - Loughtagalla Residents Association - hopes to open a new biodiversity park and sensory garden in the town.

The project is supported by North Tipperary LEADER Partnership (through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme) and a planning application was lodged over the summer with the local authority.

Our photo here comes from a biodiversity group in Co. Limerick. The butterfly may have grown up in Tipperary of course, if the colours are anything to go by!



ACTIVISTS REMAIN POSITIVE DESPITE CLIMATE ACTION BILL FALLING SHORT



• Young Irish activists attend a Fridays For Future strike. W: <https://www.fridaysforfuture.ie>

BY ÁINE RYNNE

On October 12th, co-ordinators of the Stop Climate Chaos coalition group - Oisín Coghlan and Sadhbh O'Neill - hosted a webinar discussing the recently published Climate Action Bill.

The campaign group includes environmental, overseas aid, youth and faith groups, and it has been calling for a strong climate law since 2007. It co-ordinated the campaign that led to the passing of the 2015 Climate Action Act.

Oisín Coghlan, co-ordinator of the campaigning coalition said:

"This Climate Bill substantially improves the 2015 law, but substantial weaknesses remain that must be fixed by TDs and Senators."

The webinar panelists also included Dr Diarmuid Torney who specialises in climate politics and Prof. John Sweeney, climatologist.

CLIMATE ACTION BILL 2020 VS 2015

Dr. Torney explained how the Climate Advisory Board operates in a similar role to how NPHE does and this, he said, was appropriate. He said the Bill was a marked improvement on the 2015 document. It explicitly sets out a more balanced and more diverse policy planning framework.

However, the fact that there is no obligation by the government to meet the 2050 goal of zero emissions, is a clear cause for concern. There is no legally binding element to this and

so the focus seems to be on planning for a carbon budget but with no guarantee that this will be met.

Prof. Sweeney, a climate scientist, dug deep into the language of the Bill and described it as weak. He pointed to the usage of words such as "pursue" being used instead of "achieve" and said, "These action words are necessary requirements for compliance."

He noted that the word "may" appears 45 times in the document, which really drilled home his point about the use of "weasel words" giving the Bill a lot of uncertainty.

There is also a compliance gap in relation to individual sectors that must play their part to meet the targets. What was most stark of all was his closing piece when he examined what was missing in the Bill:

- No sanctions.
- No criteria for Ireland's carbon budget.
- No phasing out of fossil fuel cars.
- No international dimension regarding biodiversity.
- Loopholes that give the minister of the day extensive discretion to amend elements of Bill as s/he sees fit.

Returning again to the use of language, he noted we are not required to "achieve" the 2050 target, but to "pursue" it.

To quote the legislation:
"The State shall pursue the

transition to a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by 2050."

IT CAN BE FIXED

Closing the seminar, Sadhbh O'Neill sounded a more positive and hopeful tone, saying that while there are issues in the Bill, these can be fixed.

She said that climate governance needs joined-up thinking and should include clear obligations. She criticised the exclusion of methane gas as a separate target for agricultural sectors and said that this was a major legal loophole that needed amending.

She said the "wooliness" of the language used was unhelpful and confusing.

She stressed that the highest level of ambition needs to be reflected by this bill and that the definition of the carbon budget needs amending.

PEOPLE POWER

Oisín Coughlan summarised the seminar's view when he said the Bill is not going to break new ground. He described it as "not bad for 10 years ago, but not enough for now".

He urged those sitting in on the webinar to engage with their TDs and take action by being part of the movement to ensure these amendments happen.

Editor's note: If you're reading this in print, you're holding recycled paper and looking at vegetable inks.

What is the Climate Action Bill?

The draft text of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020 was published on October 7.

The bill covers:

- Putting targets into law.
- Annual carbon budgets.
- A strengthened role for the Climate Change Advisory Council.
- New oversight and accountability by the Oireachtas.

While we will have national targets, the Bill will require greater climate action at regional and local level, with local authorities required to develop five year Climate Action Plans.

A Government press statement welcoming the development said:

“The Bill puts into law a commitment for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

“The State will pursue the transition to a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by the end of the year 2050.

“A climate neutral economy means a sustainable economy where greenhouse gas emissions are balanced or exceeded by their removal.

“Setting a 2050 target into law provides a clear long term direction for our climate ambition and provides Ireland with opportunities to reimagine our economy and society.

“The Bill will set the country on course to become climate neutral by 2050,” the statement said.

The full government statement is available at this link (we shortened it):

<https://bit.ly/IRLclimatelaw>



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

TRAVELLER ACTIVISTS CAMPAIGNING 1990-2020

- The Irish Traveller Movement has campaigned for 30 years

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) was live on Facebook on October 7th as it marked 30 years representing and being a voice for Travellers.

Looking back over three decades wasn't entirely celebratory as the ITM was set up to campaign for Traveller's basic needs and human rights.

“I came to ITM a bit of an angry person,” said Brigid Quilligan, who now works for the campaign group.

She explained her frustrations, based on ongoing discrimination by the State and in wider society that marginalise Travellers.

Her concerns were echoed by Bernard Joyce who highlighted the fact that “82% of Travellers are unemployed” and “suicide levels are seven times higher than the national average.”

The conference was opened by Minister for Children, Disability, Equality Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, who congratulated ITM on its work and spoke about the impending launch of the Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

“I am looking forward to implementing the strategy and improving lives for everybody,” he said.

Founded in 1990, ITM was inspired by Travellers who opposed the settlement policies imposed by the State and widespread anti-Traveller racism. At the time, the Traveller population stood at 3,066 families, 854 of whom were living on the roadside, 1653 in housing and 559 on permanent halting sites.

It was noted that community development had helped in the meantime to improve participation levels by Travellers in policy-making.

RTE’s Miriam O’Callaghan chaired the online event and she later interviewed Ms. Quilligan on air.

You can still tune in and watch the ITM conference at:
<https://bit.ly/ITM30confer>

This time last year, Ray Lucey interviewed Ms. Quilligan for ‘Changing Ireland’. You can read the interview here in Issue 66:
<https://bit.ly/QuilliganInterview>



• Minister Roderic O’Gorman attended as a special guest at a webinar in October to celebrate 30 years of the Irish Travellers’ Movement. Miriam O’Callaghan M.C.’d the event and featured it on her radio show.

2017



• Miriam O’Callaghan and Brigid Quilligan in 2017 when they were awarded Honorary Doctorates of Law from UCC.
PHOTO: DARAGH MCSWEENEY.

2002



• Thomas McCann spoke at one of the biggest ever protests by and for Travellers in this country, in 2002, when a new law basically made it illegal for them to stop anywhere when travelling.
PHOTO: A. MEAGHER

THE FUTURE: Lockdown lessons

Kerry-based Carey recounts the work of his colleagues when the pandemic struck

LET'S FOCUS MORE ON EQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS & FLEXIBILITY

BY ROBERT CAREY*

We asked Rob Carey of North East West Kerry Development (NEWKD) how he and colleagues responded during the early days of Covid-19. He talks here about the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and Local Development Companies (LDCs):

On March 27th, Ireland was placed on full lockdown and, like many other workers, the SICAP staff were under lockdown and working from home. The delivery of SICAP is people-intensive and involves relationship-building with individuals, groups and communities. We often meet people where they are located, for example, in the local estate or community hall.

Given these circumstances, within the SICAP team we asked ourselves two initial questions:

What is the best way we can use SICAP resources to provide support to people right away?

As it was obvious that these restrictions would be challenging for communities and vulnerable groups in particular, NEWKD decided to develop its own Community Response Service based on requests and needs in the area. This was ultimately linked with the interagency Countywide Helpline led by Kerry County Council from which we received referrals.

It was decided that SICAP would lead out this response by providing both funding and staff. SICAP staff are well networked in various communities, have good interpersonal and problem-solving skills and therefore were a good fit for this work.

The second question was: How do we deliver a people-centred programme to target groups when we are not allowed to be near people?

We approached this as follows:

1. Contacted clients by phone and email, and then via Zoom, to touch base and find out their most pressing needs
2. Looked at different needs, for example, among lone parents, those in direct provision, people on low income
3. Tried to provide practical supports to those who need it most.
4. Developed a revised adapted plan.
5. Under this new plan, the company quickly transferred supports online. We used Zoom for group and individual meetings and developed a programme of online training across different actions

WORK ADAPTATION DURING COVID

The following are examples of some of the work we undertook during the first lockdown



• A protest in Dublin in August over the Israeli detention without charge of Palestinian human rights defender, Mahmoud Nawajaa. Following global protests, he was released. (Photo courtesy of IPSC).

- We set up a community response whereby we had contact people in each office who took calls, did deliveries, etc.
- We supported the delivery of food through Foodshare Kerry, a social enterprise set up in 2015 by ourselves and St. Vincent De Paul. It is a model project and we shared how it operates with all other local development companies, through the ILDN. This informed the speedy and successful roll-out of food initiatives throughout the country in collaboration with Foodcloud.
- We made contact with people in every conceivable way possible.
- We delivered online training for micro and social enterprises.
- Funded risk assessments for social enterprises.
- Provided hygiene packs for people living in Direct Provision.
- Held online tech and digital training for young people.
- Produced masks for people in the community sector.
- Funded well-being videos and shared them on all our platforms.
- Developed a laptop loan scheme with Tralee Chamber of Commerce.
- Our well-being and personal development supports for groups including lone parents, unemployed, and women, all went online.
- We ran an online workshop for people with eating disorders.
- "Moving on" - our project which supports women into employment - delivered a parenting support programme for women wanting to support their children and teenagers housebound during the pandemic. We set up an online weekly newsletter for the group which was very popular.

SOME LEARNING FROM THE PANDEMIC

- Working online has advantages for clients and staff. Therefore, we should take a blended approach from now on.
- Local Development Companies (LDCs) could and should be leaders in embracing this work flexibility.
- Those who were most excluded fared worse under Covid. Therefore, LDCs should reflect on their role in the context of changes which Covid precipitated and other changes such as the emerging strength of the Black Lives Matters. We should take on human rights issues and causes, locally and nationally.
- The social democratic approach which the government took during the initial lockdown - with bans on evictions, mortgage breaks, universal health care - shows what can be done and obvious questions about the current system and obvious opportunities to change.
- Questions arise around the value of different jobs and low paid work. Those who are paid least were most required and most exposed when the pandemic broke.
- LDCs should take more of an equality and human rights approach to our work. Embracing EHR, as its known, provides not only a strong conceptual, but also a legal framework to support people who are marginalised.
- This means promoting and educating communities around equality issues and looking at the work through an equality lens.

** Robert Carey works as Area & Programme Manager with NEWKD. He is a member of the Changing Ireland Editorial Team.
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Connections made by trusted, adaptive, nationwide groups

BY JOE SAUNDERS*

The work by Local Development Companies (LDCs) in the early days of the pandemic was summarised in a report by the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN). The following are edited highlights:

SNAPSHOT

Given their presence in local communities, the Local Development Company (LDC) response to Covid-19 has been rapid and widespread. All responses are locally based, working with local partners at community, statutory and NGO level to address locally identified need and respecting existing local structures and efforts. A snapshot of efforts during the initial lockdown was provided through a national survey of LDCs conducted May 11 to 14th

SURVEY RESULTS

As a key part of the country's community response capacity, because they are embedded in every community and have infrastructure, local knowledge, and trusted relationships, Local Development Companies reconfigured their operations in five key ways:

1. To ensure that as many as possible of the 173,000 persons they work with annually are contacted so that their needs can be met by their LDC or referred to partner services, whether state, Local Authority or other community/voluntary organisations.
2. To implement new ways to support existing and new client groups and social enterprises who need assistance at this time.
3. To adapt their labour activation schemes (Tús, the Rural Social Schemes and Community Employment) including people, vans, equipment and premises for deployment at community level

in the Covid-19 response.

4. To engage, add value and play a full part in Local Authority Community Call Fora.

5. To provide employment assistance, income support information and self-employment to the newly unemployed, many of whom are first time claimants, and the self-employed beneficiaries of SICAP, for most of whom income generation has ceased.

During the survey period in May, the 49 LDCs were receiving 1,552 calls daily with Covid-19 specific requests for assistance. In response, up to 1,398 LDC staff and 985 scheme participants worked directly on Ireland's initial Community Call Response.

LDCs also provided the Community Champions role for more than 76% of the population.

The thrust of the LDC response has been to use its existing contacts and collaborations to deliver for vulnerable people. As LDCs already have the contacts with the key target groups (see below) the LDC response has been possible within existing resources and structures and their work has greatly complemented and added value to the local authority-coordinated Community Call Helplines. Many LDC staff have also worked on the ALONE Helpline.

The majority of those with social inclusion needs across the State are contacting their Local Development Company. While LDC channels of communication are not in competition with newly set-up helplines, their call numbers demonstrate that LDCs are an automatic, trusted contact point for social inclusion target groups and those supporting them.

In most cases, requests for assistance are met from within the resources of the LDC and its network of collaborating partners. Although

there is some overlap, the scope of request and response is broader than the Community Call helplines can provide, as LDCs also deal with income/employment issues, mental health, family support, community development, social enterprise supports, etc.

This State-Community Sector partnership is thus working very effectively. There have been challenges, but LDCs have not been overwhelmed. With highly skilled and experienced staff, they will continue to help as this crisis develops, morphs and hopefully settles. LDCs will also play a key role in getting people back to work and assisting social life to re-emerge.

49 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES SUPPORT 15,000 GROUPS

The Republic of Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs) deliver over €300 million of state-funded programmes each year that supports more than 15,000 communities and community groups and 173,000 individuals.

The principal funders are the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the HSE and Education and Training Boards.

LDCs act as community partners for government agencies and Departments, providing specialist animation and engagement services based on a bottom-up approach, local rootedness and having the confidence of local communities.

Members provide a national footprint through local, community-based delivery, ensuring that programmes are deployed effectively at local, community level. Place-based response is core to the companies' mission.

LDCs were initially set up 28 years ago (variously named partnerships, social inclusion companies, LEADER companies over the years but now all 'cohesed' into LDCs).

LDCs are there to respond to the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion through a locally responsive, innovative, integrated approach, built on a partnership model, with local ownership. At national level, the sector has recently been defined as follows: "Local Development promotes area-based, integrated community-led interventions based on participative democracy to address long-term unemployment, economic marginalisation and social exclusion."

(Reference: Government of Ireland, Sustainable, Inclusive & Empowered Communities, 2019, p.16).

* Joe Saunders is the ILDN's manager. He is also a member of 'Changing Ireland's editorial team.



• Local Development Company staff have an online meeting with Minister of State, Joe O'Brien.

SERVING COMMUNITIES

One Minister - two Departments - Heather Humphreys has dual role

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

There are 17 departments in the Irish Government. The constitution states that there can be no more than 15 members of the cabinet.

In effect, Minister Heather Humphreys is responsible for two in one: Social Protection on the one hand; Community, Rural and Islands development on the other.

Her official title is “Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands”.

“I’m taking charge of two departments,” she confirmed on national radio* on being appointed by An Taoiseach. “Two departments. Two Secretary Generals.”

She said she was up for the challenge and that the responsibilities were a good match.

There had been speculation that the Department of Rural and Community Development - the smallest of the government departments in terms of budget - would be abolished. Instead, the Department is growing in size and stature.

The Minister has ultimate oversight and responsibility for the department achieving its objectives, as set out in the Framework Policy for Local Community Development in Ireland.

The Minister also ensures that the department carries out its mission, which is: “to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.”

As is pointed out on the Department’s website, the Minister is the ultimate decider of departmental policy within the overall context of government policy.

* Humphreys’s radio interview: <https://bit.ly/Humphreys2depts>

Who is Heather Humphreys?

With two departments under her remit, Heather Humphreys (57) is a busy minister.

She does, however, have considerable ministerial experience in regional and rural affairs, in arts, heritage, an Gaeltacht, and promoting business, enterprise and innovation. On her website, she expresses pride in having introduced the Town and Village Renewal



• Minister Heather Humphreys at one of her two ministerial desks.

Scheme.

Her focus is “to see that no person or community is left behind”, as she said shortly after being appointed to her new role. This phrase is repeated in the Programme for Government.

She is one of the minority of four women serving as senior ministers. She sits alongside Helen McEntee (Justice), Norma Foley (Education) and Catherine Martin (Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht).

The National Women’s Council expressed the disappointment of many over the cabinet’s gender imbalance - saying the government will have to work harder on women’s rights and calling for it to introduce a gender quota for elections.

Humphreys lives in Aghabog, a rural area near Monaghan town and, before entering politics, she worked as manager of Cootehill Credit Union.

However, islanders can be assured that Minister Humphreys has sea legs. While she comes from a landlocked county, she visited Clare Island last year and heard first hand of the challenges facing offshore islands.

Responsible for offshore islands

Ireland’s offshore islands now come under the responsibility of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

This has historic precedence. From 2002 to 2010, responsibility for community, rural and island affairs lay with the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA).

Under Éamon Ó Cuív, that Department was known as “Craggy” - due to its acronym, the Minister’s western base and, indeed, its popularity. It was abolished after the country went bankrupt.

In recent years, government responsibility for supporting offshore islands rested with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

There are 30 inhabited offshore islands and they are represented by Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann (the Irish Islands Federation). The federation’s office is based on Inis Oírr - you can connect online here: <https://www.facebook.com/oileain/>

Recently, the 40th anniversary of the death of an island was commemorated on RTE when it re-broadcast ‘Inis Airc: Bás Oileáin’ (2007). It can also be viewed on Youtube and serves as a warning to us to do better than before. - AM

Joe O'Brien, Minister of State for Community Development & Charities

Joe O'Brien (Green Party) was appointed Minister for State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities at the Department of Rural and Community Development in July.

He was first elected to the Dáil in a by-election in November 2019.

O'Brien previously worked with Youthreach, with Crosscare, and as a migrant rights campaigner with the Immigrant Council of Ireland. He describes himself as a human rights advocate at home and abroad.

His senior minister Heather Humphreys (see left) also has a professional community background having been a credit union manager.

His work has seen him meet online with the heads of local authorities, of local development companies and others.

He has backed volunteering initiatives nationwide with much of the focus on

responding to Covid-19. On Sept 10th, he thanked "all the community groups, national organisations and all the kind and generous people around the country who are helping the most vulnerable get through this challenging time".

Asked how it has been as a newly appointed communities minister connecting with people over Zoom rather than over a cuppa, he said: "Difficult. I was very much looking forward to travelling around the country to see where the need is but also where all the good work is being done and meeting the people doing it."

He sees a number of positives in the midst of the pandemic:

"Our ability to adopt to challenging circumstances is notable I think. Also, when we come out the other side of this and have the experience of getting through a pandemic, I think we will have a greater appreciation of our strength

and resilience, which we may not necessarily be feeling now."

O'Brien lives in Skerries, Co Dublin, with his wife and three young children. He grew up on a 42 acre dairy farm in Grenagh, Co. Cork.

Read our interview with the Minister in this edition.

- A. Meagher



• Joe O'Brien, Minister of State for Community Development and Charities.

A history: 'Community' in Cabinet

In 1997, "Community" became a named function of a government department for the first time. It has remained in usage ever since.

For a long stretch, from 2002 to 2010, it was a central plank of a high-profile department. Then came the banking-led crash, austerity policies and harsh cuts to the community sector. During this time, "community" almost disappeared from view in department titles.

And then came the turnaround - in 2017 a new department was established and 'community' was brought to the fore once more. The new department proved to be a success and, if this government runs its full term, "Community" will be closing on three decades of prominence.

This is important: If you're not named you're less visible. At present, many are annoyed that "Youth" was dropped in name and are calling for it to be reinstated in the appropriate department's name.

While "Community" was moved between different departments, the Community Unit and its staff often moved

and changed, disrupting the growth of a corporate knowledge and memory. This time - 2020 - sees the Department stay intact. It will grow, not diminish, and the inside knowledge gained through years of contact with vulnerable communities and grassroot organisations should survive. That's especially important at a time when the country may look again to communities to rise to a Covid-19 challenge.

1997 - 2002

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
(DSCFA - under Dermot Ahern).

2002 - 2010

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
(DCRGA - Eamon O'Cuiv).

2010 - 2011

Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs
(DCEGA - Pat Carey).

2011-2016

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.
(DECLG: 2011 - 2014 - Phil Hogan / 2014 -2016 - Alan Kelly)

2016 - 2017

Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.
(DHPCLG - Simon Coveney).

2017 - 2020

Historic moment in July as it marked the establishment of the Department of Rural and Community Development
(DRCD - Michael Ring)

2020 -

Two Departments have come under the responsibility of one cabinet minister, namely Minister Heather Humphreys who has become the Minister for Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands.

- AM

How's college online? How was Lockdown 1? What were the positives? What impact on your mental health?



Above: Generic pre-pandemic photo from LIT's website. In Beth Ardill's vox-pop, she asks students how Covid-19 impacted on their mental health. Four people said "a little" and two replied: "a lot". Before the pandemic struck, did the students find college easy, hard, or in between? All six interviewed said "in between". Interestingly, one student found the pre-Covid-19 mandatory 80% attendance rule "stressful". That's one stress they currently don't have in their lives.



BY BETH ARDILL

On placement - remotely - with 'Changing Ireland', Beth Ardill is a third year degree student in Community Development at Limerick Institute of Technology.

She interviewed fellow students about their pandemic experiences, their views on how the authorities have performed, and the charging of full fees while they all stare at laptops and study at home. Five feature here. One respondent chose anonymity; their views echoed what is said here by classmates.



1. Positives and negatives for you from the lockdown?

"Positives - I spent time with my family and didn't have to spend hours travelling and waiting for buses. The negatives - it affected my social and personal life."

BERNIE FORDE - likes less travel

2. Did the authorities handle Covid-19 appropriately for you as a college student? Marks out of 10.

"There was lots of information on student accommodation, but nothing on how students that use public transport would be facilitated. So, one mark out of 10."

3. How were the assignments/exams given to you during Covid-19 lockdown?

"I found this difficult, because

lecturers and students were struggling with online classes. I do not learn from slides, as they can be interpreted in many different ways."

4. Do you agree with colleges demanding full fees for the academic year?

"I think it is disgraceful. Students at the end of the day are the consumer."

5. How are you finding working/studying from home?

"I am still finding it difficult. But hopefully getting better. The alternative of having to use public transport is something that I am not willing to do. Packed buses, waiting in Arthurs Quay, everybody wanting to get on the bus and get home. Before the pandemic, being left behind because there were not enough seats on the bus was a major problem."



1. Positives and negatives for you from the lockdown?

"Positively: It helped me to reflect on things a bit more and become more conscious of my health and others around me. Negatives were not being able to socialise and difficulties working."

CRAIG O'BRIEN - more conscious

2. Did the authorities handle Covid-19 appropriately for you as a college student? Marks out of 10.

Craig gave them 8/10 saying, "It is hard to control this, because it is so new and unknown." He felt the government had to choose between "no Covid or no economy" and it is "very hard to come to an agreement between one to be done 100% over the other, over different minded people". He felt the path taken struck a balance and prevented a spike early on. He predicted the lockdown we are

now under: "I personally feel a full lockdown should happen for a couple of weeks".

3. How were the assignments/exams given to you during Covid-19 lockdown?

"They were difficult to complete, just because of the stress of everything going on."

4. Do you agree or disagree with colleges taking full fees for the academic year?

"I feel a subsidy should be given. Wages are being cut and

jobs lost around the country."

5. How are you finding working/studying from home?

"I am a frontline worker, so I have been out for it all. So it hasn't changed much for me - just the use of more sanitiser and the constant wearing of face masks."

All felt paying full fees was unfair

JOHN CLANCY - illness an issue, misses mates



1. Positives and negatives for you from the lockdown?

"There were no positives for me. Due to my illness I had to cocoon for eight weeks, so my whole life was turned upside down.

"College online is not the same learning experience. My social and personal lives don't exist and mental health suffers a lot."

2. Did the authorities handle Covid-19 appropriately for you as a college student? Marks out of 10.

"5/10. The points system they used leaves a lot of unanswered questions for students. If students wanted to question their results they had to wait until November and give up their College place?"

3. How were the assignments/exams given to you during Covid-19 lockdown?

"They were ok, but I was not happy with some of the results."

4. Do you agree or disagree with colleges taking full fees for

the academic year?

"I disagree, if that's the case you could do Open University for a couple of hundred quid and get a full degree. LOL!"

5. How are you finding working/studying from home?

"It's not the same. I'm missing having coffee in the mornings with my classmates, not being able to have face to face discussions with tutors, and last but not least the College experience."

LARA BOOHAN - home plusses v laptop life

1. Positives and negatives for you from the lockdown?

"Positives: It made me appreciate where I am living. I was able to be active outside, as I live on a farm."

"Negatives: I found college stressful coming up to exams. Our exams were replaced with assignments and there wasn't enough time for research, and deadlines were very close together. It left me very stressed. Also, going online did not suit me at the beginning as I had poor internet. Also, socially it was challenging not being able to meet up with my friends; conflicts arise when you are stuck in the same house with your family day-in, day-out."

2. Did the authorities handle Covid-19 appropriately for you as a college student? Marks out of 10.

"7/10. It was handled pretty well. At the beginning, the government

handled the situation very well. But I feel some of my college lecturers could have been more supportive. As a class we did not get the right supports, especially coming into exams. I felt I was left to my own devices for the majority of it. Lecturers did not respond to emails."

3. How were the assignments/exams given to you during Covid-19 lockdown?

"Mentally, I found the assignments as an alternative to exams a lot more stressful. The time limits to complete them was very tight and I had other assignments on top of exam assignments that counted towards my overall grade."

"Overall, I got on very well in my exams and was very happy with my results, but it was mentally challenging. Most days I spent eight hours at my laptop researching and writing essays."

4. Do you agree or disagree with colleges taking full fees for the academic year?

"Disagree. It is unfair paying the full fee. Students are unable to use the facilities as normally." She pointed to the cost of paying for student accommodation while only going on campus once or twice a week. Many students on placement found themselves on placement at home and were therefore not getting the full placement experience, yet were still paying for a full college term.

5. How are you finding working/studying from home?

"Working from home while on placement can be nice as you have the luxury of your own home. On the other hand, I am missing out on what would have been a great working experience."

"Sitting at a computer for nine hours, three days a week is a bit



much. I learn by practically doing things. Instead I am having to communicate virtually and work virtually. I get flustered. I have to teach myself new ways of working virtually which I was never shown."

"I also get unsettled at times as I need to be active. Instead, I am waiting at a desk for my placement mentor to phone me and when I am stuck on certain tasks, I cannot just ask and get an answer straight away. I must wait until she reads my message for a reply."



1. Positives and negatives for you from the lockdown?

"Covid-19 gave me the time to think about my future plans; life had slowed down for everyone due to the lockdown. This extra time was also helpful for simple things like painting the house and doing home-based hobbies."

"Covid-19 was difficult as I could not meet friends and family

members. It's been straining on my social life. College was also more challenging as the course was all online. The lack of in-class lectures made it more difficult to learn."

2. Did the authorities handle Covid-19 appropriately for you as a college student? Marks out of 10.

"8/10. I believe the authorities handled the pandemic very well and kept the risks at a minimum. But, they could have acted earlier based on the information given by other countries who had the virus first. This would have ensured readiness for the pandemic and it's

challenges."

3. How were the assignments/exams given to you during Covid-19 lockdown?

"I found the work understandable and very well planned out. It was difficult at the beginning, but the lecturers ensured a stable flow of work and course control."

4. Do you agree or disagree with colleges taking full fees for the academic year?

"I disagree with the colleges requesting full fees as the students will not be using the colleges' time,

services, staff assistance, utilities, electricity or assets to the same degree as the previous years."

5. How are you finding working/studying from home?

"I find working from home difficult as there is no face-to-face contact with colleagues. This hinders the communication aspect of work and study. I much prefer the on-campus study dynamic. The social side of work/study has also been diminished which lowers the feeling of involvement and slows team-building."

JOHN HANAFIN - time to think

INTERVIEW

Q&A with Minister Joe O'Brien Programme for Government:

Minister of State Joe O'Brien said his Department is taking lead responsibility for delivering a number of key Programme for Government commitments.

"Focusing on my own remit of community development and charities, a key priority will be the continued implementation of the Community and Voluntary Strategy, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities'. This will be key to strengthening the Community and Voluntary Sector who have shown their valuable contribution to all aspects of Irish society throughout this pandemic."

"I am personally committed to working with the sector, and my officials, to deliver the many important actions contained in this strategy that will contribute to building

resilient, inclusive, communities. I believe that their implementation will provide much needed support for organisations that support communities all over Ireland every day and in particular within those communities that are most marginalised."

"Closely linked to the Community and Voluntary strategy is the Government's Volunteering Strategy which is well advanced, has undergone extensive consultation with the sector, and which I hope to publish this year. This strategy will look at ways to further support the voluntary effort that has always been such an integral part of Irish life and has become a critical component of our response to Covid-19."

He also highlighted "our funding supports for

communities, which are more important than ever" and ensuring that resources are "targeted at those who need it most".

He said, "In this regard, the Department will be continuing to refine and build on our range of programmes that support communities (such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Community Services Programme and the Community Enhancement Programme). The needs of our communities and the issues facing them are evolving all the time, particularly so given current events, and we need to be in a position, through our programmes of funding and supports, to react to those community needs in a changing environment."

Community work in a pandemic:

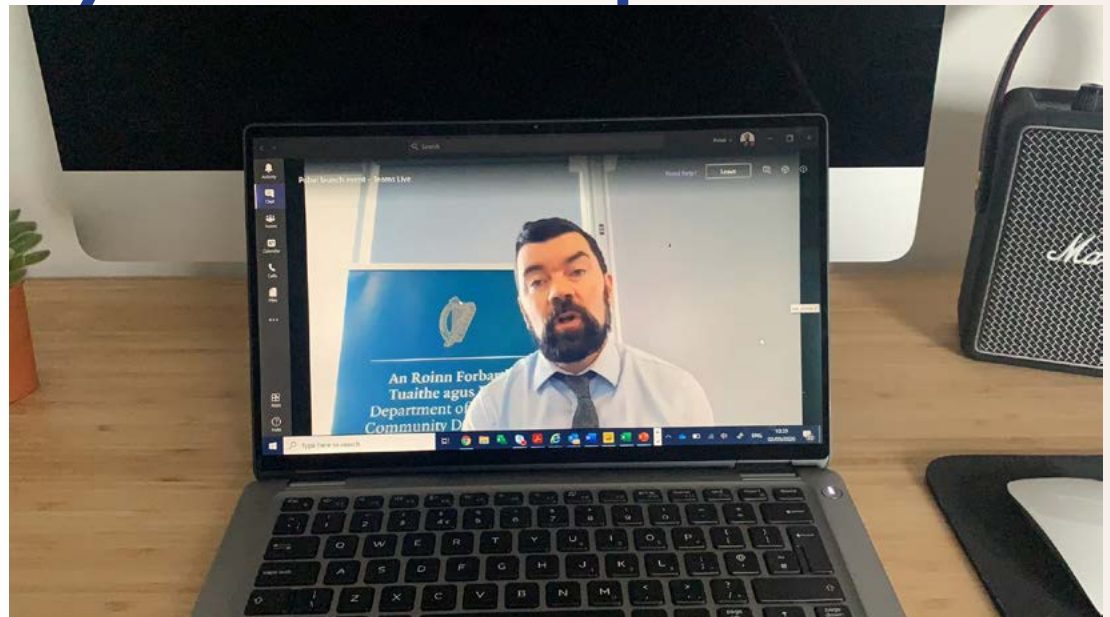
Minister of State Joe O'Brien said that, since the establishment in 2017 of the Department of Rural and Community Development, it has been "very proactive in developing a working partnership approach with stakeholders and service users". He named Local Development Companies (LDCs), Volunteer Ireland, Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and The Wheel as examples.

"Because of this partnership and collaborative approach, we were well placed to respond quickly and effectively and hit the ground running to address the challenges arising from Covid 19, particularly those presented to our vulnerable and older citizens when the usual activities have stalled or moved online."

"We have worked collaboratively with a range of community and voluntary groups, funded and supported by my Department, to ensure a coordinated and effective approach to the current situation."

He said that volunteers played a key role in the community response, from assisting in Covid testing centres to reading books to the elderly in our communities. "Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and PPNs are also currently playing a central role in the community response to the COVID-19 emergency, as evidenced by initiatives at local level throughout the country. They are also key local stakeholders in the Community Call initiative."

He recalled how many of the organisations supported under the Community Services Programme (CSP) adapted 'at the start of the



• Minister of State, Joe O'Brien, as most people see him in these strange times. Photo courtesy of @MartinQuigley.

emergency and began to deliver essential services such as Meals on Wheels.

"Some organisations were already delivering such essential services and many expanded their service provision to meet the increased demand. This is the essence of the CSP - delivering services to vulnerable communities - and I would like to thank all of these organisations for adapting and expanding and also for their ongoing efforts. I for my part am committed to continuing to provide support where possible," he said.

"Existing relations with existing networks were hugely important during the pandemic making sure

there were no gaps. Stakeholder engagement was at the heart of Community Call 2020."

"The Community Call was an unprecedented mobilisation of national government, local government and the community & voluntary sector to support vulnerable people in our communities. The initiative ushered in a new way of working (with) a shared purpose and significant levels of collaboration between local and national government, community and local development, and the volunteer sector."

"The establishment of Community Call Forum by each local authority then sought to connect and mobilise

all of the organisations, both statutory and voluntary, involved locally in the Covid-19 response effort.

"This mechanism also provided local community and voluntary groups with an additional assurance that their contribution to the process was valued and their views on issues emerging were being heard.

"These structures remain in place and are being scaled back up as we move to heightened levels of restrictions. I would encourage anyone that needs help or wants to offer help to contact their local Community Call Forum. All of the contact information is available on www.gov.ie/communitycall."

Supporting old and young:

REACHING OLDER PEOPLE

Asked about how volunteers and community groups can support people living alone, the Minister O'Brien highlighted how the Seniors Alert Scheme (SAS) provides personal alarms to people over 65 "to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind".

It gives people a free monitored alarm which they can activate if they get into difficulty or need assistance.

The scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, via Pobal - with equipment made available through community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations registered with Pobal.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the scheme was expanded when his Department, along with POBAL and ALONE, introduced a phone-call service to support participants.

"The initiative offers participants in the Scheme a regular phone call to check on their wellbeing and need," he said. Over 50,000 people are registered with the scheme.

To find out more about the scheme you can

contact your local registered organisation. Contact details for registered organisations can be found at www.pobal.ie or by calling 01-5117222.

"Also, as previously mentioned, the Community Call Fora in each local authority area have manned helplines and anyone feeling isolated can contact them as well," said the Minister.

MORE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Asked how can we entice more young people to join committees to run community halls/services, Minister O'Brien said, "There are clear programmes, opportunities and supports in place through the formal education system including programmes such as Youth Reach, Foróige, Gaisce and Young Social Innovators to support community involvement by young people. It is through the support and development of such programmes and by examining the potential of including civic engagement and volunteering as part of our formal education system, that some of these challenges may be addressed."

DISGRACEFULLY HIGH INSURANCE COSTS

Asked did the Minister see the Department playing a role to play in seeking reductions in the disgracefully high insurance costs for volunteer and community groups, he said:

"My Department, through our work with the Community and Voluntary Sector, is very aware of the challenges arising from the current high cost of insurance. For example, the results of a survey carried out by the network of PPNs have clearly demonstrated the effects of the current situation on the community and voluntary groups around the country."

"The Programme for Government contains a commitment to deal urgently with the issue of insurance reform and I will be following up on this issue with my Government colleagues."

"My Department has also highlighted this issue as a challenge in the development of the National Volunteering Strategy," he said.

Supporting newly marginalised:

Q: Are practical measures being considered to address youth and/or sectoral unemployment in particular through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and other programmes under the Department's responsibility?

"Disadvantaged young people (aged 15-24) is one of 13 target groups to benefit from the SICAP," said Minister O'Brien.

"A practical measure taken in the first instance by the SICAP workers is to support the youths who are at risk of early school leaving to help them stay in education for as long as possible."

"For disadvantaged youths, not in employment, once they engage with SICAP services a Personal Action Plan is developed. This empowers them to be able to reflect on their own abilities, aspirations and progression pathways during their participation in SICAP."

He said the programme provides disadvantaged young people with supports to

help give them that step-up in life to help them reach employment.

Also, the new 'My Journey Distance Travelled Tool' for SICAP is currently being implemented nationally and "will help get to the heart of what the client needs and services are better aligned when used. It ensures that all clients get the most out of the service and improves life circumstances," he said.

For a full report on the Distance Travelled Tool, including the tool itself, read the coverage in our Spring edition: <https://bit.ly/ChangingIreland-Spring2020>

Q: How useful and adaptable have the social inclusion and community-based programmes your department supports proven in these pandemic times?

The Minister noted that local authorities and local development companies (LDCs) are responsible for delivering social inclusion programmes such as SICAP and other

community based programmes and have over the years "developed an awareness of the vulnerable and disadvantaged areas locally".

He credited both with responding rapidly when the pandemic struck, as they went to work with communities to reduce the spread of the virus, providing vital information and responding to the impacts of this virus on communities.

"The Department also offered as much flexibility to LDCs as possible to redeploy SICAP staff, which continued to be funded, to meet the needs arising in the current crisis."

He said information and advice was issued to Local Community Development Committees and LDCs to address concerns and questions raised by service providers. "In terms of the SICAP programme, LDCs advertised up-to-date information as it arrived - using social media to advertise the new jobs that were advertised in medical industry and health care and offering CV/interview supports," he said.

Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme:

Q- In the light of continuously positive evaluations of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and given its habit of exceeding targets and being adaptable during Covid, might funding be increased? (Investment in this area is still lower than it once used to be).

Minister O'Brien replied:

"We are always looking for an increase in

funding especially for SICAP. The programme is the root of a lot other programmes run by other Departments."

"SICAP 2 isn't about the targets, this programme moved away from the numbers to allow for the more intensive engagement with those furthest removed from mainstream services and its performing very well in this sphere," he said.

For more on SICAP, see pages 28-29.



INTERVIEW

Minister O'Brien gives his views - On Rural Development:

Q - What, in the short term, can the Government do in the face of Covid-19 to better enable remote working in rural communities?

Minister of State Joe O'Brien said that, even before Covid-19 struck, remote working was emerging as a significant driver for developing sustainable rural communities.

"By letting people stay in their local towns and villages - rather than moving to the major cities for work - remote working can help to more evenly spread the benefits of economic growth throughout the country. This would also be a major benefit to those people living in cities where demand for housing and other services has priced a lot of people out of the market."

Needless to say, remote working can also help us meet our carbon reduction targets and reduce congestion and, most importantly, save workers money, by shifting people away from their daily commute."

"Obviously the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a quantum leap in the evolution to remote working and I have been really impressed how adaptable and resilient workers and employers across all sectors have proven themselves to be during this crisis. My department has already developed a number of initiatives to support workers and businesses through this transition," he said.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

"For example, the Broadband Connection Point project, Connected Communities, will provide high-speed broadband connectivity to community centres, sports clubs and other sites at the heart of rural communities. These connections are enabling these local communities to develop connected work spaces for local residents that will support remote working in the National Broadband Plan intervention areas. My Department was allocated an additional €5 million in Budget 2021 to further develop remote working in rural areas."

He said that, in addition, his department was working closely with the Western Development Commission (WDC) to develop the Atlantic

Economic Corridor (AEC) Hub Network initiative: "This project has identified over 100 co-working hubs along the western seaboard, from Kerry to Donegal. These hubs are incredibly diverse in terms of mission, size and facilities offered but they all provide connected working spaces and the WDC has developed a strategy that recognises these hubs, not just as individual entities, but collectively as major economic assets for the region. This strategy will be published shortly," he said.



• Last of the evening light, in Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo. Photo by A. Meagher.

He said that the WDC, supported by local authority AEC officers, have engaged with these hubs and have already provided €282,000 in funding supports to hubs to help them make

the necessary changes to reopen safely after lockdown. "As these hubs have re-opened, they've allowed local workers and businesses who could not work effectively from home a remote working option. This has allowed people to get back to work safely," he said.

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

"The WDC is also currently developing a suite of online services for participating hubs such as booking engines, customer relationship management tools and online social media fora that will connect the hub managers and clients. These tools will take a significant administrative burden off the hub management and give them a far more prominent platform to connect with current and potential clients. The development of a social network element will also help managers and clients from Donegal to Kerry to come together and learn from one another and have those 'water cooler' moments that can so often spark innovative ideas. It is expected that these online services will be launched before the end of the year."

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON REMOTE WORKING

"The successful projects my department and its agencies are delivering in this space can productively contribute to the wider government response to Covid-19 and also help support our post-Covid-19 recovery. The national ecosystem of remote working facilities and hubs are incredibly diverse. However, Covid-19 has really demonstrated that, collectively, these facilities, whether they be private, public or social enterprise run, as well as the fibre connectivity being provided to the home by the National Broadband Plan, can be looked at as a piece of core economic infrastructure. The National Strategy on Remote Working currently being developed represents a real opportunity to maximise the benefit of that infrastructure to communities, business and people across the country," said Minister O'Brien.

Climate Change & Resilient Communities:

Q - Have you a message for groups on the ground? (e.g. FRCs, CDPs, LDCs, PPNs, CSPs, fully independent groups and NGOs).

Minister of State Joe O'Brien replied, to quote:

The mission of my Department is "to promote rural and community development and to create vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities".

Sustainability is at the heart of ensuring that communities across the country are able to thrive into the future. Building resilience within

communities is key to their sustainability, particularly at a time when that resilience is being challenged by the impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and the obligations we must meet as a society to adapt to climate change.

While some of the actions that have been necessitated through the pandemic have lessons that can contribute to our climate goals, such as the observed benefits of remote working, Government has been strengthening, and continues to strengthen, its focus on sustainability and climate issues and the

Programme for Government contains many commitments in this area. One area that is key is engagement with communities, particularly in rural areas, firstly to assist them with the climate adaptation challenges they face, but also to highlight the opportunities that are available to them in a low-carbon, digital, economy. My message would be to encourage locally-based groups to explore those opportunities and to say that help and advice is available to those seeking to do so.

Covid-19 can't stop us connecting

5 Ways To Wellbeing



• Best friends relax on the slipway at White Strand, Co. Clare, in August. Kerry is in the far distance! Photo by A. Meagher.

The 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' were central to the 'Kerry Mental Health and Wellbeing Fest'.

Time and again, scientific studies have shown that if we regularly practice the following, our mental health and wellbeing improve.

We can all make active and deliberate choices about changing the state in which we find ourselves. We just need to begin.

CONNECT

Lend an ear; Lend a hand; Talk instead of messaging; Share experience.

BE ACTIVE

Move your body; Move your mood.

TAKE NOTICE

Be curious and be aware; How are you feeling? How are others feeling? What can you change?

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

Surprise yourself with what you can do!

GIVE

Your time; Your effort; Your time; Your kindness.

KERRY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING FEST 2020



• Photo by Sophie Matthews - Highly Commended - Senior Cycle. Mental Health Ireland held an art/photography competition recently. Kerry Mental Health & Wellbeing Fest held a similar competition.

BY RAY LUCEY

Kerry Mental Health & Wellbeing Fest 2020 held in October was a success throughout the county, even more so in the midst of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the 59 events were held online (40) or outdoors (8) with many completely booked out - from laughter yoga, forest walks and a photography competition to Radio Kerry programmes on family mindfulness.

The South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP) this year, as always, was a key stakeholder and their rural men's outreach officer, D.J. Moran, emphasised the special importance of the Kerry Mental Health and Wellbeing Fest in 2020.

"The feedback we got back from the public was great because we had to change a lot of things this year. We were hoping to have everything face-to-face with people out in public in parks, beaches and in every town in South Kerry, but obviously that all changed with Covid-19. So it was a bit of a task to start doing things online. Our fear was a lot of the elderly people would be lost with it because as you can imagine... asking them to go on a Zoom call, they would look at you as if you had two heads. But, in fairness, everyone pulled together. We got to do some outdoor things, even with the restrictions, and they worked well."

D.J. continued, "Day Care Centres, community events, they're all gone for now. So there is a large percentage of people that we don't know how they are getting on and this was one way of reaching out to people."

Of concern, only 14% of people who took part in Wellbeing Fest activities were men - according to data from the organisers.

D.J. pointed out that isolation is not only a rural problem but an urban one as well. In response, civil society and community groups are endeavouring

to provide essential supports in these challenging times.

The Kerry Mental Health Association is, said D.J., the main centrepiece for information in relation to issues with mental health within the county.

Jigsaw Kerry is an organisation aimed at the youth and it also plays a critical role. As DJ said, "It might be harder to see a mental health problem with a younger person."

Speaking about Kerry Volunteer Centre, he agreed that volunteering is a fantastic way to become involved within your local community and in turn boost one's confidence and self-esteem.

D.J. is one of the many community workers making themselves available around the clock. He said, "I am always available by phone so anytime night or day people can ring me."

• BELOW: Alex Bermingham won First Place (Special Education) with this entry in Mental Health Ireland's art/photography competition.



PLASTIC

BAN WET WIPE - SAY GALWAY PPN MEMBERS

The Galway County Public Participation Network (PPN) represents the voice of over 950 community groups in County Galway. Right now, as a collective, they are calling for urgent action to address the current burden on their waste management systems and environment caused by wet wipes.

Most people do not even realise that wet wipes are made from plastic.

The Covid-19 response is producing an enormous number of wet wipes. Sewage treatment plants are unable to breakdown wet wipes containing plastic, and they are not biodegradable. They also wrongly end up in compost bins.

Mairsíl Claffey (right) Galway Co PPN representative and member of 'Plastic Free Kinvara', has written to Minister Eamon



Ryan regarding the "urgent need for restriction of availability of single use plastics".

"Wet wipes are washing up on the shores of Galway bay in alarming quantities," wrote Ms. Claffey who has a degree in polymer science. She said members of the Galway public "want to see the sale of plastic containing wet wipes restricted in order to protect their right to live in an environment which is adequate for personal health and wellbeing".

NOT ON EU LIST

Galway County PPN are concerned as wet wipes are not on an EU ban list: "We want plastic-containing wet wipes to be treated in the same way as the other single use plastic products and restricted."

"The Galway community depends on the reputation and quality of their waters and shoreline for tourism, oyster harvesting, sea swimming and many other recreational and business endeavours".

Research by an NUIG team led by Dr. Liam Morrison found that 50% of wipes labelled flushable contained plastic.



NATIONAL: Programme repe

PRE-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS ARE INTERNATIONALLY "REMARKABLE"

- ESRI on social inclusion/community programme



• Annette Cahill, Cormac Shaw, Esther McGearty, Sacha Cahill and Finn McGurk, Southside Partnership. Ms. Cahill's company supplies computer-sensitive eyewear and was a prize-winner among self-employed business star-ups in 2019.

PHOTO: A. MEAGHER

Research published in September by the ESRI shows improved employment outcomes among long-term unemployed people who receive employment supports under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

The study focuses on support given to people deemed to be "furthest from the labour market" - typically both long-term unemployed and having low levels of educational attainment (Leaving Certificate or less).

KEY FINDINGS

- Jobseekers who engaged with SICAP employment supports in 2018 were approximately 18% more likely to have progressed into employment or self-employment after 3 to 6 months than similar individuals who had not received such supports. These supports were particularly effective in boosting involvement in self-employment.

- One-to-one employment supports were the key drivers behind the programme's success.

- SICAP employment supports had distinctive features that enhanced the work with more marginalised groups - including flexibility, a holistic approach, staff skills and links with other providers/services.

- SICAP beneficiaries interviewed were very positive about the assistance they received. All described a trajectory from low self-confidence to a renewed ability to engage with courses and/or apply for jobs, a pattern they attributed to the ongoing coaching provided by LDC staff.

Dr Adele Whelan, ESRI,

described the findings as remarkable: "International evidence suggests that assistance measures targeting marginalised groups have typically had limited success in terms of achieving labour market re-integration. The success of the SICAP interventions are remarkable and should serve as a benchmark for all agencies dealing with disadvantaged job seekers going forward."

Minister of State Joe O'Brien

welcomed what he termed "this very valuable piece of research which clearly illustrates that SICAP pre-employment supports are helping people furthest removed from the labour market, and who often face multiple barriers, to gain employment or enter self-employment."

"Given the sharp rise in total unemployment in the wake of COVID-19 SICAP and its holistic, person-centred response to individual needs will be more important than ever," he added.

Pobal CEO, Anna Shakespeare

said, "The findings clearly illustrate the key successes of SICAP and the benefits that one-to-one, person-centred interventions provided by Local Development Companies are achieving, through tailored supports and recognising the individual participants personal employment goals".

- AM



Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

atedly proven to work

Social inclusion workers praised for dedication

"Thank you", said Minister of State Joe O'Brien to all the community workers involved in supporting 55,000 people and 3,500 community groups since 2018 through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). It is the country's main community-based, anti-poverty programme.

The 2019 Annual Report showed, once again, that the programme was exceeding targets.

Minister O'Brien particularly commended Local Development Company staff for providing pre-employment supports and recognised that these staff go the distance with people.

He thanked them "for sticking with people, for helping them gain belief in themselves over time, and for being available long after initial interventions. Thank you!"

He also thanked Pobal for administering the programme. The 85-page annual report hows SICAP is a national success in helping people across the country to transform their lives and is value for money.

The programme supports those who are most marginalised in Irish society and unlikely to use mainstream education, training and employment services.

Groups supported by

SICAP include people with a disability, disadvantaged young people, Travellers, Roma, new communities, lone parents and the unemployed.

In 2019, SICAP provided supports to 2,636 Local Community Groups, 370 Social Enterprises and 30,280 individuals. 46% of individuals participated

in a lifelong learning activity (i.e. course placement, apprenticeship or work experience), 6% got a job and 8% set up their own business.

The 2019 SICAP Annual Report is available online at this link:

<https://bit.ly/SICAP2019report>



PROGRAMME DESERVED EXTRA FUNDING IN BUDGET - NETWORK

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) expressed disappointment that there was no increase in funding for the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) for 2021.

"ILDN acknowledges the economic difficulties the COVID19 pandemic has created and understands that Budget 2021 has been framed in this context. It is however disappointing that in a Budget where record funding has been provided across Departments and sectors that the opportunity to increase funding to the SICAP was not availed of," it said.

"SICAP providers played a central role in communities across the country in responding to needs which emerged during the Covid lockdown and beyond," it said.

"SICAP remains at approximately 50% of what it was in 2008 (€43m 2021, €84.7m 2008)," it stated.

At that time, two programmes existed - the Community Development Programme (funding 180 Community Development Projects) and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (funding what are now known as LDCs).

130 Community Development Projects either had their funding cut, or were put under funding pressure by government to merge, during a distressful time, with LDCs.

The Government plans in 2021 to invest €1m to set up new pilot community development projects.

The ILDN welcomed this. It said

it was "critical that the Minister and the Department engage with the ILDN and its member Local Development Companies in terms of the proposed delivery model for this support."

It is a over a decade since funding for communities was at its highest. Protests over cuts in 2009 and 2010 featured strongly in this magazine as CDPs put forward their arguments, with some success - 50 projects retained autonomy.

This time 10 years ago our back page headline read: "Frontloading of Cuts to Communities of €35m". (Issue 34, published Dec. 2010).

In a sign of improving fortunes, in 2017, the Department of Rural and Community Development was established.

- AM

NEWS

COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME TO BE REFORMED

Minister Joe O'Brien's Department of Rural and Community Development yesterday published a comprehensive independent review of the Community Services Programme (CSP) by Indecon Consultants.

The report makes 11 key recommendations that the Department (and Pobal, who administer the programme on its behalf) will use to assist with the restructuring of the programme.

The Minister said, "I am very confident that the outcome of this reform will mean a better programme for everyone."

The Department are going to re-contract all 400-plus organisations until December 2021 "while this important work is going on".

More info:

<http://bit.ly/CSP-DeptPressRel>

Download the CSP Review:

<http://bit.ly/Review-CSP>

Download the high level action plan for the CSP - setting out the timeline for delivery of each phase of the 2020 Review of the Programme:

<http://bit.ly/CSPactionplan>

€51M FOR COMMUNITIES FROM DORMANT ACCOUNTS

Joe O'Brien, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, in November, announced funding of €51m from the Dormant Accounts Fund "to address disadvantage across the country".

"The 46 measures approved for funding in 2021 will be implemented across Government and will help to address a diverse range of issues such as long term unemployment, youth disadvantage, migrant integration and probation support to prevent re-offending. Dormant Accounts funding makes a real difference," he said.

Funding under the 2021 Action Plan has increased to €51m. (The spend was €28.5m in 2016). Examples of measures approved for 2021 include:

- €6.4m to sports in disadvantaged communities and for persons with disabilities.
- €6m for youth and community justice services aimed at countering the influence and impacts of crime on young people and in communities.
- €2.3m to support social enterprises to address social and economic disadvantage.

HIGGINS: Don't be cold with each other

President applauds our kindness, compassion and warmth - Recognises value of 'Community Call'



BY BETH ARDILL

President Michael D Higgins has released videos on the community response to Covid-19 and how important it is. He believes the principles guiding us are based on “fundamental values that represent the best of ourselves such as solidarity, care, compassion and kindness”.

“We must acknowledge that breaches of solidarity damage, and have damaged, social cohesion in combatting COVID, but our righteous concerns must not be allowed to dislodge us from our common purpose... By following the advice in relation to public health which we are determined to do out of good citizenship, we will, together, suppress the virus,” he said.

President Higgins believes that “the transition to a post-Covid economy must be to an economy and society that has care as a central purpose”. Our language must be compassionate and our citizens must be empowered and encouraged by each other's actions.

“Kindness’ is precious,” he said, warning against “cold language” that “invokes fear”. He called for us to communicate in a way “that conveys a warmth, one that reflects a shared concern for us all living and working together as citizens.”

He spoke in an audio message about the community outreach programmes. “It must surely be a source of the greatest encouragement

and hope for the future to know that across Ireland community groups and individuals are out in numbers, supporting people in their local areas with selfless acts of kindness”.

Community groups and individuals across the State are supporting each other.

SENSE OF SOLIDARITY IS STILL VERY STRONG ACROSS IRELAND

He said, “Covid-19 community outreach, an initiative of Irish Rural link and The Wheel and with funding from Government, is a shining example. It links and supports the many community and voluntary organisations across the country to ensure that their assistance goes where it is most needed”.

He pointed out that “Community champions” are active in every county, helping those who need assistance, providing them with the latest information and making sure nobody is excluded.

The country's 49 Local Development Companies have provided many of the boots on the ground throughout this crisis, in both urban and rural areas, backed up by the efforts of local authorities.

The President is “conscious of those in the

many rural areas, for whom their isolation makes it all the harder to access essential items and services, and there are those, too, for whom the lack of physical contact with others at this time is particularly challenging and distressing”. He pointed to the high number of people wanting to volunteer since the pandemic arose, running crisis helplines, helping vulnerable members of communities, and volunteering at Covid-19 testing centres.

None of these people are seeking recognition, but President Higgins believes they deserve recognition: “As President of Ireland I take this opportunity to sincerely thank all of you who have been involved, and all who have volunteered, for making yourselves available to give a helping hand to those who need it now, at this difficult time”.

The sense of solidarity is still very strong across Ireland. He said, “The ethos of volunteering and actively engaging with fellow citizens is the lifeblood of our society. Active citizenship is surely a most durable insurance against any sense of helplessness or indifference, which might have prevented us from reaching out to our neighbours who are in need”.



Independent living gets boost from 'first of its kind' community space

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A funky community space with a difference, one that is staffed and equipped to be exceptionally welcoming to all - once lockdown restrictions are eased - opened in Co. Sligo six months before the pandemic broke.

Number 45, High Street, in the heart of Sligo town was fitted and kitted out by the Sligo Centre for Independent Living (SCIL) - whose members and staff are convinced they have imagined up a place that doesn't exist anywhere else.

"I couldn't find a place like this in Europe, or America, searching online," said Maria Mulligan, CEO. "I don't know anywhere like this in Ireland. Yet, what we're doing is simple stuff. We're making it easy for people who are lonely or isolated to step back into a communal space. That's the point of it."

She describes a contemporary space with the best of high-end and high-tech furnishings. After securing LEADER funding for the capital works, SCIL poured €80,000 of its own funds into the project to create what all agree is a "first of its kind community space in Ireland".

SCIL was set up in 1996 to support people with disabilities and, over the years, the organisation saw that many members found it difficult to integrate into their community. This was despite the fact that they very much wanted to be part of the cut and thrust of daily community life. Ms. Mulligan said, "This difficulty led to increased marginalisation and isolation and to a disconnect and a diminished sense of belonging to their communities. The community



space was designed to address the issue directly."

"We wanted to create a space that allows every user to feel comfortable and know they belong. If we can get you through the door, we'll mind you - we've great people working here. They are gentle and there's no pressure on you to talk or engage."

"You can just read the newspaper or sit there. In their own time, callers can choose if they wish to play games, get creative, join a book club or sing. A lot of people say to us that there's a very warm, safe, comforting atmosphere here," said Ms. Mulligan.

"Ultimately this project is about seeing all community members as resourceful and worthwhile individuals who can contribute to their community in different ways," she added.

SCIL's aims to support people to lead independent lives, to be included, empowered and to participate in mainstream society. This project epitomises what they're about. Reaching out from the beginning, SCIL invited third-year

Interior Architecture and Design students from Sligo Institute of Technology to pitch their ideas for "a warm, welcoming, accessible place for all members of the community".

Step by step, SCIL's plan turned to reality with support from LEADER, the Sligo Local Community Development Committee and its implementing partner Sligo LEADER Partnership. Elements of the students' designs were used, along with advice from an interior designer and an accessibility consultant.

Ms. Mulligan said the community space provides marginalised groups with a place to tell their story and reflect their strengths, which will hopefully lead to reduced marginalisation and a greater appreciation of these groups in the local community.

SCIL had some funding for the capital works, but it was not enough. The LEADER programme made SCIL's dream project attainable. They were guided through the application process by Sligo LEADER Partnership and, ultimately, their funding application proved successful.

"It can feel daunting at first. We found the local LEADER programme co-ordinator very helpful - she walked us through the process one step at a time," said Ms. Mulligan.

While nobody reckoned on a pandemic, the facility is now up and running and ready to reopen at the drop of a hat.

• **SCIL sisters: Maria Pereira and Vicky Matthews.**



SLIGO CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

The Sligo Centre for Independent Living supports its service receivers by offering individual support, signposting, and advocating with other agencies on their behalf.

SCIL also manages and provides personal assistants to people with disabilities. They recruit and train people as personal assistants and run a highly regarded Community Employment scheme to induct newcomers into the caring profession.

The people they support have a range of disabilities, including physical and sensory disabilities (sight or hearing loss), intellectual disabilities, enduring mental illness and other hidden disabilities (e.g. autism, epilepsy or acquired brain injury).

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection funds the CE scheme.

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• **Dancing in Sligo: Rian Pereira, Christopher Cogan, Marian Roycroft, Ronan Campbell and Karen Casey at a SCIL event (not in 'No. 45').**

UNIQUE: Ireland's first of its kind community space

LEADER support made this dream a reality

- While Covid-19 fund helps keep project operational

(Continued from previous page)

HOW THE SPACE WORKS

Sligo town's 'Number 45' is funky while fully wheelchair accessible and has a step-down changing space (with hoist and hydraulic changing table), an accessible toilet and regular toilets. All workspaces are fully designed with wheelchair users in mind so visitors can use the space equally. Desk heights can be adjusted at the touch of a button.

A dynamic team of 15 workers facilitate projects daily and gently encourage interactions between guests. In addition, an outreach worker is available to accompany individuals from transport centres or their homes (if local) to the building.

A noticeboard provides information about services, activities and volunteering opportunities and gives updates on upcoming projects.

The community space has comfortable seating for users to engage with each other, if they wish, through board games, puzzles, arts, crafts and music. Karaoke and live music have proven most popular. They serve coffee and tea for free, but it's not a cafe.

"We have no rules, except we demand you treat everyone else and the property with respect. If someone's disrespectful to someone else, we'll call them out," says Maria Mulligan, CEO.

BIG BUDGET

The total projected budget was €157,061. Of that total, €57,000 came from SCIL's funds. The €100,061 from LEADER included €62,838 through the EAFRD (EU) with €37,223 being the national contribution.

The LEADER funding was provided under its social inclusion subtheme: "Basic Services Targeted at Hard to Reach Communities".

(Separate to this capital spending, SCIL pumped €80,000 into the project).

TIPS IF APPLYING

The LEADER application process can be quite demanding, especially for smaller organisation's. SCIL advise that there is a need to be rigid with documentation in supporting your application and in using the public procurement process. For example, they suggest keeping hard copies of all contracts, invoices, payments and submissions. SCIL were guided and supported through the application process by the local LEADER officer at Sligo LEADER Partnership.

As Ms. Mulligan says, "Number 45 has come together through hard work, huge commitment from our team, generous and wholehearted support from the board, significant support from government agencies, together with an overarching belief by everyone in Sligo CIL that we can be the change we wish to see in our community."

LESSONS LEARNT

SCIL advise that contracts for capital build projects in particular should be signed off within a 6-month period of being granted. After this period, contractors can change their prices, and this was an issue that SCIL experienced while developing 'Number 45'.

COLLABORATION: This is the third in a series on LEADER. Thanks to staff in the LEADER Policy and Operations Unit at the Dept. of Rural and Community Development and to Dr. Maura Farrell, NUIG, for their co-operation.

One thing they didn't think of when calling it 'Number 45' was that this is how Americans refer to the unruly US president with the orange hair (Biden will be No 46). Now there's only one 'Number 45' and it's in Sligo. Long may it last!



• **TOP-RIGHT:** Artist Robert Cox with one of his superb drawings.
• **ABOVE:** Rian Pereira and Christopher Cogan singing karaoke.



• **Mairead Connolly on ukelele with an impromptu band of musicians - Owen Kilfeather, Caroline Walsh, Maria Pereira and Darwin Fahy.**



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



National Rural Network



Ireland's EU Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014 - 2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union

project a reality during current crisis

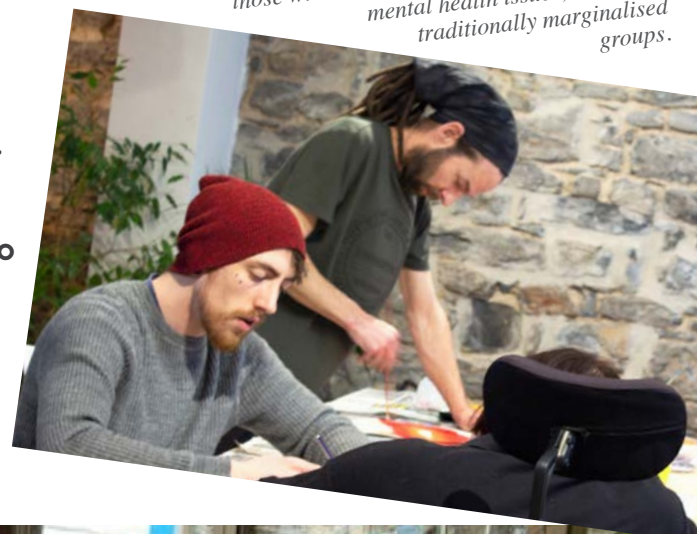
NUMBER 45

"This is a place of love. This is a place of safety. Between church and pub, between God and Satan, this place is Goodness itself. They label us "disabled", but I see able people. People able to paint and write. People able to smile and laugh. We are not "disabled". We are "enabled" by this place to live full lives, full of joy and passion. Thank God in this republic there are such places, a bright light in a sea of darkness. It's not we in here who are sick. It is the world out there that is sick. Clinging, grasping, clutching. In here, there is an open hand to shake, a hug to give, a conversation to be had. I salute the workers, so kind, so respectful, so intelligent. Keep up the good work. This place has a name - Number 45. And I am glad to be part of it."

- by Ed McPhillips, who ran a Poetry Workshop recently at Number 45.



• The project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of its guests by increasing opportunities for social interactions, hobbies and creativity. In time, this will hopefully lead to stronger and safer communities whereby individuals can connect with all members of their community, including those with disabilities, the elderly, those with mental health issues, and other traditionally marginalised groups.



Covid-19 Stability Fund: €53k

Sligo Centre for Independent Living was awarded €53,240 under the third tranche of the COVID-19 Stability Fund.

The national fund was created to support charities and Community and Voluntary organisations who are experiencing a significant drop in fundraised and traded income as a result of the restrictions imposed to counter the spread of covid19.

The fund is intended as an immediate cash injection to help the organisation in meeting their operational costs in the current crisis and to assist them to continue to provide critical frontline services to the most marginalised in our society.

The list of who received what across the State is available here: <http://bit.ly/CovidStability2020>



• The project set out to develop a community hub in Sligo, with the help of LEADER funding. The new space is aimed at all members of the community.

LOCKDOWN DIARY: Activist & Carer

What makes these diaries unique?

Two volunteers, Ciara and Harry, kept public diaries during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Nobody else in Ireland kept a live public diary during the first lockdown (a few people in quarantine did). The were published daily on our website.

Ciara is a volunteer on environmental projects and with people in direct provision. During lockdown she became a carer. Harry works for the fire service. Both have ample experience in activism and volunteering.

Ciara and Harry (pseudonyms) told of their ups and downs and how lockdown changed them. Their writing also tracked how life in Ireland changed in the early months of the pandemic.

Their conclusions are encouraging and they found that keeping a diary had a positive impact on their ability to cope.

We feature samples of Ciara's writing in this edition; Harry's featured in our summer edition.

See all at: changingireland.ie

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Ciara's Diary, Day 1 (March 11th)

BY CIARA

The atmosphere in the small rural town in the West of Ireland close to the recent outbreak of COVID-19 has shifted. At the local supermarket, people are cautiously doing their shopping at a quieter yet steadier pace – people are not so eager to stand around and chat.

It's more about getting in, get what you need and leave again.

Everyone is talking about the unknown nature of this virus, how soon will we need to self-isolate, how soon will schools close, how soon will this all be over. The concern is primarily on older family members or family who have serious underlying conditions who are most vulnerable. Information is trickling down to us but at a snail's pace.

For example, what additional measures, if any, would a man with latter stages MS who is requiring 24/7 care at his home require to help protect him from contracting this virus? No specific information is at hand yet.

So, it's business as usual with frequent hand washing, careful sneezing and keeping distance where possible. A lot of this is down to hoping for the best outcome for us all.

The town itself is quieter too. Events, classes and workshops are getting cancelled daily. Fewer people are on the street and on a recent visit to the local doctor not long after the news broke that the virus was now a short distance from us in the local area – it was eerily quiet.



What is evident though is despite all these challenges and just the strangeness of it all, is that people are looking out for each other. Stories are emerging of cancer patients being driven to appointments by neighbours or having their shopping dropped to them – true to what community spirit is during turbulent times.

There are 35 asylum seeker men living in emergency Direct Provision in the town who, due to the lack of self-isolation options for them, are in an even more vulnerable situation. Most share a room with up to three other men in small dorm accommodation.

While there is little that can be done about these circumstances, the local community welcome group offer them support and friendship as they – like everyone else – are trying to grapple with the situation as best they can.

WHAT I LEARNED IN 50 DAYS:

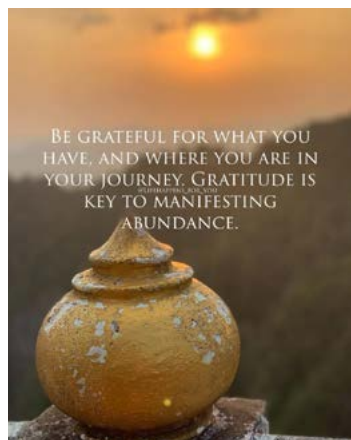
"I feel different, more present."

BY CIARA

Day 50 and after my diary entry about the incredible weather we have been having (for most if not all of this crazy pandemic / lockdown period) it is now pissing from the heavens. But it's needed. The plants and gardens need a good dose of rain to revive growth.

I feel different these days. More present in myself. I completed a 21-day meditation challenge yesterday and feel it has vastly improved my overall outlook. There is a lot to be said for connecting more inwardly (not too much though – naval gazing as my nana used to call it) and being mindful of how to take each day as it comes.

There is a sort of spiritual awakening happening for people I know, myself included. It's not something profound or



otherworldly, it's actually to be found in the simplest of ways. Nature, meditation, music and daydreaming.

For me, not having access to my friends or colleagues is not easy. I miss human connections and being in the company of another person (

that I am not related to). I miss the feeling of discovering something about myself when someone says something that might irk me and how I might respond either through body language or directly.

Today is Bealtaine – the start of summer and a time for hope, growth and health.

My own life working as a community co-ordinator with asylum seekers has taken a new approach and while we don't meet in person, I am still offering support when I can. Only yesterday, I got asked to help a man to organise references for his upcoming interview to determine his future in Ireland.

Deportation orders are still a very real prospect, even in the midst of the pandemic. My hope also is that we begin the process to end Direct provision and replace it with a more humane, dignified

alternative that allows for own door accommodation and kitchen facilities. Imagine not having these?

Food is nourishment not just for the body but for the soul. I will continue to campaign and support my friends in Direct Provision and hope that one day they can invite me to their home for a meal.

Writing about my experience through this community diary for 50 days is something I found great solace in doing. Sharing my own ups and downs was extremely cathartic for me.

So now what? Well, life is changing, ebbing and flowing and we are all adapting.

I think it's safe to say there will be more difficult days ahead, but what I have learned from this time is that taking things day by the day is the only way to live life at the moment.

Editor's pick - it's been a funny ol' year

NO, I'M NOT COMING!
We've been on 20 walks today. Leave me alone!



Given their presence in local

I'M NO EXPERT ON COVID-19
BUT THIS IS THE CURE

LET'S BE
GRATEFUL
FOR THE
LITTLE
THINGS.

THANKS
COVID-19
FOR THE
BEST
MEMES
EVER!



From Monday, your postie will be working from home. They will read all your letters and ring you if there's anything important.



First flight to
Ianzarote
after the virus



BOOK REVIEW

Ruairí's serendipitous timing in offering communities hope

BY ÁINE RYNNE

When we see how a dramatic turn of events in the world can really shape things for us, it's time to reflect. The timing of this book 'Hitching for Hope' - published during a global pandemic - has been unexpectedly fortuitous.

What we reflect on while reading this book is how the Irish population rallied together in many towns and cities up and down the country

during a particularly brutal recession. McKiernan gives the reader space to explore human nature during tumultuous times. He digs deep and finds resilience and hope at a time when there was little of these. He very carefully and sensitively handles the timely need for community involvement by offering the shared common goal of getting through a difficult time through strength, humility and humanity.

What immediately grabs the reader in this compelling memoir is how Ruairí McKiernan makes no bones about his reason for embarking on a quest for hope in the midst of a crisis

during a bruising recession in Ireland.

From the outside, it seemed like he had it all. He was in his early 30s, had achieved a lot of respect as a mental health advocate, having founded the young people's charity SpunOut, and he was engaged to be married. But he was heading steadily for burn out and this was beginning to impact his outlook greatly.

Now based in Lahinch, Co. Clare, where he lives with his wife - singer and meditation teacher, Susan Quirke - McKiernan is much happier. Before the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown, he planned to hitch to the venues around the country where his book would be launched. But instead, he launched the book live on his Facebook page with senators Lynn Ruane and Frances Black along with musician Colm Mac Con Iomaire.

"Matters of hope, happiness and vision for Ireland weren't going to be resolved through a brief

future for all on this beautiful island," he writes.

McKiernan writes in a very accessible way, with an empowering humanitarian vision, referencing the need for community and for elders to be more central in their role of advocacy, especially for young people.

He notes: "Time after time I had seen the need for intergenerational connection - young people who needed guidance from elders and elders who could benefit from the ideas and energy of our youth."

It felt at times that this concept of hope could be diluted by the overall themes of the book, which included some real gritty details and heavy topics about a country crippled to its core. However, with McKiernan's honesty and vulnerability weaved into the narrative, this made hope a compelling hook for the reader to grasp and get on board with.

"(While) the sharp decline and the Irish government's response evoked widespread anger, it also gave way to self reflection. People started to ask bigger questions about the vision we were working towards as a society, and as individuals," he writes.

What this book does ultimately is take responsibility for how we react to societal issues and political upheaval. Do we allow this to continue to happen or do we stand up to those in power and find our voice in these decision-making processes? McKiernan's voice is one that allows these questions to penetrate and sift deep in the ultimate quest for a better world and a more equal role that we all should by right get to play.

'Hitching for Hope' is available in all bookshops nationwide and online. #BuyLocal

Book a bestseller and an ideal stocking filler!

solo hitching trip lacking in any great academic depth; that much was for sure. This was an amateur adventure, and I was fine with that," he writes.

The part of his journey which stood out the most was when he challenged himself and his core beliefs. This was particularly striking on his visit to Derry and his decision to attend an Orange parade. Having grown up just a few miles from the border, his sense of 'The Troubles' growing up in Cavan has a much more real and personal perspective than most of us have in the Republic.

"There is a desire for people to come together and celebrate their culture and heritage and it's clear most people are just here for a good day out with the families. Ultimately, I know we've more in common than what sets us apart, something we need to remember as we build towards a better

• Ruairí McKiernan-hitching in Co Clare. PHOTO BY: A. MEAGHER

